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4 Post-truth dystopia

Huxleyan distraction or Orwellian control?

Darrin Durant

Introduction

What is "Post-Truth"? I argue that post-truth is a Huxleyan moment in the intensification of alt-fact discourses, in which vaudeville entertainment, propped up by partisan thought-bubbles and framed by allegiance superceding evidence, morphs into gaslighting. This picture of post-truth stems from a sociological bet, building upon Neil Postman's *Amusing Ourselves to Death* (1985), that we live in a society more like the dystopia of Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932) than the dystopia of George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty Four* (1949). Contemporary right-wing authoritarians certainly make Orwell's warnings deeply relevant, but I suggest we live in a world of Huxleyan distraction more than Orwellian indoctrination. Moreover, Huxley explained distraction as a cultural product not just a capitalist product, granting Huxley's warnings more scope than stories describing capitalism's instruments for distracting and pacifying the masses (like Guy Debord's *Society of the Spectacle* (1967)). Crucially, the Orwell/Huxley contrast allows us to see how control relations can differ in dystopias. For Orwell, control is achieved through externally imposed oppression, information deprivation, and the concealing of truth. For Huxley, control is achieved through coming to love one's oppression, information overload, and flooding discussion with irrelevancies and trivialities. Although both Orwell's and Huxley's dystopic visions foretold salient elements of modern political culture, Huxley's concerns are more informative about the character of our post-truth age. Huxley's focus on politicians as entertainers reveals more than Orwell's focus on politicians as deceivers, and Huxley's focus on trivialisation reveals more than Orwell's focus on repression. I also elucidate two specific mechanisms of post-truth dynamics that stem from thinking we live in Huxley's dystopia not Orwell's. The first mechanism is the way fragmentation obscures incoherence (illustrated by Australia's 2016–2019 deliberations about whether to build nuclear reactors to address climate change). The second mechanism is the way culture becomes burlesque, draining the seriousness and spirit out of the elements and factors that feed into political discussion (illustrated by political

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responses to South Australia's electrical blackout in 2016 and subsequent carbon carry-over credits debates).

Two features of post-truth help explain its diverse implications. One, post-truth discourses are intimately tied up with fears about relations of control. The types of control relations and their targets vary per discussant, resulting in high normative variance in understandings about post-truth dynamics. Two, post-truth overlaps with political populism. Some treat populism as a benign process of re-politicising issues and thus ameliorating political exclusion (Laclau 2005; Mouffe 2018). By contrast, I treat populism critically as an anti-elitist, anti-pluralist adulation of the common people (Muller 2017; Mudde and Kaltwasser 2017; Durant 2018, 2019a; and see the book-length discussion in Collins, Evans, Durant & Weinel, *Experts and the Will of the People* (2020)). More generally, assessments of the social utility of post-truth will mirror different ideas about collective goods and what might challenge them, and our response to post-truth will reflect assessments about the distribution of responsibility for post-truth. Some thus emphasise an evenly spread complicity – both the alt-right and progressives are equally to blame – in fostering post-truth (Gray 2017; Jasanoff and Simmet 2017). The absurd political naivety of such self-admonishments is the lesser sin here. Worse still, progressives end up playing the same unwarranted social levelling card as the alt-right - an example being the then-President Trump saying there were good people on both sides of the August 2017 Charlottesville neo-Nazi demonstration (Blake 2019) - only in inverse fashion (we are all bad). Comedians provide a better guide, as they confront live on stage the fact that responding to life-worlds powered by filter bubbles requires "messy, stranger, more unmoderated conversations" (Safran, interviewed in Koslowski 2019). Taking my cue from the comedian, I intend to engage post-truth via a messy and unmoderated conversation, splattered across four sections.

In section two, I show that Orwell's *1984* and Huxley's *Brave New World* constituted overlapping warnings about futures-to-be-avoided and thus help illuminate the social dynamics within which contemporary post-truth discourse dwells. In section three, I discuss a tendency within general audience books on post-truth and within my own field of Science and Technology Studies (STS) to view post-truth through the lens of Orwell's threatened dystopia. I nevertheless use and build upon Postman's *Amusing Ourselves to Death* (1985) to frame an answer as to why Huxley is the better guide if we wish to grasp post-truth politics. In section four, I introduce empirical vignettes to illustrate two features of political culture that are Huxleyan in tone: the dangers of a fragmented, and a burlesque, political culture. In my concluding fifth section, I speculate on resources useful for guarding against post-truth as information overflow (Huxley) not information diminishment (Orwell). I suggest we attend to processes of intensification (see Pellizzoni 2016), to the side of democracy that closes down not just opens up issues, and to the possibilities for reimagining authority relations as supportive not undermining of democracy (see Moore 2017).

Reading Orwell and Huxley

I first recount the stories told by Orwell and Huxley. Next, I analyse their different control mechanisms, namely Orwell's grim constriction and Huxley's entertaining proliferation, and the enduring applicability of both dystopic visions.

Orwell versus Huxley

Orwell's *1984* is set in Airstrip One (a province of Oceania) and dominated by the ideology Ingsoc (English socialism). Winston Smith works for the Ministry of Truth, rewriting history, but secretly hates the Party. If you fall foul of the Party, you become an "unperson". Winston rebels by getting involved with fellow employee Julia, whom he suspects is an informant. They start an affair after Julia hands Winston a simple note reading "I love you". Winston's superior is O'Brien and Winston suspects O'Brien to be a secret agent for the resistance movement (The Brotherhood). O'Brien offers Winston a chance to join The Brotherhood and Winston and Julia do so. Unfortunately, O'Brien is part of a sting operation "thoughtcriminals". Over several months, O'Brien tortures Winston to cure Winston's insanity and coerce him to believe the Party line, even if it means believing 2 + 2 = 5. Although O'Brien informs Winston that after re-programming, he will be released, only to be executed a little later, Winston says at least he has not betrayed Julia. But soon after O'Brien takes Winston to the final stage, Room 101, where you confront your worst fears. For Winston, that is rats. A cage of rats is lowered onto Winston's head, but he yells "do it to Julia". Julia later reveals she also betrayed Winston. Winston thus realises the Party has even managed to take away their love. Winston eventually "realises" that he loves Big Brother, because he can celebrate Oceania's victory over Eurasia in Africa.

Two features of *1984* are worth highlighting. First, some characters are constituted by the acts of referring to them rather than their actual manifestation. We never meet Big Brother (the leader) nor the resistance leader (Emmanuel Goldstein). Nor do we meet the enemy of the people railed against during the televised Two Minutes of Hate (where subconscious feelings of angst are re-directed away from Oceania and towards external enemies). Second, everything fits: deceptions are temporary, so discordance is minimal; the plot quickly settles around clear and consistent roles; and outcomes are frightening but go to plan.

By contrast, in Huxley's *Brave New World*, no character is shadowy, and nothing fits perfectly. The story is set in a future World State where advances in reproductive technologies, psychological manipulation, and classical conditioning have created a pre-defined social hierarchy. The World State is built on the principles of Fordist production: homogeneity, mass production, and consumption of disposable goods. Citizens are engineered in vitro, and, from birth, classes are indoctrinated by recorded voices

reading slogans saying their own class is superior but other classes perform needed functions. Residual unhappiness is treated by soma (an antidepressant). The novel opens in London 632 AF (After Ford; or AD 2540). The story turns on the alpha-plus Bernard Marx, who has an inferiority complex because he is shorter than average after an alcohol accident with his blood-surrogate pre-decantation. Bernard has incomplete conditioning. He is cowardly, hypocritical, and does not enjoy communal sports, solidarity services, or promiscuous sex. Bernard even dislikes soma. Bernard's love-interest is Lenina Crowne, a beautiful foetus technician who is part of the 30% of the population not infertile. Lenina is typical in enjoying promiscuous sex and soma. Bernard and Lenina holiday outside the World State in the unrefined New Mexico Reservation. There they encounter Linda, a former beta-Minus, who had been on holiday there and fell pregnant to the Director of Hatcheries and Conditioning. The offspring of that union, the abandoned-by-his-father John the Savage, and the promiscuous Linda, are both outsiders on the Reservation. Bernard and Lenina relocate Linda and John to the World State. The novel is the fallout from this decision.

John the Savage becomes a celebrity in the conformist World State, by virtue of not fitting in. Initially optimistic and excited to relocate to the World State, John then misses the disease, dirt, and free will of the Reservation. John is soon confronted by one of the World Controllers, Mustapha Mond, who tries to convince John that people will believe what they are conditioned to believe, and that soma is the appropriate treatment for unpleasant things. Yet John rejects a perfumed world where nothing costs enough and there is no value placed on hard work and sacrifice. Mustapha presents a worldview where traditions are the enemy of innovation, and only newness is valued. Mustapha explains to John that beautiful things, including great works of art, literature, and science, tend to last. But a consumerist society demands new things and, if newness is to trump intrinsic value, achievements beyond local consumptive moments need to be suppressed. Importantly for understanding modern post-truth, Mustapha considered science "subversive" and in need of corralling (Huxley 1932, 231), indicating Huxley saw anti-science as an instrument in the pacification not enlightenment of citizens.

Although Huxley's citizens thus lived and consumed in a context of open information about their personal relations and social roles, such information proliferation is treated by Huxley as designed to overwhelm citizens and intensify their emotional conflicts. Consider the uncomplicated (if ultimately unsuccessful) love Orwell depicted between Winston and Julia, and the ultimately accommodating outcomes as Party wins over Resisters. By contrast, the relations of love, friendship, and citizen–state central to Huxley's story are relations of frayed edges and partial accommodations. For instance, John the Savage is physically attracted to Lenina but finds her promiscuity socially repulsive, because he was educated by reading Shakespeare's romances. Bernard is John's custodian but becomes jealous of John and Lenina's mutual attraction, and of John's friendship with Bernard's friend Helmholtz Watson. While Linda starts taking soma to build a wall between herself and the angst

caused by relocation, John and Lenina completely fail to understand each other's social and sexual norms despite almost complete information about each other. When Linda dies, John attacks onlookers who refused to mourn, their emotional connection to tragic outcomes desensitised by soma. Is this like our current `living with Covid' mantra, the drug of an open economy desensitizing many to the death that follows the contours of existing inequalities? The resident controller ultimately expels Bernard and Helmholtz to islands for their antisocial activity, for they aided John's rebellion and let their own dispositions to the manners of their society become maladjusted. Helmholtz is happy to finally face some physical discomfort, but Bernard the misfit protests his exile because he had come to enjoy the popularity of being the custodian of a celebrity. The resident controller refuses John's request for exile, so John retreats to a hilltop. Crowds gather to watch John's bizarrely reclusive lifestyle, including whipping himself. Lenina arrives to watch and, while John had previously assaulted Lenina for wanting sex without love, now he launches a fresh, frenzied attack on her with the whip, fueled by the soma-induced voyeurism of the crowd. The novel ends when we learn that John had hung himself the following morning.

But the ending of Huxley's story was really the depiction of the audience in the final few pages. The audience had soaked up John's madness as a form of entertainment. Is that like contemporary post-truth social dynamics, participating in the frenzy of factual contestation as a form of entertainment? When we make civic engagement entertaining, does that ameliorate the stress of democratic contestation in the short-term, but in the long-term trivialise and disempower citizen engagement? Democratic engagement can be much tougher and more difficult than fuzzy utopian invocations of universal participation typically allow. Mark Warren (1996a) thus argues that the "complexity, size, and scale … [and the] … differentiated, pluralized, and extensively politicized" (242) nature of industrial-capitalist democracies creates the conditions for the "social groundlessness of political space" (243). That social groundlessness consists of all the inter-personal discomforts occasioned by civic debate. Yet as our factual debates become fragmented by the modern proliferation of epistemic viewpoints, with their easy travel across digital networks and entrenchment in echo chambers, it seems like everyone is watching gleefully as factual testimony becomes a combat sport. Huxley himself was certainly concerned about the relaxation rather than enforcement of standards, and the way audience engagement can hype such loosened standards into trivialisation not seriousness. Or, as Huxley wrote to Orwell when reviewing Orwell's book:

> Whether in actual fact the policy of the boot-on-the-face can go on indefinitely seems doubtful. My own belief is that the ruling oligarchy will find less arduous and wasteful ways of governing and of satisfying its lust for power, and these ways will resemble those which I described in *Brave New World*.
>
> (Huxley 1949)

Orwell and Huxley

An important caveat here is that the two dystopic visions ultimately comprise overlapping warnings. The two sets of warnings do differ systematically, but both warnings remain applicable to the modern condition.

Orwell's warnings can be conceptualised as three forms of grim constriction. One, Newspeak, involving deliberately contradictory speech-terms that are used to narrow and obfuscate the *range* of thought. Two, information deprivation; to narrow and obfuscate the *subjects* of thought and dominate their meanings, whether that be through conscious deception, deliberate lies, the blunt reversal of facts, or blatant acts of selection to privilege one interpretation. Three, the repression of individuality, sexual intimacy, and emotion, to push the passivity of citizens to their limit. By contrast, Huxley's warnings can be conceptualised as three forms of entertaining proliferation. One, the immediacy of the moment becomes the entire field of experience, symbolised by art and science being considered dangerous unless tied directly to immediate problems. Two, information overload, often via entertaining distractions, lulls citizens into egotism and passivity. Three, overindulgence, with sexual promiscuity and varied personal experiences hyper-extended to render citizens infantile (and anxiety about contradictory experiences and knowledge is narcotised by the citizen consuming soma).

Orwell's warnings of course remain salient. Orwell wrote of Big Brother as a leader that never appears but through a cult of personality and strict control over bureaucratic agencies exerts dictatorial control over Oceania. Contemporary focus is on Trump in America since 2016–2020, gutting federal agencies and using personality politics to undermine democracy (Johnston 2018). Yet the drift towards autocratic rule has been underway for quite some time. Dictators have ruled over most of the African continent since the mid-1800s (Kenyon 2018). Egypt had overthrown authoritarian rulers in the Arab Spring of January 2011, only to return to authoritarianism by 2013 (Fahmy and Faruqi 2017). Political populists with the hallmarks of would-be autocrats have been assuming power in democracies, such as Victor Orban in Hungary, Recep Tayyip Erdogan in Turkey, Rodrigo Duterte in the Philippines, Hun Sen in Cambodia, Nicolas Maduro in Venezuela, and Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil (Mounk 2018). Meanwhile the openly authoritarian China, under Xi Jinping, exports autocratic management in the form of its "one belt, one road" infrastructure loans programme. The other Communists (the Soviet Union) had collapsed in the late 1980s and flirted with democracy yet, when Vladimir Putin came to power in 2000, he re-established authoritarianism (Gessen 2017). Putin's Russia set about attempting to destabilise Western democracies through digital warfare, including fake news cyberwar during the UK Brexit vote of 2016 and Trump's presidential election run of 2016 (Snyder 2018).

The way such online disinformation and misinformation are mobilised seems eerily reminiscent of Orwell's depiction of Oceania, Eurasia, and Eastasia engaged in perpetual war; sometimes attacking "the other", and

sometimes launching domestic attacks and blaming "the other". Of course, Orwell famously described how Winston became convinced that 2 + 2 = 5, so that domestic war included the policing of thought itself and especially politically unorthodox "thought-crimes". Tellingly, the debate over political correctness tells us that – aside from the fact that right-wing conservatives successfully captured and inverted the left-wing progressives' concerns about speech and social problems – everyone wants to prosecute someone else's thought-crime (Sparrow 2018). Moreover, a foretelling of modern internet trolling and viral outrage (Reagle 2016) is Orwell's televised "two minutes of hate", when citizens would vent their rage and it was impossible for anyone not to join in. Trump, as we know, replicated the move, inciting his supporters to chant "lock her up" during the 2016 primaries run-off against Hillary Clinton, "send her back" in 2019 references to four non-White democratic Congresswomen, and of course "stop the steal" as his supporters stormed the US Capitol building in 2021 after losing the 2020 election. Like Orwell's two minutes of hate, the point of the chants is to incite hatred against an abstract other than needs to be eradicated (Hesse 2019). Orwell's worries thus find resonance in our political times, but also our cognitive times. Orwell worried about an assault on the idea of truth, to the point where the very possibility of a distinction between truth and lie is erased. Some concur, arguing we are witnessing an attack on the very idea of established knowledge (Nichols 2017).

But as befits my purpose in this chapter, Huxley is as salient as ever. Huxley depicted promiscuous hedonism as reflecting a strategy within broader power relations to enact painless consensus. The contemporary sexualisation of everything is often treated as indicative of (misogynistic) power relations (Bridges et al. 2015). Huxley depicted citizens consuming soma (a drug) to dull any sense of inconsistency in life. Today anti-depressants and other means of diagnosing or medicating away our human variances appears to be reaching epidemic proportions (Schwarz 2016). Huxley suggested if you want passive citizens you distract them, heightening their experiential life and overloading them with information. Today we heighten experiential life by commodifying it; witness the popularity of reality TV from *The Bachelor* to *Survivor* and, ironically, *Big Brother*. Huxley worried that a trivial culture would trivialise both entertainment and injustice. Those who worry democracy is under siege indeed conclude that "the struggle for freedom and dignity has become a reality TV show" (Temelkuran 2019, 264). We also roll that experiential life into general information overload, pushed by the hyper partisanship of commercial and online media outlets (Ball 2017), and deepened by the way the likes of Facebook and Google foster a digital life characterised by over-sharing (Agger 2012) and datafied citizens (Sumpter 2018). Huxley worried that information overload would render citizens passive egotists. Some suggest our digital-information age indeed produces an inordinate number of passive copycats following egotistical leaders (Baddeley 2018) and disenfranchised citizens (Moore 2018).

In general terms, Huxley suggested a distracted world can be a dangerously passive world. Huxley (1932, 230) modelled the political organisation of his World State after an iceberg – one-ninth above the water (the World Controllers) and eight-ninths below (the Class-Stratified Citizens) – and depicted his citizens as too busy entertaining themselves to care. If democracy were to end, some suggest, one clear route would be for democracies negative powers (their institutionalised means to challenge authority relations) to wither due to citizen inattention (Runciman 2018). Huxley anticipated such concerns, realising that confusion and experiential gluts are just as much of a weapon for achieving political docility as doctrinaire thought-control. To the extent that what makes our post-truth age distinct from previous eras of lies, bullshit, and propaganda is the deep penetration into the modern social fabric of information technology based social patterns (Keane 2018), the contemporary over-investment in the digital age is grist to the mill of Huxley's thesis that entertaining proliferation breeds passivity. Indeed our modern digital war, as Dyer-Witherford and Matviyenko (2019) show in their analysis of digital subterfuge, "is a veritable fog machine, because operations are usually conducted covertly and are often intended to confuse; hacks are hidden from view and, when discovered, are laden with misdirection; signals intelligence implodes into infloglut" (7). While Orwell's villain O'Brien was personally overbearing, cyberwar is more "ahuman" (Dyer-Witherford and Matviyenko 2019, 18), because it is carried out largely by chat bots, malware, and algorithmic filter bubbles. Yet as we come to love our digital inter-connections, we face the problem, as Huxley (1949) realised, that "the lust for power can be just as completely satisfied by suggesting people into loving their servitude as by flogging and kicking them into obedience."

Post-truth as If the problem Is Orwellian control

To see why we should adopt Huxley as our guide to post-truth, and not Orwell, we need to calibrate the moral compass of the reader by following the trail of the control relations in discussions of post-truth. Orwellian images of control involve a tightly ordered surveillance State. Huxleyan images of control involve a loosely organised promiscuous State (note the constitution of the populace into tightly ordered Castes is the outcome of previous social experimentation and not available for political reimagining). In Orwell's dystopia, if the possibility of veracity is steadily undermined, one can dominate social relations by stifling free thinking. In Huxley's dystopia, if veracity can be trivialised, one can encourage social passivity. For Orwell, manipulative leaders deprive us of information. For Huxley, manipulative leaders flood us with information. To the reader: at first blush, in what dystopia might you live, one more Orwellian or one more Huxleyan?

It turns out that most social commentary fixates on Orwell and thinks we live in or are heading towards Orwell's dystopia. Below I thus show

why general audience books view post-truth through an Orwellian lens, and then show why my own field of STS follows suit. Finally, I build upon Postman (1985) to frame a defence of Huxley's dystopic vision as the more informative one about our modern condition.

Books titled "post-truth"

Turning to four books titled *Post-Truth*, written for general audiences, typically by startled philosophers and other disaffected culture critics and journalists, Orwellian images of information deprivation and the thought-police are prominent organising tropes. Note there are several versions of Orwell. James Ball's *Post-Truth* (2017) is Orwellian-lite, because autocrats lurk behind confusion not imposition. Ball depicts post-truth social orders as an "infosmog" – a general atmosphere of uncertainty – of mass-produced bullshit and confusion. Ball's post-truth social order is explained as resulting from an ongoing vacuum of trust in modern democracies. Dwindling trust, fueled by the proliferation of media sources, and the economics of the media landscape, undercuts traditional investigative journalism. For Orwell, the imposition of control is the tool of the autocrat, but Ball writes that "confusion is the tool of the autocrat", and that the infosmog is what "serves the agenda of the strongman and the autocrat" (2017, 277). Ball lands between the dystopias of Orwell and Huxley, fearing the exclusionary practices of the autocrat but thinking the autocrat exercises power by information overload and distraction techniques.

Evan Davis' *Post-Truth* (2017) is an instance of Orwellian-hope, because complex language is thought capable of saving the day. Davis argues that lies display a relation to truth by attempting to hide the truth. Bullshit is the absence of any regard for truth. A critic may object that the bullshitter has regard for the audience's regard for truth and manipulates audience norms. Regardless, for Davis, post-truth points to a social order that operates with an extreme version of overstating the case. Our social order is said to be shaped by both the way bullshit helps achieve manipulative psychological and advertising goals and can be socially rewarding, and the impacts of extreme divisions and tribalism. Yet Davis deflates the novelty of post-truth bullshit, emphasising our continuity with the past. The relation of control we ought to fear, in Davis' story, is the one where allegiance to a position (regardless of evidence) is used as a tool to enforce loyalty. Greater attention to communicative self-awareness, and to general linguistic and journalistic practice, is the suggested solution.

Why is Davis an instance of Orwellian-hope? Because Orwell left open the possibility that hope could reside in the redeeming features of nuanced language. Big Brother did not get the last word in *1984*. Yes, Winston Smith, with gin scented tears flowing down his cheeks, arrived at a point where he could think that "he loved Big Brother" (Orwell 1949, 245). Yet those words were not actually the last words of the story. Orwell included an

Appendix, "The Principles of Newspeak". Newspeak was an effort by Oceania to convert complex ideas to stark terms, reducing the vocabulary and narrowing the range of thought. Dissent and unorthodox opinions would become impossible because there would be no words to express them. The Appendix is written at some unspecified point in the future, narrated by an unspecified historian, meaning Orwell writes the history of Newspeak in the past tense. The Appendix documents that Newspeak failed, yet what function does the Appendix play in Orwell's morality tale? Orwell scholars debate the question as "the Appendix theory". Some argue – pessimistically – that Orwell meant to recreate in the reader the experience of living in a world where the authenticity of all documents was in doubt (Sanderson 1988, 593). Others argue – optimistically – that the Appendix points to a future world in which Winston's story (*as* a surviving record) implies a language with nuance enough to convey dissent and freedom (Rooney 2002, 80; Lynskey 2019). Either way, the fate of language is tied to the fate of social order. The optimistic reading gains support from the final page of *1984*, which mentions the US Declaration of Independence: governments depend on the consent of the governed and citizens can challenge any government that fails to honour that contract. Such ideas could only be translated into Newspeak ideologically, via the stark term "crimethink" (Orwell 1949, 256). The very idea of independence was unable to be captured and controlled by the severely diminished Newspeak term for it. Here Orwell was in good company with later political studies of totalitarian regimes, which have documented the limits to their manipulative use of language (Eidlen 1988).

Our final two books are full-blown Orwellian in fearing practices of grim constriction. Matthew D'Ancona's *Post-Truth* (2017) depicts a social order plagued by "the declining value of truth as society's reserve currency" (2). Post-Truth itself "is the direct ancestor of … 'doublethink' … [Orwell's term for] the power of holding two contradictory beliefs in one's mind and accepting both of them" (102). D'Ancona claims "digital technology has been the principal infrastructure of Post-Truth" (113), along with public acceptance of lying as the political norm, the Relativism of postmodern philosophers, and the economics of information. D'Ancona worries the deflation of truth risks "a drift towards autocracy" (8), meaning "Orwell provides a text for our times" (3). It is thus encouraging to see citizens turning to Orwell's novel (103), D'Ancona writes, because Orwell alerted us to the dangers inherent in the quest for truth itself being abandoned. For D'Ancona, Orwell offers a solution. Orwell's "hard-won realism" (148) from a life dedicated to truth teaches us that "it is only the vigilant citizen that stands watch over a free society and its fundamental values" (148–149).

Lee McIntyre's *Post-Truth* (2018a) is similarly full-blown Orwellian in fearing practices of grim constriction. McIntyre's post-truth social order is described as the latest product on the assembly line of misinformation produced by those who sowed doubt about smoking, vaccines, evolution, and

climate change. The post-truth social order also contains a new way to seek ideological supremacy. McIntyre (2018b) defined the post-truth social order as about the vapid lying of contemporary politicians and a transformation in ways of asserting power. Self-contradictions matter little, suggested McIntyre, when the aim is to trumpet the ability to be powerful enough to speak utter bullshit with impunity. Compelling belief in the shameless absence of evidence amounted to "a recipe for domination" if not resisted (2018a, 13). For McIntyre, Orwell's warnings were prophetic: McIntyre (2018a) sprinkled his book with quotes from Orwell (cf. xiii, 1, 35, 63), as well as allusions to politicians appealing to public feelings being a chilling reimagining of Orwell's Ministry of Love (4).

STS meets Orwell

My own field of STS tends to double-down on the Orwellian images of control, even among those who differ in their characterisations and evaluations of post-truth. For instance, Steve Fuller (2016a, 2016b, 2018) *celebrates* post-truth as a condition of modern democracy whereby the protection racket of expertise is being rightly upended. By contrast, both Sheila Jasanoff and Hilton Simmet (2017), and Noortje Marres (2018), *deflate* the idea of post-truth; they critique the idea of post-truth and refer to it as a label applied by those in a moral panic that Fuller is right. Yet all share a disdain for any conception of knowledge generation, dissemination, and discussion in which monopoly, concealment, deception, control, and domination prevails. They fear an Orwellian dystopia. Yet where Fuller argues post-truth is like a vaccine against Big Brother, Jasanoff and Simmet, and Marres, worry that post-truth is an ill-informed pining for expertise likely to accidentally create Big Brother.

Jasanoff and Simmet (2017) deflate post-truth because the "very idea of a 'post' implies a past where things were radically different … where politics was governed by pure *veritas*" (752). Jasanoff and Simmet suggest that to be anxious about post-truth amounts to ignoring the fact that "moral panics about the status of knowledge in the public sphere are as old as knowledge itself" (755). Both claims are warranted only because they are so narrowly and legalistically cast. The broader meaning of Jasanoff and Simmet's deflation of post-truth is revealed by noting that Orwell's concerns form the normative background of their argument. Just as Orwell worried that freedom is curtailed when citizens experience their political order as an exogenous imposition of judgement, Jasanoff and Simmet treat public truth claims as inherently problematic *because* "truth claims in the public sphere are normative because they reduce the space for democratic engagement by appealing to exogenous standards of rightness" (753). Just as Orwell suggested Newspeak was an attempt to sweep under single terms very diverse ideas, reducing the expression and even possibility of difference, Jasanoff and Simmet worry about an "unthinking reduction of lived

realities to technical facts" (762) and that collective disagreements will be "swept under a carpet of 'facts'" (754).

Marres (2018) similarly worries about processes of constriction, noting that "facts are too important to be reduced to vehicles of the restoration of authority" (441). Authority relations loom large in Marres's normative horizon and, like Jasanoff and Simmet, Marres' targets are mostly the *critics* of post-truth. "There is," sneers Marres, "an element of nostalgia afloat. To want your facts back is to evoke a time when experts still seemed to have unquestionable authority and felt secure in this authority" (423). Just as Orwell sounded the alarm about centralised authority figures coercing respect, Marres worries that "[there is a]…risk of re-instating an outdated strategy for securing the role of facts in public debate, one in which public respect for knowledge is based on authority" (424).

Such deflationary arguments are animated by Orwellian concerns about truth claims recused from contestation. Jasanoff and Simmet's "serviceable truths" (2017, 756, 759) captures the Orwellian idea that truth claims need to be both instrumentally and socially sensitive. But Orwell's commitment to truth orientation as a remedy was far less permissive about truth standards than we see in deflationary accounts of post-truth. Orwell's sociology of knowledge, which emphasised the idea of facts amenable to testing, is somewhat innocent of the idea that what counts as a fact is produced through a socially contested process of interpreting data (rather than being algorithmically determined by experiment alone). But Orwell's testability notion was embedded in a normative commitment to public discourse requiring the truth/falsity binary if enslavement is to be avoided (cf. Lynskey 2019). Hence it is reasonable for Jasanoff and Simmet (2017) to recommend we "rethink and complicate the stark binaries of … true/false" (762), but tone deaf when they use '2 + 2 = 4' as the kind of singular reality from which progressives should run (763). Orwell warned that when your truth standards are permissive enough that 2 + 2 = 5 is possible, you are on the road to slavery.

Marres (2018) is similarly reasonable when correctly observing that the "genre of 'fact' is undergoing transformation" (440) and thus we should expect that "epistemic authority will also have to be earned the hard way, through an exchange between epistemically diverse viewpoints" (441). But Marres is also tone deaf when treating the solution to the problems of the diversity of truth-making as more diversity of truth-making. Deflationary accounts end up committed to the very same epistemic promiscuity that post-truth dynamics exploit, possibly because deflationary accounts of post-truth are over-committed to seeing post-truth as a species of epistemics. Can we say instead that what Marres calls fact-making can also be called political demagoguery, asked Steve Hoffman (2018)? Hoffman correctly identified the challenge being shirked by deflationary accounts of post-truth: "scepticism toward scientific authority and expertise" weakens their ability to defend "scientific institutions and evidence-based reasoning

from the attacks of reactionary plutocrats and authoritarians" (2018, 446). Marres' claim to still believe in "hierarchies of epistemic value" (2018, 440) rings hollow when her entire article attacked fact-checking, like an astronaut defending space-walks while attacking safety checks. When critics of post-truth are attacked, on the grounds their defence of truth risks reinstating uncontested facts and ushering in Big Brother authoritarianism, the great deflators conflate achieved truth with truth orientation. Orwell knew to avoid that conflation. Orwell might not have accepted a friend-request from latter-day Orwell-informed deflationary accounts of post-truth.

Steve Fuller represents another side of STS, which takes post-truth seriously, though there are two sub-camps: one that worries about the trend (Collins, Evans and Weinel 2017; Hoffman 2018; Durant 2019a) and the other that celebrates the trend. Fuller is the latter. Fuller (2016a) writes of social order as produced by the interplay between two elites, the lions (where legitimacy is derived from tradition and expert authority) and the foxes (the maverick outsider and dissenter). The threat of an Orwellian dystopia looms large for Fuller, who associates scientific authority with "totalitarian 1984 … Truth is just one more … resource in a power game without end" (2016a). Post-truth is thus a fox's paradise, fortuitously disrupting the authoritarian hegemony of scientific authority. Fuller is so vexed by the spectre of Orwellian authoritarianism that even post-truth is an ally, which unfortunately leads Fuller to obfuscate any critical evaluation of the politics of post-truth.

Fuller's obfuscation begins with the mother of all academic diversions, creating a genetics dispute around whether STS spawned post-truth: the "post-truth world is the inevitable outcome of greater epistemic democracy … [and we should not] repress STS's foxy roots" (Fuller 2016b). True to form, Fuller (2017) owns the "undesirables", embracing climate change deniers and creationists as independent corroborators of the tropes of STS. Regrettably, Fuller confuses political evasion with methodological sophistication, playing the (modern; ironic) free speech card by (only …) allowing STS scholars the space to contest the undesirables "on political, not methodological grounds" (2017). This kind of slick demarcation between politics and method can have the effect of setting up a form of normative individualism, where politics is just random and isolated individual choices (Durant 2010). Thus, when Fuller (2017) uses Naomi Oreskes as his cardboard sparring partner, chiding her for being "asymmetrical" in treating consensus as based in nature and controversy as based in the artificial, the political thinness of the celebration of post-truth is laid bare. For Oreskes, a "manufactured" controversy is one where inauthenticity and gaslighting is evident. But Fuller disarms political critique by reducing "manufactured" to the methodological point that consensus is never self-evident.

Like deflationary accounts of post-truth, celebratory accounts are thus vexed by the threat of Orwell's authoritarian dystopia. But both Orwell-inspired accounts are ultimately and unwisely too relaxed about Orwell's

political warnings about the loosening of the public, democratic commitment to a truth orientation. Indeed where both deflationary and celebratory accounts of post-truth tend to lambast appeals to authority relations as nostalgic, outdated strategies pining for some idyllic past, they unwittingly replicate the error Huxley had Mustapha articulate: "we don't want people to be attracted to old things. We want them to like the new ones" (Huxley 1932, 225). John the Savage had replied to Mustapha that "the new ones are so stupid and horrible" (225) but, not too far from the political evasions of deflationary and celebratory accounts of post-truth, Mustapha replied that "they mean a lot of agreeable sensations to the audience" (227). Our Orwell-inspired discussants of post-truth thus appear innocent of Huxley's warning about how you build a passive society. Mustapha outlined that respect for science was anathema to passive stability: "every discovery in pure science is potentially subversive; even science must sometimes be treated as a possible enemy. Yes, even science" (231). Huxley thus provided a vision of the perils of treating science as the enemy. Despite impressive arrays of information and experiences provided to citizens, treating science as the enemy is part of a politics of disconnection, where nothing fits, and nothing truly coheres.

Huxley: are we amusing ourselves to political passivity?

So why is Huxley ultimately more informative about our post-truth age than Orwell? Postman's *Amusing Ourselves to Death* (1985) provides important clues, *because* that book is pre-Trump. We are not in the midst of a cultural change initiated by one particularly racially, economically, and politically divided nation electing a financially and morally corrupt television personality. We are instead living through an *intensification* of long-running cultural and political trends. To see what happens when the gaze is restricted to the very recent past or to one political context, consider Michiko Kakutani's *The Death of Truth* (2018). Kakutani discusses the way Postman had compared Orwell and Huxley's dystopias, and that Postman had concluded that Orwell told us more about totalitarian states (the Soviet Union for Postman; China for us?) but Huxley told us more about Liberal democracies. Fixated on Trump, Kakutani (2018, 165–168) dissented, thinking Orwell's dystopia was more relevant simply because Orwell's focus on controlling the narrative appeared to match Trump's quest to dominate the US political-cultural narrative. But Postman's thesis has more depth than Kakutani realised.

Postman (1985) sought to show that "the decline of a print-based epistemology and the accompanying rise of a television-based epistemology has had grave consequences for public life" (24). Treating TV as a paradigm of public information, Postman argued that ideas of truth move with a culture's shift from oral, written, to printed and on to televised media of communication. For Postman, TV packages news as vaudeville and, given

the influence of TV, "the total information environment begins to mirror television" (111). The images and fragments of TV challenge our ability to assemble isolated bits of information into coherent wholes, rendering us "unfit to remember" (137), as "the public has adjusted to incoherence and been amused into indifference" (110–111). To extend Postman into modern times is simply to ask whether digitised social media platforms are the latest cultural shift, with the total information ecosystem mirroring it?

Postman framed his book – as I have framed this chapter – as "about the possibility that Huxley, not Orwell, was right" (1985, vii). Where Orwell feared "externally imposed oppression", Huxley speculated that "people will come to love their oppression, to adore the technologies that undo their capacities to think" (vii). For Orwell "people are controlled by inflicting pain" but for Huxley people are "controlled by inflicting pleasure" (vii). Or as Postman said:

> Orwell feared those who would deprive us of information. Huxley feared those who would give us so much that we would be reduced to passivity and egoism. Orwell feared that the truth would be concealed from us. Huxley feared the truth would be drowned in a sea of irrelevance. Orwell feared we would become a captive culture. Huxley feared we would become a trivial culture.
>
> (1985, vii)

Akin to Postman, I think Huxley's dystopic vision has more relevance for capturing the modern post-truth condition than Orwell's. Several observations can help establish the point.

Postman (1985) suggested that "what Orwell feared were those who would ban books. What Huxley feared was that there would be no reason to ban a book, for there would be no one who wanted to read one" (vii). Does that resonate with the parochial echo chamber of shamelessly partisan books that do nothing but preach to the converted, in which there is little point to reading a book when the most that is required is that one signals political allegiance by flagging the book's existence? See, for instance, Rogers' (2018) discussion of Trump promoting books that promote him. Consistent with Huxley, the issue here is the trivialisation and capitalisation of political divergences.

Postman (1985) noted that Orwell "feared the politician as deceiver, not as entertainer" (129). In the last generation we appear to have seen politicians become consummate entertainers, typically in a quest to use widely televised reassurance to elicit acquiescence. (In)famous examples include the UK Agriculture Minister, John Gummer, feeding his four-year-old daughter beef during the BSE crisis (on May 16, 1990). Or US President Barack Obama swimming with his daughter in the Gulf of Mexico after the BP Oil Spill (on August 15, 2010). As a father I do not find it all that entertaining to think of using my daughter as a political prop but Google

the images and you will see smiles all around. Then there is the Japanese Parliamentary Secretary in the Cabinet Office, Yasuhiro Sonada, drinking treated water from the basements of Fukushima's Reactors 5 and 6 (on October 31, 2011). And closer to home, then Australian Treasurer (and now Prime Minister) Scott Morrison passed a lump of coal around Parliament House as a way of rationally debating energy policy (on February 9, 2017). Such televised and social-media-boosted political stunts show politicians as entertaining gaslighters more than bland deceivers, consistent with a reading of the post-truth phenomenon as one of confusion, gaslighting, distraction, diversionary reframing, and strategic irrelevance. Recall Huxley's quip that citizens will fall in love with the very technologies that contribute towards the undoing of their critical sensibilities. Trained as spectators, citizens stop critically watching. Or, as Hanna Pitkin – the major theorist of the concept of political representation – observed:

> Deception, propaganda, and indoctrination have always played a role in the rough and tumble of actual political life, but they take on new, disturbing dimensions in our age of electronic media and satellite surveillance, of 'hype', 'spin', and the 'infomercial', of 'image', 'credibility', and 'virtual reality'. Watching television from infancy, people not only acquire misinformation; they become habituated to the role of spectator. The line between fantasy and reality blurs (indeed, the line between television image and one's own fantasy blurs). As for those who set policy and shape the images, insulated from any reality check, they soon become captive to their own fictions. All this does not bode well for democracy.
>
> (Pitkin 2004, 231)

Climate Shenanigans in Australia

We can also draw upon Postman's discussion of Huxley's dystopia to identify two clear mechanisms by which post-truth operates. In this section, I will illustrate those two mechanisms with examples drawn from climate and energy policy debates in Australia.

All fragment, no coherence

Postman noted that "Huxley grasped, as Orwell did not, that it is not necessary to conceal anything from a public insensible to contradiction and narcotised by technological diversions" (1985, 111). The Huxleyan implication is that, in a "world of fragments, where events stand alone, stripped of any connection to the past, or to the future, or to other events" the perception of incoherence can vanish (110). Fragmented discussions, and not just centrally controlled messages, can evaporate all hope of pointing out incoherence.

An example capturing the dynamics of post-truth fragmentation is the oft-quoted "portfolio" idea in energy policy discussions. In Stewart Brand's (2009) influential book on environmental planning, he writes that "portfolio" captures

> the idea that climate change is so serious a matter that *we have to do everything simultaneously* to head it off as much as we can … [Socolow and Pacala's 'Stabilization Wedges' (2004) argued that] a set of 'stabilization wedges', made up of already proven technologies and practices, could reduce greenhouse gases to a tolerable level, *but only if all the wedges are pursued extremely aggressively at the same time*, starting yesterday. [There are] seven wedges to level off emissions: energy efficiency, renewables, clean coal, forests and soils … fuel switch … and nuclear.
>
> (87; emphasis added)

This framing of energy policy as about pursuing all options simultaneously became a default energy policy in itself when the then Prime Minister, Malcolm Turnbull, announced in March 2017 that an "all-of-the-above approach, including hydro, solar, coal, and gas, was critical to future energy supplies" (Grattan 2017).

This same framing later drove the August 2019 formation of a Parliamentary Inquiry into the pre-requisites for nuclear power in Australia, called by the right-wing conservatives in office. The fragmentation effect here is multiple in nature. First, the left-wing opposition correctly derided the inquiry as a technological diversion, in part because Australian conservatives have lacked an energy policy for more than a decade. Throwing up reactors further kicks real choice-making down the political road (Macmillan 2019). Second, the South Australian Royal Commission into the nuclear fuel cycle had already concluded in May 2016 that there was no commercial case for nuclear power in Australia. Political memory can be made short when it is pretended that no contrary and contextually relevant evidence exists. Third, the framing itself, the idea of all-of-the-above, trades on de-contextualised comparative assessment that omits crucial data and promises incoherent forecasting (Durant 2019b). Fourth, contrary to Brand's popularisation, the stabilisation wedges idea does not license all-of-the-above. A stabilisation wedge "represents an activity that reduces emissions to the atmosphere that starts at zero today and increases linearly until it accounts for 1 GtC/year [one billion metric tonnes] of reduced carbon emissions in 50 years" (Pacala and Socolow 2004, 968). Crucially, Pacala and Socolow specified that "although no element is a credible candidate for doing the entire job (or even half the job) by itself, *the portfolio as a whole is large enough that not every element has to be used*" (968; emphasis added). Note the issue here is the faulty, partial, and deceptive interpretation of Pacala and Socolow. Post-truth dynamics gain speed when information is so fragmented across cultural and historical space that incoherence can escape unnoticed.

Culture becomes a burlesque

Postman (1985) also noted that "there are two ways by which the spirit of a culture may be shrivelled. In the first – the Orwellian – culture becomes a prison. In the second – the Huxleyan – culture becomes a burlesque" (155). The Wikipedia entry for "burlesque" adequately captures the intent of the descriptive term:

> a burlesque is a literary, dramatic or musical work intended to cause laughter by caricaturing the manner or spirit of serious works, or by ludicrous treatment of their subjects. The word derives from the Italian *burlesco*, which, in turn, is derived from the Italian *burla* – a joke, ridicule or mockery.

An example capturing the dynamics of post-truth burlesque is the political response to the South Australia blackout of September 28, 2016 (Durant 2018, 2019a; Warren 2019, 81–84). A very large storm hit the State and the electrical grid crashed. On the night of the storm, the Australian Electricity Market Operator informed the Liberal government (conservatives) that the blackout was due to the severity of the storm and downed transmission lines. Regardless, the conservatives blanketed TV and radio with claims that wind power was to blame for the blackout (South Australia has over 50% wind power penetration in their electrical grid). Technical advice, internal to the government, was wilfully ignored. Or as Huxley had depicted, science was dangerous, negatively impacting the political discretion needed to completely invent what was convenient.

But another point here is the mockery made of serious discussion. Some government ministers boisterously joked that wind turbines do not work well when the wind is blowing too hard. In fact, wind power was furiously cranking out 70% of South Australia's electricity at the time. Yet after transmission lines were felled, the wind turbine generators in the north of the State were cut off from the grid entirely. Other government ministers blamed climate change and renewable energy policies of the (left-wing) Labour Party, both State (South Australian) and Federal (Labour was in opposition). Despite otherwise denying any link between extreme weather and climate change, now when it suited, the conservatives invoked that previously denied factual claim to chide Labour for having tried to address carbon emissions. The caricature of authentic argument was ludicrous political obfuscation at its best. Post-truth burlesque, while involving a mocking and ludicrous approach, will also caricature and demean the spirit of something.

An apt example is the Australian conservative government's approach to carbon carry-over credits as the nation moves from the Kyoto protocols to the Paris accord. Carbon credits are emissions that Australia could have released but did not, converted into certificates and equated with tonnes.

Can and should Australia use credits from the first and second Kyoto periods (2008–2012 and 2013–2020) to satisfy obligations under the third (2021–2030)? Australia managed to "over-achieve" by conducting less deforestation, and the conservative government announced plans to use that credit from over-achievement as a short-cut to meet Australia's Paris accord targets. The problem is that it is not in the spirit of either the Kyoto or Paris rules, as UN rules ban the carrying over of credits from Kyoto to Paris. More broadly, Australia's commitment to Kyoto was originally an internationally weak 8% increase in emissions when others committed to a 5% decrease in emissions, and Paris was explicitly framed as a "reset". Other nations have declared they will not artificially lower their Paris commitments by using carry-over credits (Hannam 2019; Pears and Baxter 2019).

Huxley's dystopia had no need for the theatrics of Orwell's concern that the State would literally destroy the records of the past, for Huxley instead predicted that "a politics of image, instancy and therapy may disappear history as effectively, perhaps more permanently, and without objection" (Postman 1985, 138). Post-truth burlesque is not dependent upon the crudely destructive behaviour lambasted by Orwell, but instead can achieve its aims via the vaudeville process of multiple unrelated acts all slyly draining the spirit out of its target.

Conclusion

To state that we live in a post-truth world that is Huxleyan, not Orwellian, is to claim that we live in a world that cultivates information proliferation and experiential gluts, that is promiscuous about standards, that gives oxygen to the idea that science and indeed any lasting achievement is dangerous, that trivialises learned opinion, tolerates irrelevance, lets politicians be entertainers, fails to guard against the incoherence that results from fragmented discourse, permits a burlesque political culture, and remains blind to the threat of social passivity in the midst of citizen engagement. Responding to these Huxleyan post-truth dynamics is another paper entirely but can be outlined here as three moves. One, resist the temptation to idolise novelty and instead focus on processes of intensification. Two, resist reducing democracy to opening up issues and admit democracy includes closing down issues. Three, resist reducing authority relations to an Orwellian process of coercing the surrender of judgement and theorise the scope for authority relations to coexist with democratic autonomy.

First, there is a tendency for some to use a kind of Jedi mind trick: "these aren't the post-truth dynamics you're looking for" (after Obi Wan Kenobi's "these aren't the droids you're looking for" from *Star Wars* (1977)). Novelty becomes the criterion; a quest for the completely new, original, and unusual. Concerns about a post-truth age are then dismissed on the grounds that historical precedents exist for modern lying, bullshit, misinformation, and deception. Sometimes novelty is buttressed by legalese, for instance

treating post-truth as "alleged" (Jasanoff and Simmet 2017, 754, 761). But the general form of the novelty argument is to point out that politics has always involved the bending of truth and facts have always been complicated assemblages, even if the lack of shame for being untrustworthy is somewhat new (Blackburn 2017). But shame is a moral quality. If truth has always been tied up with the moral problem of whom to trust, then changes in the political economy of the moral environment will involve an intensification of established dynamics.

Some pick up on this intensification, suggesting that post-truth is the weakening of norms of vigilance about the fallibility, biases, and politicisation of human reasoning (Enfield 2017), or that post-truth pushes vaudeville into gaslighting (deliberate sowing of confusion while toying with identities) (Keane 2018). The concept we all need here is – as Luigi Pellizzoni (2016) discussed (in relation to technoscientific governance) – Foucault's notion of intensification. Rather than sudden changes, we see "the lightening, saturation … and transversal linkage of existing practices [up to a] tipping point … where the object or subject mutates into another form" (Pellizzoni 2016, 212; citing J. Nealon). Reminiscent of Postman's thesis that shifts in the media of communication are tied to gradual but transformative shifts in sense-making, Pellizzoni argues that intensification is where "gradual sliding in sense-making and practices engenders eventual qualitative shifts, the terms of which are, however, difficult to grasp for precisely this reason – things look similar, yet also different to what they used to be" (212).

Second, we can easily miss the Huxleyan dynamics of our post-truth age because we are wearing blinkers when it comes to democracy: is it about opening up or closing down political issues? Andy Stirling (2008) once argued democracy is both, but closure is too often the tool of the privileged. Yet if appraisal processes can help establish plural and conditional policy advice and help map out and make visible and influential diverse perspectives, Stirling suggested, then any subsequent "necessary, inevitable, and desirable" (284) closure would have a hope of being just and accountable. Unfortunately, the nuances of Stirling's position are often lost in panics about Orwellian thought-control. Too many responses to post-truth calculate democracy in a one-sided way – open up = good, close down = bad – via banal pandering to the proliferation of voices: Jasanoff and Simmet citing the Catholic Church, that bastion of inclusive tolerance, to recommend a "culture of encounter" (2017, 766); Marres's "epistemic diversity and dynamism" (2018, 441); Fuller's (2017) foxes all the way down. Scared by the spectre of Orwellian processes of closing down political thought, too many social analysts settle on a conception of democracy as forever *and only* opening up issues. Huxley warned of such dynamics. As Mustapha Mond chided John the Savage, if you want passive citizens you do not let them settle, but instead encourage them to always reach for and open up that next trinket, that next experience, that next claim.

Third, where might authority relations fit in closing down post-truth shenanigans? An obstacle to answering that question is that authority relations are often taken to imply that acts of deference cannot be anything other than acts of completely surrendering one's judgement. Political theorists and STS scholars have now begun the process of undermining such accounts. Mark Warren (1996b), for instance, showed that authority relations are democratic when accompanied by the constant potential for scrutiny, contestation, and revision. Warren used a matrix of positions to pose questions about what kinds of movements we think are the normatively appropriate movements to focus upon when characterising democracy. Is the enemy a Big Brother scenario where unaccountable elites make decisions that are not open to participatory regulation, and so we must move our political action towards opening up and greater inclusion? Or do we think the movement to aim for in democracy is to have constant but provisional, contestable, temporally specific zones of deference relations, leaving citizens to devote their energies not to everything all the time but to some issues some of the time as per their resources and inclinations? More broadly, Richard Sennett (2002) asks if our culture's feeling of shame attached to dependency relations undermines our collective capacity for mutual respect. I suggest a culture ashamed of dependency is a culture with an unhealthy relation to divisions of epistemic labour.

Alfred Moore (2017) extends Warren and Sennett by attacking the "surrender of judgement" model directly. Moore shows that the concept of authority implies a moment of surrender of judgement, without precluding judgements over time that are conditioned by judgements of the parties to the deference relation over time. Where deference to authority is constructed in terms of belief, it is difficult to avoid the perception of unthinking docility. But Moore develops an "acceptance" model of authority that addresses such concerns. Moore shows that where deference to authority is constructed as acceptance, the process is clearly more reflective. The objects of judgement of the deferential party might be of a substantive claim itself, of the source of the claim, or of the authority relation itself. Overall, accepting the claim of an epistemic authority involves a decision of what to consider relevant in a context of adopting a policy of taking the authority's claim as a premise in one's own deliberations. I suggest that any sensible response to post-truth dynamics – and to the role of experts (Durant 2019a) – needs to come armed with a model of authority relations informed by works like those of Warren, Sennett and Moore, lest the spectre of Orwellian control send the analyst in the brave new world direction of thinking scientific authority is inherently dangerous.

A final word is just a reminder that modern forms of governance utilise complexity, uncertainty, contingency, and the unknown to stabilise vested interests (Durant 2009; Pellizzoni 2011). If we can appreciate today's Huxleyan modes of control, authority relations framed by Orwellian fears remain salient but more limited than most suppose. In an age of post-truth,

while it remains true that "truth does not, and never has, come unadorned … some ways of truth- telling are better than others, and therefore have a healthier influence on cultures that adopt them" (Postman 1985, 24). Where Orwell warned of an oppressive regime of truth shoved in your face, Huxley comes closer to the modern age, in which we appear to be entertained by one "good soma vaporisation" after another (Huxley 1932, 232–233).

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