Whose Truth: A Dialogic Interplay with Online Political Dialogue(s)

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INTRODUCTION

While "post-truth" is positioned as a "truism" of the modern age, that legitimates deceit and is weaponized via social networks, this paper takes an ironic stance to this claim. Drawing on the philosophical writings of Bakhtin enables a playing with dimensions of truth as received (*istina*) and lived (*pravda*) in parodic interplays with information, misinformation, and disinformation.[1] In this view, truth is no more "after-the-fact" (as in "post-truth"), than it is absent. Rather, truths legitimacy, or, conversely, its fraudulence, rests in the social spaces that grant it seriousness, or foolishness for that matter.[2] In public, so-called democratic, social networking spaces there are arguably multiple truth games at play. Importantly, not all are mastered by the so-called "powerful."[3] Taking a jesting stance, political deceit can be understood as a dialogic act of trickery that draws its legitimacy (and power) from those who benefit least; while those who have the most to gain are at liberty to benefit from its consequence.[4] Inspired by Bakhtin's late-life interviews, a reading of social networking encounters as political dialogues, that strategically play with dimensions of truth is investigated.[5] This conceptualisation of political dialogues, as responses to everyday issues of political concern, enables an examination of diverse, and thus never fully merging truths, facilitating analyses of richer ideological becomings.[6] An entreaty that explores such communions according to their strategic purpose over time and space, in dialogic struggles with truth and power.

Bakhtin's distorting, and disturbing, viewing of "truth" as lived and received is discernible in social networking encounters, characterised by tensions strategically lurking within the discourse. This multiplicity of truths within everyday interactions problematises the posed absence, or "after," of post-truth, for jostling ideologies in dialogic interplays. The Bakhtinian

dialogic concepts of chronotope, carnivalesque and authoritative, official seriousness construct a philosophical vantage point for exposing the nuanced, communicative language forms that take place as onto-epistemological encounters. In addition to their situatedness within the everyday discourse (as skaz).[7] As Brandist and colleagues explain, dialogism has "much to offer in the consideration of learning, relationships and what these aspects mean for contemporary society."[8] Dialogism dismantles monologic notions of truth by drawing attention to the strategic orientations of speakers' argumentation and beliefs, which drive the way truth claims are applied in the discourse. Within this political viewing, truth surpasses claims to "post," offering instead a series of dialogic loopholes.

WHOSE TRUTH?

Since a dialogic viewing cannot settle for a single truth, claims of post-truth are only partial. This is because the singular negates *multiple* received and lived truths that can be discerned within the discourse, as well as the genres through which they are disguised. As discourses compete for meaning, they offer potential for alterities and pluralities, rather than any single narrative. Subsuming divergent worldviews as 'information' is, therefore, antithetic to Bakhtinian dialogism, which complicates monologic appreciations of misinformation and disinformation. Moreover, claims to any one truth in the absence of another immobilises "other" and casts them as voiceless objects at the mercy of those in power.[9] As Epstein notes, "a civilization in fear of itself because any of its achievements can become a weapon for its own destruction."[10] This fear is seemingly magnified in contemporary social networks' intricate communicative interplays. With communions within these sites a feast of complex beliefs, their argumentation and language calls for a philosophical framework in which these unfinalizable, no end and no beginning, complexities are considered and upheld.

Received and lived truths in living discourse offer a point of departure from all-too-certain claims of truth or, for that matter, a lack of any truth whatsoever (as is arguably the case in post-truth discourse). From a dialogic standpoint, neither can exist without the other. While *istina* is viewed

as a theoretical or universal truth which is widely propagated,[11] *pravda* is a means of generating truths that are based on lived experience in "both thinking and acting."[12] Appreciating these nuances upends notions of post-truth by exploring how, and if, political dialogues respond to received *istina* within social networks, and the extent to which they do so by utilizing *pravda*. How political dialogues might mirror a received *istina*, disavowing a lived *pravda*, or impose *istina* on another, seeking to silence this other's *pravda*, take centre stage in this viewing. This dialogic entreaty does not so easily conceptualise notions of information, misinformation, and disinformation. Instead, it offers a framework to analyse how information might be perceived as a multiplicitous sea of misinformation and disinformation, through interplays of lived *pravda* and received *istina* in social networks.

Truth can also change over time and space, shifting axiological values embedded in these dimensions. The chronotope problematizes a monologic viewing of post-truth, which is always "after," due to its intrinsic time, space, and axiology interplays. These chronotopic interactions are not linear, allowing for backwards and forwards shifts of truth values and positions across peoples, spaces and times.[13] As temporal and spatial coordinates are intrinsic to speakers' axiology, this concept facilitates a compass and map for language investigations and truth claims. Such a framing is arguably pertinent for dynamic social networks that exist across virtual times and various value spaces, such as 4Chan's alt-right and TikTok's trend machine.[14] Furthermore, during pandemic times, Facebook groups enabled teachers' political dialogues to recategorize notions they were babysitters as disinformation.[15] Hence, concerns of how political dialogues spread misinformation and disinformation are rejected as simplistic by this chronotopic framing, positioned as past relics, disclaiming (post-)truth and "information" as delimiting due to their "ready-made and finalized" characterization.[16] For example, Miltner and Highfield pinpointed the dual utility of a waving Obama GIF on Facebook, which catered to the objectives of both left-wing and right-wing political groups.[17] To the former, it conveyed "affection" and endorsement, while to the latter, it conveyed a sense of sarcastic disdain. These chronotopic truths

of differing social networks, promulgate the question whose truth? Bakhtin, who perceived the "wound as a womb," facilitates an analysis of such possible, competing truths that might be birthed from the multiple political dialogues within social networks.[18]

CARNIVALESQUE AND AUTHORITATIVE TRUTHS

Dialogism fosters an investigation into how truths can become topsy-turvey through Bakhtin's notion of carnivalesque, enabling contemplations of how received *istina* and post-truths are upended and rejected for a multiplicity of lived *pravda*. Carnivalesque characterizes the de-stabilizing and reversal of esteemed truth *istina* through atypical responses, tongue-in-cheek, mocking, grotesque, parodying laughter.[19] This carnivalesque viewing reframes misinformation and disinformation as a means of birthing new truths. Ones that enable "wider perspectives," "from the people's [*pravda*] point of view" beyond authoritative, received truth "reaching far beyond the limited progress of the time."[20] Calling on the cynical "image of Diogenes" as a radical truth teller, and the "image of Menippus" as a mocking satirist, Bakhtin[21] outlines the "trial of truth (the old new truth)." An inverting that speaks to social networks seemingly absurdist political responses, such as Reddit's "Sexy John Oliver" posts for proposed policy changes within this site.[22] By parting way with the "ordinary," the typical world order is inverted during carnivalesque, by a jesting public court that upends authorial, esteemed truths for transgressive, underground voices and values.[23] This type of humour's relationality to truth games enables rejections and reimaginings of authoritative *istina* for silenced, underprivileged *pravda,* with such laughter reconstituting whose truth is granted allegiance.[24] Consequently, this concept offers a viewing of "how the old truth is laughed at and shown the door, in order to create room for new truths to be born."[25] Although this mirth appears effectively leveraged by the right (see for instance, "The Left Can't Meme" political mantra), carnivalesque offers no allegiances. Instead, fostering equal antidotes to repressive power forms, by taking nothing seriously, "it knows no inhibitions, no limitations."[26] Therefore, carnivalesque is signalled as a potential political dialogue, employable across ideological discourses of

multiple truth *pravda*. Such as those fostered by the #MeToo and #Black-LivesMatter movements, suggesting the ways this concept can verse the official immortalized *istina*.

Whilst carnivalesque is "contrary to the classic images" of truth, authoritative official truth embraces and instils a single unified *istina*.[27] When positioning information and truth as a "legitimate" authority, placed beyond reproach, the "correct way" to (politically) respond is engendered. Simultaneously misinformation and disinformation are connotated in ways that may entrench "existing hierarchy, the existing religious, political, and moral values, norms, and prohibitions" as "predominant truth…put forward as eternal and indisputable."[28] The infused legitimacy of authoritative truth *istina* can be strategically employed as an endeavour to unify conceptions of information, misinformation, and disinformation to the speakers' political ideology, stationed as a "magisterial script."[29] Such as Trump's inciting of the Capital Hill riot, due to his characterization of the 2021 presidential outcome as disinformation, which was positioned as an authorial truth *istina*.[30] Bakhtinian dialogism, that looks in two directions at once, offers an examination of these authorial entrenching and carnivalesque inverting truths.[31] A philosophical lens that can appreciate the many loopholes of argumentation and belief, which when brought to bear in social networks, sets in motion a more strategic viewing.

JESTING AND AUTHORIAL TRUTHS IN SOCIAL NETWORKS

As virtual public spaces, political dialogues within social networks can be likened to carnivalesque crowds, because they can exist outside of official institutions' prescribed allegiances. Bakhtin described how such a crowd is "the people as a whole, but organized *in their own way*, the way of the people."[32] Although social networking members may come with titles, and varying degrees of professional qualifications, experiences, etc, these do not necessarily dictate who has the primary voice in these virtual forums; "freed from the authority of all hierarchical positions (social estate, rank, age, property)."[33] Social networks may inhabit a sort of carnivalesque freedom because they provide collective venues, where people can freely engage in

dialogic encounters, ones beyond official doctrines that might be encountered in other spaces. Davies and Rahimi have both claimed social networks facilitate carnivalesque. Carnival, Bakhtin explained declined after the Middle Ages and Renaissance.[34] Witnessing a "gradual narrowing down of the ritual, spectacle…which became small and trivial."[35] With public life shifting to private homes, the participatory carnival shrank, and with it went the atmosphere of freedom that granted the silenced an ability to share divergent voices.[36] Bakhtin, who died before the rise of the internet, never knew of social networks that connect communities, offering virtual public spaces ripe with carnivalesque.[37] These "Web 2.0" sites, a term which denotes how users generate the evolving content based on their interests, are arguably a space created by and for the people.[38] Such carnivalesque responses subvert official truths, enabling an outlet to speak up in divergent ways.

Notably, carnivalesque and authoritative, official truths are interwoven language styles, with carnivalesque arising in response to authoritative official truths, denoting the likelihood of this language style in social networks.[39] A carnivalesque "suspension [of *istina*] for the time of the festivity" might be observed in social networks, such as the Arab Spring, and in blogs for the neurodivergent.[40] Simultaneously, social networks can be steeped in the "coercive socioeconomic and political organizations," that carnivalesque inverts. Examples include the rise of the Chinese party-state's adoption of "digital populism" on WeChat to validate its political truth *istina*; Facebook's Cambridge Analytica scandal; the rise of influencers' authority, such as those on YouTube whose commercial-cultural "microcelebrity management" instils political truth; in addition to social network companies vying and conglomeration, such as Elon Musk's Twitter takeover and Facebook's buy out of Instagram, suggesting a coercive saturation of authoritative truth *istina*.[41] A Bakhtinian dialogic analysis of political dialogues stays with these tensions of competing and inverting truths, facilitating an examination of language and beliefs within social networks. As opposed to (post-)truth concerns about the spreading of information, misinformation, and disinformation.

Political Dialogue Truth(s)

   Employing Bakhtin for a dialogic analysis of political dialogues may cause aghast for those such as Emerson, who have described Bakhtin as apolitical, denoting his unsuitability for such endeavours.[42] Yet, a reading of Bakhtin from the 1930s to 1970s invokes a philosopher entrenched in dialogic analysis that can be fruitfully applied to political dialogues. Especially when privileging his concept of carnivalesque and authoritative official seriousness. Perhaps, unsurprisingly, Emerson considered carnivalesque "(to say the least) highly peculiar," given Bakhtin's "antirevolutionary" and "apolitical" sentiment. Guided by the recently translated into English interviews,[43] a discernible Bakhtin is unveiled from his Aesopiansim to be engaging in political dialogue.[44] These late-life interviews are a unique entreaty for hearing "Bakhtin in his own voice," facilitating an "uncensored" journey into his "inner world," proving "invaluable" to "help correct previous errors."[45]

   Whilst controversial, several Bakhtinians have employed a dialogic analysis to political dialogues. Among them, Neilson emphasised Bakhtinian political dialogues as ethical imperatives.[46] One where the self responds to the "imaginary but not fictional subjectivity of another who can answer me back," prompting the query "how should I act toward this other."[47] Within this framing, political dialogues are appreciated as not only responses to a heard other, but also imagined dialogues that might occur within the self, with a basis in previous encounters. Hearing "voices in everything and dialogic relations among them," Bakhtin fosters an examination of co-subjectivities and becomings that speak to multiple truths, entrenched within ethical imperatives, dispelling positivist notions of information and (post-)truth.[48]

   Additionally, a Bakhtinian analysis of political dialogues by Sweet centred on investigations of rhetoric, whereby the speaker advances their worldview with little regard for others'.[49] Sweets contends such encounters can have collaborative, as opposed to purely monologic, implications. To develop this argument the author highlighted media consumers as critical viewers, as opposed to "couch potatoes."[50] Hence, a dialogic analysis of political dialogues encourages an examination of how social networking spaces

may be steeped in rhetorical truth *pravda* and *istina*, that may foster carniva-
lesque contestation, whilst also having the potential of entrenching authorial
populism. Such possibilities establish a framework that contemplates how en-
counters can include competing truths that may be equally lived and received,
complicating notions of disinformation and misinformation.

POLITICAL DIALOGUES AS STRATEGIC WORLDVIEWS

Vantage points into the ways political dialogue truths' jostle is
enabled when investigating how communication expresses speakers' world-
views, that are understood as deliberate language strategies with a specific in-
tent. The ways in which political dialogues encounter and respond to received
truth *istina* with their lived *pravda* is appreciated as a reflection of speakers'
evolving values and beliefs, that form their worldviews, or *ideologiya*. This Rus-
sian word for ideology opens up investigations of competing truths as a "set
of ideas and their contexts…rather than inflexible ideas imposed through
the use of propaganda and other coercive mechanisms."[51] Such a viewing
reconstitutes political dialogues as continually evolving worldviews, that are
discernible in responses which facilitate vantages of truth based on the chro-
notopic dimensions of the speaker(s). Reframing notions of misinformation
and disinformation as coercive propaganda, for examinations of how beliefs
and values are entrenched in the experiences of political dialogues, offering
deeper, nuanced insights into what incites their truth values.

An examination of strategic orientation is another vantage point
for dialogically analysing political dialogues within social networks. Strategic
orientation relates to the speaker's intent, analysable in the chosen content
and forms of response these elements form a Bakhtinian genre.[52] Coupling
"strategic" and "orientation" acknowledges the forward-thinking intentions
and agency of all dialoguers, who are always "strategic dialogue partners."[53]
When paired with *pravda* and *istina ideologiya*, political dialogues are analysable
as a parrying of beliefs and values, where each speaker's chosen response
strategically presses and expresses their temporal and spatial worldviews.

This process of dialogic exchange and intent is not a simple task, en-

abling vantages into how the language and argumentation of truth is jostled within social networks. Each speaker takes the other's words and "make it one's own...Expropriating it, forcing it to submit to one's own intentions and accents."[54] This difficult and complicated undertaking signifies *how* political dialogues may attempt a carnivalesque inverting and authoritative instilling of truths. In addition to *why* they may do so given their chronotopically situated worldviews. Because of the multiplicity of the self and others intent when in dialogue, no voice or thing has "supremacy over the other…since language can never be de-coupled from its strategic orientations."[55] Political dialoguers, therefore, do not necessarily accept all received truth claims, enabling examinations of how truth that is either *istina*, or simultaneously authoritative, jostles with truth *pravda,* as well as carnivalesque. To exemplify this proposition, a Bakhtinian framing has been utilized against the authors larger doctoral study, investigating the strategic ways early childhood education (ECE) teachers' political dialogues inverted and instilled truths during the pandemic, in the Victorian state of Australia.[56]

A Case in Point: ECE Teachers' Political Dialogues in Social Networks

ECE teachers' political dialogues were analysed as a carnivalesque inversion of federal and state governments' Covid-19 truth *istina* within Facebook groups. Connoting a chronotope of crisis, ECE teachers were kept in face-to-face teaching roles in 2020, whilst the rest of Victoria self-isolated due to the rampant spreading of Covid-19, prompting a questioning of their expendability.[57] This workforce was then the first "industry" removed from financial aides, even though they were subject to reduced pay, hours and job security.[58] Facebook groups became a space where ECE teachers appeared to invert the received truth of these policies for their *pravda*. Igniting carnivalesque responses by sharing the governments' authoritative truth, a teacher posted they were "not surprised" the then Australian Prime Minister "has forgotten about the Early Childhood sector" given his previous comment that, "*we're not trying to run an education system here were trying to provide a payment to help people stay in work which is good for the economy* [Scott Morrison, 2014, emphasis added]." This response seemingly fostered a carnivalesque jesting, and

thus inverting, of the hierarchy of this politician, topsy-turveying notions of who is informed and who is spreading disinformation. A teacher replied, "*is he* [Morrison] *taking his lead from the oompa loompa*," connoting Donald Trump, the American president of the time, who has been caricatured as this figure to indicate his petty foolishness.[59] The communal performance of such Facebook exchanges seemingly enabled the teachers to delimit politicians' truth, enshrining their lived expertise and knowledge of ECE. An endeavour that appeared to make this boundary-authority space a fertile site for their political dialogues at the time. Potentially enabling them to feel heard and affirmed by peers, with this negated by pandemic policies.

Whilst the teachers' political dialogues inverted authoritative truths, they were also analysed as embracing *istina* in a strategic attempt to have their truth *pravda* heard beyond the Facebook group. Due to the enshrined legitimacy of authoritative truth claims, such as ECE as a critical stage for investment and intervention, teachers instilled these narratives in their letters sent to politicians during the pandemic, to demand recognition and improved working conditions. In one such letters, a teachers' political dialogue stated, "*we work with vulnerable children and children at risk*" and that they "*guide families to seek early intervention…This is vital, as if intervention is not sought early, it is often too late. This is our strength.*" (emphasis added) Arguably, this teacher's response strategically orients to authoritative truths, in an endeavour to be granted legitimacy in their ECE role, necessitating they be taken seriously and thus be valued and protected. For a sector that has stated it lacks recognition, the employment of authoritative truth to instil and validate teachers' truth *pravda* is perhaps unsurprising.[60] Posting these open letters within the Facebook group, at the edges of official culture, implied a carnivalesque inverting of information, misinformation, and disinformation, whilst simultaneously upholding received *istina*. Consequently, received and lived truths coalesced through a complex interplay of carnivalesque and authoritative seriousness. An analysis that affirms the significance of truth claims' chronotopic coordinates, particularly in how the teachers responded to pandemic policies. In addition to how truths may be brought to bear in social networks to foster the strategic

ideologies and intent of speakers.

Educational Implications

Having traversed a dialogic dismantling of (post-)truth, and how this might be applied to an analysis of political dialogues within social networks, attention is now turned towards the wider educational implications of this entreaty. Embracing multiple truths, and negating post-truth, aligns with Wegerif's Bakhtinian critique of democracy as a silencing oneness.[61] This author contends in seeking a majority consensus, a monologue is encouraged that aims to silence and consolidate divergent lived truths. While the received *istina* of a democratic decision may align with some individuals lived *pravda*, it could silence others, perishing dialogue in place of monologue. This view challenges notions of democratic education and scientific justification, by questioning whose truth is upheld in these institutions. For instance, within colonial countries the teaching of science through Western lenses silences indigenous knowledges and ways of being, connotated as misinformation.[62] Consequently, authoritative 'truth' within educational institutions, when dialogized as politically strategic worldviews, prompts contemplation of tensions and contestations, steeped in *istina* and *pravda* that does not seek resolution.

When paired with social networks these sites appear to offer a carnivalesque space where alternative and inverted truths have prominence at the "footlights' of educational settings" official discourse. In addition to the ECE teachers' political dialogues analysed, are examples of how teachers within Oklahoma utilized Twitter to mobilize their striking, with social network enabling a "forum for support and commiseration for many determined, frustrated, and distraught educators."[63] This challenging of education's truth *istina* is arguably facilitated within social networks, because they are "structurally independent from the traditional arena of politics or news," inverting a "traditional model based on a strongly hierarchical and mainly one-way mass communication, to a network-based multidirectional and horizontal communication."[64] Educational settings are thus challenged as repositories of 'true' knowledge that might offer an antidote within an epoch of post-truth's misinformation and disinformation. Turning this notion on

its head, enables the jesting suggestion that social networks are subversive spaces, where the flourishing of political dialogues as multiple truths, renders all users "history actors." This claim does not ignore the authoritative *istina* within social networks. But rather, embraces these tensions as a chronotopic, and strategic ideological entreaty that may offer a means to open up political dialogues to deeper understandings. Such as how and why such posts may occur.

Concluding Thoughts and Further Dialogues

A dialogic viewing playfully mocks the notion that post-truth is a truism of our modern age. Advocating instead for a revised reading of multiple truths situated within chronotopic time, space and axiology. These dimensions add to the jostling of received and lived truths that are instilled and inverted through authoritative seriousness and carnivalesque mirth. This viewing not only legitimizes, but also encourages an awareness of the parodies, ironies and tensions embedded within social networking political dialogues. When interplaying truths are viewed through this lens, virtual sites are unveiled as inherently political, given they offer spaces where notions of information, misinformation and disinformation are brought to bear and jostle with one another.

Social networks, due to their expanse of sites and users, foster the complexities of these multiple truths, granting a space where notions of democracy as a seeking of one-ness, is dissolved from lived *pravda* and received *istina*. The ways these truths jostle makes space for divergent worldviews, offering new vantages into social issues and responses. Exposing language, argumentation, and beliefs as a jostling of complex, and plural strategic worldviews, enabling contemplations of the dimensions that may prompt the categorisation of information, misinformation, and disinformation. By acknowledging the complexities that lurk within these dialogues, the existence of competing and curious political encounters that pluralise truths can be recognized. Consequently, seeing how these political dialogues that exist, but are not always granted legitimacy, purpose, or power, come to play in social networks. Opening up to this multiplicity of truths within virtual realms,

enables a re-conceptualizes of these sites as possibility spaces for political dialogues.

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