Platforms of Post-Truth: Outlines of a Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere

https://www.e-ir.info/2022/09/27/platforms-of-post-truth-outlines-of-a-structural-transformation-of-the-public-sphere/

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This is an excerpt from *Global Politics in a Post-Truth Era*. You can download the book free of charge from E-International Relations.

On 6 January 2021, a violent mob stormed the United States Capitol Hill in an attempt to stop the US Congress from formalising the victory of Joe Biden in the November 2020 presidential election. A shock test of democratic institutions in the US, the events also represent a watershed moment in the analysis of post-truth politics that has been ongoing since the British 'Brexit' vote and the election of President Donald Trump in 2016. The acts witnessed on 6 January were incited by Trump, who in the preceding weeks had repeatedly made unfounded references to a 'stolen election'. Adding fuel to the fire were many claims about widespread election fraud in social media. The riot itself was also planned on social media, including on public Facebook pages. Many insurrectionists taking part in the events on Capitol Hill were believers of the conspiracy theory known as QAnon. Originating in the anonymous imageboard 4chan, QAnon orbits around the idea of Trump's secret battle against a cabalist elite of media, scholars, and (Democratic) politicians.

While neither Trump insisting on blatant falsehoods nor the role of social media in the diffusion of misinformation was new, the events in Washington seemed to prove for the first time how severe consequences these untruths could have. Slightly less drastically, a related point was made by President Biden six months later, when he accused Facebook of 'killing people' due to its failure to stem disinformation about Covid-19 (Kanno- Youngs and Kang 2021). In both cases, it was apparent that widely spread disinformation could affect not only the behaviour of citizens online, but also lead to physical consequences, even violence, and endanger democratic processes.

This chapter seeks to shed light on the structural conditions of post-truth politics – in particular, the emergence over the last decade of social media as a central platform of public discourse. I first clarify my take on the concept of post-truth, and how it differs from various forms of mendacity that have traditionally appeared in the democratic public sphere. I highlight two aspects in the post-truth phenomena – a rhetorical style I call 'careless speech' and a broader set of structural conditions that contribute to the devaluation of factual truth. I also introduce the metaphoric vocabulary of public and factual infrastructure/architecture that forms the backbone of my analysis. The rest of the chapter then inquires into the structural transformation of the public sphere, linking the role of platform capitalism to the tension-ridden history of privately-owned public fora.

Social media is capable, perhaps more than we realise, of 'changing the ways that we act, perceive, feel, think, and live together' (Han 2017, ix). But, technologies are never autonomous actors. Their meanings and repercussions emerge from the broader political, economic, and cultural environment. Hence, I will focus on the nature of platform capitalism as a part of a broader set of developments that constitute a threat to the prerequisites of democratic politics.

On truth and democracy

After being selected the word of the year in 2016 by the Oxford English Dictionary and by Gesellschaft für deutsche

Sprache, much has been written on post-truth and post-factuality. Political discussion has purportedly undergone a profound change and left facts and truth behind for good. The definition offered by the two dictionaries refers to the tyranny of emotions over cold facts. Many take a different stance altogether. Politics, especially democratic politics, is supposed to be about opinions and ideological struggle, so why worry about truth? Are we not projecting an imaginary golden age into the past, a time when truth reigned supreme? Moreover, what is truth except a petrified outcome of past political struggles? Is not the whole alleged crisis of truth and expertise merely a reflection of problematic melancholia for the waning (neo)liberal consensus of the post-Cold War era?

Let us address these concerns first from the viewpoint of democracy. A broadly accepted tenet in democratic theory is that democracy is an opinion- based form of government. However, as Nadia Urbinati argues, opinions are always 'interpretations of specific facts and events' (Urbinati 2014, 35). An exchange of opinions becomes a mere battle of forces if the opinions lack any point of reference outside themselves. Thus, as Hannah Arendt wrote, freedom of opinion means nothing if factual information is not guaranteed. Opinions, inspired by different interests, values, and emotions come in a plurality of shapes. Without anchorage in facts, their interaction is rendered into violent clash of passions (Arendt 2006, 234–237). At best, pluralistic democratic debate enhances our understanding of the shared world from various angles. A disagreement over the facts divides this shared ground into separate islands, inhabited by people distrustful of each other.

As this formulation suggests, the dictionary definitions of post-truth tend to downplay the legitimate role of emotions in politics, while the sceptics underestimate the need for shared factual ground in democratic debate. As such, the two stances reflect the poles often at play in the contemporary public sphere. On the one hand, there is a pronounced tendency to dissolve every factual question into a matter of opinion – hence destabilising the public sphere by depriving it of any common points of reference. On the other hand, an opposite but equally real threat to democracy is the attempt to reduce even legitimate disagreements to factual questions, thus subjecting them to the tribunal of expert knowledge.

I find it useful to compare factual truth to the physical infrastructure that colours our everyday experience. Life in a city, for instance, is enabled, guided, and limited by urban architecture and infrastructure. Which modes of transportation are available for my trip to uptown? Which spaces are open to the public, and which are private? In politics, we are similarly limited and enabled by a variety of tangible and intangible infrastructures and architectures.

Facts are one such enabling constraint, a limitation that at the same time facilitates, encourages and stimulates debate. This infrastructure is given form by various architectures, such as ways of accessing information. Like public infrastructure, the factual infrastructure of politics deteriorates, becomes meaningless, unless we constantly attend to it and make sense of it from our varying perspectives. No one would expect exact guidelines on what to do from the material environment, just as no one would completely ignore its limitations on our actions. Finally, urban architecture may very well support racist, sexist, classist, or ableist structures of domination, and often upholds ecologically unsustainable petroculture. Yet, few would find razing the city a plausible solution to these shortcomings – the task is to restructure, not to destruct.

It is worth noting that this conceptualisation does not hinge on any particular theory of truth. Because it approaches truth politically, and not epistemologically, it is equally compatible with critical realism and non-realist approaches. Any consideration of truth in politics has to acknowledge that truth never stands on its own feet in the plural world of public affairs. The 'truthlikeness' of scientific statements, highlighted by realists, is of little value if they are ignored in political decision-making. The non-realists, in turn, often conceive truth as 'warranted assertability' – or 'what our peers will […] let us get away with saying' (Rorty 1981, 176). The current political crisis indicates that such communities of justification are dispersing fast. Accepting what is an undisputed fact in the scientific community becomes, ironically, an indication of having failed to 'do your own research' in many online communities.

Post-truth politics, then, ought to be understood as a predicament in which the factual infrastructure is crumbling, while political speech continues to find new ways of detaching itself from it. Consequently, our ability to react to political events and to engage in a democratic process of opinion-formation is compromised. This definition combines a structural perspective with a viewpoint focused on a particular rhetorical style. The latter I call 'careless speech', by

which I mean speech that not only does not care about truth, but also often does not devote any careful attention to the details of the untruths it contains. Unlike the classical lie, careless speech does not primarily serve to hide particular facts from view. It seeks to actively eliminate factuality from the criteria used to assess political opinions and decisions. It denotes the purposeful creation of ambiguity over whether people believe in the factuality of the things they say. Nothing is to be taken too seriously or literally. While available to all, careless speech is particularly forthcoming to white male politicians prone to masculine boasting and aggression. Amplifying these post-truth tendencies indicates an attitude of not caring about the democratic process, or the world we share with others (see Hyvönen 2018).

The structural transformation of the public sphere

To understand the erosion of factual infrastructure and the emergence of careless speech, these phenomena must be placed in a historical context. One particularly helpful tool for gaining such historical vantage point is Habermas's 1962 work *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*. Particularly when combined with later correctives and elaborations, the book is an indispensable resource for the critique of 'actually existing democracy', also in the digital sphere (Fraser 1990, 56; Wischmeyer 2019).

Habermas's historical presentation revolves around the rebirth of the public from the seventeenth century onwards. The architecture around which the modern European public emerged was mostly privately owned – salons, coffeehouses, and later the pages of newspapers. In these spaces, private people could 'come together as a public', disregarding the exact societal status of the participants. At the centre of such public sphere was the critical assessment and evaluation, exercised by private persons, of matters of public interest (Habermas 1991, 27–36, 52, 158–164). As Rosenfeld has also argued, many of the ideals regarding fact-based public debate we take for granted, such as objective news reporting, emerged only in the modern public sphere, supported by Enlightenment values (Rosenfeld 2018, 10, 25–35).

The public architecture Habermas describes – not unrelated to the point made earlier about urban infrastructure – was largely premised on exclusions based on gender, race, and class status. The disregarding of social rank only applied within the cohort of white property-owning males and did not include women, colonial subjects or the poor. To a large extent, these structures of domination continue to be coded (both metaphorically and literally) into the architectures of contemporary public spaces, amplifying the voices of traditionally dominant groups over those of the oppressed. A different historical narrative could be told by focusing on the aspects of modern publicity ignored by Habermas, such as the physical assemblies that occasionally destabilise such exclusions. But, to understand the role of media platforms in the emergence of post-truth politics, it makes sense to follow in Habermas' footsteps and trace historically the vicissitudes of privately-owned public spaces.

Importantly, Habermas's narrative points towards an aspect in modern publicity loaded with irony. What started out as a form of protection from the state authorities – private ownership – has become a threat to 'the critical functions of publicist institutions' (Habermas 1991, 188). As physical publics wither, and the media becomes increasingly driven by advertising interests, passive consumption begins to replace critical public debate (Habermas 1991, 188, 159). In the twentieth century, Habermas argues, 'the rational debate of private people becomes one of the production numbers of the stars in radio and television, a saleable package ready for the box office; it assumes commodity form' (Habermas 1991, 164).

As we will see, Habermas' history is crucial for democratic thought still today, as the shift in the fortunes, for the public, of privately-owned public spaces still defines our politics. Perceptive to what was to come, Habermas highlighted the emergence and increasing dominance of entertainment as a result of the aforementioned processes. Pivotally for us, entertainment by nature represents a shift away from fact-based debate, and 'instead of doing justice to reality, tends to present a substitute more palatable for consumption' (Habermas 1991, 170).

In the twenty years that followed the publication of *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, Habermas's ruminations about entertainment gathered more weight as television established its role as the dominant medium for daily consumption. It thus makes sense to read Neil Postman's*Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the*

Age of Show Business (1985) as something of a sequel to Habermas's work on structural transformation – although this connection is not intended by either author. Postman's focus lies on the tendency of television to turn everything into entertainment. For him, the dominant medium, whether printing press or TV, is not a passive machine – it is a structure for discourse. As such structure, TV by its very nature tends to fragmentise and trivialise all content. (Postman 2005, 43, 87).

Although the tendency has been present from the early years of television, there have also been radical changes over the past decades. First, while early TV channels had entertainment programmes, these were supposed to finance the economically less profitable news, which in turn granted credence to the network. From the late 1970s onwards, cable news, the 24-hour news cycle, and the idea of making a profit from news have turned news themselves into entertainment – hence further eroding the distinction between facts, opinions, and fictions (See McIntyre 2018, 63–65).

More recently, the financial struggles of the television networks have pressed them to develop a distinct and marketable brand. A run-of-the-mill aspect in the marketing of ordinary consumer products, brand differentiation in news and information is arguably alarming. According to his own testimony, Cass Sunstein thinks about the economy in terms mostly owing to the neoclassical Chicago school. Yet, even from this perspective it seems clear that 'serious problems' emerge when information is treated as a consumer good among others (Sunstein 2018, 149). The goal has shifted from offending the least number of viewers to creating outrage on purpose. One of the best ways to achieve this in an entertaining way is to include 'panels of celebrity anchors and paid provocateurs making themselves, and their outrage, the "story" rather than the events they are discussing' (Tanguay 2019, 28–30).

The triumph of candidates like Trump in the 2016 US presidential elections was dependent on news media that had become completely infused in the logic of reality television. News, reformatted after the model of reality TV and the attention economy, operate in 'truth markets' where the operational logic is not driven by public interest of any kind, but by ratings. Brazenness and frequency of lies, accompanied by sexists and racist proclamations that would have been out of bounds still a decade ago were turned into a recipe for success. They grasped the attention of radicals, while the more moderate supporters were not scared away by them because the reality TV-infused media logic hollowed them out and made them seem less real (Tanguay 2019, 23–24, 30–31).

Of course, the transformation of the media is not the sole culprit. A fuller picture of the developments culminating in post-truth politics would have to account for the impact of broader trends of democratic backsliding and erosion of representative institutions over the past decades, and the phenomenon of toxic white masculinity (Bennett and Livingston 2020). For example, the 1990s consensus around liberal democratic market society effectively narrowed the space for meaningful political disagreements or policy differences of elected governments. One consequence of this was that parties became increasingly reliant on public relations agencies and outright bullshit – 'empty words you could hear anywhere' but attract 'no real believers' (Spicer 2018; Frankfurt 2005). Combined with media transformations, the general decline of social trust, thirty decades of neoliberalism, the shocks of the 2008 financial crash and other factors, the widespread use of bullshit fertilised the ground for post-truth rhetors. Yet, this picture remains incomplete without factoring in the role of online platforms. We must continue the investigation of the structural transformation of the public sphere, delving into the dynamics of platform/surveillance capitalism, and particularly its mode of operation in social media.

The hybrid mediascape and the question of information supply

Critics from Aldous Huxley to Habermas and Postman were mainly worried about the reduction of the audience into a silent, passive recipient (Habermas 1991, 200–201). From this angle, the early enthusiasm about the internet and its potential for active engagement is understandable. Is it not preferable that people search for information independently, instead of just following the agenda set by the media? The development of the internet into a multimedia experience full of user generated content (known as Web 2.0) was greeted with an enthusiasm that likened it to a 'second Gutenberg event' that would radically democratise politics. Perhaps bathing in the naivete of liberal democracy's triumphs after the fall of the Berlin Wall, it was assumed (by some, at least) that the forces of free markets and civil society would always produce pro-democracy results.

The first step on the road to understanding why this has not been the case is recognising that social media functions as a part of a technological environment defined by a superabundance of information. The question is not merely one of substance (what information is available) – it is a matter of how we acquire information. The internet has replaced the television as the 'meta- medium' – the instrument that not only supplies us with information, but also directs our ways of knowing (Postman 2005, 78–79).

Psychological research suggests, for instance, that the instant availability of information online feeds our tendency to over-estimate our own understanding. The fast access to information blurs the boundary between internal ('in the head') and external ('in a book'), leading to inflated 'cognitive self-esteem'. In other words, we think we know much more than we actually do (Fisher et al. 2015). Often, the result resembles the image presented by Adorno and Horkheimer in 1944 (2007, xvii), according to which 'the flood of precise information and brand-new amusements make people smarter and more stupid at once'.

This has been vividly illuminated by the 'infodemic' that accompanied the Covid-19 pandemic. Traditionally, one of the major challenges for making sense of crisis situations has been the paucity of available information. To some extent, this still holds true for element of the Covid-19 pandemic. Arguably, however, for the meaning-making processes during the crisis, the main challenge for the populace has not been the absolute lack of information. It has been, instead, the ability to recognise the relevant, epistemologically sound, and politically utilisable knowledge from the flood of available information, misinformation, and disinformation. One manifestation of the disarray of information is the fact that disagreements are increasingly based on mutually contradictory bits of information first voiced by people claiming various degrees of expertise, and later amplified by political pundits and ordinary citizens. Hence, during the pandemic almost any decision or recommendation by public health authorities was vulnerable to criticism from a source, statistic, or expert pointing towards a different conclusion. Rather than fostering the democratic virtue of fallibilistic pluralism, public debate as a result becomes characterised by an aggressive need to 'be right' (see Lynch 2019; Arendt 1968, 28). In some cases, this buried any attempt to have a properly democratic debate – one where disagreement pertains to principled judgments, not to the possession of indisputable facts.

Social media platforms know that being buried under an unstructured flow of information is not an ideal user experience. As a solution, information the user encounters is typically filtered by algorithms. For O'Neil (2017), this can be compared to the editorial decisions of traditional media. But these decisions were clear and visible, being the same for everybody. Hence, they could form a shared ground for discussion. The 'newsfeeds' of social media, and the result pages of Google search, make similar 'editorial decisions' in a manner that is more individualised and less visible, hence evading the awareness of most users. This complicates the idea that the internet would enable liberation from an external agenda. If what individuals encounter in the newsfeed is algorithmically determined and personalised, even the members of the same political community can inhabit differently structured realities. We may then justifiably share the worry voiced by Sunstein (2018, 37–41) regarding the wilting of random encounters, shared experiences and somewhat overlapping conceptions of reality. During the impeachment hearings of President Trump, for example, the events appeared radically differently depending on whether they were followed via, say, CNN coverage or through a Facebook account whose 'likes' were exclusively on pro-Republican and pro-Trump pages.

Social media allows us to choose, or chooses for us, the sources of information in a way that buffs out the uncomfortable edges that facts tend to come with. A scholarly consensus on the true scale of filter bubbles does not exist as yet, but polarisation and conflicting views on facts and reality are nevertheless an established fact (Marietta and Barker 2019). For example, on YouTube, where the recommendation algorithm steers around 70 percent of viewing time, the recommendations tend to bolster political biases and favour sensationalist videos – often highlighting conspiracist content or other forms of disinformation (Starr 2020, 80). Filter bubbles raise the risk of people being divided ever more clearly into their own mutually hostile cliques, equating the truth with their own group (Urbinati 2014, 4). Meanwhile, growing tribalism also implies that lying becomes increasingly acceptable from one's group, because it is seen as serving some higher end (Hendricks and Vestergaard 2018, 83; Rosenfeld 2018, 9). A manifestation of this that cuts through ideological divisions is the dominance of viral (often emotional) narratives weaved around first-person experiences. Such stories are all but immune to fact-checking due to their claim to representativeness that does not hinge on the factual accuracy of the particular story on which their appeal

nevertheless rests (Mäkelä et al. 2021). Such divergence of experiences and reality conceptions erodes the basic respect between participants of a debate. No wonder that one characteristic phenomenon of social media is, in the words of Byung-Chul Han, a 'shitstorm' (Han 2017, 2–12).

The problems go beyond saying nasty things on the internet. Political theorists from Cicero to Rawls have alerted us to the potential threat of violence when disagreement relates primarily to truth (Urbinati 2014, 100). The events at Capitol Hill in 2021 proved this to be the case in the online era as well. However, the exact nature of polarisation – especially in the US – also attests to the link between the media and broader political trends. If it was merely a question of social media and algorithms, this would predict symmetrical polarisation of the media system. Notably, this is not the case. The US media ecosystem is characterised by asymmetric polarisation, where a niche has emerged on the right side of the political spectrum largely isolated from mainstream sources of news and strongly linked to various conspiracist agendas (Benkler 2020, 44–47). In the extreme, the information disorder allows for a strategy mastered by the likes of Steve Bannon and Roger Stone. For them, the point is no longer even upholding a certain political narrative by using lies, but rather emancipating politics from the horizon where adherence to facts is one vector in the critical evaluation of opinions and policies. This is done by disorienting the audience with a flood of stories and narratives, rather than sticking to only one. As Bannon famously described his strategy, the goal is to 'flood the zone with shit'. This

exemplifies a strategic use of careless speech. The point is not to gain ground within the confines of a single policy issue as much as it is to eliminate the whole idea of a common world in the context of which political disagreements are played out according to the 'rules of the game'. While Bannon certainly draws from the playbook of older 'merchants of doubt' (for example, the tobacco and oil industries), the move from the traditional to social media has eliminated much of the viscosity introduced by professional journalists with editorial standards (Starr 2020, 69–70).

Of course, social media can also be used for truth-telling. Unlike some, I use the term rather strictly to refer to speech that can actually be said to be *truthful*. For example, the #MeToo and #BlackLivesMatter campaigns successfully used social media for raising public awareness about the structural injustices of contemporary society. In this sense, social media creates space for what Fraser (1990, 67) has called 'counterpublics'. By doing so, it also harbours the potential of restructuring the architecture of modern publics, i.e. challenging the historical exclusion of certain voices from democratic fora. Yet, the internet is also full of public and semi-public spaces used for the dissemination of disinformation and antidemocratic thinking. The period of the 2020 elections and the Capitol Hill riot in the US is the most flagrant example. Even after the most visible far-right 'Stop the Steal' group on Facebook was removed due to threats of violence, the movement continued to spread disinformation and plan the Capitol Hill riots across various Facebook pages. Through 2020, as the Tech Transparency Project (2021) summarises, 'Facebook's efforts to curb violent activity and disinformation were either too late or ineffective or both'. In less mainstream platforms, such as Parler, violent rhetoric and disinformation are even more prevalent, while generally reaching a smaller overall audience.

Blatant disinformation and violence are only one aspect of the phenomenon. Social media also serves as a platform for spaces dominated by hateful content – usually misogynist, racist, or homophobic in orientation and weaponised as a silencing tactic (Särmä 2020). The solution cannot lay merely in embracing the 'good' and rejecting the 'bad' when it comes to social media. Neither can we rely exclusively on individual-level interventions, media literacy programs or fact-checking. While important, these approaches remain ineffective if we do not grasp the bull by the horns, analysing the issue from the viewpoint of the imperatives of platform capitalism.

Welcome to the era of platform capitalism

To gauge the problem accurately, we must understand the operational logic of the online platforms. Platforms are 'digital infrastructures' that position themselves as intermediaries between two or more groups (Srnicek 2016, 42–43, 48). Most of these firms build their success on the extraction and refinement of data. This union of data and capital is widely considered a new type of economic formation and has been called surveillance capitalism or platform capitalism among other labels. The logic of the accumulation of surveillance capitalism relies on turning all spheres of human experience into quarries of data extraction – i.e. expropriating 'behavioural surplus', which is then refined into

instruments of behavioural prediction and modification (Zuboff 2019, 8–9, 99, 200; Srnicek 2016, 39–40). While the general tendency is to expand this operation to everyday 'offline' life (e.g. through the Internet of Things), for our purposes it suffices to note that every aspect of 'the internet's computer-mediated architecture […] is repurposed as an extraction architecture' (Zuboff 2019, 129). Key interfaces of this extraction architecture are user engagements – the main unit of the online attention economy, which includes clicks, views, viewing time, and shares (Hendricks and Vestergaard 2018, 1–17). Prioritisation of engagements as the pivots of data extraction leaves the door ajar for actors following the Bannon 'flooding' strategy. It also helps us understand why organised disinformation campaigns and bot armies are potentially so effective. Provocations, viral stories, and careless speech – i.e. statements indifferent to their truth-value and often blatantly disrespectful of democratic norms – are excellent sources of engagement, whereas facts and critical, pluralistic debate typically are not.

The platform companies have little interest in stemming the flood. On the contrary, since operations involving data become more profitable the more raw material you have, their business model relies on what Zuboff calls 'radical indifference'. In other words: 'it doesn't matter what is in the pipelines as long as they are full and flowing'. This acts as a constant invitation to, modifying Bannon's metaphor only a little, fill the pipes with shit – that is, with disinformation, conflicting narratives, and rage-inciting content. The chances are that – except for content considered disturbing almost universally, like child pornography – Facebook and other platforms will not interfere heavily with such content unless forced to do so by legislation. In fact, it seems likely that Facebook could turn down most mis-/disinformation on its site if it wanted to. This, however, would directly intervene with its logic of accumulation, which relies on the maximum amount of users sharing the maximum amount of content (Zuboff 2019, 509–12; Srnicek 2016, 45). Less content means less data, which means less capital and lower profits.

Towards an expanded notion of critical infrastructure

This chapter has sought to add to the understanding of post-truth politics by providing a critical genealogy of the digital public sphere. As the recourse to Habermas's notion of structural transformation suggests, having major parts of the architecture of public discourse in the hands of private ownership is not new in the context of modern history. The implications of private ownership for public discourse have always been ambivalent. Yet, it seems that the recent emergence of data-driven platform capitalism has introduced new threats that should be taken seriously. From the passive, sometimes mis- (or under-) informed citizens of the television era, we have moved to the polarised public of our hybrid era. Rather than reducing them to silence, the digital architecture of the contemporary public sphere invites citizens to consume disinformation, which has a high potential to inflame aggressive hyper- agitation either online or offline.

Thus far, legal regulation of the platforms has focused primarily on privacy concerns. As Zuboff's argument about surveillance demonstrates, privacy is indeed a key concern also politically. However, over-emphasising the role of the consumer over that of the citizen can also mean that regulative action fails to address some of the pressing threats to the public interest. What is needed is more focus on the role of the platforms as de facto public spaces – in other words, infrastructures of democracy. In addition to protecting privacy, we need to protect and take care of publicity. Security political discourse of the past two decades has been dominated by the notion of 'critical infrastructure'. Given that democracy is increasingly under attack globally, the factual basis of political decision-making should be considered a critical infrastructure in need of protection.

Caring for and protecting public discourse requires, among other things, a regulative framework that supports the diversity and plurality of online spaces and guarantees access to common sources of factual information (Dommett and Verovšek 2021). Pushing for such reforms is bound to incite resistance from the platform companies. They tend to consider 'old institutions like the law', to quote the Google CEO Larry Page, too viscous in principle to regulate digital technology. Any impediment to data extraction, in particular, is a direct threat to the platforms' logic of accumulation, and data extraction is best served by content that produces engagements (Zuboff 2019, 60, 104–105). Yet, as with other parts of critical infrastructure, regulation must be enacted to guarantee not only the factual basis of debate, but also the broader horizon of shared experiences – without which the facts and democracy itself lose their meaning.

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