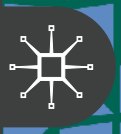

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Post-Truth and Political Discourse

David Block

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Finally, some of the ideas developed in this book have appeared in previous publications, albeit in very different and less elaborate forms:

Block, D. (2016). Discursos corruptos y el mundo al revés. *La Maleta de Portbou*, *19*, 19–24.

Block, D. (2017). La propagación de la ignorancia. *La Maleta de Portbou*, *25*, 69–74.

Block, D. (2018). *Political economy in sociolinguistics: Neoliberalism, inequality and social class.* London: Bloomsbury, 157–164.

Contents

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Abstract This chapter introduces the main topics and foci of this book. It begins with the meaning of post-truth, named the 2016 'word of the year' by the Oxford English Dictionary and an explanation of why this book appears at this point in time, written by this author. The chapter also introduces terms that may be seen as alternatives to post-truth, such as 'bullshit', 'misleadingness' and 'agnotology', although it leaves detailed treatments for Chapter 2. The final half of the chapter is devoted to the type of critical analysis of discourse that appears in Chapters 2 and 3. This approach draws on Fairclough's notion of semiosis and his interest in the political economic backdrop of discursive activity; Wodak and Reisigl's Discourse Historical Approach, which focuses heavily on the socio-historical context and the use of *topoi* as a rhetorical resource; and finally, the key notions of heteroglossia (Bakhtin) and intertextuality (Kristeva).

Keywords Post-truth · Bullshit · Critical Discourse Studies · Discourse Historical Approach · Intertextuality · *Topoi*

Opening Comments

As calendar years come to an end, the general public in local nation-state contexts as well as worldwide are bombarded with lists of 'the top 10 songs of the year', or 'the top ten films of the year', or 'the top ten novels of the year', and so on. In many parts of the world, there is also 'man

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of the year' and 'woman of the year', or the more gender-neutral 'person of the year'. Probably not so well known to many people around the world before the end of 2016, there is also 'the word of the year', published annually by the Oxford English Dictionary. I recall how in November 2016, newspapers and online news outlets around the world published headlines along the lines of "Post-truth' declared word of the year by Oxford English Dictionaries' (BBC 2016), often providing the following definition of the word from that much-venerated source:

> Relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief. (OED 2016, n.p.)

The relative importance of being declared word of the year by the OED is difficult to discern. As regards post-truth, it was the English language press that broke the OED story, followed by the press in other languages. This means that while many people around the world now know that the OED names a word of the year at the end of each year, few people outside of Germany and Austria probably know that the *Gesellschaft für deutsche Sprache* (Society for the German Language) has done the same since 1971. Interestingly enough, in 2016, that word was 'postfaktisch' (post-factual), which looks not dissimilar to post-truth, although we could debate for hours on end about the difference between 'faktisch' in German and 'factual' in English, and further to this, between 'facts' and 'truth'.

It is always good to see a language-related issue achieve frontstage status in the media worldwide, when normally the use of a particular word does not merit much attention. However, we might also ask ourselves how important such an announcement really is. I say this upon noting that the word of the year in the previous year, 2015, was the 'face with tears of joy' emoji :'-), and that in the year after, 2017, it was 'youthquake', defined as 'a significant cultural, political, or social change arising from the actions or influence of young people' (OED 2017, n.p.). So, as regards post-truth, are we in the realm of lasting importance or just the capture of a fad? My answer to that question leans towards the former view as well beyond 2016, post-truth has survived as a frequently used word. I see this in the languages in which I function regularly—Catalan, Spanish and English—and I see it in others languages, ranging from French to Russian. Nevertheless, with time and use across a range

of contexts, word meanings evolve. And so, with post-truth, there is the loss of novelty accompanied by a rise in its use in a growing number of domains as its original meaning becomes stretched and mangled. For example, in Spain, the word *posverdad* (a literal translation of post-truth) is becoming a simple epithet to apply to one's interlocutor when disagreements over politics arise. More locally, in the Catalan-speaking context in which I live, the same applies to the word *postveritat*. And if I move back to English-speaking contexts, and beyond this to other language contexts, I see a similar trend.

So why am I writing this short book about post-truth? What can be said of interest about it once its novelty has worn off and it has become mainstreamed?

A short answer to the first question is opportunity and happenstance. In the autumn of 2016, I was asked to give a talk to a group of Ph.D. students at my place of work, the University of Lleida. The talk and the event of which it formed part were scheduled for March 2017. The audience would be mixed with all university faculties represented. This meant that there would be students from the STEM disciplines (science, technology, engineering and mathematics), medicine, agriculture, and architecture, as well as the social sciences and humanities. The topic was left open, for me to decide; however, it had to be sufficiently broad to be of interest to this diverse audience.

The invitation to give this talk coincided fairly closely with the aforementioned announcement of post-truth as the OED word of the year for 2016. It also came at a time when I was immersed in the study of political discourses in Spain. In my research, I was finding, among other things, that mendacity was as pervasive as it was perverse in Spanish politics. In the end, I decided that my talk for Ph.D. students would be my first attempt at seriously studying post-truth, the idea being that I could treat this matter in a broad, cross-disciplinary way, and thus more effectively cater to the interests of the audience. The preparation for this paper led me for the first time into realms of academic discourse, discussion and argumentation with which I had previously had only minimal and fleeting contact. I am thinking about debates about the links between smoking and lung disease and all of the controversies—real or imagined—around global warming. But the big issue was that by delving into post-truth, I had opened up a can of worms, or a Pandora's box, depending on one's preferences. In effect, the more I read about the topic, the bigger the scope and depth of what I had decided to explore became.

As I take on the task of offering my particular angle on post-truth in this book, I am all too aware that it was journalists around the world who got their two-cents in first, as in 2016 and 2017 there was a spate of articles and full-length books on the topic. If I just focus on the UK, a country I know well (having lived there for 16 years, from 1996 to 2012), I can cite three key books, all published in the first half of 2017: Ewan Davis's *Post-Truth*: Why We Have Reached Peak *Bullshit and What We Can Do About It*; Mathew d'Ancona's *The New War on Truth and How to Fight Back*; and James Ball's *Post-Truth*: How *Bullshit Conquered the World*. As the British journalist Stuart Jeffries (2017) points out in his review of this trio of books, all three are chock-full of topical examples (especially with regard to Trump and Brexit) to make the point that good old-fashioned lying has become more extensive and difficult to contest or refute in recent years. And all of this is due to the rise of social media and related social phenomena such as echo chambers and filter bubbles (see Chapter 2 for a discussion), along with relatively unrelated phenomenon such as the crisis of confidence in political establishments in countries around the world. But beyond the tut-tutting and finger wagging, the three authors in different ways manage to touch on the key point of why recent developments actually matter. As Jeffries explains:

> The point of all three books is to argue that we should care. We should care that we have allowed Trump and others to push us into the post-truth trough. We should care that among the 50 top performing fake news stories of 2016 on Facebook was not only the lie that President Obama had banned reciting the pledge of allegiance in US schools, but also the hilarious story headlined: "Pro-lifers declare: ejaculation is murder, every sperm cell is a life". We should care that we are living at a time in which, as d'Ancona argues, we prioritise the "visceral over the rational, the deceptively simple over the honestly complex". … Davis, d'Ancona and Ball explain how we got mired in bullshit, and how we might emerge, ideally smelling sweeter. (Jeffries 2017, n.p.)

The use of the word 'bullshit' in this quote is important, as it appears centrally in the titles of the Davis and Ball books and it becomes a kind of proxy for post-truth for all three authors. I shall have more to say about the differences between the two terms in Chapter 2. However, here I mention 'bullshit' to highlight how post-truth is perhaps not the term we need to be using for much of what these three authors

and many others weighing in on the topic focus on in what they write. Equally, bullshit comes with its own baggage that makes it inappropriate in some cases where we would agree that the truth is taking a beating. In this book, I discuss post-truth and bullshit, but I also incorporate into my terminological repertoire 'agnotology'—in short hand, the propagation of ignorance—and 'corrupt discourses'—which refers to attempts to cover up corrupt activity in and of themselves, along with the perversion of communication that occurs when politicians enter a spiral of mendacity in attempts to conceal wrongdoing.

Of course, propaganda has existed for some time as a term used to describe biased, misleading, inaccurate or false information (ideas, doctrines, allegations, accusations, rumours, opinions, images and so on) that is deliberately spread by people, organisations and institutions in positions of power with the intent to promote a particular cause, or influence public opinion, or damage political opponents (see Herman and Chomsky 1988). And George Orwell was surely prescient in his writing about political language (Orwell [1946] 2013), to say nothing of his fiction writing: in *Nineteen eighty-four* (Orwell [1949] 2004), he introduced new words such as *doublethink* (holding two contradictory beliefs simultaneously) and *newspeak* (a grammatically and lexically simplified language designed to impose limits on an individual's ability to think freely and independently) to capture both the absurdity and horror of propaganda under totalitarian regimes. What is perhaps new (although Herman and Chomsky may be seen to have been on the case three decades ago) is the focus of attention today, not exclusively on totalitarian regimes, but also on countries deemed to have a long traditional of fully functioning democracy. Thus, in Chapter 3, I focus on Spain, generally positioned as a fairly mainstream democracy in Western Europe, as the site of what Herman and Chomsky would call 'propaganda' and more recent commentators would call post-truth.[1]

At the time of writing, I do not see any monographs on post-truth in the academic disciplines where I tend to be situated (Sociolinguistics or Applied Linguistics more broadly), although I have no doubt that one, two or more books will likely appear as this one goes to press. Certainly, scholars in a range of disciplines, especially philosophy, have been writing about the issues related to post-truth for some time now.[2] In short, I do not fool myself into thinking that I am dealing with a topic that no one else has examined. Nevertheless, I do think that this book is different from other already-published and to-be-published

efforts for two key reasons. First, I do not dwell on post-truth, shifting my emphasis to phenomena such as agnotology and corrupt discourses. Second, the examples I cite are not primarily from the Anglosphere, in particular the worlds of Donald Trump and Brexit (although these two globally famous phenomena do receive some attention); rather, I draw on events taking place in Spanish politics, doing so with the conviction that this context provides very fertile ground for this type of discussion and that it is one that will not have reached an international audience to a significant extent.

My original plan was to finish this book in March 2018, but events, as they say, have overtaken me in various domains of my life. The finishing point is July 2018. Apart from irritating the editors at Palgrave Macmillan, this delay has allowed me to cover events occurring in the first half of 2018 in Spain, and thus make this book in many ways 'hot off the shelf'. Bearing this recency in mind, I have endeavoured to be as rigorous as possible and so avoid the whiff of hurriedness and collateral carelessness. However, the topic at hand is, as I have already indicated, slippery and hard to get a handle on. There is always the problem of seeing the world through a post-truth critical lens, which while healthy in some ways, is exasperating and disconcerting in others. It is healthy for the obvious reason that we should all be critical annalists of all around us at all times. It is exasperating and disconcerting because it is never possible to understand events around us fully.

This Book: Content and Methodology

This book is composed of four chapters. After this one, in which I introduce the topic (see above) and say something about the methodology that I employ in subsequent chapters (see below), Chapter 2 is a journey through my encounters with and understandings of 'post-truth' and other interrelated concepts and terms, with interspersed references to real-world events and debates over the 'truth'. Chapter 3 is devoted to political discourse, in particular the case of the Spanish conservative party, the *Partido Popular*, which has what may be described as an ambivalent relationship with the notion of truth. There is a detailed account of the party's immersion in corruption scandals and the discursive moves taken to cover up wrongdoing. The book ends with Chapter 4 (necessarily short due to word-count restrictions), which attempts to tie together several strands arising in previous chapters.

In this book, I analyse texts—written and spoken—from a range of media, especially newspaper articles (both online and in print form) and video recordings (mainly from YouTube). This policy applies as much to Chapter 2, where I use a diverse range of texts to exemplify various constructs related to post-truth, as it does to Chapter 3, where I focus on the *Partido Popular* and discourses emerging around its many corruption scandals. In sampling terms, my selection procedure is based on the principles of convenience and relevance: in order to develop the arguments that I wish to develop, I need particular types of texts. I thus rely on a few select texts which act as *telling cases* (Mitchell 1984; Anderson 2017), as opposed to either finding or developing large corpora. In short, I prefer saying a lot about a few select texts over saying a little about a far greater number of exemplars. I am aware that some readers will have a preference for the latter option; however, I have taken the former route because of my belief in the power of telling cases and my observation that in more survey-like research, there can be a decontextualisation of data, and that 'typical' cases, identified through statistical analysis, often do not tell the researcher much beyond superficialities. I therefore follow Mitchell's view that 'the search for a 'typical' case for analytical exposition is likely to be less fruitful than the search for a 'telling' case in which the particular circumstances surrounding a case serve to make previously obscure theoretical relationships suddenly apparent' (Mitchell 1984, p. 239, cited in Anderson 2017, p. 457).[3] An additional, more practical condition has been that in a book of this length, focusing on a few illuminating cases seems more useful than an attempt to provide a survey.

My analytical procedures are derived from my readings in Critical Discourse Studies.[4] These include early publications when the field was called Critical Discourse Analysis (e.g. Fairclough 1989, 1993; Hodge and Kress 1989; Kress and Hodge 1979; Van Dijk 1988; Wodak 1996); general texts on the field as whole (e.g. Wodak and Meyer 2016a); state of the art collections (e.g. Flowerdew and Richardson 2018a; Hart and Cap 2014a); and articles appearing in journals such as *Critical Discourse Studies*, *Language in Society* and *Discourse and Society*. Critical Discourse Studies (CDS) has been defined as 'an inter-disciplinary approach to language in use, which aims to advance our understanding of how discourse figures in social processes, social structures and social change … and seeks to develop a critically contextualised approach … [to] issues of ideology, power and inequality' (Flowerdew and Richardson 2018b,

p. 1). Central to CDS is the belief that discourses, as the objects of analysis, are not just words on pages or words uttered in communicative acts, but productions of *semiosis*, understood in simple terms as the making of meaning via the use of semiotic resources (not only written texts, speech and visuals, but also body movement, clothing and ornamentation, gaze and so on) (see Fairclough 2006; Hart and Cap 2014b). Discourses are evolving, complex objects derived from and embedded in a material world of scaled and interrelated macro, meso and micro structures. As I note elsewhere (Block 2015), these structures may be understood according to social science disciplines—politics, economics, sociology, anthropology, and geography—and they structure and shape our day-to-day activity, and indeed, who we are. Expanding on my previous discussion of this topic (Block 2015), I see five key types of social structure, which, as indicated above range from macro to micro levels. In order, these look as follows:

1. The material, economic bases of societies, as well as the legal and political superstructures composing the state (Marx [1857–1858] 1904).
2. More concrete institutions, such as religion, education, employment and family.
3. Psychologically based, embodied dispositional formations, such as Bourdieu's (1977) *habitus* or Layder's (2006) *psychobiography* or Lahire's (2013). 'embodied, individualised folds of the social', which act as internalised structures.
4. Socio-cultural configurations which emerge in the ongoing interactions among individuals acting collectively in social formations, e.g. fields (Bourdieu 1984), and communities of practice (Lave and Wenger 1991).
5. The ongoing interactions that people engage in on a moment-to-moment basis.

The analysis of discourses is therefore a complex task, as at any given time, analysts need to bear in mind how these different structures impact on activity and, in addition, how they are interrelated. In most CDS research today, these structuring elements are blurred somewhat and there are three general levels at which analysts tend to work. First, there is the micro level of social events, examining how meaning is made through semiosis. This may entail (a) a language analysis, that is, a close

examination of a text's grammatical structure, its metaphorical structure and its rhetorical structure, and/or (b) a multimodal analysis, including a close examination of visual images, sound effects, body language, clothing, gaze and so on. Second, there is an intermediate, meso level of analysis, of social practices as orders of discourse, where there is also a consideration of a text's production, distribution and consumption, and how these processes are constituted by and constitutive of power relations in society. These power relations are mediated by the concrete institutions and socio-cultural configurations cited above. Third and finally, there is the macro level, which considers the temporal/historical framing of social events and social practices, for example, how a given text intersects with and is constituted by other previous and present texts—how it is shaped by, and may contribute to the shaping of, broader economic, political, social and cultural currents in society. Following Fairclough, in this book, I am interested in how these macro-level structures, processes and events act as backdrop to orders of discourse which find their way into micro levels of meaning making.

This three-part model entails a series of auxiliary phenomena which are part and parcel of CDS. First, there is style, which I understand as an individual's way of being in the world, an amalgam of particular multimodal practices producing texts associated with recognisable (or where not recognisable, emergent) identities as 'points of temporary attachments to the subject positions which discursive practices construct for us' (Hall 1996, p. 6), or as the performance of 'a certain kind of person' (Gee 1999). A second key phenomenon is genre, which Fairclough (1995, p. 14) defines, in simple terms, as 'a socially ratified way of using language in connection with a particular type of social activity' and, in effect, as modes of acting and interacting in the world. As for the interrelationship between style and genre, it may be said that styles are the semiotic realisations that index identities within a particular genre being enacted. It is worth noting that the relationship between the two is a dialectical one, which means that they never appear as entirely discrete phenomena. Genres can also be bent (see below my comments on my writing style in this book) and they can be mixed and/or blended. Thus, as has been argued by Fairclough (1995) and many other authors since the 1980s, there has been a marketisation of domains of activity such as education, and this process has meant the emergence of business genres where they previously had not existed.

It is also worth noting that discourses, as defined above, are always ideological and 'positioned' ways of presenting social practices in the world and life in general, which means that they are not casual, but always *come from somewhere*. For example, political parties and political organisations often produce and reproduce particular discourses about events and phenomena which are deemed important by society in general: a preferred discourse of education where there is public debate about declining standards, or a preferred discourse produced by representatives of a government keen to convince the public that the economy is going well. In addition, discourses about social events and phenomena do not normally exist in isolation; indeed, the norm, as Weedon (1997) notes, is for there to be multiple discourses, as 'competing ways of giving meaning to the world and of organizing social institutions and processes' (Weedon 1997, p. 34), that are in conflict with each other. One key factor in such discursive conflicts is the relative advantage that incumbent politicians and their parties may have over those who are not in power. To some extent, incumbents engage in discursive conflicts with what Williams (2002, p. 42) terms the 'purely positional advantage'. For Williams, '[t]his is the idea that a speaker can tell someone else about a situation because he (sic) is or was in it, while his (sic) hearer is not or was not'. In the case of political discourse conflicts, we may adapt Williams's maxim such that incumbent politicians and their parties can dominate discussion of particular issues because they hold the resorts of power—they are and were here and there, and others are not and were not.

A final point about discourses is that they exist as integral historical artefacts, which means that they are potential resources for communication in the present. It was first Mikhail Bakhtin ([1934–1935] 1981) and then later Julia Kristeva ([1966] 1986), who best captured this general notion in their respective work on 'heteroglossia' and 'intertextuality'. Heteroglossia is about how the 'living utterance …, having taken meaning and shape at a particular historical moment in a socially specific environment, cannot fail to brush up against thousands of living dialogic threads, woven by socio-ideological consciousness around the given object of an utterance' (Bakhtin [1934–1935] 1981, p. 276). Meanwhile, intertextuality, is, in simple terms, 'the insertion of history into a text and of this text into history' (Kristeva [1966] 1986, 39). In his work, Fairclough makes a similar point, using the term 'interdiscursivity' to refer to 'the property texts have of being full of snatches

of other texts, which may be explicitly demarcated or merged in, and which the text may assimilate, contradict, ironically echo, and so forth' (Fairclough 1993, p. 84).

The suggestion that texts are constructed combining elements from multiple previous texts can mean many different things. On the one hand, intertextuality might be achieved 'through continued reference to a topic or to its main actors; through reference to the same events as the other texts; or through the reappearance of a text's main arguments in another text' (Engel and Wodak 2013, p. 7). Alternatively, it might entail the mixing of genres, as when a formal speech is peppered with anecdotes, or the mixing of styles, as when in the same formal speech, a colloquial style is used to relate the anecdotes. The latter example connects with a very important point to be made about how texts are constructed, namely that their intertextual nature means that they often incorporate a good number of distinguishable social voices, be this in the explanation of a process, the exposition of an argument, or the telling of a story. And the choice of voices often tells us a great deal about the person producing them. The notion of voice leads us to language-user positioning, and here, we might consider Goffman's work on *footing*, which he defined as 'change[s] in alignment we take up to ourselves and the others present as expressed in the way we manage the production or reception of an utterance' (Goffman 1981, p. 128). These alignments may be relatively stable, or they may shift fairly frequently in the course of an interaction. Much depends on the relationship that exists between two interlocutors: distant–close, amicable–adversarial, hierarchical–egalitarian and so on.

Another notion related to voice is authorship, and here too, Goffman provides an interesting framework. He posits three positions that language users may inhabit with regard to the production of language. First, there is the position of being the 'author' of what is produced, that is, the person 'who has selected the sentiments that are being expressed and the words in which they are encoded' (Goffman 1981, p. 144). Language users may also be the 'animator', that is, a 'talking machine, a body negotiated in acoustic activity, or … an individual active in the role of utterance production' (Goffman 1981, p. 144). Finally, they may be the 'principal', that is, the person 'whose position is established by the words that are spoken, someone whose beliefs have been told, someone who is committed to what the words say' (Goffman 1981, p. 144). It should be noted that all references to language here apply to multimodality more broadly, that is, we are not just in the realm of

language, but symbolic behaviour. An interesting question arising from this three-part model is whether in a particular communicative act the same person embodies all three positions. For example, politicians today have teams of advisors who become the co-authors, if not exclusive authors, of what a politician animates, on the way to constructing the principal that he/she is *for* the general public. In this sense, Trump is somewhat unusual in contemporary politics as he often seems to occupy all three of Goffman's positions.

As I conclude this discussion of CDS, the reader might well expect me to situate myself in one of several distinct currents or schools of thought and analysis that have emerged over the past three decades (for Wodak and Meyer 2016b, there are six such currents). From what I have written thus far, it is fairly clear that I follow, to some extent, Fairclough's version of discourse analysis. However, in this book, I will also be drawing on frameworks found in what is known as Discourse Historical Analysis (DHA). Wodak and Meyer (2016b, p. 65) identify three forms of critique that were developed as part of the DHA:

> "discourse immanent critique", aimed at identifying internal contradictions, inconsistencies or dilemmas within a practice;
>
> "socio-diagnostic critique", which draws on social theory and contextual knowledge in order to point out the "manipulative character" of some discursive practices; and
>
> "prognostic critique", which uses the insights gained through immanent and socio-diagnostic critique in order to "contribute to the improvement of communication".

In this book, I focus on the first two of these critiques, as I am interested in contradictions, inconsistencies and manipulation in public discourse, especially political discourses, and how discursive practices cannot be fully understood without a detailed consideration of their social situatedness, which means drawing on work in a range of social science disciplines as well as (local) knowledge of the context.

One of the key elements in DHA, and one which is important in my approach to discourse analysis, is the identification of stretches of discourse as realisations of *topoi*, where *topoi* are understood as

> … central parts of argumentation that belong to the premises. They justify the transition from the argument(s) to the conclusion. *Topoi* are not always expressed explicitly but can be made explicit as conditional or causal paraphrases such as 'if x, then y' or 'y because x' … (Reisigl 2014, p. 75)

Reisigl goes on to list nine example *topoi*: definition, species and genus, comparison, part and whole, cause and effect, contradiction, authority, example and analogy. For example, the *topos of authority* may rely on 'epistemic authorities' (i.e. someone or something with the intellectual power to arbitrate disputes over truth), which are imported to warrant a truth claim, or 'deontic authorities' (i.e. someone or something with the power to determine the duties and obligations of others), which are brought into warrant a claim of 'normative rightness'. This *topos* thus abides by the follow logical reasoning:

> If authority X says A is true/that A has to be done, A is true/A has to be done.
> X says that A is true/that A has to be done.
> Thus: A has to done. (Reisigl 2014, p. 76)

Beyond the logic inherent in *topoi*, there is also their social situatedness. Authority, for example, is not of interest solely as an abstract notion in a rhetorical syllogism like the one above; rather, there is the social structuring around it that gives it specific meaning. This means that in CDS research focusing on *topoi*, authors generally provide a great deal of political, economic, social and cultural background for their analyses. In this book, I follow this norm, often providing fairly detailed information for the examples I cite and analyse. This is particularly the case in Chapter 3, where I discuss political communication in contemporary Spain.

Finally, there are two technical matters that I need to address. First, the conventions for all transcribed oral data can be found in the appendix of this book. Second, all oral texts produced originally in Spanish have been translated by the author into English. I have used a system whereby I present these quoted fragments in tables, with the English translation appearing in the left column and the original in Spanish appearing in the right one. For written texts translated from Spanish to English, I have not provided the original Spanish versions.

A Caveat

Before proceeding further, a caveat is in order about my writing style in this book. Upon reading full drafts of Chapters 2 and 3, critical readers noted that neither chapter was written in what might be considered a standard academic style, with Chapter 2 perhaps leaning towards the genre of popular science writing and the latter leaning towards a *quasi*-journalistic style. I suppose I have always been interested in what might be seen as genre-bending in academic writing in sociolinguistics and applied linguists more broadly. Going back in time nearly two decades, I remember being captivated by the first three pages of Suresh Canagarajah's *Resisting linguistic imperialism in English language teaching* (Canagarajah 1999), where the author provides a gripping narrative aimed at situating the reader in the principal context of his book—a war-torn Sri Lanka. More recently, two books have appeared, in which editors have encouraged contributors to write in more a distended and less academic style: David Nunan and Julia Choi's (2010) *Language and culture: Reflective narrative and the emergence identity*, and Gary Barkhuizen's (2017) *Reflections on language teacher identity research*. I contributed to both and found the experience of writing without constraints to be liberating. Elsewhere, authors such as Samy Alim (2006) and Alastair Pennycook (2012) have also creatively mixed genres and in two of my own books *Multilingual identities in a global city: London stories* (Block 2006) and *Social class in applied linguistics* (Block 2014), I begin with personal vignettes written in a relatively informal style, with the intention of situating readers in the more academic discussions that I go on to develop. In the case of the former book, I was also interested in appealing to a broader audience, in particular in the UK, where at the time I was writing, issues around multiculturalism and multilingualism were being discussed in many contexts.

Against this backdrop, this book may be seen as another effort on my part to connect with diverse readerships. It is, after all, published as a Palgrave Pivot book, where lists are broadly defined (e.g. 'Humanities', 'Social Sciences', 'Politics and International Studies', etc.), which, in turn, opens up the prospect of a broader audience. This has led me to the aforementioned genre bending, not merely as a temporary, author-positioning strategy, with the function of setting up a more academic discourse, but as something altogether more defining.

Notes

1. I am grateful to Will Simpson and John Gray for pointing me in the direction of Orwell and Herman and Chomsky at this juncture in the book.
2. I am not sure how important it is to discuss the supposed originator of terms which become popular in day-to-day discourse. However, perhaps I should mention at this point that it is Ralph Keyes, an American cultural commentator, who is generally credited with 'inventing' the term (even if, of course, the concept has been around for centuries). In his best-selling book, *The post-truth era: Dishonesty and deception in contemporary life* (Keyes 2004), he documents the pervasiveness of mendacity and deceitful behaviour, and the increasing tolerance of such behaviour, in twenty-first-century American society.
3. Anderson (2017) is a perceptive critique of the superficial and partial use of Mitchell and the term 'telling case' in an extremely large number of publications in the social sciences. I therefore include this very short discussion with some trepidation. However, I hope to have achieved my aim, which is to explain this particular aspect of my approach to social inquiry in a succinct and clear manner.
4. I am grateful to John O'Regan for having helped me to clarify my self-positioning with regard to Critical Discourse Studies in this section.

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CHAPTER 2

Post-Truth Ruminations

Abstract This chapter is a critical reflection on post-truth and related terms. It starts with a consideration of what truth might be taken to mean and then moves to a discussion of epistemology and agnotology, which is the deliberate propagation of ignorance to satisfy the biases of powerful economic interests in favour of a particular status quo. A case examined here is climate change denial, specifically a debate taking place in a journal devoted to tourism management studies. The tourism management example leads to a discussion of several interrelated phenomenon, such as the existence of anti-expertise and anti-intellectualism in many parts of the world; the role of emotion in cognition, and how it impacts on the processing of diverse information; and finally, the balkanisation of access to the media and uses of the social media (e.g. Twitter), which is connected to echo chambers and what is known as the 'filter bubble'.

Keywords Truth · Humbug · Bullshit · Lying · Misleadingness Ignorance · Agnotology · Anti-expertism · Anti-intellectualism · Filter bubble

Introduction

I begin this chapter with two statements relevant to post-truth, one made decades before the term came into vogue and the other made once it had become ubiquitous:

D. Block, *Post-Truth and Political Discourse*,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-00497-2_2

> The vast accumulations of knowledge - or at least of information - deposited by the nineteenth century have been responsible for an equally vast ignorance. When there is so much to be known, when there are so many fields of knowledge in which the same words are used with different meanings, when everyone knows a little about a great many things, it becomes increasingly difficult for anyone to know whether he knows what he is talking about or not. And when we do not know, or when we do not know enough, we tend always to substitute emotions for thoughts. (Elliot 1920, p. 9)[1]

> Imagine a world that has had enough of experts. That considers knowledge to be "elitist." Imagine a world in which it is not expert knowledge but an opinion market on Twitter that determines whether a newly emergent strain of avian flu is really contagious to humans, or whether greenhouse gas emissions do in fact cause global warming, as 97% of domain experts say they do …. In this world, power lies with those most vocal and influential on social media: from celebrities and big corporations to botnet puppeteers who can mobilize millions of tweetbots or sock puppets—that is, fake online personas through which a small group of operatives can create an illusion of a widespread opinion …. In this world, experts are derided as untrustworthy or elitist whenever their reported facts threaten the rule of the well-financed or the prejudices of the uninformed. (Lewandowsky et al. 2017, p. 354)

Publishing their thoughts nearly a century apart, Elliot and Lewandowsky, Cook and Ecker paint a dystopian picture of the present and future of the world in the early twentieth and twenty-first centuries, respectively. Elliot laments how the increasing amount of information in circulation (to be distinguished from knowledge) has not led to the betterment of communications between individuals; quite the contrary. Meanwhile, for Lewandowsky et al., the ever-greater sophistication and diversification of social media have meant, mean and will mean the ever-greater sophistication and diversification of the information available to us at any given point in time. Of course, it was not always thus. I recall how my childhood in the 1960s America was mediated by a narrow range of media: three national commercial televisions channels (ABC, CBS and NBC), one national public channel (PBS), a handful of local commercial channels and a relatively limited offer of national and local radio. Listening to the Beatles on a transistor radio in 1964, I could never have imagined that in 2016 I would go to a site called *YouTube* and access a video recording of the Beatles playing 'I want to hold your hand', an

event that I had watched live on American television in February 1964. However, my very rudimentary use of twenty-first-century communication technologies is by now as common as it is unremarkable.

Bearing in mind Lewandowsky et al.'s pessimistic view of the world in which we live today, my aim in this chapter is to engage in a critical reflection on post-truth and related terms. I start with a short consideration of what we might mean by truth, a necessary first step given that truth is self-evidently a key issue at stake here. My aim is not to say all there is to say about this topic; rather, it is to introduce and discuss some possible different takes on truth that I can later return to in Chapter 3, where I examine in detail political communication in Spain. From this discussion of the truth, I move to consider epistemology and more specifically, the phenomenon known as agnotology, or the deliberate propagation of ignorance to satisfy the biases of powerful economic interests in favour of a particular status quo. A case in point I examine is climate change denial, specifically a debate taking place in a journal devoted to tourism management studies. This discussion, in turn, leads me to the rise of anti-expertism and the tradition of anti-intellectualism, both existent in many contexts around the world. From here, I move to the role of emotion in cognition, and then finally, the balkanisation of access to the media and uses of the social media, which are connected to what is known as the *filter bubble* (Pariser 2011).

Some Thoughts on the Notion of Truth

Julian Baggini's *A Short History of Truth* is, at 115 pages in length, a slip of a book, although it is one with some suggestive ideas about how we might understand the word 'truth'. In the book, Baggini covers types of truth that are very familiar to readers. For example, there is 'eternal truth', the best example being 'revealed truths', found in the world's religions, such as 'Jesus is the son of God and Mary' in Christianity. Baggini points out that most Christians, no doubt influenced by scientific values in society, do not take this assertion literally. However, as an act of faith, it can be held as a belief alongside an allegiance to facts as defined by the scientific community. In other words, for most Christians, holding religious beliefs, and even being devout, is compatible with living in a world in which science is looked to for the ultimate truth about how the world works. Religious faith, in this case, comes to be

something akin to an 'accept[ance] that faith is mysterious', as 'the most essential truths for the believer can become not so much facts about the cosmos but insights into how we ought to live … [and] ways of orienting ourselves towards the transcendent' (Baggini 2017, p. 17). Further to this, it is not a matter of substituting theology with science or history with myths; rather, what makes eternal truths special is precisely that they are not of the reasoned or empirical kind found in science.

Moving to terrain more familiar in academia, Baggini discusses 'reasoned truth', or the optimistic faith in rationality in many contemporary societies. Reasoning to truth is often associated with enlightenment philosophers such as Descartes ([1637] 1975) and Baruch Spinoza ([1677] 1996). There is the idea that we can arrive at truth through careful thought and consideration of all of the information we have at hand at a given time, but without having to subject our line of thought to empirical scrutiny. Chomsky's early 'Cartesian linguistics' is a good example of how this works (Chomsky 1966). For those who subscribe to this type of truth, 'reason is superior to observation because it can get behind mere appearances, the world as given to the senses, and see with certainty reality as it really is' (Baggini 2017, p. 45). However, through philosophers such as Francis Bacon ([1620] 2017), John Locke ([1690] 1964) and David Hume (1748), this more radical view came to be questioned and by now we are in a world in which a more balanced view obtains. Thus, most would agree that '[r]reason works best in a blend with which includes not just logic but experience, judgement, subtlety of thought, and sensitivity to ambiguity' (Baggini 2017, p. 47).

All of which brings us to another common type of truth, 'empirical truth'. This truth is based on the notion of experience as the great teacher (Bacon); inductive reasoning, working from observation to theory (Locke); and facts derived from trial and error and systematic observation in the real world (Hume). As Baggini puts it, '[t]he strength of empirical truth resides in the fact that it is always held up to scrutiny, revision and rejection' (Baggini 2017, p. 56).[2] And as Simon Blackburn (2005) has noted, such self-assuredness has historically been manifested by empiricists as *absolutism*. Absolutists appeal to *logos*, that is, a rational and objective authority that transcends all else and arbitrates disputes about the truth. *Logos* provides validation or a stamp of approval independent of wishes, emotions and desires that muddle thought and obfuscate. Absolutists thus believe in and abide by authority deriving from the key elements knowledge, facts, rationality, objectivity and truth.

Friedrich Nieitzse may be seen as the philosopher who most called into question such notions of truth, famously writing the following:

> What is truth? A mobile army of metaphors, metonyms, and anthropomorphisms, in short, a sum of human relations which were poetically and rhetorically heightened, transferred, and adorned, and after long use seem solid canonical, and binding to a nation. Truths are illusions about which it has been forgotten that they *are* illusions, worn-out metaphors without sensory impact, coins which have lost their image and now can be used only as metal, and no longer as coins. (Nietzsche [1873] 1989, p. 250)

Such words have served as an inspiration for *relativists*, who have taken a position in marked contrast to absolutists, seeing logos as fantasy. They thus have little time for the idea of an independent authority or barometer according to which we might consider a statement as true. In this case, 'man is the measure' takes precedence over the idea that we can ever attain a one-to-one alignment with the truth; rather, we are limited to a 'socially constructed, contingent, situated parade of words' (Blackburn 2005, p. 42). As Blackburn further explains,

> Where the absolutists see a 'concept heaven', in which the immutable relations between rights, duties, justice and truth hold their eternal sway … [, the relativist] sees only human institutions, ways of coping with social mess, patchworks and fixes and compromises, some of which prove useful, some of which break down, all of which have in principle a lifespan which depends on us and the problem we meet. (Blackburn 2005, p. 42)

But, of course, relativism is always open to self-refutation or what is known as the 'recoil argument', that is, if there are no reasons to take one's belief as more valid than another's belief, then why should we accept that this is how things really are? In this sense, Blackburn cites what is known as the 'Ishmael effect': Herman Melville's novel *Moby Dick* ends with the sinking of the ship and presumably all on board, and yet the character Ishmael survives to tell a tale in which events unfold in such a way that makes this feat impossible. For Blackburn, relativists are like Ishmael, condemning others to a fate that they somehow manage to rise above so as to narrate and analyse it. Relevant to our discussion here, Baggini includes 'relative truth' as a type of truth which he frames as being about multiple perspectives and world where '[t]here are no

alternative facts, just *additional* facts we might have missed, or genuine facts, that replace old ones' (Baggini 2017, p. 76; italics in the original).

Beyond reasoned truth and empirical truths and relative truths, all foundational to debates in the philosophy of science, Baggini discusses a series of other truths, some of which are phenomena that are not usually thought of as truths per se. First, there is what he calls 'authoritative truth', which he sees as a truth that is validated by the expertise or the divine right of the propagator of the truth. As he explains, '[t]o understand why anyone is taken to be an epistemic authority – an authority on truth - it is vital to understand what authorises them' (Baggini 2017, p. 22). It is worth noting here that it is the *by whom* of truth that is important. This means that not just any set of religious beliefs or scientific facts will acquire a following: there need to be trustworthy, and indeed credible, individuals and collectives as well as artefacts (such as holy texts or academic publications) to ensure that people will align themselves with a particular religion or science.

Nevertheless, we often embrace bodies of knowledge without being able to justify our actions rationally. I might have all kinds of extra-theoretical reasons for believing in theories of global warming, such as people I trust say so, or it is consistent with my political beliefs, or I seem to notice that we are having lots of extreme weather lately (even if I cannot be sure that this is not cyclical) and so on. But if I have to read the science to make a decision on this matter, I am likely to find such an endeavour very difficult. In any case, one of the problems of the twenty-first century is that those who hold positions once invested with the authority to propagate truth now find their position undermined. As Baggini puts it, '[o]ur current predicament is that authorities of expertise are routinely dismissed, with the authority of the gut, intuition, the people and/or God taking its place' (Baggini 2017, p. 30).[3] I shall have more to say about this in a later section of this chapter.

Some authoritative truths would seem to fall into the category of what Baggini calls 'holistic truths'. These are totalising theories that are hard to refute. An example cited by Baggini is what is known as Young Earth Creationism, that is, the belief that the earth was created by God some 10,000 years ago. According to this narrative, scientific discoveries, such as fossils which are four and half billion years old, can be explained away by reference to stories told in the bible. Baggini calls the arguments offered by creationists 'Byzantine' and 'incredible', but he also suggests

that they use the same logic of holistic thinking that one finds in science. As he explains:

> Truths do not stand or fall independently but are held in a network with other truths, all of which mutually support each other. Belief in the scientific evidence for evolution, for example, depends on belief in the general uniformity of nature over time and space; the ability of human beings to … see reality accurately and to understand it properly; the integrity of academic science and scientists. We arrive at truth holistically. (Baggini 2017, pp. 96–97)

As cognitive scientists have found with regard to mental models and folk theories of how the world functions (see Gelman and Legare 2011, for a review), human beings develop webs of beliefs about various aspects of their individual environments as well as those shared with their conspecifics. These beliefs may be based on first-hand experience in the world, or knowledge handed down through the years, or academic study, or some combination of these three sources, or, indeed, some other source. But the key is that, with time, they often harden into networks that are difficult to unpack with reason or argument. In addition, examining work in the sociology of science (e.g. Latour and Woolgar 1986; Yearley 2004), we see how researchers in a range of academic disciplines also develop their own webs of beliefs that solidify to the point of being impenetrable by outside evidence and argument. For example, Baars (1986) explains how in the late 1950s and early 1960s, many behaviourist psychology scholars stuck by their theories even when experimental evidence began to appear that contradicted many of their key tenets. It seemed that for many, being a well-established field with public recognition, and above all, having the veneer of 'science' (behaviourism was *the* scientific psychology), provided sufficient armour against challenges coming from a growing number of researchers who self-identified as 'cognitive psychologists' (and later as 'cognitive scientists').

Such defensive behaviour by academics is due, as Thomas Kuhn (1970) noted some time ago, to the existence of scientific paradigms, which serve as 'accepted model[s] or pattern[s]' (Kuhn 1970, p. 23) that scientists follow in times of 'normal science'. Normal science is defined by Kuhn as follows:

> Closely examined, whether historically or in the contemporary laboratory, … [normal science] seems an attempt to force nature into the preformed and relatively inflexible box that the paradigm supplies. No part of the aim of normal science is to call forth new sorts of phenomena; indeed, those that will not fit the box are often not seen at all. Nor do scientists normally aim to invent new theories, and they are often intolerant of those invented by others. Instead, normal-scientific research is directed to the articulation of those phenomena and theories that the paradigm already supplies. (Kuhn 1970, p. 24)

In this view of scientific activity, there is not only the evolution of ideas and research, but also the evolution of individual researchers and their behaviour which are constitutive of group identity. In short, examinations and analysis of science in action, from Kuhn to the present, reveal how big theories as holistic truths may come to be defended tooth and nail by researchers situated in extended and compact networks. Their activity becomes devoted to the confirmation of theories, even where this involves considerable cognitive and epistemology gymnastics, as opposed to the subjection of theories to possible refutation, as Karl Popper ([1963] 2002) long ago suggested.

Somewhat distant from religion and science-bound notions of truth are 'esoteric truths'. These are the daily bread of 'conspiracy theorists' and 'truthers' who believe theories of the who/why/how of major events and phenomena in the world which are at odds with more mainstream versions. Often, these alternative theories are called 'preposterous' and even 'crazy' by those who are immersed in more mainstream thought collectives. In addition, those who hold these alternative theories are often pilloried as paranoid, or as people with limited intelligence, or as people with nothing else (or nothing better) to do with their time. Nevertheless, esoteric truths are often held with great conviction as believers often actually *do* believe them. Thus, for those who believe that Barack Obama, the 43rd President of the United States, was not actually born in the United States (and therefore was never eligible to be president), there will always be information available through the social media and other information sources to contradict and refute alternative information from what are considered more rational sources. It should be added that at least some of what motivates some followers of these theories is an otherwise healthy scepticism of what we are constantly sold as the truth by institutions and from the highest estates of power. In addition, with the ever-greater extension and intensification of social

media in the lives of individuals, esoteric truths, which often originate in very personal and individual hobby horses and obsessions, can rapidly become widespread (go viral), thereby gaining credibility through their ubiquity. Nevertheless, John Gray (personal communication) reminds me that some conspiracy theories do have some credibility. One such case is the theory that the assassinations of three key political leaders in the 1960s America—John Kennedy, his brother Robert Kennedy and Martin Luther King—were far more than the work of solitary, lone-wolf killers.

In the world of politics, there are also, no doubt, what Baggini calls 'powerful truths' or truths deriving from power structures in society. Baggini provides a slightly altered version of Marx and Engels's ideology and '[t]he ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas' (Marx and Engels [1846] 1998, p. 67), suggesting that to have control over what counts as 'truth' at any given time is to have great power. And this is why those desirous of power and influence in society constantly spin the truth to suit their purposes. Here, with some caution, Baggini aligns himself with Foucault and the latter's notion of 'regimes of truth'. In Foucault's view, truth, 'understood as a system of preferred procedures for the production, regulation, distribution, circulation and operation of statements [,] … is linked in a circular relation with systems of power which produce and sustain it, and to effects of power which it induces and which extend it' (Foucault [1977] 1980, p. 133). However, Baggini injects a critical note with regard to Foucault, warning against seeing 'the frequent capture of truth by power … [as the] equation of truth and power' (Baggini 2017, p. 83).

Truths emanating from the power structures of society frequently depend on the authority vested in those who govern to create these truths. The latter are often in conflict with empiricism and rationality and are what Baggini calls 'creative truths'. Creative truths are those truths that take seriously a simplified version of social constructionism (we can make reality what we choose) and a very partial reading of John L. Austin's (1962) 'perlocutionary acts' (saying something is so makes it so). It is the declaration of hopes and intentions and threats by a politician on the way to creating his/her own set of facts. Creative truths, as suggested above, in effect wrong-foot those who believe in empiricism or rationality or just about any organised thought system that only accepts as true those things that can be shown to be the case or can be argued. However, if there is one thing that all commentators on post-truth seem to agree on, it is that we now live in societies where empiricism

and reasoned debate are not as venerated as they once were and creative truths have become more and more common. For some years now, a story has been in circulation about a conversation that purportedly took place between a group of White House correspondents and a White House aide. Said aide was later revealed to have been Karl Rove, the Republican Party-political strategist, who was often called 'George Bush's brain'. The story, which goes to the heart of the matter with regard to creative truths, was explained by journalist Ron Susskind as follows:

> The aide said that guys like me were "in what we call the reality-based community," which he defined as people who "believe that solutions emerge from your judicious study of discernible reality." I nodded and murmured something about enlightenment principles and empiricism. He cut me off. "That's not the way the world really works anymore." He continued "We're an empire now, and when we act, we create our own reality. And while you're studying that reality - judiciously, as you will – we'll act again, creating other new realities, which you can study too, and that's how things will sort out. We're history's actors … and you, all of you, will be left to just study what we do." (Susskind 2004, n.p.; cited in Danner 2007, n.p.)

Rove's comment was aimed at journalists, but one might easily imagine his words being directed at group of scholars in the social sciences and humanities, positioned not as history's actors but as its interpreters.

Finally, there are 'moral truths', that is, ethics-based truths around notions such as right and wrong, virtue and vice, good and evil, and so on. In effect, this is feeling-based truth as opposed to empirical or reasoned truth (see above), although it is frequently based on an appeal to a higher authority, be this religious or secular (e.g. an appeal to the classical humanism of the Enlightenment). There is actually no fact of the matter that murder is wrong, for example; there is only the ability of human beings to feel for others, to empathise, which leads to discursive regimes emerging around the notion that murder is wrong and should be made illegal.

To sum up matters, Baggini's book on the truth has provided me with a good deal of food for thought that helps me with the principal focus of this book, post-truth. Following Baggini, my position is that there is no single truth and that what counts as truth is contingent on many factors. However, I do not take a relativist position on this matter, whereby all informational bundles put forward as 'true' are equal. I suppose that to

Table 2.1 Baggini's truths in a nutshell

Type	*Comment/gloss*
Eternal	'Revealed truth'. But most religious individuals can and do embrace both religious and scientific facts
Reasoned	The optimistic faith in enlightenment-inspired rationality in many contemporary societies
Empirical	'The strength of empirical truth resides in the fact that it is always held up to scrutiny, revision and rejection' (Baggini 2017, p. 56)
Relative	There is no universal, objective truth and there are multiple perspectives, each with its own truth
Authoritative	Not just any set of religious beliefs or scientific facts will acquire a following. They must be backed by argumentation and artefacts
Holistic	Total theories as broad pictures of reality that are hard to refute
Esoteric	'Truthers', conspiracy theorists and so on
Powerful	'To control the "truth" is to have great power' (Baggini 2017, p. 81), but I would add here Marx and Engels's views on ideology, namely, that '[t]he ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas' (Marx and Engels [1846] 1998, p. 67)
Creative	Truths that take seriously a simplified version of social constructionism (we can make reality what we choose) and a very partial reading of Austin's (1962) perlocutionary acts—saying something is so makes it so
Moral	Ethics based-truth around notions such as right and wrong, virtue and vice, good and evil and so on

a great extent, I align with the kind of pragmatism practised by Larry Laudan. Some years ago, Laudan suggested that the notion of 'adequacy' may serve as a guiding light for choosing one theory over another (and, I would add, one 'truth' over another). As he explains, at any given time, '[o]ne theory is more adequate (i.e. more acceptable) than a rival just in case the former has exhibited greater problem-solving effectiveness than the latter' (Laudan 1996, p. 84). The best theory is therefore the one that works the best in real-world activity, and, I would add, this theory is likely to be assigned the label of 'true'.

In Table 2.1, I very briefly summarise some of the main points arising from my discussion of Baggini's ten takes on truth. These different understandings of truth will serve me well in the remainder of this chapter and in Chapter 3, as at different times, I will come back to the truth types outlined here. This discussion also provides an appropriate lead in to the next section of this chapter, where I discuss alternatives to telling the truth: bullshit, lying and misleadingness.

Humbug, Bullshit, Lying and Misleadingness

In his oft-cited essay, 'The Prevalence of Humbug', Max Black argues that *humbug* is, despite being ubiquitous, extremely hard to define. And judging by the synonyms that he cites—'balderdash, claptrap, rubbish, cliché, hokum, drivel, buncombe, nonsense, gibberish, or tautology' (Black 1983, p. 5)—we must entertain the notion that it is more literary than street, and perhaps even a little out of fashion. Black takes on the task of developing a clear definition of the term, working inductively, that is moving from examples (mainly from literary works) to some understanding of the object of analysis. A case in point is the exclamation—"Humbug!"—generally uttered when the speaker does not believe a word he/she is hearing from an interlocutor. After a good deal of to-ing and fro-ing, Black finally settles down to the following definition of the term:

> … deceptive misrepresentation, short of lying, especially by pretentious word or deed, of somebody's own thoughts, feelings, or attitudes. This definition covers only first-degree humbug. For second-degree humbug, produced by a self-deluded speaker or thinker, the unsatisfactory reference to thoughts and so on would need to be replaced by something like "thoughts … that might be revealed by candid and rational self-examination." (Black 1983, p. 20)

I will return to 'second-degree humbug' shortly. First, however, I would like to focus on 'short of lying … by pretentious word or deed, of somebody's own thoughts, feelings, or attitudes', that is, Black's 'first degree humbug'. I find this to be an interesting expression, above all because it introduces another term that is complicated though necessary to consider in this book, lying. Lying may be defined in many ways, but here I shall follow Jennifer Saul's succinct summation:

> If the speaker is not the victim of linguistic error/malapropism or using metaphor, hyperbole, or irony, then they lie if (1) they say that P; (2) they believe P to be false; (3) they take themselves to be in a warranting context. (Saul 2013, p. 3)

It is interesting to examine what this definition rules out with regard to lying. First of all, there is what may be called 'accidental lying', as what happens when someone does not tell the truth due to a lack of information or because someone has supplied him/her with false information.

Here, the key element is the lack of intention. Another action that Saul differentiates from lying is when someone misleads others, or saying something that is, strictly speaking, true, while conveying something that is false. This occurs when vague or indirect language is used in response to a question or another prompt relevant to a particular topic. Saul uses the example of Tony Blair and the claim that Saddam Hussein had weapons of mass destruction. Instead of blatantly lying, saying 'yes' in response to a question on the matter, Blair could instead opt to say something along the lines of 'Well, he is a dangerous man'. In doing so, he would be implying that Saddam Hussein perhaps did possess said weapons, as that is the kind of thing that a dangerous leader might do. Given the devious nature of misleading, Saul suggests that it may be considered worse than direct lying in some cases.

Also important in Saul's definition of lying is the notion of being 'in a warranting context'. Stephen Toulmin (1958) is perhaps the best-known theorist of warranting as a discourse strategy. In his model of argumentation, he outlines how a person moves from a claim that something is true (e.g. Mary is a dual national) to the provision of grounding or evidence for that claim (Mary has a Spanish passport and a Canadian passport), to the provision of a warrant that links the claim to the grounding (people who have two passports are usually called 'dual nationals') to the provision of backing (I work in immigration and I know that the term 'dual national' is used in such cases). Put in less logic-bound terms, we may understand a warrant as what occurs when a speaker makes reference to reliable sources as authorities to bolster his/her position as a credible witness or simply a legitimate interlocutor. This is as common in the world of academic activity (see Latour 1987) as it is in the world of political activity, which will be the focus in Chapter 3. In the lay world, which is probably the world that Saul has in mind, warranting has to do with one upholding one's side of a conversation in which it is assumed that he/she is a sincere interlocutor who can be trusted. In effect, '[i]f one warrants the truth of a statement, then one promises or guarantees, either explicitly or implicitly, that what one says is true' (Caron 2006, p. 294; in Saul 2013, p. 8). Being in a warranting context means that the person who is telling a lie is positioned by his/her interlocutor as a legitimised speaker to be taken seriously. Lying thus is a double betrayal—of facts in the world and of the trust of the person to whom one is lying.

For Black (1983), there is distinction to be made between lies that are 'direct' and lies that are 'indirect'. In the former case, we are in the realm

of absolute situations in which an individual produces an utterance, as if he/she believed it, expressing what in fact he/she either clearly or reasonably does not believe. By contrast, indirect lies are those instances when '[o]ne can intimate "the thing that is not" by implication, by significant silence, or even by the double bluff of pretending to lie while actually speaking the truth' (Black 1983, p. 14). This seems even more complex than Saul's misleadingness, as it seems to involve a good deal of calculation on the part of the liar. At play here as well is the 'creativity of falsehood' that George Steiner (1975) derives from his succinct archaeology of lying. Steiner suggests that 'the Greeks took an aesthetic or sporting view of lying', adding that '[a] very ancient conception of the vitality of 'mis-statement' and 'mis-understanding', of the primordial affinities between language and dubious meaning, seems implicit in the notorious style of Greek oracles' (Steiner 1975, p. 219).

The notion that lying can be 'aesthetic' or 'sporting'—or, I would add, 'ludic'—leads us seamlessly into a consideration of bullshit as a useful term to use in many instances. Or in any case, it does in my mind, given that in my experience, bullshit is about 'having someone on' or 'fucking with them', that is, saying or writing things that one knows are not true but will serve the purpose of establishing some dialectical superiority. When my friends and I bullshitted each other back in my childhood and adolescence, it was about finding ways to fool the other into believing things that could later be revealed to be false. Sometimes, this involved elaborated storylines over time. In all cases, and in general terms, the bullshitter is someone whose:

> focus is panoramic rather than particular. He does not limit himself to inserting a certain falsehood at a specific point, and thus he is not constrained by the truths surrounding that point or intersecting it. He is prepared to fake the context as well, so far as need requires. This freedom from the constraints to which the liar must submit does not necessarily mean, of course, that his task is easier than the task of the liar. But the mode of creativity upon which it relies is less analytical and less deliberative than that which is mobilized in lying. It is more expansive and independent, with more spacious opportunities for improvisation, color, and imaginative play. This is less a matter of craft than of art. Hence the familiar notion of the "bullshit artist." (Frankfurt 1986, p. 16)

This quote comes from the famous and oft-cited essay entitled 'On bullshit', by the American philosopher Henry Frankfurt (1986). Frankfurt acknowledges his indebtedness to Black's earlier discussion

of humbug, and he confesses that he cannot see a great deal of difference between this term and bullshit in terms of the meanings of the two words. Thus, although he rejects the notion that the words are interchangeable and accepts that they collocate differently with regard to their use across contexts, he concludes that 'the difference appears on the whole to have more to do with considerations of gentility, and certain other rhetorical parameters, than with the strictly literal modes of significance that concern me most' (Frankfurt 1986, p. 2). He thus considers the utterance 'Humbug!' in response to an interlocutor one thinks is talking nonsense, politer than saying 'Bullshit!'.

By contrast, where Frankfurt does find clear differences is in his comparison of lying and bullshitting. As he explains:

> Someone who lies and someone who tells the truth are playing on opposite sides, so to speak, in the same game. Each responds to the facts as he understands them, although the response of the one is guided by the authority of the truth, while the response of the other defies that authority and refuses to meet its demands. The bullshitter ignores these demands altogether. He does not reject the authority of the truth, as the liar does, and oppose himself to it. He pays no attention to it at all. By virtue of this, bullshit is a greater enemy of the truth than lies are. (Frankfurt 1986, p. 18)

Bearing in mind the idea that some people do not so much reject the authority of truth as simply pay no attention to it at all, it is perhaps appropriate to return to Black's 'self-deluded speaker'. Here, it is worth considering that in cases of notorious lies, such as American President Bill Clinton's statement that he 'did not have sex with that woman, Monica Lewinsky', or British Prime Minister Tony Blair's claims that Saddam Hussein had 'weapons of mass destruction' (and this was the justification for the Iraq war), it may well be that the individuals in question *actually do believe* what they are saying. In his mind, Clinton distinguished between *felatio* (not real sex) and penile penetration (real sex). In his mind, Tony Blair really believed that Saddam Hussein had the WPDs. And finally, there is the frightening notion, but one that is not to be ruled out altogether, that Trump actually believes most of the things he says to be true. On the other hand, in the political world, we can never rule out intentional and deliberate concealment as what is at work when politicians speak, particularly when they are trying to divert attention away from real issues which might be embarrassing to them

and detrimental to their electoral interests. Concealment, especially with a view to manipulating others, is a key element in what is known as agnotology, to which I now turn.

From Epistemology to Agnotology

Traditionally, the related fields of philosophy of science, sociology of science and history of science have focused on epistemology, which we may understand as consisting of four key elements: (1) the nature of knowledge, including the differences between knowledge and belief or truth and opinion; (2) the sources of knowledge and/or how we come to possess it; (3) how we understand the processes via which we possess it; and (4) stances towards the construction and dissemination of knowledge—how we formulate, justify, manifest agreement, show scepticism and so on. In recent years, many scholars have concentrated on point 4, how knowledge is constructed and circulated in society, and among these scholars, there has been growing interest in what is known as agnotology, the study of how ignorance is culturally created, legitimised and disseminated, as well as the purposes and interests that it serves in a society.

Agnotology has been defined in different ways, which is normal, given that authors from a range of different backgrounds have adopted it as a key concept and attempted to make it work for their particular areas of research. For example, the economist Philip Mirowski offers the following very thorough and robust definition of what the term signifies for him:

> Its essence is a series of techniques and technologies to both *use* and *influence* independently existing academic disciplines for the purposes of fostering impressions of implacable controversy where actual disputes are marginal, wreaking havoc with outsider perceptions of the configuration of orthodox doctrines, and creating a parallel set of spokespersons and outlets for ideas that are convenient for the behind-the-scenes funding interests, combined with the inflation of disputes in the name of "balance" in order to infuse the impression in outsiders that nothing has been settled within the research community. The ultimate purpose in erecting this Potemkin controversy is to stymie action. (Mirowski 2013, p. 227)

Robert Proctor is usually cited as the originator of the term, and with good reason. His *Cancer Wars: How Politics Shapes What We Know and Don't Know About Cancer* (Proctor 1995) is a classic in the field. In the book, Proctor uncovers forty years of misinformation campaigns

organised by tobacco companies in the United States, which aimed to obfuscate debate and befuddle the general public with regard to the well-established links between cigarette smoking and lung disease. More recently, in the introduction to the collection *Agnotology: The Making and Unmaking of Ignorance* (Proctor and Schiebinger 2008), Proctor introduces the topic of ignorance after briefly highlighting how in the philosophy of science, there has traditionally been a great deal of work on knowing, but very little work on not knowing:

> What is remarkable … is how little we know about ignorance. There is not even a well-known word for its study (though our hope is to change that), no fancy conferences or websites. This is particularly remarkable, given (a) how much ignorance there is, (b) how many kinds there are, and (c) how consequential ignorance is in our lives. (Proctor 2008, pp. 1–2)

As Proctor goes on to explain, there are several differentiable types of ignorance:

1. ignorance as 'primitive or native', simply not knowing;
2. ignorance as 'lost realm' or 'selective choice', a result of inattention, unavailability of information or even choice;
3. ignorance as 'strategic ploy', as an act of secrecy or censorship, with the intent of withholding information; and
4. ignorance as 'active construct', as the result of a concerted effort on the part of legitimised sources (e.g. scientists, pundits) to deceive, and to manufacture and manipulate individuals' and collectives' understandings of particular matters.

The first type of ignorance, 'primitive or native', is the state of all people before entering realms or webs of knowledge, either via formal education or via day-to-day experience. This ignorance is presented as something to be remedied or overcome and may be seen as a motivator of education and learning. Altogether different in origin and nature is Proctor's second type of ignorance, the 'lost realm'. Here, we have a state of affairs that might well lead to Saul's (2013) 'accidental lying', discussed above. This is a situation in which a person may lie, not intentionally, but due to a utilisation of information that is irrelevant to the immediate circumstances or is erroneous. In addition, as this type of ignorance is sometimes attributable to inattention, we might consider

that sources of inattention such as fatigue or having one's mind on other matters, are further contributors to accidental lying. Nevertheless, the ignorance-lying link is surely stronger for the latter two types of ignorance, as 'strategic ploy' and 'active construct'. Indeed, it is these two types of ignorance that have most attracted the attention of historians of science like Proctor. And with good reason, given that over the past fifty years what might be called backlash movements, or even counter-intelligence movements, have arisen as powerful economic interests have come to realise that certain scientific findings are a threat to their long-term survival.

For example, once the virtual entirety of medical researchers agreed that there were causal links between cigarette smoking and lung disease (and this takes us as far back as the early 1960s), the tobacco industry began to fund studies which supposedly showed that this link did not exist in a conclusive way. The above-cited book by Proctor (1995) chronicles the unfolding of such events, unmasking how big economic interests (in this case, the tobacco industry) will resort to just about anything in the pursuit of their aims. Most notably, Proctor finds an historical causal link between being funded by the tobacco industry and emitting public declarations against the link between smoking and health problems. Among the many agnogenetic strategies employed by the tobacco industry and its supporting researchers, Proctor cites the following:

> … we have the repeated claim for insufficient proof or evidence, the call for ever more research to eliminate doubt …, the perils of rushing to judgment, the infinitely high bar for proof of causation, and the eternal focus on "confounding factors" or the febrility of statistics or the irrelevance of animal studies, etc. (Proctor 2006, p. 123)

Thus, there is not enough evidence, but if more research is conducted so as to produce enough evidence, then the claim will shift to there being too many findings to reach a conclusion. In addition, no matter how much evidence is found, critics can always insist on even more, as further research might serve to reverse the evidential trend. All of this is done, without a doubt, to muddy the waters further. Indeed, so committed (and perhaps even desperate) were the major tobacco companies that they also funded research which seemingly went against their interests. However, they did this with the intent of flooding the field with such a

wide range of findings that it would be much easier to claim that no consensus can be reached because of the large number of crisscrossing findings in circulation. In an interview with *Guardian* journalist Stéphane Foucart in 2011, Proctor explained matters thus:

> It is less well known, but tobacco companies also spent large amounts subsidising good quality biomedical research in fields such as virology, genetics and immunology. They funded the work of several Nobel prize winners, … but they only encouraged this research to serve as a distraction. The idea was to build up a corpus of work on possible causes of diseases which could be attributed to cigarette-smoking. In court cases involving the industry, its lawyers always highlighted viral risks, the pre-disposition of certain families and so on to play down tobacco-related risks. (Proctor, in Foucart 2011, n.p.)

Such stopping at nothing is not the exclusive purview of the hard sciences, as the social sciences are by no means immune to such manipulations. Mirowski has written eloquently about what he sees as an organised movement of economists who have spent the past several decades proselytising in favour of neoliberal policies and practices worldwide. Calling this loose amalgam of individuals, think tanks and lobbies the 'Neoliberal Thought Collective', he has denounced some of the questionable practices and even dirty tricks which he has witnessed over the past several decades. For example, he argues that 'it clearly has become an imperative for neoliberals such as the Koch bothers to further transform the economics profession by further dispersing their influence' (Mirowski 2013, p. 235). The Koch bothers are multimillionaire industrialists/venture capitalists who are well known in the United States as free market fanatics in favour of the liberalisation of just about all things economic. The specific case that Mirowski refers to is the brothers' donation of 1.5 million dollars to Florida State University to fund a chair in economics. There is nothing wrong with this practice, and indeed, there is a long tradition of such philanthropy in the United States. For Mirowski, the key problem with the donation is that the Koch bothers have not been content with just having their name next to an academic post of prestige; rather, they have insinuated themselves into the inner workings of the economics department in which their chair is located. For Mirowski, this means that the brothers made the donation:

> in exchange for staffing the advisory board that would approve faulty hires, and vested the Koch representative with sole veto power, which it proceeds to exercise in the 2009 hiring round. A Koch representative pre-screened candidates at … job meetings. Koch also stipulated as a condition a new course featuring the writings of Ayn Rand. (Mirowski 2013, pp. 235–236).

Mirowski argues that it is not uncommon at all for donors to wish to have some influence as regards how their money is spent, although there is also a long tradition of doing the very opposite. That is, there are cases of multimillionaire donors who give their money to economics faculties and think tanks in exchange for little beyond name visibility. One such example cited by Mirowski is the Hungarian-American investor and philanthropist George Soros, who has funded the Institute of New Economic Thinking without intervening in its day-to-day functioning. However, the key question in citing Soros is the extent to which he is an exception to the general rule of meddling by philanthropists. Another question is if there is substantially more such funding with a purpose in economics today than there was in the past. Hermann and Chomsky, writing three decades ago, would appear to suggest that matters have always been thus, that at least in the US, members of the business establishment have always wanted a say in what goes on in higher education and they have had no qualms about using their money to obtain this influence. In addition, they have done so at the behest of the US government, as Herman and Chomsky (1988, p. 23) further explain:

> This process of creating the needed body of experts has been carried out on a deliberate basis and massive scale. Back in 1972, Judge Lewis Powell (later elevated to the Supreme Court) wrote a memo to the U.S. Chamber of Commerce urging business "to buy the top academic reputations in the country to add credibility to corporate studies and give business a stronger voice on the campuses".

Nevertheless, despite the claim that matters have always been thus, Mirowski suggests that there is far more private sector influence on goings-on at American universities today, across disciplines, than was the case in the past. This is a difficult claim to corroborate, but it is certainly consistent with how in recent years, global financial elites, riding the dominance of neoliberal ideology in day-to-day public and private policies and practices, have been playing hardball while the rest of the population plays softball. In any case, the issue at stake in the Koch brothers'

case is not a direct engagement with Proctor's third and fourth types of ignorance cited above: secrecy, censorship and withholding information and concerted efforts to deceive, manufacture and manipulate understandings of particular matters, respectively. Rather, it is the buying of academics charged with carrying out these tasks by elites in positions of immense power in the United States.

Such purchases are clearly carried out with the intention of influencing—first, academic, and then eventually public-opinion about the way that capitalism works. Specifically, with regard to the 2007/2008 economic crisis, they are means to the end strategy of bait and switch, whereby responsibility for the crisis is shifted from the banks to governments which supposedly, through their profligacy, caused widespread bankruptcies and a worldwide depression. Indeed, this theory, not only unsubstantiated by events but refuted by them, is alive and well several years after it was first floated in the early years of the crisis. Thus, in a session of the Spanish parliament taking place on May 3, 2017, the Spanish Finance Minister Cristóbal Montoro exercised no caution whatsoever (nor apparently felt compelled to do so) when he defended a new round of cuts in public spending by saying to his opponents: 'We are leaving behind a public spending drinking binge and now you want to go out drinking to celebrate' ('*Venimos de una borrachera de gasto público y ya queiren ir de copas a celebralo*').

However, with regard to such statements, and above all the thinking behind them, Mark Blythe has written:

> … any narrative that locates wasteful spending by governments prior to the crisis in 2007 as the *cause* of the crisis is just simply wrong; it is disingenuous and partisan. In fact, average OECD debt before the crisis was going down, not up. What happened was that banks promised growth, delivered losses, passed the costs on to the state, and then the state got the blame for generating the debt, and the crisis, in the first place, which of course, must be paid for by expenditure cuts. The banks may have made the losses, but the citizenry will pay for them. This is a pattern we see repeatedly in the crisis. (Blyth 2013, p. 47)

On the same point, Slavoj Žižek provides a similar explanation, but in terms of a Marxist view of ideology. As he suggests, 'in old-fashioned Marxist terms, the main task of the ruling ideology in the present crisis is to impose a narrative that will not put the blame for the meltdown on

the global capitalist system as such, but on its deviations (overly lax legal regulations, the corruption of financial institutions, and so on)' (Žižek 2009, p. 19). I will come back to ideology, understood in these terms, in Chapter 3, but for now I turn to another area of inquiry in which agnotology has had a noteworthy presence over the past several decades: climate change research. Once the vast majority of environmental specialists reached the point where they agreed that some form of global warming existed, and that it was being caused by the emission of certain substances, the industries responsible for those emissions began to fund research which aimed to refute the damning findings. In the next section, I examine in detail the case of an exchange which took place in 2014 and 2015 in the journal *Tourism Management*, which I think exemplifies the kinds of dialectical conflicts that agnotology provokes.

Climate Change in Tourism Management Studies

Anthropogenic Global Warming (AGW) is the theory that in recent decades there have been clear changes in climatological patterns worldwide. It rests on at least five key pillars:

1. Based on evidence available, global warming may be said to exist.
2. Human behaviour and activity are its primary (though not only) cause, mainly through the reliance on and use of apparatuses and substances that emit greenhouse gases such as carbon dioxide.
3. It is destructive to the planet because of the damage caused by unexpected and unpredictable fluctuations in climatological phenomena (e.g. flash flooding destroying agriculture).
4. It is proceeding at an increasingly rapid (and unprecedented) rate.
5. It is only reversible if there is the globally agreed-upon adoption of sustainability as a guiding principle for human development. This would mean deep and abiding changes in the way that human beings understand the environment and how they behave as key agents in its ongoing evolution.

In an article appearing in the journal *Tourism Management*, Amir Shani and Boraz Arad (2014) challenge what they see as the tendency among tourism specialists to accept the notion that 'the global tourism industry [is] a significant contributor to destructive climate change and … it therefore ha[s] a moral obligation to considerably diminish its

greenhouse gas footprint and educate tourists to alter their travel behavior' (Shani and Arad 2014, p. 82). Shani and Arad chide their colleagues for accepting at face value just one side of a scientific debate—the AGW side—which, they argue, is far from conclusive and representative of just a part of the scientific community devoted to the study of the environment. Key elements in their critique are claims that AGW theory is 'pessimistic', 'highly controversial' and 'overly alarmist', and that there is 'evidence that the mainstream reports … are vastly exaggerated … and … human-induced greenhouse gas concentrations do not play a substantial role in climate change' (Shani and Arad 2014, p. 82). The authors even argue that whatever (small) degree of AGW that exists will have positive effects such as 'fewer winter deaths (which tend to exceed summer deaths), lower energy costs, improved agricultural yields, decline of famines, and probably fewer droughts and richer biodiversity' (Shani and Arad 2014, p. 84). Ultimately, Shani and Arad see the embrace of the AGW agenda as a case of 'jumping on a bandwagon' and that in doing so, tourism specialists and tourist industry employers and employees are wasting both time and money pursuing measures aimed at alleviating an unproven problem. And not content with criticising their colleagues in tourism management, they offer the following advice to climate change researchers:

> While tourism scholars are not expected to be climate scientists, those who study climate change and tourism should exercise extra caution and adopt a critical approach when evaluating the subject matter. … Diverting scarce resources and energy to "fight" human-induced climate change, a phenomenon not yet well understood, is likely to make it harder to tackle the unambiguous environmental challenges the tourism industry faces. (Shani and Arad 2014, p. 84)

Here, the authors establish that universities function with limited resources, not an unreasonable claim by any means. They then make an appeal for the greater good, that is, for spending limited resources so that they do the most good. Their conclusion is that by devoting resources to the teaching of AGW, perhaps other more important environmental issues are not being dealt with—the 'the unambiguous environmental challenges the tourism industry faces'. The latter, as the authors note, include: '[p]reservation of natural assets and culture, management of natural parks and reserves, prevention of environmental

degradation caused by tourism activities, wildlife conservation and protection of endangered species, as well as empowerment and promotion of the wellbeing of local communities' (Shani and Arad 2014, p. 84). The authors thus convert the debate into an either-or proposition, drawing on what we might call the *topos of incommensurable alternatives*: if tourism management professors teach AGW, they cannot deal with other issues which are also environmental in nature. What this move seems to gloss over is that AGW could be said to impact on everything mentioned by the authors—natural assets, parks and reserves, wildlife conservation and so on.

In a rejoinder to Shani and Arad, aimed at 'providing the balance that is missing from such climate change denial and scepticism studies on climate change and tourism' (Hall et al. 2015, p. 342), C. Michael Hall and some 50 additional scholars from management, business, environmental studies and tourism studies departments in universities around the world take on some of the key arguments offered by Shani and Arad. And having done this, they conclude their piece as follows:

> Shani and Arad (2014) claimed that tourism scholars tend to endorse the most pessimistic assessments regarding climate change, and that anthropogenic climate change was a "fashionable" and "highly controversial scientific topic". This brief rejoinder provides the balance that is missing from such climate change denial and scepticism studies on climate change and tourism. Recent research provides substantial evidence that reports on anthropogenic climate change are accurate, and that human-induced greenhouse gas emissions, including from the tourism industry, play a significant role in climate change. Some positive net effects may be experienced by some destinations in the short-term, but in the long-term all elements of the tourism system will be impacted. The expansion of tourism emissions at a rate greater than efficiency gains means that it is increasingly urgent that the tourism sector acknowledge, accept and respond to climate change. Debate on tourism-related adaptation and mitigation measures is to be encouraged and welcomed. Climate change denial is not. (Hall et al. 2015, p. 345)

Here, the authors take on the either-or proposition suggested by Shani and Arad, that there are other priorities to deal with, when they write that 'in the long-term all elements of the tourism system will be impacted'. However, the most interesting aspect of the Hall et al.

rebuttal is how, in compiling his long list of co-authors, Hall bore in mind the power of numbers, with the added element that his fellow contributors were from a range of disciplines and not just climate research. This means a double warrant, of quantity and quality, that leads Hall et al. to show a great deal of confidence in their claim that the vast majority of climate scientists either implicitly or explicitly endorse the view that 'reports on anthropogenic climate change are accurate', while only a minority argue the contrary view, that AGW does not exist. In short, their view is that AGW has achieved the status of 'adequacy' in climate science (Laudan 1996; see discussion above), having shown greater problem-solving effectiveness than its rivals.

Nevertheless, this is not enough to seal the deal, as it were, as AGW sceptics have adopted a strategy that Proctor (1995) noted in his analysis of the tobacco industry's attempts to rebut medical research showing links between smoking and lung diseases, namely to repeat the claim that there is roughly a 50–50 split among climate scientists. This claim does not hold up to scrutiny if we are to judge by surveys of the climate research that have appeared periodically over the years (e.g. Anderegg et al. 2010; Cook and Jacobs 2014; Cook and Lewandowsky 2016; Cook et al. 2013, 2016). To make this point, I reproduce below the abstract of an article published by Cook et al. (2016), in which the authors reviewed six independent studies that they had carried out on climate change and global warming articles appearing in refereed journals over a period of 25 years (1991–2016):

> The consensus that humans are causing recent global warming is shared by 90%–100% of publishing climate scientists according to six independent studies by co-authors of this paper. Those results are consistent with the 97% consensus reported by Cook et al (2013) based on 11 944 abstracts of research papers, of which 4014 took a position on the cause of recent global warming. A survey of authors of those papers (N = 2412 papers) also supported a 97% consensus. Tol (2016) comes to a different conclusion using results from surveys of non-experts such as economic geologists and a self-selected group of those who reject the consensus. We demonstrate that this outcome is not unexpected because the level of consensus correlates with expertise in climate science. At one point, Tol also reduces the apparent consensus by assuming that abstracts that do not explicitly state the cause of global warming ('no position') represent non-endorsement, an approach that if applied elsewhere would reject

> consensus on well-established theories such as plate tectonics. We examine the available studies and conclude that the finding of 97% consensus in published climate research is robust and consistent with other surveys of climate scientists and peer-reviewed studies. (Cook et al. 2016, p. 160)

The discredited Tol (2016) notwithstanding, the authors make the case for a consensus in favour of the thesis that yes, there is climate change, and yes, there is global anthropogenic warming. The kind of surveys they cite show, again and again, how AGW has won the battle in climate science, having achieved a high level of adequacy leading to a general acceptance by climate scientists. Nevertheless, the topos of equivalence (Anti-AGW theory has just as much support among climate specialist scientists as AGW theory) remains a strong rival, a creative truth embraced with faith more than empiricism. And, as I shall argue in Chapter 3, it is strategy that emerges not only in debates based in the sciences, but also those occurring in other social domains where conflicts over 'the truth' exist.

But to return to our current discussion, we might well ask at this point: What, then, are the key issues arising in this example of debate over the relative merits of AGW? And what lessons can be learnt? First, as we observed above in the case of the Koch brothers, there is the need to follow the money, as it were, when reading publications arising from funded research. Who is funding the research and with what purposes and interests in mind? Around the world, there are a good number of think tanks and individual millionaires which/who devote considerable time and effort to the defence of the elite interests that currently dominate the world. One can never exclude the benevolence of any organisation or any individual when it comes to a (healthy) interest in science and research. Nevertheless, and again as we observed in the Koch brothers case, there is, by now, ample evidence to suggest that the aforementioned think tanks and millionaire benefactors tend to fund activities, including research, which provide 'evidence' in favour of the causes that they support.

Beyond academia, we also find counter-intelligence movements which aim to promote ignorance via the combination of secrecy, censorship and withholding information and concerted efforts to deceive, manufacture and manipulate understandings of particular matters. Larry Dossey (2014) provides a good example of such counter-intelligence work, citing a memo that conservative communications strategist Frank Luntz

sent to high-level Republicans in 2002 about the dangers of allowing AGW proponents to dominate debate about climate change. I reproduce Dossey's reproduction below. It should be noted that in the original memo, Luntz made somewhat creative use of capital letters, bold and italics. In addition, I have inserted additional text in brackets to facilitate comprehension:

> Should the public come to believe that the scientific issues are settled, their views about global warming will change accordingly. Therefore, ***you need to continue to make the lack of scientific certainty a primary issue in the debate … .*** *The scientific debate is closing [against us] but not yet closed. There is still a window of opportunity to challenge the science. …* [USE] LANGUAGE THAT WORKS. *We must not rush to judgment before all the facts are in. We need to ask more questions. We deserve more answers…* Emphasize the importance of "***acting only with all the facts in hand"*** and ***"making the right decision, not the quick decision … ."*** *Scientists can extrapolate all kinds of things from today's data, but that doesn't tell us anything about tomorrow's world.* (Luntz 2002, n.p.; cited in Dossey 2014, p. 334; all capital letters, italics and bold in the original)

In this memo, Luntz offers a lesson in the dark art of agnotology. First, he implies that the battle may be lost—'the scientific debate is closing'—but then adds that it 'is not yet closed', saying that this is all the more reason for climate change deniers not to give up. The insistence on the lack of scientific certainty, as we observed above in our discussion of Proctor's work, is a key element here, as is the appeal to common sense and the perils of rushing to judgement. Luntz even employs folk logic when he questions how scientists can know what will happen in the future. Finally, as a kind of an icing on the cake, he inserts the phrase 'we deserve more answers', thereby adopting the language of conspiracy theorists—the conspiracy here being that powerful and influential scientists, acting on behalf of 'liberal' interests, have invented climate change to attack the oil industry and other emblematic representatives of American capitalism. In terms of intertextuality and interdiscursivity, the text sits comfortably among many others produced on a day-to-day basis by the right-wing power structures in the United States.

Luntz wrote his memo over a decade and a half ago, and recent events have revealed how dogged determination and the material means to sustain agnotological campaigns over a long period of time can pay off.

Thus, on 28 March 2017, Trump signed an executive order pulling the United States out of the 2015 Paris agreement on climate change. He also revoked the Clean Power Act, which was an attempt to accelerate the move from coal to wind power in the United States. In taking these actions, he nullified two flagship environmental policies from the Obama era, perhaps satisfying his apparent desire to dismantle as much of the Obama legacy as possible during his presidency. However, in signing this executive order, Trump, was also fulfilling one of his many presidential campaigns promises. Indeed, was it really a surprise that he did what he did, given that for some time he had been making public declarations questioning the existence of climate change and reality of global warming? The following statement, taken from a campaign speech he made in Hilton Head, South Carolina on 31 December 2015, is typical, both in terms of content and stylistic flair.

> I want to use hair spray/they say/*don't use hair spray/it's bad for the ozone*/so I'm sitting in this concealed apartment/this concealed unit/ you know I really do live in a really nice apartment (.5) {laughter}/but it's sealed/it's beautiful/I don't think anything gets out/. (Trump 2015)

In this statement, we see Trump making light of global warming by using the day-to-day example of applying hairspray in one's home. There is an element of interdiscursivity at work here as Trump references information about himself that the audience would be familiar with through his high-profile media presence over two decades. Thus, the hairspray example is not accidental or casual as Trump's wispy barnet is one of his trademarks. In addition, he can elicit laughter about how rich he is, as he tells the audience that his apartment in New York is 'really nice' and 'beautiful'. But these niceties aside, the key element in this short excerpt is the way that Trump attacks the notion of global warming.

Like all AGW deniers, Trump has on occasion resorted to the strategies employed by Shani and Arad and many others, making reference to conflicting research findings and the supposed lack of consensus among scientists to support his opposition. He has famously referred to global working as a 'hoax' perpetuated by AGW scientists, although he has never really been able to explain why so many scientists would fabricate and participate in said hoax. Unless, of course, it is because they are Chinese agents, given that he is also on record as having claimed that global warming is a Chinese invention meant to damage American

industry. However, more typical of Trump's approach is what we observe in this excerpt—an appeal to folk theories and common sense as an alternative to what the AGW experts would say.

In cognitive science, there is a long-standing interest in what are known as 'folk theories' or 'folk models', understood as 'statement[s] of the common-sense understandings that people use in ordinary life … [which] contrast […] with various "specialised" and "scientific" models of the mind"' (D'Andrade 1987, p. 113). Folk theories can be about a range of phenomena that individuals experience in the world that surrounds them, from the behaviour of footballers in Champion's league matches to the causes of street crime, to how a home heating system works. Trump has a folk theory regarding the falsity of the AGW, and it looks as follows:

1. Everyone knows that the ozone is up in the sky, very far way.
2. And everyone knows that an apartment with doors and windows closed constitutes a 'sealed unit' (not 'concealed' as Trump says twice before correcting himself).
3. Thus, given the distance of the ozone from where we are on the earth's surface, and given the common-sense fact that a sealed unit lets nothing out, how on earth can the application of hairspray cause global warming?

In rhetorical terms, this is a brilliant manoeuvre by Trump, and his argument no doubt is far more comprehensible to his audience than what a scientist would come up with to make the counterclaim. A question remains, however, regarding what sense we are to make of Trump and his pronouncements. On the one hand, we might think that this is a concerted effort by Trump to deceive, manufacture and manipulate understandings of how the environment works using an alternative to scientific arguments, plain old common sense and down-home folk theories of how the world works. On the other hand, we need to be wary of how it is an entirely possible that Trump actually believes what he says to be true, in which case he is simply expressing his view of the world. In the former case, we are in the realm of Machiavelli; in the latter, we face something akin to what would appear to be an incomplete understating of climate science.

In a similar vein, Mariano Rajoy, Spanish Prime Minister from January 2012 to June 2018, revealed his views on climate change in October 2007, when he was leader of the opposition in the Spanish parliament, as follows:

English translation	*Original in Spanish*
I'm going to talk about my cousin {laughter} (.5) eeehhh who is professor of physics in the Universidad of Sevilla/and so when asked about this matter/he said/ l*isten/I brought here/ten of the most important scientists in the world* (1) *and none of them* (.5) *could guarantee me* (.5) *what the weather would be tomorrow in Sevilla* (.5) *How can someone say what will happen in the world in 300 years?* {shrugging} (2) I don't know/I mean/I don't know/but it's a matter that we need to watch (.5) but in the end {opening both hands outwards} /we can't make it (.5) {extending his right out outward and then dropping it for emphasis} the greatest problem in the world/ (Rajoy 2007)	Voy a hablar de un primo mío {laughter} (.5) eeehhh que es catedrático de física en la Universidad de Sevilla/y entonces preguntado sobre este asunto dijo/oiga/he traído aquí (.5) a diez de los más importantes científicos del mundo (1) *y ninguno* (.5) *me ha garantizado* (.5) el tiempo que iba a hacer mañana en Sevilla (.5) cómo alguien puede decir lo que va a pasar en el mundo dentro de 300 años? {shrugging} (2) no lo sé/es decir/no lo sé/pero es un asunto al que hay que estar muy atentos (.5) pero en fin {opening both hands outwards}/tampoco lo podemos convertir (.5) {exentending his right out outward and then dropping it for emphasis} en el gran problema mundial/

In this case, Rajoy does not ignore experts in climatology as Trump apparently does; rather, he embraces such expert opinion as a warrant and tells a story of how it serves to support the same argument. While it is doubtful that his cousin ever actually managed to unite at the same time and in the same place 'the ten most important scientists in the world', we understand that here Rajoy is using a kind of shorthand for 'those experts'. Unlike Trump, Rajoy admits his own ignorance with regard to climatology, adopting the different strategy of enlisting the support of scientists as a warrant for his particular folksy view of climate change, which is similar to Trump's: it does not exist. And it is his cousin, and not Rajoy, who 'would know' and who backs him up. He even uses a rhetorical trick found in the Luntz memo discussed above, putting in the mouth of his cousin the challenging question: 'How can someone [in this case, a scientist] say what will happen in the world in 300 years?'

Although Rajoy enlists the support of scientists, he does so in such a way as ultimately to question their usefulness. One reading of his comments is that scientists are so ineffectual that they cannot even predict tomorrow's weather. Magnifying matters somewhat, what we see here, and indeed in the previous comments made about climate change, is a kind of anti-expertism, as part of a broader anti-intellectualism, which is becoming ever more pervasive in contemporary societies. This, because people have access to all kinds of alternate sources of information, much of which falls well outside the realm of academic scrutiny and is propagated as what Baggini might see as esoteric or creative truth.

Anti-expertism and Anti-intellectualism

The mention of anti-expertism above brings me to a third and final key issue arising in the Shani and Arad/Hall et al. exchange introduced above, namely how those aligned with the agnotological activities of think tanks and millionaires adopt a combination of victimism and human rights discourses when faced with academically informed opposition. Thus, just as those who make racist comments in public often claim, counter-factually, that they cannot say what they want in public because of 'political correctness', so AGW deniers such as Shani and Arad (2015) claim that they are subject to censorship. Falling back on their self-positioning as rebels and outliers, to say nothing of victims of 'climate McCarthyism', they begin a reply to Hall et al. as follows:

> More than an academic rejoinder, Hall et al's response gives the impression of a resolute protest petition (symbolically signed by 51 scholars) aimed at both Tourism Management and the present dissenting authors for having the audacity to produce such a "deviant" paper, which sheds light on inconvenient (as far as the mainstream environmental movement goes) scientific evidence. The rhetoric style used by Hall el al. to undermine the arguments presented in our paper is well known to those who are familiar with the intense scientific debate on climate change. Climate change alarmists have never hesitated to ridicule and bully environmental skeptics, using ad hominem arguments, for example when labeling them as "deniers" (a designation invoking "holocaust deniers") or "right-wing extremists," dealing with "voodoo science." These styles and language are indicative of an academic witchhunt, rather than factual and productive scientific discourse. (Shani and Arad 2015, p. 348)

Here, Shani and Arad position themselves as victims, adopting in this way the *topos of victimhood*. Using a basic form of irony, they reference themselves as the authors of a 'deviant' paper, and then position Hall et al. as their victimisers, representing the academic establishment of 'climate change alarmists'. In doing so, Shani and Arad situate the more immediate debate in which they find themselves in broader, public narratives regarding bullying and social exclusion. The problem for them in adopting this position is that their original article was published and that they have, in addition, been given the right to reply to a critique of it. In addition, their expressed grievance about being called names is somewhat undermined when they mock Hall et al.'s article, calling it a 'protest petition', and then accuse the authors of participating in a 'witch hunt', calling them 'zealous climate evangelizers' (Shani and Arad 2015, p. 350). They also open their reply with a quote from Ralph Waldo Emerson—'A foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds, adored by little statesmen and philosophers and divines'—presumably as a statement about the lack of intellectual integrity in the line of argument that Hall et al. adopt.

One key element in Shani and Arad/Hall et al. exchange is the question of relative expertise, both in academia and in society at large. And this brings me to one of the most commented-upon aspects of the Brexit campaign in the UK in the run-up to the EU referendum held on June 23, 2016, namely the way that the Remain campaign's 'fact-based' campaign was treated. In an interview televised in the UK on May 23, 2016, one of the leaders of the Brexit campaign, Michael Gove was asked about the numerous specialised agencies and organisations (including academic institutions) which were at the time warning about the potential and probable negative effects of an exit from the EU. Gove famously replied that 'people in this country [the UK] have had enough of experts … from organizations with acronyms saying they know what is best and getting it consistently wrong'. The disdain for expert opinion expressed by Gove, and backed by most of the Brexit campaigners, was especially disturbing given the fact that Gove had been Secretary of State for Education in the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition government from 2010 to 2014.

However, Brexit campaigners were not introducing a new strategy in British politics, nor in European politics for that matter. For example, an earlier episode in anti-intellectualism comes from Angela Merkel, who became Chancellor of Germany in 2005, and has, in the

view of some, acted as virtual president of the EU for nearly 15 years. In December 2008, she used her keynote address at the Christian Democratic Union party convention to offer her view on the causes of the worldwide depression that had begun in United States in 2007 and then quickly moved to other parts of the global economy. Proffering the often-used (though empirically unsubstantiated) claim that the crisis was caused by excessive government spending in many parts of the world (see my comments on this above), she spoke in glowing terms of the 'Swabian housewife, … in Stuttgart, in Baden-Wuürttemberg … [who] would have provided us with a short, simple, and entirely correct piece of life-wisdom: that we cannot live beyond our means'. Then, in full anti-expert mode, she added that 'we have too often put our trust in experts that were not really experts' before concluding that '[w]hen we come together now to think about how one should answer these new global questions, we should put less faith in self-proclaimed experts, and instead follow one principle: the principle of common sense!' (Farrell and Quiggin 2011, p. 29).

Importantly, in taking their respective anti-expert tacks, Gove and Merkel seem to be tapping into a deeper anti-intellectualism which exists today in different ways in different cultures around the world and has done so for some time. Indeed, as David Castillo and William Egginton (2017, p. 62) remind us, as long ago as 1615, Cervantes warned his readers about the dangers of denigrating intellectualism and glorying ignorance in his short story 'The election of the mayors of Daganzo' (*La elección de los alcaldes de Daganzo*). In this story, the citizens of the village of Daganzo are gathered together to decide who is to be mayor of the town. In the course of the meeting, each candidate is asked to explain why he thinks he is qualified for the post. One of the candidates, Humillos, handles his question—and—answer session as follows:

> *Bachiller*: Do you know how to read, Humillos?
> *Humillos*: Not at all, and no one will be able to prove that anyone in my ancestry ever possessed such little judgment as to apply themselves to learning those chimeras that drive men to the stake and women to the whorehouse. I don't know how to read, but I know other things that have many advantages over reading.
> *Bachiller*: And what are they?
> *Humillos*: I have committed to memory all four prayers, and I pray four or five times per week.

> *Rana*: And with that you intend to be mayor?
> *Humillos*: With this and my old Christian stock I daresay I could be a Roman senator. (Cervantes [1615] 1982, n.p.; author's translation.)

Humillos clearly situates reading as unnecessary, and perhaps even as something to be ashamed of ('no one will be able to prove that anyone in my ancestry …') when one has religious beliefs (a loyalty to Baggini's eternal truth) and memory. Therefore, able to recall and recite his prayers, but knowing nothing that one can learn from books or other written texts, he is as qualified for the post of mayor, as he would be qualified to be a Roman senator! The matter could not be clearer.

Writing in the mid-twentieth century, and in a very different context, Richard Hofstadter (1962) took a very similar stance with regard to intellectual–ignorance tensions. Hofstadter somewhat daringly suggested that the development of the United States as a 'land of opportunity' in which individuals could shape their lives in ways which Europeans of the time could not, led to a hyper-valorisation of practical knowledge and the ability to get things done (a simple form of pragmatics) and a concomitant suspicion of those who used their minds too much. Fundamental to Hofstadter's thesis was a distinction between 'intelligence' and 'intellect'. While the former was said to be 'an excellence of the mind employed within a fairly narrow, immediate, and practical range' and was 'a manipulative, adjustive, unfailingly practical quality', the latter was framed as 'the critical, creative, and contemplative side of the mind' that 'looks for the meanings of situations' (Hofstadter 1962, p. 25). According to Hofstadter, in the early nineteenth century, as the United States became consolidated as a republic, presidential candidates such as Andrew Jackson felt the need to emphasise their intelligence as self-made, can-do frontiersmen with practical common sense and business acumen, in contrast to the class of men who had dominated the political sphere up to that time: well educated, cosmopolitan and ultimately elitist individuals such as Thomas Jefferson and John Quincy Adams. Taken to an extreme, arguments favouring the likes of Jackson over Adams (and this was the choice made by the majority of American voters in the 1828 election) might easily lead to the belief that 'anyone who had anything of the professor about him made an inferior leader … and that political leaders should be sought from among those whom in this respect resembled the untutored citizen' (Hofstadter 1962, p. 155). How chillingly resonant this notion seems today when one considers

how the winners of elections held in the United States in the twenty-first century—George W. Bush, Barak Obama and Donald Trump—have all played their part in keeping it alive, albeit in very different ways. Thus, while Bush always projected the image of the under-read simpleton, Obama, a master of elaborate speech, seemed to dumb-down his speaking style as he settled into his presidency, leaving behind the Harvard legal scholar that he was before his entry into politics. Meanwhile, Trump comes across as an exaggerated version of everyman (every angry white American man, that is), as he flaunts his ignorance while displaying stereotypical American bluster.[4]

But to return to the topic at hand, it was in the early nineteenth century that debates in the United States over the intellectual preparation of political leaders spilled over into education and we see the beginnings of disputes over education as practically and instrumentally oriented versus education for the development of the intellect. Such discussions have never gone away in the United States and indeed they are alive and well today in that country, as well as other countries around the world (the commonly voiced concern over whether or not universities are providing rightly-qualified workers for the economy). And inevitably they end up being, in part, about the role of experts in society: while few would doubt that some are necessary to keep the hospitals operating, to maintain infrastructures and public transport intact, and to develop ever-more sophisticated technologies, experts also regularly serve as easy foils and objects of ridicule in popular culture in the form of the know-it-all, usually abusive, university professor (a long-time staple in Hollywood films), and the socially maladjusted nerd, to be found in just about all television series developed over the past 20 years. Gove was no doubt trying to connect with this strand of thought in British society when he ridiculed the 'experts from organizations with acronyms' making the case against Brexit.

Such anti-intellectualism is not in evidence to such an extent or in such an obvious way in Shani and Arad's argumentation with regard to climate change (although it is, quite clearly, in Trump's). However, the authors do seem vexed at being criticised by a long list of scholars, who do so as partial or full specialists in matters related to climatology, and one of their chief arguments seems to be that those studying tourism management should not waste time thinking about how tourism impacts on the physical and atmospheric environments which act as its host.

They conclude their reply to Hall et al. by calling for tourism management academics and professionals to keep things simple, concentrating on what is important (the money generated by tourism), and to leave arcane ecological interests for another day (or for *anoraks* so inclined!):

> … even if climate change is perceived to be the greatest challenge of our time, the best course of strategy the tourism industry should adapt (based on the available data) is to continue acting as an important engine for worldwide economic development. The AGW policies advocated by tourism scholars will do little to reduce warming, but instead inflict enormous costs and serious pitfalls, preventing the tourism industry from fulfilling its full economic potential. History provides us ample evidence that "wealthier is healthier," since as societies become more affluent their capacity to adapt to changing environmental conditions is significantly improved. Consequently, effectively preparing our students for managerial positions in the tourism industry and focusing our research on the commercial aspects of tourism are probably the tourism academy's functions with the most sustainable outcomes, despite the fact that they might perceived as being less sexy than "saving the earth." (Shani and Arad 2015, p. 350)

Remarkably, the authors admit here that climate change may well be real, before suggesting that even if it is, there is nothing that tourism scholars can do about it. They then align themselves with common-sensical motto—'wealthier is healthier'—submitting the somewhat spurious argument that a wealthier society will be in a better position to repair damage to the environment. They come full circle with the insertion of 'consequently' followed by the idea that the best policy is no policy, that is, the best thing to do is to do nothing. Presenting this option as 'less sexy' connects back to the common-sense argument of keeping things simple. All in all, this statement may be seen as twisted case of logic. However, it might also be seen as anti-expert, and even anti-intellectual, or, indeed, as a relativisation of the truth that Hall et al. believe in. Or perhaps it is an example of bullshitting within academia, in that the authors 'do[…] not reject the authority of the truth … and oppose …. it'; rather, they 'pay[…] no attention to it at all' (Frankfurt 1986, p. 18).

In any case, there are several additional points to make about this exchange. First, it shows us that areas of research such as climate change are debated not only within the confines of environmental sciences such as climatology, but also in the study of any activity mediated by the environment, such as tourism. Second, the exchange is further evidence that

scientific research, and particularly what counts as the right research at any given time, is shaped by political, economic and social forces (see Baggini's holistic truths above). This argument often comes as a surprise to those who do not frequent academic environments, but it is certainly very well known to those who work inside such environments. Finally, as we see in the articles by Shani and Arad and Hall et al., there is a degree of emotion that mediates such debates, and it is to emotion that I now turn.

Emotions in Discussions of Post-Truth

One key element in the OED definition of post-truth cited at the beginning of this book is emotion: in the post-truth era, 'objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief'. Emotions may be understood as complex feelings resulting in physiological and cognitive changes which influence thought and behaviour. The study of emotions has evolved considerably over time since scholars first turned their attention to the topic in the nineteenth century (Mandler 1984). A key question at that time was if emotions were acquired via experience and then found expression in response to a particular stimulus (Darwin [1872] 1965). Or, was it the case, as William James suggested, 'that *the bodily changes follow directly the* PERCEPTION *of the exciting fact, and that our feeling of the same changes as they occur* IS *the emotion*' (James 1884, pp. 189–190; italics and capital letters in the original)? In both cases, emotions are about a physiological response, based on elements in the subject's neurobiology.

In behaviourism, which in the early to mid-twentieth century became the dominant strand in psychology (particularly in the United States), emotions were situated in stimulus–response model which ruled out complexity and above all cognition. This behaviourist paradigm was eventually surpassed by the cognitive paradigm (Baars 1986; Mandler 1987), which did take mental complexity into account. More recently, José Muñoz (2017) observes that over the past two decades, researchers interested in emotion have followed various versions of Robert Damasio´s Somatic Marker Hypothesis (SMH) (Damasio 1994). In his renowned book *Descartes Error*, Damasio argues that somatic markers, which can be about both negative and positive feelings (e.g. shame and enthusiasm, respectively), are '*connected, by learning, to predicted*

future outcomes of certain scenarios' (Damasio 1994, p. 174; italics in the original) as they guide decision-making and behaviour. This is part of Damasio's more general view of the brain as embodied, which among other things means that we cannot see cognition as exclusively a technical process of information processing; rather, it is intertwined with ongoing physiological activity (anything from an increased heart rate to movement of the facial muscles to form a particular expression), which is linked to the accumulation of past experience distilled into both memory (episodic and semantic) and a mosaic of emotions. From this perspective, issues such as the relative rationality or irrationality of decision-making come under scrutiny. How can we explain that Donald Trump was able to garner so many votes from professional women in the last elections, when this demographic should have been put off by his numerous exhibitions of misogyny over the years?

To make his point about the benefits of seeing decisions about the world of politics from an SMH perspective, Muñoz proposes a thought exercise, which looks as follows:

> Consider the following example. Suppose that an individual *x* is a citizen of democratic country *A*. Since her childhood, *x* has been educated in the values of compassion and empathy toward the suffering of others, which conforms to a well-established moral norm in *A*. Now imagine that, for decades, the presence or abundance of citizens from country *B* has been (voluntarily or involuntarily) associated with images of misery and violence in a great part of *A*'s mass media. Due to this, and after having watched dozens of productions with these characteristics, *x* has learned to respond to the scenario "presence/abundance of *B*-citizens" with a feeling of fear and an attitude of rejection. A negative somatic marker is thus formed. This alarm signal remains latent most of the time. However, suppose that at the right time a citizen *y* who aspires to govern *A* through the support of *x* publicly proposes measures to avoid the supposed horrible consequences associated with the scenario "presence/abundance of *B*-citizens." In this way *y* is able to reactivate and strengthen the somatic marker "fear and rejection" in *x*. This *argumentum ad passiones* could persuade *x* to vote for *y*.
>
> But let's go a little further. Citizen *x* might also think that avoiding the scenario mentioned will cause suffering to *B*-citizens. And let us remember that *x* has the deeply rooted values of compassion and empathy toward others' suffering. Based on these moral values, *x* might intend not to vote for *y*. As a result, *x* suffers great mental tension because of the strong cognitive dissonance resulting from the coexistence of two completely

> opposite intentions: to vote for *y* and not to vote for *y*. As is well known, a strong cognitive dissonance strongly motivates people to try to reduce this psychological tension (Festinger, 1957). At this point, *x* might be enormously receptive to accepting arguments from *y* in favor of avoiding the scenario "presence/abundance of *B*-citizens," even if the facts on which those arguments are based are false. Thus, *x* would end up making a decision coherent (i.e., consonant) with her "fear and rejection" somatic marker: to vote for *y* to govern *A*. (Muñoz 2017, pp. 2–3)

Muñoz's example might be read in many different ways, and analogous scenarios are not hard to imagine. One thing I like about it is how it allows for ambivalence and nuanced thinking: Citizen *x* might end up being influenced by the first part of her education—the compassion and empathy she feels towards the suffering of others—or she might be swayed by the second part—the idea that the presence or abundance of citizens from country *B* is the cause of misery and violence in society. But more than likely, she will spend some time entertaining a range of situations deemed to be problematic and an even wider range of alternatives for dealing with them. Human beings are complex, which is often forgotten, especially when discussion and debate become polarised and people are pushed to take either one side or the other in a dispute. And even when individuals act in an overtly sectarian way, which might even be considered extremist, they often have inner doubts about their public behaviour. This makes it difficult not only to judge people based on the things they do and communicate, but also *who* they actually are in the aftermath of having done and communicated them.

As noted above, those who invoke post-truth as the key descriptor of contemporary life see it as the priming of emotion *over* reason and logic, where the latter are presumably based on a respect for 'objective facts'. Perhaps it would be better to say that these and other 'cognitive' elements do not exist as the sole determinants of key processes such as conceptualisation and meaning making; rather all 'cognitive' elements and processes are embodied, that is, they are embedded in our sensual, physical contact with a wide range of elements in our lived environments, as Mark Johnson (1987) and George Lakoff (1987) explained long ago. This means that when we talk about the kinds of decisions that people make, for example voting for Trump or for Brexit, it is unwise to write off such actions as having one single cause, that is, as the result of people being led solely by their emotions. Rather, these votes may be seen as

people following a particular line of reason and logic, where these will always be embodied and therefore mediated by emotions at some point. The 'objective facts' assumed to be ignored by voters in the two cases cited are perhaps not important, or in any case it was not ignorance of them that swayed voting. There is ample evidence to suggest that many Brexit voters had made up their minds about the direction of their vote long before they came into contact with false promises about National Health Service funding or sending Eastern Europeans back where they came from. Similarly, Trump's victory was arguably due more to political party tribalism—that is, Republican Party voters who self-identify as such and therefore will *always* vote for the Republican Party candidate—than it was to Trump's powers of persuasion through his construction of a parallel universe of alternative facts. Nevertheless, there is some element of truth in the arguments made about manipulation of public opinion through uses of the social media.

The *Bubble Effect* and Other Matters Related to the Social Media

As Castillo and Egginton (2017) note, a new kind of division has arisen in recent years, one which has serious consequences for how the spread of ideas and information begins, evolves and ends up and how we produce, communicate and record ideas. I refer here to the increasing trend towards a certain ideational and ideological balkanisation in countries ranging from the United States to Spain, which is driven by the segmented access to the media by individuals who then come to form groups with common world-views and day-to-day political activity. For example, in the United States, divisions are not so much about political economy (in a strict sense) as they are about multicultural politics—the vast majority of Americans are convinced capitalists, although they may differ considerably when it comes to their views on race, gender, sexuality and religion in American society. Views on such issues are kept alive and shaped by many forces, but one which has become very important is the source of one's news. Sourcing exclusively Fox News or MSNBC, or particular social media, means that the ongoing conversation about social issues is always with like-minded friends, family and acquaintances. Individuals live their lives in what is commonly known in journalism circles as the 'echo chamber'.

The 2016 Brexit and US presidential campaigns and results, deemed unexpected by most observers, provide further food for thought about

the segmentation of populations into thought collectives. Indeed, these events have thrown the spotlight on how the social media, which initially seemed anodyne given their capacity to provide spaces which are simultaneously ludic, emotive and personal, are now beginning to be seen as sites for the manipulation of information, the manufacture of compartmentalised consent and the propagation of ignorance. Thus, we see how Facebook has lost its status as simply a way for people to *connect*, to share information about themselves and establish and maintain family, friendship and other personal links. It is now under scrutiny as being one of the key reasons why—or perhaps better said, a way through which—the Trump campaign convinced enough people to vote for their candidate in the 2016 election.

In 2011, Eli Pariser published the best-selling book. *The Bubble Effect*, in which he deftly outlined and explained how the new social media, such as Facebook, create the 'filter bubble effect', that is, the confinement of users in spaces in which they are only exposed to information that suits their already-established belief systems and puts them in contact with people who are like-minded. All of this is achieved through the algorithms used on social media sites. These algorithms register clicks (likes, dislikes, information searched for, products searched for, products purchased and so on) and then through the compiled click history, collected over time, they narrow more and more what one will see first when one googles a term or when one begins shopping online. For activities such as shopping, or searching for the latest gossip about a footballer or a pop star, this process may be seen as efficient and even desirable. However, when it comes to the what and how of access to news and information, these algorithms are not always appreciated. Robert Dale explains matters as follows:

> [N]ews delivery via social media is insidious. It has been widely observed that the algorithms used by social media sites show you the news they think you want to see, creating echo chambers where your beliefs are reinforced rather than being challenged. And into this world comes the phenomenon of fake news, where the truth of a story doesn't matter. What matters is whether you click on the headline to find out more, since that leads to advertising revenue for the fake news site that hosts the story. And of course, social media makes it easy to share the story with like-minded individuals, with the result that outrageous claims can, and do, spread like wildfire. (Dale 2017, pp. 320–321)

And yet, as Dale and many others have noted, an increasing number of Americans use the social media as their primary source of information about day-to-day events in the world, a trend, it should be noted, that is in evidence worldwide. The established political classes of many countries were initially minded to combat such media as they allowed for all manner of positional chatter to take place 24 hours a day. However, the communication specialists contracted by leaders such as Recep Erdoğan in Turkey, Vladimir Putin in Russia and, of course, Donald Trump in the United States, are now regular users of the social media, manipulating them to provide 'alternative facts', spread malicious gossip about opponents that is more often than not grounded in very little tangible evidence and foster the outright propagation of ignorance. All of this information is produced and disseminated intensively and extensively, immediately and repeatedly. What a difference a century makes, as we see from the opening paragraph of Walter Lippmann's *Public Opinion*, first published in 1922:

> There is an island in the ocean where in 1914 a few Englishmen, Frenchmen, and Germans lived. No cable reaches that island, and the British mail steamer comes but once in sixty days. In September it had not yet come, and the islanders were still talking about the latest newspaper which told about the approaching trial of Madame Caillaux for the shooting of Gaston Calmette. It was, therefore, with more than usual eagerness that the whole colony assembled at the quay on a day in mid-September to hear from the captain what the verdict had been. They learned that for over six weeks now those of them who were English and those of them who were French had been fighting on behalf of the sanctity of treaties against those of them who were Germans. For six strange weeks they had acted as if they were friends, when in fact they were enemies. (Lippman [1922] 1997, p. 3)

In an age of immediacy and acceleration (Rosa and Trejo-Mathys 2015), waiting weeks for news seems bizarre. But is it as bizarre as some of the things we find online and take for granted?

Googling 'most followers on Twitter' at the end of May 2018, I arrive at the site 'Twitter Counter' (https://twittercounter.com/pages/100) and a list of people and entities with the most followers. Concentrating on the top 20, I see that websites occupy three places: YouTube at 9, Twitter at 11 and CNN Breaking News at 17. But of course, more interesting are the celebrities occupying the remaining 16 positions.

On this occasion, the American singer Katy Perry was top of the list with over 110 million followers, more than enough to win an election in most countries in the world. She is followed by a list of fellow singers, all but two of whom are American (Justin Bieber at 2, Rhianna at 4, Taylor Swift at 5, Lady Gaga at 6, Justin Timberlake at 10, Britney Spears at 13, Ariana Grande at 14, Demi Lovato at 15, Selena Gomez at 16 and Shakira at 19). The remaining spots are occupied by reality-show celebrity Kim Kardashian-West at 12; footballer Cristiano Ronaldo at 8; American comedians/talk-show hosts Ellen DeGeneres and Jimmy Fallon at 7 and 20, respectively; former US President Barak Obama at 3; and Donald Trump at 18 (having moved up from number 33 a year earlier). However, notwithstanding the extremely high ranking of Obama (number 3, with over 100 million followers), the important piece of information here is that the singers in the list have between 52 and 110 million followers (Shakira and Katy Perry, respectively).

In the spirit of this book, I, of course, must be wary of taking this information, accessed through one click on Google at face value. However, a quick perusal of similar sites reveals that it is in line with other similar efforts to quantify Twitter impacts. In any case, my point in mentioning Twitter and the number of people following Katy Perry's view of the world is to suggest that at least much of the time, it is celebrities and not specialists—academic or otherwise—who dominate conversations about any number of real-world issues on day-to-day and moment-to-moment basis. This is not necessarily a problem; however, it can become one, for example, if a well-known celebrity publicly denounces the universal inoculation of young children against diseases we now have the medical know-how to prevent. It is on such occasions that we perhaps wish that experts ruled the social media.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have taken the reader with me on something of an epistemological journey, which started with the notion of post-truth, but then evolved into a full-blown discussion of a host of related concepts. In this sense, post-truth, the usefulness of which I have questioned here, has served as something of a catalyst for the in-depth treatment of other concepts. I began with a discussion of the notion of truth, drawing on Baggini (2017) as a guide to ten types of truth: eternal, reasoned,

empirical, relative, authoritative, holistic, esoteric, powerful, creative and moral. I then considered deceitful practices, such as lying, humbug, bullshitting and misleadingness. This was followed by an examination of agnotology, or the study of the intentional and deliberate propagation of ignorance both in academia and in society at large. I have focused on a climate change debate taking place in a tourism management journal in 2014 and 2015 to bring to the fore key issues about how agnotology plays out in real-world contexts. I have also examined anti-expertism/intellectualism, arguing that while it has surely always existed in societies where a minimal degree of literacy exists; it is perhaps a more pervasive phenomenon today than in the past. Finally, I have dealt with the role of emotion in cognition before concluding with a consideration of Pariser's (2011) notion of the filter bubble, which led me to a discussion of the social media in general and the power of Twitter.

Ultimately, this chapter may be seen as free-standing, as one authors' personal reflection on notions and ideas related to post-truth. However, I see it more as background for the next chapter, where in my examination of political discourse and communication in contemporary Spain, the notions and ideas considered in this chapter will return as mediators in my discussion.

Notes

1. I am grateful to May Sabbagh for drawing my attention to this quote.
2. In this discussion of truth, I am all too aware that I am following Baggini's line of thinking very closely, leaving far too many other philosophers out of the discussion (Nietzsche, for example, surely deserves more attention). I have chosen to proceed in this fashion for questions of space, but also because I do not see this section as an attempt on my part to write philosophy; rather, my aim is simply to introduce what I think are some suggestive angles on the notion of truth, some of which I later return to in my analyses of texts. Upon reading this section, Giuliana Ferri (personal communication) expressed her concern that Baggini (or perhaps more accurately and fairly, Baggini as I have represented him) may be guilty of conflating truth and knowledge. She added that differences between empiricists and rationalists were perhaps more about knowledge and not truth. In this sense, truth may be seen to have become a major focus of attention from the early twentieth century onwards, Wittgenstein's correspondence theories and Foucault's regimes of truth, being too key examples of lines of thought. I accept this caveat, but my immediate (and admittedly limited) interest here is more on how research traditions such as empiricism

produce what people in society at large consider to be 'facts', and ultimately, 'the truth'.

3. As Will Simpson (personal communication) suggests, however, the dismissal of experts may be less about the intentions or even preferences of the general public and more about the collateral effects of the 'global information market'. It is, therefore, not so much that experts are now dismissed and their knowledge undervalued; rather, it is more a matter of their voices being buried under the layers and layers of information that people are exposed to every day.
4. There are, of course, connections between anti-intellectualism and populism of the type practised daily by Trump and an ever-increasing number of leaders around the world. However, space does not allow a thorough exploration of these links in this book. See Speed and Mannion (2017) for an exploration of the populism/post-truth connection in health policy and Fraune and Knodt (2018), who examine links to sustainable energy policies.

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CHAPTER 3

Political Discourses, Corrupt Discourses

Abstract This chapter begins with an extended discussion of key background concepts, such as the manufacture of consent, political communication and discourse, and the interrelated notions of corruption, discourses of corruption and corrupt discourses. It also provides a short history of the Spanish conservative party, the *Partido Popular*, which is the focus of analysis here. The chapter then moves to a lengthy discussion of political communications related to corruption scandals involving the *Partido Popular*. This discussion shows how discourses of corruption and corrupt discourses are constructed and how they serve, at the same time, to construct the *Partido Popular* as a particular type of political party. There is a specific focus on how party members avoid taking any responsibility for wrongdoing via the use of *topoi—victimism, history as teacher*, *equivalence* and *incommensurable alternatives*—and discursive strategies designed to shift the focus away from the party and onto other agents.

Keywords Post-truth politics · Manufacture of consent · Political communication/discourse · Corruption · Discourses of corruption Corrupt discourses · *Partido Popular* · The Gürtel case · *Topoi* Discursive strategies

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Introduction

Wag the Dog is a film directed by Barry Levinson, which was released in 1997. Starring Dustin Hoffman and Robert DeNiro, it tells the story of the fabrication of a fictional war in Albania, designed to distract public attention and opinion away from the president of the United Sates, who has been accused of sexually assaulting a girl scout in the White House just two weeks before an election. The title comes from the homonymous expression which refers to an attempt to divert attention away from an important event or circumstance to an event or circumstance of lesser importance (or even no importance), all with the intention of covering up all or part of the more important event or circumstance. The expression is based on an old saying along the lines of: 'a dog is smarter than its tail, for if the tail were smarter, it would wag the dog'. The film may be said to be very much of its time, given that it was released in the midst of President Bill Clinton's increasing problems arising from the Monica Lewinsky sexual harassment scandal. Or, it may be said to be very much of any time, given that history is full of examples of false stories being filtered by leaders and governments (e.g., Arendt 1972). Or, indeed, it may be said to be of the time in which we live of post-truth and other forms of deception. Whatever the case, the film is chockfull of witty and memorable lines relevant to any discussion of post-truth in the world of politics. The short excerpt that follows is an example:

> *Conrad Brean*: You watched the gulf war/what did you see day after day?/ the one smart bomb falling down a chimney/the truth (.5) I was in the building when we shot that shot/we shot it in a studio [in] Falls Church Virginia/one-tenth scale model of a building/
> *Stanley Motts*: is that true?/
> *Conrad Brean*: how the fuck do we know?/you take my point?/ (Wag the Dog 1997)

The participants in this exchange are the Hollywood producer Stanley Motts (played by Hoffman) and the president's spin doctor, Conrad Brean (played by DeNiro). Motts has been hired by Brean to put together footage of war scenes from Albania that can then be shown on television with the obvious intent of protecting the president from scrutiny for his actions. When the CIA gets wind of this plan to deceive the general public, they threaten to reveal all. This prompts Brean and Motts to raise the ante, inventing an American prisoner of war left behind,

a circumstance that leads to a grassroots campaign for his rescue, including t-shirts and a tear-jerking song. Matters escalate from this point up until the final denouement, which sees the president re-elected and Motts assassinated because he decides to go public with the real story after seeing how he has received no credit for having saved the president.

Wag the Dog is constructed around many well-worn themes in Hollywood portrayals of how members of the American political class operate. There is a conspiracy to cover up presidential wrongdoing by creating a distraction. All of this reveals a lack of moral fibre, both in the political class and in the entertainment business (Brean and Motts are two individuals with no scruples). However, the film works to a great extent because its message resonates with what a large proportion the American public (and indeed publics around the world) think about those who govern them. As Hannah Arendt (1972, p. 4) put matters, 'truthfulness has never been counted among the political virtues and lies have been regarded as justifiable tools in political dealings'.

In the context of this book, the interaction above serves as a convenient lead-in to the topic of this chapter—in general terms, political communication, and in more specific terms, political discourses, corruption and corrupt discourses. The kind of creative truth and propagation of ignorance that Brean is peddling is all too familiar to those of us living in twenty-first-century societies. And as I shall argue here, Spain stands out in Western Europe as a country where truth in the public realm has taken quite a beating over the past three decades. For it is in Spain where the right-wing *Partido Popular* (People's Party) has been providing master classes in the dark arts of esoteric and creative truths, lying, misleadingness, bullshit and the deliberate propagation of ignorance, all with extraordinary doses of cynicism and impudence. I realise that in making such a statement, and indeed in orienting this chapter in the way that I have, I open myself up to the accusation that I am being overly partisan and biased. In other words, I may be seen to have allowed my left-wing preferences with regard to politics and political parties to take precedence over reasoned discussion and acceptable academic discourse. However, I fully identify with the notion that CDS is 'discourse study with an *attitude*' (van Dijk 2015, p. 466), and in this chapter my aim is to convince the reader, via my analysis and discussion of selected *telling cases*, that the *Partido Popular* is indeed a particularly extreme example of a political party mired in mendacity and dishonesty.

The chapter is organised as follows. The first part of the chapter is devoted to background: I discuss, in order, the key constructs post-truth politics, the manufacture of consent, political communication and discourse, and the interrelated notions of corruption, discourses of corruption and corrupt discourses. I also provide a brief history of the *Partido Popular*, so as to situate the reader with regard to what is to be analysed in this chapter. From this background, I move to consider a selection of political communications relating to corruption scandals involving the *Partido Popular*. My aim is to show how discourses of corruption and corrupt discourses are constructed and how they serve, at the same time, to construct the *Partido Popular* as a particular type of political party.

Post-Truth Politics

If there is one area of human activity where there are the most disputes over what is true and what is not, it is in the world of politics. And it is in the world of politics that we see an abundance of esoteric truths (conspiracy theorising) and creative truths (the imaginative social construction of factual universes); lying (outside of malapropism or the use of metaphor, hyperbole or irony, saying something one knows or believes to be false); misleadingness (telling a truth but with the intention of creating a false interpretation); bullshit (intentional, deceptive misrepresentation, showing no interest in or regard for the notion of truth); and of course, the deliberate propagation of ignorance (the focus of agnotology). These behaviours, together or separately, come together to create what we might understand as 'post-truth politics'. The latter has been defined by Will Fish as follows:

> a form of politics where there is a willingness to issue warnings regardless of whether there is any real sense of the events being likely to come about, or make promises that there is no real commitment to keeping, or make claims that there is no real reason to believe are true, all for the purpose of gaining an electoral advantage – and, as the Brexit case and the Trump campaign both demonstrate, this has significant consequences for international as well as national politics'. (Fish 2017, p. 211)

In this definition, Fish mentions the Brexit referendum in the UK and Donald Trump's presidential election victory in the United States, both of which occurred in 2016, as examples of what a post-truth politics can

lead to. In doing so, he situates such politics in the present, thus aligning himself with a general perception among many in the media (and also in academia) at the time of writing, that what the Brexit and Trump campaigners did was somehow new. However, mendacity, coupled with a cynical intention to deceive, has for some time now formed part of politics as practised by politicians around the world, as Machiavelli argued so long ago in *The Prince*:

> How praiseworthy it is for a prince to keep his faith, and to live with honesty and not by astuteness …. Nonetheless one sees by experience in our times that the princes who have done great things are those who have taken little account of faith and have known how to get around men's brains with their astuteness; and in the end, they have overcome those who have founded themselves on loyalty. (Machiavelli [1532] 1985, pp. 68–69)

Here, we have the suggestion that honesty and loyalty, though noble traits, are not the most expeditious route to getting things done; astuteness, and the ability to deceive ('get around men's brains') are.

There is an additional problem I see in Fish's definition. When he states that post-truth is a form of politics deployed 'for the purpose of gaining an electoral advantage' (Fish 2017, p. 211), I think he is coming up short in cases like the Trump election, as there is far more to what is going on than merely gaining an advantage. Indeed, Trump's 'post-truth' looks a lot like Marx and Engels 101, in that 'a willingness to issue warnings regardless of whether there is any real sense of the events being likely to come about or make promises that there is no real commitment to keeping, or make claims that there is no real reason to believe are true' is serious business when it comes from the dominant power structures in society. Above all, what is going on runs much deeper, and I would argue that we are once again in the midst of ideology and how it shapes behaviour, perspectives and what counts as true. And just as Marx and Engels ([1846] 1998) wrote of the 'camera obscura' and the world upside down, so we see the Trump power grab as the further strengthening of elite positions in society and as part of the broader class struggle and warfare, which many are currently writing about (Duménil and Lévy 2011, 2018; Harvey 2014). The new element that Trump adds to this reality of capitalism is the addition of extreme forms of American jingoism and outright racism, wrapped in a defence of the 'traditional' working class in the United States. The world even more upside down.

Ultimately, however, Trump has proven to be too easy a target for those who feel that contemporary societies are by now dominated by esoteric and creative truths, lying, misleadingness, bullshit and the deliberate propagation of ignorance. This is evident in how comedians, not only in the United States, but in countries around the world, have been rubbing their hands with delight at the amount of workable material that the former real estate magnate and mega entrepreneur has served up on a day-to-day basis since he first declared himself a candidate for the presidency in 2015. One key issue focused on by comedians is how Trump and members of his administration seem to spend an inordinate amount of their time trying to offer alternative versions of what Trump has said, or, more typically, has written on his twitter account. Indeed, early on in Trump's political career, twitter emerged as his preferred site to engage in the practice of telling his truth, as, via this medium, he has shown himself to be nothing short of hyperactive. His extensive use of twitter means that followers and observers of Trump never lack evidence of his ignorance about global politics and his estranged relationship with argumentation based on rational thought, and of course, notions of truth and factuality.

Apart from the vacuity which usually accompanies Trump's tweets, there is an alarming combination of concealment of information, which is then replaced by new information. Worse still, there is concealment of information followed by the publication of a version of events that runs counter to the concealed information, but which is never backed up with the provision of supporting information. These are the infamous 'alternative facts'. One example is how in the early months of his presidency, Trump often spoke of the 'mess' that Obama had left, implying that by the last quarter of 2016, the United States economy had become something of a basket case in international terms. No one who has read anything I have written over the past ten years can imagine that I am a fan of the economic policy adopted by the United States in the face of the 2007/2008 economic crisis. Among other things, the application of more neoliberalism to cure the ills engendered by the neoliberalism of previous decades has served, among other things, to increase inequality in the United States. Nevertheless, from an EU perspective, where in zombie-like fashion, the European Bank has imposed austerity as the cure-all for the current depression, the United States was, by 2012, generally considered to be in an enviable position. Certainly, within the

confines of neoliberal rationality, so dominant in the upper echelons of power in the EU, the Obama administration can only be seen as successful in its efforts to pull the United States economy out of the depression.

Another example of unsubstantiated claims made by Trump was his public campaign against Obamacare, which he finally was able to repeal with much fanfare in May 2017, albeit without a national health regime of his own to implement in its place. Passed into law in 2010, Obamacare was, again and again, said to be a disaster, as Trump made reference to problems such as 'skyrocketing premiums & deductibles' and the 'bad healthcare' that it provided for the disenfranchised masses. Yet, he never actually provided much evidence for these rising costs to the consumer and surely it is counter-intuitive to imagine that whatever plan that Trump might devise will reduce the cost of health for working class and poor people. In addition, it is not clear what Trump actually meant when he referred to 'bad healthcare', given that before Obamacare, tens of millions of Americans simply had no health care at all, a state of affairs likely to reappear once Trump's alternative health plan comes into force.

More recently, Trump has become embroiled in a conflict with a growing number of African American players in the National Football League. Showing solidarity with movements such as Black Lives Matter and wishing to call attention to racism in the United States, these players refuse to stand when the national anthem is played before their matches. Standing during the national anthem, always played before sporting and other institutionalised events, is something of an unquestioned given in American society. It is inculcated into children as a reflex action from a very early age through formal schooling as well as more informal agents of education, such as family and friends. The following text, composed of two tweets sent in succession by Trump as the NFL entered its third weekend of the 2017–2018 season, is fairly representative of his part in the ongoing discussion of the whether such actions are justified, justifiable or even important:

> If a player wants the privilege of making millions of dollars in the NFL, or other leagues, he or she should not be allowed to disrespect … our Great American Flag (or Country) and should stand for the National Anthem. If not, YOU'RE FIRED. Find something else to do! (Trump, @realDonaldTrump, September 23, 2017: NB two consecutive tweets)

In these two tweets, Trump mixes several genres. There is a patriotic appeal to the 'Great American Flag' as a symbol of the presumably great American nation, which is not to be 'disrespected'. There is also an anti-elitist appeal—who are these players who 'disrespect' their country whilst making million-dollar salaries that the American way of life has afforded them? In addition, there is an intertextual turn, moving from the conceptual domain at hand to Trump's past as host of the American television programme *The Apprentice*, as he uses his key catchphrase 'YOU'RE FIRED'. Finally, there is the basic common sense of what he says after 'YOU'RE FIRED!?'—'find something else to do!', presumably besides playing professional football (which, it seems, automatically entails the duty to a stand for the national anthem). Running through the statements made in this tweet is a good dose of emotion, and even hysteria, two elements observable in Trump's press conferences and interviews. But above all, in Trump's tweets and speech, there is an alarming combination of hyperbole, seemingly oriented to incite, along with numerous statements of 'fact' without any support, that is, argument by affirmation.

I could go on about this and other examples of esoteric and creative truths, lying, misleadingness, bullshit and the deliberate propagation of ignorance in the world of Trump. As I stated above, from his presidential campaign onwards, he began to serve up material—highly contestable and propitious for parody—on a day-to-day (if not more frequent) basis. Indeed, by mid 2018, an unprecedented number of people in the world were following what the President of the United States was up to at all times, presumably with a view to accessing, first hand and immediately, the seemingly inexhaustible supply of commentary emanating from his telephone. However, as I stated previously, Trump does not mark the beginning of what many are today calling 'post-truth'. There is a far longer history to consider, to which I now turn.

The Manufacture of Consent

Herman and Chomsky's (1988) *Manufacturing Consent*, which I have already cited on two occasions in this book, is a groundbreaking description and analysis of how factors such as advertising, the drive for profits and an underlying consensus amongst elites (a state ideology serving the interests of capitalism) shape what gets reported as news and when, where, and for how long it gets reported. Self-described as a 'political

economy of the mass media', and focused on propaganda as a system of communicating particular messages to the masses while suppressing others, the book winds its way through a series of sometimes surreal and sometimes disturbing examples of the manipulation of information, and the elaboration of creative truths, at a time when the cold war was still the cold war and the American political-military establishment either had been or was still embroiled in political and military conflicts around the world. At the beginning of the book, Herman and Chomsky clarify one of their chief premises, contrasting distinct propaganda contexts:

> In countries where the levers of power are in the hands of a state bureaucracy, the monopolistic control over the media, often supplemented by official censorship, makes it clear that the media serve the ends of a dominant elite. It is much more difficult to see a propaganda system at work where the media are private and formal censorship is absent. This is especially true where the media actively compete, periodically attack and expose corporate and governmental malfeasance, and aggressively portray themselves as spokesmen for free speech and the general community interest. What is not evident (and remains undiscussed in the media) is the limited nature of such critiques, as well as the huge inequality in command of resources, and its effect both on access to a private media system and on its behavior and performance. (Herman and Chomsky 1988, p. 1)

Of interest here is the argument that private control over the media does not prevent it from being loyal to the state apparatuses of the United States. And it is equally interesting that Herman and Chomsky write about limits on free speech, which is allowed to critique the effects of power structures in the United States, such as individual corporations or individual politicians, as long as these attacks remain in the realm of weeding out bad apples and do not become full-scale critiques of American capitalism, which, arguably, generates the kinds of individual cases that are allowed to reach the public. Above all, there is a filtering process constantly at work, which marginalises news deemed dangerous to the interests of governing elites, while promoting news that ranges from anodyne to openly supportive of the status quo.

In addition, as Chomsky notes elsewhere in a television programme broadcast in 1982 (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xI-bfl7OQ0y4), there is what he calls the 'tyranny of concision', whereby people appearing in the mass media generally say things that are

mainstream and easily understood, and therefore do not require much time to say what they wish to say. It is when a speaker attempts to develop an idea or an argument that is new, or what is worse, critical, that trouble begins. More often than not, the speaker will be positioned as overly longwinded and will likely be cut off before he/she can get to the point of the intervention. Interestingly, the most used social media today, twitter, is one that has a low limit on the number of characters that one can use in a single message—280. Twitter is obviously not a site for engaging with new ideas or critique; in communication that is mainstream, short and simple take precedence over all else.[1]

By now, most countries in the world have private and state media, and what Hermann and Chomsky wrote three decades ago can be said to apply to these contexts in more or less the same way. Nevertheless, the traditional media are progressively less and less in control over what circulates as information and so we see an ever-greater number of cases of grassroots campaigns—often complete hoaxes—that are outside the control of the state apparatuses and the traditional media. Indeed, all it takes to set in motion such a succession of events is to send a tweet with a malicious, and even false, statement about an individual, or an organisation, or an establishment offering a service, or a medical procedure. Immediately, hundreds, thousands or even millions of twitter users will have accessed the story and many of these people will believe it.[2]

This type of mass delusion based on information that is manifestly false is not exclusive to societies today, or even the age which Hermann and Chomsky were writing about. The manufacture of consent, both from power and from the grassroots, is a constant in history. A good example is to be found in Brazil, which in the post-World War II period was host to the one of the biggest and most widespread cases of the manufacture of consent through fake news in history. I refer here to the supposed Japanese victory in the Second World War (Lesser 1999; Morais 2000; Hernández 2016). In 1945, as the war came to an end, a sect calling itself the Shindo Renmei (more or less, the Way of the Subjects of the Emperor's League) was formed with the general purpose of defending and protecting the cultur, language, religion and political economic interests of Japanese–Brazilians, and the more specific and immediate purpose of first establishing, and then mainlining alive, the collective belief amongst this population that the Japanese emperor and his military had won the Second World War. This scenario proved to be an esoteric truth of epic proportions. Using a combination

of fabricated news stories and photographs, assemblies, and eventually violence (Hernández 2016), the organisation managed to keep alive the belief among a large proportion of the Japanese–Brazilian population that Japan had, indeed, defeated the American and the Russian armies and won the Second World War. Any individual or entity rebutting this story was accused of dishonesty, deceit and collusion with any number of villainous enemies of the Japanese people: '"Western capitalists," "Communists," "Jews," "Chinese," or "nissei" (meaning Japanese – [US] American) …' (Lesser 1999, p. 145; brackets in the original). Remarkably, the organisation at one time claimed over 100,000 members (Hernández 2016; Lesser 1999), although, eventually, the theory of the war victory began to unravel. That things should have gone this far was due in no small part to the overt racism against the Japanese-Brazilians from the time they began to arrive in great numbers in the first decade of the twentieth century. Many Japanese migrants and their decedents lived in relative isolation from mainstream Brazilian society, in some cases not learning Portuguese. Ultimately, this kind of isolation made possible the propagation of ignorance with regard to the Second World War, with the consequent negative outcome.

Interestingly, today, such isolation and, in effect, the consequent living in a parallel world would not be possible in Brazil or indeed in many (if not most) parts of the world in the same way, not least because of marked improvements in both physical and electronic infrastructures. Indeed, as Castillo and Egginton (2017) remind us, today, we are saturated with information and contacts with others. Defining the times in which we live as 'the age of the inflationary media', the authors start with the obvious point that 'the media with which we produce, communicate and record ideas have multiplied in kind, speed, and power' (Castillo and Egginton 2017, p. 1). However, they add the more interesting argument that it is not this multilevel multiplication that accounts for their use of the term 'inflationary'; rather, it is the way that 'the scope of … [the multiplications] threatens the confines of … prior notions of reality' (ibid.). If reality, or some notion thereof, was once seen as a base which could be represented and even shaped by ever-more sophisticated technologies, we now experience the dominance of simulacra of copies that surpass what they originally replicated, taking on lives of their own. In this sense, Baudrillard (1996, p. 2) was prescient when he wrote that '[i]t is no longer a question of imitation, nor duplication, nor even parody. It is a question of substituting the signs of the real for the real …'.

In part, I read here the notion that while there are continual propulsions outwards of the kind of multiplications that Castillo and Egginton discuss, many alive today remain turned inwards, clinging to a past that never was exactly what it is today presented as, given that it was shaped at the purported time of its existence by the media of the time, and it is presently shaped by the media of today. Trump's vague promise to 'make America great again' appeals to those anchored in some version of the past, while using the technology of today to propagate any number of collateral messages which normally prove to be grounded in nothing that the same people (apparently) believing them would recognise as 'real'.

On the other hand, having access to so much information has not prevented eye-catching and captivating esoteric and creative truths from taking precedence over more mundane versions of events at key points in time. I never believed the Bush administration in 2002 when they claimed in a wide range of public fora that (1) Saddam Hussein was behind the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 and (2) Saddam Hussein possessed weapons of mass destruction that were aimed at the United States and could cause the annihilation of the country in a matter of seconds. There was an abundance of information available at the time debunking these two theories (Lewis and Reading-Smith [2008] 2014). And yet, they went forward, being supported by millions of Americans and the then-leaders of the UK and Spain, Tony Blair and José María Aznar. Given all of the information available at this time, it seems odd that anyone could actually believe these stories presented as truths, esoteric and creative though they were. However, stating one's incredulity at cases of massive self-deception, and wringing one's hands at the futility of life in a world where such things happen, do not move anyone towards an understanding of the mechanisms that allow such stories to be embraced, if not actually believed, by so many people. In order to move in the direction of doing this, we need to examine the nature of political communication and how it is constructed.

Political Communication and Discourse

If political post-truth and the manufacture of consent are to be successful, they must rely on key elements of what is known in CDS as political communication. In the introduction to their recently published edited volume *The Routledge Handbook of Language and Politics*, Ruth Wodak and Bernhardt Forchtner define what political communication

is by citing Armin Burkhardt: 'all types of public, institutional and private talks on political issues, that is, all types of texts and genres typical of politics and political action, as well as the use of lexical and stylistic linguistic instruments characterizing text and talk about political contexts' (Burkhardt 1996, p. 5; cited in Wodak and Forchtner 2018, p. 3). Wodak and Forchtner (2018, p. 3) go on to cite Burkhardt further, noting how he proposed four general areas that political communication and discourse analysis might focus on: (1) word-level analysis (catchwords, value words and euphemisms), (2) sentence and text-level phenomena (e.g., tropes, strategies, *topoi*), (3) pragmatic devices (e.g., forms of address, speech acts, presuppositions quotations and intertextuality) and (4) semiotic techniques (e.g., icons, symbols and the multimodality of communication events in general). In this chapter, I will be concerned with all four of these levels, although my main focus will be on (2), and (3) given my particular interest in *topoi* and intertextuality.

Elsewhere, Reisigl and Wodak (2016, p. 24) propose eight distinct fields of political action where political communication takes place and which critical discourse analysts might document and examine. These are: (1) law-making procedure; (2) formation of public attitudes, opinion and will; (3) party-internal formation of attitudes, opinions and will; (4) inter-party formation of attitudes, opinions, and will; (5) organisation of international/interstate relations; (6) political advertising; (7) political executive and administration; and (8) political control (Reisigl and Wodak 2016, p. 28). In this chapter, my concern will be primarily with field of action number (2) formation of public attitudes, opinion and will. According to Reisigl and Wodak, this field of action is, like the other seven, composed of a long list of political (sub)-genres, which they list as follows:

> press release, conference, interview, talk show, president speech, speech of an MP (especially if broadcasted), opening speech, commemorative speech, jubilee speech, radio or TV speech, chancellor speech (e.g., inaugural speech), minister speech, election speech, state of the union address, lecture and contribution to a conference, (press) article, book, etc. (Reisigl and Wodak 2016, p. 29)

In preparation for this chapter, I have examined a good number of exemplars falling into the categories of press releases, conferences, interviews, talk shows, leaders' speeches, and MPs' speeches, finding these

in the print, television and online media. My specific focus is on a relatively inchoate and emergent genre of political discourse that is related to political corruption. I am interested in how talk on or about corruption and in addition how the production of esoteric and creative truths, lying, misleadingness, bullshit and the deliberate propagation of ignorance often lead to the very corruption of language as communication. This I will show via a detailed examination of a selection of political acts discursively realised by the Spanish conservative party, the *Partido Popular*. Before moving to a discussion of this party (as background) and selected discursive examples (as data), however, I will discuss corruption along with related concepts—discourse of corruption and corrupt discourses.

Corruption, Discourses of Corruption, Corrupt Discourses

In his article 'The nature of political corruption', published over a century ago. Robert C. Brooks succinctly defined corruption as 'the intentional misperformance or neglect of a recognized duty, or the unwarranted exercise of power, with the motive of gaining some advantage more or less directly personal' (Brooks 1909, p. 4). He went on to make the point that those who study political corruption should note that the elements in this definition apply to walks of life outside of politics, and that, as a result, political corruption researchers would do well to examine the main phenomena,—corruption—in what he understood to be non-political domains of activity, such as business, the family, the church, educational contexts and clubs. This view is certainly anthropological in spirit, in that it proposes a more thorough understanding of the phenomenon, grounded in activities taking place in a range of socio-cultural contexts. Elsewhere, two anthropologists, Cris Shore and Dieter Haller (2005), would no doubt agree with what Brooks suggests, although their main concern is how researchers in the social sciences have tended to view corruption in purely structural terms. On the one hand, some researchers adhere to a kind of condescending and/or paternalistic view of the societies they study, adding corruption to 'the list of those negative characteristics that are typically applied to the 'Other', such as underdevelopment, poverty, ignorance, repression of women, fundamentalism, fanaticism and irrationality' (Shore and Haller 2005, p. 3).[3]

Meanwhile, other structure-oriented researchers are more focused on corruption as embedded in institutions and the rules of behaviour

in society. In this case, the goal of research is to analyse the institutions and formal rules of society as a system generating activity. Here there is an interest in 'how ruling elites are composed, what sorts of competition exist among them, and how accountable they are' (Shore and Haller 2005, p. 3). Neither of these approaches is satisfactory to the authors, who propose interactive approaches as the best way forward. They describe such an approach as follows:

> In contrast to structural approaches, 'interactional' approaches focus on the behaviour of actors in particular public-office settings. Here corruption is defined as behaviour that deviates from the formal duties of a public role in favour of private or personal gain. Alternatively, corrupt behaviour is that which 'harms the public-interest' (Friedrich 1966; Heidenheimer 1989a, 1989b). This might include a corrupt civil servant who uses his office as a private business (see Van Klaveren 1989), or who creates an informal 'black market' for official favours and 'rents', for example, by helping certain clients to cut through the 'red tape' of bureaucracy in order to obtain the necessary permit or licence. (Shore and Haller 2005, p. 4)

Elsewhere, Wolfgang Streeck sees political corruption as 'the gross violation of legal rules and systematic betrayal of trust and moral expectations in pursuit of competitive success and personal or institutional enrichment, as elicited by rapidly growing opportunities for huge material gain in and around today's political economy' (Streeck 2016, p. 30). As for the specific actions considered to be corrupt, these may be divided into two distinct categories, which in practice more often than not overlap. On the one hand, there are financial dealings such as bribes, kickbacks, embezzlement, insider trading and money laundering. On the other hand, there are social improprieties, such as giving or receiving illicit gifts, nepotism, cronyism, personal favours and informal promises. In both categories, following Streeck, laws are broken, trust is betrayed and actions may be considered immoral by general societal standards of ethics and decorum. Streeck situates his discussion of corruption in the neoliberal era in which we live, and there is little doubt that if capitalism may be said to be based on the original corruptions of exploitation and dispossession, neoliberalism stands out as an extremely open and unfettered variant of capitalism in which, worldwide, exploitation and dispossession have seemingly spiralled out of control. In Streeck's view, in the highly financialised economies of today, where there is a constant push towards

ever-greater capital accumulation, the alliances struck between bankers, fund managers, brokers and entrepreneurs, on the one hand, and politicians, civil servants, and members of the judiciary, the police and the military, on the other, are inevitable, as are the results of such alliances. And here I return to list of financial corruption practices listed above—bribes, kickbacks, embezzlement, insider trading and money laundering—all aided and abetted by social practices such as cronyism, nepotism and illegal gifts.

Nevertheless, it is not difficult to find news pundits or just average people (family and friends) who subscribe to the folk wisdom that corruption has always been with us as something akin to the original sin of politics and something endemic to human nature. Holding political office puts flesh and blood human beings in a position of control over legal, financial and social resources, along with constant contact with a wide range of people who want certain things to happen in particular ways. The combination is lethal, so the story goes. But the important question to ask is if corruption was far worse in the past, when there were far fewer accountability and control mechanisms in place (from legislation to a free press), or if it is worse today, when the above-mentioned resources are more varied and more abundant and the people wanting favours are far more sophisticated in their methods. Whatever the case, it would appear that there is great deal more articulation of views on corruption—as corruption and not just normal political practice—than there were in the past. There are even indexes ranking countries by how corrupt they are that can be found online. An example is the Corruption Perceptions Index (2017) available at https://www.transparency.org/news/feature/corruption_perceptions_index_2017.

This discussion of corruption in general terms, and political corruption more specifically, leads to the notion of discourses *about* and *of* corruption, that is communication in which the topic is corruption, along with what I have elsewhere termed 'corrupt discourses' (Block 2016, 2018). The latter term refers to the phenomenon whereby the process of discoursing about corruption leads to discourse itself becoming corrupted. As I noted in Chapter 1, Orwell was the originator of a good number of new terms (e.g., *doublethink*, *newspeak*) to describe how political language is authored and animated with the intention of lying and misleading. However, even though he is often associated with the term *doublespeak*, it seems that he never in fact used it in his writing. This task has been left to many others, among them William Lutz, who edited

the journal *Quarterly Review of Doublespeak* for 14 years, from 1980 to 1994. In a well-known essay published three decades ago, Lutz, wrote about *doublespeak* as a corruption of language in the following manner:

> Doublespeak is language which pretends to communicate but really doesn't. It is language which makes the bad seem good, the negative appear positive, the unpleasant appear attractive, or at least tolerable. It is language which avoids or shifts responsibility, language which is at variance with its real or purported meaning. It is language which conceals or prevents thought. Doublespeak is language which does not extend thought but limits it. (Lutz 1988, p. 40)

All of the elements that Lutz mentions here apply to my understanding of corrupted discourses. However, there is one key feature that is missing, and it is an understanding of discourse that is based in CDS. Thus, if discourse is more than language and it is about semiosis, that is multimodal meaning-making, then corrupted discourse is about the undermining of multimodal meaning making and not just language-based meaning making. In addition, Lutz toes a fine line between criticality towards the public uses of language and outright prescriptivism: he writes that '[t]the task of English teachers is to teach not just the effective use of language but respect for language as well' (Lutz 1988, p. 41). This is a task that I would avoid. It is, therefore, important to make clear what I am *not* saying here, to wit, I am not using 'corrupted' to refer to language and communication in the prescriptive sense of suggesting that there is a correct and an incorrect way of communicating and that corrupted discourses are, in essence, incorrect language. This is not about 'verbal hygiene', which Deborah Cameron (1995) so effectively deconstructed some 25 years ago. Cameron defines verbal hygiene in very simple terms as 'meddling' in language matters by people coming from a range of backgrounds. She sees debates over issues such as the relative value of standardised vs. vernacular varieties of language, political correctness and effective communication (e.g., self-help books on how to communicate in business, in couple relationships, in public and so on) as examples of attempts to shape how people communicate, or, where deemed appropriate by hygienists, clean up language that has been contaminated. I have no such designs in mind in the discussion of language use that follows, as my value judgements lie much more in the realm of political economy and sociology than they do in linguistic right or

wrong. Still, I am drawn to phenomena that I have observed on occasion amongst politicians who attempt to cover up corruption, namely how the discourse experiences an analogical transformation, whereby the communicative potential of words and symbols employed is seemingly perverted by the corruption being referenced, to the point of being unclear or even incomprehensible to the audience.[4]

A Lead-in to Telling Cases in Point: The *Partido Popular*

The *Partido Popular* (hereafter PP), is a relatively young party by European standards, having been founded with its present name in 1989. However, it existed previous to 1989 as the *Alianza Popular* (Popular Alliance; hereafter AP). The latter was officially founded in 1976 by Manuel Fraga, who during the Franco era was Minister of Information and Tourism (1962–1969), as well as Minister of Interior and Deputy Prime Minister in the two years after Franco's death in 1975. In between, from 1969 to 1975, he was the Spanish ambassador to the UK. From his experience in the UK, Fraga developed a great admiration for the British two-party system, and the democracy he envisaged for Spain in 1975, when Franco died, was a constitutional Monarchy with a parliament dominated by a conservative party and a social democratic party (Juliá 2018; Muniesa 2005; see Fraga 1987). All of this would happen, it should be added, within a high degree of order and control. For Fraga was arguably more authoritarian than democratic.

Unfortunately for Fraga, a more politically astute and reform-minded Francoist minister, Adolfo Suárez, was to become the leader of the Spanish right in the first years of democracy (Juliá 2003, 2018; Moran 2014). And as for the two-party system, this seemed little more than a pipedream in 1976, given the strength of the Spanish communist party (with an extremely strong formation in Catalonia), local centre-right nationalist parties in Catalonia and the Basque country and an array of other smaller parties that were formed from 1976 onwards. Nevertheless, when the Spanish socialist party won a landslide victory in the parliamentary elections of 1982, Fraga's AP was the only large party on the right with representation all over Spain (the aforementioned Catalan and Basque nationalist parties only had representatives in their respective territories). Having won 26.4% of the popular vote and 107 seats

(to Felipe González and the socialists' 48.1% and 202 seats), the AP began to emerge as the hegemonic formation on the right of the Spanish political spectrum. The party was to remain in the opposition through four socialist party victories (1982, 1986, 1989, and 1993), before finally winning in 1996. By that time, Fraga had stepped aside on the national scene and gone to his native Galicia, where he won five elections and governed as leader of the Galician assembly, *La Xunta*, from 1989 to 2005 (Juliá 2003).

In 1989, the party changed its name from AP to PP and José María Aznar, a former state financial inspector and leader of the *Castilla y León* autonomous community assembly, took over as national leader of the party. He lost the 1989 and 1993 elections before the victory of 1996. Running in parallel with the party's increasing success on the national scene were the gains it made during the 1980s and 1990s in the governments of Spain's 17 autonomous communities. Importantly, the PP became hegemonic in Madrid, Valencia, Murcia and the Balearic Islands, four communities in which a good number of front-line party members have been involved in the most extreme cases of corruption (more on this below).

On paper, the PP is a conservative party with elements of a Christian Democracy, and as such, it sits in the European parliament with the European People's Party (EPP) group. However, the party also has clear and unequivocal historical links to the Franco regime, and it retains a close relationship with ultra-conservative elements in the Catholic Church that supported Franco, in particular Opus Dei, acting as their de facto representative in the parliament. In addition, there is a latent authoritarianism in some of its actions, as the party adopts a general law-and-order stance towards civil liberties. The PP also manifests clear and overt support for and celebration of 'national symbols' such as bull-fighting, and it tacitly supports neo-fascist organisations such as the *Fundación Francisco Franco*, a conservation society for twenty-first-century Francoists. In this sense, the party can be said to cater to the interests of a section of Spanish society that remains loyal to and embraces *nacionalcatolicismo* (national Catholicism), the ideological base of the Franco regime which fused Catholic fundamentalism with fascist nationalism (Di Febo and Juliá 2012; Payne 1984). This part of the support for the PP is by no means the majority tendency in the Spanish right, but it is, arguably, a central and foundational pillar of the party.

The arrival of Aznar as leader of the PP marked a shift in the way that the party operated. Aznar was an extremely ambitious politician and he had a vision for how the conservative party of Spain should proceed if it aspired to govern in Spain (Aznar 1994). Though much younger than Fraga, he was Francoist in his formation: in his youth, he was member of a Falangist Catholic organisation and he admitted to having voted against the new Spanish constitution in the referendum held in 1978. However, Aznar was, if nothing else, flexible, and very much a work in progress when he became leader of the PP in 1990. Indeed, through his defeats in 1989 and 1993, and his victories in 1996 and 2000, he evolved, taking his party with him. The result was a somewhat eclectic, if not confusing, mix of trends. Aznar and the PP represented a return to certain values and currents of thought that had been suppressed during the 14 years that the socialists were in power. I refer here to their social conservatism, their overt manifestations of Spanish nationalism (usually described as 'patriotism') and the equally overt imperialist view of the world (an especially neo-colonial view towards Spain's former colonies, as well as the former colonies of all European powers) and Spain's neighbour to the south, Morocco. There was also the Aznar who had never really accepted the granting of home rule to Catalonia and the Basque Country in the constitution of 1978. Finally, there were Aznar's close relationship with the aforementioned *nacionalcatolicismo*, and his especially close relationship with *Opus Dei*, as the maximum representative of fundamentalist Catholicism in Spain. In his brilliant satirical book, *La Aznaridad* (Aznar-ness), published posthumously in 2003, the renowned novelist and political and cultural commentator Manuel Vázquez Montalbán describes the essence of Aznar as follows:

> A long time wandering, from the national-Catholic anti-constitutionalism and the JONS [a Catholic Falangist youth organisation][5] of his early political years, Aznar has managed to territorialize and populate his current framework, Aznar-ness. It likely consists of a national-Catholic and para-imperial constitutionalism, sometimes for the empire towards God and others for God towards the empire. … he has often shown himself to be influenced by the Spanish reactionary patriotic thought of the fourteenth century, transmitted to the twentieth century through an awareness of the disaster of 98 and movements against the disintegrators of the unity of the Spain forged, according to the golden legend, by the Catholic Kings and Franco, Franco, Franco … (Vázquez Montalbán 2003, pp. 357–358; author's translation)

This caustic portrayal of Aznar captures his and the PP's immersion in ideological strands that link it to Franco and Spanish fascism. What it does not capture is Aznar's (and PP's) capitalism, a Spanish version of neoliberalism that meant, among other things, key privatisations that proved to be a thinly veiled cover for crony capitalism. In effect, Aznar's government sold—to its friends and associates—the Spanish government's remaining shares (its so-called 'golden shares') in *Telefónica*, the Spanish telecommunications company, *Repsol,* the Spanish oil company, *Endesa*, the Spanish electricity and gas company, *Argentaria*, a state-operated holding company, and *Tabacalera*, the Spanish tobacco company (García Delgado and Jiménez 2003). There was also a liberalisation in the real estate market (De la Dehesa 2009), and most importantly, relative *carte blanche* for construction companies to build new housing developments just about anywhere they pleased. Spain also experienced something of a transformation during this period with regard to the use of new technologies, which increased markedly. These and other developments were foundational to the then-famous—now infamous—economic boom in Spain (Juliá 2003).

From Boom to Corruption

The economic boom in Spain dates roughly from the mid-1990s to 2008, when the current economic depression definitively arrived (Alonso Pérez and Furió Blasco 2010; De la Dehesa 2009). A big part of this boom, which saw record growth rates in Spain (roughly 4% annually, with 2000 being peak year at 5.7%) and massive immigration (over 5 million immigrants entered the country during this period), was the transformation of the housing market. Prices trebled between 1997 and 2007 and construction came to occupy as much as 10.8% of the country's GDP in 2006. High personal indebtedness became the order of the day in a country touted by the most enthusiastic cheerleaders as an 'economic miracle' and by more pessimistic (and realistic, as events came to demonstrate) observers as 'an accident waiting to happen'.

Before the economic crisis hit, corruption scandals began to emerge around Spain. Nevertheless, these seldom prospered beyond the early stages of police investigation and/or legal process, perhaps due to a traditionally overly cosy relationship between the political class and parts of the police and judiciary, or because of the lack of a continuous and institutionally supported tradition of investigative journalism (Tijeras 2015).

In 2007, matters began to change slightly as the Anti-corruption Office of Spanish national police began what was to prove a long and in-depth investigation of the PP and its finances. As was eventually revealed, there were multiple cases of fraud, bribery, kickbacks, embezzlement and money laundering. These investigations focused in particular on the autonomous communities of Madrid and Valencia, where, as noted above, the party was hegemonic, winning majorities in local parliaments in elections taking place from the mid 1990s onwards.

The main legal process was called *el caso Gürtel* (the Gürtel case) (see Ekaizer 2013, for an excellent account). The key figure in this case was Francisco Correa,[6] all-round fixer and events organiser for the PP, and it was his activities that led prosecutors to Luís Bárcenas. Bárcenas was the PP national party treasurer from 2008 to 2009, but well before this short tenure, indeed from 1993 onwards, he was intimately involved in the party's finances. In February 2009, Bárcenas was indicted by the well-known judge, Baltasar Garzon.[7] This indictment amounted to serious business for the PP, as members of their party were being accused of mafia-like activity leading ultimately to the personal enrichment of members of the party, as well as the illegal financing of the party's activities, especially election campaigns.

Defending the Indefensible

On 11 February 2009, Mariano Rajoy, at the time leader of opposition and still two and a half years from winning the 2011 Spanish general election, called a press conference after a meeting of the PP's executive committee. The event was significant for several reasons. First, Rajoy appeared surrounded by prominent members of the party and his shadow cabinet, many of whom would take up ministerial posts when the PP won the general election of 2011. This event was clearly organised to present an image of unity—the unity of party members, but more importantly, the unity of a persecuted group of Spanish citizens. Second, the event was significant, as it gave the Spanish political class and the Spanish public in general a clear indication of how Rajoy and other party members would handle the indictments, and indeed all future cases of corruption that eventually would come their way. Rajoy opened his statement by acknowledging the opening of the case and the arrests that had taken place, before shifting into attack mode.

English translation	*Original in Spanish*
As everyone knows (.5) Judge Garzón (.5) has instituted criminal proceedings (1) he has arrested six people (.5) and he has charged more than thirty (.5) some have tried to make these proceedings/a general cause against the Partido Popular/they have published countless recordings in which people implicate/many leaders of our party (.5) all this occurs during the electoral campaigns of the Basque and Galician elections (.5) all this occurs when Spain is going through a very serious economic crisis/that affects the good functioning/and survival of our small and medium companies/of our self-employed workers/and that punishes Spanish families extremely harshly/an issue that should require /and, of course, for the Popular Party, it does require/everyone's attention (.5) this issue reminds us of/ the climate that we lived in the election campaign of 1999/the famous linen affair (.5) on that occasion, the names of many leaders of the popular party were stained/and in particular the name of our candidate number one/Loyola de Palacios (.5) this affair/in ended up being (.5) nothing (.5) but the damage (.5) to the people (.5) was already done. … it is a frontal attack on the rule of law/… we will do everything in our hands/so that nobody smears the name of our party/this is not a PP plot/as some claim (.5) this is a plot against the Partido Popular/which is a very different thing (elplural.com 2018)	como todo el mundo sabe (.5) el juez Garzón (.5) ha abierto un sumario (1) ha detenido a seis personas (.5) y ha imputado a más de treinta (.5) este sumario/algunos han pretendido convertirlo/en una causa general contra el partido popular/se han publicado un sinfín de grabaciones en las que se involucran/a muchos dirigentes de nuestro partido (.5) todo esto se produce en plena campaña electoral de las elecciones Vascas y Gallegas (.5) todo esto se produce cuando España está atravesando por una gravísima crisis económica/que afecta al buen funcionamiento/y a la supervivencia de nuestra pequeñas y medianas empresas/de nuestros trabajadores autónomos/y que castiga con enorme dureza a las familias españolas/un asunto que debería requerir/y desde luego para el partido popular requiere/toda la atención (.5) este asunto nos recuerda/el clima que vivimos en la campaña electoral del año 1999/el famoso asunto del Lino (.5) en aquella ocasión se manchó/el nombre de muchos dirigentes del partido popular/y en particular el nombre de nuestra candidata número una/Loyola de Palacios (.5) este asunto /al final quedó (.5) en nada (.5) pero el daño (.5) a las personas (.5) ya estaba hecho/… es un atentado frontal al estado de derecho/… haremos todo lo que este en nuestras manos/para que nadie manche el nombre de nuestro partido/esto no es una trama del PP/como algunos pretenden (.5) esto es una trama contra el partido popular/que es una cosa muy distinta

Delivering his statement with little or no body movement, Rajoy remains relatively expressionless, using a monotone throughout (his emphasis on 'nothing' being the exception to this rule). The party

members surrounding him are equally expressionless and the general mood conveyed is one of seriousness and resoluteness (the sense of conviction that comes when one has right on one's side). Content-wise, Rajoy clearly enters the realm of esoteric truth here when he accuses the state apparatuses (the police and the judiciary) of acting on orders from the socialist party (then in government) in the organisation of a witch-hunt against members of his party. Taking this tack, he uses what we might call the *topos of victimism*—captured best in the statement 'this is not a PP plot, as some claim; this is a plot against the Partido Popular'. The use of this *topos* constitutes a strategy which, as we saw previously in the case of Shani and Arad (Chapter 2), focuses attention on the alleged victimiser whilst exempting the alleged victimised from assuming any responsibility for internal coherence in argumentation, or in addition, as is the case here, for certain events, practices and activities taking place in the past and present. Another *topos* that Rajoy employs is that of *history as teacher*, whereby 'history teaches that specific actions have specific consequences, [which means] one should perform or omit a specific action in a specific situation (allegedly) comparable with the historical example referred to' (Forchtner 2014, p. 26). He cites a case from several years previous, the so-called *caso lino* (the linen affair), which was a fraud case uncovered in the late 1990s by the Anti-corruption Prosecutor's Office. Loyola de Palacios, mentioned by name here, was Minister of Agriculture in the first Aznar administration (1996–2000), and she and other members of the PP were accused of widespread fraud in the application of an EU-funded aide scheme for the textile industry in Spain. In the end, the case collapsed and no members of the PP were held legally responsible for what had occurred. As Rajoy put matters: 'this affair … ended up being … nothing … but the damage … to the people … was already done'. Further to the *topoi* of *victimism* and *history as teacher*, Rajoy uses a third *topos* here, one also found in the Shani and Arad's argumentation discussed above, when he invokes the *topos* of *incommensurable alternatives*. As he explains, Spain clearly has more pressing problems—elections, growing economic insecurity and so on—than the indictments of members of his party.

Quite extraordinarily, Rajoy names the judge handling the case, Garzón, who, as it happens was also the judge in the aforementioned linen affair. In doing so, he suggests that matters are so serious that all respect for the separation of powers and any sense of etiquette and decorum in political discourse have been suspended. This move

definitively situates Rajoy in the realm of esoteric and creative truth, and what Wodak has called *anything goes*. Thus, following Wodak (2013, pp. 32–33), we may break down Rajoy's words as follows:

Rajoy	*Author's notes*
Employs discursive and rhetorical strategies which combine incompatible phenomena	But one cannot self-present as a law-and-order politician, as PP members invariably do, and then question the judicial system when it indicts party members
Makes false claims sound innocent	Nobody in the PP has ever done anything wrong
Denies the obvious	Relevant evidence released to the press clearly pointed to acts of corruption by PP members
Says the unsayable	Naming the judge in a public speech
Transcends the limits of the permissible	Saying that the party in power is using the state apparatuses against the main opposition party

Ultimately, and most importantly, what we have here is a lack of respect for the separation of powers, and, indeed, the institutions of governance more generally, coupled with a refusal to accept even the most minimal responsibility for any wrongdoing. Indeed, Rajoy and the group of party members who stand with him make it clear that they will stonewall any attempts to prosecute members of the PP for corruption, doing so by any means necessary (Trias Sagnier 2018). This strategy, which continues to this day, is based on various combinations of misleadingness and mendacity. In it, there is little concern for notions of truth, leading to a good deal of discourse that could be termed bullshit. There is the propagation of ignorance in the provision of alternative facts. There is also what might be seen as plain and simple lying, as party members who *know* certain things to be true (such as person x has been indicted) insist that the opposite is the case (as we shall see in the next section). Thus, in the wake of Rajoy's statement, other prominent members of the PP continued in the same argumentation, maintaining a similarly defiant tone.

As noted, the judge handling the case was yet again Garzón, acting on behalf of the Anti-corruption Prosecutor's Office. However, he was soon removed from the case when a complaint about the alleged illegal wiretapping of suspects' conversations with their lawyers led to his suspension by the General Judicial Power Council. Garzón was eventually

found guilty of professional malfeasance in 2012 and was disqualified as a judge for 11 years. This was a highly controversial judicial decision, and it served as a reminder of the long arm of the PP, which had by the time of the sentence had a significant amount of influence on the theoretically independent judiciary (Trias Sagnier 2018). Indeed, one has to wonder if Rajoy's declaration on 11 February 2009, in which he cited Garzón by name, was not something of a warning to the judge about what might happen to him if he persisted in pursuing members of the PP.

Although the removal of Garzón and other legal machinations by the PP legal team meant a certain derailment of the Gürtel case, in that the 2009 indictments were overturned, it did not mean its complete cessation. In particular, a part of the anti-corruption police continued to investigate and by 2012, the PP was once again in the spotlight for this case as well as a growing number of other scandals. By this time, there was a pattern emerging and one began to hear references to 'systemic corruption' to describe how the PP had operated through the years of Aznar and Rajoy as party leaders (1990–2004 and 2004–2018, respectively). Rajoy's defiant declaration, adopting *anything goes* and the three *topoi—victimism*, *history as teacher* and *the incommensurability of alternatives*—was to become classic in the coming years, replayed on politics programmes on radio and television and viewed on YouTube every time a new corruption case involving the PP was uncovered. It marked an epoch, one that was to continue through years of an endless stream of corruption cases involving high-level members of the PP. This, until finally, on 5 June 2018, Rajoy announced his resignation as Prime Minister. In between these two points in time, however, the discourse of corruption flowed and flowed. And sometimes, as we shall see in the next section, the very discourses of corruption themselves became corrupted.

The Corrupted Discourse of Maria Dolores de Cospedal: Part 1

A little over a year after Rajoy's statement of defiance, Francisco Camps, leader of the Valencian assembly, prominent member of the PP and a close ally of Rajoy, was indicted for having received bribes. And, as has come to be the case each time a prominent member of the PP is indicted for corruption, Rajoy and the other party members came out in support of the new 'victim' of the 'plot against the Partido Popular'.[8] If any one member of the PP embodies this defiant attitude towards all accusers of

PP members, it is Maria Dolores de Cospedal, who was named General Secretary of the party in 2008 and has since become famous for her curious brand of *semiosis* consisting of her unorthodox use of language and her embodied behaviour (her facial expressions and other bodily movements). A case in point is the following exchange, which took place on a daytime television talk show in May 2010 between Cospedal and left-leaning investigative journalist Ernesto Ekaizer. There is a disagreement over whether or not the aforementioned Camps had indeed been indicted.

NB Ernesto Ekaizer = EK; Maria Dolores de Cospedal = CO

English translation	*Original in Spanish*
EK: do you think that Mr Camps has been indicted or not/in this case that has now come back in Valencia?	EK: usted cree que el señor Camps está imputado o no/en este caso que vuelve hora a Valencia?
CO: well eeh/look/I have to tell you that the the the complexity of these proceedings/there are political discussions of [all	CO: pues eeh/mire/yo le tengo que decir que la la la compleijidad que tiene este procedimiento/hay discusiones políticas para [todos
EK: [but it's the supreme court that says so (.5)	EK: [pero lo dice el supremo (.5)
[if Mr Camps weren't indicted as the judgement says	[si el señor Camps no estuviera imputado como dice la sentencia/
CO: [{shaking her head} no no no (1) I'm sorry/	CO: [{shaking her head} no no no (1) perdóname/
EK: {holding up a document} I'll read it for you/	EK: {holding up a document} se lo leo/
CO: [sorry/	CO: [perdóname
EK: [{reading as Cospedal observes him with a fixed smile indicating patience and condescension} *nevertheless/the simple reading of the appeal* {holding up his index finger to emphasise the point being made}/ that is the proceeding that was appealed (2) *would not have been possible if the equivalent judicial indictment to prosecute in the case of Mr. Camps and the other people indicted had not been returned/*	EK: [{reading as Cospedal observes him with a fixed smile indicating patience and condescension} *no obstante/la simple lectura del auto combatido/*{holding up his index finger to emphasise the point being made}es decir el auto que fue recurrido (2) *no hubiera sido posible si no hubiera recaído la imputación judicial equivalente al procesamiento en el caso de señor Camps y los otros imputados/*
CO: ehh look=	CO: ehh mire usted=
EK: = he's indicted/how can you deny the evidence?/	EK: = está imputado/como puede negar la evidencia?/
CO: well I'm not denying anything/	CO: pues yo no estoy negando nada/

(continued)

(continued)

English translation	*Original in Spanish*
EK: but that doesn't mean/he's indicted but as you rightly say{extending his arm outwards towards Cospedal in a conciliatory gesture}/there is the presumption of innocence/but he is indicted= CO:=I don't know but I'll tell you again {extending her hands outwards in a revolving motion}= EK:=but indicted he is/ {intervention by another speaker in support of Cospedal} CO: look/sorry/the supreme court proceeding doesn't say that he is indicted= EK=I've just read it/ if there had been no judicial indictment/the appeal that Camps lost would not have been possible/ CO: {laughing openly} let's see /the supreme court resolution does not say that he is indicted/it's true that eh Francisco Camps is in a legal and procedural situation/eh/which is an intermediate situation {moving her hands back and forth} between an indictment and= EK:=no/that's not true/ CO: {shaking her head in resignation} EK: let's not mislead the Spanish people= CO:=no no {placing her hands on her chest}/sorry/I'm not misleading anyone/ no no no no/{holding her hands up in parallel in an up-and-down motion} things also have to be left very clear/at no time in the proceedings is there a formal resolution to indict Mr Camps/this must be said{-looking around her as if for confirmation, holding her hands palms up}/there is none {smiling}	EK: pero eso no quiere decir/está imputado pero como bien dice usted {extending his arm outwards towards Cospedal in a conciliatory gesture}/ hay presunción de inocencia/pero está imputado= CO:=no sé pero yo le vuelvo a decir {extending her hands outward in a revolving motion}= EK:=pero imputado está {intervention by another speaker in support of Cospedal} CO: mire/perdóname/el auto del supremo no dice que este imputado= EK=lo acabo de leer/si no hubiera recaído imputación judicial/no hubiera sido posible el recurso [que ellos resuelven/contra Camps CO: {laughing openly} Vamos a ver/la resolución del supremo no dice que este imputado/es cierto que eh Francisco Camps está en una situación jurídica y procesal/eh/que es una situación intermedia {moving her hands back and forth} entre una imputación y= EK:=no/no es verdad/ CO: {shaking her head in resignation} EK: no engañemos a los españoles= CO:=no no {placing her hands on her chest}/perdoname/no estoy engañando a nadie/no no no no/{holding her hands up in parallel in an up-and-down motion} lo que hay dejar es las cosas también bien claras/no hay una resolución formal de imputación al señor Camps en ningún momento del procedimiento/eso hay que decirlo {looking around her as if for confirmation, holding her hands palms up}/no la hay {smiling}

(Ekaizer 2010)

In this exchange, in which Ekaizer very aggressively pursues an admission that Camps has been indicted, Cospedal delivers a master class in how to avoid answering a direct question. The issue is plain: Mr. Camps was indicted or he was not. Ekaizer provides evidence in the form of documents published by the Supreme Court. His argument is one based on the warrant of supreme court judges, empirical evidence in the form of documents produced by the court, basic legal reasoning and finally, simple everyday logic. Basically, one cannot contest or appeal against a judicial procedure (in this case, an indictment) that has not occurred. Thus, if Camps and his legal team appealed against an indictment, this means that there was actually an indictment for them to contest. As he puts it: 'if there had been no judicial indictment, the appeal that Camps lost would not have been possible'. However, much to Ekaizer's exasperation, Cospedal seems unfazed by his insistence (he interrupts her on several occasions) as she contradicts his interpretation of the judicial language used and turns the disagreement into a confusing exchange revolving around the exact words used in the Supreme Court documents. Indeed, one has to wonder if this is what Steiner (1975; see Chapter 2) had in mind when he discussed the 'creativity of falsehood': in this case, Cospedal may be seen to be taking 'an aesthetic or sporting view of lying', demonstrating the 'the vitality of 'mis-statement' and 'mis-understanding' … [and] the primordial affinities between language and dubious meaning' (Steiner 1975, p. 219).

This exchange is punctuated with a great deal of physical gesturing and Cospedal's use of head-shaking, a glacial smile and even laughter at one point. Perhaps sensing that Ekaizer's vigour and enthusiasm could be seen as over-earnestness, or even a case of trying too hard, Cospedal effectively takes the higher ground, conveying that she is above wasting time trying to decide what words *really* mean, which, in any case, is always about one's individual interpretation. In this way, she questions the truth of written documents, including the ones that Ekaizer holds up as his warrant and as evidence for one clear, undeniable truth. Cospedal's position here is one of relativism—that texts can be read and heard in different ways by different people. Ultimately, while Ekaizer has his truth, she has hers.

Lying? Misleadingness? Bullshit? Perhaps all of these. Of course, we do not know what Cospedal actually *knew* at this time, but as the General Secretary and long-time member of the PP, we might well imagine that she must have *known*, or in any case, *understood*, that Camps had been indicted. And further to this, she might also have known the details of the events that led to his indictment. So, if a lie is saying something one believes to be false, then Cospedal is lying if she believed that Camps had been indicted. But, of course, as we observed in our discussion of lying in Chapter 2, there is space here to think that perhaps Cospedal does not consider an indictment to be an indictment unless a judge says the word loudly and clearly. There is also the prospect here of Cospedal 'misleading' the Spanish people, as Ekaizer suggests at one point. But if we adopt Saul's (2013) technical definition of this term, whereby misleading is about telling one truth to create an effect that hides another truth, it is hard to see how this works in this case. In the original exchange in Spanish, Ekaizer seems to use *engañar* as a euphemism for lying, and in my translation, I might well have used other words such as 'deceive', 'fool', 'trick' or 'dupe'. He likely uses *engañar* because using the word *mentir* (lie) would be a more threatening, and perhaps even counterproductive discursive move. It might have had the effect of allowing Cospedal to take the high ground in her disagreement with Ekaizer (calling someone a liar is not very polite), providing her, as well, with a reason to end the conversation and therefore avoid further probing from Ekaizer. Of course, if a straight-up equivalent of 'bullshit' existed in Spanish, he could have used that word here. After all, here and elsewhere, Cospedal can be said to show little or no regard for any notion of truth.

As for what was at stake in this conversion, and why Cospedal was being less than forthcoming in her part of the exchange, the key is in the word 'indicted' (*imputado*). People can be indicted for all kinds of wrongdoing and misconduct, but at the time of this particular exchange, the word was synonymous with political corruption. And while an indictment is not a conviction (as Ekaizer notes, there is the presumption of innocence), the general mood among the public was if a politician was indicted, he/she was probably guilty of what he/she was alleged to have done. Following her party's strategy, which as we observed above was

to stonewall any accusation of corruption, Cospedal could do nothing but deny, deny and deny in this situation. She could not under any circumstances allow Ekaizer's fact of the matter, that Camps had, in effect, been indicted. The issue thus shifts to perception. Would members of the viewing audience believe Cospedal or Ekaizer (or neither, as the case might be)? There is no way of knowing this, but if we examine the comments written in response to the video on YouTube (see reference), we see that few viewers have come out in defence of Cospedal. Nevertheless, given the amount of trolling that goes on in online communication, it is problematic to take this as evidence that Cospedal's performance had not gone down well among the general public. More likely, as we see in studies of voter loyalty (see discussion below), Cospedal would have convinced those already positively predisposed towards her and her party, and she would not have convinced those with a negative attitude towards her and her party.

The Corrupted Discourse of Maria Dolores de Cospedal: Part 2

I now fast-forward almost three years to February 25, 2013, when another much-commented-upon press conference was held at the party headquarters of the PP in Madrid. I say much-commented-upon because it took place after a story had broken that seemed to contradict earlier declarations made by members of the PP in public about their former treasurer Luís Bárcenas. Bárcenas had again been indicted for tax fraud, but he was also suspected of having been the chief organiser of the procurement of illegal funding for the party for nearly two decades, during the 1990s and the 2000s. When he was indicted in 2009, Bárcenas was removed from his post as party treasurer. However, over two years later, it was revealed that the PP had continued paying him a monthly salary of €21,300.08, when they had previously claimed that his contract had ended in 2009. Maria Dolores de Cospedal, whom we met in the previous section, was tasked with facing the press to explain why the party would still be paying a salary (and a generous one at that) to a former employee over two years after he had been fired. Showing a curious combination of discomfort and aplomb, Cospedal offered the following explanation, which was to go viral immediately:

English translation	*Original in Spanish*
ehh the negotiated compensation/was a deferred compensation (.5) and as it was defer/deferred (.5) as/effectively/a simulation/simulation/or what would have been delayed/in parts of a/of what was previously a remuneration/he had to have social security remuneration/because if not it would have been (1.5) now there is a lot of talk about withholding payments/that do not have social security remuneration/ right?/well here we wanted/we wanted to do things/like they are supposed to be done/that is/with social security remuneration/ and look/I'm going to be straight with you/if there was something to hide/ if there had been something to hide (2) moreover/with the socialist party governing in Spain (.5) and therefore having absolute access to all the official documentation (2) well a deferred payment of an indemnity in the form of compensation would not have been made/or that payment would have been made also giving it the form in his share of the social contributions/it was not understood that there was anything to hide/and there has been nothing to hide/ (Cospedal 2013)	ehh la indemnización que se pactó/fue una indemnización en diferido (.5) y como fue una indemnización en difer/ en diferido (.5) en forma/ efectivamente/ de simulación/simulación/o lo que hubiera sido en diferido/en partes de una/de lo que antes era una retribución/tenía que tener la retención a la seguridad social/es que si no hubiera sido (1.5) ahora se habla mucho de pagos que no tienen retenciones a la seguridad social/verdad?/pues aquí se quiso/se quiso hacer como hay que hacerlo/ es decir/con la retención a la seguridad social/y mire usted/yo le voy a decir algo bien claro/si hubiera algo que ocultar/si hubiera habido algo que ocultar (2) es más/gobernando en España el partido socialista (.5) y por lo tanto teniendo acceso absolutamente a toda la documentación oficial (2) pues no se habría hecho un pago en diferido de una indemnización en forma de retribución/o se habría hecho ese pago también dándole la forma en su parte de las cotizaciones sociales/no se entendía que hubiera nada que ocultar/ y no ha habido nada que ocultar/

The reader may well think that this English translation makes little sense, but this is due, in no small part, to the fact that the original in Spanish makes little sense. Cospedal appears evasive, and perhaps even shifty, as she constantly searches for the *right* words and expressions. Her frequent short pauses of .5 seconds or more are eloquent as hesitation often communicates far more than words. In addition, her verbal disfluency, seemingly a transmutation of the haziness of the argumentation she is trying to present, is accompanied by a gaze that is, for most of her intervention, fixed on a small part of the audience (or, indeed, an individual). In addition, she has a glacial, distant expression on her face, not unlike the one she displayed during much of her exchange with Ekaizer

(see above). This brings a surreal quality to the event. In short, Cospedal seems to be in a trance. The latter is broken somewhat abruptly when she surveys the audience and smiles while explaining that the PP did what they did because it was the only legal option that they had. This comment and the smile that accompanies it are revealing, as doing the right thing should go without saying and should be done without even thinking about other, presumably less legal, alternatives. The 1.5 -second pause that comes when she does not complete the utterance 'he had to have social security remuneration because if not it would have been …' is significant in that Cospedal seems to avoid pronouncing the word 'illegal', which would have been the most natural lexical choice to terminate with.

There is a stylistic change midway through the statement when Cospedal shifts footing, adopting a more direct discursive stance: 'I'm going to be straight with you'. This is followed by the hypothetical 'if there had been something to hide', which is then interrupted with second curious shift in footing in the form of the insertion of the socialist party in the narrative: when Bárcenas began to receive the payments, the socialists were 'governing in Spain … and therefore ha[d] absolute access to all the official documentation'. This mention of the socialists, at first hearing, seems odd. Unless, of course, and as seems to be the case, Cospedal wishes to suggest that either the socialist party allowed wrongdoing to occur on its watch or there was no wrongdoing in the first place and the case against Bárcenas is part of the larger conspiracy against the PP. Either way, the suggestion seems to be that the problem lies with the socialist party and not the PP. Stating the obvious fact that the socialists were governing—that is, telling the truth—with the intention of attributing them responsibility for the PP's problems—surely not telling the truth—is, following Saul (2013), at best misleading, and at its worst, downright cynical. As occurred in Rajoy's statements four years earlier, Cospedal employs the *topos of victimism* as she enters, once again, the realm of *anything goes*: the implication here seems to be that a judicial case is being run from the office of certain government ministers. As I noted above, this line of argumentation is a direct questioning of the separation of powers, which is something of a nuclear strategy in a modern-day, European democracy. Cospedal concludes by returning to the notion of innocence on the part of PP: 'it was not understood that there was anything to hide and there has been nothing to hide'.

The Courts Decide, PP Continues to Deny

Cospedal's behaviour is not surprising when one considers that she was trying to explain the unexplainable in an attempt to deny any wrongdoing on the part of the PP. The unexplainable in question was why Bárcenas had been paid an extremely high salary for two years if the PP had fired him when he first began to encounter legal problems. The good proportion of public opinion in Spain has always leaned towards the theory that the former treasurer knew everything there was to know about financial corruption in the PP and that the two-year salary was hush money. Bárcenas had, after all, been directly involved with the finances of the party for almost twenty years (1990–2009), even if he was only the head treasurer from 2008 to 2009. In effect, Bárcenas knew where all of the bodies were buried and as he was later to divulge, he had documents showing that, among other things, just about every prominent member of the PP (including former prime minister, José María Aznar; the then-prime minster, Mariano Rajoy, and a number of past and current government ministers) had accepted what in essence were salary top-ups, tax-free payments handed to them at the end of each month.

The documents in question, which came to be known as *los papeles de Bárcenas* (the Bárcenas papers) were a handwritten ledger of incoming and outgoing funds kept in an undeclared (and illegal) alternative bank account, which the press came to refer to as *la caja B* (the B-account). Over the years, these papers have been much commented on in the Spanish press and the expression '*caja B*' has taken on iconic statutes, as a symbol of corruption in the PP. And yet, its existence has always been denied by members of the PP, as the official line is that there never was any such thing as a B-account, among other things because the PP would never allow such a practice. However, two key events occurring in May and June 2018 make this argument difficult, if not impossible, to maintain. I refer here to two separate court decisions that were handed down in the Gürtel case, one in Madrid and the other in Valencia. In the Madrid case, 29 out of the 37 accused, all members or associates of the PP, were given sentences totalling 351 years. Correa, identified as the ring leader, was sentenced to 51 years and Bárcenas, to 33 years four months and a fine of 44 million euros. At the time of writing, it remains to be seen what these sentences will mean in terms of actual prison time served, but reductions will surely be applied. Bárcenas, for example, could end up serving 10–15 years.

Importantly, the court ruling also included a condemnation of the PP on two counts. First, it was considered a financial beneficiary of what can

only be called a well-oiled criminal organisation. For this, it was fined 245,492.8 euros. In addition, the ruling confirmed not only the existence of the B-account, but also that the B-accounting was for the PP and not for Bárcenas as an individual. Finally, the ruling held that all of this B-accounting and the illegal financing of the party dated back to at least 1989, the year that *Alianza Popular* became *Partido Popular*. All of this seemed to come as a surprise to the PP, in particular what the sentence said about the party's responsibility. And this meant that individual party members were ill-prepared to respond. In a press conference held on May 28, one day after the court decision was handed down, the then-Justice Minister Rafael Catalá was asked for his view on the ruling. What follows is a part of his response:

English translation	*Original in Spanish*
So today still/I've read/with surprise I admit/and with a little disgust/that some/ eh/ political leaders/carry on saying *the sentence that finds the Partido Popular guilty of corruption ta ta*/but really/the sentence has nothing to do with corruption in the Partido Popular/the Partido Popular's sentence finds it responsible as a participant for profit/therefore as you all know very well/those who are jurists/this is a civil responsibility/for having benefited from the commission of a crime/which it neither participated in nor had information or knowledge about/these are the exact terms of what has happened (Catalá 2018)	pues hoy todavía/he leído/con sorpresa lo reconozco/y con un poco de disgusto/ que algunos/eh/lideres políticos/siguen diciendo *la sentencia que condena al partido popular por corrupción ta ta*/pues hombre, la condena no tiene nada que ver con la corrupción en el partido popular/la condena del partido popular le hace responsable como participe a titulo lucrativo/por lo tanto como muy bien saben todos ustedes/que son juristas/es una responsabilidad de carácter civil/ por/de haberse beneficiado de la comisión de un delito/de que ni participó ni tuvo información o conocimiento/estos son los términos exactos de que es lo que ha pasado/

Here, Catalá seems to be saying that the PP has not actually done anything wrong, thus adopting the official party position marked by Rajoy back in 2009. He even goes so far as to say that 'the sentence has nothing to do with corruption in the Partido Popular'. He then cites as significant that the PP's involvement in the corruption proven in a court of law—the illegal funding of the party—is classified as 'civil'. But, of course, in doing so, he seems to be saying that the ruling *is* about corruption in the PP; it's just civil corruption and not criminal corruption. Catalá's statement is then rounded off with his minimalisation of the fact

that the court found that the PP had 'benefited from the commission of a crime'. In short, he seems to think this is all right. He then concludes with the claim that the ruling says that the party 'neither participated in nor had information or knowledge about' the corrupt acts committed.

The continued claim that the PP had never been involved in corruption—more specifically, bribes, kickbacks, embezzlement, insider trading, money laundering, cronyism, nepotism and illegal gifts—in many ways defies the forces of discursive gravity. Thus far, we have: in 2009, Rajoy's outright denial of any wrongdoing, coupled with victimism of 'the plot against the Partido Popular'; in 2010, Cospedal's claim that Francisco Camps had not been indicted, but instead found himself 'in a legal and procedural situation … which is intermediate'; in 2013, Cospedal's description of payment of a hush-money salary to Bárcenas for two years as 'deferred payment of an indemnity in the form of compensation'; and finally in 2018, nothing less than a Minister of Justice denying any part in corrupt activity, while simultaneously recognising that the PP benefited from said corrupt activity (which it neither participated in, nor knew anything about).

What Happened Next?

The denial continued the next day, when Cospedal appeared before a congressional committee convened to investigate illegal party funding. As Ignacio Escolar (2018) explains, nothing that Cospedal said before this committee about the Gürtel sentence rang true, if, that is, one actually consulted the ruling (which, it should be noted, is not an easy read at 1687 pages!). In his article entitled *Las mentiras de María Dolores de Cospedal sobre la sentencia de la Gürtel* ('María Dolores de Cospedal's lies about the Gürtel sentence'), Escolar lists a good number of verbatim claims made by Cospedal that are clearly rebutted in different sections of the ruling. For example, she claimed that there had never been a B-account, *ni aunque lo diga un juez* (not even if a judge says so), but then later acknowledged that there might have been be such an account, while adding: *será una contabilidad de Bárcenas, no es la contabilidad del Partido Popular* (it must be Bárcenas's accounting, it's not the Partido Popular's accounting). However, the ruling contains numerous references to illegal financing, especially illegal election campaign financing. The section reproduced below shows in a fairly clear manner the judges' views on the existence of B-accounting in the PP.

> … the aforementioned "B-Account" of said party [the PP], or "extra-accounting" accounting, which [Bárcenas] kept, in agreement with the treasurer, outside the official accounting, and which was sustained in the manner indicated, to a large extent, based on income or contributions that did not comply with the regulations on political party financing, made by persons and/or companies who were beneficiaries of significant public contracts, and as a bonus for that favourable treatment. (Audiencia Nacional Sala de lo Penal 2018, pp. 231–232)

Nevertheless, Cospedal, Catalá and other members of the PP continued to stonewall the matter, showing unity without fissures with regard to ever admitting any wrongdoing on the part of the PP.

In the wake of the court decision, and in anticipation of further condemnatory rulings in a long list of pending cases around Spain, there was widespread agreement among all of the parties in the parliament, with the obvious exception of the PP, that Rajoy could no longer be prime minister. There was, however, some disagreement over whether the PP should simply get rid of Rajoy and propose a new Prime Minister, or if the PP should be removed from power altogether. Despite all denials by members of the PP, there was simply too much evidence suggesting that at a minimum, Rajoy must have known something about the corruption that had become so pervasive in his party since he took over as leader in 2004 (and indeed, going back to 1989, then the PP was re-founded). However, as Rajoy and the PP had made it clear that they would make no changes, for the simple reason that they did not accept the court ruling, it fell to the socialist party and its leader, Pedro Sánchez, to propose a confidence vote in the parliament on the 1st and 2nd of June 2018. Space dos not allow a thorough discussion of this event, which involved a great deal of audacity on Sanchez's part, given that for the vote, he had to cobble together a coalition of seven parties with diverse ideologies and interests, convincing them that for the sake of the greater good, the PP must be removed from power. On the 2nd of June, Sánchez and the socialists won the vote and then proceeded to form a minority government, which, at the time of this book's completion, has been in power for just over a month. Before closing this chapter, which has been about the PP and discourses of corruption (and sometimes corrupted discourses), I wish to discuss one final example of the PP and the dark arts of esoteric and creative truths, lying, misleadingness, bullshit and the deliberate propagation of ignorance.

The Enduring Appeal of the *Topos of Equivalence*

Rafael Hernando has always been a seemingly limitless source of quotable lines, and this was especially the case during his time as spokesperson for the PP in the Spanish parliament (the *Congreso de Diputados*). He was appointed to this post by Rajoy in December 2014 and stepped down in June 2018, when Rajoy was removed from power via the aforementioned no-confidence vote. During his time as spokesperson, he produced a good number of insulting comments aimed at all whom he considered to be political adversaries of the PP. Some of his outbursts have landed him in court, facing libel suits brought against him by offended people or associations.[9] Hernando's strategy has always been to attack political opponents when he thinks that the PP is being attacked and what ensues often makes for uncomfortable viewing/listening. In Spanish political parlance, he is what is known as a *politico jabalí* (a 'wild boar politician'), that is, a politician prone to visceral, crass, aggressive outbursts who, in effect, takes no prisoners.

On 29 May 2018, just three days before Sánchez and the socialists won the no-confidence vote, Hernando appeared on the morning television talk show *Espejo Público* (Public Mirror), broadcast on the Spanish channel *Antena 3*. Interviewed by host Susanna Griso, he was asked for his thoughts about the aforementioned no-confidence vote, then imminent, and especially about the corruption scandals that had engulfed the PP from 2007 onwards. Specifically, Griso asked Hernando to comment on the Gürtel ruling discussed above. At one point in his response to Griso, Hernando uttered the following words:

English translation	*Original in Spanish*
Look/I have no problem apologising again/and I would like to know if there are others who should be apologising/permanently/for the EREs cases/I haven't heard anything at all from them/if Mr. Rivera should apologise for submitting falsified accounting/for the period 2014–2015 to the Audit commission/if Mr. Iglesias should apologise every day for having been financed by the Iranian dictatorship or the Venezuelan dictatorship/ (Espejo Público 2018)	mire usted/yo no tengo problema en volver a pedir perdón/pero me gustaría saber si hay otros que tienen que pedir perdón/permanentemente/por los casos de los EREs/que yo no les he oído absolutamente nada/si el señor Rivera tiene que pedir perdón por presentar unas cuentas falsas/del año 2014–2015 al Tribunal de Cuentas/ si el señor Iglesias tiene que pedir perdón todos los días por haber sido financiado por la dictadura iraní o la dictadura venezolana/

In this statement, Hernando employs one key *topos*, which forms part of the by-now well-established general strategy of the PP to avoid ever taking responsibility for any wrongdoing, or where possible, to conceal wrongdoing. I refer here to the *topos of equivalence*, based on the idea that corruption is integral to the holding of political office and all Spanish political parties have their corruption scandals. Hernando does three things here that are captured by three key expressions in Spanish. First, he resorts to saying, in effect, *y tu más* ('and you more'), meaning that 'you cannot talk about my sins because yours are greater'. Thus, when asked about corruption in the PP, Hernando takes a detour and talks about the alleged corruption of other parties. He may also be seen to be engaging in a practice known as *echar balones fuera* (literally, 'throwing balls out of bounds', but better translated as 'dodging the issue'). Once he has acknowledged some link between the PP and corruption without dealing with specifics, he goes on to talk about anything but corruption in the PP. Third and finally, Hernando employs a strategy known as *el ventilator* ('the fan'), which evokes the image of a rotating fan blowing air in all directions, thus making it difficult to centre on the topic at hand, in this case corruption in the PP. In effect, the adoption of these distinct, though overlapping, discursive strategies is key to the construction of the *topos of equivalence*. In effect, Hernando is saying that since all parties have their corruption scandals, there is no need to worry about those involving the PP.

As I have noted, Hernando mentions alleged cases of corruption involving the PP's three main rivals in the Spanish parliament—the socialists, the centre-right party *Ciudadanos* (Citizens) and the new left party *Podemos* (We can). Let us examine each case in turn.

The socialists. Hernando's mention of the *EREs* (*Expedientes de Regulación de Empleo*; in English, 'employment regulation orders') is a reference to a scandal which for decades saw the socialist-dominated government of Andalucía involved in: (1) paying subsidies to companies that were not presenting an employment regulation order, or indeed to companies that never existed; (2) paying (sometimes exorbitant) commissions to individuals acting as intermediaries between the government and insurers, consultants, law firms and trade unionists; and (3) paying fraudulent early retirement pensions to individuals who had never worked in the companies soliciting an employment regulation order. Members of the socialist party are under investigation or on trial at present and some

have already been found guilty of professional malfeasance and embezzlement of public moneys in trials that continue in mid 2018.[10]

Ciudadanos. Hernando's reference to Ciudadanos' submission of falsified accounting for the period 2014–2015 to the Parliamentary Audit Commission is about a report by said commission, issued in 2017. The report cited numerous anomalies in this party's accounts for 2015, including the undervaluation of assets, incorrect classifications of debts and subsidies and a deficient central control over (and integration of) all local branch accounts of the party. Ciudadanos acknowledged these anomalies and the case had no formal legal consequences.

Podemos. Standing somewhat in contrast to the previous two cases is Hernando's claim that the leader of Podemos, Pablo Iglesias, should apologise every day for having been financed by the Iranian and Venezuelan 'dictatorships'. Several members of Podemos spent periods of time doing research and providing consultancy in Venezuela when the late Hugo Chavez was in power (Chavez died in March 2013). All of this was before Podemos became a political party in early 2014, which makes the illegal funding claim difficult to believe. Similarly, the financial link between Iran and Podemos seems to be based on very little evidence. Crucially, neither Podemos nor its members have ever been found guilty of any kind of corruption, despite having faced several appearances in court in response to charges brought against them by right-wing groups, acting in collusion with right-wing judges.

Thus, in constructing the *topos of equivalence* with regard to corruption, Hernando combines a combination of truth, misleadingness and either lying or bullshit. It is possible to argue that the EREs scandal is very real and that it is about the malfeasance (at a minimum) of prominent members of the socialist party in Andalucía. The Ciudadanos case is perhaps misleading, when one considers that, in the cited report, most of the parties in the parliament were found to have incurred similar anomalies in their finances, and that the PP actually faced more serious charges with regard to its actions and opacity in this regard than Ciudadanos. The Iglesias case is either a case of lying (Hernando knows that what he refers to is simply not true), or he is showing a disregard for the canons of reason and truth, entering the realm of esoteric truth (the theory that Podemos is a Trojan horse of Latin America Marxists trying to take over Spain). In addition, in citing Podemos and accusations of illegal funding,

he is contributing to the further propagation of ignorance practised by right-wing groups and the majority of the Spanish media with regard to Podemos, as its members are subjected to far more scrutiny with regard to their actions than members of other parties.

Several days later, in the run-up to the no-confidence vote that was to remove the PP from power, Hernando spent half an hour expanding on the statement he had made on television. This was to be his last speech in the parliament as spokesperson for the governing party and he took full advantage of the opportunity, serving up a great deal of diatribe with little or no regard for relevance or factuality. The speech was an example of genre-bending, as it was delivered in an off-the-cuff style reminiscent (to me, in any case) of what are known as *roasts* in the United States. A *roast* is a ceremony (often a dinner party) in honour of an individual, during which his/her friends and associates take it in turns to tell the most outrageous and insulting stories they can fabricate about the honouree. It is all done in good fun, though participation in such events is contingent on the honouree's stomach for being, in effect, *roasted*. Roasts do not exist in Spain, and what seems like a case of genre-based intertextuality, Hernando' s performance comes to be viewed as part and parcel of what he is considered to be by many—both inside and outside politics—a 'wild-boar politician'. The strategy seems to be a combination of 'take no prisoners' or 'shoot and ask questions later'. But perhaps it would be more fitting to call it 'gathering together all of the shit you have on others and then turning on the fan'. What follows are three examples along with my annotations, meant to provide the reader with necessary background. These examples show how Hernando, and the PP, chose to leave government:

In the first example, Hernando addresses Pablo Iglesias, leader of Podemos:

English translation	*Original in Spanish*
Mr. Iglesias/I'd like you to speak with a little more dignity/about my party (.5) yeah I know that you used to be a young revolutionary/and that now you're just a petty bourgeois with chalet and swimming pool/things change/ (Hernando 2018)	señor Iglesias/yo le pido que hable con un poco más de diginidad/de mi partido (.5) yo ya sé que usted era antes un joven revolucionario/y que ahora es solo un pequeño burgués con chalet y piscina/las cosas cambian

The 'speak with a little more dignity' is in reference Iglesias's earlier damning portrayal of Rajoy and the PP. This admonishment on Hernando's part does not seem unduly harsh given Iglesias's style, which may be seen as either 'vigorous' or 'aggressive', depending on the observer. By contrast, the 'chalet and swimming pool' comment seems to cross the line between the public and the personal. This is a reference to the recent purchase by Iglesias and his partner, Podemos's parliamentary spokesperson Irene Montero, of a large house with a garden and swimming pool in a village outside of Madrid. Since Iglesias and Montero self-position as communists, many have criticised them for hypocrisy, including some members of Podemos and parties allied with Podemos. The question is if this is an appropriate piece of information to introduce into a parliamentary debate on a vote of confidence.

Next, Hernando addresses Margarita Robles, an ex-Judge and parliamentary spokesperson for the socialist party:

English translation	*Original in Spanish*
Mrs. Robles/judges are not infallible/not even you/do you remember that you ruled on or dictated a sentence/against Ahmed Tammouhi/you sentenced him to 15 years for rape/a rape he didn't commit {protests from the socialist group} (2.0) people make mistakes/even judges/	señora Robles/los jueces no son infalibles/ni tan siquiera usted/se acuerda de que usted dictaminó o dictó una sentencia/contra Ahmed Tammouhi/lo condenó a 15 años por violación/una violación que no había cometido {protests from the socialist group} (2.0) la gente se equivoca/también los jueces/
(Hernando 2018)	

In an attempt to discredit Robles, Hernando brings up the tragic case of Ahmed Tammouhi, who was indeed sentenced to 15 years for rapes occurring in 1991, which, as was later shown, he did not commit. Margarita Robles was a member of the tribunal that found Tammouhi guilty. Again, one might well wonder if this is an appropriate topic to insert into a debate about a confidence vote. If the point is to argue that Robles is not up to the task of holding the post that she holds, surely there are other ways to convey this.

Finally, Hernando addresses Albert Rivera, the leader of the centre-right party *Ciudadanos*:

English translation	*Original in Spanish*
Mr. Rivera/you are the lord of the medals/ stop being the lord of the big ideas/OK?/ {Rivera points at Hernando} because big ideas of this type/we have all been reading/ {Rivera points at members of the PP} and we heard them yesterday/we already know that they lead nowhere (.5) and stop gesturing/relax/I don't know what's wrong with you/you spend the whole day gesticulating/ (Hernando 2018)	señor Rivera/que es usted el señor de las medallas/deje de ser el señor de las ocurrencias/vale?/{Riveras points at Hernando} porque ocurrencias de este tipo/que hemos estado leyendo todos/{Rivera points at members of the PP}y las escuchamos ayer/ ya sabemos que no llevan a ningún sitio (.5) y deje de gesticular/esté usted relajado/no sé que le pasa a usted/pasa el día gesticulando/

The reference to 'lord of the medals' is about what many political observers see as a tendency for Albert Rivera to claim that his party has been the inspiration for publicly popular policies passed in the parliament. The reference to 'big ideas' is about his self-positioning as a reformist politician and how he tends to send up a good number of trial balloons, only to quickly pull back if he sees that the general public's reaction is negative (see Block, in preparation, for a discussion of the populism of Ciudadanos). However, these are a relatively mild criticisms of Rivera's political practices, which is perhaps why Hernando suddenly shifts gears to attack Rivera's body language, and this leads to the far more personal attack on his character—'you spend the whole day gesticulating'.

Conclusion

Ultimately, what we see in Hernando's words is much like what we see in the discourse of Cospedal and other members of the party, and this is an unfailing loyalty to the PP, which some have likened to the *omertá*, the purported code of silence in the Italian mafia. This loyalty explains the frequent entry into the world of *anything goes* discourse, which at times prioritises insults over debate, but more importantly involves the holy trinity of lying, bullshitting and misleadingness, when it is not about more elaborate attempts to propagate ignorance. There is the constant invocation of the three-headed strategy of evasive discourse—'dodging the issue', 'and you more' and 'the fan', coupled with a propensity for

esoteric truths (e.g., conspiracies against the PP) and creative truths (we create our own reality). All of this combined with a general disdain for empirical or rational truth. Perhaps taking their cue from Machiavelli, many PP members have embraced the notion 'that the princes who have done great things are those who have taken little account of faith and have known how to get around men's brains with their astuteness' (Machiavelli [1532] 1985, pp. 68–69). Wagging the dog would appear to be their daily bread. Meanwhile, Fish's definition of post-truth politics cited at the beginning of this chapter, with its concentration on the issuing of false warnings and the making promises with no intention of keeping them, seems off target, even if the reference to 'mak[ing] claims that there is no real reason to believe are true' (Fish 2017, p. 211) would seem to apply. To be sure, the PP has engaged in the previous two types of action: for example, their discourses about sub-Saharan Africans trying to land on Spain's southern shores and their notorious record on breaking campaign promises, respectively. However, issuing false warnings, making false promises and making false claims perhaps are, as Machiavelli noted in the sixteenth century, part and parcel of politicking. In this sense, there is no post-truth in the matter; just a political party trying to survive as such.

Nevertheless, it is my view that the corruption scandals of the PP, and the lengths they have gone to cover them up, is, without paragon in Western Europe at present. Three of the last four leaders of the Madrid autonomous assembly, who governed uninterruptedly from 1995 to 2018 (Alberto Ruiz Gallardon 1995–2003; Esperanza Aguirre 2003–2012; Ignacio González 2011–2015; and Cristina Cifuentes 2015–2018), have had to step down due to corruption scandals and all four have been indicted, or, as this book goes to press, are about to be indicted. Numerous municipalities in this community are the focal points of investigations in the Gürtel case discussed above. Meanwhile, in the autonomous community of Valencia, all four of the regional leaders of the PP as recently as 2011, have gone to trial and numerous former autonomous assembly ministers have met the same fate. The mayor of the city of Valencia from 1991 to 2015, Rita Barberá, was perhaps one of the most corrupt politicians ever to grace Spanish politics, involved as she was in bribery and money laundering scandals. She died of multi-organ dysfunction, aged 68, just when she was about to be indicted and likely subjected to what would have been (for her, in any case) a long and agonising public humiliation. Earlier in this chapter, we met

Francisco Camps, the former leader of the Valencia assembly from 2003 to 2011, who was indicted in 2009. Camps has since been indicted several times but has never been convicted of wrongdoing of any kind. The general thinking is that he never will, despite being the focal point of the numerous cases of bribery, kickbacks, money laundering, cronyism, nepotism and so on, that occurred in Valencia from the mid-1990s onwards when the PP first wrested power from the socialists both at the assembly level and at the municipal level. I could go on, including cases from other parts of Spain where the PP has been dominant, such as the Balearic Islands and Murcia. Suffice it to say that the PP's corruption has been 'systemic', as the party and its members have come to embody many of the characteristics associated with organised crime.

In this chapter, my aim has been to show how an assemblage of interrelated discursive moves play out in the discourses of members of the PP about corruption in the PP, and how, at times party members' attempts to conceal information and manipulate discussion of their activities lead to a corruption of the very discourses used in political communication. The by-now undeniable involvement of the PP in a massive corruption ring extended around Spain (Trias Sagnier 2018) has finally led to the party's removal from power in the national parliament. However, at the time of writing, this sudden loss of power has not yet led to a change in tack, as PP members continue to deny the obvious and to attack their political opponents. This *modus operandi* has served them well for decades in which they have been able to dominate the Spanish political landscape while very skilfully covering up their corrupt activities. It is now a question of seeing what happens in the immediate future, in short, to examine the party's future path: will members continue the stonewalling tactics that have been a constant for decades, or will there (finally) be some show of contrition and repentance? And will those who have voted for the PP in the past continue to do so in the future?

Some researchers (e.g., Anduiza et al. 2013; Fernández-Vázquez et al. 2013; Muñoz et al. 2016) suggest that Spanish voters in general are tolerant of corruption scandals involving members of *their party*, while they tend to denounce scandals affecting members of other parties, and that PP voters are especially loyal. Perhaps at work here is an element of Damasio's (1994) somatic markers, discussed in Chapter 2, whereby deeply ingrained and embodied negative and positive emotions guide decision-making and behaviour: there is a closed predisposition to vote for the PP which only with great difficulty can be affected by (empirical)

events. Or perhaps these voters have discovered a key characteristic of politics in democratic regimes, which is, as Gianni Vattimo (2011, p. 39) notes, 'its own incapacity to conform to truth, since it has to let itself be driven by the play of majorities and minorities in democratic consensus'. In any case, up to now, the number of voters who seem to accept the PP's strategy with regard to corruption has been sufficient to guarantee the party perhaps more than its fair share of power in Spain. This has occurred around a set of key ideas, which include: (1) in the end, all politicians are corrupt and all political parties, therefore, will have their corruption cases; (2) the PP corruption scandals are the fabrications of the left-wing media out to damage members of the PP and the party as a whole; (3) parts of the police and judiciary have been compromised such that the police fabricate evidence against the PP and judges then indict them and sometimes convict them; and (4) corruption can generate positive developments, such as the building of infrastructure and public facilities. There is also, a degree of tribalism, emotional bonds and the technological circumstances in which we live today (the filter bubble), all of which contribute to what on the surface is identified as voter loyalty. In any case, with regard to the continuance of loyalty, only time and events will tell.[11]

Notes

1. I thank Will Simpson for drawing my attention to this recording.
2. Jayson Harsin (2006) has written about what he calls the 'rumour bomb', that is, the irresponsible and unaccountable spreading of false information about individuals and groups considered to be enemies or adversaries. Harsin argues that 'changing institutional news values, communication technologies, and political public relations (PR) strategies have converged to produce a profoundly vexing relationship between rumour and verification, which is exploited by politicians with anti-deliberative aims of managing belief' (Harsin 2006, p. 85).
3. Relevant here is a comment made by José Sánchez (personal communication). Sánchez notes that among anthropologists studying Arab societies, there are two positions on nepotism: on the one hand, a Western ethnocentric view whereby it is framed in a negative way, and on the other hand, a post-colonial view whereby nepotism, or *wasta*, has to do with the 'sociabilities' historically rooted in those cultures. Thus, what is understood as corrupt in the West may not be considered so in societies where being in a network of sociabilities allows one to obtain benefits. In

such contexts, the use of *wasta* by elites may, in fact, be seen as corrupt, while the use of *wasta* by those with few resources is a matter of getting by, something that is done. May Sabbagh (personal communication) has also explained to me how *wasta* works in her context, Lebanon.

4. I am borrowing this notion of the analogical from Robert Haskell (1978), who long ago discussed how members of a therapy group, who at the time were discussing the power that journalists wielded in society, produced analogical utterances. At one point, one of the participants happened to ask if anyone knew a newspaper columnist named 'Harry Harris'. Haskell points out that that the two therapists present were himself (Haskell) and a colleague named Heapes and that this fact might be linking analogically to asking about a journalist with a double-H name. In addition, the name 'Harry' is homophonic with 'hairy' and 'Harris' is almost homophonic with 'hairless', and this is significant because one therapist had a beard while the other was clean shaven. Haskell does not see such associations as idle or accidental, and attributes them to analogical information processing.
5. JONS is the acronym for *Juntas de Ofensiva Nacional-Sindicalista* (National-syndicalist front collectives), a fascist syndicalist organisation founded in the 1930s, which remained intact as an ideological current through name changes over the decades. Here, Vázquez Montalbán's use of the term is probably best seen as more orientative and indicative of Aznar's political views in his youth than the accurate naming of any organisation that he belonged to.
6. Spanish investigative police have a penchant for coming up with cryptic names for their cases. In this case, an agent who had spent time in Germany chose the name *Gürtel* (the German word for 'belt') based on an association he made between the Spanish words *correa*, technically the leather strap that forms part of a belt, and the word for belt, *cinturón*, as in the phrase *la correa siempre va con el cinturón* ('the leather strip always goes with the belt'). The idea seems to be that the principal suspect Correa always went with the belt, the *Gürtel*.
7. Garzón is famous in international legal circles for having indicted former Chilean dictator Augustin Pinochet for human rights violations committed during his period in power (1973–1990). Knowing that Pinochet was in the UK, Garzon drew on the principle of international jurisdiction to issue the indictment as well as an extradition order to have him tried for his crimes in Spain. The British authorities arrested Pinochet in October 1998 and held him under house arrest until March 2000, when British judges ruled in his favour, refusing to grant extradition, based on the principle that Pinochet enjoyed state immunity.

8. There was not in the Camps case, nor has there ever been with regard to the multitude of corruption cases that have emerged since, a reaction of the kind one observes in British politics, whereby the party almost immediately turns on politicians accused by the courts of wrongdoing, expelling them if they do not themselves immediately resign. In marked contrast to this *modus operandi*, the PP strategy has always been to defend and defend and defend accused party members—which often involves an unnecessarily prolonged period of lying, misleadingness and creative theorising—until it becomes obvious that this strategy is no longer sustainable, Once a wrongdoer has stepped down, there is the argument that the corruption case has nothing to do with the PP because the individual in question is no longer a member of the party.
9. For example, he lost one such case in 2014 when he had to pay a €20,000 fine to a rival party, *Unión Progreso y Democracia* (Union of Progress and Democracy) for having offended its honour when he claimed that it was guilty of illegal financing without providing any evidence.
10. Nevertheless, this macro case has attracted considerably less attention than the PP corruption cases for several reasons. First, it is an incredibly complex case involving multiple levels of state bureaucracy and private interests. Second, not only socialist politicians have been involved and a good number of private citizens, many of whom are probably not socialist party sympathisers took part in the distribution of favours and money. Third and finally, the scandal took place in Andalucía, where there is there is extremely high systemic unemployment and a largely subsidised economy, particularly in the agricultural sector. This contrasts with the Gúrtel scandal, which took place in considerably more prosperous parts of the country that receive greater media attention, such as Madrid, Valencia and the Balearic Islands.
11. Polls carried out in 2018 have tended to show PP's support to have been diminished from the 33% of the popular vote it obtained in June 2016 down to 20% and, in some cases, significantly below that.

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CHAPTER 4

Conclusion

Abstract After a brief summary of the contents of Chapters 1–3, this chapter links together a series of relatively discrete issues not covered in those chapters. It takes on the notion of bourgeois pessimism that may be seen to permeate the book, before moving to a discussion of what is known as the 'dirtbag left' in the United States. The chapter then considers how those writing about post-truth and related phenomena are progressively from countries which are deemed democratic, leaving the open question of how notions around the truth and untruth are relative. Finally, there are some closing comments about future directions that the author might pursue, in particular ones focusing on Spain and Catalonia.

Keywords Post-truth · Bourgeois pessimism · Dirtbag left · Alt-right Eurocentric perspective · Spanish politics · Catalan politics

Introduction

In Chapter 1 of this book, I introduced the topic of post-truth, though I made it clear that I found it inadequate in many ways and that I would be focusing on additional terms such as lying, misleadingness, bullshit and the propagation of ignorance. I also discussed my research methodology, how I would be analysing texts and drawing on work in CDS. Then, in Chapter 2, I took the reader on a journey through my reflections on post-truth and the above-mentioned alternative

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concepts/terms, threading into the discussion numerous examples from day-to-day life and academia. Previous to this, I discussed the notion of truth, and truths, drawing on Baggini's (2017) typology. I also dealt with anti-expertism/anti-intellectualism, the role of emotions in cognition and finally how the social media can determine what discourses are legitimised and what discourses remain relatively marginal. The content of Chapters 1 and 2 then served as a way of framing Chapter 3, where I conducted an in-depth analysis of political communication—specifically the *Partido Popular*'s discourses about and of corruption, as well as what I have termed corrupt discourses.

As I sit down to write this, the final chapter of this book, the question in my mind is: Where do I go from here? *Here*, in this case, is the content of Chapters 2 and 3, where I hope to have made clear the links between the key terms in the title of this book—Post-Truth and Political Discourse. Given word-count restrictions, this chapter will necessarily be a short one. What I aim to do here is to link together a series of relatively discrete issues that have arisen in my contacts with the readers of the previous three chapters, as well as conversations I have had with a range of people on the topic of post-truth.

Post-Truth and Political Discourse: Issues Remaining

Those who cast a critical eye on contemporary societies and phenomena such as post-truth show a general tendency to be pessimistic about the object of their gaze. Is this a case of 'bourgeois pessimism'? That is, is it a case of members of the ruling class (and those who identify with their interests) once again exercising their right and privilege to propagate their self-indulgent pessimism, whilst the popular classes, condemned to living directly and immediately the negative effects of capitalism, only have time to survive and resist that which is bad and wrong and unfair? I do not have an answer to this question, as I am not sure I think that the label is particularly useful: Is there not a certain inevitability at work here as whatever pessimism a middle-class person might espouse will, by definition, be bourgeois?

Recently, I learned of yet another new term, which somehow had previously escaped my lexical and conceptual radar, the 'dirtbag left'. 'Dirtbag' is a term used for mountain climbers with few resources, who with determination and sacrifice can survive in extreme conditions

(literally, living in the dirt). However, it also applies to people living on the fringes of a mainstream society, who are completely devoted to a cause which they pursue zealously and relentlessly, ignoring or violating accepted norms of behaviour, such as politeness or respect for others. 'Dirtbag left' is said to have been coined by Amber A'Lee Frost, a host on a podcast called *Chapo Trap House* and according to Jeet Heer (2017, n.p.), the term is 'used to describe a take-no-prisoners style of American socialism that's ascendant in the age of Trump'. Dirtbag left-wingers use the same tactics as the so-called Alt-right (Alternate Right), such as memes and trolling, while employing sharp and cutting irony to insult and critique not only those who are situated clearly on the political right, but also, individuals and groups associated with the Democratic Party. The former deserve no respect and all of the ridicule that dirtbag left-wingers can muster because for some time now they have been employing aggressive 'anything goes' discourses in political communication; the latter are deserving because the Democratic Party is deemed to have lost all vestiges of the relatively light version of social democracy that once defined it.

The dirtbag left may be seen as a case of bourgeois pessimism moving from the more laid-back image of dinner party conversation to a direct engagement with right-wing activism and Democratic Party sell-outs. Above all, there is a very real sense that for many people who self-identify as 'progressive' or 'left-wing' in the United States, the gloves are off, as bare-knuckled cyber activists descend into the trenches to fight it out with followers of the Alt-Right. As mentioned above, dirtbag left-wingers mimic the Alt-Right's tactics, but assume that they will be better at them and above all more intelligent in their application. Class warfare mediated by the social media? Hardly, given that the ideological battle over what counts as the truth becomes an elite online game that can only be played by those with the technical savvy and confidence to display their *irony*. This is ideological debate as the exclusive domain of elites. Now where have we seen that before?

To return to the topic of pessimism in post-truth commentary (bourgeois or otherwise), I come to a short piece written by Andrew Odlyzko, who sums up the state of post-truth commentary as follows:

> The advocates of the war on the post-truth world do offer many beguiling arguments. The Internet was acclaimed as leading to a new age of enlightenment through easy communication and universal access to information.

> Instead, observers see the emergence of an increasingly polluted information environment. We face torrents of false or at least distorted tweets, video clips, and blog posts. We also observe the formation of many echo chambers, groups that reinforce those groups' chosen visions, selecting what to accept as true, and amplifying each other's biases. There are widespread fears such trends will hurt our society, especially since there is growing evidence of large organized projects to pollute social network discourse and redirect it. (Odlyzko 2017, n.p.)

Odlyzko then goes on to suggest, somewhat tongue-in-cheek and displaying views aligned with social evolutionism and rational choice theory, that human beings have always run behind cultural developments, but that eventually they catch up. In addition, thought collectives, echo chambers and filter bubbles (he refers to 'groupthink') have always existed and can serve a positive purpose, as when they lead to a well-organised collective of like-minded people working towards positive change in society. Finally, Odlyzko suggests that the fight against post-truth and efforts aimed at rescuing the 'truth', are problematic because, as he puts it, '[h]human life depends not only on fooling others, but also on fooling ourselves, and the ability to do so could be impaired by many of the methods being developed to fight [post-truth]' (Odlyzko 2017, n.p.).

Though I share neither Odlyzko's apparent belief in the naturalness of the times in which we live, nor his optimism regarding the future, I do think that there is something in the suggestion that human beings have yet to catch up with the technologies we now have at our disposal. It is not just a matter of taking advantage of all that they afford, but knowing how to incorporate all that they afford into our everyday thinking and behaviour in such a way that we do not lose sight of many of the aspects of contemporary polities and cultures that have made our lives more liveable. Further to this, I see the real prospect that new ways of dealing with information will emerge, such that everything we see and hear is subject to an unprecedented amount of scrutiny. We know, for example, that with new technologies all images can be altered and that it takes no effort whatsoever for people to post fabricated stories online or via social media. There is the need to be permanently critical, as the age of innocence, if it ever existed, necessarily gives way to an age of scepticism.

However, I am keenly aware of my Eurocentric perspective on all of the matters and issues I have commented on in this book. And this leads me to another consideration that was not explored in this book, namely,

how most of the talk and writing about post-truth, agnotology, misleadingness, bullshit and so on are coming from parts of the world that historically have enjoyed a good deal of freedom of speech and where elected officials and members of the political class in general are at least to some extent held accountable and are not immune to prosecution if they do something wrong. Much of the problem-framing and many of the arguments surrounding post-truth must be different (and indeed, they are different) if we move from my positioning in Western Europe to contemporary Russia and China, just to cite two examples. But more importantly, there is the matter of the poorer nations of the world, where there is neither the infrastructure nor the critical mass of online and social media users for phenomena associated with post-truth to occur in the same way as they occur in Spain or the United States, again just to cite two examples. This is not to say that mendacity, bullshit and misleadingness do not exist in these contexts; rather, it is to say that their polities and cultures have developed against very different socio-historical backdrops and are mediated by very different media regimes.

Finally, the criticism of partiality in my approach may be extended inwards, so to speak, to my treatment of Spanish political communication in Chapter 3. There I focused exclusively on the *Partido Popular*, but did not deal with other instances of corruption, discourses of corruption and discourse corruption, such as the ERE's case which I only mentioned in passing. I also had nothing to say about Catalonia, where I live and work and encounter on a day-to-day basis a wide range of interactions between notions of truth and political discourse. In fact, my intention in Chapter 3 was always to focus exclusively on the *Partido Popular*, and in particular the Gúrtel case, while only allowing other political formations to enter the discussion, where, when and as necessary. To have done otherwise would have made my treatment of this topic unwieldy and above all, extremely difficult to follow.

However, with regard to the *Partido Popular*'s ambivalent relationship with notions of truth and its higher-than-normal propensity to lie in order to avoid responsibility for wrongdoing, there is, indeed, a lot more work to be done. For example, as I was completing this book, a scandal arose around the falsification of adamic credentials on the part of Cristina Cifuentes, the then-president of the Madrid assembly. Cifuentes was accused of having used her influence to obtain (buy) an MA in Public Sector Law from a state university in Madrid (eldiario.es 2018). After several weeks of stonewalling and lying (no other terms apply),

Cifuentes was forced to step down from the post of president and abandon her seat in the Madrid assembly when a video of her being detained for shoplifting several years earlier suddenly surfaced (Expansión 2018). In this case, and indeed many others which have occurred in recent years, there is corruption in the realms of morality and right and wrong, as other *Partido Popular* members have been involved in scandals that are often outside the bounds of acceptable behaviour to say the least. One example is a papal visit to Valencia in 2006, which was turned into an opportunity to line the pockets of political cronies and friends (see Castillo 2016 for an account of a long list of corruption scandals in Valencia).

As regards Catalonia, and in particular the independence movement and all of the events and phenomena emerging from it, I see a great deal of scope for a focus on post-truth. This is especially the case because of the large number of disputes over *the truth* of different representations of past, present and hypothetical future events. Indeed, as this book ends, so begins my shift in attention from the *Partido Popular* to the Catalan independence movement and events occurring around it. My interest continues to be in how esoteric and creative truths, lying, misleadingness, bullshit and the deliberate propagation of ignorance are part and parcel of the discursive construction of events from different angles. As I hope to have shown in this book, this type of political discourse analysis is most appropriate for the times in which we live.

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Appendix: Transcription Conventions

Slash (/) shows the end of a chunk of talk that is normally paced.

Pauses are timed to the nearest second and the number of seconds is provided in parentheses: (.5).

Italics indicate the adoption of a voice as a rhetorical device, which could be the speaker's voice or that of another person. Voicing includes the reading of a document.

Commentary about body movements, facial expressions and extralinguistic features in interaction such as laughter are put in curly brackets: {laugher} {lifts her arm}

Overlapping turns are indicated using square brackets: [xxxx [yyyyy

Latched speech (just as one interlocutor is finishing an utterance, another begins one) is marked with an equals sign: =

Rising intonation is marked with a question mark: ?

Words pronounced with higher than normal volume are written in capital letters: HIM.

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