

FUGITIVE TRUTH

Renewing the Public Sphere in the Age of Post-Truth



01

Is this the end of the public sphere?

Today, the public sphere is threatened by the spread of **disinformation**, **fake news**, **alternative facts** and the breakdown of trust in established sources.

Lies often prevail over **factual truth** because facts are often mundane and 'boring'; whereas lies are on the side of movement, disruption and transformation (Hannah Arendt, 'Truth and Politics').

Right-wing populist parties use disinformation to disrupt reasonable political discourse, sow distrust, and polarise the political field. This leads to political/affective polarisation and fragmentation into **echo chambers** and **filter bubbles**.

What can we do about it?

The public sphere could be transformed and renewed by **progressive social movements**, fighting for social, economic and climate justice and against racism and police violence.

Over the years, movements such as Occupy Wall Street, Extinction Rebellion, Black Lives Matter, and Just Stop Oil have **occupied public spaces** and developed **alternative forms of democratic deliberation** to reclaim the public sphere.

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Speaking truth to power

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This ancient concept - also known as '**parrhesia**' - is dependent on democracy and the right to **free speech** - although at times, it goes against the "will of the people".



Parrhesia is **anti-populist**. It involves an ethical commitment to the truth in a way that populism does not. It favours '**careful speech**' as opposed to 'careless speech'.



Do progressive social movements propose a different relationship between politics and truth?

New social movements might be seen as **contemporary forms of parrhesia** in a way that they speak an uncomfortable truth that challenges the system.

Progressive social movements show how the truth can be **re-politicised** in transformative ways.



By using reason to question authority and encouraging the coming together of private individuals as public, progressive social movements are reclaiming and renewing the critical nature of the public sphere.



Read the paper