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Politics, Lies, and Moral Exoticism. Re-Reading Hannah Arendt on the Crises of the Republic[1]

Abstract

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE: The aim of the article is a critical analysis of Hannah Arendt's views on the role of truth in politics and their validity in the context of contemporary global politics.

THE RESEARCH PROBLEM AND METHODS: The problem of the role of truth in politics has become increasingly relevant today due to the noticeable increase in political undertakings justified by false claims. In the article, the issue is addressed by analyzing several such actions of global significance, among them the Vietnam War, the Iran-Contra affair, and the US invasion of Iraq, as well as the public justifications for these actions formulated by the American administrations.

THE PROCESS OF ARGUMENTATION: The argument proceeds from an analysis of the course of political and military events that led to the United States' war against North Vietnam, as well as analogous processes preceding American military involvement in the Middle East and Central America. These analyses are subsequently confronted with Arendt's statements regarding *The Pentagon Papers*.

RESEARCH RESULTS: While many of Arendt's observations remain valid, there are significant differences between the factually unfounded justifications of political actions critically appraised by Arendt and those of contemporary

policies. The differences are especially expressed in the frequency of the resort to false justifications in politics and the invoked doctrinal basis for them.

CONCLUSIONS, INNOVATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS: The overall analysis points to the growing significance of political aesthetics in contemporary politics: the art of political problem-solving is increasingly replaced by the art of image building. The analysis of selected mendacious justifications in politics suggests also a paradox: excessive focus on the creation of a favourable image in politics, a prerequisite in democratic conditions, not infrequently brings about counterproductive results because political actions, if primarily trimmed for superficial public approval, tend to disappoint democratically formulated expectations.

INTRODUCTION

The problem of truth and lies in politics, both domestic and international, continues to agitate the public at large. The gravity of the issue may be realized by a re-rereading of Hannah Arendt's essay on lies in politics, occasioned in 1971 by the publication of *The Pentagon Papers*, from a contemporary perspective. In this paper, I explain the origin of Arendt's influential paper through reference to the infamous Tonkin Gulf incidents and Robert McNamara's decision to document the history of American intervention in Vietnam, an event which deeply affected not only American politics, society, and culture, but also the international politics as a whole. An analysis of subsequent developments suggests that despite the concerted efforts of the media and intellectuals, the painstakingly documented and publicized history did not bring the expected result of preventing America's politics from committing similar mistakes. The re-reading of Arendt's paper from a contemporary perspective suggests also that democratic systems increasingly gravitate away from the ideal of knowledge-based and common-good-seeking governments, and gradually relapse into the political-aesthetic regimes of crowd management by means of images and emotions.

AN INCIDENTAL WAR

On August 2, 1964, the US Navy destroyer USS Maddox was 28 miles off the coast of North Vietnam. Three North Vietnamese torpedo boats, probably mistaking her for a South Vietnamese Navy ship, approached her within five nautical miles. Maddox fired three warning shots in their direction. From a distance of two and a half miles, the Vietnamese attacked her with torpedoes and machine-gun fire. Maddox managed to evade the torpedoes and responded by firing about 280 shells of 76 mm and 127 mm calibre. Four American planes entered the action. Vietnamese boats were damaged, four Vietnamese soldiers were killed, and six were wounded. The only damage on the American side was a single bullet hole in the American ship and the loss of a part of a wing in one of the aircraft.

This was the first incident in the Gulf of Tonkin. Two days later, in the second incident, USS Maddox and USS Turner Joy, operating in stormy conditions only 11 miles off the coast of Vietnam, confused by faulty radio and radar data, again opened fire, but this time at random because no one attacked them.

Already on August 7, both houses of the United States Congress passed a resolution authorizing President Lyndon B. Johnson to use conventional military forces in Southeast Asia. Only two Democratic Party senators declined to support the document. One of them, Ernest Gruening, objected to the resolution saying:

> The serious events of the past few days, the attack by North Vietnamese vessels on American warships and our reprisal, strikes me as the inevitable and foreseeable concomitant and consequence of U.S. unilateral military aggressive policy in Southeast Asia [...]. We now are about to authorize the President if he sees fit to move our Armed Forces […] not only into South Vietnam, but also into North Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, Thailand, and of course the authorization includes all the rest of the SEATO nations. That means sending our American boys into combat in a war in which we have no business, which is not our war, into which we have been misguidedly drawn, which is steadily being escalated (Congressional Record, 1964).

This was the opinion of a minority. Though the memory of the three years earlier Bay of Pigs debacle was still fresh, on August 10, President Johnson ordered 184,000 troops to be sent to Vietnam. In the

culminating year of 1969, 550,000 American soldiers and almost a million soldiers from South Vietnam and Korea fought in Vietnam. In 1973, after nine years of war, most American troops left Vietnam. Hostilities ended on April 30, 1975, with the hasty escape of the remaining Americans and their Vietnamese supporters from Saigon.

America was not the first Western power to flee Vietnam. France's century-long brutal colonization of Vietnam began with Napoleon's decision to invade the country in 1857 and ended with the fall of the French garrison at Dien Bien Phu in May 1954, when France was forced to recognize the superiority of Ho Chi Minh's guerrillas aided by Communist China. Two decades later, the same guerrilla tactics defeated America's military might.

THE PENTAGON PAPERS

On June 17, 1967, Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara formed a secret team. His task was to write an encyclopaedic history of American military involvement in Vietnam. Half of the 36 analysts were active military personnel, the other half were academics and employees of the federal administration. The purpose of the research was to protect future US governments from the mistakes made in this war. The team's work ended on January 15, 1969, resulting in 47 volumes containing 7,000 pages of analysis and documents.

This is how the famous, and infamous *Pentagon Papers* originated. Fifteen existing copies of the report were classified, but Daniel Ellsberg, one of its authors, passed it on to the press. The existence of *The Pentagon Papers* was revealed by the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* in 1971. One needs to stress, however, that immediately after the Tonkin incidents the *New York Times* wrote about the alleged attack as the beginning of "a mad adventure by the North Vietnamese Communists" (Chomsky & Zinn, 1972, p. 48). The full content of the files was fully declassified only in 2011.

THE COMFORT OF MORAL EXOTICISM

As predicted, the eleven-year-long American war in Vietnam spilt into neighbouring Cambodia and Laos. It claimed the lives of approximately 3.8 million Vietnamese soldiers and civilians, over 310,000 Cambodians and approximately 62,000 Laotians. 10 million people emigrated from Vietnam. The war left one million widows, 880,000 orphans, over 360,000 crippled, three million unemployed, and five million hectares of forest burned with napalm and Agent Orange. More than 58,000 American soldiers died in the war.

Russia's aggression against Ukraine in 2022 brought home the fact that if that distant conflict in Vietnam raged closer to our borders, and their victims had been less exotic, the enormity of destruction, human death and suffering would have aroused stronger condemnation. Similarly, the Western public would continue to remain oblivious to the predicament the Palestinian nation endured since the Nakba of 1948 caused by Western policies, had it not been for the Hamas terrorist attack in 2023 and subsequent genocide of the Palestinian people in Gaza by Israel. But there is something that overrides the comfortable Euro-Atlantic moral exoticism. For it turned out that in the case of the Vietnam War, the resolution of America's legislature, which marked the beginning of the never-declared and shamefully lost war by the US, was based on a lie. On August 2, 1964, the American ships were the first to open fire; on August 4, 1964, American ships deployed massive fire though no one attacked them, possibly misled, perhaps deliberately, by false radar data.

> A calculated fraud was exposed further in statements by members of the crews of the United States vessels involved in the incident, long before the Pentagon Papers were published (Chomsky & Zinn, 1972s, p. 48).

The entire course of this war was also based on a systemic lie. As in each war, truth was its first casualty.

In this respect, this war was no different from other American political actions and military interventions in the international arena. Ten years later, during Ronald Reagan's second presidential term, the American administration illegally sold arms to the Iranian government, in violation of President Jimmy Carter's strict embargo on

selling weapons to that country. The American illegal arms sale to Iran was preceded by a global deceptive diplomatic campaign aimed at convincing the world public that the arms embargo on Iran should be strictly adhered to by all countries. This allowed the Americans to monopolize the arms trade with Iran and gain more revenue. Some of it was secretly and illegally diverted to finance the Nicaraguan Contras who aimed to overthrow the democratically elected Sandinista government in Nicaragua. Forced to explain himself about the Iran-Contra affair, Reagan lied several times, saying that he knew nothing about the illegal activities of his administration.

The activities of the Contras were additionally financed by the proceeds from drug trafficking in the United States. They smuggled drugs in collusion and with the acquiescence of the Central Intelligence Agency, then led by the later President George Bush. The smuggling, in which Manuel Noriega, a commander of the Panamanian military forces, and a well-paid CIA spy, was a major contributor, opened up new channels for the supply of drugs to the America, led to drug addiction of millions of Americans, an unprecedented rise in organized crime, and the declaration of a costly though ineffective war on drugs. This war on drugs was declared by President Reagan whose administration contributed to the aggravation of the problem like no other factor.

In 2003, the American troops invaded Iraq to overthrow Saddam Hussein. This war claimed at least 150,000 victims on the Iraqi side and almost 4,800 on the side of the Coalition of the Willing. The justification for the invasion of Iraq was presented by the Secretary of State Colin Powell at the United Nations General Assembly. He argued that Hussein was in possession of weapons of mass destruction. These weapons were never found because they were never there. Nor did Hussein's regime have anything to do with the al-Qaeda attack on the United States in September 2001. Powell lied. The twenty-year war in Afghanistan, from which American troops withdrew in 2022, replicating the retreat from Saigon in 1975, caused over 200,000 victims, destruction of the country and unprecedented political strengthening of the Taliban.

POLITICAL TWINS

Hannah Arendt's essay on *The Pentagon Papers*, "Lying in Politics", was written at the request of the *New York Review of Books* and published on November 18, 1971. Later it became a part of her book *Crises of the Republic* which includes four more essays about other, though closely related American crises (Arendt, 1972). For over half a century, Arendt's essay remains an important point of reference in thinking about truth and lies in politics. Unlike her other essays, it has aged the least and even gained in relevance. As if politicians around the world, not just in America, were competing to reaffirm its pertinence.

The human condition, as understood by Arendt, involves three spheres constituted by work, production, and action (Arendt, 1958, p. 7). Action is the domain of politics which is the realm of freedom. Freedom as a condition of action is the freedom to disagree with the existing reality, the freedom to question it and to depart from it to be able to formulate goals that allow one to achieve a better state than the current reality. Freedom of thought is the freedom to deny what exists, to judge existing states of affairs, and to accept or criticize them. Freedom presupposes the human ability to leave the place assigned to one by reality in order to be able to change it. Humans owe this ability to the imagination. Therefore, consciously questioning the facts, the ability to depart from reality, and the ability to change the facts, the ability to act, are all interconnected (Arendt, 1972, p. 5).

An understandable opposition against lies in politics stems from a belief that it is possible to base political action on truthfulness to the facts. However, the moral demand that motivates such a belief, though popular, is utopian. The bad news is that politics has only rarely, if ever, been based on truth. The demand to base politics on truth presupposes a simplistic understanding of both truth and politics. Facts alone – in Latin *facta* means things done – are defenceless, and their truthfulness is not binding. To assume a permanent place in man-made space, they need testimony and credible witnesses. *Arcana imperii*, i.e. the art of politics, always involved deception, deceit and mendacity which were, and are, considered legitimate tools of political action. In her analysis of Kant's political philosophy, Arendt makes the point even more clearly. Employing the Pythagorean

distinction between spectatorial and active attitudes at the festival, she shows that truth is only available to the disengaged spectator. As an onlooker playing no part in the spectacle, he is impartial. He is a spectator who has given up *doxa*, i.e., opinion and fame, and judging things in a contemplative way, he strives for truth. The man of action, however, who does take part in festivities, is partial by definition. Due to his involvement, he can only know the opinion, *doxa*. He remains attached to the "*the dokei moi*, the 'it-seems to-me', and the desire to seem to others" (Arendt 1992, p. 55–56). The business of the politician, as a man of action, is thus deception and trickery rather than truth, and he is confined to the world of appearance, opinion, and illusion which fill the political spectacle. Therefore, truthfulness has never been a political virtue. As Martin Jay wrote, political virtue is not the truth but mendacity (Jay, 2010). Lies and politics are twins.

That is why Plato granted the right to create a utopia of a perfect state only to philosophers who had privileged access to the truth, but he thought they were free to help themselves to a noble lie. Machiavelli did not aim at creating a perfect republic; he believed that its ruler need not follow the precepts of virtues but should make people believe that he possesses these virtues. By claiming that virtuous conduct is not the essence of political action but the virtuous image of a prince, Machiavelli laid the foundations for modern politics. Arendt stressed that when Machiavelli said that rulers must be taught how not to be good, he did not mean that they ought to be taught how to be evil and wicked but simply how to act according to political, as distinguished from moral and religious, or criminal principles (Arendt, 2003, p. 80; Chmielewski, 2021, p. 53–54). Demands to base politics on truth are now being voiced only by idealists such as Václav Havel and other alethic populists (Chmielewski, 2018).

Arendt says that moral condemnation of mendacity will not make the lies disappear from politics. If lying were not efficacious in political action, it would never have a place in politics. It is common because it is effective. No wonder it informs international politics as well. Arendt's essay recalls the key moment when a lie entered the global stage with impudence and firmly entrenched itself there. In her views, contemporary politics is being propped with two new types of the art of lying. The first is the specialized art of image management which has transformed political ideas and politicians themselves into

consumer goods, and politics into a space for the market-like exchange of images. The second type of the art of lying is the expertisation of politics which is about making decisions dependent on the advice of experts specializing in solving social and political problems.

For Arendt, *The Pentagon Papers* are a description of the quagmire of lies, deceit, and self-deception that became a permanent feature of America's domestic and foreign policy. She demonstrates how reliable knowledge obtained by American intelligence was consciously ignored by both managers of the image of the state and the president, as well as by specialists in problem-solving. The Gulf of Tonkin incident was not a *casus bello* for America, but only a pretext. So what was this war about?

Officially, the objective was to prevent the region from the domino effect; it was believed that should communism win in one country, it would spread to neighbouring ones. The Americans were aware that the brutality of French colonialism in Indochina fostered support for communism. Dwight Eisenhower admitted that if the elections, agreed to by the Geneva Accords in 1954, were to be held in Vietnam, 80 per cent of the Vietnamese would support Ho Chi Minh and his socialism. But America's only idea to save the region from communism was more brutality which only increased the local support for communism. Convinced of their omnipotence, experts thought that this war could be won with complete disregard for Vietnamese culture and contempt for the military capabilities of this nation, which, despite a technological weakness in comparison to the might of American military technology, eventually succeeded in winning this war. The same mistake was made later in Afghanistan, Iraq, and elsewhere. The war in Libya, unleashed in 2011 by France with the participation of America, before it got stuck in the present unresolvable deadlock, succeeded in destroying the country, claimed many thousands of victims, initiated a wave of migrants to Europe, and sends tremors along geopolitical faultlines which continue to be felt until today.

Arendt concludes that the Vietnam War was not fought to stop the Soviet-Chinese "communist plot" which did not exist at the time anyway, or to stop Chinese expansion into Indochina. It was not about the prosperity and freedom of the Vietnamese people, American territorial gain, or material benefits. Eventually, America's war in a faraway corner of the world was just an extension of its domestic policy.

POWERLESS WORDS

The bitter pill we have to swallow is that the tremendous effort by the McNamara team that compiled *The Pentagon Papers*, the great risks taken by Daniel Ellsberg, the editors of the *New York Times*, and the *Washington Post*, in going public with them, and the Arendt's criticism, all turned out to be meaningless. They did not influence the US foreign policy in any way. The aim of McNamara's team was to protect future US governments from the mistakes made in Vietnam. But it was not be. *The Pentagon Papers* turned out to be a warning that no one wanted to listen to. The effort put into telling and spreading the truth was in vain. Words, though true, proved powerless. The people who should have been most interested in the report not only did not know its contents but could not even locate it. The source of this comfortable political amnesia was the fear of punishment for criminal decisions, and the Western moral exoticism: it enabled all interested parties not only to forget about the unnecessary deaths of their own soldiers, and the embarrassing problem of veterans but also to avoid responsibility for the deaths of millions of Vietnamese, the less worthy exotic "gooks".

No one wanted to listen to Philip Roth's "modest proposal" either. In an anti-war essay written in 1970 after visiting Cambodia, he demanded that America bomb Indochina with airdrops of food, clothes, shoes, and air conditioners, which he rightly argued would be much cheaper than bombs and would more likely convince the Asian peasant to love America. "Instead of spraying him with bullets, drop a sack of flour at his feet. That'll make him stop and think" (Roth, 1975, p. 169).

ECHOES OF VIETNAM AND THE CLOSED-EYES POLICY

This war was counterproductive. It didn't solve any problems. Yet presently its distant echoes are getting louder. Now, as then, the growing likelihood of China's attack on Taiwan threatens to trigger a domino effect, i.e. Chinese expansion to other countries. As then, the Western world is increasingly afraid of the consequences of the

Russian-Chinese alliance. And like then, America sends its forces to Vietnam again. This time, however, they are not regiments of troops, but squadrons of diplomats and businessmen aiming to convince the Vietnamese to ally with America. This policy would have been more credible if America had paid a single cent of the $3.5 billion war reparations pledged in 1973 for the casualties, damage, and compensated for post-war sanctions that stifled Vietnam's development potential. When the sanctions were lifted, Vietnam's economy was hampered by neoliberal policies that fostered corruption, extreme social stratification, and severe poverty: today, the richest five per cent of Vietnamese appropriate a quarter of the national income.

The leading problem of American politics is its political epistemology. According to Donald Rumsfeld, knowledge consists of known knows; known unknows; and unknown unknowns. As a psychoanalyst, Slavoj Žižek remarked on an important omission in this now widely cited (Shermer, 2005) epistemology as it is missing the category of unknown knowns (Žižek, 2006).

But there is a more fundamental error in this epistemology; it is about deliberately closing one's eyes to knowns that are known. The gravity of error may be explained by the fact that the above questionable political epistemology has been propped by a no less perilous political ontology. The depth of the rift between reality and politics here involved may be conveyed by a statement by Ron Suskind, an adviser to President George W. Bush. A year into the invasion of Iraq, he publicly criticized the belief that the truth about reality had anything to do with politics. Rejecting political realism, which demands that solutions to real problems be sought through careful examination of reality, he said: "That's not the way the world really works any more. We're an empire now, and when we act we create our own reality" (Suskind, 2004). The concept of "alternative facts", known from the time of Donald Trump's presidency, shows how deeply this doctrine is embedded in American politics.

Suskind's view is another version of the doctrine of "where there is a way there is a will". But it is also in line with Arendt's concept of "thinking without banister" (Miller, 1995) which she borrowed from her teacher Martin Heidegger, and with her conception of politics as freedom of action. The irony is that this doctrine of imperial omnipotence disconcertingly coincides also with Richard Rorty's postmodern

view that we should give up the idea of finding the truth and instead should see knowledge as made: "We cannot regard truth as a goal of inquiry. The purpose of inquiry is to achieve agreement among human beings about what to do, to bring about consensus on the ends to be achieved and the means to be used to achieve those ends" (Rorty, 1999, p. xxv). The view agrees also with Rorty's impunity conception of truth, according to which "truth is something what… our peers will let us get away with saying" (Rorty, 1979, p. 176). While the conception adequately reflects the fact that only few dare to object to the opinions of the mighty, it overlooks the fact that is the surest way to their fall.

Some of Arendt's opinions are far from uncontroversial. At the beginning of her essay, she states that factual truths that are usually unquestioned are never compellingly true (Arendt, 1972, p. 7), and then condemns successive American administrations for disregarding the facts by writing that

> the relation, or, rather, nonrelation, between facts and decision, between the intelligence community and the civilian and military services, is perhaps the most momentous, and certainly the best-guarded, secret that the Pentagon papers revealed (Arendt, 1972, p. 21).

She condemns the pervasive post-Machiavellian notion that half of politics is about image making, and the other half is about making people believe those images (Arendt, 1972, p. 8), but defends Plato against accusations of justifying a lie in politics, however noble. Moreover, Arendt wrote almost nothing about the fact that the Vietnam War was a great deal for the American military-industrial complex. Yet even though she fails to provide a systematic answer as to the proper place and role of truth in politics, her later essays devoted to political philosophy (Arendt, 1961; 2003) are brimming with informative insights into the complexities of the practical and theoretical recognitions and denials of truth in politics. In particular, her conception of a politician as confined to the world of deception helps to understand the more recent phenomenon of post-truth. If in the pre-post-truth world, the politician, though lied, was aware of his mendacities and their consequences, and might have been ashamed of them, in the post-true world, he shamelessly repudiates the truth altogether and cynically refuses any accountability for doing so.

BITTER HOPE

Although the present argument has been illustrated by examples taken mainly from American politics, it does not mean that the problem is exclusively American, or characteristic of contemporary politics only. The concern about, and focus on, American politics is justified by the fact that a cavalier attitude toward truth, abundantly expounded by a country which presents itself as a paragon of moral uprightness, radiates onto other countries and encourages their politicians to emulate it. Yet it would be a mistake not to mention other examples.

The political significance of lies may be illustrated by the British supporters of the Leave Campaign who employed the deceitful slogan: "We send £350 million a week to the European Union. Let's fund the NHS instead. Let's take control". Reflecting upon the success of Brexit, its ideologue Dominic Cummings wrote: "Would we have won without £350m/NHS? All our research and the close result strongly suggests No" (Withers, 2023; also Mount, 2021). This lie not only helped to achieve victory for Brexiters but also helped destabilize Britain and undermine the still-young organism of the European Union.

The politics of the really-existing socialism, a utopian vision supposedly erected upon the foundation of true knowledge, was fuelled by mendacity. Some resorted to lies out of servility, or the desire to assume positions of privilege. For others, condoning and resorting to lies was a survival method, a part of mimicry and adapting to nefarious circumstances. With currency and market exchange abolished, the economy of really-existing socialism was commanded by arbitrary decisions out of touch with reality. Although they had at their disposal all instruments to control thought and action, totalitarian regimes lost their confrontation with reality. They failed because they were based on a lie.

But the power of lies was known in the political practice of the more distant past as well. In June 1098, the participants of the First Crusade, besieged in Antioch by Muslim troops, exhausted by hunger and fighting, held to their posts only to delay certain death that awaited them. Seeing the desperation of his companions, Peter Bartholomeus announced that Saint Andrew the Apostle had appeared to him and revealed that in the Antiochian St. Peter's Basilica there

was buried a relic of extraordinary strength, the spearhead of the Holy Lance that pierced the side of the crucified Christ. When the Crusaders were unable to find it in the dug-out pit, Peter jumped into it and soon emerged with the spearhead he had allegedly found. The thus-deceived Crusaders were so enthused by the bogus find that despite extreme exhaustion, they successfully repelled the enemy and saved the First Crusade, thus securing the political presence of European powers in the Middle East for the next three centuries (Asbridge, 2012, p. 77–78).

Similar examples abound. The omnipresence of lies in politics suggests that at no point in history has politics obeyed the truth. It is rather the other way around: politics uses the truth only when it is convenient. Given Plato's encouragement of the employment of γενναῖον ψεῦδος, or "noble lie", as an essential instrument of politics (Plato, *Rep.*, 389b), Machiavelli alone cannot be held accountable for countenancing the use of lies in politics: he was only remarking upon a long-established political practice. More than that: if one is to believe Aeschylus who claimed that even god is not averse to deceit in just cause (Aeschylus, 1926, p. 479), the tradition of mendacity may claim even nobler origin. Humans only expanded this practice to include unjust causes as well.

CONCLUSION

Re-reading Arendt's book today leads to several conclusions. First, people seek power not to solve problems, but for the sake of power alone. In a democratic system, politicians deal with real problems only when it helps them to build their self-images that will enable them to continue to exercise power. The current decline of democratic politics stems from the fact that it has renounced the essence of politics and transformed itself into a repulsive image of itself.

Secondly, in a democracy where power depends on the capricious and easily manipulated electoral vote, the image of a powerful but always wobbly political authority turns out to be more important than truth and goodness. The art of image management and the expert art of problem-solving are no longer different: nowadays they work on the same team.

The third conclusion, emphatically confirmed by *The Pentagon Papers*, goes in the opposite direction. Nothing tarnishes the public image of politicians more than their obsessive concern about their self-image alone. People's perception of reality can hardly be manipulated all the way down. This observation is supported by a paradox of democratic politics, one of many: the focus on a favourable image in politics, a prerequisite inescapable due to the very nature of democratic politics, is usually counterproductive when associated with vying for superficial public approval only instead of genuinely addressing democratically expressed expectations. This should be a warning for politicians in democratic regimes who entrust their political fate to the supposedly unfailing effectiveness of lies. A lie, which lives only in so far as it preys on truth, certifies its existence and is dependent on the truth.

There is no denying that truth is an elusive concept. Yet, despite the many existing, question-begging, and justifiably criticized definitions, there is a way to make sense of truth by conceiving it as an outcome of a socially established cognitive regime capable of producing reliable and adequate knowledge of the natural and social world (Chmielewski, 2022, p. 1687). The problem with today's democracy is that it operates as if such knowledge were no longer relevant. Instead, it has become a political-aesthetic regime which tries to manage societies by means of images and emotions only, to the peril of the self-appointed managers, and the managed people alike.

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