

The Reality of the Image in the Post-Truth Era

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ABSTRACT: Contemporary society recently faced the introduction of a new phenomenon: the post-truth era. Terminology often used conjunctively with, amongst others, “alternative fact,” “fake news,” and “misinformation.” The term “post-truth” was coined in 1992 by Steve Tesich, to describe American society’s proneness to accept government lies. However, since its incorporation into the *Oxford Dictionary* in 2016, post-truth is defined as “circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief.” This research aims to analyze, in what way, in a regimes of post-truth world, alternative meaning is established, and what role photography plays in this process. An extensive framework of literature is operationalized for the analysis of two case studies, both of photographs in a post-truth context. Subsequently, as the concept of meaning in the post-truth society is fractured, the potential, for the documentary language of images, to suture is explored. KEY WORDS: Post-Truth, Photography, Documentary, Reality, Truth.

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Introduction

Ever since the term was first coined by Steve Tesich, post-truth has been widely used. Mostly to describe types of argumentation and styles of government, but more importantly, it is heavily linked to notions such as misinformation, fake news, and alternative facts. Often misinformation is presented accompanied by a photograph, the object of interest in this research. It has come to the point where the contemporary period is being branded the “post-truth era.” A notion that pertains to the circumstance in which objective facts and personal opinion merge into equally apt tools of public persuasion.¹ The effects of post-truth can be found in all aspects of western society, Europe and the United States alike, for instance in politics and journalism; however, this research is directed at observing its effects in the field of photography.

As sight is one of the most significant ways in which humans experience the world, and observe information about it, the photographic image, essentially a *direct* representation of human perception, presents information with a strong sense of signification. Where text is quite abstract, images can bring the necessary input in order to contextualize and make messages more understandable, and more lively. In the context of misinformation, what appears to happen is that the article and or caption that comes with the photo change the image’s meaning. The interplay between image and caption has often been subject to academic debate over the years. Does textual language influence visual language, does the visual influence the textual, or do the two work conjunctively together, as Clive Scott argues², as they are equal in communicative sophistication?

What happens when the caption presented with the image does not complement, but rather, contradict it, as it would in a piece of misinformation or fake news? Fake news articles, namely, often incorporate random unrelated (found-)images, in order to give the surrounding lines of bogus text legitimacy. This research tends to the following issue. In what way has the process of information distribution been affected by the post-truth era, and what are the ramifications for a discipline such as photography, that is inherently connected to the concept of truth; as so many expect it to be depicted truthfully. An analysis of how this principle behaves within and surrounding the medium of documentary photography. This raises a lot of questions, for instance in what way, in a piece of misinformation, is false meaning planted? What are the dominant societal structures at play, what changed, if anything, to put forth such a

¹ *Oxford Dictionary of English*, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), “post-truth.”

² Clive Scott, *The Spoken Image: Photography and Language*. (London: Reaktion Books, 2007), 57.

diversification of facts; to, as the Oxford Dictionary defines the “post-truth era”: “relating to, or denoting, circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief: *in this era of post-truth politics, it’s easy to cherry-pick data and come to whatever conclusion you desire* | *some commentators have observed that we are living in a post-truth age.*”³

Furthermore, the aim of this research is to explore the how false meaning comes about, and how it interacts with the documentary image. A main focus is reserved for the roles, and influence of, image and text and the implications they have on both the construction and reinforcement of false news. Meaning and signification of information tie in jointly with this topic; in fact, meaning *is* signification, according to semiotician Roland Barthes. Because a picture is, in a sense, a re-representation or resurrection of a thing that was, an icon essentially, to which text holds the role of the signifier. With the addition of text, any random picture suddenly becomes meaningful.⁴ In times of post-truth regimes (as opposed to philosopher Michel Foucault’s truth regimes⁵), the significance of the “fact” has changed tremendously. As a sense of mass individuation, and an increasing amount of time spent in online opinionated echo boxes, causes people to disagree on the level of facts, and instead listen to emotion and gut-feeling rather than empirical observation.

Subsequently, the role of photography has also changed over recent years, as portable devices, with integrated cameras, enable everyone to take high quality pictures. At the same time, editing software is widely available, on computers as well as portable appliances, with built-in features. Both instances substantially changed digital photography. Whereas in the analog age, photography was mostly used as a tool for individuals to memorize the way things were, often in the shape of a photo album or shoebox. Presently, photography holds a function of communication and identity. Photographs are rarely kept for preservation; instead, they are uploaded or shared online to confirm and upkeep the personal identity, or instead shared to communicate with others.⁶

Individuation stands at the core of the change in attitude towards both the case of truth and the case of photography. In relation to the meaning of “truth,” individuation caused a preference of one’s own emotions over the observable fact, “if it feels true, it probably is.” In

³ *Oxford Dictionary of English*, “post-truth.”

⁴ Roland Barthes, *Image, Music, Text*. London: Fontana, trans. Stephen Heath. (London: Fontana, 1990), 32-34.

⁵ Michel Foucault, “Truth and Power,” in *Power: Essential works of Foucault, 1954–1984*, ed. James Faubion (New York: New Press, 2001). 131.

⁶ José Van Dijck, “Digital Photography: Communication, Identity, Memory.” *Visual Communication* 7, no. 1 (2008): 58.

relation to photography, a similar trend can be observed, also more connected to the individual; photographs maintain identity or serve as means of communication, as opposed to being an artifact of a past reality.

There are many examples of misused photography in the history of media. Dutch photographer Koen Wessing, for example, shot a series of photographs of the struggle for freedom of the Sandinistas in Nicaragua in the 1970s and 80s.⁷ Amongst these photographs, an image of two women weeping after hearing their father had been killed by the Nicaraguan Somoza regime. Several years later, the Dutch newspaper *De Telegraaf* used this image above an article about mass executions, the caption below: “civilian casualties after fighting between Sandinistas and their opponents continues.”⁸ The article was written sympathetic of the oppressive Nicaraguan Somoza regime, the party behind the murder of the man that was mourned by the people in the image. A decision that is not only plainly wrong, it also is exceptionally ethically questionable. A present of how the addition of a photograph adds reliability to a piece of deceitful text is when fake bitcoin ads were marketed through interviews with Dutch celebrities. Interviews in which individuals, known to the public as successful entrepreneurs or investors, unveiled how they made a fortune by investing in a bitcoin app. The scammers behind this had used Facebook advertisements to reach an enormous audience. In one particular case, Dutch newspaper *De Volkskrant* was entirely imitated to feature an “article” on a cryptocurrency investment.⁹ What is clear, from both examples, is that text alone apparently needs an image to become more believable. However, image without text also lacks a certain persuasiveness.

In this thesis, the relation between photography and “truth,” in a post-truth world, is examined. Does universally understandable meaning reside in depicted reality, or does photography require the addition of text to become intelligible? However firstly, a thorough understanding of post-truth as a discourse is required. That is the way in which it came about, including a short etymological history, as well as a historiographical exploration of the term. Related terminology, such as fake news, alternative facts, false meaning, and misinformation, is discussed as well. Subsequently, the topic calls for an in-depth discussion of the way in which truth can be established, if at all, and how individuals can come to disagree upon it. Lastly, in

⁷ See Appendix I

⁸ Bolier, “De Telegraaf En Twee Huilende Vrouwen.” *Reformatorsch Dagblad*. September 5, 1987. <https://www.digibron.nl/viewer/collectie/Digibron/id/2fe0839d23862aadf507eb5e26ab85d0>.

⁹ Niels Waarlo and Flora Woudstra Hablé. “Nepadvertenties Van Bekende Nederlanders Vormen Groeiend Probleem: 1,7 Miljoen Euro Schade Gemeld.” *de Volkskrant*. De Volkskrant, April 12, 2019. <https://www.volkskrant.nl/nieuws-achtergrond/nepadvertenties-van-bekende-nederlanders-vormen-groeiend-probleem-1-7-miljoen-euro-schade-gemeld~b7b4b2e6/>.

this section, theories such as semiotics, epistemology, postmodernism, and the society of control are discussed. These pieces are necessary to construct a framework through which the case studies can be submitted to proper examination. In short, as the aim of the chapter is to emphasize the context of the notion of the post-truth era, the methodology that is operationalized to achieve this is discourse analysis. The research question that the first chapter aims to answer is: to what extent post-truth era discourse poses a problem to the strive for realism as present in documentary photographic discourse. Resulting in a subsequent aim to find relevant overlap among theories on documentary photography and the post-truth era be found, so as to identify a gap in the academic field on the intersection of these two topics, as well as built a theoretic framework for the next chapters to build upon.

This thesis contains two different types of research, the first being textual discourse analysis. This methodology of analyzing visual, written and spoken messages was used to closely analyze the concept and context of post-truth for the first chapter. This methodology fits the aim in the first chapter well as defining the post-truth era requires thorough discussion of academic, but also a number of non-academic sources for which some visual examples are used as well. The analysis of said source-material required a sense of zooming-out, to grasp the bigger context the information is part of. Subsequently, the information under scrutiny contains several sources, visual: documentary photography, and textual: periodicals, newspapers, magazines, and academic sources. To aptly display the appropriate context and reading for all these different types of media in this thesis, entails a level of interdisciplinarity that allows the analysis to shift between the fields such as media studies, history, art history, philosophy and media art in order to get the context right. To keep the analysis manageable and concise, the principles as defined in the first chapter have been tested through two carefully selected case studies. These case studies are two visual sources, the method therefore shifts towards qualitative visual analysis, focused on interpreting and understanding the case studies. This method allowed for concrete, contextual, in-depth research into the topic, and the identification of the key characteristics and implications of the topic with respect to these specific cases. Both cases are photographic, and therefore, the notions of discourse and visual analysis were used in their analysis as well.

The second section of this thesis consists of two in-depth case studies. The first showcases an example of fake news and how it spreads online. In this case, within the French *Gilets Jaune* movement. For this case study, a small study of participant observation was conducted within the movement's Facebook page. Subsequently, through a combination between a visual and textual analysis, of respectively the image and its caption, and a

comparison with the framework as established from the literature, it becomes clear that post-truth poses problems, particularly to photographic styles that rely on the capacity to remain truthful to reality, such as documentary photography.

Subsequently, the case of *The Truth, The Whole Truthiness And Nothing But Alternative Facts* is examined. It is a work made by Cors Brinkman, a superimposed composition of three photographs in lenticular style. That is, when the image is viewed from a different angle, a different image can be observed. In this case, one of the post-truth's most notable moments in terms of media attention; the Donald Trump inaugural address in 2017 (where his supporters claimed it was the largest crowd ever, and his opposers disagreed). The image is observable from three different angles, left, center, and front, presenting a number of different images: an utterly empty crowd, the actual crowd, and an entirely full crowd. This work is especially notable since it combines the versions of reality that those in favor, against, as well as those with a neutral attitude, wanted to see. Remarkable, as in a fragmented post-truth world, individuals, especially when part of opposing groups, are, to an increasing degree, estranged from each other, without engaging in dialogue.

Lastly, in a world that functions according to the principles of regimes of post-truth, where western societies are internally shattered, it is of equal, increasing importance to look for the tools to cope with that situation, to attempt to suture. The photographic image as an icon and a sign can, attached to devices of identity politics serve as a wedge and divide people, but might, in the right shape or form, reverse that same process and remove barriers instead of building them.¹⁰

¹⁰ Hito Steyerl, "The language of things." In *The Greenroom*, ed Lind, Maria, and Hito Steyerl (Berlin: Sternberg Press / Center for Curatorial Studies, 2008), 228.

Chapter 1: Dawn of the Post-Truth Era, an Analysis

Introduction

The first chapter in this thesis serves to introduce the two main topics under scrutiny; i.e., the post truth era and documentary photography. The research question for this chapter is: to what extent does post-truth era discourse pose a problem to the strive for realism in the discourse on documentary photography. That is to say, this chapter is devoted to the investigation of the post-truth era; its roots, composing its historiography, stating its definition, and, most importantly, it aims to examine its intersection with documentary photography. Because the latter is a photographic style that bears a heavy link to factual and correct representation, that collides with an era that is defined as *the problematization* of the same exact notion of factuality that documentary photography seeks to represent. Hence, cases of post-truth era expressions in visual culture will be lifted out and analyzed to allow for and help generate a better understanding of the structures at play.

Subsequently, the aim in the first chapter of this thesis is to craft a framework in order to aptly analyze the case studies further ahead in chapters 2 and 3, a framework consisting of theory on the subject of documentary photography as well as the post-truth era. Firstly, the latter notion requires a clear characterization of how post-truth, as a concept, is operationalized as a tool for the analysis of documentary photography. To achieve this, current theories on the relation of post-truth to reality and contemporary society are reviewed alongside an in-depth reading of scholarly theory on documentary photography.

To, by the end of this chapter, get to an apt framework of combining the narratives on documentary photography and the post-truth era, first a series of steps are required; a quick outline: firstly, inducing an exhaustive understanding of post-truth, and terms closely related. And secondly, clearly defining the understanding and use of these terms in this research. Secondly, an investigation that leads past previously mentioned related terms, such as disinformation, elective actualities, and fake news. As the term post-truth stems from an exposition distributed by American columnist and playwright Steve Tesich, that means that some of the theory on the origin of the term is non-academic – i.e. stems from (polemic) debates on- and offline. For that reason, sources for this chapter on the post-truth era, largely consists out of a combination between scholarly articles and essays from newspapers, periodicals, and magazines.

Moreover, it is the aim in this chapter to answer the research question to what extent post-truth era discourse poses a problem to the strive for realism as present in documentary

photographic discourse. Subsequently, the aim is to find relevant overlap in the theory, so as to identify a gap in the academic field on the intersection of these two topics. All to build a theoretic framework for the next chapters to build upon. To achieve this goal, this chapter aims to operationalize discourse analysis on both subjects.

Reviewing literature on the post-truth era helps to paint a framework of a society that is largely fractured, expert-fatigued, anti-elitist; all symptoms that summarize the direction taken by Jayson Harkin in his theory on *Regimes of Post-truth*, which takes a central role towards the end of this chapter. A society that is fractured in the sense that opinionated groups are separated into echo chambers. It must be noted that a division in echo chambers is not a negative necessarily since every medium is an echo chamber of sorts, it is, however, the lack of diversity in information distribution and reception where it has the potential to become problematic. This risk lies at the core of the post-truth era, and is perhaps best illustrated by the of the notion of filter bubbles, especially, at the summum of individualization and internet culture, where algorithms ensure that people are only confronted with information familiar to their currently held beliefs; as becomes clear from a study of internet activist Eli Pariser's and media and communications scholar Jayson Harsin's theories, respectively on filter bubbles, and post-truth regimes.

As the old Chinese saying goes: "may you live in interesting times." This phrase may seem complementary, however, is used in quite a contradictory manner, namely as an insult. It means something like this: it would be preferable to live in "uninteresting times," as *uninteresting* demarcates an absence of disorder and conflict. In that light, contemporary societies have, from a social perspective, managed to make times much more interesting. Whereas an optimistic outlook on the future characterized the 1990s, the post 9/11 world is quite the opposite and all the more complex. The fall of the Soviet Union led scholars such as Francis Fukuyama to proclaim the end of history, a concept that, instead of a literal end to history, encapsulates that the final point of the (modernist) linear reading of history had been reached. Decades later, Fukuyama's thesis seems preliminary and even a bit naive.

To highlight some apparent differences in zeitgeist; in the 90s, the demise of Communism led to blatant belief in the message of liberalism; and thus, in human rights, democracy, free-market, the rule of law, and the welfare state. Politicians frantically declared that all political and socio-economic troubles from the past had now been fixed.¹¹ A bipolar world turned into a hegemonic unipolar world. Everything was wholesome, the unification of

¹¹ Yuval Harari, *21 Lessons for the 21st Century* (New York: Spiegel & Grau, 2018), 28-29.

the peoples of the world, under the banner of liberalism, seemed within an arm's reach. At least that was the assumption, an assumption that turned out to be wrong. The human condition still is, so it turned out, a work in progress.

Where the 90s' zeitgeist can be described in terms of confidence and certainty, so can contemporary times be characterized in terms of uncertainty and insecurity. Now, many factors have influenced this shift in zeitgeist, to state it in dramatic terms, from slightly comedic to predominantly tragic — one of which being the multiplication and diversification of belief systems that has slowly but surely manifested itself. When people reside on an increasing scale within their own filtered bubble, they also live increasingly in their own realities. Eventually, enabling them to disagree on the level of fact rather than opinion.¹² It seems that the latter development created fertile ground for the growth of the phenomenon of disinformation.

Naturally, disinformation is no new occurrence on the world stage; it was at the heart of Soviet foreign policy¹³. However, what is new is the scale on which it happens in democratic nations. States that, notably, carry the whole package: checks and balances, democracy, human-rights, free-market, the rule of law, and a welfare-state. States that score high on levels of effectiveness, freedom of the press and personal freedom, and low on corruption, government authoritarianism, and citizen representation. Primarily, states that were believed not to be prone to disinformation because of its liberalist philosophy and its well-designed institutions. In 2016 the notions of fake news, disinformation, and post-truth skyrocketed into public consciousness, and the everyday vocabulary.

¹² Eli Pariser, *The Filter Bubble: How the New Personalized Web Is Changing What We Read and How We Think* (New York: Penguin Press, 2011), 63.

¹³ Carolyn Forrest, "Russia's Disinformation Campaign: The New Cold War." *Communications Lawyer* 33, no. 3 (2018): 2–5.

1.1. The Post-Truth Era

To start, the first subject of analysis is the notion of post-truth. However, the concept of truth is already hard to pin down; it differs inter and intraculturally, and on a smaller scale, interpersonally. Granted, it is an obvious statement, however it is necessary to start a fruitful discussion on the topic of post-truth. The manner by which *truth* is described in dictionaries is indicative of the ambiguity surrounding the term, for instance in the *Oxford Dictionary*; “the quality or state of being true.”¹⁴ This definition needs the notion of “true,” a word that, in its own dictionary definition, is defined as “in accordance with reality,”¹⁵ again diverting the definition to different terminology. Reality, in turn, is defined as “the state of things as they actually exist.”¹⁶ To follow this train of thought is yet another method to arrive at the conclusion, like many scholars did before, that truth has no universal definition.

However, it does allow to equate truth to “things as they actually are.” A definition that again creates more problems than it solves because it is highly dependent on whomever was the observer of “these things that were.” Physiological properties and limitations of the eye and brain predetermine how “things as they actually are” can be observed, cataloged, and registered. Yet, animals see the world differently, in different colors; if a dog sees an apple as grey, and a human as red, then what color *is* the apple *actually*? Truth is often claimed to be understood, but can it really? Is it not genuinely intangible?

These notions mentioned above all revolve around the notion of equating truth to power. As different beings observe things differently, those who dictate others to follow their interpretation of reality can, and probably should, be considered powerful. Truth then becomes the interpretation of the most powerful party around, rendering a somewhat singular interpretation. This, however, does nothing more than pinpoint an interpretation as *commonplace*, truth still remains a multitude of plausible observations. Institutes often hold a position of *power* by having an influence on which interpretation is commonly accepted (i.e., institutes such as the scientific community, governments, dictators, or businesses).

The latter three paragraphs serve as to highlight and problematize the ambiguity of discussing anything relating to the notion of truth, let alone post-truth. Thus, some specificity is required here concerning the terminology for *disinformation*. Disinformation is not a new concept. Lying is as old as time itself; it is, therefore, an inevitable certainty, and will keep on

¹⁴ *Oxford English Dictionary*, eds. Catherine Soanes and Sara Hawker, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), s.v. “truth.”

¹⁵ *Compact Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. “true.”

¹⁶ *Compact Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. “reality.”

happening as long as humanity is around. Nevertheless, people have, for long, built their societies around values such as truthfulness and accountability. Enlightenment thinkers promoted, amongst others, reason and empiricism, intellectual tools to uncover facts and truths of the world. Based on these basic principles, societies would eventually base their states on enlightenment values, and thus institutions such as democracy, the rule of law, civil society, the market, separation of church and state, all can be traced back to scientific thinking. First, it is necessary to carefully unpack the notion of the post-truth era, to understand, in a linguistic sense, what it entails before going into the historicity and practicalities of the term. The notion of the post-truth era constitutes two essential things: 1) there was a time of *truth*; 2) there was a shift away from the *truth*.

Discursively, “post-truth” and “alternative facts” are often used conjunctively or as a substitute of each other. Historically, one of the earliest mentions of “alternative facts” is in the 1914 *Lawyers Reports Annotated*, an American periodical publication of annotated reports of cases by and for practicing lawyers. It features a mention of the practice “alternative facting,” the practice where alternative narratives, of the events disputed in court, are presented. The interpretation is clearly meant as a rebuttal of an untrue statement, meaning that the *alternative facts* are based upon empirical evidence, whereas the opposing statement might not.¹⁷ What can clearly be taken from this source is that an alternative fact, a century ago, was used in a legal context; however, only in relation to a clear, falsifiable statement.

The abovementioned sequence proves that the “term alternative fact” had been used before in the legal context, providing a clear interpretation in that it ought to be grounded in truth. What tied the use of “alternative facts” in to the post-truth discourse is its use after the 2017 presidential inauguration. Afterwards President Trump’s stated the event had featured “the biggest crowd ever.” His adviser Kellyanne Conway would later state that the president based his opinion on “alternative facts.”¹⁸ Which proved to be a reinvention of the term, this time in a political context. It most importantly, severs the connection with to objective truth. When Trump’s administration released this statement, the point was never to establish one single truth and rebuttal another. But rather to set the precedent that the president’s opposition hold diametrically opposed opinions. Truth is inherently linked to power, and those in power are the ones that do not have to present evidence for their statements. To make others

¹⁷ Oregon Supreme Court, in *The Lawyers, Reports Annotated (Vol. 51)*, ed. Burdett Rich, and Henry Farnham (New York: The Lawyers Co-operative Publishing Company, 1914), 160.

¹⁸ Pomerantsev. “Why we’re post-fact.”

continually fact-check one's statements establishes a clear power dynamic: the one acts, the other reacts.

The term "post-truth" was coined by Steve Tesich. It stems from an essay published in 1992 in *The National* titled: *Government of Lies*, a highly critical assessment of the American public opinion, state of the nation, and of the 1990s politics. The subsequent events of Vietnam and Watergate still managed to affect the American public. The lies, crookery, and deceit by the presidential office and the level of disdain shown towards the electorate still led to the appropriate response: anger and disgust.¹⁹ Tesich identifies Watergate syndrome as the main cause of what happened next: disinterest.

Between Watergate and the moment when Tesich wrote his essay, three administrations came and went, among some of which committed at least as many impeachable offenses.²⁰ "The high crimes... committed by Ronald Reagan and his administration, which included our current president (i.e., George H.W. Bush sr.), in the Iran/contra scandal were far more serious and un-American than the crimes for which Nixon was kicked out of office."²¹ Later, during the first Bush administration, came the first Gulf War. A conflict the Americans entered after officials lied under oath.²² Interestingly enough, several years later, the Presidential office felt safe to declassify that information, and thus admitting they had lied. By which, Tesich argues, the administration made the public choose between national self-esteem and the truth. The fact that this blatant lie had no legal implications clearly indicates which choice was made.²³

"The implications are even more terrifying than this. We are rapidly becoming prototypes of a people that totalitarian monsters could only drool about in their dreams. All the dictators up to now have had to work hard at suppressing the truth. We, by our actions, are saying that this is no longer necessary, that we have acquired a spiritual mechanism that can denude truth of any significance. In a very fundamental way, we, as a free people, have freely decided that we want to live in some post-truth world" (1992).²⁴

Despite the fact that Tesich's analysis is dated, the central thesis, the danger that comes along when people's mindset at large, succumbs to a sense of scandal fatigue. The specific sentiment

¹⁹ See Appendix XIV.

²⁰ Steve Tesich "A Government of Lies." *The Nation* 254, no. 1 (1992): 12.

²¹ Tesich, "A Government of Lies.", 12.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

that he goes for, namely the general public's accepting attitude towards falsehoods, is something that is still relevant today.

Tesich ascribes this change of mindset solely to the political powerhouses of that time. Nevertheless, a similar trend might be identified differently by others. Yuval Noah Harari argues that, around the same time, the seemingly indestructible system of liberal democracy started to fail.²⁵ Resulting from the fall of communism, belief in the assumption that liberal democracy was the ultimate answer to the world's problems would slowly decline from that point onwards. Where Harari points to the liberalism failing and Tesich to the rise of a sense of fact-free politics: striking is that the time period indicated by both of them, is that of the late 1980s and early 1990s. A time that also featured the rise of neoliberalism and postmodernism. All of the abovementioned theorizations seem to be indicative in some form or another of a paradigmatic shift. The former example of neoliberalism champions a surge in individualization of people, the labor market and society at large. The entrepreneur is the central figurehead of the neoliberal state, and, life as such is organized entrepreneurially. Which is to say that one is responsible entirely, and solely, for the success and failure of their life.

To highlight, systems in place before the neoliberalist "revolution" focused more on social institutions and defined society as being part of a greater whole, where the aspect of individualization of neoliberalism promotes a rather solipsistic worldview. On the other hand, postmodernism, finds that objective reality is different per individual, as one can never be certain that everybody sees and experiences the same. Things like previous experience, culture, and personality all influence perception to the extent to make a case against the possibility of ever knowing the objective truth. An interpretation that can, again, be mobilized to support a solipsistic worldview. However, before going further into the possibilities of knowing truths, chapter 1.2. is dedicated to the analysis post-truth truth regimes and iterations thereof.

It is essential to differentiate between the terms post-truth era, fake news, and disinformation, to prevent confusion about these terms at a later stage. Disinformation and fake news mainly refer to the same notion: they are an asset to disinform an audience. Prominent examples of disinformation stem from the former USSR, where a special department of disinformation was formed within the KGB, a department that instigated the notorious campaign titled "Operation *Infektion*." A campaign directed at flooding opponents' information

²⁵ Harari, *21 Lessons for the 21st Century*, 28-29.

channels with wild conspiracy theories in order to generate civil unrest.²⁶ The term “post-truth era” was coined to describe the time in which people started debating over facts rather than opinions. Additionally, it is an umbrella term for the phenomena of disinformation and fake news. In other words, the latter two are instances where facts and fiction blend, the former is a term used to demarcate a period in time in which that happens. Academics often refer to this recent upsurge of disinformation as the post-truth era. The next section aims to dissect the concept, and to place the concept in the right context, to gain a better understanding of what this concept entails.

According to, German-American philosopher and political theorist, Hannah Arendt, perhaps best known for her work on totalitarianism, truth and politics do not go well together. In her later work, she thoroughly analyzed the notions of truth in politics, arguing the both do not go well together, whereas examples of this would often be quite banal, some rather extreme ones can be witnessed in the.²⁷ Explicitly, she stated that in politics, the truth has never been considered a virtue, and lies have been considered justifiable and necessary.²⁸

However, the notion of post-truth goes beyond mere government lies. According to the *Oxford Dictionary*, post-truth is a term “relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief.”²⁹ The fact of the matter is that truth has become debatable, often central to sensitive political disagreement. The examples vary widely: like Vladimir Putin dispassionately claiming on live TV that he had no troops in Ukraine, while at the same time, Russian soldiers entered the Crimean Peninsula; to, alternatively, the pro-Brexit campaign claiming the United Kingdom unilaterally paid £350m per week to the European Union, getting nothing in return. Furthermore, Donald Trump stating that the crowd at his inauguration had been the largest to date, despite photographs proving the contrary. Moreover, none of the authors of the abovementioned falsehoods seemed to have suffered any severe consequence from their

²⁶ Adam Ellick and Adam Westbrook. Meet the KGB Spies Who Invented Fake News. The New York Times, November 12, 2018. <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/11/12/opinion/russia-meddling-disinformation-fake-news-elections.html>.

²⁷ See Appendices III-VI.

²⁸ Hannah Arendt, (1967), “Truth and politics,” *The New Yorker*, 25 February, <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/1967/02/25/truth-and-politics>. Accessed 20 October 2019. ^[1]_[SEP]

²⁹ *Oxford Dictionary of English*, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), “post-truth.”

actions.³⁰ The post-truth era, is often, by its critics, described as a result of post-modern thinking, linking back as far as Friedrich Nietzsche.³¹

Many like to point at the internet as the leading cause of this drift of truth and fact. New media, with its platformization, endless screen time, and information streams, has fragmented reality to the point that it becomes impossible to comprehend. Big tech algorithms are developed based upon previous interest and search-queries confirming one's preexisting bias, one click to the next. A fragmentation of reality combined with online life, and the disillusionment of globalization, creates in many, a yearning for the past, thereby breeding nostalgia, a first sign of the effects of post-truth regimes.³² Russian-American philologist Svetlana Boym characterizes the twenty-first century by its proliferation of nostalgias: "nostalgic nationalists and nostalgic cosmopolitans, nostalgic environmentalists and nostalgic metrophiliacs (city lovers)" all of which are exchanging pixel fire in what she calls the blogosphere.³³ Soviet-born British journalist and senior fellow at the London School of Economics, Peter Pomerantsev, argues that this flight into techno-fantasies is intertwined with a distrust of government and media. A notion easily connected to British Brexiter Michael Gove's statement that the people "have had enough of experts." Mistrust of experts, government, and the mass-media combined with healthy skepticism sends people on a search that often leads them to wild conspiracy theories, readily available online.³⁴

The information-sphere of the internet features countless sources of content pretending to be factual, mimicking in shape, and form regular newspapers' websites. A prominent example is *Russia Today*, a news station that expertly blends conspiracy theories, on equal validity, with evidence-based research, claiming they give alternative views on global news.

The postmodernist school of thought is often attributed to the equaling the scales between truths and falsehoods and Nietzsche most of all. Even though he was not part of the postmodernist movement, many point to him as the first who started to question the integrity of "truth." Central to Nietzsche's thesis is a lack of truth; there is only interpretation. Every version of an event is just another narrative because truth is relative to the experience of the

³⁰ Emmanuel Alloa, "Post-Truth or: Why Nietzsche Is Not Responsible for Donald Trump." *Los Angeles Review of Books - The Philosophical Salon*, August 28, 2017. <https://www.alexandria.unisg.ch/publications/251483>. Accessed 12 December 2019.

³¹ Peter Pomerantsev, "Why we're post-fact." URL: <https://granta.com/why-were-post-fact> (2016). Accessed December 2019.

³² Pomerantsev. "Why we're post-fact."

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Delia Mocanu, Luca Rossi, Qian Zhang, Marton Karsai, and Walter Quattrociocchi. "Collective Attention in the Age of (Mis)information." *Computers in Human Behavior* 51, no. PB (2015): 1198-204.

individual. In a literal sense, this allows for the possibility to entitle everybody to their truth. Friedrich Nietzsche is often linked to post-truth as one of its intellectual fathers.³⁵

The notion that knowledge is a resource accessible only by an expert elite goes against the very fiber of which postmodern ideas are made off. Postmodernist thinking, in a post-truth world, tends to go against the status quo. Argumentation, in post-truth-style, often comes from the domain of emotion, rather than knowledge. Sizable groups of the electorate feel ignored by the traditional expert ruling class and want them to consider their point of view (i.e., the French *Gilets Jaunes* and the election of Donald J. Trump). A diversification of information online outputs accounts for the formation of many groups of likeminded people, who, supported by the algorithms of the internet converse increasingly inside their own filter bubbles. These aforementioned notions all describe effects of post-truth regimes, a notion the next section aims to expand on.

³⁵ Helmut Heit. “‘there are no facts...’: Nietzsche as Predecessor of Post-Truth?.” *Studia Philosophica Estonica* 11, (2018): 44-63.; Alloa, Emmanuel. “Post-Truth or: Why Nietzsche Is Not Responsible for Donald Trump.” *Los Angeles Review of Books - The Philosophical Salon*, August 28, 2017.

1.2. Regimes of Post-Truth

According to Foucault, “each society has its regime of truth, its ‘general politics’ of truth.” By which he means the types of discourses that are generally accepted, and thus, function as truths. Techniques and mechanisms that enable one to differentiate between false and true instances. Foucault’s theorization of the “news media” (*les média*) is as follows: “it is the object, under diverse forms, of immense diffusion and consumption (circulating through apparatuses of education and information whose extent is relatively broad in the social body, notwithstanding certain strict limitations).”³⁶ Moreover, “it is produced and transmitted under control, dominant if not exclusive, of a few great political and economic apparatuses (university, army, writing, and media); lastly, it is the issue of a whole political debate and social confrontation (‘ideological’ struggles).”³⁷

This does not necessarily hold today, as the apparatus of the news media has, through the evolvment of the online media sphere, turned from a somewhat centralized landscape into an extremely diverse and widespread version of itself. International communications scholar Jaysin Harsin justly calls the present news apparatus a many-headed hydra, one branch disappears, and thousands of blogs and twitter-feeds spawn to replace it.³⁸ What this indicates, (perhaps most clearly in the United States but with many examples worldwide) is a change in the regime of truth. News media, intrinsically part of the regime of truth, have diversified so immensely from a dosed system several times a day through several print, radio, or television outlets, into millions of constant, twenty-four hours a day, push-notified and data-driven news services.³⁹ What is interesting, though, is how the shift away from universally accepted facts is dealt with in media that are largely reliant on a truth claim. Visual media, for instance. A type of media that can be divided into several groups; artistic, journalistic, and documentary. All of which are reliant on photography’s truth claim.

Speaking in Foucauldian terms, modern technology ripened the conditions for a regime of post-truth. Newly acquired tools for the freedom of participation, expression, and consumption only brought about a system that diffuses the ability to evaluate information. In a similar sense, the amount of information on offer, in Harsin’s view, has the same effect as going grocery shopping for a carton of milk, only to find an entire aisle with thousands of options of

³⁶ Michel Foucault, “Truth and Power,” in *Power: Essential works of Foucault, 1954–1984*, ed. James Faubion (New York: New Press, 2001). 131.

³⁷ Michel Foucault, in *Power: Essential works of Foucault, 1954–1984*. 131.

³⁸ Jaysin Harsin, “Regimes of Posttruth, Postpolitics, and Attention Economies.” *Communication, Culture & Critique* 8, no. 2 (2015): 329.

³⁹ Harsin. “Regimes of Posttruth, Postpolitics, and Attention Economies,” 329.

milk. The latter, of course, is meant in the sense that news, for instance, exploded from several newspapers to thousands of online options. Furthermore, as always, more choice does not necessarily mean more clarity.⁴⁰ Subsequently, techniques such as data-gathering and microtargeting, which were originally used for the distribution of advertisements only, have infiltrated the realm of, everything online. The web, the world's primary source of information and truth-seeking, is becoming increasingly personalized. The infinite number of available sources of information are catered to the user based on previous viewing behavior, and thus, people are more and more confronted with what an algorithm thinks they want to see. "It is not that truth and facts have disappeared altogether, but that they have become objects of deliberate distortion and struggle."⁴¹

If a shift has taken place between regimes of truth (ROT) towards a regime of post-truth, and as Foucault theorized, the ROT to run parallel with his theories of the disciplinary society, which many scholars increasingly agree has been superseded by Deleuze's notion of a society of control.⁴² Additionally, since power, in the aforementioned Foucauldian scheme, resides in a central state apparatus, in the control society; however, power has been decentralized and dispersed. From there, logically, it has to follow that, some adaptations are necessary before the notion can be applied in a regime of post-truth, and thus society of control, context.

In order to understand the shift towards regimes of post-truth, we need to analyze the term in the Deleuzian sense. The disciplinary society was based on individuals, as single bodies, within the system of society, the individuals mobilized within unions for mass resistance, whereas the boss would survey the mass. Under the control society, however, Deleuze states: "We no longer find ourselves dealing with the mass versus individual pair. Individuals have become 'dividuals,' and masses, samples, data, markets, or 'banks.'"⁴³ In other words, individuals have become archaic, separate, and distinct (i.e., dividuals). The masses, on the other hand, have been depersonified into "data" or "markets." Power in the present world, and truth for that matter, consist out of compact data-packets that can easily be labeled and categorized in different market segments; and, social relations are, unlike disciplined, long-term and discontinuous, to an increasing extent continuous (controlling) orbits and networks mediated through online application and social platforms.⁴⁴ Marketing now lies at the soul of

⁴⁰ Harsin. "Regimes of Posttruth, Postpolitics, and Attention Economies.", 329.

⁴¹ Cors Brinkman, "The Truth, The Whole Truthiness And Nothing But Alternative Facts." Master's Thesis, Leiden University, 2018, 2.

⁴² Harsin. "Regimes of Posttruth, Postpolitics, and Attention Economies.", 329.

⁴³ Gilles Deleuze, "Postscript on the Societies of Control." *October* 59 (1992): 3-7. Accessed February 14, 2020. www.jstor.org/stable/778828.

⁴⁴ Harsin. "Regimes of Posttruth," 330.

business and economics. Institutions are in decline, which all makes for a hyper-segmentation of society and an “increasing dependency on algorithmic power and predictive data-analytics.”⁴⁵ The baseline here is that, information distribution has become individuated, every single group or minority can find reinforcement of their opinion and support in a likeminded group. This allows for an enormous emancipation of opinion and decentralization of truth-telling. Which simultaneously means that filter bubbles, echoing these decentralized opinions, hold an ever stronger grip on the belief systems of their members. A situation that can cause significant fractures and mental distance between members of different filter bubbles.⁴⁶

Information, to an increasingly larger degree, circulates in the online sphere. News articles, blogs, columns, and opinion pieces are all in order to reach their audience, subject to the online algorithms of sharing. Media companies are economically dependent upon marketing strategies based on data to end up on the right side of the algorithms, so their products are seen, read, (i.e., consumed).

Marketing, through data-analytics, a universal practice amongst media producers, makes information circulate in echo chambers of preselected people with similar opinions. This brings about a sense of algorithmifying modern life, expressing everything as such that it can be reproduced by means of an algorithm to divide people based on what they have in common or not, with laser-precision.⁴⁷

Important to regimes of post-truth are, according to Harsin, truth games (i.e., instances where truths are posed and consecutively debunked). Key in this process is that in regimes of post-truth, facts seem only in part to seek to capitalize upon their believability. That is, only within distinct ideological filter bubbles. Actors in the field of truth regimes are now, by way of the attention economy, bound to the collective aim of occupying perception and to induce and manage participation consecutively, “the point being to avoid contingency/politics by predictive analytics and controlling/patrolling what appears and is heard.”⁴⁸ Instead of truth regimes merely demanding an adherence to its products, “the domination of truth regimes now demands popular attention to/participation in its discursive games,”⁴⁹ and thus, truth and power remain welded together.

⁴⁵ Harsin. “Regimes of Posttruth,” 330.

⁴⁶ Further reading on algorithmification and the personalization of the internet: Eli Pariser, *The Filter Bubble: How the New Personalized Web Is Changing What We Read and How We Think* (New York: Penguin Press, 2011).

⁴⁷ Eli Pariser, *The Filter Bubble*,

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

That, however, is just the first step. Society, specifically with respect to opinion production and distribution, in the post-truth era, has inched towards total fragmentation. As mentioned before, the potential for founding opinionated platforms to cater to a rather small minority is allowed to bloom by grace of online possibilities. It is apparent that a fluctuating cycle exists between de-bundling and re-bundling. Services provided in one large bundle, are then often taken apart into smaller subsets and offered separately. The next step for innovation is to then re-bundle once more. The same could be true for opinion-producing media in the post-truth era, a thought pattern that allows the post-truth era fragmentation to be viewed as the peak stage of de-bundling, which, coming back to the terms of the post-truth era would entail some form of de-fragmentation.

1.3. Documentary Photography: Context and Meaning

Documentary photography is a term that is hard to pinpoint, as there are many forms of expression that can be referred to as documentary styles. Documentary can be, amongst others, a visual, film, photographic, literary and journalistic medium. In this case, the focus shall be on the photographic medium. It is useful to start with the meaning of the word, documentary photography means to document something, using the medium of photography. That indicates an intrinsic connection with something real or true, something that was once the way it is captured. As mentioned before, the focus will be on documentary photography, which already narrows the definition to something real and true captured on the photographic plate. Interestingly, speaking in terms of film, the distinction is often made between fiction and documentary, with the two as each other's polar opposite.⁵⁰ This distinction, for example, is much less apparent in photography, as the discipline of fiction photography is a lot smaller than fiction in film. This would suggest that photography has a much more intimate relationship with the "real" and the "true" than the medium of film.

The term documentary, and how it is understood, has changed quite often throughout human history. To gain a better grasp of how to see the concept, it is useful to place it in a historical context. *Documentary* as a term used for *the image* stems from French; it was later incorporated into the English language. Early examples of a different interpretation of documentary photography are, for example, pictures taken by Carleton Watkins who was widely popular throughout the 19th century. He was best known for taking pictures of American landscapes of the untouched wild lands to the west. Many of his pictures, however, feature manmade progress, like railways through deserts, roads and mines, not so much "untouched nature." For instance his photograph *Malakoff Diggings* portrays highly polished "beautiful" visions of what essentially is environmental destruction.⁵¹ In early twentieth-century France, *film documentaire* was also quite different from the current understanding; it signified more of an anthropologically themed travel film.⁵² For photography, the term historically held a different meaning and was mostly used for the purpose of archiving and inventorying.⁵³

During the interbellum British and American authors began to adopt the French term *documentaire* for works of film and photography, thereby inventing a new term used to describe work that displayed non-staged scenes from the world (factual representation) as well as social

⁵⁰ Olivier Lugon, "'Documentary': authority and ambiguities," in *The Greenroom*, ed. Maria Lind and Hito Steyerl (Berlin: Sternberg Press/Center for Curatorial Studies, 2008), 29.

⁵¹ See Appendix II.

⁵² Olivier Lugon, "'Documentary': authority and ambiguities," 29.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

reality such as Dorothea Lange's series on the Great Depression. This tremendously increased the public image of documentary photography and shows an association with truth as well as commitment to social justice.⁵⁴ Another interpretation of the documentary that prevails are its archival qualities. Since the dawn of photography, the image has increasingly been linked to documenting and archival practices. "The assumption [first] was that no single image was "documentary" as such, neither with regard to regards subject matter nor form, but it became documentary in the way it was incorporated in an effective archive system."⁵⁵ This framework of the archive as communal memory is what has the power to transform an image into a document; archival that material lies available for use in research; in other words, for someone to pick it up, contextualize it and thus give it meaning.⁵⁶ The latter distinction is highly important as the *user* is the dominant figure, that gives able to give meaning, not the producer, nor does the image hold meaning within itself.

American curator and art historian Okwui Enwezor's agrees with this notion of importance of the user as interpreter. His primary concern with documentary forms is that they "pose to our comprehension of reality in the context of art works and media images,"⁵⁷ in other words, they fit our assumptions of reality. Subsequently, he introduces the concepts *vérité* (French for truth), which he proposes to equate to "documentary," thereby, arguing that the documentary-style should be interpreted as a version of the truth.⁵⁸ A statement that heavily draws on the assumption that documentary images are snapshots drawn from the real world, or stolen, as he argues that photographic pictures are commonly understood as embalmed reality that interacts with and comment directly on reality itself.⁵⁹ Documentary photography, seen as a document, strongly ties into the archival notion of truth, to keep slices of it recorded as evidence, of a reality long gone.

Semiotics are pivotal when it comes to analyzing documentary photography and how images are thought to reflect reality. It is the philosophical branch that traces the link between the thing (sign), its observation (signifier), and its mental understanding (signified). To understand real-world objects, say a dog (sign), an approximate average mental representation of that dog (signified) is triggered, making the observer know what it sees is a dog. A

⁵⁴ Olivier Lugon, "Documentary": authority and ambiguities," 30.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Okwui Enwezor, "Documentary/Vérité: Bio-Politics, Human Rights and the Figure of 'Truth' in Contemporary Art," in *The Greenroom*, ed. Maria Lind and Hito Steyerl (Berlin: Sternberg Press/Center for Curatorial Studies, 2008), 83.

⁵⁸ Enwezor, "Documentary/Vérité: Bio-Politics, Human Rights and the Figure of 'Truth' 87.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

representation that is approximate because not all species of dog need to have been observed before the observer can identify a dog. Upon observing a drawing of a four-legged creature with snout, pointy ears and wagging tail (signifier), the observer can also identify what it knows (sign) as a dog. This applies to photography as well, in that case an image would constitute the signifier. The signified is the mental concept that is evoked in the observer.

Postmodern philosopher Jacques Derrida expands upon the traditional definition of semiotics, as is mentioned above, as he brings in the notion of “Différance.” To him the signifiers and the signifieds are not identical, there is a space between them, they are different; subsequently, signs are not only different, but they also spread out over many other signs as part of the infinite chain of signifieds.⁶⁰ Derrida uses the term difference [différance], as to explain his position that signs and signifieds are not only fundamentally different; they also consist of an endless symbiosis of other signs and signifiers. Notably, both the signifier - which triggers mental representation - along with the signified, are both relative constructs that derive their meaning from context. It is essential to realize that Derrida is interested in pointing out how people produce the knowledge they have; his position is that the difference or distance between a [photograph] and its context will always be there, so the only truth is that there is no final truth.

In a post-truth context, however, the question of how a short caption of (con)text can change the interpretability of the image completely, is more relevant than ever. A documentary image allows for a margin of error between the image’s actual depicted content, and how the viewer, influenced by his or her understanding of the world, interprets it. The act of documenting is not the same as creating a singular universal truth, in a way the act of documentation is an incarnation of statement collecting, or as Foucault calls it “statement events.”⁶¹ In this view documentary pieces should be seen more as archival sources, as such that several images can be used for the interpretation of an event, never to, without reservation, claim a truth. Statement collecting, as police officers would, involves asking witnesses for their statement, whatever is reported back most often, is most likely to be closer to what actually happened. Following this argumentation, that is what happens in documentary photography as well. An image without context is bound to be signified by its viewer, unless plenty of other images are presented next to it.⁶²

⁶⁰ Anne D’Alleva, *Methods & Theories of Art History*. (London: King, 2005), 138.

⁶¹ Enwezor, Okwui. “Documentary/Vérité”, 93.; Foucault, Michel, and Alan Sheridan. *The Archeology Of Knowledge and The Discourse On Language*. New York, NY: Random House, 1992. 126-31.

⁶² For an example of an image that requires extra visual context, see the images in Appendices VIII to IX.

On the other hand, art and film critic Hito Steyerl argues that documentary in terms of a universal language understandable by everybody worldwide. A language that replaces speech and is understood by everyone, a language of things rather than words.⁶³ Dziga Vertov, a renowned communist director, believed documentary images could “establish an optical connection between the workers of the world.”⁶⁴ He wanted to contribute to the socialist world revolution by not only informing and entertaining but also organizing his audience.⁶⁵ The rise of global information capitalism, a similar style of connectivity has been achieved, phones and computers dominate people’s lives connecting them with images from over the world.⁶⁶ According to Steyerl, this has led to a new situation where the separation between information and disinformation, rationalism and hysteria, and lastly, sobriety and exaggeration has faded; “documentary forms partake in the arousal of fear and feelings of ubiquitous threat.”⁶⁷ However, she remains predominantly positive, asserting that a documentary language based on common-places is, in fact, able to transcend national borders and to kickstart international public debate; and is thereby able to solve its own internal problems.⁶⁸

If documentary photography possesses the internal strength to emit interpretable meaning to arrive at a universal visual language, that must hold that the image resembles cultural commonplaces familiar to the viewer. Which requires commonplaces to begin with, and universally recognizable signifiers. This becomes problematic taking cultural, social and anthropological differences into consideration. Subsequently, as she argues for a language of images, that must exclude the use of caption in any form, as a language that needs another language to make sense would not be a language at all. In that context it is hard to imagine, a documentary photograph, in the age of regimes of post truth, would be able to transmit meaning; let alone meaning that would be interpreted even vaguely similar between several fragments of the population.

The two understandings of Enwezor’s and Steyerl’s seem to be on opposite parts of the spectrum. Whereas Enwezor believes that documentary photography poses to our comprehension of the world, in which he sees a danger through the changing of the images context, and thereby meaning. Steyerl on the other hand argues from the same position positively; precisely

⁶³ Hito Steyerl, “The language of things.” *European institute for progressive cultural policies*, in *The Greenroom*, ed. Maria Lind and Hito Steyerl (Berlin: Sternberg Press/Center for Curatorial Studies, 2008), 225.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

documentary photography's ability to pose to the viewer's understanding of the world is what allows it to kickstart an international public visual language.⁶⁹

To sum up, documentary photography is a style that aim to represent reality truthfully. To do so it is limited to the visual cues trapped on photographic paper. As an image is a signifier of a reality that once was, it has to either be interpreted by a viewer, in order to be understood, or has to have an incorporated caption to provide the viewer with the necessary context. On the one hand this suggests a danger to the presented content and distribution of meaning of a photograph, as the interpretation is left to the viewer, which leaves a margin of error for misrepresentation. On the other hand, for the very same reason, one could argue that precisely the fact that the viewer is dominant in the interpretation of what the image signifies, those of comparable background could all recognize the same signs. The latter two interpretations suggest, as such, for documentary photography to hold a binary potential for two opposing notions; namely, to fracture, as well as to suture.

⁶⁹ Hito Steyerl, "The language of things." 225.; Enwezor, Okwui. "Documentary/Vérité", 93.

1.4. Conclusion

The first chapter has been devoted to excavating the term post-truth. The term excavation is used here as the aim is to uncover its context, history and use. What does it mean to be post-truth? Was there an era that was pre truth? How can one know something to be accurate or untrue in general? But most of all, the aim of this first chapter is to answer the research question to what extent post-truth era discourse poses a problem to the strive for realism as present in documentary photographic discourse. With a subsequent aim to find relevant discursive overlap in theory on documentary photography and the post-truth era, so as to construct a theoretic framework for the next chapters to build upon.

For the matter of clarity in this research, there are some terms that are considered related, and are often used conjunctively, namely “post-truth,” alternative facts, disinformation, and fake news. To gain a better grip on the notion of the post-truth era, it is useful to return to Steve Tesich, the man considered to have invented the term by first writing about it in an essay. The essay in question strongly manifested the term, such that it is still in use today. In his essay Tesich argued that a new era in US politics had begun, a time in which the public willingly ignores untrue statements by the government. Which means that the term’s previous meaning was slightly different from the meaning today, in that it appears not to be merely a matter of acceptance of falseness, but rather, disagreement on whether facts are true at all. It appears to be more like a zero-sum game, a binary, where whichever side one is on, the other side is always wrong.

The postmodern neoliberal society of control puts forth a population of people that behaves highly individualized. Neoliberalism, with its focus on the individual, promotes the entrepreneur as the highest value, where one is responsible entirely for oneself. Postmodernism, on the other hand, promotes the notion that predeterminations such as culture, personality, physiology, and the like mean that universal objective truth does not exist. It differs inter and intraculturally, and on a smaller scale, interpersonally. All tendencies that paint a picture of the post-truth era as a time in which people have an immensely personal understanding of reality, “individualized truth,” so to say.

Power is to dominate truth, a bond that remains true under regimes of post-truth and societies of control. Historically, this was especially apparent in totalitarian regimes where dictators attempt to control their subjects’ senses of reality. In the examples of historical

propaganda photography, it shows that images were retouched to portray the regimes' desired reality.⁷⁰ Naturally, technology has only increased the possibilities to tweak an image's content.

However, with the compression of the individual and the summarization of the masses into data for analysis, society has been fragmented into small subsections, each with their filter bubbles, resulting in a fragmented truth perception. Regimes of post-truth, in theory, put forth the idea that postmodern society has become compartmentalized to the extent that people reside within their filter bubbles, reiterating these individualized truths. Which, as part of the zero-sum game, defines the other filter bubbles as wrong, problematizing the notion of fruitful dialog with opposing parties. Whereas the notion of *truth* regimes dictates and distributes truth-products through several institutes and centralized production centers, under ROPT, truth and facts have not disappeared entirely; they appear to have been quantified as they are, increasingly, experienced through the lenses of a multitude of fragmented groups of *dividuals*. Groups that, notably, often disagree with each other on fundamental levels. Hence they have become objects of struggle, quarrel, and deliberate distortion.

Another compartment of the post-truth era is the notion of anti-elitism. Post-truth is often presented as problematic, a disaster for society, politics, and organizational structures. However, on the other hand, the scientific revolutions of the past have pushed the empirical method and notions of science and knowledge to an increasing extent towards an elite class of experts to which all access to knowledge belongs, perhaps exemplified best by the paywall erected around the databases of the scientific community's publications. Post-truth, in that sense, also represents an anti-elitist argument balancing the scales. Truth is volatile construct, did known-unknowns, turn into unknown-unknowns? Did anything change at all? Perhaps truth is just impossible to be ever captured universally.

The theorization of post-truth regimes offers the reading that individuals (or *dividuals* in the Deleuzian sense) exist together yet separated. Society is fragmented, and common shared understandings are no longer capable of reaching all corners of the fragmented field of opinion. Several structures are of influence on this, not in the least the introduction of algorithms in information selection and the culture of sharing online. One is not as likely to be shown something contradictory to personally held beliefs online. Filter bubbles serve the function of echo chambers of individual interpretations of reality. Regimes of post-truth have a diversifying effect, in that more opinions are believed to be true by more people. In the latter, understanding regimes of post-truth are a force of emancipation.

⁷⁰ As listed in the Appendices III-VI.

Documentary photography is an artistic genre that aims to represent things as they are. A tradition that stems from the French *film documentaire* signifying an anthropologically themed travel film, although different from the current interpretation, already shows the focus documenting reality. Despite documentary photography having progressed away from archiving and inventorying towards the realm of the arts, the act of snapping a shot of real life ontologically stays quite close to its roots. In the interpretation of Foucault photographs should be understood as “statement events,” the interpretation of which quite closely resembles the notion of the archive. An archival source in this interpretation is intended in relation to truth finding, where one should always strive for several sources indicating something, before one can start to assume that its plausible that thing happened. Foucault essentially says that documentary photography is similar, and therefore should be seen as a signifier of an event.

In summary, documentary photography as a style aims to represent reality truthfully. It is limited to its material and visual means, which entails that it merely signifies the moment of reality snapped by the camera. This leaves a large part of its understandability to the viewer to interpret; or additionally, the inclusion of a caption. On the one hand, this suggests a danger to the presented content and distribution of meaning of a photograph, as the interpretation is left to the viewer, which leaves a margin of error for misrepresentation. Added to that, in relation to post-truth regimes, is that the interpretability might differ per filter bubble. As well as that, in a post-truth society, the potential for caption to be subject to present false context to an image have increased rather than decreased. On the other hand for similar reasons, taking the direction of Vertov’s and Steyerl’s, allows to argue that the dominant position of the viewer in interpreting the meaning of an image. Those sharing commonplace knowledge, and thus of comparable cultural background, could recognize the same signs in an image. This presents two potential readings of documentary photography under post-truth regimes, a potential for fracture and a potential to suture. These latter notions provide fruitful bases for the case studies in the following chapters.

Lastly, to answer this chapter’s research question, the extent to which there is a relevant overlap between the fields of documentary photography and the post-truth era is sufficient. Matter of factly, it provides a proper ground for the investigation cases in which documentary photographs interact with post-truth mechanisms. The theoretical framework as defined in this chapter provides a clear and fruitful basis for the analysis of the case studies in the following two chapters of this thesis. As the theory on documentary photography provides an understanding of the relation between truth, reality and the documentary style; that, in combination with theorizations of post-truth regimes provides the necessary framework to

analyze what happens at the intersection of the concept of truth its representation in documentary photography in the post-truth era.

The following chapters aim to take this understanding of the post-truth era and examine examples of photography and caption in the context of the alternative fact, fake news, and false meaning. Particular focus shall be with the matter of conveying a false sense of meaning, truth, or reality in this context of the post-truth world of filter bubbles, individualized truth, and fragmented opinion.

Chapter 2: Documentary Photography, Post-Truth and the *Gilets Jaunes* Movement: A Case Study

Introduction

Following Jayson Harsin's theory of regimes of post-truth it becomes apparent that late capitalist societies, influenced by the neoliberalist tendency of individualization, cause the increased organization of individuals in thought groups. Thought groups that essentially function as echo chambers of opinion. Now, as mentioned before, an echo chamber is not necessarily a negative occurrence. Everybody has an opinion, and, when shared with those of who think alike, one can speak of an echo chamber. It becomes problematic when there is no bilateral communication between one group and another. Then, in its most perverse form, the echo chamber can come to produce a hollow howl of unchallenged, one sided opinion and unfounded speculation.

Online human rights platform Avaaz published a report on the online spread of fake news in 2019 pointing out that an alarming number of fake news articles circulated amongst members of the French *Gilets Jaunes* movement. A movement that organizes primarily online, a trend not only visible in France, but also in all of its international sister movements. Now, these online social media groups, primarily on Facebook, do behave a lot like the perverse carnation of the echo chamber. Opinions race around without meeting much opposition, and thus, without getting challenged, or even changed for that matter. Especially worrying when it comes to the more unorthodox of ideas, which ideally would, be softened down a bit in a healthy debate, as one tends to be associate with modern democracies. Yet, as reported by Avaaz, the online groups associated to the *Gilets Jaunes* produced a staggering amount of disinformation, often consisting of a quote (containing falsifiable "facts") and an image providing the "proof" for the aforementioned quote.⁷¹

There has been a lot of scholarly debate on the notion truth, meaning and the representation of reality in documentary photography; as stylistically speaking, the documentary medium has the intent to represent reality as truthfully as possible. The premise is that the eventual image is a representation of what happened in front of the camera, logically this leads to the fact that digital altering is generally frowned upon by documentary photographers. However, one can argue, in a more semiotic tradition, that a caption is the signifier to the signified that is the photograph, which entails that meaning resides within the photograph but requires a signifier to

⁷¹ See Appendices VIII and IX.

communicate it. Notwithstanding, it is Okwui Enwezor's interpretation that documentary media can pose a threat to *our comprehension* of the world. In that it allows for a margin of error between what an image actually depicts, if that can be understood at all, and how a person, influenced by their environment, cognition and experience, interprets it. Moreover, the act of documentation cannot be put on par with creating an artifact of singular universal truth. Instead, perhaps, it should be interpreted, in the Foucauldian sense, as a statement event, as a collection of smaller subdivided parts of a greater whole that is the "real world."

The introduction of the post-truth era brought about phenomena such as fake news, false meaning and disinformation strategies; all of which have the potential to act as misleading signifiers, or captions, to photographs. At large, this chapter seeks to analyze an example of an image spread within the *Gilets Jaune* community, specifically an instance in which a caption, with false meaning, was attached to an image, thereby altering the way in which it could be interpreted by viewers. And, subsequently, to compare the interaction between a documentary photograph, and a falsely fabricated caption with the theoretic framework on the characteristics of post-truth regimes. Specifically however, the following chapter is written to explore to which degree the case of the *Gilets Jaunes*-image⁷² behaves according to the framework of the fractured society under regimes of post-truth; so as to answer the chapter's research question to what extent, in this specific case, the caption weighs heavier than photographic content in conveying the image's meaning?

⁷² See Appendix VIII.

2.1. The Post-Truth Era: Faking an Image in the Digital Age

The reality of modern technological feats is that editing software keeps getting more advanced, also on the level of image creation, generation, and AI-based faking programs. In the early days of digital photography, the technology was frowned upon by most respected photographers. The technology was not good enough, but also, the technology gets in between the real world and the photograph. Where photography, in the traditional analog way, used to be the result of a chemical process of light falling onto the sensitive plate, translated into a negative image, digital photography takes that organic process out of the equation. Driving a wedge between the real world and the image, according to some. Eventually, many would transfer to the digital camera.

Even in the age of analog photography, there are examples of misleading photographs being created. Citizens of in the Stalinist USSR had to endure a constant barrage of false truth, non-information and propaganda. Where efforts to spread disinformation were directed at other countries outside of the union, they were most definitely also used on Soviet citizens. Many tools are available to influence the public discourse with “alternative narratives,” the one operationalized under Stalin’s rule was that of falsification. One often used method of falsification was retouching. many of the Stalin era images were edited to hide discredited members of the government.⁷³ The most extreme example of retouching photographs of Stalin’s government is one taken at a party conference in 1926, after everyone that had fallen from grace had been removed only Stalin himself remained.⁷⁴ Retouching was a practice quite common under dictators, Benito Mussolini, for instance, posed on horseback holding up the *Sword of Islam*, after signing into a treaty with Libya. The photograph was retouched to erase the groom holding the horse in place for the dictator, hiding the fact that he was unable to ride a horse by himself.⁷⁵

These latter notions of historical altered photography, however done analogically, perfectly show why photography ought to be interpreted as a statement event. These dictators aimed to erase certain facts that were not part of their desired narrative, presenting a fake and altered image which, however, does not erase the event itself. Given that of all previously

⁷⁴ See Appendix IV.; An example is the picture of Stalin accompanied by his advisors *Defense Commissar* Kliment Voroshilov and *Premier* Vyacheslav Molotov, and on the right secret police chief Nikolai Yezhov strolling past the Moscow Canal. Shortly thereafter Yezhov was arrested and executed in 1939, after which he was removed from the image, his existence no longer was in line with the alternative reality of Stalin’s government (Appendix III). Another example is the famously staged photograph of victorious Russian troops on the roof of the German *Reichstag* at the end of World War II (Appendix V).

⁷⁵ See Appendix VI.

mentioned images, the original, “other statements” still exist, just goes to show that sufficient documentary photographic statements (i.e., a multitude) can overrule a single faked image.

The process of digitizing the photographic image brought about a whole array of different tools to alter photographs with, software such as Photoshop and Lightroom, but also smaller simpler tools on portable devices such as the smartphone are capable of editing photographs in ways that used to require decent levels of skill and access to a dark room. The realms of documentary photography and photojournalism know several rules of ethics. As both types of photography derive their essence from a basis in the depiction of reality, editing on the level of content is considered unethical.⁷⁶ Digital tools are, to an increasing extent, able to trick the viewer into believing the observed is real. Referring back to the previous paragraph, the digital age has brought about some challenges of its own. Access to different statement events, for verification, has become both easier as well as more difficult. Easier because online access removes a lot of barriers, harder because eventually, by laws of multiplication, a statement, fake or not, can be found to back-up anything.

Deep fake technology and AI are becoming better at generating completely artificial images every day. As media scholar at the University of Amsterdam, José van Dijck argues, digital photography has given the photographic image an entirely different *image* in the contemporary world. From something tangible and finite, the concept has turned towards more intangible and infinite properties.⁷⁷ Where once one was limited to the contents of the camera roll, now people take endless amounts of pictures, most of which never to be looked at again. Through the generally exploded hours of screen time on phones, computers, and televisions, people are confronted and interacting with more images than ever before. Images are often linked to a form of keeping memories, to document things that happened, to this notion Van Dijck states that the increased potential for manipulation of photographs might go well with the need for the individual to remodel one’s self. Nevertheless, might, at the same time, create a flexibility that might lessen the grip we have on our images repurposing and reframing in the future, forcing a to face the acknowledgment that pictorial memory might be changed by the newly introduced ease of digital manipulation and distribution.⁷⁸

⁷⁶ Matt Carlson, “The Reality of a Fake Image News Norms, Photojournalistic Craft, and Brian Walskis Fabricated Photograph.” *Journalism Practice* 3, no. 2 (2009): 130.; Tom Wheeler, *Phototruth or Photofiction?*. (New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2002), 3.

⁷⁷ Van Dijck, “Digital Photography: Communication, Identity, Memory.” *Visual Communication* 7, no. 1 (2008): 57.

⁷⁸ Van Dijck, “Digital Photography: Communication, Identity, Memory.”, 59.

2.2. Post-Truth Photography in the *Gilets Jaunes* Community

The next section is devoted to the examination of the complementary use of image and text in the presentation of alternative or false facts. Interesting because, the inherent and assumed photographic truth claim intersects with a deceitful context or caption. Obviously, the advent of the internet has generated much potential for interpersonal connectivity, a space of interaction, agreement, disagreement, and sometimes misdirection. Facebook, as a social media platform, has been under substantial scrutiny for its role in the facilitation of fake and misdirecting information. For that reason, in this first section, an instance of photography in the post-truth era is examined, an image of a bleeding woman at a protest that circulated on the French *Gilets Jaunes*'s social media pages.

There are examples of photographs where the subject matter appears legitimate, but has in fact been staged. For example a work by photographer Alexander Gardner, who took a picture of a fallen rebel soldier after the battle of Gettysburg during the American Civil War.⁷⁹ The image titled *Home of a Rebel Sharpshooter* shows a dead man lying next to the rock that still, albeit barely, supports his rifle. However, Gardner had placed this man's body in a more "photogenic" spot, the rifle was not his, the man had not been a sharpshooter, in fact, Gardner even got the side wrong: the dead infantry trooper had not fought for the southern rebels, but for the northern union. To be precise, none of the facts in the image appear to be correct.⁸⁰ The example mentioned above, excellently shows the vulnerability of a photograph. As a signifier, the viewer is entirely reliant upon the context provided in the caption. If Gardner states the man in the picture frame is a rebel, then to the general public, unaware of military insignia, he is one.

Back to the post-truth era. Many images still circulate with false captions, or misleading context. For instance, on social media platforms, both private (i.e. private Facebook groups, WhatsApp) and public (public sections of Facebook and twitter), disingenuous content keeps on circulating. For instance, a Dutch newspaper reported on the repeated occurrence of fake news messages on the Yellow Vest Movement's Facebook page.⁸¹ Many of them accompanied by images to make the falsely provided context appear legitimate.⁸² A study by Avaaz examined, for the first time, the reach of online fake news in terms of likes and shares on

⁷⁹ See Appendix VII.

⁸⁰ Hans Rooseboom, *Lichtjaren een geschiedenis van de fotografie* (Amsterdam: Meulenhoff Boekery bv, 2019), 130-31.

⁸¹ Pim van den Dool, "'Gelehesjesbeweging Door Nepnieuws Overstroomd'." *Nrc.nl*, March 13, 2019. <https://www.nrc.nl/nieuws/2019/03/13/gelehesjesbeweging-door-nepnieuws-overstroomd>. (accessed June 10, 2019).

⁸² See Appendices VIII and IX.

Facebook.⁸³ Avaaz, in their research, focused especially on the *Gilets Jaunes* (i.e., Yellow Vests) movement in France. At the peak of the protests held in France around the end of 2018 and into 2019 disinformation concerning the Yellow Vest movement, circulating on related social media, was viewed by around 105 million people, and was subsequently, shared around four million times.⁸⁴ These are particularly high numbers as France only counts 35 million active Facebook users, indicating that every user in France viewed fake news at least three times over several months.⁸⁵ This is, notably, still a partial representation as Avaaz only examined cases that had already been fact-checked by news media.⁸⁶ According to Avaaz's disinformation campaign manager, Cristopher Scott, this research shows the effectiveness of fake news in Europe, as "groups of people create their own reality."⁸⁷

In March 2019, during the yellow vest protests in France, an image went viral on French social media showing a woman that had been beaten bloody by the police. The captions obviously aimed at spiking anger at the state or destroy trust in the possibility of peaceful protest. However, there is one issue concerning the image in question. It does not show anything related to France or the yellow vest movement. In fact, it shows a woman that got injured in Spain during a confrontation with the police. Instead of 2019, the picture was taken in 2012 when Spanish miners clashed with the police during protests about a recent cut in industry funding.⁸⁸

Specifically, the image shows a woman bleeding from a wound in her head as she is arrested by the Spanish police.⁸⁹ The image, however, is cut off, so the Spanish police badge remains invisible. The faked image is presented with the caption: "*Les merdias et le gouvernement... vous ont caché les images des manifestants pacifiques tabassés par les CRS*" (which translates to: "the media and the government of Macron have hidden the images of peaceful protesters beaten by the CRS").⁹⁰

Often misinformation is presented accompanied by a photograph, the object of interest in this section. What appears to happen is that the article or caption that come with the photo change the image's meaning. Does textual language influence visual language, does the visual influence the textual, or do the two work conjunctively together? A caption always disrupts the

⁸³ Avaaz, "Yellow Vests Flooded by Fake News Over 100m Views of Disinformation on Facebook," *Avaaz.org*, March 15, 2019, <https://avaazimages.avaaz.org/Report%20Yellow%20Vests%20FINAL.pdf>

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*; For a selection of examples see Appendices VIII and IX.

⁸⁵ Avaaz, "Yellow Vests Flooded by Fake News Over 100m Views of Disinformation on Facebook," 7.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ Pim van den Dool "'Gelehesjesbeweging Door Nepnieuws Overstroomd'." *Nrc.nl*.

⁸⁸ Avaaz, "Yellow Vests Flooded by Fake News Over 100m Views of Disinformation on Facebook," 7.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

intimate connection between the real world and the photograph. Where first, the photographic image, left alone in a room, merely mirrors what happened before the lens when the photographer snapped the shutter. Later, when confronted with a human, and summarized by a caption, what remains of it is little more than an interpretation.

“No photograph is necessarily, say, photojournalistic; photo-journalistic photographs are photographs used by newspapers.”⁹¹ It is the context that defines what a photograph is seen as, for example, a picture of a table might be a minimalistic artistic photograph or an advertisement, or it might be a piece of photojournalism accompanying an article about a furniture factory. The reality depicted in the photograph, therefore, switches with the lens, and therefore interpretation, through which it is observed. Similarly, no photo is necessarily a fake news photograph. The image, posted on the *Gilets Jaunes* social media groups,⁹² becomes a representation of a fake reality because the image is cropped to hide the Spanish logo on the policeman’s chest; just as the caption with the image in *Appendix IX* represents a faked reality because it actually depicts a woman wounded in the riots after the Catalan referendum. Had, in the former case the logo not been there, then the image would not have needed to be cropped. The fact that the image resonated with the public in France is not necessarily tied to this act of cropping. To gain a better grasp of the inner workings of the image, it must be examined through the lens of post-truth regimes and the scope of anti-elitism. The following sections will be devoted to dissecting the image on these bases.

⁹¹ Scott, *The Spoken Image: Photography and Language*, 57.

⁹² See Appendix VIII figure 2.

2.3. Regimes of Post-truth: the *Gilets Jaunes* Photographs and Anti-Elitism

Examined through the lens of the attention economy and data-analytics, from a purely economic viewpoint, conspiracy theories, polemics, and fake news generate many views, and therefore profit.⁹³ The motivation from an economic point of view is clear. The Facebook-post in the *Gilets Jaunes*-community,⁹⁴ itself got shared over 137.000 times, generating an even larger reach through the enormous amount of clicks and views. Attention, next to data, is the main natural resource of the late-neoliberalist, late capitalist society. Subsequently, as per Deleuze, “we are no longer dealing with the mass” as opposed to the individual, but rather the “dividual,” and the substitute for mass: “data”⁹⁵ As opposed to the former situation in the disciplinary society and the system of mass organization and resistance maximizing support and engagement meant to tap into the masses’ demand. Under the current situation of the control society and regimes of post-truth, to maximize audience engagement is quite different. The *dividuals* do not organize in the large mainstream; rather, they meander discontinuously through networks mediated through online groups and social platforms. In other words, under regimes of post-truth, maximizing engagement from an audience is to tap into online niche filter bubbles and the opinionated echo chambers of the control society.⁹⁶

To summarize, under regimes of post-truth facts and information need to resonate within distinct ideological filter bubble in order to generate attention, participation, and engagement from an audience. The *Gilets Jaunes* movement can be considered such a movement of an ideological counter-culture opposing the central state government. More importantly, they organize online through Facebook groups. For this particular bit of research, by means of participant observation, for this research some participant observations were made on *Gilets Jaunes* and *Gele Hesjes* (respectively French and Dutch for Yellow Vest) groups on Facebook. What follows is a general description of behavior in terms of information sharing within these groups. Most of the groups are private, meaning aspiring members have to apply in order to get in. Upon getting accepted into the groups, in some cases, new members are welcomed with a personal mention, accentuating a group dynamic. In terms of user behavior, members often post links to articles and information from elsewhere, accompanied by a description consisting of ideologically colored summaries of the content.⁹⁷ The text provided with these links is

⁹³ Greg McFarlane, “The Business Of Conspiracy Theories.” *Investopedia*, January 29, 2020. <https://www.investopedia.com/financial-edge/1012/the-business-of-conspiracy-theories.aspx>. (accessed February 25, 2020).

⁹⁴ Appendix VIII.

⁹⁵ Deleuze, Gilles. “Postscript on the Societies of Control.” 3-7.

⁹⁶ Harsin. “Regimes of Posttruth, Postpolitics, and Attention Economies.”, 330.

⁹⁷ Much like the photograph in Appendix VIII figure 1.

providing members of the in-crowd with filter-bubble-specific context. Behavior that, automatically generates the echo chamber characteristic of ideological groups in the hyper-segmented society of control.

The sentiment that can best be attributed to the post-truth era is anti-elitism. The notion of expertise, highly specific knowledge held by the most knowledgeable elite, became both an ideal to be strived for as well as a necessity in the economic sense; because society became organized around experts rather than all-rounders.⁹⁸ Now a strong counter-movement has come around against this ruling-expert-elite. A movement that feels it has been forgotten and does not believe in the privileged status the elite derives from its access to knowledge; the *Gilets Jaunes* are an example of this anti-elite sentiment. This notion also comes back in the *Oxford Dictionary* entry, which states that post-truth is an adjective “relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief.” Combine this with notions such as regimes of post-truth and the society of control, and one gets a fragmented public opinion centered around groups that identify themselves based on emotion and personal belief.

To exacerbate the definition of photography in the post-truth era, the latter interpretation ought to be compared to the images in figures 1 and 2.⁹⁹ The image in figure 2 in the context of news media represents a violent clash between miners and the Spanish police in Madrid in 2012; in the context – and to the members of – the *Gilets Jaunes*, an anti-elitist protest movement that felt they were structurally ignored by the French government, the image represented proof the government was their nemesis, and thus, strengthened their emotion of antiestablishment. The protesters out of resentment turned against the French state, which they argue only promotes the betterment of the rich. This means that the anti-elitists, in this case, turn anti-state as well. To the protesters, it mattered not who exactly was depicted in figure 1, as they identified as anti-elitists, a sentiment that can hardly be better represented than by police officers (servants of the state) apprehending a protester.¹⁰⁰

In other words, whereas the reality depicted in figure 1 and 2 has nothing to do with the *Gilets Jaunes*, the interpretation does appeal to the emotions of the movement’s members. The image itself, cropped as it is, lacks the power to overrule the attached caption.¹⁰¹

⁹⁸ Eric Ash, “Introduction: Expertise and the Early Modern State.” *Osiris* 25 (2010): 2.

⁹⁹ See Appendix VIII.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

Photography is to reality what a signifier is to a signified. In other words, the slice of reality that is represented in an image remains not more than a slice because it merely signifies that *thing* was *there*. Photography is a strong a signifying force. Instead of a mental representation, it presents a sign that looks exactly like the real world. To find the meaning of a photograph is like any other instance of semiotics different between cultural backgrounds. Gestures that mean come closer in one culture might mean “go away” in another. Stripped of all further meaning, photography might be definable as a means to transfer information: a communicative device. Which leads to the next step, defining photography as part of a photographic discourse, for discourse means to engage in information exchange.¹⁰² A discourse, to define the term, means the context of an exchange, and the rules and regulation of it. Generally, it indicates the conditions restrict and substantiate the meaning of an exchange.

Photography is, according to this definition, an uttered exchange, in the sense that it carries a message, contains something of significance in the context of a discourse.¹⁰³ To define photography as a discourse, however, also means that whatever message it carries within, is an incomplete expression. One that requires the interference of external indicators, conditions, and restrictions before it can be read and understood. Which, by definition, makes the photograph context-dependent. Being able to read a photograph is dependent on many things, culturally as well as contextually. A person from a culture that has no tradition of creating, crafting realistic art, or has no cultural tradition of visual representations, does not understand the visual cues of the photograph.¹⁰⁴ Someone who lacks the cultural reference to “read” an image, first needs to acquire “photographic literacy” to understand its message.

Allan Sekula, theoretician, and art critic, argues that photography is often presented as a universally significant system of sign language that ought to be understood by all, despite the fact that some might have to become proficient at “reading an image” first.¹⁰⁵ However, he juxtaposes this by stating that by accepting the premise that the interpretation of information is culturally determined, one can no longer ascribe universally understood meaning to the photographic image.¹⁰⁶ As a standalone object, the image cannot possibly presents to the viewer merely a suggestion of meaning; there is potential, but there is no unequivocal certainty. Only

¹⁰² Allan Sekula, “On the Invention of Photographic Meaning”, In Victor Burgin, *Thinking Photography. Communications and Culture* (London: Macmillan, 1982). 84.

¹⁰³ Sekula, “On the Invention of Photographic Meaning,” 85.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

by its contextualization or its embeddedness in a sequence or discourse can the photograph's essentially "floating" potential for meaning be yielded into a clear semantic understanding.¹⁰⁷

One consequence is not sufficiently highlighted in the abovementioned reading of meaning in the photographic discourse, and that is, the aspect that perhaps is highlighted most by the emergence of what Deleuze calls the society of control. Namely, that the message captured within a photographic image is understood within a certain discourses, but loses that particular meaning in another. The transformation of the individual, its behavior, and the diversification of group discourses in the society of control, with special regard towards regimes of post-truth, means several things. Firstly, Photographs have a certain meaning only in the right context, yet, images can be spread much easier and faster. Secondly, individuals, in a fragmented society, gather in orbit around certain discursive groups or filter bubble.¹⁰⁸ Information that is presented to them is therefore understood in the context of the group's sense of the world, meaning that a photograph might be interpreted differently.

To summarize, the image shows a wounded woman, in reality she was at a mineworkers protest in Spain, in the false context provided with the image that circulated amongst the *Gilets Jaune* movement could be read that she was subject to state violence against group members.¹⁰⁹ The *Gilets Jaunes* movement, organized as it is online, functions in many ways exactly like the notion of filter bubble, as it is mentioned above. In the context of *Gilets Jaunes* members, who are, notably, people that often attend mass-protests, the image resembles something that concerns them. Protests often feature violent clashes, so it is logical an image showing someone wounded at a protest resonates with members of the *Gilets Jaunes*-bubble. Secondly, the woman in the image appears to be carried by police officers. This might indicate that she is escorted to safety, or maybe arrested. To an antiestablishment minded *Gilets Jaunes* member, this probably looks like the latter.

The issue here is that that the filter bubbles, through the algorithmification of the internet, often reinforce rather than challenge held opinions. So, when an image as such circulates in a group that holds a strong opinion of antiestablishment, regimes of post-truth inhibit the flow of documentary statement events with context or caption alternative into the community. However, aside from the predispositions a members of the *Gilets Jaunes*'s filter bubble might be subject to, the fact that, as part of that bubble, the influx of alternative statement events is severely inhibited. Which is likely to lead to opinions being repeated back to each

¹⁰⁷ Sekula, "On the Invention of Photographic Meaning," 85.

¹⁰⁸ Harsin. "Regimes of Posttruth, Postpolitics, and Attention Economies.", 329.

¹⁰⁹ See Appendix VIII.

other. With as a result, the potential for a false caption to entirely determine the way in which an audience can interpret the image to which it is attached.

2.4. Conclusion

This chapter aims to explore whether the case of the *Gilets Jaunes*-image behaves according to the framework of the fractured society under regimes of post-truth; specifically, to answer the research question: to what extent, in this specific case, the caption weighs heavier than photographic content in conveying the image's meaning? In order to do so, firstly, this chapter discussed how notions of truth and misinformation, how they arise, and how they disperse and spread through modern online communication networks. It did so, not at large, but in the specific case where the picture of a woman bleeding from her head was posted, conjunctively with several other images of wounded people. It brought in the notions of the control society and regimes of post-truth, a lens through which the forming of counter-movements can be categorized and understood in the context of the fragmented control society.

Post-truth has a strong connection to a notion of anti-elitism, a notion that is strongly attached to the *Gilets Jaunes* movement as well. Truth in a regime of post-truth is fragmented; one's position, or point of view, highly predetermines what interpretation of it one might adopt, much like the slices of truth that an archive puts forth. Observed from the angle of anti-elitism, closer examination of the images, both original and with false context,¹¹⁰ brought forth that, without sufficient context, the image, showing a woman beaten by the police, conforms to the *Gilets Jaunes*'s sentiment. Especially, since members of the movement during their protests in 2019, often violently clashed with the police, the image's content depicts a scene that resembles a clash as such. The attached caption therefore creates enough alternative meaning to conceal the image's original content and meaning as well as the intent with which the photographer took it, none of the latter permeates from image to the observing viewer, aside from the false caption.¹¹¹

Secondly, in this chapter, the relation between documentary photography and meaning or truthfulness was analyzed. The understanding of documentary photography, as presented in the previous chapter, does not hold up well compared to the examples of post-truth photography.¹¹² Moreover, taking the example set by the case study in this chapter, a strong case can be made for the caption, and thus text, being a stronger indicator of meaning than image. For if the image would hold such a strong connection to the events of the miners' protest in 2012, then how can a short caption with (con)text completely change the interpretability of

¹¹⁰ See Appendix VIII.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Ibid.

the image.¹¹³ It is important to take into consideration that the digital alteration of the image does contribute in the interpretability of the image.

Furthermore, Enwezor's reading that documentary forms "pose to our comprehension of the world", allows for a margin of error between the image's actual depicted content, and how a person, influenced by his or her understanding of the world, interprets it. The act of documenting cannot be equaled to the creation of an artifact of singular universal truth; in a way, the act of documentation is an incarnation of statement collecting, or as Foucault calls it "statement events." In this view, documentary pieces should be seen more like archival sources in that several images can be used for the interpretation of an event, but never to, without reservation, "claim" truth. If documentary photography possesses a powerful internal language of images that has the potential to be understood, as Steyerl argues, surely that holds at least that an image is understood vaguely similarly by everybody that views it, regardless of cultural background. Subsequently, she argues that a language of images must exclude the use of caption in any form, as a language that needs another language to make sense would not be a language at all. In that context, it is hard to imagine, a documentary photograph, in the age of regimes of post-truth, would be able to transmit meaning, let alone meaning that would be interpreted even vaguely similar between several fragments of the population.

Following the case study in this chapter, it makes sense to interpret the photograph of the bleeding woman as an archival source.¹¹⁴ More specifically, in Foucault's interpretation of "statement event," where pieces of evidence that can be puzzled together after which a specific reading of events can be formed. In this case the inclusion of the false context to the photograph and the erasure of the Spanish police insignia make it seem the image is about police violence at *Gilets Jaunes* protests. Every piece of evidence represents one statement event, as part of a series. Archival truth finding, according to Foucault, only becomes convincing if a series of statement events all point in the same direction. Which, in this case would mean that the wrongfully attached caption only stands out *if* presented alongside the image in figure 2.¹¹⁵ But only when accompanied by other, different, photograph (i.e., collected statements) on the same event. Reading both photographs this way allows for an interesting take on their interpretability.¹¹⁶ Namely, what the case study clearly shows is that the single image, as posted in *Gilets Jaunes*'s social media groups, requires more context, either through the addition of a

¹¹³ See Appendix VIII, figure 2.

¹¹⁴ See Appendix VIII.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

caption, simply because it is a singular statement event, or through the inclusion of several other images (i.e., statement events), and thus, when it lacks those, can be interpreted in various ways as it remains a small part of the bigger picture.¹¹⁷

On top of that, the provision of context, as far as post-truth discourse goes, is to some extent inhibited by the fragmented state of the control society. For this specific case holds that the presence of the proper context is key in interpreting the image as it was intended. Logically, this can happen through the addition of text, however, what remains to be examined is the application of context through image alone. Hito Steyerl's assertion that a documentary language based on common-places ought to be able to transcend national borders, suggests that is possible. The next chapter aims to analyze how an image can provide the proper context, without the addition of caption, to self-sufficiently permeate the reality that was captured on film.

¹¹⁷ See Appendices VIII and IX.

Chapter 3: The Case of: The Truth, The Whole Truthiness and Nothing but Alternative Facts

Introduction

Few examples of post-truth era politics have been as striking and widely debated as the one that occurred after the inauguration of Donald Trump in January 2017. More specifically, the events ensuing afterward, specifically the debate around the number of visitors. Events that require unpacking on several levels: firstly, the White House alleging that the inauguration crowd had been the largest ever, of which photographic evidence proves the opposite. Secondly, the official pictures taken of the event having been tampered with, i.e. cropping the bottom section, the part showing the empty of the inaugural field, off in order to make the crowd seem bigger.

In chapter 2 the relation between caption and image, in the context of the post-truth era, have been explored. This was achieved by focusing on the case of the misappropriated caption of a documentary news-photograph. The text in the caption made different claims than the contents of the image represented, thereby raising the question as to whether the caption, in fact, weighs heavier than image in truthfully conveying the image's reality. Subsequently, it is the aim in chapter 3 to examine documentary photography's innate properties to represent reality as it existed in front of the camera's lens; and specifically, to convey *truth*, or *meaning*, without caption. An exploration that is operationalized as case study, by the examination of one of Cors Brinkman's works. The work in question is stored in the Leiden University's special collection and is titled *The Truth, the Whole Truthiness and Nothing but Alternative Facts*.¹¹⁸ Chapter 3 therefore entails an exploration that, to a greater extent than in chapter 2, takes place on the intersection of art and reality.

This chapter takes off with Hito Steyerl's argument for a universal language of documentary photography as a starting for the exploration of the documentary style in the context of the fractured society of post-truth regimes. Her argument for a universal language of documentary images which bases itself in commonplace recognizability and should be able to transcend national borders and kickstart an international debate on the visual level. Now, an obvious critique of Steyerl's argument is that it completely surpasses the notion of culture, which can lead to widely different interpretations cross culturally. However, an interesting point to explore is the applicability of Steyerl's notion of commonplace recognizability to the fractured post-truth society. And subsequently, whether it, perhaps instead of national borders, can transcend the existing borders between filter-bubbles, and thereby kickstart a much needed

¹¹⁸ See Appendix X.

public debate so as to answer this chapter's research question: to what extent does the case of *The Truth, the Whole Truthiness, and Nothing but Alternative Facts* present a convincing example of commonplace recognizability, a photograph that provides context without caption to the viewer, and thus circumvents the false meaning that could potentially be ascribed through the addition of text.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁹ See Appendix X.

3.1. The Post-Truth Era: The Case of the 2017 Presidential Inauguration

Usually, inauguration ceremonies are rather dull political affairs. The size of the crowd present is dependent on the level of civic, political engagement throughout the campaigns and popularity of the candidate. Presumably, because Trump, throughout his campaign, had actively contrasted himself with his predecessor Barack Obama, his team cared about contrasting crowd sizes as well. Right after the inauguration ceremony, Trump sent out a Tweet stating claiming that his crowd had been the biggest ever. After this, Sean Spicer experienced an intense debut as White House press secretary has to defend the president's claims. After questions concerning the president's Tweet, Spicer claimed that the ceremony drew "the largest audience ever to witness an inauguration, period, both in-person and around the globe."¹²⁰ According to him, the journalists were at fault for minimizing the president's support in their reports, and "these attempts to lessen the enthusiasm for the inauguration are shameful and wrong."¹²¹ However, as soon as the official pictures of the ceremony started to be released, it became apparent that the number of attendees for Trump's 2017 inauguration was much lower than Obama's in 2009.¹²²

As the official numbers of attendees remain classified, Spicer attempted to bolster his argument with metro ridership data, comparing Trump's inauguration to Obama's. The numbers showed 420,000 for Trump and 317,000 for Obama. However, for this specific comparison, he had used whole-day ridership for Trump's inauguration, and for Obama, he had only used the data up to 11 am. Moreover, he had used the data of Obama's 2013 inaugural day at the start of his second term, where attendance was lower than at his first inauguration.¹²³ Despite the fact that the actual numbers are unknown, all the estimates, as well as the visual evidence, point out that the position of Trump's White House is false.¹²⁴

These are all peculiar developments as the size of the crowd would, in a normal scenario, hardly be of interest to the media. However, not only did White House press secretary Sean Spicer claim a provable falsehood, he did so when he addressed the press for the first time ever. In response, counselor to the president Kellyanne Conway said the following in an *NBC News*

¹²⁰ Hunt, Elle. "Trump's Inauguration Crowd: Sean Spicer's Claims versus the Evidence." *The Guardian*, January 22, 2017. <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2017/jan/22/trump-inauguration-crowd-sean-spicers-claims-versus-the-evidence>. (accessed February 20, 2020).

¹²¹ Elle Hunt, "Trump's Inauguration Crowd."

¹²² Ibid.; For an overview comparing the crowd at the Obama vs. the Trump inauguration see Appendix XII.

¹²³ Hunt, Elle. "Trump's Inauguration Crowd."

¹²⁴ Tim Wallace, Karen Yourish, and Troy Griggs. "Trump's Inauguration vs. Obama's: Comparing the Crowds." *The New York Times*, January 20, 2017. <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2017/01/20/us/politics/trump-inauguration-crowd.html?smid=tw-nytpolitics&smtyp=cur>. (accessed February 23, 2020).

interview: “You’re saying it’s a falsehood and ... Sean Spicer, our press secretary, gave alternative facts to that.”¹²⁵ Some of the very first official words uttered by members of the Trump government already furthered the notion of post-truth, and, in addition, brought the term “alternative facts” into the fake news lexicon. This point marks the moment in time when the postmodern notion of countering single ontological truths crosses over onto facts. People now disagree on facts rather than opinions.

A year later, in 2018, *The Guardian* published an article, again on the same process. Namely, that in addition to blatantly stating falsehoods, the White House also attempted to have the pictures of the inauguration digitally altered to make the crowd appear larger than it was. The newspaper bases these claims on officially released documents. The article clearly states the following: “A government photographer edited official pictures of Donald Trump’s inauguration to make the crowd appear bigger following a personal intervention from the president.”¹²⁶

As a result of the presidential request, the photographer cropped out the empty space where, on the image, the crowd ended. The National Park Service (NPS), the institute in charge of the inauguration ceremony, is mentioned to have been pursued for “more flattering photographs” of the crowd.¹²⁷ Spicer, reportedly, requested “for NPS to provide photographs in which it appeared the inauguration crowd filled the majority of the space in the photograph.”¹²⁸ An unnamed NPS photographer reportedly mentioned that he edited some inauguration photographs to “make them look more symmetrical by cropping out the sky and the bottom,”¹²⁹ where the crowd ended.

Consequentially, the inaugural ceremony and the pictures taken that day prove to be a difficult, multifaceted case of post-truth rhetoric. The images represent both sides of the argument and, subsequently, all truths and all facts, both alternative and otherwise. That is the position, or filter-bubble, one is in determines the way in which one views the world. As was mentioned before, the post-truth era is defined as a time in which objective facts exert less influence on public opinion than for instance, personal belief. The example of the presidential inauguration is one such instance. The election prior to the inauguration stirred up as extreme

¹²⁵ NBC, “Kellyanne Conway: Press Secretary Sean Spicer Gave ‘Alternative Facts’”, *NBC’s Meet The Press*, January 22, 2017. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VSrEEDQgFc8>. (accessed February 20, 2020).

¹²⁶ Jon Swaine, “Trump Inauguration Crowd Photos Were Edited After He Intervened.” *The Guardian*, September 6, 2018. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/sep/06/donald-trump-inauguration-crowd-size-photos-edited>. (accessed February 20, 2020).

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

dispersity in reception between supporters and the opposition. Essentially creating two groups, those in favor and those opposing the election results. If interpreted according to the discourse on post-truth regimes, situations as such can cause significant fractures and mental distance between members of different filter bubbles.¹³⁰ Bring in the algorithmification of modern life, and two groups ascend (those in favor and those against), both of which are reinforced, by their fellow group members, only in their personally held beliefs.¹³¹ The photographic evidence presents many different versions of the event, one to back up every version of events be it a full field, or an empty one. “Just as the factory farming system that produces and delivers our food determines what we eat, the dynamics of our media shape what information we consume.”¹³² Thus, a situation arrives where these personally held beliefs, regardless whether they are in favor or against, can be backed up by a fitting piece of “evidence.”

The shift in people’s thinking towards a post-fact-based form of argumentation is clearly identifiable in the case of the 2017 inaugural ceremony. In his artwork, *The Truth, The Whole Truthiness, and Nothing but Alternative Facts*, Cors Brinkman explored the concept of post-truth in relation to the notion of alternative facts.¹³³

¹³⁰ Eli Pariser, *The Filter Bubble: How the New Personalized Web Is Changing What We Read and How We Think* (New York: Penguin Press, 2011).

¹³¹ Eli Pariser, *The Filter Bubble*, 14.

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ See Appendix X.

3.2. Lenticular Photography: A Multitude of Viewpoints Combined

Brinkman's work *The Truth, The Whole Truthiness and Nothing but Alternative Facts* explores how individuals can have a different point of view, based on essentially the same objective fact. In this case about the presidential inauguration ceremony of 2017. The fact that several pictures, some cropped, some not allows for the argument to exist that deliberately unflattering imagery is chosen by the opposition. As White House Press Secretary Sean Spicer claimed: "photographs of the inaugural proceedings were intentionally framed in a way, in one particular tweet, to minimize the enormous support that had gathered in the national mall... this was the largest crowd to ever witness an inauguration, period, both in person and around the globe."¹³⁴ Again, since cropped photography of the event exists, evidence, flawed or not, can be found to support either claim. Only, context, and reference from other collected statement events, can beg the differ. Brinkman's work starts from this point.

The question is how to capture, in one visual cue, the complexities of this situation, while also bring together the different members, outside of their filter bubbles. Brinkman's photographic collage consists of three images in one. The medium chosen to convey the visual cue is lenticular print. Meaning the visual content changes as the viewer alters their point of view. The process of lenticular printing consists of several steps where two, or more, images are combined into one lenticular photograph. This is done by extracting the photographs into different frame-files and, digitally, weaving them together into a single file. Vertical lines of each image are printed next to each other forming a blurred image.¹³⁵ The next step to print the combined file onto a lenticular lens. This is a plastic surface with a vertically ribbed surface. The texture of the surface is what allows the viewer to be able to observe all incorporated images independently again, by moving their point of view.

"This process is used to create various forms of animation for motion effects, offsetting the layers at different increments for 3D effects or alternate between images that appear to transform into each other. Lenticular printing is a very precise technique as any misalignment in the process of the image or lens will result in the final effect, not working correctly."¹³⁶

¹³⁴ CNN. "Inaugural Crowd Sizes: Trump v. Obama - CNN Video." CNN. Cable News Network, January 20, 2017. <https://edition.cnn.com/videos/us/2017/01/20/trump-obama-inaugural-crowd-size-sg-orig-mobile.cnn/video/playlists/inauguration-crowd-size/>.

¹³⁵ See Appendix XIII.

¹³⁶ Cors Brinkman, "The Truth, The Whole Truthiness And Nothing But Alternative Facts." Master's Thesis, (Leiden University, 2018), 6.

In the case of Brinkman's artwork, the lenticular photograph consists of a sum of three parts. It depicts three top-down views of the crowd at Donald Trump's inaugural ceremony: an empty field, no crowd; a mostly filled field, medium crowd; and full field, large crowd. In Brinkman's words, the viewers can, by changing their points of view, experience alternate truths.¹³⁷

The middle "panel" depicts the true dimensions of the crowd as it was on the 20th of January 2017. For the artist, the work is an exploration of the phenomenon of alternative facts, by which he hopes to generate a better understanding of the notion. Central to his aim is to translate the political and scientific understanding of alternative facts and bring them together visually for the broader public to experience.¹³⁸ In his work, he attempts to balance the scientific with the vague. In other words, the scientific aim to find defensible facts and vague real-world concepts such as personal opinions and truths which cannot be pinned down and defined as easily.¹³⁹ Lastly, the work's size is 99.5 cm by 120.8 cm, making it overwhelming for the viewer to observe, and, also quite fragile.

The work is titled *The Truth, The Whole Truthiness and Nothing but Alternative Facts*. As mentioned before the term alternative facts indicates a set of competing facts. Politically, they are strongly connected to falsehoods, a connotation that is grounded in the way it is used, for instance, by the Trump administration. However, strictly speaking, the term signifies different points of view and is strongly related to individual perception. Brinkman writes that in his art, he is interested in the operationalization of alternative facts and how they are able to affect – even alter – the way in which truth is experienced.¹⁴⁰

For analysis of the lenticular photograph, the three parts will be discussed as panels, specifically a left (L), right (R), and centerpiece. The order of the panels is based on the angle from which the different images can be observed, from left to right: an empty, semi-filled, and full field.¹⁴¹ On a formal level, the work consists of two fabricated versions of the photographs taken of the National Mall in front of the Capitol Building at the 2017 inaugural ceremony, i.e., the empty (L) and full fields (R). Interestingly, the artist chose for the middle panel (i.e., the actual representation of the crowd that day) a cropped version of the image.

Notably, the work's title uses the word "truthiness," an early 19th century term that has become disused. However, recently, it was revived by comedian Stephen Colbert in his satirical

¹³⁷ Brinkman, "Alternative Facts."

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ Cors Brinkman, "Alternative Facts." CDBRINKM, 2018. <http://cdbrinkm.com/projects/the-truth-the-whole-truthiness-and-nothing-but-alternative-facts#0>. (accessed February 15, 2020).

¹⁴¹ See Appendix X.

news show *The Colbert Report*. Colbert uses the word as such that “truthiness” is something that feels true without it necessarily having to be true. It thereby closely resembles the *Oxford Dictionary’s* definition of post-truth, which states that emotions weigh heavier in argumentation than fact.¹⁴²

This brings attention to another possible layer of analysis to the work. This time related to framing. What is striking comparing photographs of US presidential inaugural ceremonies,¹⁴³ the image used in the finalized work *The Truth, The Whole Truthiness and Nothing but Alternative Facts*, is the, or a, cropped version of the Reuters photograph taken on the 20th of January 2017. Which, following the interpretation that, viewer from the middle, the image reflects the reality as it was captured on camera, during the inauguration; is still a slight misrepresentation. As the left and right panel present two extremely fetishized version, i.e., completely empty, and completely full, the middle, least extreme depiction of it feels most realistic to the viewer.¹⁴⁴

As was stated by work’s, the purpose of the work was to give people the experience that the truth, or facts, seem to change when observed from a different point of view. As two of the panels are obvious fabrications, it begs the question which points of view the creator had in mind while working on this piece. They are fetishized idealistic versions of what different groups of people thought about the inauguration ceremony. The panel on the left shows an empty pitch, which is an intensified vision of what Trump’s political opponents hoped the turnout would have been. The panel on the right shows a full field and can be interpreted as the version of the ceremony the Trump administration wanted the public to see. They both blur in a sense the content of the middle panel, which is the only panel showing the reality of January 20th, 2017, and even this panel has been cropped to hide the gaping empty space behind the spectators.

Argued from a semiotics point of view, all the images could signify the event as it was experienced. The right panel perhaps best signifies the mental concept a fervent Trump supporter has of that day, i.e., “the largest crowd ever.” The objective reality however, which has been turned so convoluted by those involved especially since the disagreements were fought out publicly, is hard to argue what signifies it best. The *uncropped* Reuters version¹⁴⁵ presents the top-down view of the crowd, including the empty parts of the field, which shows that the

¹⁴² *Oxford Dictionary of English*, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), “post-truth.”

¹⁴³ See Appendices X-XII.

¹⁴⁴ See Appendix X.

¹⁴⁵ See Appendix XII.

ceremony did not achieve maximum attendance. The *cropped* version,¹⁴⁶ however, shows the same amount of people present that day, but also includes part of the discussion ensuing afterwards in its physical state of being cropped. By choosing the cropped version for his final work *The Truth, The Whole Truthiness and Nothing but Alternative Facts*, Brinkman indirectly acknowledges the public polemic discussion over the objective facts that took place, between Trump supporters (including the administration) and their opposition.

The artist himself compares his work to anaglyphs, i.e., the use of red and blue overlays. A practice used in black and white film to hide special effects, more recently, this technique was used for creating 3D effects. A viewer would use glasses colored blue on the right and red on the left side. The right eye would observe the color red as black while blue registers as invisible. For the left eye, the same is true except in the inverted sense. Brinkman defines narratives and alternative truths in a similar way; one's point of view determines through which color-overlay one views the world; i.e., a biological filter bubble of sorts. Some narratives are colored blue, and some are colored red, which, when viewed by people through colored glasses renders some narratives invisible yet others sharply defined.

¹⁴⁶ See Appendix XI.

3.3. Conclusion

The focus in this chapter lies with the examination of documentary photography's innate ability to convey reality *truthfully* and *meaningfully*, without interference of caption. The case study in chapter two highlighted the intricacies of this problem and brought forth the question whether documentary photography's suppression of artistic liberty in favor of realism, still functions in the post-truth era. This chapter therefore presents an analysis, by means of studying of a piece of visual, photographic art (i.e. case study). An exploration that happens, to a greater extent than in chapter two, on the intersection of art and reality (and the depiction thereof). The chapter thereby aims to answer the research question: to what extent can the case of *The Truth, the Whole Truthiness, and Nothing but Alternative Facts* be operationalized to present a convincing example of commonplace recognizability, so as to break through the fractions and borders that exist between filter-bubbles, and thereby open up a common ground for an open debate to take place in?¹⁴⁷

The conclusion in chapter two poses a kind of grim outlook for documentary photography in the post-truth era, where caption completely determines the context and interpretability of the image and overrules the visual signs within the photograph. In semiotics the signifier is considered the most potent interpretant of the sign, translate that to photography, which is usually considered a sign with a tagline or caption that behaves as a signifier. However, in case of a false caption, the semiotics fail as well; with false interpretants, signs lose their meaning. This chapter aims to look for a fix to this problem, the argument follows along the lines of an article written by Hito Steyerl on a universal language of imagery. Essentially, her argument argues for a universal language of documentary photography, is, in this chapter, used as a blueprint for the exploration of the documentary style in the context of the fractured society of post-truth regimes. Brinkman's work *The Truth, the Whole Truthiness, and Nothing but Alternative Facts* can be argued to be comparable to Steyerl's notion of a universal documentary language; or, as an attempt to present documentary language – based on recognizability; and thereby opens up the possibility for the viewer to transcend the borders that exist between filter-bubbles, and observe different points of view represented in one photographic work of art.

Regimes of post-truth dictate that society is fragmented; distanced bodies disagree on what the truth is, and how to interpret it. For instance, few examples of truth-disputes had such a striking impact as the debate that ensued after the inauguration of President Donald J. Trump

¹⁴⁷ See Appendix X.

in January 2017.¹⁴⁸ People behave socially within echo chambers and filter bubbles, amplified by the online economy of attention. News, fact, and truth are welded to power but also represent a business to those producing products containing it. Deleuze's concept on the society of control teaches that content is directed at the (multiple) specific markets of interest groups, in which individuals are organized. The case study in the preceding chapter highlights exactly that. The real world occurrence is that "x" number of people were present at location. This was followed up by a statement "y", claiming that amount "x" was "the largest ever." Media, according to Deleuze, has the tendency, due to its mode of business, to direct their content at interest groups. In the post-truth regimes, this means that there is a potential variance between the content broadcasted to those in agreement and those in disagreement with statement "y".

Brinkman, creator of the case study in this chapter, recognizes that society, in its current fragmented state, contains bodies that observe and understand reality from their different points of view. This translates directly into his work *The Truth, The Whole Truthiness, and Nothing but Alternative Facts*,¹⁴⁹ where the viewers' literal point of view determines what version of reality can be seen. On the left side, an exaggeration of what liberal voters would have liked to see, in the middle neutral and factual, and on the right the version the Trump administration wanted to see. The symbolism pertaining to the viewer's position in relation to the work (i.e., left, middle or right) and the political preference (i.e., left, middle or right) to which that version of the truth appeals to, is striking.¹⁵⁰

Nevertheless, Regimes of Post-Truth (ROPT) have diverted truth into a realm of discussion and disagreement, all based upon the point of view of the minds and bodies of society. Society and truth are fragmented, yet by depicting a single event from three different angles in a single work of photographic art, Brinkman has managed to capture an essence of quarrel over truth in ROPT. The work takes a bird's eye's perspective towards society and forces the viewer to contemplate and realize that several points of view exist for every instance; and that even in societies of control, attempts can be made to suture them together. An encounter with this work does not suture the fragmentation of the control society. However, it does provide the observer to think freshly and differently.

A situation that, as mentioned earlier, in the view of Steyerl, to a separation between information and disinformation, rationalism and hysteria. Where above all, documentary forms and photographic images are shared, interpreted, and thereby partake in the arousal of wide

¹⁴⁸ See images in Appendices X to XII.

¹⁴⁹ Appendices X.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

arrays of emotions, which in the context of ROPT indicates a contribution to the fragmentation of society. Steyerl, however, does see a potentially positive role for documentary photography, in that by capitalizing upon its intrinsic power to encapsulate common-place imagery, it has the capacity to break the gridlock, to transcend borders and open up the debate. Brinkman's work *The Truth, The Whole Truthiness and Nothing But Alternative Facts* does present an incarnation of photography where, by showing three perspectives at once, the medium suddenly is able to solve its internal problems. By stepping away from a realism, it depicts the fractured signified reality more realistic than an unedited version could.

Lenticular photographic images are by no means a viable option to print and distribute on a massive scale; they are simply too fragile and too expensive to produce. Nevertheless, what Brinkman achieved with this work is to capture one instance from the points of view of several disconnected groups with entirely segregated opinions and bring them together in one singular visualization. No matter what the viewer wishes to believe, and despite political opinion or influence, the image forces the viewer to consider three frames at the same time. By combining the three versions of the image into one, the author, for a brief moment, forces a bridge between the audience's respective filter bubbles.

Conclusion

The aim in this thesis is to examine the relationship between the concept of documentary photographic truth and the post-truth era. The questions central to this matter are to what extent the former is impacted by the latter, and how the notion of reality in documentary photography is affected by post-truth devices. In the former chapters these questions have been examined through the lens of several case studies. Both of which are cases of photographic content in some way or another dealing with the notion of the post-truth era. The aim at large is to answer the research question, which consists of two parts: firstly, how, under regimes of post truth, the documentary style behaves in instances where false (con)text is introduced, either per caption or per news article, to a piece of documentary photography; and secondly, in a typical post-truth instance in which various groups of people have widely different interpretations of which “truth” is represented in an image, to what extent can an observation, as such, offer new insights on the traditional interpretations of the image versus caption (text/context) debate.

The answer to this question is divided over three chapters, all analyzing specific parts of the research question at large. The first chapter provides a general overview of the relevant literature, defining the framework of analysis throughout the following chapters as well as defining the central terminology. It seeks to answer the question to what extent post-truth era discourse poses a problem to the strive for realism as present in documentary photographic discourse. Followed by a subsequent aim to, as the introductory chapter, build a theoretic framework at the intersection of these two topics for the next chapters to build upon.

In the first chapter the discourse on the post-truth era is examined. It shows that from its first mention in Steve Tesich’s essay, the concept of the post-truth era underwent several stages in terms of how it was understood. Finally producing the contemporary understanding of truth, as a binary: whichever side one is on, the other side is always wrong. Stacked upon that is the increased individualization of people within the contemporary society. Which, according to the interpretation presented by Harsin, shows a society that exists in a fractured state, with people behaving within small spheres of influence, filtered on belief systems accordingly.

The post-truth era, with such a volatile construct as truth, begs the question what does it mean to be passed that? Did known-unknowns, turn into unknown-unknowns? The theory of regimes of post-truth states that, in opposition to regimes of truth, individuals exist divided from each other, “together apart,” so to speak. A fragmented society where common interpretations no longer reach all of the divided fragments, an observation that has several implications. The compression of both individual and mass has rendered society divided into

fragmented subsections, the algorithmification of modern life, seems only to amplify this trend. Filter bubbles serve as echo chambers of individual interpretations of reality, resulting in a subsequent fragmentation of perception between groups. Where regimes of truth dictated and distributed “truth products” through centralized institutes, regimes of post-truth have had a diversifying effect.

Subsequently, the first chapter analyzes the discourse around documentary photography, its strive for realism and how that becomes problematic under post-truth regimes. It shows that when, in a post-truth world, the commonplace examples of interpretations, of *how things are in actuality*, fade away, documentary photography’s ability to *pose* to our understanding of the world, claims a more dominant role. However, that does not mean that the photographic image’s ability to be a universally understood conveyer of truth is somehow improved. It does entail that, when everything else seems vague, a high definition representation of reality can offer a steady grip to hold on to. A grip that, in the example of the miners’ protest in 2012, can prove to be a treacherous one. A complicated relationship between text and image arises here, for as caption can validate the image, so can image can validate the attached text. From the same case study follows as that a short caption with “(con)text” proves sufficient to alter the interpretation of the image completely.

The small margin of error between the image’s actual depicted content, and how a person, influenced by his or her understanding of the world, interprets it, still remains. Thereby, the first chapter achieves to answer its research question, to what extent post-truth era discourse poses a problem to the strive for realism as present in documentary photographic discourse. Namely, that at its base documentary photography is inherently a practice of statement collecting, it is dependent on the context given to the statement in order to be understood. However, combined with the notion of a post-truth era style fractured society, the notions of cherry-picking facts and filter bubbles, documentary statements can easily be attributed false meaning, which, to documentary photography’s strive for realism, is quite problematic. The first chapter lays out a framework for documentary photography in the post-truth era, however, some concrete examples in the form of the case studies in chapters two and three are needed to bring in more specificity.

In the second chapter the first case study of documentary photography is placed in the framework produced in former chapter. This is the more visual analysis based section of this thesis. Subsequently, the answer to the research question in chapter two – to identify the extent to which, in this specific case, the photographic caption weighs heavier than photographic content in conveying the image’s meaning – is quite complex. First there is the context of the

image and of the audience that saw it. As mentioned before, the algorithmification of modern life heavily influences *which* information reaches *whom*. The way in which the image of the woman present at the mineworkers' protests in Madrid that circulated the *Gilets Jaunes* social network pages, to *Gilets Jaunes*-members functions as an example of police violence against their own, is an example of this.¹⁵¹ Firstly, when large protests happen, standard action for police is to try and break up the mob of people; secondly, the movement already had a sense centred around antiestablishment ideals, which preliminarily frames the inevitable confrontations with police. Imagery of any person beat up by the police will resonate with members of protest movements that often put forth large mobs of people. This specific case-study closely resembles the level of fragmentation as described in the literature. As truth in the post-truth world is fragmented, the position, or point of view, that one has, influences the interpretation of reality one might adopt. Much like documents in an archive, interpretations of reality are, at their core, conclusions drawn based on observations.

Secondly, there is the discursive role of documentary photography which, similar to its many cross-media (documentary) counterparts, and its intrinsic strive for documentation, does not equal the creation of a singular universally understood product of truth, it rather resembles, in the words of Foucault, a sense of collecting statements, as journalists or detectives would. This view ties into the notion of understanding the documentary image as an archival piece (a notion that helps identify and place the results of the case study in chapter 2). Not only archival in the sense that it documents something, but more the manner in which it is ought to be interpreted. If something is mentioned only once, in an archival source, that does not mean it can be used to claim truth, it would merely be anecdotal. In a similar sense that counts for documentary photography, it encapsulates a version of reality, not *all* of it.

Lastly, it does, however, encapsulate a strong internal language of signs. One that has, or ought to have the potential to be understood, to “emancipate understanding.” Steyerl, for that reason, argues that photography, if used in the proper manner, should be able to produce an image that resonates with everybody that views it, even cross-culturally. A language that excludes caption entirely. In a post-truth world where everything is interpreted from inside a filter bubble, surely a language consisting solely of *signs* would trigger different *signifieds* in all of the viewers. In that context, it is hard to imagine documentary photography being able to overcome its own limitations and transmit the same meaning, without context, to all fragments of society.

¹⁵¹ See Appendix VIII.

To conclude in short, the case study in chapter two remains *one* image, a single statement event recorded at a mineworkers protest in Barcelona. Therefore, without the context of a multitude of other statement events, *requires* the addition of a caption, simply because it is a singular, and thus, can be interpreted in various ways as it remains a small part of the bigger picture. The photographic content therefore does not weigh heavier than the textual, and thus the interpretability is easily altered by the inclusion of a false caption.

The third chapter takes another case study, this time an artistic work from the Leiden University's special collection. As the analysis of the *Gilets Jaunes*'s case confirms that documentary photography, with its strive to accurately represent reality, is in prone to manipulation through false context creation. This chapter, following Steyerl – hypothesizing in one of her articles about a universal visual documentary language – seeks to analyze a case of artistic documentary photography on the premise of caption-less, yet meaningful imagery. In other words, a photograph that signifies. The research question central to this chapter aims to find to what extent the case of *The Truth, the Whole Truthiness, and Nothing but Alternative Facts* can be operationalized to present a convincing example of commonplace recognizability, so as to break through the fractions and borders that exist between filter-bubbles, and thereby generate common ground for an open debate to take place in?¹⁵²

Firstly, to establish the playing field, the post-truth world full of echo chambers, filter bubbles, and the online algorithmification of life at large, all amplified by the attention economy, make for a tremendous potential for societal fragmentation. The interpretation of truth, however, is, in a sense undergoing a certain emancipation. Elitist institutes – i.e. universities, newspapers, information databases – only accessible to the highly educated, used to produce interpretations to be internalized by the privileged interested few. The post-truth era brings in a sense of emancipation as the reduced value of singular truth allows for anyone to potentially go their own separate way. However, in a society of control, that content was marketed to the segmented markets of interest groups, in which the control society's (in)dividuals are organized. That same principle happens under regimes of post-truth as the interest groups are being treated information catered to their interest, creates a fractured playing field with many different groups that view the same thing with a different lens.

Secondly, Cors Brinkman's lenticular photograph (combined out of two edited versions, and one original image – all authorized by the photographer) is based on this understanding of society in its fragmented state. It recognizes the notion that bodies observe reality all through

¹⁵² See Appendix X.

different lenses, retinas, and with different assumptions about the world living in their brains. Point of view matters. A view that translates quite directly into his work *The Truth, The Whole Truthiness and Nothing but Alternative Facts*, where the viewers' point of view literally determines the version of reality that can be observed.¹⁵³

By taking a step back, the work of art forces the viewer to accept that there are several sides to each coin, it induces contemplation. For an individual, it is hard to step back and observe the dominant societal structures at play; however, to some degree, Brinkman's work does manage to nudge the viewer to become aware of the whale that they are trapped in. As mentioned earlier, Brinkman's work *The Truth, The Whole Truthiness and Nothing But Alternative Facts* does represent an incarnation of photography (the editing strictly bans it from the realm of documentary) that by presenting three perspectives in one, enables the medium to overcome its problematic relation with representing reality, albeit for a short moment. Oddly enough, by taking a step away from realism, it consecutively takes a step closer to it as well, a quantum step of sorts.¹⁵⁴

To conclude, the Brinkman's work *The Truth, The Whole Truthiness and Nothing But Alternative Facts*, other than the *Gilets Jaunes* case study, incorporates three perspectives into one. What it includes in the visual experience is the aspect of *viewpoint*, the audience physically has to move in order to experience all three perspectives. Thereby inducing a sense of reflection with the viewer, who in turn becomes aware of their own position and point of view. And thus, for a brief moment allows to break through the fractions and borders that exist between filter-bubbles, and thereby generate common ground for an open debate to take place in.

The post-truth era in general presents several issues to deal with. The relationship between humans and the truth has always been difficult. Humans, throughout history, appear to be obsessed with finding truth, perhaps to make the condition of life more bearable, to understand the surroundings, to get a grip on the world. Truth, however, remains volatile and intangible. What does that make the notion of post-truth? Perhaps a coming to terms with the inability to come to a true essence, perhaps a crisis in the philosophical understanding of what is and what is not real. It does open up the possibility to explore what truth regimes dictate, what institutes present interpretations, and a chance to observe what divides people, and where the common ground is, and thus, what it is that can ultimately bring them together. To take that notion and dive into the field of visual media, one of the fields of human activity that is most intrinsically connected to truth representation, is what lies at the core of this thesis' objective;

¹⁵³ See Appendix X.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

to view documentary photography through the lens of the post-truth era places question marks behind all parts; documentary photography, post-truth, and society as well.

The post-truth era is not necessarily a period that is fundamentally different from other periods in human history, many of other dominant forces are timeless, for instance. Yet what drove the notion to the forefront of the public discourse is the increased framing and crafting of a solipsistic individual. All facets of contemporary democratic, neoliberal capitalism are directed at the individual, as such that, with the addition of online discussion groups, the stage is set for mass individuation. However, that is just the first step, specifically, the latter notion entails that also in the field of opinion-making media there has been a move towards fragmentation, as for every lurking opinion a platform and subsequent group of supporters can be formed, the possibilities, in that sense, are endless. After every trend of platformization follows a trend of deplatformization, in the sense that information tends to be bundled to then, subsequently, be debundled. A trend that seems to be comparable to the trend of post-truth, as a highly fragmented or so-called “de-bundled” state of being, the ultimate anti-collective, complete emancipation from authority over truth. As paradigms shift, this observation also entails that it is likely to make a shift back to rebundle and replatform; to defragment.

Documentary photography, despite its problematic relationship with caption, proves, over the course of the case studies presented in chapter two and three, to be a remarkable medium that is able to overcome its own weaknesses. Taking into account the Foucauldian notion of statement events, i.e., a series of documentary images creates a context of itself, and is thus harder to falsify. The case in chapter three took this principle and presented a series of images, however, on top of that frames the original image by two digital recreations, for maximum effect. The the case of *The Truth, the Whole Truthiness and Nothing But Alternative Facts* combines the different deplatformed, fractured views that viewers might be succumbed to, and combine them into one representation.

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Appendices

Appendix I

Artist: Koen Wessing. Part of a series of photographs on the struggle for freedom of the left-wing movement *the Sandinistas* in Nicaragua, shot in 1978.



Wessing, Koen. *Nicaragua, Esteli, Na een bombardement van de regering-Somoza zakken twee zussen van wanhoop in elkaar, nadat ze het lichaam van hun vermoorde vader langs de kant van de weg hebben gevonden.* 1978, Rotterdam: Nederlands Fotomuseum.

Appendix II

Picture taken by Carleton Watkins of the Malakoff Diggings. The image shows unprecedented environmental disruption and destruction, the photographer clearly aims to show the beauty of conquered nature.



Carleton Watkins. *Malakoff Diggings, North Bloomfield, Nevada County, Cal.* Albumen silver print. Ca 1871. Collection MOMA: SFMOMA.

Appendix III:

Two pictures of Stalin and his cabinet members walking past the Moscow Canal. On the left, the original image, the image on the right, however, shows the final retouched version after Nikolai Yezhov, in charge of the large scale purge against communist party members, fell from Stalin's favor. He was denounced, arrested, secretly tried and executed, and thereby, erased out of existence.



Unknown Photographer. *Nikolai Yezhov with Stalin and Molotov at the Moscow-Volga Canal Embankment.* 1934-1938. Getty Images: Hulton Archive.

Appendix IV

Throughout the purge of the 1930's the list of Stalin's political enemies grew ever longer. The example on the left shows Stalin with three deputies, after each of them, consecutively, fell out of favor, all of them were individually removed, until only Stalin remained.



Unknown. *Nikolai Antipov, Stalin, Sergei Kirov, Nikolai Shvernik, and Nicolay Komarov at Fifteenth Leningrad Regional Party Conference, Leningrad. 1926.* Tate: David King Collection, London/New York.

Appendix V

This photo portrays the Soviet armies during the battle of Berlin, it shows the “capture” of the Reichstag. The picture however turned out to have been staged as well as retouched. The latter for instance to cover up the many looted watches the soldiers had on their wrists.



Yevgeny Khaldei. *Russian soldiers flying the Red Flag, made from table cloths, over the ruins of the Reichstag in Berlin.* 1945. Getty Images: Hulton Archive.

Appendix VI

The image on the left shows the source material to the final retouched product on the right in which the groom has been removed.



Unknown Photographer, *Italian Dictator Benito Mussolini Brandishing the Sword of Islam*.
18 March 1937. Getty Images: Keystone-France/Gamma-Keystone.

Appendix VII

Alexander snapped this shot of a dead rebel marksman at the battle of Gettysburg. However, the entire image was staged, the man was a union fighter, most likely not a marksman, the gun visible in the picture was not his, and the body was moved, for the sake of scenery, to this location.



Alexander Gardner. *Home of a Rebel Sharpshooter, Gettysburg*. 1863. MOMA: Photography department.

Appendix VIII

Figure 1 – Screenshot from a social media post circulating on French social media between November 2018 and March 2019. Example taken from research done by Avaaz.



Figure 2 – Doyle, Denis. *Miners Clash With Police While Demonstrating In Madrid*. July 11, 2012. Getty Images News, Getty Images Europe.



Appendix IX

The Avaaz report on the connection between misinformation and supporters of the Yellow Vests (*Gilets Jaunes*) movement features several other examples of misrepresented, fake news images. They are part of a post shared on a *Gilets Jaunes* support page with the caption: “the media and the government of Macron have hidden the images of peaceful protesters beaten by the CRS.”¹⁵⁵



Figure 1.

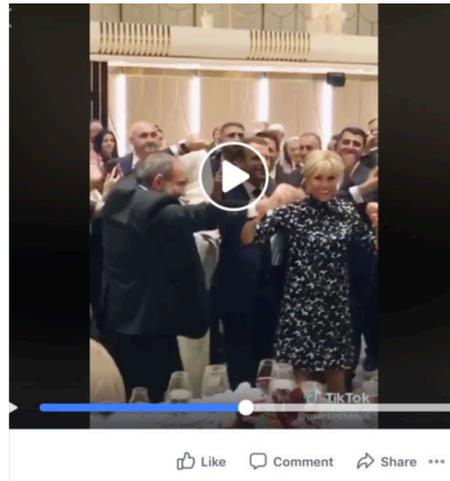


Figure 2.

Figure 1 – shows an image which in Avaaz’s research features the explanation: “The third image of an older lady with a bloodied face has been shared around social networks during the autumn 2017 Catalan referendum.” It was originally shared on social media affiliated to the *Gilets Jaunes* supporter base, as proof of state violence against *Gilets Jaunes* supporters.¹⁵⁶

Figure 2 – this video posted on November 17, 2018 at the start of *Gilets Jaune* protests in France, shows a French president Macron dancing with his wife. It was accompanied by the caption “while France suffers,” which insinuates that the president preferred to party instead of helping French citizens. The video, according to Avaaz’s research, was recorded at a French diplomatic summit in Armenia, on October 11, 2017, one month before the first *Gilets Jaunes* protest in France.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁵ Avaaz, “Yellow Vests Flooded by Fake News Over 100m Views of Disinformation on Facebook,” *Avaaz.org*, March 15, 2019,

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

Appendix X

Brinkman, Cors. *The Truth, The Whole Truthiness and Nothing But Alternative Facts*. 2017.
Leiden University Special Collections PK-F-2018-0001, Leiden. Sized: 99.5 cm X 120.8 cm



Appendix XI



Figure 1 - Jackson, Lucas. *Inauguration ceremony of U.S. President Donald Trump in Washington, D.C., January 20, 2017, Reuters.* Note: not the official image cropped by the NPS, this is just an illustration of which area was cropped in order to visually enlarge the crowd.



Figure 2 – *Inauguration ceremony of U.S. President Donald Trump in Washington, D.C., January 20, 2017, Reuters.* Cropped version of the image as found in the Reuters database.

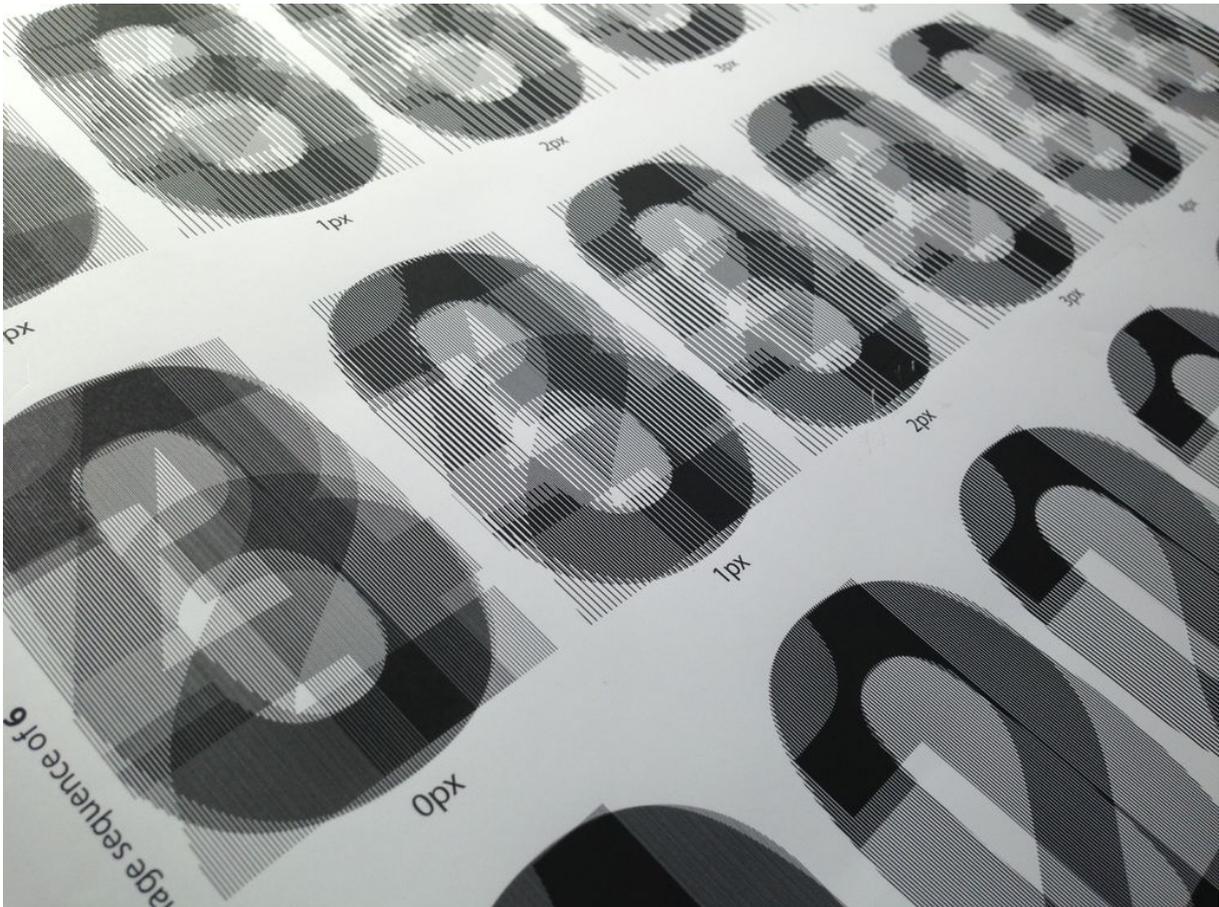
Appendix XII

Reuters database: A combination of photos taken at the National Mall, shows the crowds attending the inauguration ceremonies to swear in U.S. President Donald Trump (L) on January 20, 2017 and President Barack Obama on January 20, 2009, in Washington DC, U.S. Pictures taken by Lucas Jackson (L) and Stelios Varias.



Appendix XIII

The image below shows how lenticular printing works. Several images are printed, superimposed, which creates a blurred effect. After the print has been attached to the lenticular lens, the several layers become individually recognizable. Switching between these images can be achieved by altering one's point of view towards the lenticular photograph.



Source: Instructables. "Computational 3D Lenticular Printing." Instructables. Instructables, October 13, 2017. <https://www.instructables.com/id/Computational-3D-Lenticular-Printing/>.

Appendix XIV



Bettman Collection. *Tourists Reading Nixon Resignation Headline*. 1974, Seattle: Getty Images, Bettmann Collection.

Further Research

This research focused on the role of post-truth and its connection to documentary photography. It concludes with a case study of a lenticular photograph of the Trump inauguration, and particularly of the crowd, about which a heated debate arose in the media. The case studies in this research were carefully selected to contain this research within certain boundaries, in this case to cover things mostly through the lens of documentary photography, due to its connection with reality. Nonetheless, certain leads did turn up in the research for this thesis that had to be left out because they did not quite fit the scope of the thesis. That, however, does not mean they do not deserve to be explored. The following section is therefore devoted to name some leads for further research.

Belgian photographer Max Pincker is interested in the current post-truth era. He focuses on cases in which truths, half-truths, lies, fiction and entertainment are interchanged or confused with each other. A development he thinks helped to create a culture of hyper-individualized truths. A concept that fits well within the notion Harsin's theory of post-truth regimes. As he pertains contemporary era no longer has a generally accepted interpretation of reality, no defined reading that is universally agreed upon, he pushes for a new approach of reality interpretation. In his book *Margins of Excess* several individuals are followed. All selected on the common denominator of having experienced short lived fame by having claimed to be someone they were not, for various reasons. For instance, a person pretending to be the infamous hooded man from the Abu Ghraib prison. The project is aimed at the volatile experience of reality as present in contemporary society, and the continuous sense of anxiety induced by the 24 hour news cycle. By binding fiction and reality, and conjunctively using staged and archival photography, with found footage and interviews forcing the mind if the viewer to follow the paranoid associative logic to connect unrelated events into a narrative that feels right. The aim of the project to never make the viewer sure which of the images are real and which are not, and not to mislead, but rather to generate an experience of contemplating the concept of "reality." In his own words the aim is to: "to pierce through the noise, buzz, pulp, lies, dreams, paranoia, cynicism and laziness and to embrace 'reality' in all its complexity."¹⁵⁸

Where this research focuses mostly on the question of context in relation to the image in the post-truth era, the case as presented above would, as it focuses mostly on the notion of realizing the complexity of reality, be an interesting example for further research. Subsequently,

¹⁵⁸ Max Pinckers, "Margins of Excess (2018)." *Margins of Excess*: Max Pinckers, 2018. <https://www.maxpinckers.be/projects/margins-of-excess/>.

as this research makes use of several case studies to excavate, a lead for further research could be to craft a general theory to explain the interplay between photography and the notions of truth and reality in the post-truth era.