

Designing Truth

From Truth(s) Regime(s) to Exosomatization

Argument

Since the development of digital capitalism within information organs and technologies, it appears that the truth regime upon which our relationship to knowledge was built is now in crisis¹. The main symptom of this crisis is the increasing number of symposia — often funded by Big Tech — being convened to redress what is called "post-truth," which encompasses a range of bad political behaviors and their products, including *misinformation*, *disinformation*, *fake news*, *conspiracy theories*, *deepfake*, and so on. In general, these research programs only provide additional solutions to control, monitor, moderate, regulate, censor, etc., in order to bring to heel those who would stray from approved political behaviors on social networks. This is a vast techno-political enterprise, in which big-tech platforms act as undemocratic political and economic powers. This is demonstrated by Benjamin Bratton's remarkable analysis in *The Stack*² ; Antoinette Rouvroy and Thomas Bern's concept of *algorithmic governmentality*³ ; Bernard Stiegler's concept of *computational capitalism*⁴ ; and Shoshana Zuboff's concept of *surveillance capitalism*⁵, to name but a few. The point of their analyses is to show how the infrastructures of Big Tech today produce a number of (geo-) political, economic and epistemic effects, leading to a number of contradictions, of which "post-truth" becomes an epistemic symptom to be resolved.

The aim of this colloquium is to examine the expression of what is labeled "post-truth" on social networks not as a failure of democracy, but on the contrary, as a failure to recognize localities - something that imperialist technological strategies have been quick to sweep aside. We would also like to reflect on the theoretical and technological alternatives that it is possible to imagine in the wake of mediactivism and based on the media experiments currently being carried out by grassroot protest movements and marginalized communities.

To do this, we'd like to (re)develop three concepts in particular, to be articulated together: *automediam*, *truth regime* and *exosomatization*.

Automediam: whether it is the self-media gesture produced on the fly by a single individual with a smartphone, or the collective *automediam* enterprise already seen in the field of democratic struggles and experiments which reinvents the forms of tactical media and of mediactivists, *automediation* refers to the self-production and self-communication of political information

¹ Antoinette Rouvroy, Bernard Stiegler, *Le régime de vérité numérique. De la gouvernementalité algorithmique à un nouvel État de droit*, OpenEdition Journals, Socio, *Le tournant numérique...et après ?*, 2015, first paragraphe (<https://journals.openedition.org/socio/1251>)

² Benjamin H. Bratton, *The Stack, on Software and Sovereignty*, MIT Press, 2016

³ Antoinette Rouvroy, Thomas Bern, *Algorithmic governmentality and prospects of emancipation. Disparateness as a precondition for individuation through relationships?* Volume 177, Issue 1, January 2013, translation Liz Carey-Libbrecht, pp 163 to 196 (https://www.cairn-int.info/article-E_RES_177_0163--algorithmic-governmentality-and-prospect.htm)

⁴ Bernard Stiegler, *Qu'appelle-t-on penser? Volume 1. L'immense régression*, Les Liens qui Libèrent, 2018

⁵ Shoshana Zuboff, *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism: The Fight for a Human Future at the New Frontier of Power*, PublicAffairs, 2019

through the use or reinvention of digital communication devices and circuits. *Automedia* and *automediation* can be understood both as an individual, autonomous and (de-) automatable power to produce information.

Truth regime: this designates for Michel Foucault “the set of procedures and institutions by which individuals are committed and compelled to perform, under certain conditions and with certain effects, well-defined acts of truth?⁶”. These epistemological regimes are established and institutionalized by (political) powers as a mechanism of *governmentality* – another Foucauldian concept designating the rationality and mode of exercise specific to the government of the population.

Exosomatization: this designates for Alfred Lotka⁷ the technical exteriorization of the living — that is to say, the production of exosomatic organs by organisms. Exosomatic organs (usually referred to as technical organs or artificial organs) are organs that grow outside of the body or organism (“exo-” and “soma-” meaning “outside” and “body,” respectively, in Latin). The exosomatic process thus designates a process which solicits the cognitive functions of imagination and invention, and the technical and technological functions of design and production.

The exosomatic process values subjectivity and singularity, as soon as they express the idiom of a locality. In the context of this symposium, it is a question not only of opening up and democratizing political expression, but also of diversifying its truth value — something that a *territorial design coupled with anthropology* can support. It's about imagining a new type of digital platform that mediates and empowers something of a territorial locality in the production of information, that responds to criteria of truth.

Thus, the objective of this symposium will be to shed light on the enterprise of epistemological-political domination of Big Tech on information production — which is today constituted through the fight against *post-truth* — to reflect on an epistemological, political, and design alternative through automedia practices and collectives. Indeed, automedia practices and experimentation can give rise to new truth regimes that take locality into account, through exosomatic processes in information design conception. It will be a question of reflecting on the principles of an *automedia truth regime* — as distinguished from the *journalistic truth regime and its pretention to universality*, in particular because it does not integrate a complex exosomatic conception of truth criteria.

However, in order to take shape, these alternatives must not only be the subject of conceptual elaboration, but must also feed into the fields of digital design and interaction design, which share political responsibility for their development. Through this symposium, we therefore hope to introduce the idea of a new *territorialized information design*. This design is not limited to a professional field of design, but embraces both environmental design and UX design, placing it in relation with philosophy, political science and anthropology

⁶“Basically, if you like, a regime of truth is what determines the obligations of individuals with regard to the procedures for manifesting the truth [...]. We speak of a political regime [...] to designate, in short, the set of procedures and institutions by which individuals find themselves committed, in a more or less pressing way [...]. We can [also] speak of the penal system, for example, to designate the set of procedures and institutions by which individuals are committed, determined and forced to submit to laws of general application. So, in these conditions, why not speak of a regime of truth to designate the set of procedures and institutions by which individuals are committed and compelled to perform, under certain conditions and with certain effects, well-defined acts of truth? (The translation from the french is ours). In Michel Foucault, *Du gouvernement des vivants - Cours au Collège de France*, Gallimard, Seuil, 2012, coll. "Hautes études", p. 91-92 and 98-99.

⁷ Alfred Lotka, *The law of evolution as a maximal principle*, Human Biology, vol. 17, no 3, 1945, p. 167-194