Populism, Fake News, and the flight from Democracy.

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> "Our Ukraine policy has been thrown into disarray, and shady interests the world over have learned how little it takes to remove an American Ambassador who does not give them what they want." (Ambassador Marie Yovanovitch)

A whisper in the president's ear and a tweet later, U.S. troops withdraw from Syria, leaving allied Kurdish fighters exposed. A little while later in the U.S. Congress impeachment inquiry, Ukrainian Ambassador Yovanovitch is asking how it could come to the point where a key official, brokering a conflict in another war zone, could be so easily removed by such "shady interests." Both of these stories are widely reported in the press, and yet, what is true and what is false about them is in dispute. In this chapter, we ask how populism and fake news are bypassing mainstream journalism, democratic politics, and critical social science, so that seemingly every truth claim can be parcelled, distorted or denied. How has it come to this, and where might we hope to go from here?

Politicians, journalists and social scientists play different though often overlapping roles in the production of the relation between truth and democracy. Agents in each of these fields are first- level observers of events and each has a different approach to their sources, constituents, and/or actors, as well as to the relations among fact, opinion, and truth. Agents in each field are being assaulted by right populist media and Republican politicians, and each are

responding to the attacks in kind. Right populism and fake news, as we argue below, are putting democracy (rule by the people) in a flight toward oligarchy (rule by few), away from what de Tocqueville (1988/1850) called an American "love for the condition of equality" (pp. 504) toward a wildly libertarian version of freedom, haunted by the spectre of racism and sexism. We explore how this shift is in part due to the way strengths in these three fields may have given way to their weaknesses.

Fake News

The phenomenon of fake news is often explained in terms of the opposition's public relations strategies and geopolitics that shift audiences toward an "epistemic (or truth) crisis." Emotion is said to triumph over reason, computational propaganda over common sense, or sheer power over knowledge (Peters, et al. 2018). For some, "the crisis is more institutional than technological" (Benkler et al., 2018, pp. 20). For others, fake news is more importantly understood as a state-sponsored conspiracy (for example, from Russia or Ukraine, depending on one's political affiliation; Howard et als. 2019) or technologically determined via patented algorithms and feedback loops rather than as a development in the political economy of the media ecosystem (Benkler et al., 2018). Social media has proven that there are multiple ways of taking advantage of long simmering and often highly volatile controversies over race, sexuality, class and other topics (ripe for dog whistles) that seem to always lie on the fringes of what can be said or even thought and what cannot be in polite society. Crossing the line between the two is culturally discouraged and to some extent illegal (libel laws), but it is also allowed under the umbrella of rights related to freedom of association and speech/communication. Destabilizing the category of

truth in a democracy for geopolitical gain (Mueller, 2019) in our view becomes possible because democracy as a regime of truth allows for a great variety of controversial discourse.

Spreading outrageous and distorted information to discredit opposition or create divisiveness between opposing groups is not a new method in the history of propaganda. The Nazi used the term "Lügenpresse" the "lying press" (New York Times, 2019). However, the growth in types of fake news and the volume that has been disseminated since 2016 is unprecedented. This has been documented in a variety of official reports (House of Commons (U.K.), 2019; U.S. Congress, 2019; DiResta, 2018) that also shed light on the dangers posed by social media monopolies. We have witnessed officials in televised hearings struggling to comprehend the stakes at play in questioning social media executives. There are also reports from several large scale research projects that focus on the opportunist and predatory usage of technology and social media techniques ("computational propaganda" via bots or automated messages and other means) in local and global communications systems (Wooley & Howard, 2018). Finally, the history of disinformation and propaganda, as well as suggestions for policies that would prevent fake news and curb its damaging effects are cited as key research areas for protecting democratic practices in the future (Canada, House of Commons, 2019; Sauvageau et als.2018).

In this chapter, we propose something different from these large scale empirical investigations and official reports in order to theorize the audience(s) that authors of fake news imagine and the conditions of reception. We shift the discussion away from the investigation of the number, legality, complexity, and performance of fake news toward a theory of the imaginary audience and its flight from democracy. There is very important and rich research on

each of these types of investigation but very few attempts to provide a general theory of knowledge production and of the depth of the interpretive division that defines our moment. We explore the relation between populism and fake news and how the relation impacts current regimes of truth and democracy, more specifically through the fields of politics, journalism and social science that help produce them. Our main question is how have we embarked on such a perilous flight and what is to come? What has happened to the understanding that journalism, politics, and social science are producers of knowledge and truth? This leads us to re-evaluate the effect fake news plays in exploiting the weaknesses in each field and what it means for democracy to come. After further introducing the argument below, each field is presented in a separate section, while keeping in mind the relations between each: 1. Journalism: Seen from the right and the left; 2. The Political: Lies Politicians Tell; and 3. Can sociology come to the rescue?

Populist Right

Three types of background assumptions from the populist alt-right media (the terms right populist and alt-right are used interchangeably) can be postulated as a way of understanding the way audiences are imagined for fake news under the value of liberty and that also show a clear symbolic split from the democratic value of equality. The first postulate is that the political field is weakened beyond repair by special interests and endless spin that cannot provide liberty or security for the individual. All politicians who do not oppose globalists (those in favor globalization through free trade, for example) responsible for offshoring the manufacturing base and who have allowed the waves of illegal immigration are branded as creatures of the “swamp.” This assumption combines elements from classic reactionary nationalism and the libertarian ideal

of freedom as being eroded by proponents or strategies that promote any kind of global civic equity. Second, legacy journalism like science and politics are assumed covers for the interests of the most well-off globalists, liberals, or other equally conflicted elites against the liberty of "normal" middle or working class individuals. Opposition is seen most concretely here in the assumptions right wing media make, covering climate change and the advocacy for deregulating the fossil fuel industries and environmental protections. Climate change denial is widespread and often assumed a made-up excuse to block a way of life that has been left behind. Such an emotional denial of science moves beyond the neoliberal and conservative impulse toward favoring less government regulation for markets, and then into a deep nostalgia for individual liberty and the loss of a particular community. Thirdly, social science `thinkers` are also assumed to be compromised by alt-right pundits, who claim universities have turned toward "cultural Marxism," and have contributed to elitist political correctness. The term assumes anger against systems of left-leaning ideas that embrace diversity, feminism, and freedom of religion. It can also be used against those who do not agree with white supremacy. This is seen in multiple incidents in universities, where students and faculty have been chastised for protesting against alt-right speakers or in violent clashes that pit antifa against neo-fascist white nationalists in demonstrations. It is broadly assumed that these same elites have corrupted individual meritocratic measures in favor of liberal affirmative action or movements for reparation in the name of equality.

Each of these assumptions and interpretations can be seen in everyday reports across the spectrum of alt-right media, which now constitutes roughly one third of U.S. outlets (Benkler et al., 2018). There are very stubborn truth claims being made that need to be taken into

consideration when theorizing how audiences interpret these assumptions and how the authors of fake news imagine them. We will explore some of these claims in due time, but first we need to further deduce some of the ways fake news imagines its audience. While state-organized practices are reported to call out the most potential violent opposing groups in order to provoke division, more local cynically calculating authors assume that the (click) audience already denies, ignores, or suspends the social facts that journalists, politicians and social scientists are expected to trust in order to help create democracy. The alt-right ideologues are simply looking to convince audiences of their belief in the damage that liberals inflict or the threats they pose to their lifestyles, religious beliefs, or perceived privileges. Fake news is not a symmetrical phenomenon. It is not used equally by both the left and the right, despite what the alt-right assumes and what politicians claim. Fake news has evolved within a one-sided closed loop that includes both a variety of social media carriers and a mainstream broadcaster, Fox News. This media sector regularly attracts some of the largest numbers of U.S. media consumers, an audience that mostly does not consider other sources (Benkler et al., 2018). Could we have this way of imagining the audience if the fields of politics and social science did not have blind spots, such that they could not see or anticipate the rise of right populism or the eventual polarity of media systems and monopolies? Alternatively, are these fields so well aligned in the current post truth configuration that their voices are simply more chatter? To again quote Ambassador Yovanovitch, “how little it takes” to erase these fields. How can we asses so many untrue interpretations and convictions as the strengths in social science, politics, and journalism are so easily exploited, name-called, and dismissed? Below, we consider in more detail the contradictory claims from left and right populists, from the context of each field that reveals the extent to which fake news has sent the symbolic regime of democracy into flight.

1. Journalism: Seen from the Right and the Left.

As we have discussed so far, for right populists, professional journalism, defined as a gatekeeper of democratic values, is simply a cover for the interests of elites and conflicted liberals. Put simply, the 'real' democratic values are expressed by those media that speak to the people's (MAGA or BREXIT) reality. Conservative charges against liberal media and liberal charges against conservative bias date back almost to the origins of broadcasting. The Fairness Act, administered by the Federal Communications Commission, was introduced in 1949, so that controversies of public interest would be aired and one-sided political opinions would require media outlets to provide equal free time for the other side to respond. By the time a rapid expansion occurred in the cable television industry, the withdrawal of the Fairness Act under the Reagan administration (lobbied by the now disgraced founder of Fox news, Roger Ailes) in 1987 meant the requirement for making sure that controversial political issues were presented in a balanced way was suspended. In turn, this opened the way for one-sided partisan journalism to flourish and the birth of a new wave of right wing media began: right wing radio talk show hosts, Fox News commentators, and later, extremist right or alt-right digital outlets Dailywire, Western Journal, and Breibart -- the top three with 300,000 combined subscriptions. In total, *Newswhip* (2019) counts four times more right-wing (373) than left-wing digital outlets (87) (pp.11). One estimate claims that last year Western Journal alone received 750,000,000 Facebook likes and comments, "almost as many as the combined tally of 10 leading American news organizations that together employ thousands of reporters and editors" (Confessore & Bank, 2019).

Commentators from the later media frequently call all other self-defined professional (nonpartisan) legacy newspapers, television networks and public broadcasters, as well as mainstream media outlets, fake news (Polletta & Callahan, 2018). This later definition, first

weaponized by the U.S. President (repeated over 600 times since 2017) and whose usage has spread globally across more than forty governments, has come to mean any news, including factual news that contradicts the movement. (New York Times, 2019) Organized partisan or fake news of the geopolitical type that is addressed to right populists or simply to divide the left from the right is meant to excite the audience by putting the adversary in moral or political jeopardy. For fake news from the right populists, it becomes believable and even legitimate (often even if it is known not to be true) in part because it opposes institutions that support the elites, but more importantly because it tells stories people want to hear or that simply entertain them.

For the populist left, good journalism has long been defined as speaking truth to power, while bad journalism is about manufacturing consent (Herman & Chomsky, 2002), or trading truth for access to power elites (Goodman & Goodman, 2006). For the left, the professional culture of mainstream journalism is corrupted economically (its corporate structure), morally (its greed), and politically (for the 1%). Something quite new occurs though in the current context of fake news as the populist left is put in the position of defending "elite" journalists (as part of a resistance) in non-right legacy organizations, who have traditionally been seen as part of the problem. The reverse is not the case. Unlike the alternative left outlets like Democracy Now, Intercept, or The Nation, there is a sense in which the historical argument for the "condition of equality" along with the freedom of the press holds the stronger side of the democratic binary between equality and liberty.

To sketch out how such an interpretive division could occur, we need to further locate the conditions that made fake news possible; i.e.; fake news in the sense of actors faking stories to help the most divisive right populists come to power and not in the sense of banishing any

journalism that does not support your worldview as fake. In the Western European context of the 1980s, Pierre Bourdieu observed that journalism is both a weak and strong autonomous field. As a strong field, it has professional ideals that place high value on autonomy, accuracy, reliability, and truth. The field of journalism dominates over access, framing, and the tone it sets for audiences, but its strength is in turn contingent on trust that it tells the truth. Journalism is also a weak field in that it relies on the market to sustain its institution, and other fields to provide stories. There is growing consensus that the field of journalism is becoming weaker as the digital economy advances. In spite of the post-truth dimension of current public culture, all kinds of studies of journalists suggest they continue to see themselves as responsible for telling the truth, maintaining autonomy, performing the craft, reproducing its codes, methods and techniques, and legitimizing the ideals. Journalists are also aware they cannot act without the organizational and technological infrastructures and the needed complex labor, capital, and state relations (Ryfe, 2012; 2017).

The outpaced transformation of the organizational side of the institution (its economic and administrative crises) is putting pressure on the craft in a variety of ways. These pressures differ greatly across regions, types of ownership, and range from deregulation and increased corporate concentration to overt intervention, intimidation, and censorship in more authoritarian contexts (Halin & Mancini, 2012). Restructuring ownership from family-run firms to corporate hedge funds, collapsing advertising revenue streams, technological innovation, and the increase in audience fragmentation and infotainment, along with massive layoffs, continue to drive media platform convergence and the loss of local news outlets.

Fake news is not only happening because it is technologically possible to share any story instantly with large audiences but also because of the current transformation of the news

industry, the creation of new publics, and the complex impact on politics. The emerging context leaves enormous room for completely new forms of everyday knowledge production, pitting social media algorithms against journalism's editorial gatekeepers, the verification of facts before publication vs posting stories to see what happens, and governing by clicks vs professional codes and ethics councils (The Public Policy Forum, 2017). In this still emerging context, the chance of circulating false news is greatly enhanced, and so are the opportunities to manipulate populations with fake news.

We do not need to look far to discover negative influences that appear to have weakened a century's worth of values committed to autonomous, balanced, fact-based, and verified reporting by the institutions of "quality" or "good" journalism. In this new context, the strength in the professional culture is precisely what is most under attack. Most infamous and well-known examples of the new computational propaganda model are seen in the techniques used by Aggregate IQ from Victoria Canada and Cambridge Analytics from the U.K., paid for by the multi-millionaire Robert Mercer and brokered by Steve Bannon, adviser to multiple right populist politicians (Alexander, 2018). It remains untested as to whether the application of social science and psychological operation methods by these firms determined voter outcomes in the Brexit referendum and American election. The evidence of fake news interference and voter manipulation is overwhelming, as seen in recent Washington hearings into social media ownership and privacy security. At the same time as reports on massive amounts of false information were being spread, truth organizations, such as Freedom House, Centre for Media Freedom and Responsibility, First Draft, and the Reuters Institute, determined that fake news was used to discredit unfavorable reports and to help the growing number of authoritarian right populists in power to define the media as the opposition to the state (Magoto, 2017).

While Bourdieu's (1996) prediction that neoliberalism, already very observable in the French media landscape at the time he wrote on television journalism, would be a primary threat to the autonomy of both the academic and political fields continues to resonate. The idea that television would come to be the dominant model for social science and politics needs a revision. Bourdieu's 1996 book *On Television* was written at the height of the privatisation of public media organizations in Europe. While insisting the medium had enormous potential for provoking productive mass dialogue, bringing social scientists together with politicians for a better-informed public, he concludes that the potential strength of the medium was ultimately zapped by the economic imperatives of audience ratings and the subsequent mode of spectacle vs information/analysis production. The medium creates a dumbed down fast-paced journalism and "a circular circulation of information" among small numbers of academics, who cash in on celebrity (Bourdieu, 1996, pp. 23).

A little more than two decades later, and while the rise of social media initially showed much emancipatory potential, it is now clear that it has also led to the return of destructive forms of muckraking. The volume of yellow journalism and fake news alone is on such a scandalous scale that social media itself has become a central story in the division-- which begs the questions: "Where does news come from? What is true? What isn't? What's the agenda, if there is one, of the publisher?" (Doctor, 2016, pp. 1). Briefly, the television model of spectacle has given way to social media, and, in turn, social media has led politics back to reality TV. Hard to see how the autonomy of journalism, politics and social science will adapt in the next internet that combines cloud technology with big data analytics and the internet of things.

For Vincent Mosco, we have already seen a vampire version of economics, where the top American based corporations in the world have redistributed journalism content without paying for its production, and at the same time siphoned off most of the advertising revenues that have supported bona fide news agencies over the last century. When we consider the results of research that shows most people get their news from social media, we should emphasize that most of that news, if it is news, has been copied from newspaper organisations and/or television (Pew, 2010; 2019). The big five social media companies have collected, manipulated, leaked, or sold massive amounts of private data, and created ever newer technologies for data gathering and distributing, hence putting greater stress on the private sphere, while promising greater freedom and deceiving the public while promising greater democracy. When confronted by politicians for having contributed to massive intrusions into privacy and election fraud, corporate heads, as Mosco (2017) puts it, have claimed the Frankenstein defence-- we didn't know we created a monster, and we promise to fix it (eventually).

2. The Political: Are Lies Politicians Tell Fake News?

To recap the look of the political landscape since 2016: The flight from liberal democracy toward oligarchy has spread out from the unexpected results of the 2016 American presidential elections, bringing in a wave of reactionary populism, climate-change denial, anti-"globalism," Islamophobia, an opening to white supremacy, anti-immigrant, anti-refugee, anti..., the non-documented, DACA, LGBTI, and many other vulnerable communities. Questions need to be raised as to what role fake news plays in this and how much of this flight is about right populism, what kind, and how much of it is baked into white nationalism, a 1930's style racism, or a reaction to decades long expansion of inequality in the West. But if this is not a flight from democracy toward oligarchy, then it is, at the very least, a distinct erosion of its principles

(separation of powers, rule of law, fair elections, a free press) and a freezing out of its preferred legitimation operations through deliberation. Voter suppression and the crises around gridlock in the U.S. Congress and in the Brexit referendum definitely contribute to the flight from democracy. But, at the same time, there has been a parallel rise of numerous strong men authoritarian politicians, the globally publicized impeachment ("constitutional coup") of the President of Brazil Dilma Rousseff, followed by perhaps the most spectacular election built on fake news of one more of the world's most extremist politicians in Brazil (Scarabelli, 2019). All of this occurs as large swathes of children from the failing part of the triangle in Central America are joining caravans to nowhere, and other American iron cages.

A definition of what we mean by democracy as a regime helps explain how the political field has become divided. Two approaches can be seen in opposition, but also as mutually reinforcing, when theorizing democracy as a political regime. Claude Lefort (1988) argues democracy is a form of society where the people (*demos*) rule (*kratos*) themselves, but that the *demos* is a symbolic form that makes the "locus of power (a bodiless) empty space, it cannot be occupied… it is such that no individual …can be consubstantial with it, and it cannot be represented" (pp. 17). In other words, there is enormous room for disassociation in how democracy can work and the kinds of struggles for truth and power that might occur. While populism is a threat to democracy, especially in the despotic form that denies contingency, it has also been a force in democracy-- such as Russian peasant coups before the revolution or the agrarian movements in the American and Canadian Midwest in the last century (Riley, 2018; Laclau, 2005). Fake news works as a supportive discourse for the authoritarian variety of the current right populist moment. But is this a sustainable politics?

Following and improvising from Lefort, Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe (2000, 1980) see the rise of a populist right as predictable, given how the empty space of the political is filled with all kind of differences that pit regimes of truth against one another. Without discursive conflict, there is no political field in their view. Mouffe (2018) argues that since the 1980s both the left and the right have been gradually forced to the center, thereby short-circuiting the antagonisms needed for politics. The center is disciplined by a neoliberal consensus that takes politics out of the hands of the people, and so no longer offers believable alternatives. The current right populist moment is a sign of the return of the political. She argues against a return to the center as a correction, but rather in favor of a left populism to counter the authoritarian version. A radicalization of a pluralist democracy would seek out equivalences between emerging (intersectional) identities and a deepening of the traditional critique of the labor capital relation without making it the determinism "in the last instance." The point is to directly combat the rise of the authoritarian right populism that promotes freedom at the expense of equality.

For the more associative approach to politics, John Rawls (2001) and Jürgen Habermas (1996) see democracy as a system of justice as fairness, and propose a discourse theory of democracy that draws on both liberal and republican traditions. The democratic form of society is founded on the rule of law, out of an original agreement, or one that has come about through a long process of reasoned deliberation. The process results in a separation of powers, a set of rights, a market, an autonomous media, civil society, and a public sphere that help check and balance insurmountable differences and that enable the transfer of lifeworlds from one generation to another. In contrast to Laclau and Mouffe, Habermas's discourse theory of democracy depends on the institutionalization of deliberative procedures and not on a

collectively acting citizenry. For Laclau and Mouffe, the state does not provide a neutral arbiter but is itself composed of struggle among a plurality of conflicting antagonisms.

Both the associative liberal and post-Marxist approaches are needed to think through a much larger project that I cannot elaborate on here but would be needed to capture the full complexity of our present state of affairs. I focus instead in this section on theorizing how interpretive antagonisms in the form of lies and distorted communication work alongside fake news and have a significant impact on the way left and right populists imagine each other now.

If the political can be defined as the institutionalization of antagonisms that populate empty space, then politics might best be defined as turning the impossible into the possible. This means that a part of the politician's role in a democracy has to lie somewhere between telling the truth and wagering what constituents are predisposed to hear. Politicians are in a strong position to provide journalism with content but are weakened at times to the point of absurdity by a dependence on spinning the truth in the service of party interests, but also in ways that do not contradict their constituents. Canadian journalist Daniel Dale (2017) reported in December 2017 that the American president made 1,064 false or misleading claims in the first year of office. Today, that number is reported to exceed 12,000 instances and growing (Kessler, Rizzo, & Kelly, 2019). According to one poll, 75% of republicans believe Trump over mainstream news media reports. (Quinnipiac, 2018). Most discussions about fake news focus on its theatrics and capacity to manipulate public opinion. Lies told by politicians are not necessarily filed under the category of fake news. Only lies told by those pretending to be journalists or citizen journalists are understood as fake news. For the right populists, this is just part of the game to get back at

the wrongs that have been done for so long. For the emerging populist left, the lies politicians tell are daily proof of corruption and greed in the name of freedom vs equality.

A lie is the opposite of a truth and is meant to deceive. It implies intention so that when the interlocutor is confused or believes the truth is not distorted, it is not quite a lie. While all fake news is in some sense a lie, not all lies politicians tell are fake news. If only one third of the time the President's claims were simply made in a confused or simply misspoken mode, we could still say there are an average of 16.4 lies a day over 928 days, often disseminated from what might be the most centralized political communication medium in the history of the world ---The President's tweets (Kessler et al., 2019). In any case, even a couple of lies a day, along with a misspoken or misleading claim, and just for good measure, a conspiracy theory every couple of weeks, is a lot of misinformation by any standard. The point about politics is not that the progressives or the reactionary forces do not care or cannot see the misdirection; it is rather that the interpretive lifeworlds are so deeply convinced the other side has been out-manipulating their side for so long that the motivation to hear the other has disappeared.

Lies are not new to politics but they are antinomies to 'good' journalism and social science. The relation between politics and truth has a long and complicated history, in which the one needs to contradict the other. Hannah Arendt (1956) goes so far as to argue that lies are necessary for the politician and not just political demagogues but the statesman as well. To grasp the significance of this, the domains of truth and politics need to be separated out only to come back to how they need to be joined in conflict. As she puts it, "Is not impotent truth just as despicable as power that gives no heed to truth?'' Both truth and politics are invested in the interpretation of facts. What appears to be extraordinarily divisive in the current interpretive contradiction is the extent of disagreement that is possible regarding facts. Intentional lies spoken

by a politician are measured against facts, which in turn are interpreted and put in the form of opinions for public deliberation. "When the liar, lacking the power to make his falsehood stick, does not insist on the gospel truth of his statement but pretends that it is his opinion, the resulting confusion can be considerable." For Arendt (1956), factual truth has no antagonism to opinion, but truths are "opposed to opinion in their mode of asserting validity." In this sense, "truth carries within itself an element of coercion" (pp. 249-250). Direct lies, on the other hand, contradict facts altogether and leave opinions isolated from any common reference. In politics, lies get increasingly organized when politicians seek greater authority in government, to encourage bigger big business profits and to create scapegoats, all in order to consolidate power.

Both right and left populists make the claim in different ways that the political field is weakened by both corrupt elites and their usage of endless spin/lies. The populist left makes its claim from the perspective of intersectional minorities or more classically from labor organizing, while the right looks to recover its majority white hegemony or more classically a national ethnic identity. Echoing Mouffe's analysis of how the left in Europe moved to the center, Nancy Fraser (2017) argues that the division in the U.S. spread out from what she calls the progressive neoliberals stretching from Clinton to Obama to Clinton and the absence of an organized left, on one side, to the emergence of reactionary populism on the other. While progressive neoliberals adopted the progressive language on equality, anti-racism, and feminism over decades, economic policies did not reduce the rate of inequality that continued to expand, creating an ideological backlash. As if in step with the 2016 rise of right populism, a left populism emerged with an anti-neoliberal, anti-free trade Sanders-style socialism in the U.S. At the same time, you can see the return of left populism in the U.K. labor party under Corbyn growing to more than 600,000 members, the largest in Europe (Mouffe, 2018). A variety

of marginal ethnic nationalisms and strong man type despots came to power in Eastern Europe and elsewhere that have contributed to the epistemic division between us and them in the post-Brexit post-Trump context. With the ongoing trade war with China in particular and the withdrawal of the U.S. from the world's international agreements like the Paris Accord, the Iran Agreement, and the Intermediate-range Nuclear Forces (INF) treaty with Russian, there is now a large spread official renewal of the cold war, the official denial of the cause of climate change, and a renewed nuclear arms race.

The current legitimation and motivation deficits are explained by the left as symptoms of the ongoing break down of neoliberal forms of capitalism and by the right as a pent-up resentment stemming from years of stagnated wages, exported jobs, and exclusions left behind in the long shift to post-industrial economies. Wendy Brown (2019) argues that most left explanations do not recognize "the disintegration of society and the discrediting of public good by neoliberal reason as tilling the ground for the so-called tribalisms emerging as identities and political forces in recent years…It does not explain how the attack on equality……could turn up the heat on long simmering racisms" (pp.7).

On one side are progressive social policies that embrace globalism, an improved or socialist welfare state, a green plan to stem the crisis in climate change, encourage multicultural diversity, affirmative action, and gender equality, and support social movements (pro-choice, gun control, Black Lives matter, #metoo). The populist left is also critical of the neoliberal progressives, who used the language of social movements but also deported masses of undocumented (400,000 a year under Obama), and especially to have bailed out the global financial institutions with massive amounts of public money and the continuation of previous neoliberal economic policy favoring Wall Street. On the other side, the right populists promote

climate change denial, deregulation, anti- globalism, anti-immigration, pro-life, pro-gun and anti-political correctness –in the social movements especially. It is striking, as Fraser points out, how labor unions as a social force are left out of both sides of the divide. For Mouffe, it is imperative that left populists find a new narrative to recover the imagination of workers and find a language that equivocates with intersectional identities, in favor of arguments for equality.

These kinds of diagnosis give us a central but still partial sense of the interpretive division and not the full sense of a motivation crisis driving progressive neoliberals (the centrists in the new political landscape) and left and right populists that are able to negate each other's truth claims with such immunity and help set the scene for fake news. Any discovery of a new narrative that could bridge the left and right populists into a common political narrative needs to first recognize the blind spots that led to the impasse in the first place.

3. Can sociology come to the rescue?

In this section, we briefly review three competing approaches in media sociology and journalism studies that address the crisis in motivation and the broader condition, which have allowed the phenomenon of contemporary genres of fake news. Clearly, the theories of knowledge that media sociology are working from stand for a particular type of social science, but they also draw on a variety of political, economic, and cultural analyses that speak well to the disciplines normally affiliated with this faculty of research. If media and politics are in effect a big part of the problem, we are hard pressed to point out how social science "thinkers" have contributed to bridging the divide. A survey of the different media sociology epistemologies here is meant to be more exemplary than representative as a means to demonstrate this point.

Our first point is that slow-moving social science most often arrives after the scene has already been set, but also is delayed due to long divisive debates over the relations between

knowledge, truth, and power. To put it crudely, on one side, those who work from a critique of the fusion of power/knowledge/truth (Marx, Foucault) make it difficult to see the actors' point of view, discourse, or consciousness as valid. On the other side, those who seek to understand and explain the separation of facts from values in the actor's situation make it difficult to posit truth claims that might transcend the actor or their type of situation (Weber, Goffman). For positivist social science and objective (stenographic) journalists, "the mere telling of facts leads to no action whatever; it even tends, under normal circumstances, toward the acceptance of things as they are" (Arendt, 1956, pp. 251). Like politicians, social scientists are in a strong position to provide content for journalism and because of their autonomy from spin and the market they are expected to tell the truth with some measure of validity.

For right populists, the social science "thinkers" are caught in their own debates that lead into the traps of cultural Marxism (political correctness) and globalism. Some social science also provides a positive critique of the power elites through biographies of damage done to the ethnic nation (Cramer, 2016, Vance, 2016; Hochschild, 2016). Both the left and the right refer to the existential wounds that power inflicts. The left populists see knowledge production through intersectionality as a metaphor of oppression, in which each oppression is a vector, whose origins are postulated in advance and experienced painfully by the individual's race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, class, ability, and/or appearance. However, for some neo-Marxists, class is not a collection of hardships, nor is race or gender for that matter. Class is a position within a system of production and reproduction. Race is a relation of colonial exploitation. As Holly Lewis (2016) puts it, "Class is not another vector of oppression; it is the mystification of all social relations in the service of production of surplus value" (pp. 274). Identity politics for left populists can tend to focus on the critique of oppression and argue for the injured and subaltern,

while eschewing a rigorous analysis of exploitation. For post-Marxism, however, overcoming the impulse to explain identity politics through a reduction to economic categories is a challenge that has to be met.

For critical social science, theorizing the cultural power of the fields of politics and journalism, their professional ethics and relative autonomy from economic forces and from each other, means explaining what makes each a distinct field with a competing position, logic, and structure that reproduces itself, that can shape symbols of collective representation from the performances of actors/subjects. What is easily missed in approaches as varied as the field theory we have been loosely following (Bourdieu, 2005; Benson, 2013; Ryfe, 2017), and competing approaches of cultural sociology (Alexander, 2015; 2003) and Actor Network Theory (Latour, 20067; Primo & Zago, 2015), are the interpretive contradictions between the subjects of news reports or the subjects of policies and the imagined demos or "normal people" that are addressed. Fake news like 'The Pope supports Donald Trump, Yoko Ono had a lesbian relationship with Hillary Clinton'; or, 'A city in Texas is evacuated because of a reported Ebola outbreak' are not speaking to the Pope, to Yoko Ono, or to Texans, but to a third imaginary audience. Examples of this "super addressee" might range from a race of people, to a region, to a neighborhood, or to a broadly implied urban, national, or even global publics.

This internal dialogue between the author and the imagined audience is not limited to a conventional exchange of ideas, as in a conversation between two speakers that can be decoded according to linguistic rules. It is understood rather as the process that takes place in the imagination of the author and the idea, however distant or intimate, of the audience. The approach to the addressee demonstrates how both real and fake news contribute to the paradox of public culture, in which the voices of those being discussed are mostly absent. If it is true,

for example, that journalism and fake news mostly speak about immigrants or the undocumented in the third person, it is usually about them and not with them, and so it is clear that the subjects of these reports are not the audience the author imagines. (Nielsen, 2009; 2016; Jackson, Nielsen, & Hsu, 2011)

We have a good idea of how politicians imagine their address to their own parties and to constituents, and of how social scientists line up potential truth tellers and fact producers in theoretical debates. However, media sociologies of journalism and politics have not yet fully problematized the way in which their discourse is able to imagine its audience without addressing itself to the subjects being considered. Bourdieu's field analysis locates what we might call the third- person narrative 'positioning' of a given actor (journalist or politician), and the logic inside a given story in a way that is already framed in advance by the structure of the field in relation to other fields. In other words, journalism speaks about and not with the subjects of reports. Any reduction of fake news to a structural or organizational explanation of the position and discursive logic though assumes a settledness that can count on a common interpretation of the facts (Benson, 2014). If we are in a period of motivation crisis in which at least one part of the audience has lost the ability to hear the other's word as partially his or her own, if there is no ability to accept each other's validity claims, if emotion and opinion get separated from facts and truth, it seems we are outside the possibility of a settled legitimacy and even outside the ability to control the dissemination of fake news.

Jeffery Alexander probes this paradox by challenging the reductionist tendency in field theory and various sociologies of culture that would explain fake news as an expression of economic or political interest. His strong cultural sociology would look first at the actor's horizons of meaning and affect through thick description of narrative performances in order to

uncover the effect culture has on structure (Alexander, 2003; 2015). The idea that right populists are simply interpolated by fake news and alt-right media is put into question. The story that people embrace most expresses a deep sense of personal injury and is already in place as fake news and the alt-right media emerge. As Francesca Polletta and Jessica Callahan (2018) suggest, these are the “stories (already) told by friends and acquaintances, stories that substitute memory for history, stories that make the experience of others seem as if it is their own, and stories whose truth is relatively unimportant to their value” (pp. 56).

Fake news is organized around narratives of imaginary inclusion that are already present and exclusions from “the community,” thereby creating domains of "We-dom" (the normal people, real Americans/British, the Christians, the whites) and "They-dom" (the elites, illegals, Muslims, non-whites, uncivilized) (Hartley, 1992; Alexander, 2018). The boundaries of We-dom and They-dom are not always coterminous with a unified political boundary and can be drawn from a specific set of well-known normative binaries. Fake news helps constitute communities, but the problem with community is that it also divides domains of 'us' and 'them.’

At the same time, cultural sociology also takes into account how the meaning and affect in narrative also impacts the institutional structure. In our case, it takes into account how much fake news upsets the journalist’s ‘sacred’ sense of autonomy (from markets and sources) and the larger professional culture (autonomy, verification, balance, objectivity, accuracy) (Alexander, 2015). As seen in the case of Cambridge Analytica, fake news does an end run around journalism and goes straight to the consumer. As Jacob (2018) puts it, “fake news is the new public relations” (pp. 79). Not just pollsters misdiagnose the U.S. elections and the Brexit referendum, nor do journalists only miss the forceful role of social media, but journalism misses the story that is already circulating in the population coming to vote.

Bruno Latour's version of actor Network theory applied to journalism studies moves in the opposite direction from both critical sociology à la Bourdieu and the strong cultural sociology under the somewhat dubious assumption that social structures themselves are simply the invention of the analyst. To grasp the meaning of politics, actor network theory simply follows the actors, looks for group formation through controversies, and finds out rather than advises the processes of change. There are no pre-determined structures that a specialized discipline can uncover and then instruct the actors per se, only associations and group formations. The ontological turn wants us to record the traces between the actors and material objects, whether they are active or passive agents. The association between material and human produces a hybrid of actants, which are the source of agency in terms of intermediators creating change, or mediators that simply maintain the association. On the one hand, Rodney Benson (2014) points out, A.N.T is a useful descriptive approach especially in unstable periods. On the other hand, 'real' patterns of inequality are empirically observable as structures and as such can be said to exist prior to their observation.

The advantage for studying journalism and fake news in this approach is the focus it puts on what journalism is becoming rather than what it is, or what it should be. It looks to understanding the traces and associations in the next internet and how the hybrid of human and non-human actants is being formed (Primo & Zago, 2015). While the approach might contribute to previously uncovered parts of the crisis journalism and politics are undergoing, the urgency, which the two sides in the motivation crisis are expressing, suggests that the mutations may have already happened by the time A.N.T. researchers get to the field.

For Latour though the idea of arriving late to the scene is not an impediment; it just means you start from where you are. For example, Latour, a founder of science and technology

studies, now withdraws (at least shortly) from his approach to natural science as a social construction. He now calls for a robust defence of climate science against fake news, and so embraces a realist epistemology (the idea that the real exists independent of our concept of it). While he spent much of his career developing an anthropological critique of scientific method, he now argues that the consequence of fake news on the issue of climate is today's greatest threat to democracy. For Latour, the conditions that have made fake news possible are defined by three phenomena that "commentators have often noted but failed to see their connections": deregulation, the loss of faith in globalization, and climate change denial. The U.S. election, Brexit, and the rise of right populism all come from the same matrix. Latour (2018) thanks the right populists for a denial that creates clarity that "the climate question is at the heart of all geopolitical issues and that it is directly tied to questions of injustice and inequality" (pp.3).

Our question returns for each of the three approaches as to how to explain the gap in third- person narratives between the subjects of reports/tweets/images and the implied or imagined audience, and how the subjects themselves are generally excluded as addressees. This is a deeply inherent form of address in acts of journalism, politics, and most social science. For journalism, there is little reason to think it is likely to change, despite the innovations and integration of social media into the news room, however decentralized they might be (come) (Deuze & Witschge, 2018).

Where can we go from here? The larger and more difficult question is what might happen if each of the three fields began to address the subjects of their reports in a first-person I-you narrative, as if they were the imagined addressee in a public dialogue? Could it be done in a way that undoes the professional commitment to neutrality, objectivity, or balance in the third-person 'he, she, they' narrative? Does putting the journalist, sociologist, or politician into the story and

addressing the story back to the subject of the story reduce the field to the status of activism? What are the implications for a direct radical pluralist politics, if it were to include the political subjects being addressees as the imaginary audience? What if left populists spoke directly to right populists (or the reverse) rather than about them? Or does moving from the pragmatic to the possible, or from balance to greater commitment to the interpretation mean endless adversarial antagonism? Or are all these things already moving back to the center in ways that are almost unnoticed?

Conclusion

We have raised more questions than we can provide answers for and have only begun to sketch out a general theory to help explain what we can hope for, once social facts give way to ever more intense emotional reactions as the new political norm takes hold. I have drawn more on the U.S. case --though it is broadly linked to Brexit and the global context-- and have loosely revised and updated a reflection from Bourdieu's earlier theory of how these three fields work with and against one another, in order to get a fresh look at the "what is" question regarding the effect of fake news on the two sides that have come to define our political moment.

Fake news and right-wing populist movements that appear to hold the fate of democracy hostage are urgent concerns around the world. A political and media storm has social scientists and pundits perplexed as to how to explain the tenacity of deeply opposing legitimation views and truth claims currently threatening the stability of liberal democracies and beyond. The present legitimation crisis, to borrow from Habermas (1975), has been sustained long enough to enter the phase of a motivation crisis in the sense that the deep interpretive divisions, as we have shown across the chapter, means that left and right populists as well as centrist conservatives and progressives have little to no inclination to even consider truth claims about all kinds of social

facts from their adversaries, putting democracy in a flight toward an authoritarian form of oligarchy. We conclude that the political and media storm around fake news has occurred in part because the strengths in each of the three fields under discussion have given way to their respective weaknesses. As fake news threatens the legitimacy of each of the three fields, there are nonetheless signs this is turning around (Langlois et als. 2019).

While it seems that journalism is continuing its downward spiral as an industry, as a craft it is also attacked on a continual basis. Caught in the motivation crisis and outflanked by its adversaries, the professional culture appears to be working vigorously not so much for a return but for a way forward to a deliberative democracy that feels lost in flight. The return of the political is not necessarily about going back to the centre either but about moving the field forward in some new, bold direction. Responding to a professional calling and acting as watchdog on powerful institutions do not make journalism or social science an opposition to the government, and yet, in these very peculiar circumstances, they cannot help but become part of the resistance, despite some denial of the gatekeepers who remain determined to remain objective, detached, or non-partisan. Ironically, the more journalism is accused by right populists of being fake, the more it recovers trust.

Big questions remain unresolved for where we can go from here: Can politics resolve the divide that fake news and the coming communications context have already helped produce? Can slow-paced social science research catch up, provide analysis, and renew trust in social facts for whatever side negates them? Will journalism be able to shape the next internet to fit its autonomous professional culture, which in turn seems to have already been both destroyed and revived by it? It appears we will not have to wait much longer to find out.

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Key Term Definitions:

Actor Network Theory. This is the study of the cultural traces that the material objects and human actors leave in the process of forming groups. Human and non-human actants are relative and none is more important than the other. Technological and human actants form a hybrid that can transform group formations or maintain them. The task of A.N.T. is to describe the process of group assemblages and not to advise them. New technologies like social media that propagate fake news are an example of the technology-human hybrid that serve as mediators. Print-journalism is caught flat footed in the shift to digital production and can be seen as an intermediator that helps maintain previous group formations.

Alt Right. The term is short for the alternative right. It contradicts the former neo-conservative movement that emerged in the 1980's as a strategy to gain electoral support from minorities while harboring traditional trickle down economic policies like lower taxes for the wealthy and free trade. The alt right seek a global movement that would reverse the effects of globalisation that left industrial labor behind in the shifts to the service and digital economies. The term alt right also describes groups associated with white nationalists, anti-Semitism, anti-immigrant, and/or climate change deniers as well as a number of charismatic intellectuals and media personalities who attack contemporary values of diversity.

Cultural Sociology. This approach argues that culture is a form of autonomous power and that every action has a horizon of meaning and affect that needs to be understood in itself. It requires an immanent reading of the actor's performance and that is not explained in terms of some other economic, technological, or political structure. Once meaning and affect are grasped on their own terms, the power of culture can then be seen to act on structures. Fake news needs to be understood in terms of the meaning and affect of stories already being told by actors in their own contexts. Only then can the power of culture be discerned.

Critical Sociology. Culture is a practice that is both a creative process and a structure of constraints. The goal of critical sociology is to understand and explain enduring structures of domination that constrain actors. It requires a first level reading of meaning from the actors but moves to a second level that explains the meaning in terms of larger forces that structure them. Fake news needs to be understood as a form of propaganda that developed over long periods of time in larger political and economic forces.

Democracy. It means rule by the people. Direct democracy requires a deliberation by the people that lead to decisions for the common good. In more complex contexts like mass society a representative form is more practical. Elected representatives are sent to legislate in the name of their constituents. In liberal and republican democracy the rule of law, the separation of legislative, judiciary, and executive power, along with a constitution that quarantines a basic set of rights for all, a market, and a civil society—are all said to guide the representative process.

Fake news. The term was first used by two reporters from Buzzfeed Craig Silverman and Lawrence Alexander following their discovery of a large number of intentional false reporting of pro-Trump stories in the 2016 U.S. election. The stories came mainly from alt right wing U.S. sources. The term fake news grew quickly as regular news stories picked up multiple examples of news intentionally meant to deceive readers/viewers. Its meaning was reversed by the President shortly after his election when he began to call all news and news organizations fake when it contradicted his agenda.

Populism. A political movement that can be defined as the rising up of "the people" against elites. Cutting across class and regional territories it builds forces that challenge existing regimes. It can be called right wing when coupled with conservative nationalism but can also engage a left wing liberalism or socialism when in struggle against conservative forces. Both left and right tend to argue that the will of the people triumphs over any other measure.