The stratagems of post-truth

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Abstract

Introduction: The concept of post-truth has become commonplace, a buzzword that is used to describe the alleged overcoming of a previous era in which, apparently, truth was the norm, and also to legitimise certain procedures that have much more to do with the sphere of power (including the discursive power) than with the sphere of truth. This article analyses the foundations and ramifications of the concept of post-truth, by linking it with such notions as "(objective) facts", the supposed decline of Europe, information in the digital environment and postmodernity. Departing from the aporetic nature of the dominant discourse around the conception of post-truth, its use is examined as a rhetorical stratagem with a strong ideological baggage and linked to conservative and regressive ways of thinking, in the theoretical and social as well as political and cultural realms. As a way of conclusion, the article proposes a dialectical approach to the notion of post-truth, that is, an approach that takes into account its rhetorical, political, material and ideological dimensions.

Keywords

Post-Truth, Fake News, Rhetoric, Discourse, Effects of Meaning, Europe, Postmodernity, Realism, Truth.

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Translated from the Spanish by CA Martínez-Arcos
and the author.

1. Post-truth as aporia

The concept of post-truth has become commonplace, a buzzword that is used to describe the alleged end of a previous age in which, apparently, truth was the norm, and to legitimise certain procedures that have much more to do with the sphere of power (including the discursive power) than with the sphere of truth. The war against "fake news", for example, is not simply a crusade against the lies that proliferate in the media. Lies or half-truths has been an essential part of any rhetorical device in all

eras and a substantial part of any societal form and the pivotal element in the determination of what is considered to be true (which is a notion with very unstable limits). This crusade against fake news that we see, from time to time, announced in big headlines in the media, is, first of all, part of a media simulacrum or staging that transcends, of course, the field of communication and allows, among other things, to segregate two large discursive fields through a procedure in which from the same logic of power –and, therefore, from the same actants- simultaneously emerge the disease and its cure: post-truth and its supposed antidote. The "false" is excluded from the global discursive logic to isolate it in a ghetto of discourses that are false and generate falsehood, declaring the innocence of the rest of the communicative system. The implications of this phenomenon are obvious. The first of them is that attention is diverted from the logic of the communication system itself and from the structural links between truth and falsehood, and directed to the supposed redoubts of falsehood that, by opposition, determine perfect and pure discursive spaces. This suggests a space of discursive transparency that aims to be beyond rhetoric and mediation in order to reflect reality *as it is*. This naturalisation of certain discursive forms that are branded as *true* against *false* forms of discourse has, as it seems evident, a deeply demagogic nature and retrieves old realistic dogmas around the issue of representation as a replica of the world, without questioning the fact that what is supposedly "replicated" is the result of a specific historical and power-based conjuncture, not of an objective factuality located beyond the historical realm. Following Lyotard (2012: 17), this kind of realism, "intends to avoid the question of the reality implicated in that of art".

Second, the discourse on post-truth and its link with forms of mediation focuses on the Internet and social networks as the perfect place for deception and misrepresentation, suggesting, *a contrario*, the existence of mediated spaces that are "angelic", unbiased and free from manipulation.

Third, the emphasis is on the bonhomie and integrity of the *truthful* sender rather than on the capacity and skills of the receiver to decode discourses that are inevitably informed by political and economic interests.

The concept of post-truth presupposes, therefore, in opposition to *fake*, the existence of pristine, depoliticised and quasi-religious redoubts.
It is claimed, for example, by way of proof, that the validity of classical evidence, such as recordings and photographs, has fallen into disuse, since Donald Trump no longer blushes when denying something that has been recorded or photographed. The fragile evidentiary status of a recording or photograph, whether analogue or digital, is never questioned.

In short, the notion of post-truth and its related concepts –like fake news–, which have flourished in the shade of the big tree of the Internet and the alleged cacophony and abundance of information that are attributed to it, presuppose and postulate the notions of discursive transparency and the existence of simple and plainly *true* narratives. As I previously wrote: "The concept of transparency implies the alleged denial of discourse as an intentional rhetoric structure that aims to produce effects and is based on a system of enunciative inequalities and restrictions, on behalf of what we could call a *systemic striptease* that is presented as existing beyond all cultural determinations and restrictions, in a global and transcultural (or multicultural) environment. In contrast to the classic notion of spectacle (which denotes artificiality and *mise-en-scène* and states itself as clearly cultural and discursive), a sort of return to nature and the spontaneity of the origins is formulated, which when applied to the context of the mass media, a rhetorical and artificial space par excellence, can only be understood as a mere

metaphor of an increasingly closed, restrictive and dogmatic discursive order, under the appearance of infinite variety and unrestricted freedom of choice" (Carrera, 2017: 45).

2. The eternal recurrence of "objective facts"

Many of the approaches to the concept of post-truth are doctrinal, not emancipatory, and are based on the idealisation of bygone eras that, it is argued, will never return, to evade the fact, precisely, that those times are not as gone as it seems and allow them to continue operating without restrictions under the pretention of being new, legitimising, in the name of an alleged revolution of values, situations that used to be problematic and controversial. Past lies are transformed directly, in the light of the sun of post-truth, into truths. The post-truth that reigns in social networks, according to this argument, restores innocence to the discourses of the mainstream media, and pseudoscience turns those discourses presented as "scientific" into innocent, absolutely-true and not falsifiable discourses.

The definition of post-truth provided by the Dictionary of the Royal Spanish Academy reflects the lack of novelty of a phenomenon that is as old as humanity: "Deliberate distortion of a reality, which manipulates beliefs and emotions in order to influence public opinion and social attitudes".

However, there is, of course, something new, and it is, precisely, that the phenomenon is presented as new, which provokes, among other things, the focalization of attention on subsidiary phenomena from the systemic point of view, such as the so-called fake news, which are undoubtedly far less dangerous and less efficient in terms of manipulation than those news stories that are taken for real.

Post-truth simultaneously serves as a lure and a smoke screen. It compels us to focus our attention on certain secondary phenomena and serves to hide from sight what is truly relevant in discursive, media, political, economical and cultural terms. By sanctifying the era that supposedly preceded it –and that, in fact, continues, in essence, in force, although represented in decay– converts the current context into a kind of *no man's land,* without a name in the strict sense, except as an unavoidable aftermath (why not, otherwise, speak of 'the age of lie' instead of 'the age of post-truth'?), the established discourse about post-truth denies the individuals any possibility of intervention on a reality that is defined only in terms of a past context. Although it may seem quite the opposite, the notion of post-truth and the discursive articulation that surrounds it, has deep dogmatic roots. In the post-truth age, there is no truth, but, and this is frightening, there is no lie either. There cannot be lie because lie, as mentioned, only makes sense in an ecosystem in which truth is considered a secular phenomenon. Otherwise, we would not speak of lies, but of heresy. However, it seems that we are returning to the age of the crusades, the age of truth as a sacred entity and of heresies.

As is the case with the Internet under a certain logic of power, the fact that what looks like a wild and plural medium is gradually becoming a sophisticated mechanism of censorship, control and reduction of discursive plurality, the notion of post-truth, as well, perfectly integrated into this logic, suggests a world without values in which anything is permitted, when, in fact, values are becoming more rigid and more dogmatic and, on too many occasions, are clearly conservative in nature. The concept of post-truth *per se* perhaps allows for another articulation (which would necessarily imply a conceptual development that, for the moment, is absent), an anti-dogmatic articulation that puts the emphasis on the media and on representation in general as rhetorical devices that work to produce effects of meaning that, always, have political, economic, cultural and vital implications. This discursive path would allow us to stop worrying so much about the Truth with capital T, and start worrying, for example, about how we are deceived by discourse, through what mechanisms, and decide whether we let us seduce or not by specific narratives. The most important thing, in the end, is not whether someone is telling the truth or is lying. This should not be our main concern. Instead we should put our effort

into elucidating the logic that underlies specific forms of enunciation. What forces or what logic are behind the staging of truth and lie? What is the logic that exposes a person into the public arena as a liar? What is behind the *mise-en-scène* of the spectacle of truth and falsehood? Because, if we refer to the biblical saying, "he who is without sin can cast the first stone", it is true that some have sinned more than others, but, surely, many of them have escaped and still escape the logic of post-truth and its categories.

On the other hand, those who look for an antidote for post-truth appeal to "facts", which is a tricky instance wherever they exist, as if they were pre-discursive entities that are independent and alien to discourse. The definition of the Oxford Dictionary assumes the existence of what it calls "objective facts", when defining post-truth as "relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief".

In the first place, most of the time, what we call "facts" are in reality "discursive facts" or fragments of mediation. They are essentially made of the so-called non-fiction narratives (journalistic and documentary pieces). These are statements, decontextualized fragments of mediation (audio, video, photographs), rhetorically constructed items. There are no facts, or, to be more precise, better, there are no *significant* facts outside of the discourse that makes them emerge as such. Facts belong neither to an objective world nor to a subjective one, but to the world of storytelling and discourse, and it is as discursive facts that their entity must be valued. Lies are never refuted with facts, they are refuted with arguments **[1]**. On the other hand, as mentioned, the touchstone is always the logic that makes those discourses, and not others, enter the scene, not just the content of such discourses. This logic of "agenda", the ability to establish the public agenda, is the logic of power, not that of truth. When someone tries to convince us, consciously or influenced by the "word of the year", that we live in the era of post-truth, because lies and hoaxes circulate at high speed in social networks and we have no way to contrast and verify information, we could affirm with the same strength that we have never had a way to do so. Concerning news, what users do is neither verification nor contrast of discourses that mainly fall outside of their exploratory and verifying possibilities and even if they had the means and power to verify them, they should also have the power to transform their own saying into a publicly relevant discourse, i.e., to get access to those forums where the public agenda and the status of "authorised" speaker are established.

Therefore, facts do not precede the discourse; "-facts-" only emerge when the discourse uses them as part of rhetorical and persuasive strategies. Persuasion, in this context, should not be understood in a negative sense, but as a repertoire of discursive elements and procedures at the service of the effectiveness of any discourse, whatever its objectives may be. Information has always been based much more on faith and on the authority and trust that we attribute to certain mediators than on the corroboration of supposed facts that fall beyond our reach. "Seeing is believing" is not, in any way, the logic that applies to news, so it is paradoxical to appeal to facts as an antidote to post-truth. The alluded facts (in the end, a way to refer to certain discursive forms in which the referential instance plays an important role) are not accessible to all and, on the other hand, information is always, by nature, incomplete and at anytime new information may question what was taken for granted. Returning to "seeing is believing", most of the time, there is nothing to *see*. We only see through what is called interpretation or representation. As Oscar Wilde rightly pointed out (2013: 63), in this case referring to artistic representation and the reception modes and cultural and experiential filters through which it operates: "To look at a thing is very different from seeing a thing (...) At present, people see fogs, not because there are fogs, but because poets and painters have taught them the mysterious

loveliness of such effects. There may have been fogs for centuries in London. I dare say there were. But no one saw them, and so we do not know anything about them. They did not exist till Art invented them".

3. Europe and post-truth

The concept of post-truth is the most refined fruit, precisely, of the so-called post-truth era, which is not a sociological, cultural nor media event, nor does it account for structural or revolutionary changes in a given socio-political and economic structure, but is a discursive effect, a rhetorical strategy to make *fogs* visible, paraphrasing Wilde –that is, to give cultural as well as political and economic effectiveness–*,* by declaring it not an effect of meaning, but *just a fact*, a final and unquestionable reality.

It is often said that the problem is in the alleged desintermediation that the Internet has brought about: everyone speaks out and information cacophony is the perfect ferment for fake news and post-truth. However, interestingly, Brexit and Trump are systematically invoked as "foundational facts" of the post-truth era, that is, in both cases, events and people directly linked to the sphere of political power, a sphere that always has influenced the agenda of the classic gatekeepers. Although a multitude of voices are heard on the Internet, those that have the capacity to generate content with viral potential are still very few and are not so different from the traditional agents that operated in the previous media system. Besides, the fact that Trump posts messages on Twitter does not mean that he does without traditional media in any way. Instead, it is thanks to these media that what Trump says on Twitter can generate public opinion. On the Internet, there are many people who spread news and make them go viral, but those who have the capacity to trigger effective dissemination are very scarce. In this sense, little has changed; if anything, the scale, scope and impact of those who have the capacity to activate viral processes.

Moreover, as mentioned, this supposed bankruptcy of truth and the sudden advent of its final stages, have less to do with ontological or theoretical questions than with political and economic issues and, of course, with strategies to shape and manage public opinion.

It is not strange that Trump, a politician, subjected therefore to the strict temporality of the electoral chronos, and Brexit, with its connected politicians, historical circumstances, in any case, are the two *proofs* (paradoxical evidence) that are systematically put on the table when it is announced that the post-truth age has irrevocably started. This is a curious ontologization of specific timely events, but not without a reason, in our opinion. There is a very powerful utilitarian and pragmatic component in that supposed event of biblical proportions that threatens to exile once and for all the mythical Truth from the face of the earth. In both cases, Trump and Brexit, what is systematically questioned (and whose questioning is supposedly supported through the mere postulation of the arrival of post-truth) is a certain idea of Europe. Brexit has quickly become a questioning of the idea of Europe and it is known that Trump considers that "the European Union is an enemy" [2]. At the same time, we have seen a proliferation of books and articles on post-truth, and of books about the decline of Europe that axiomatise, on a scant or almost non-existent argumentative basis, just as it happens with post-truth, "the death of Europe". An endless number of articles and books such as *The Decline and Fall of Europe* (2012), *The Strange Death of Europe* (2017) and *After Europe* (2017), exploit the same idea.

All these obituaries have something in common: the interest to declare, once and for all, that the idea of Europe belongs to the past, that there is no future and that the discussion is settled.

Post-Europe and post-truth are, in our opinion, two closely related discursive events.

Paradoxically, what is conceived as symptoms of impasse and decadence of Europe, could well be considered to be constitutive and constructive (not deleterious, therefore) elements of this same idea of Europe that is declared to be over. Douglas Murray states in *The Strange Death of Europe*: "But the final act has come about because of two simultaneous concatenations from which it is now all but impossible to recover. The first is the mass movement of peoples into Europe (…) The second concatenation (is) the fact that (…) at the same time Europe lost faith in its beliefs, traditions and legitimacy (…) Europe is now deeply weighed down with guilt for its past (…) there is also the problem in Europe of an existential tiredness and a feeling that perhaps for Europe the story has run out" (Murray, 2017: 2-3). According to the author, the symptoms are summarised in an "existential civilizational tiredness". The arguments are as old and overused as the "old Europe" they want to bury. Europe has been, by definition, a melting pot of cultures, capable of assimilating and appropriating the most diverse traditions. What can endanger it is not *Otherness*, but, precisely, *Oneness*. This in regards to the first argument. As for the second, the myth of the "tired", "decadent" culture, crushed by the weight of its own past, omits that any culture is, in essence, a process of re-appropriation and is not supposed to be an *ex nihilo* novelty. However, there is something striking when the mainstream discourse alludes to both post-truth and post-Europe: in both cases, the discourse appeals to static and supposedly atemporal concepts, presenting European identity, as a fixed, immovable notion, and truth, as a static and universal notion that is given once and for all. In both cases, the discourse omits the fact that both identity (in political, cultural and individual terms) and the so-called truth are not fixed and ahistorical instances, but discursive devices that articulate change, allowing cultures and individuals to survive in environments characterised by mutation.

On the other hand, what is called identity, in relation to European culture, and unlike what happens with other cultural environments, consists, precisely, not of a compendium of closed narratives, but, in fact, of a meta-narrative that stablishes specific rules of production and re-appropriation of discourses and is defined essentially in terms of those rules, articulating the coexistence of narratives that can even be considered incompatible from the point of view of their content. What characterises European culture, therefore, is not its adherence to a precise narrative or to a specific story, with the exclusion of all others, but the administration of the coexistence of diverse, even contradictory discourses, as well as the reception systems that its metatextual nature activates. This implies that no specific discourse can claim its exclusivity and absolute Truth above others, which is, on the other hand, the strength of European culture, although some want to dress it as weakness and loss of values. The metatextual nature that defines European "identity" should not be confused, in any way, with relativism. Rather, and this is an undisputed strength, it is articulated not as a set of textual dogmas, but as a discursive device based on the consciousness of the narrative as a rhetorical and political artefact. This conception of narratives turns them, whatever they are, into means of political construction (politics in the noblest sense of the term). European identity is not simply a set of dogmas or precepts, the lowest common denominator that unifies a manifest diversity of traditions, the one in the diverse, etc.; it is a meta-narrative that questions, precisely, the infallibility of any particular narrative. We could say that *rhetorical consciousness* is perhaps the best definition of the notion of European culture. In *Aurora*, Nietzsche (1999: 364-365) wrote: "The snake which cannot cast its skin has to die. As well the minds which are prevented from changing their opinions; they cease to be

mind". Probably, the most common interpretation of this sentence, which is used both by those who question the existence of Europe and those who postulate the inevitable advent of post-truth, appeals to relativism, lack of values, cynicism and opportunism, etc. However, we should think for a moment about what follows the image of "skin change" in Nietzsche's aphorism: the "mind", the possibility of "changing one's mind". That is, the non-dogmatic mind, the *critical* mind which systematically questions the innocence of the narratives in the name, precisely, of certain values. A culture that questions discursive transparency and affirms the unavoidable ideological substrate of all diegesis cannot be considered, precisely, to lack values. Its tolerance is not based on relativism or the inability to discriminate. Rather the complete opposite. The possibility to "change one's mind" implies the assumption of a postulate that cannot be subjected to doubt: no story can claim the truth for itself in absolute terms. The advocates of post-truth, obviously, assume the opposite. They lament that the mendacious narrative has buried the true narrative and, at the same time, they postulate, even if it is to chant its requiem, that it (the "true narrative") actually took place in some utopian past. They yearn for a supposed dogmatic stage and, in its place, they institute a new dogmatic stage in which all meta-discursivity is obliterated as a constitutive element of certain cultural structures. Basically, their truth and post-truth are one and the same thing, the face of dogma. The discourse on post-truth is eminently conservative and, under the simulacrum of the order that collapses, affirms a much stricter order, in which there is no place for other statements, because any alternative enunciation is declared *false* and precisely the result of that post-truth stage. Fortunately, the discourses on post-truth, like the discourse on truth, are only discourses and, as such, can and must be confronted rhetorically. The "rapture of Europe" that some post-truth theorists seem to want to undertake omits an important detail: the only "dogma" intrinsic to European culture is that no identity is constructed by ignoring, denying or declaring false or mendacious the implacable presence of the Other.

Identity, on the other hand, in its most usual and generalised sense, is not the touchstone to affirm or deny what we can call "European culture" in its various manifestations. Let's consider, for example, the case of the cinematographic narrative: "European cinema is, in many of its most genuine representatives, a quixotic cinema: without subjectivities in the usual meaning, without roots. It is not a cinema about "Men", it is a cinema about *departing*, wandering and dispossession, a cinema that undertakes its particular ascent of Mount Carmel, perpetrating its own geography, its exploration of, not subjectivity, but otherness. Including the otherness of storytelling (Don Quixote). A wandering that is voluntarily dispossessed of epic rictus, although not of poetry, that takes place in the suburbs of the battlefield, in the suburbs of Action" (Carrera, 2016a: 62-63). Regarding the question of European identity and the impact of Brexit, Julia Kristeva affirmed that: "Europe, among the other cultures that share globalisation, is a unique cultural tradition in relation to the others, because, in our case, a philosophy has been created according to which identity is not a cult, but an interrogation. A questioning. All this dimension of European culture is extremely important: to problematise identities (3)". Tzvetan Todorov, in a text dedicated to "European identity", emphasised the elements of European culture that are refractory to an immobilist approach to this notion, elements related to reinterpretation, reuse, amalgamation, conceptual conversion and adaptation, and other mechanisms of cultural re-appropriation that are characteristic of the European tradition and that would allow Europeans "to be able to adapt quickly to changing circumstances": "One of the characteristics of the European tradition is precisely the use of critical thinking: all values can be subjected to examination (...) the unity of European culture resides in its manner of handling the different regional, national, religious, and cultural identities that comprise it (...) the spiritual identity of Europe consists not in a list of proper names nor in a repertory of general ideals, but in the adoption of one common attitude in the face of diversity" (Todorov, 2008: 288 and subsequent pages).

Returning to the connection between the discourses on post-truth and the debates about the "decline and fall" of Europe and the identitary inviability of the "idea" of Europe, it is important to remark, in summary, that Europe is more than a repertoire of thematic issues that would allow, in some way, to unify diverse traditions; Europe is, first of all, as mentioned, a cultural device that is defined in metatextual and dialectical terms, not in purely identitary terms. It is not understandable from a dogmatic point of view by the assumption or identification with a specific narrative, but as a set of rules that manage the coexistence of different narratives. It is evident, therefore, that, in this context, the only "dogma" or the only interdiction are those affecting those stories that deny, in the name of exclusivity or truth, the right to exist of the Other (narrative). In this sense, the "idea of Europe" proposed here is refractory to the very notion of post-truth, since it is not based on any absolute dogma or truth, but, precisely, on the systematic questioning of discourses that are proclaimed as ultimate, pure and excluding. The terrain of hybridisation, fusion and remake is that of politics, not that of revelation.

4. Internet and post-truth

If we take a quick tour through the storyline of various texts that address the question of post-truth, we will find a common semantic field that clusters around topics such as: Trump, Brexit, science denial, decline of traditional media, propaganda, lies, fake news, alternative facts, postmodernism, disinformation, digital media, social networks, weakness of democratic institutions, etc. In an article published in *El País* newspaper, Francesc Arroyo [4] argued that "there is a consensus: post-truth is not the same as lie. The former is an attempt to manipulate reality and requires voluntary credulous people; the latter, is a statement that contradicts the facts and seeks involuntary credulous people. Until recently, lying was frowned upon (...) lying is no longer reprehensible". As mentioned, it is unlikely that we are witnessing a change in the "ontological" status of lie. If we go a little deeper into the usual argumentation about post-truth, we can detect that the digital media environment, in some way, works systematically as a background. The Internet offers the perfect staging for the post-truth simulacra, although, as mentioned, the supposed cacophony of the network and the plurality of sources have much more of mirage than of reality. The Internet is a communicative environment much more controlled by the logic of power and capital than it might appear at first glance. However, there has always been a discursive interest in presenting it as a deregulated and wild space. The discourse on post-truth derives, in part, from this fallacious assumption of the Internet as an anarchic medium in which the discursive "authority" would have lost ground and institutional narratives (scientific, journalistic, etc.) would have been marginalised by varied and unfounded opinions capable of uniting public acquiescence around them. Meanwhile, the political sphere is strategically placed as the space of lies by excellence and the refuge of post-truth. Statements as the following, which are commonplace, exemplify this feeling: "The rise of social media as a source of news blurred the lines even further between news and opinion, as people shared stories from blogs, alternative news sites, and God knows where, as if they were all true. As the 2016 presidential election heated up, more and more content on social media skewed partisan (…) We could click on "news" stories that told us what we wanted to hear (…) as opposed to some of the factual content from mainstream media that may have been less palatable. Without knowing that they were doing so, people could feed their desire for confirmation bias (…) directly, without bothering to patronize traditional news sources. Why pay for a newspaper subscription when you could get as many stories as you wanted from friends that had just as much to say about the events you were interested in?" (McIntyre, 2018: 94).

Regardless of the fact that the point of departure is the implausible assumption of a previous information ecosystem that was free from strategies of persuasion, seduction, half-truths, half-lies and connivance with *de facto* powers, which, of course, is quite improbable when we talk about the media, which are directly and structurally inscribed in a logic of power, not merely in an informative altruistic logic, we forget that the "friends" referred to by McIntyre are not the original source of the information they spread, they are transmission and dissemination channels that operate synergistically with others. Those who have the potential to generate conversation in social networks, fake news, trending topics, etc. are not "friends", but institutionalised disseminators of different sign, including traditional media. The focus is, however, put on users who, in this case, are nothing but an interface that hides the true target. They are not the *sources*. We should not confuse gloss, comments, and viral spreading of information with emitting: "The enunciator, in the strict sense of the word, is the discursive instance able to raise the questions that open up the debate, deciding to get involved in it or not, while the user participates mostly in a debate raised or initiated by others" (Carrera, 2016b: 244). In the Internet, intramedia viral agents have multiplied, but the sources, that is, those senders with enough power to generate conversation around an issue and shape public opinion, are, as always, very few. We should not forget the fact that the Internet, as a medium, is a power structure just like the rest of the mass media that have preceded it. Following this systemic logic, a double simulation or smoke screen is generated: the nature of the network as a hierarchically organised power structure is omitted while the "blame" is put on the actor that is devoid of the power to operate on said structure and its rules, the private "user".

In conclusion: the concept of post-truth does not account –the conceptual and argumentation deficiencies and the underlying theoretical precariousness seem obvious–, as it is claimed, for a supposedly epistemological and moral stadium, but serves as an instrument to "massage" –using a McLuhanian term– public opinion, when not, directly, as a smokescreen that diverts attention from more important issues related to the communicative and discursive current environment, while justifying the use of dogmatic arguments and emphasising the futility of all criticism. It is a trap-concept that, once postulated, does not admit reply and is hermetic to all criticism except to that which ends up confirming the dogma of absolute truths, given that even its supposed denial and antithesis (which is not such a thing) -the empire of truth- is the very definition of dogma. In all cases (post-truth discourse and its supposed counter-discourse), there is a naturalisation of specific (and, necessarily, tendentious) narratives, completely overlooking the logic of power, rhetoric and persuasion that all discourses convey. What the affirmation of the advent of post-truth defends, supposedly by opposition, is the existence of a pristine, angelic, and *true* narrative that comes from authorised sources, a transparent discourse. This is, basically, the ultimate goal or the consummation of the concept of post-truth, which has become, at present, the best alibi to articulate dogmatic and conservative discourses that cry for "the return to order" barricaded behind moral proclamations.

5. Postmodernity versus post-truth

The concept of post-truth could be placed in the category of *conceptual spam*. Omnipresent, viral, conceptually superficial and rather empty in its theoretical foundations, it postulates its own existence through the classical pathway, which has been so exploited in the advertising and political rhetoric, but also, although this is rarely mentioned, in the fields of education, theory or science, of repetition, redundancy and tautological self-affirmation. Behind this type of rhetoric is the utopia (or, rather, dystopia) of a language without *éperons* [5]. The postulated stage of post-truth acquires the face of an eternal present by denying, by its own configuration, all dialectical elements. As mentioned, post-truth, as the prefix indicates, is what comes after and leads nowhere. Unlike postmodernity, a concept of

profane dimensions, post-truth is established as a pseudo-ontological concept outside of time and history. Its opportunity in terms of systemic legitimisation and conservation (including the discursive system that the notion aims to normalise) is obvious. Its clear conservative side is obvious too. The political dimension that is at stake, behind the alleged "conceptual" and "objective" discourse on post-truth (which claims to be a mere *description* adapted to facts)*,* should not go unnoticed. It is, among other things, a defence of the dogma (of "truth", which, from a pragmatic point of view, tends to coincide with the discourse of power) and a kind of adaptation of pre-democratic or directly antidemocratic principles related to that of authority (vindication of the enunciative "authority" of the institutionalised sources and denial of the public relevance of the discourse of any non institutionally authorised source), a justification of the monopoly of interpretation by such sources and an update of the old conservative critique of mass society recycled into a criticism to users who introduce "noise" into the Web, as if they had some structural power in the media system. This subterfuge manages to divert the attention from the true spaces of the media power, where it is achieved what they attribute to the activity of some users, who actually do not control nor establish in any way the rules of the game nor the rhetoric of the Internet, and are limited, most of the time, to feeding the machinery that institutional agents of various kinds set in motion to implement their own strategies. That these agents do so is licit and expected. What is more striking is the endorsement of those strategies by supposed "critical" discourses that dress what is temporal and pragmatic with metaphysical and theoretical clothing. Far from endorsing any of the classic behavioural theories that consider spectators/users only as mere peons in the game of power, what we want to point out here is that "blaming" users, understood as private instances, for a systemic logic that is clearly outside the scope of privacy is a pure act of demagogy disguised with theory, consciously or unconsciously executed by whoever supports or adopts such type of discourse. The only way to break this vicious circle (the critique of post-truth seems to imply the dogmatic assumption and defence of an obviously temporary truth that is disguised as universal and all that this entails, both in the theoretical and socio-political fields, i.e., a clear regressive temptation in all fields towards forms of thought that could be considered authoritarian) would be by articulating a discourse on post-truth which sees it as a regressive strategy at the service of those who seek to maintain the rhetoric of truth by other means. At the borders of post-truth, we will find the authoritative and well-known dogma of the objective truth as "correspondence between the discourse and the facts", as if facts were pre-discursive entities. Actually, most of what we call "facts" are, as mentioned, discursive fragments, not direct and self-evident experience: statements distorted by those who produce them; mediated images that have been irremediably formatted by the discourse; archive fragments, that is, pieces of previous narrative, etc. Reaching that destination – truth– from post-truth camouflages the true nature of the objective pursued by such discourse, making it look the opposite (a supposedly anarchic, polyphonic and relativistic space).

This concept of post-truth has little to do with the concept of postmodernity, which is systematically brought up when speaking of the former, as if they were two "viruses" coming from the same strain or there were genealogical affiliation between the two, situating them in the same conceptual spectrum. Postmodernity, in Lyotard's approach, for example, was conceived not in pseudo-ontological terms, as in the case of post-truth, but in dialectical terms, that is, the objective was to characterise a certain type of narratives. From the outset, therefore, postmodernity is placed in a profane and discursive, properly *political* field, and is not postulated, as in the case of post-truth, as an unavoidable fact that is historically determined and only contrarrestable from the cultal field of authority and one-dimensional discourse ("the truth"). In addition, postmodernity presented an emancipatory and progressive potential that we cannot find in the approaches to post-truth.

6. Conclusions

Lyotard, in "Answer to the question: What is postmodernity?," one of the writings compiled in the book titled *The Postmodern (explained to children)*, spoke ironically about those who, fully rejecting the implications derived from the notion of postmodernity and showing a clear conservatism disguised of "common sense", sang nostalgic hymns for the lost referent, realism or identity among facts and discourses. This should sound familiar to us. The difference is that the notion of postmodernity, especially as articulated by Lyotard, could serve as an antidote to this type of discourses, while the notion of post-truth sustains and supports them. Hence, we must deny any continuity or affiliation between both notions, between the theoretically progressive potential of the notion of postmodernity and the clearly conservative view of the notion of post-truth. It is important to remember some fragments of Lyotard's texts, in which he alluded to many of the desires for "order", "return to reality" and "referentiality" that the discourse on post-truth has re-activated. Such reactivation of the "need for realism", a realism understood, paradoxically as it may seem, in idealistic terms, is cyclical: "I have read that a new philosopher is discovering what he drolly calls Judaeo-Christianism and intends by it to put an end to the impiety which we are supposed to have spread. I have read in a French weekly that some are displeased with *Mille Plateaux* because they expect (…) to be gratified with a little sense (…). I have been reading a young philosopher of language who complains that Continental thinking (...) has substituted for the referential paradigm that of 'adlinguisticity' (...) and who thinks that the time has now come to restore a solid anchorage of language in its referent" (Lyotard, 2012: 11-12).

In principle, nothing would prevent realism from being declined in a very different way. The same thing happens with the notion of truth, instead of turning it into a bastion for the idealist discourse in theoretical terms and for the conservative discourse in practical terms. Most of the so-called realisms say little about the deep structures of reality that they supposedly represent; they serve more to disguise or veil it than to do the opposite. This is the reason why realism is one of the most important ideological weapons and a theoretical battlefield that should not be abandoned without further ado. Truth, according to Bertolt Brecht, serves to make the things of this world manageable. Truth is militant. It is evident that this dialectical and political dimension of truth is absent from the discourses on post-truth, that it is caged in a pseudo-religious and transmundane dimension, but with an eminently conservative and immobilist rictus, as identity between facts (politically, economically and temporarily determined, but taken in these discourses for definitive, true, timeless and unquestionable) and discourses. Regarding realism, Brecht (1970: 86-89) argued: "Realism is not just a question of forms (...) it is not simply a literary theme; it is a big political, philosophical and practical issue; it must be labelled and treated as such: as an issue that affects the whole life of men".

In short, this article proposes an analysis and an exegesis of the notion of post-truth as a strategy, or rather as a rhetorical stratagem with a strong ideological baggage and at the service of clearly conservative ways of thinking, in the theoretical and social as well as political and cultural realms. These forms of thinking are characterised by the questioning and denial of what we could call the "discursive rights" of the old masses and audiences (in short, citizens) now reconverted into users, in the name of a supposedly enunciative authority and the vindication of the institutional monopoly of interpretation, based on a conservative notion of true and the naturalisation of a specific idealistic, essentialist, pseudo-realist and pseudo-referential rhetoric that is postulated as the *natural* and genuine way of telling and narrating, relegating other rhetorical strategies to the condition of false, depoliticising the discourse and denying the "folds" of the narrative. Deleuze's notion of fold is useful in this context, to confront the atemporal and un-dialectical unity, identity, linearity and immobilism

postulated by the idealist discourse on post-truth, whose notion of "purity" refers to episodes of ill-fated memory. The fold, in contrast, represents the constant generation of differences, hybridisation and appropriation, adaptation and remake, the abyss: "A difference that continues to unfold and retreat" (Deleuze, 1988: 42). On the other hand, why not articulating a discourse on realism and truth based on the notion of fold? If the objective really were to fight post-truth (which seems obvious that it is not), it would be enough to abandon the essentialist and moralist stance in use and to adopt a genuinely realistic perspective (very different from all sort of idealistic approaches disguised into realisms), that is a political perspective linked to the evolution of the productive forces and to the logic of capital in a given historical moment.

7. Notes

[1] Cf. Pilar Carrera and Jenaro Talens (2018), *El relato documental. Efectos de sentido y modos de recepción* ("The Documentary Narrative. Effects of Meaning and Modes of Reception"). Madrid: Cátedra.

[2] Statements made during an interview on the CBS channel on 15 July 2018.

[3] Julia Kristeva, *Les Matins de France Culture*, June 24th, 2016. Retrieved from https://www.franceculture.fr/geopolitique/apres-le-brexit-paroles-d-intellectuels

[4] Francesc Arroyo, La posverdad de las mentiras ("The post-truth of lies"). *El País*, 8 June, 2018.

[5] *Éperon* (spur) is a term used by Derrida to refer to Nietzsche's writing. We use *éperons* to refer to the style elements that oppose the simulacrum of language as a "mirror along the road", i.e., elements that make resistance to a rhetoric of transparency that, in our days, adopts renewed formulas and has a paradoxical prevalence. Let's see Derrida's definition of *éperon*: "Style also used its spur as a means of protection against the terrifying, blinding, mortal threat (of that) which *presents* itself, which obstinately thrusts itself into view. And style thereby protects the presence, the content, the thing itself, meaning, truth" (Derrida, 2010: 30).

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