

Introduction

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This volume of Academic Quarter addresses how notions like the real and realism are to be understood today.

A number of new terms such as “post-factual”, “fake news” and “post-truth” have been proposed to describe the carelessness with which users of different media deal with matters of fact in our information-saturated society. One recent example is Trump adviser Kellyanne Conway defending the false description of the attendance at Trump’s inauguration, by claiming the falsehood as an “alternative fact”, or Rudy Giuliani flatly stating that “truth isn’t truth”. Combined with the efforts of private companies and pressure

groups to control and manipulate information so it will suit their interests (e.g. Berlusconi, Breitbart news, or 24nyt.dk), a “reality” emerges where truth seems bendable. Lies can be true if you repeat them long enough, and saying “I don’t believe it” has apparently become a fact to question all facts but itself. Why has it come to this?

Actually, this is nothing new. Already in the dialogue *Gorgias*, Plato had Socrates complain about the Sophists teaching about justice while having no real knowledge about justice itself. Asked by Socrates what the benefit of the Sophists’ efforts was, Gorgias replied: “The persuading of others about what is right and wrong”. Thus, Socrates concluded, what the Sophists were interested in were merely the beliefs of right and wrong and not what is right and wrong, hence they failed to distinguish between doxa (mere belief) and episteme (true knowledge). Recently, philosophers Daniel Dennett (2017) and Timothy Williamson (2017) have voiced similar Socratic responses, blaming post-modernist thinkers, like Foucault, Derrida and Baudrillard, for indirectly paving the way for fake news, and accusing these thinkers of denying the possibility of distinguishing between true and false beliefs. This, however, seems to be a misunderstanding of at least some of these postmodern thinkers, since the predominant post-modern impetus was primarily a critical impulse directed towards the authority of modernity itself as unjustified (Hoy and McCarthy 1994). Instead the framing of reality through contingency, contiguity and context was described as a condition for our understanding of the surrounding world, and our articulation of this understanding. However, this also seems to be facing an untenable relativism of facts or knowledge, presenting a challenge to the understanding of what makes something more correct than something else, i.e. what makes the real real, and the fake fake. So, what are we to make of belief versus knowledge, facts versus fiction and fake versus real today?

Against this background a number of questions were asked serving as guidelines to be considered within and across different disciplines and research-areas: are we faced with a new realism, or “fake-ism”? Is there a need to discuss realism anew? In what sense is knowledge about something real, and in what sense is knowledge about something false/fake? The essays in this volume address these and/or similar questions.

The first two articles focus on how new media challenge or reinforce what is considered real or fictitious, and asks how this affects the understanding of ourselves, each other and our surroundings.

In "Territorial stigmatization and the negotiation of place" **Jørgen Riber Christensen and Kim Toft Hansen** present an analysis of Danish tv documentaries' creation of mediated representations of real marginalized places, challenging and contesting the inhabitants' representation of the same place in the process. This creates an awareness of the inhabitants of being part of a doubling of place: the documentary's mediated representation of their place, as well as their own situated representation. This awareness, the authors claim, facilitates the possibility of the inhabitant's contestation and negotiation, but of what? The media's depiction or the real place? The authors answer that it is a negotiation of "...their position so that they can contest the mediated stigmatization of their real places."

In his "Memoir as Counter-narrative" **Howard Sklar** takes on Philip Roth's *The Plot against America*. Whereas Roth in other novels uses himself as a character ironically, Sklar claims that in the *Plot* Roth presents an unironical description of his childhood serving as a *real* backdrop for the novel's counter-historical narrative. Hence the counter-historical element in Roth's story lies not in the alternative history it depicts, but what it says of the period in which the supposedly known history took place. Roth thus presents a counter-historical potentiality based on real facts (of Holocaust and American anti-Semitic insecurities experienced in his childhood), and in the process of examining Jewish identity counters, similar to Riber and Toft's notion of contestation, the anti-Semite master-narrative of defining what being a Jew is *and* a stereotypic understanding of "the American Jewish experience". Roth's counter-narrative thereby serves as a reimagining of his actual past by redefining the significance of his identity of being Jewish, but by embracing the ambiguities and complexities involved in this search for identity.

The following two articles question the status and role of the fictitious exemplified by, respectively, fake-news in the public sphere, and conditions making design fictions real.

Anders Horsbøl's contribution "Fake-news conception of the public sphere understood within a deliberative perspective" is based on a discourse-analysis of the use and debate of the notion "fake-news" within Danish newspapers in 2017. The analysis seeks to

bring out the implicit conceptions of the public sphere within this debate, and contrast it with deliberative theories of the public sphere. Horsbøl concludes that the notion of “fake-news” is relevant, as pointing towards the negligence of expert-knowledge and questions of truth in non-elitist areas, but it also fails to cover certain issues highly relevant for a modern democracy and addressed within deliberative theories: a sole focus on truth/fake tends to bypass the inclusion of weaker voices in the public debate, certain systemic relations in political journalism as well as the division of labour among public arenas.

In “Strategic design fiction” **Peter Vistisen and Thessa Jensen** discuss the difference between a pragmatic strategic and a speculative critical design fiction. The authors argue, that pragmatist and strategic notions of design fictions are more complex than utopian and dystopian speculative design fictions. Whereas the latter is only committed to its fictionality and therefore remains solely within the possibility of a ‘what-if’ future, the former carries a potentiality for actually becoming real through corporations with the capacity to implement the design fiction.

Next, two philosophical analyses ask what we are to make of the real, interpreting different notions of facts as well as how we are to understand real fakes.

In “As a matter of fact” **Patrick Kjærdsdam Telleus** presents an interpretation of the notion of fact around three relevant themes: as relation of true and real; fact as carrying a propositional and narrative trait; and fact as being independent and dependent on the knower respectively. The result of the analysis is a view on facts claiming that these can only be understood as appearing under particular circumstances characterized by significant forms of skepticism. The author concludes by claiming that facts are not facts because we hold the knowledge they convey to be true and about reality, but because they are something that we hold on to as being objective and certain when we are confronted with unknowns, with doubts or with absurd opposing views.

In “Goodman and Cavell on Fakes” **Bo Allesøe** presents an analysis of how to understand the notion of a fake artwork, hence also what to make of a real artwork. The point of departure is Nelson Goodman’s understanding of fakes. Goodman’s conception fails to present a viable understanding of how artworks, despite being fa-

kes, still are originals. The reason is located in his lack of considering the notion of aesthetic value of artworks. The author instead turns to Stanley Cavell's understanding of aesthetic judgment as a better frame for understanding real and fake artworks. Where Goodman presents judgmental criteria external to the artistic process, Cavell locates the same as internal to process. What is real is therefore a commitment to established criteria for what art is. This commitment, however, is not to be understood as a reproduction of these criteria, but as a reflection from within this process projecting a new understanding of art as a claim to community, i.e. presenting art as meaningful in our present and coming lives.

The final two articles pick up questions of the status of our knowledge and what the knowledge is about, the first by focusing on the new educational theory of social realism, and the second by providing a more comprehensive perspective involving most of the articles

In "Knowledge, reality and curriculum" **Jørn Bjerre** analyses Michael Young's notion of social realism with a particular emphasis on what constitutes powerful knowledge. The idea is that we must accept that any notion of knowledge is socially constructed, i.e. dependent on contextual factors and potentially just reproducing societal power relations and distinctions, but at the same time also accept that this doesn't necessarily lead to an anti-realist position. What is real is the symbolic and social dimensions of reality being independent of people's interpretation of them. These symbolic and social dimensions do not hinder the experience of reality. Rather, they serve as conditions for experience to be possible in the first place. Hence, knowledge(s) is developed by a process of understanding in what sense the symbolic and social resources opens up access to different kinds of facts about the same reality.

In the last article, **Jørn Bjerre** and **Bo Allesøe** present a brief overview of discussions of realism and related philosophies of science like social constructivism, relativism and the critique of ideology, relating these to the articles in this volume.

As the presentation of the articles above shows, the subject-areas as well as disciplines involved are quite diverse. Despite this, all the articles seem to share a common presupposition in defending some kind of realism: for realism to work a distinction between our

experiences and what these are about, between what we mean and what we encounter, between possible realities and real possibilities, is needed. This seems to be a very plausible way to make sense of (some) reality imposing itself upon us in different ways, as well as allowing the possibility of us actually being in error about something, *for real*.

References

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