DOSSIER

WHAT IS THE POST-TRUTH?

Elements for a critique of the concept

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ABSTRACT – This paper provides a brief critical examination of the term "post-truth" to determine to what extent it may or may not be considered useful for comprehending the notion of public opinion in contemporaneity. We are extremely interested in this reflection due to the heightened use of this term over the last years, especially in reference to the propagation of *fake news*. To accomplish this, we set out to divide our work into two key parts: the first part questions whether "post-truth" is an accurate term for that which it describes; the second question, pertaining specifically to the massive increase in communications technologies and social networks, poses a challenge: Is there any particular present-day phenomenon that is reshaping the idea of truth?
Key words: Post-truth. Public opinion. Ethics. *Fake News*. Communications and Politics.

O QUE É A PÓS-VERDADE? Elementos para uma crítica do conceito

RESUMO – O presente artigo pretende submeter o termo "pós-verdade" a um breve exame crítico, procurando problematizar em que medida a sua apropriação pode ou não se apresentar como um dispositivo útil na leitura de uma noção contemporânea de opinião pública. O que nos impele a essa reflexão é o acentuado uso que o termo tem recebido nos últimos tempos, sobretudo em referência ao advento do fenômeno da propagação das chamadas *fake news*. Para realizá-la, dividimos nosso percurso em duas questões fundamentais: a primeira delas indaga em que medida o termo "pós-verdade" faz sentido para aquilo que em geral se deseja dizer com ele; já a segunda questão, especificamente em um contexto de hipertrofia das tecnologias de comunicação e de suas redes sociais, interpela-nos: há algum fenômeno particular de nossa época que esteja, ao fim e ao cabo, ressignificando a própria ideia de verdade?
Palavras-chave: Pós-verdade. Opinião pública. Ética. *Fake News*. Comunicação e Política.

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¿QUÉ ES LA POSVERDAD? Elementos para una crítica del concepto

RESUMEN – El presente artículo pretende someter el término "posverdad" a un breve exámen crítico, buscando problematizar en qué medida su apropiación puede o no presentarse como un dispositivo útil en la lectura de una noción contemporánea de opinión pública. Lo que nos impulsa a esa reflexión es el acentuado uso que el término ha recibido en los últimos años, sobre todo en referencia al advenimiento del fenómeno de propagación de noticias falsas. Para realizarla, dividimos nuestro recorrido en dos cuestiones fundamentales: la primera de ellas indaga en qué medida el término "posverdad" tiene sentido para lo que en general se desea decir con él; y, la segunda cuestión, específicamente en un contexto de hipertrofia de las tecnologías de comunicación y de sus redes sociales, nos plantea: ¿hay algún fenómeno particular de nuestra época que esté, al final, resignificando la propia idea de verdad?
Palabras clave: Posverdad. Opinión pública. Ética. *Fake News*. Comunicación y Política.

The term post-truth has been associated as an absolutely paradoxical condition of contemporary times, a time when public opinion seems to be based less on supposed objective truths and rational ethical ways of thinking, and more on appeals to personal beliefs and emotions. The term has been used in a wide range of cases, especially in media and politics[1], and was named "Word of the Year" in 2016[2] by *Oxford Dictionary*.

Regardless, the intent of this paper is not to discuss specific occurrences of the word or even the definition given by the dictionary[3]. The objectives of this article are described in two lines of thought. The first will focus on the very concept of "post-truth", examining it from a philosophical point of view and identifying limits and implications of its use. The second, more comprehensive line of thinking will discuss certain aspects that are believed to have led to the creation of the concept – whether or not it is properly suited to describe such circumstances.

Our working hypothesis is that these aspects, in general, relate to a change in the functioning and expression mechanisms of the public sphere which seem to migrate from "argumentative discourse" to "media image", from its attachment to a concrete referentiality or causal relations (which we consider to be rational), to a larger aesthetic appeal in which the logic of the word seems to yield to emotions.

In order to examine this issue, we need to look at what we identify as its main questions. The first refers to the conceptual adequacy of the term "post-truth", that is, does it make sense to use this word to postulate what we mean according to its definition? This leads us to the second question: regardless of the appropriateness of the term, is there any singular event in contemporaneity that could be the cause of one of the major, problematic questions in communication, that being the concept of "truth"? Our critique of the concept of post-truth will be based around these two questions.

1 The first question: the conceptual adequacy of the term

If we look at the most basic accepted meaning of the term "post-truth", that meaning being the one that indicates to us a state, condition, or circumstance which is announced "after" an initial state, condition, or circumstance, we come to a definition that, at the very least, seems to indicate something different from what we claim as "truth". For instance, the prefix "post" has been used in countless other cases (particularly after "postmodernity") to effectively indicate a transformation that overcomes an initial state, and we see it being used similarily to account for a quick, almost "intuitive" understanding of a situation where the previously recognized and cultivated "truth" no longer prevails; it is no longer the plumb line for building and using discourses in the public sphere.

Now, we must first ask to what extent the truth is actually used as the basis for structuring said discourses. This is because the recent plethora of so-called "*fake news*", and believing its content in the absence of any criteria with which to verify or authenticate it (this occurs continuously on social networks), is one of the best examples to show how "post-truth" overshadows a state of affairs which truth, up until now, has been fundamental in for organizing public opinion.

Indeed, this dilemma is unsolvable, whether we consider all the peculiarities surrounding the constitution of discourse[4] or whether we take into account the very complexity of the concept of truth, one of the fundamental themes upon which Western philosophy would be built upon. Perhaps the clash between Socrates and the sophists, and the former's critique of the latter's conception of truth is an important case in point.

In order to briefly investigate whether truth was the basis for the construction of discourses – a question which cannot be fully answered here – we have to ask ourselves what we mean by "truth". And when trying

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to answer that question, the clash between Socrates and the sophists seems to tell us that it is an impractical task; impractical because both sides of the dispute ultimately give us two different concepts of "truth": they fight over something that ultimately deals with two different objects.

While the philosophy of Socrates is based on a unique, unchanging, absolute conception of truth, sophist philosophy defends the relativity of truth, its possibility of transformation according to the operation of λόγος[5]. For example, according to Protagoras, something may be stated as a truth or as a lie, it may be for or against a given argument, and it is this flexibility of the concept of truth and the possibility of manipulating it to A or B, to yes or no, which exercises of persuasion and rhetoric lessons would be built and make the sophists' teachings renowned throughout the Greek cities. From that time on, we think of the truth as absolute or relative, thus questioning any notion of objectivity or faithful portrayal of things or of the world. This unsolvable contention would largely contribute to the birth of politics today.

Politics would thus be one of the realms par excellence in this dispute. And it would be the reconfigurations of this game that would lead Hannah Arendt to reflect, so many centuries later, on the relationship between truth and politics[6]; the fundamental difference between "rational truth" (or "philosophical truth") and "factual truth[7]". Rational truth is related to the domain of opinion; a truth that derives its opinionative nature by being placed under discussion, by "penetrating the public sphere", in Arendt's words. It presents "a shifting not merely from one kind of reasoning to another but from one way of human existence to another" (Arendt, 2014, p. 295), the "de facto truth" has an inalienable political nature insofar as it always encompasses a group of people, "it concerns events and circumstances in which many are involved" (p. 295). This is then characterized as relative to the social and material realm and implies a conception of facts beyond the subjective level[8] of opinions – the basis of rational or philosophical truth.

This is not why, however, Arendt opposes facts and opinions; on the contrary, the legitimacy of opinions is ensured as long as they "respect factual truth". It is precisely this difference between opinions and the so-called factual truth that could subvert the truth itself and advance the lie. In this regard, Arendt is quite emphatic when she suggests that freedom of opinion is not actually indiscriminately free and unrestricted, with no criteria, it must always be based on fact; any point of view based solely on an opinion is thus hindered, even if said opinion presents a logically plausible interpretation[9].

Arendt warns us of a serious risk, which would become the key point in her text[10]: the possibility, on the part of politics itself, of altering the factuality of things from the "fabrication" of parallel realities, realities which seek to legitimize certain discourses. She states:

> (...) if the modern political lies are so big that they require a complete rearrangement of the whole factual texture, the making of another reality, as it were, into which they will fit without seam, crack, or fissure, exactly as the facts fitted into their own original context, what prevents these new stories, images, and non-facts from becoming an adequate substitute for reality and factuality? (Arendt, 2014, p. 313).

This is exactly where Arendt's text seems to offer us a fundamental thread with which to sew together our brief reflection on the concept of post-truth. Based on the previous passage, it seems that to simply call these discourses lies (the ones which Arendt refers to) might reduce their complexity, and thus we might fail to recognize that, at the limit, they have an acute – albeit not "factually" true – effect upon reality. These kinds of discourses rearrange their own factuality and are constructed in order to adhere to it without any chance of denouncing their falsity. This adherence operates in a very well-organized manner; the "modern political lie", quite different from the forms used by the "traditional political lie", notes Arendt.

While the traditional lie has a clear distinction between what is considered true and what is considered a lie (such a lie embodies, especially in political diplomacy, very definite objectives such as the destabilization of the enemy[11]), the modern political lie, which mainly validates the structures of totalitarian regimes, seems to reinforce certain versions of reality on a domestic front, fallacious stories which are often created with the purpose of rewriting, under well-defined biases, certain events in certain societies[12].

However, there is still a fundamental distinction between the two types of lies (with a serious effect, according to Arendt): modern political lies, by creating certain images to reinforce their stories, they end up producing a kind of self-deception, from which the distinction between truth and lie becomes extremely difficult and complex. What was once told to the enemy as a lie, and clearly recognized as such in the domestic sphere, would end up influencing that same realm: all thanks to the creation of a sophisticated apparatus of "mass manipulation of facts and opinions" (Arendt, 2014, p. 311), in which advertising takes center stage.

What Arendt finds is that the specific context of politics seems to have taken, over the following decades, the most varied spheres of

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contemporary life. Events which are characterized today as "post-truth" (and which are largely defined as public debates no longer anchored in a supposed objectivity of facts, but in circumstantial versions immersed with the most ardent feelings and affections) may provide interesting examples of something which philosophy has already identified (of course, maintaining the singularities of each historical era). This is one path that could be taken to break down what the term means nowadays, and stop perceiving it as a characteristic of our time, despite its uniqueness, particularly after the explosion of the Internet and the recent phenomenon of *fake news*.

It is in this sense, then, that it might not be a stretch to say that a certain inadequacy lie with the term. "Post-truth" seems to represent more of a somewhat superficial attempt at shaping this complex articulation, using the "short" and "intuitive" prefix "post", which Arendt highlights, *mutatis mutandis*, between the elaborations of what is conceived as truth and lie in the public sphere. The term seems to reduce the effects of this sophisticated operation, to the point of almost making them disappear, by simply declaring it a "later stage" of a supposed earlier truth. On the other hand, despite this possible inadequacy, the attempt still has its reasons, which is what we shall look at next.

2 Second question: the changing concept of truth in our times

We have already seen that the word "post-truth" carries a lot of weight with it. But, on the other hand, it cannot be that "post-truth" has characterized events that, until recently, seemed to us as so unlikely to occur. Likewise, the spread of *fake news* and the importance of gossip and rumors in recent times can also be important elements. This raises the following question: is there any particular event of our time that gives rise to specific terms like "post-truth"?

Although Arendt already talks of a phenomenon that appears to be very similar to what we identify today as "post-truth" in politics or other realms of social life, it might be possible to identify certain elements that make the forms of truth-building in the public sphere of our era unique. And the fundamental thread that ties this all together is the question of the sophistication of these forms. When Arendt speaks of modern political lies, she describes a scenario in which the lies themselves are so well articulated that they seem to create a separate reality.

However, it is not too dramatic to assert there is at least an intensification of this process, since after a series of fundamental steps

towards privileging human dignity, granting access to fundamental rights, and building a notion of interplanetary civility, we have seen a proliferation of discourses of intolerance of the most varied types, and in varied tones. All of this is wrapped up in a dizzying amount of information that is so incredible that we neglect its practical effects[13]. Two of the best known examples of this, which even *Oxford* attributed the term "post-truth" to, are: the Brexit victory, a term used to describe the withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the European Union; and Donald Trump's election victories, both as a Republican candidate and as president of the United States[14].

Both events, fueled by a powerful network of rumors, seemed rather unlikely to occur, at least for those who used allegedly rational arguments such as "someone who claims that Barack Obama is the founder of the Islamic State would never be president of a country such as the United States" or "the United Kingdom would never turn down its main trade and political alliance". But what we saw was a barrage of news that had little or nothing to do with the facts or even data that a simple search on official websites could resolve. However, the improbability of those events became unshakeably "true" facts. Even though these events have, by and large, unfolded from false rumors and gossip, the consequences are real and will have to be experienced. How, then, do we explain the attraction certain audiences have to this fantasy news even though most of us seem to see through the utter nonsense? What about human reason? Does it not exist anymore?

This is not, of course, a definitive conclusion about such a question; what we are presenting here is the idea that it does not seem possible to disassociate such a phenomenon from the current centrality of images – especially media images – in contemporary life. By addressing the mechanisms that would make these versions of reality increasingly credible and factual, Arendt herself often refers to the question of image, especially its strategic use by totalitarian regimes for the purpose of building "political lies". The image is a key element for a powerful apparatus of state propaganda. In fact, outside the realm of politics, it would be no exaggeration to suggest that this kind of appeal seems to have penetrated other spheres of social life, especially through an excessive growth of propaganda through not only advertising but also another very unique way. It is from this point that the dynamics between media and public opinion would be completely transformed.

Initially political in nature, propaganda has become one of the most sophisticated forms of communication in the job of

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fabricating realities, sprucing up or even giving an identity to more ordinary events of contemporary life. Once confined to the political realm, these communication techniques and their specific mode of operating images seem to have spread throughout various realms of life. But this has not occurred through the old formats of using political messages of excessive patriotism and the will to fight a common enemy[15]; it has occurred by a much more complex, social use operated by a wave of new technology which seems to have transformed the very dynamics of building the public sphere.

It was this idea that would lead Jürgen Habermas to favor advertising as a "function" of a new public sphere16. Habermas seeks to mark a turning point in a public sphere grounded in the "liberal-era press" toward a public sphere in mass media. It is a turning point because the very nature of what is conceived as "public" seems to change here: while the liberal press plays a much more intermediary role in prominently private discourses assembled with the public, Habermas claims that the era of mass media completely changes this dynamic as it begins to create its own public sphere, thereby modifying all its old operating logic. There would not be, according to Habermas, a private meeting with the public, but the fabrication of a "public" from private interests posed and conveyed from these media:

> In the course of journalism, from people who would privately, to the public services of the mass media, the public sphere changes through private interests, which can present themselves in a privileged way - although they are no longer *eo ipso* representatives of the interests of private persons *as* being public. (Habermas, 2003, p. 221, italics added).

This would result in "commercial advertising" flooding the public sphere which, according to Habermas, would mean private persons acting as "private" and not "*as* public" owners. This brings us to a reversal of the very notion of "public", which is ultimately shaped by fundamentally private interests. Habermas points out that such a change was not due to the fact that advertising took over the public sphere – a necessary economic measure perhaps (Habermas, 2003, p. 225) – but how it took over. There might well have been the possibility of having developed a public economic sphere separate from the political one, and thus retain the characteristics of the public sphere of the liberal press. Yet this is not the case. Conversely – and perhaps therein lies the very "structural nature of such a change" – what Habermas identifies is a profound relationship between the new

way of working with propaganda and journalism, and the defense of very specific interests, far from what we would characterize as "public": in the words of Habermas, "the journalistic and advertising representation of privileged private interests was, from the outset, fully amalgamated with political interests" (p. 225).

One caveat here is that perhaps Habermas's trajectory between the *modus operandi* of the media and the characteristics of the public sphere is, to some extent, too linear, concentrating on an extreme responsibility of the media, to the point of disadvantaging other equally relevant aspects (such as the plethora of cultural nuances or subjective order). And perhaps this is what led him to add important observations in prefaces and later editions to his theoretical proposal. This is a very interesting topic and would warrant at least one more article to be written on it. However, what we are looking to shed light on here is the possibility of understanding how such interests will ultimately be linked to a marketing *modus operandi* which, together with the logic of advertising, operates its rules and formats in various realms of contemporary life.

What we see in Habermas's thesis is a fundamental element of change in the way politics functions in the public sphere, which tends to almost irrationally manage the relationship between public and private. This is because, as new media begin to define the character of "public" based on specific private interests, it becomes even more necessary to "sell" this new character as an expression of something general, universal, good and necessary for "all". Thus, the narratives that unfold in this new sphere cannot clearly demonstrate their primary objectives based on private interests if they want to win over the public, they have to act towards promoting the "common good" – which in certain cases, according to Habermas, would even function as a form of protection against certain "social reforms".

It is in this context that an even more sophisticated form of "public" communication seems to emerge, sophisticated in the sense that it rearticulates the discourses in the public sphere so that they come across favorably for the ones who propose them which, ultimately, demonstrates the strategic marriage between the media and the industrial and financial sectors. This form of communication is what Habermas points to as public relations, the fundamental objective of which is to "work with public opinion"[17]. There is, in turn, a sophisticated way of dealing with the audience, a purposeful confusion between the private and the public, between the role of consumer and the role of the old "educated public", who acted

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as protagonists in a public space where newspapers only acted as mediators of their speeches. Habermas states:

> Private claims always turn to other private persons once they are considered as consumers; the recipient of public relations is "public opinion", it is private persons as public and not as imminent consumers. The issuer conceals its commercial intentions behind the image of someone interested in the common good. Consumer manipulation borrows its connotations from the classic figure of a private-minded educated public and takes advantage of its legitimacy: traditional functions of the public sphere are integrated with competition from organized private interests. (Habermas, 2003, pp. 226-227).

Thus, according to Habermas, there is a complete reversal of the positions of advertising and the public sphere. Initially, publicity is the way to undo the unilaterality of decisions from heads of government, and is thus "imposed" as a way of subjecting them to public debate, or "subjecting them to public opinion". However, with the development of its forms, especially the advent of mass media, advertising shifts from "imposed" to that which "imposes" from its own devices: "It intrudes into the process of 'public opinion' by producing planned news or taking advantage of attention-grabbing events" (Habermas, 2003, p. 227), and as a result can give prestige to a particular person or issue. The result, therefore, would not be the critique of an issue from a "public" which already constitutes an independent public sphere, but the fabrication of a "public" according to the interests posed by advertising or its consequent forms, for example, *public relations*. In the words of Habermas, "the public sphere needs to be 'fabricated'; it is no longer 'there'"[18].

This is how Habermas, in his own way, leads us to the issue that we discussed previously with Arendt: the possibility of building supposed facts in the public sphere, the construction of pseudo-facts prior to reality itself and that, due to their high acceptance by the public, would even have the ability to generate practical effects in reality[19]. We then move from a factual truth whose coverage was regulated by a debate in a realm pre-existing the debated question itself – a realm imbued with 'symbolism guaranteed by tradition', in Habermas's words – into a context in which the questions and the ways in which these questions are transformed into public truths, fabricate a particular "public".

It is clear that this "fabrication" of the public sphere by the media, as we pointed out above, must be relativized, especially from the interaction and connection practices offered by the development of these media, mainly digital communication. Yet, on the other hand,

this perspective can help us to more clearly identify the key point of the constitution of today's public debate. This is because the advancements in television and the advent of the Internet seem to suggest a higher presence of media in the public sphere[20], in the very "structural" sense given by Habermas. Eugênio Bucci and what he identifies as the "invention of the live image" help to visualize this improvement. Bucci, while keeping with the importance of Habermasian thinking, complexifies the way in which we think about this kind of *media* action, going beyond the linear or mechanistic interpretations.

For Bucci (2009), the emergence of live images would be powerful enough to transform the very status of our forms of world representation. His reflection, although based mainly on journalism, centers on live image and its ability to affect various spheres of contemporary life. Bucci uses the expression "instance of live image" to refer to a kind of "realm" – in his words, "headquarters" – of a momentary set of "fixations and slips of meanings" (Bucci, 2009, p. 66), something that is continuously being modified and reconstructed from the very dynamics of the discourses that take place there.

Drawing heavily on Habermas's research on the public sphere, Bucci defines two expressions as operative concepts for the structural transformation he describes. What Habermas describes as a passage between the bourgeois public sphere and the public sphere of the mass media is reflected in Bucci, in a transition between what he calls the "instance of printed word" and the previously mentioned "instance of live image".

The element of the live image thus gains privileged *status* in his reflection which carries the idea that the public space is, above all, a communicative space. This is fundamental for Bucci to relate the forms of world representation that occur in this public space to discursive manifestations. He concludes: "Reality is a discursive construction; it is not a thing, it is not something one can hold in their hands, but a representation that acquires the ability to name things which, once they have been named, are able to be held in our hands" (Bucci, 2009, p. 66).

The "instance of printed word" is fundamentally related to the daily press and print media as intermediaries in public debate, providing an arena in which to discuss issues of a prominently public nature. The "instance of live image" introduces a new dynamic of functioning and expression of the public space.

Words, once preserved by print media, lose space to the live image, a dominant form of media for representing the world which leads to a repression of rational discursive forms in place of a growing

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appeal to "see". Moreover, it is worth noting that Bucci's notion is that the very criteria for defining truth in this new instance, and in this new age of world representations, fundamentally comes from that which is transformed and exposed as a live image. The word of print newspapers, a fundamental instance which draws factual truth from the world, gives way to a "markedly aesthetic" public space, according to Bucci says. And it is in his "emotional appeals", subjected to the "laws of entertainment" (Bucci, 2009, p. 69), that this new public space will have a consequence: the possible loss of influence of reason[21] or, at the very least, a certain tendency to privilege aesthetics which do not exactly fall within the rational domain[22].

Following Bucci's thought process, this shift from the rational to aesthetic, a change in how a common truth is defined in the public sphere, is the fundamental element we wanted to achieve. Perhaps through this shift we can understand this massive change more clearly, to the point of even seeking a new term with which to redefine something that, in other times, would be very well situated at the extremes of true or false.

3 Implications on the public sphere: from rational to aesthetic

Such a passage and the tensions it creates are at the center of the contradictions articulated by the definition of the term post-truth: an antinomy between the "objective facts" – supposedly verifiable from rational operation – and the "appeals to emotion" and "personal beliefs", given by the unpredictability of emotion. It is true that Habermas himself already recognized, to a certain extent, this aesthetic force when he highlighted the new mechanisms available to advertising for mobilizing its public: the "dramatic representation of facts", the use of "calculated stereotypes"[23]. But this approach becomes even clearer from Bucci and the element of the live image which, particularly through film and TV and now intensified by the Internet, would figure as a supreme instance for defining the very forms of representing the world.

If there is any particular phenomenon of our time that challenges our relationship with the truth, or at the very least, confuses us to the point where we no longer recognize the basic criteria needed to establish it – and here we revisit our initial question – perhaps it is this new dynamic: all the particularities of such an intricate, even contradictory, notion of factuality arise from the fundamentally aesthetic nature of the contemporary public sphere, such as obscurity itself and

the inconclusiveness of emotional experience. And what are the main implications of this? We can point to two: one that questions the sphere of ethics and another that approaches the very concept of existence.

For the first point, the most pertinent question may not be whether or not something is true or the extent to which something is false or not, but how we will safeguard, under this aesthetic nature of the public sphere, a minimal set of values or even norms (which, in order to exist, require a basic logical foundation). That seems to be exactly where the greatest risk lies in this new condition. As a critical reflection on what we are proposing here, we cannot ignore what the implications of its aesthetic nature on the public sphere are, particularly the political implications. This is precisely what leads us to Arendt, Habermas and Bucci: insightful in their own way and within the particularities of their different eras, they force us to think, not just about the notion of truth, but about the construction of a certain idea of "common" and how this construction has become more complex since the 20th century with the growing, efficient participation of communication technologies.

As for the second point, the transition from rational to aesthetic imparts on us an element that Habermas highlights: let us not forget the turning point that occurs from the marriage between the media and the industrial and financial sectors. Sophisticated media techniques, whether advertising or its more subtle forms like *public relations*, seem to be directly linked to new modes of conception of factual truth, ways in which the existence of something is no longer situated in its rational possibility, but is much more related to the simple fact that it can be seen in the form of a "media image" (whether the moving image in TV or cinema, or the digital image on our mobile devices).

It might therefore be premature to equate "post-truth" to a lie. Maybe due to the simple fact that media image presents itself as "media image" (quotations added for emphasis), which may already lend a certain credibility to it, a kind of magical effect attributed by its features and convenience; everything is just one click away. The image becomes believable simply because it is seen. It conveys the idea that something is happening, something is "in action" (this is why Bucci's concept of "live image" is so appropriate), and it seems to suggest that something "exists", even if it does not hide – and this is very important – its probable inconsistency with reality. It is a mechanism that is so well operated nowadays that it seems to generate a certain appreciation for the false, a "fetish" for something that, from the onset, is not committed to the factual truth of common critical thinking.

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NOTES

1 If we are able to break them down into different spheres. We note, however, that the term was not coined in 2016, but was first recorded as early as the 1990s, according to *Oxford Dictionary*. The interesting aspect is the explosion of its use in recent years and how trendy it has become. In 2016, the year it became *Oxford*'s word of the year, Gabriel Priolli (Priolli, 2016) cites the numbers that prove this: "its use increased by 2,000% (...) [in 2016]. *Google* registered over 20.2 million citations in English, 11 million in Spanish and 9 million in Portuguese, which shows how popular it has become".

2 According to *Oxford Dictionary*, "post-truth" used in cases like "post-truth politics" or "the age of post-truth" are related to or denote "circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief". Every year the *Oxford Dictionary* selects a new term to add to its vocabulary. Definition available at: <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/post-truth>. Access on: February 25, 2019.

3 This can be verified in a number of brief articles published on the Internet after the election. We therefore leave this task to texts from Eugênio Bucci (Bucci, 2016), Jaime Rubio Hancock (Hancock, 2016), *The Economist* (The Economist, 2016) or even the *Oxford Dictionary* itself (Oxford, 2016), as well as countless other examples.

4 When using the term "discourse" we are referring to its earliest meaning from Greek philosophy: discourse as the organized use of "word" which, like the term "reason", derives from the same root, λόγος (see note below). Thus, our conception of discourse is a renewal of its original meaning, prior to the meanings it would go on to adopt, especially in contemporary language theories. Although we safeguard the importance of its later uses, our intention, as described in the introduction, is to bring a prominently philosophical contribution to the discussion of post-truth.

5 It is interesting to look at *Protagoras* (Plato, 2002), and see how truth, or what is believed to be true, is extracted by Socrates from the very organization of discourse. In one of the dialogue's most interesting parts, Socrates, using his questions, brings forth elements that end up breaking the sophist's argument. And he does all of this without directly problematizing the concept of what the sophist says, but instead uses logical devices,

to the displeasure of Protagoras who is obliged to agree with the Athenian philosopher. For more on this issue, consult the translated comments: Plato (2008) and Platon (2011), or the clash between truth and opinion by Reale & Antiseri (2014).

6 Which we borrowed from his essay *Truth and Politics*, published in 1967, and a year later added to the work *Between the Past and the Future*, originally from 1961.

7 A tension that does not necessarily suggest an opposition to "opinion" and "fact" as it so clearly does, for example, in the dispute between Socrates and the Sophists.

8 Used here in the sense of "relative to the subject" and not opposed to "objective".

9 Continuing with Arendt's idea: "Freedom of opinion is a farce unless factual information is guaranteed and the facts are not in dispute. In other words, factual truth informs political thought just as rational thought informs philosophical speculation" (Arendt, 2014, pp. 295-296).

10 What we understand as we remember the appalling historical age through which she had lived through, especially her still very present memories of the horrors of World War II.

11 More in Arendt (2014, p. 311).

12 Arendt gives us a number of examples here: General Charles De Gaulle's efforts to retell France's history in World War II, positioning it as proud and powerful, ignoring the years when the Germans were in occupation; or even the regime of Josef Stalin, responsible for erasing Trotsky's name from the pages of the victorious history of the Russian Revolution (Arendt, 2014, pp. 311-312).

13 With which our coexistence nowadays will be very factual.

14 See more in Hancock (2016).

15 For example, the Jewish in Germany, the formalists in the USSR, or the communists in Latin American dictatorships.

16 What would be the title of one of his primary works, *Strukturwandel der* Öffentlichkeit*: Untersuchungen zu einer Kategorie der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft* (Habermas, 1990; 1996; 2003).

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17 *Cf.* Gross *in* Habermas (2003, p. 226). Later on, when referring to the "subversion of the principle of advertising", Habermas was quite emphatic when commenting on this rise in public relations: "*Public relations* do not really refer to *public opinion*, but to *opinion* in the sense of *reputation*. The public sphere becomes a court before which public prestige is enacted – instead of criticizing it" (p. 235).

18 Habermas (2003, p. 235). This translation could be reconsidered, although what we have written here does convey the overall idea.

19 For Arendt, there is a certain kind of "action" in lies. The liar seeks to subvert the world by asserting his own version of how he would like reality to be. There is an active, intentionally changing action in this. More in Arendt (2014, p. 309).

20 Whether from their news sites or from access to their own communication technologies such as mobile applications or online social networks.

21 Continuing with Bucci's thought: "The instance of the live image has established itself as the oracle of society, a massified oracle that presents itself as the highest form of recording this reality for a civilization which will use its eyes as the main criteria for verifying the truth" (Bucci, 2009, p. 69).

22 Here, "rational" resides within a philosophical framework and its meaning must be imagined beyond a simple operation of thought or a mere ability to think. What we are saying is that, following Plato's heritage (acknowledged in particular by the modern philosophy of Descartes or by contemporaries such as Husserl), "rational" refers to that which derives from an argumentative position, and therefore it is inseparable from the word. It is precisely this question of argumentation as the ordered and logical use (in the strongest sense of the term) of the word we seek to evoke. So, our own understanding of "discourse", which, as we have pointed out, has a more philosophical affiliation here, prior to contemporary language theories and the broad meaning some of them attribute to the term. It seems to be because of this "philosophical" affiliation of the term "discourse" and its relation to the argument that runs through both Arendt's reflection (think of her concept of "rational truth" and her participation within the exercise of public discussion) and Habermas's (with his notion of "understanding" as an objective to be pursued within what he calls "communicative action").

23 Habermas continues: "(...) it [publicity] makes direct use of the

psychology and technique of *feature-publicity* and *pictorial-publicity* of mass media, with its frequently tested *topoi* of *human interest*: *romance*, *religion*, *money*, *children*, *health*, *animals*" (Habermas, 2003, p. 227, italics added).

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