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Special Issue: Digital Truth-making

Anthropological Perspectives on Right-wing Politics and Social Media in "Post-truth" Societies

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How do users of social media platforms produce, shape and share truths online? In this introduction, we outline our understanding of digital truth-making as a process that builds on the affordances of digital infrastructures to entangle information with social, cultural and emotional dynamics in a way that co-constitutes beliefs and convictions about the world. The contributions to the special issue illuminate how different variations of this process can be illuminated with the help of digital ethnography and additional empirical methods. In doing so, they exemplify how digital anthropology can contribute to ongoing debates about populism and right-wing politics in "post-truth" digital societies.

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Truth-making in the Age of Social Media

We write this introduction at a time when digital truth-making has become a viral phenomenon and the gatekeepers of Truth with a capital T – from scientific authorities to legacy media outlets and policy experts – are losing more and more of their influence. When we and other colleagues hosted a conference exploring digital truth-making at Humboldt University Berlin in the autumn of 2020,[1] our interest was driven in part by the frictions growing around questions of truth during the Covid-19 pandemic, but also by the ongoing rise of populist and right-wing movements in Europe and beyond. It was already foreseeable then that the trends discussed at the conference would continue to gain momentum.

A highly relevant encapsulation of those trends is Donald Trump's social media network Truth Social, which was founded in October 2021, some nine months after the US Capitol attack[2] and Trump's subsequent ban from Twitter (now X). The platform invites users to share and circulate their own individual "truths" – and even features a "Compose Truth" function for posting messages. Though the influence of Truth Social has been negligible, its launch constituted a telling moment in view of this issue's central question: How can we contribute to a better understanding of truth at a time when large-scale digital infrastructures have been explicitly designed to create and shape it? Truth has always been shaped by infrastructures of one kind or another. Michel Foucault's work on institutions and their discourse-producing practices provides a case in point. While the institutions illuminated by Foucault (e.g. hospitals, schools, states) on the one hand and digital infrastructures (e.g. social media platforms) on the other are certainly different, seeing them as analogous is still helpful for our approach: The "will to truth, like the other systems of exclusion, relies on institutional support" (Foucault 1971: 11). Today, digital infrastructures provide essential elements of this institutional support. Social media, in particular, have shifted the balance of power over truth toward different actors and practices: on these platforms, it is individuals, heterogeneous communities and also new technologies (sorting algorithms, automated bots, machine learning systems) that shape truth along new trajectories.

This is evident not only for an extreme case such as Donald Trump's platform Truth Social; it also extends to mainstream and alternative social media platforms around the world. The articles collected in this special issue – a selection of the papers

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[1] The event, which took place October 7–9, 2020, under the title "Digital Truth-Making: Ethnographic Perspectives on the Practices, Infrastructures and Affordances of Truth-Making in Digital Societies", was the 8th biannual conference of the Digital Anthropology section of the German Association for Cultural Analysis (DGEKW) and was funded by the German Research Foundation DFG. – GZ: BA 6440/3-1 AOBJ: 668336.

[2] The US Capitol attack occurred on January 6, 2021, when supporters of the now-defeated President Donald J. Trump stormed the US Capitol in Washington DC.

presented at the 2020 conference – examine digital truth-making across a range of different national contexts: Twitter users in the UK, Instagram influencers in the US, Facebook discussions in Germany, and the social network Weibo in China. The articles analyze how users in different fields and highly divergent political contexts produce, shape, and share truths on and through social media platforms. As the reference to Trump suggests, the political gains of right-wing actors and movements since 2015 have constituted an important point of departure for these investigations into digital truth-making practices. From analyses of discursive practices of populist parties such as the British UKIP, and the historization of fascist legacies in Spain to the study of the online communities of traditionalist influencers, this issue is largely concerned with "the right" in its various forms. We maintain that the relationship between social media and right-wing political formations is not circumstantial. Rather, there is a special affinity between right-wing populism and social media (Gerbaudo 2018). One reason scholars have put forward for this affinity is the participatory character of new media and their independence from legacy media gatekeepers (Hopster 2021; Manucci 2017). The relationship between right-wing politics and social media is not linear, and other political formations (including those on the left) have certainly benefitted from social media in similar ways. Yet the emergence of an ecosystem of far-right online spaces (Munn 2023; Strick 2021) and the strategic use of social media by right-wing parties calls for special attention to the affordances that new media provide for right-wing politics. Thus, most of the authors in this special issue draw on digital anthropology's long tradition of "following the conflict" (Postill 2021: 164; Marcus 1995) and deal specifically with political forms of truth-making on the political right.

Since 2020, additional fields for digital truth-making that bear mentioning have come to the forefront. The Covid-19 pandemic is an important area in which digital truth-making has played a part in fomenting conflict. This has become evident not only in the huge number of Covid-19 hoaxes, misinformation, and conspiracy theories in circulation, but also in the intensification of science communication and fact-checking on social media. The pandemic has grown into a digitally augmented "infodemic" (Cotter et al. 2022). Of course, this is not the first time that digital infrastructures have influenced the perception of health-related issues. From depression and ADHD to multiple sclerosis, there is rarely an illness that has not been extensively discussed on online forums and social media (Conrad, Bandini & Vasquez 2016). What is new with the Covid-19 pandemic is the immediacy with which digital truth-making has impacted people's everyday lives. Truths about health, the body, and the virus itself have become discursively entwined with questions of individual autonomy, freedom, and self-determination (Anker 2022: 8; Bratton 2021: 56).

More recently, the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 has prompted a new set of questions about digital truth-making as it relates to imperialist projects, to geopolitics, and to informational warfare. Though we cannot provide a deeper analysis of the invasion here, we can observe that the "truth" about the war, no less than the truth of European history and national identity, has become an arena of strategic conflict. In part due to political manipulation, in part at the grassroots level, "people consuming posts on Twitter or Facebook have themselves become communications projectiles which send both Russian disinformation and Ukrainian pleas along meditative networks which expand before our eyes" (Ries, Wanner & Dunn 2022). Social media platforms, memes, and influencers have entangled the war with popular culture, just as they have repurposed history and helped produce or deny national identities. Crowdsourced research showed that a Twitter account with memes condemning "war everywhere" (Redfish 2022) turned out to be launched by Russian state media (Laschyk 2022; Heyndyk 2022). Influencers such as the German-Russian Alina Lipp who trivialize the invasion, organize their followers via Telegram (a private messaging service that is also used in similar ways as a social media platform). We are witnessing the largest digital "information war" in Europe since the emergence of the internet (Butler 2022). Its strategies include both crafting and circulating one's own narratives about the war, but also fostering a fundamental sense of suspicion by flooding social media with informational noise.

What these examples show is that the criteria for truth go far beyond "factuality". Simply checking whether the "facts" are correct would overlook the affective and social dimensions of whether something is deemed "true". In both digital and non-digital spaces, truth is often a matter of personal conviction; it is about what *feels right* for individual actors embedded in particular social and cultural dynamics.

We have deliberately not provided a specific definition of truth for this special issue. However, we believe that the contributors, as well as our own arguments in this introduction, are indebted to a notion of truth developed most prominently by Michel Foucault. For Foucault, the question of truth was inextricably linked to the question of power: "We are subjected to the production of truth through power and we cannot exercise power except through the production of truth" (1980: 93). This means that truth is not an abstract entity, something to be found through philosophical contemplation. Rather, truth is made. It is worth quoting in full one of Foucault's key reflections on this question:

> The important thing here, I believe, is that truth isn't outside power, or lacking in power: contrary to a myth whose history and functions would repay further study,

> truth isn't the reward of free spirits, the child of protracted solitude, nor the privilege of those who have succeeded in liberating themselves. Truth is a thing of this world: it is produced only by virtue of multiple forms of constraint. And it induces regular effects of power. Each society has its regime of truth, its "general politics" of truth: that is, the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true; the mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish true and false statements, the means by which each is sanctioned; the techniques and procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth; the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true. (1980: 131)

In his reflections on Foucault's concept of truth, Bernard Harcourt argues that Foucault introduced a radically different way of thinking about truth than that of Kant: "Rather than identify the criteria to determine truth, Foucault's project was to write a history of truth production, of truth-telling, of truth-making" (Harcourt 2020: 107). Instead of focusing only on what people believe to be true, Foucault attended to the techniques, the modes, and the forms that produce truth, or what Harcourt describes as "the technē of truth making" (ibid.). The idea that truth is produced in practice has inspired our own approach. But rather than developing a historical perspective, we focus on the techniques of truth-making as quotidian practices and interactions with digital media. The tools on social media for capturing, selecting, editing, displaying, and circulating digital content allow people to *curate* truth on a previously unknown scale. Social media's wide range of digital formats (images, videos, texts, etc.) can be used for the construction of individual truths while enhancing the speed and range at which such truths can be circulated. Ultimately, the infrastructures and affordances of social media co-constitute the regimes of truth that shape contemporary digital societies.

Research on Post-truth and Right-wing Populism

There are several key concepts that help to illuminate practices of truth-making within *political* fields at the heart of this special issue. The first is the concept of "post-truth". One of the most frequently cited definitions of post-truth is the formulation used by Oxford Languages when it made the term its 2016 Word of the Year: 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" (Oxford Languages 2016). The Oxford definition has found its way into recent research literature (Boler & Davis 2018: 75; Cosentino 2020: 3; Harambam 2000: 6–7; Ho & Cavanaugh 2019: 160; McIntyre 2018: 5). For this special issue we have chosen not to focus on the concept of "post-truth" because, as Karen Ho and Jilian R. Cavanaugh remind us, we need "to

recognize the importance of refusing to romanticize a time when 'truth was truth,' as if there existed a moment of pristine objectivity when all knowledge production from multiple social categories and locations was equally valued" (2019: 163). This critical remark is relevant to this special issue, as its contributions strive to avoid romanticizing truth. Despite this critique, however, our special issue benefits from the notion of post-truth because it draws our attention to context-bound ways of making things true.

A perspective which pays close attention to truth-making contexts and practices has ramifications for this issue's focus on right-wing political formations. The prolific research on populism in recent years has contributed significantly to this topic. While populism as a category is not limited to right-wing political formations, this special issue focuses largely on right-wing populism. Often based in political science and drawing on quantitative approaches, researchers studying populism either investigate the strategies and ideologies of populist actors – the "supply side" – or the causes and conditions for their support – the "demand side" (Mudde 2010; Kaltwasser et al. 2017). The term populism itself is contested, however. For some, it describes a specific antagonistic construction of the political (Laclau 2005); for others it is a rudimentary ideology whose defining element is the moral opposition between a pure "people" and a corrupt "elite" (Müller 2016); and for still others it denotes a specific style or performance of politics (Moffitt 2016). Research on populism tends to focus on conceptual debates, analyze electoral strategies, or link the phenomenon to sociological metanarratives. Within such a framework, right-wing populism is most frequently depicted as harnessing the "losers of modernization", as constituting a "cultural backlash", or as responding to conditions of "post-democracy" (Rippl & Seipel 2018). While these studies provide crucial insights into contemporary political dynamics, we are skeptical about macro-level explanations because they run the risk of producing simple causalities or mechanistic explanations that are difficult to square with the complexities that unfold in the field.

Anthropological and ethnographic work on right-wing politics complicates programmatic diagnoses. It locates practices and discourses in specific socio-cultural contexts and closely observes how they are embedded in patterns of everyday life. As Agnieszka Pasieka (2017: 26) points out, contemporary right-wing politics are multi-faceted and variegated; accordingly, they produce a "blurred conceptual landscape". Anthropological studies of the political right make use of general terms such as right-wing populism, "the far right," and "the extreme right" together with more specific elements such as racism, neo-nationalism, anti-genderism, anti-elitism, and anti-gypsyism (Shoshan 2016; Szombati 2018; Wielowiejski 2020; Ege & Springer 2023). We

want to highlight two aspects of anthropological work on right-wing politics that we view as important for the contributions in this issue.

First, anthropological investigations of right-wing politics are sensitive to the complexities of everyday meaning-making. Rather than viewing interlocutors as repugnant or manipulated "others," anthropology takes them seriously so as to understand how ideological commitments become embedded in patterns of practice and how they lend meaning to quotidian experiences. Ethnographic studies on right-wing movements such as work on women in racist organizations in the US (Blee 2003), on neo-fascists in Italy (Cammelli 2017; Pasieka 2022), or on far-right movements in Poland, Hungary and Slovakia (Pasieka 2020), reveal how political commitments rest on narrations of the self, are forged in shared social spaces and communal practices, and can constitute their own cultural lifestyles. Sensitivity to the complexities of quotidian meaning-making also brings into view the role of emotions and affect. Right-wing movements produce communities held together by collective emotional practices (see Virchow 2007) involving anger, fear, hate, belonging, affection, or intimacy, as Julia Molin and Pia Schramm (2023) point out in this issue. Such emotions can correspond to what Arlie Hochschild (2016) terms "deep stories", such as feeling politically abandoned or powerless. But as Julia Leser and Florian Spissinger (2020: 338) have recently pointed out, emotional pratices can also produce affective spaces of "shamelessness" in which far-right views can be articulated without shame and repercussions. Attending to the everydayness of ideological commitments can thus highlight how right-wing politics have become part of the current political and cultural landscape.

Second, an aspect of anthropological work that we wish to underscore is its attention to broader economic, political and cultural developments. In-depth and multi-sited ethnographic work on European right-wing politics has linked the far right to specific traditions of anti-liberal thought and regimes of production (Holmes 2001), and has traced its relationship to processes of European integration (Gingrich 2006). Similarly, ethnographers and anthropologists inspired by traditions of cultural studies have analyzed everyday anti-elite or anti-migration sentiments as entry points for understanding the current conjuncture of political, economic, and cultural developments in Europe (Harder & Opratko 2022; Ege & Springer 2023). Such studies attempt to complicate mechanistic explanations of right-wing politics, and highlight how macro-level phenomena, including the ideological effects of "progressive neoliberalism" (Deem 2023) or fascist histories (Campos Valverde 2023) shape, and are shaped by quotidian practices.

More recently, journalists and academics have discussed the relationship between right-wing politics and truth-making by way of concepts such as "fake news",

"alternative facts" and "conspiracy theories". The transnational protests against Covid-19 restrictions that began in 2020 and which featured right-wingers mixing with heterogeneous crowds of demonstrators have given work on conspiracies and right-wing politics special prominence. Sociological and ethnographic studies have pointed out the movement's shared skepticism of public media, parliamentary politics, and scientific institutions (Reichardt 2021; Nachtwey, Schäfer & Frei 2020), its widespread invocation of common sense and alternative experts (Harder 2022), as well as its frequent and public displays of emotion (Hentschel 2020). Contemporary conspiracy theories are, at their core, populist (Butter & Bergmann 2020: 333) because they employ common-sense explanations or folk knowledge against those with the power to claim expertise (see Hofstadter 1962). Moreover, conspiracy theories have sought to mobilize "counter-knowledge" from institutions outside mainstream politics and society (Ylä-Antilla 2018), heavily aided by the digital infrastructures of private messaging services and alternative streaming websites. The German intelligence service's introduction of new categories of politically motivated crimes during the pandemic and recent efforts to find terminology that better captures emerging ideological formations (Amlinger & Nachtwey 2022) show the ways in which these phenomena resist placement within existing political frameworks. They make it clear that truth, counter-knowledge, and alternative expertise are crucial elements in current right-wing formations and thus merit closer inspection.

The mobilization of counter-knowledge by right-wing actors is also where the relationship between digital media and truth becomes pertinent. Phenomena associated with communication on social media such as "filter bubbles" (Pariser 2011), "affective publics" (Papacharissi 2014), and disinformation (Marwick & Lewis 2017) suggest that the orchestration of counter-knowledge and mobilization of emotion by right-wing actors is especially easy online. This is either because social networks produce siloed communities, because they privilege emotionalized communication over supposedly rational debate, and/or because they obscure the sources and the validity of statements. Accordingly, some authors focusing on the online strategies and organization of the political right deem social media its "transmission belt" (Fielitz & Marcks 2020). Inquiries into the affinity between right-wing movements and social media are extremely timely. However, we would like to challenge the idea of digital media users as essentially being duped by right-wing actors. The story of "Bots, Bubbles, and Fools", as Nils Kumkar puts it in his contribution (2023) to this issue, calls for closer attention to the circumstances of media users and the ways in which they actively make and share truths online.

Perspectives from Digital Anthropology

What does digital anthropology offer to such debates concerning social media and far-right politics? Although not all contributing authors come from anthropological disciplines, they share a core principle: to be "attentive to the actual everyday implications of technologies in people's lives" (Geismar & Knox 2021: 14). From the standpoint of digital anthropology, technologies do not simply affect everyday lives in a deterministic sense. It is not the platforms that change the world, as is often suggested in the public discourse, but their users, the content they create and the practices that come to matter for their everyday lives (Miller et al. 2016). The same, we submit, goes for the processes of digital truth-making. If truth in the post-truth era is what *feels right* for individuals within their social and cultural contexts, then the articles in this special issue show how social media users co-create such beliefs, convictions, and contexts. At the same time, digital anthropology recognizes that social media platforms provide specific affordances – prompts, potentials, and constraints – for users and their practices (Costa 2018; Hopkins 2016). The articles in this special issue thus focus on the *making* of truths while reflecting on how this process is shaped by the infrastructures of social media platforms.

A central strength of digital anthropology is that it does not consider human-technology relationships in isolation. Instead, it examines the complex social and cultural entanglements within which they unfold. For instance, social media platforms give users the ability to compose texts and combine them with edited images, emojis, hashtags, etc. These possibilities constitute "emotional affordances" (Bareither 2019) insofar as users employ them to mobilize emotional content, broadcast it to a wide audience, and invite others to participate (Stark 2019). The emotional, affective, or sensory dimensions of digital truth-making – what Döveling, Harju & Sommer (2018) call "digital affect cultures" – in one way or another inform all the articles in this issue.

Infrastructure studies and practice theory, both elements of digital anthropology, supply additional concepts to approach these social and cultural entanglements. They, too, inform our thinking about truth-making in relation to digital technologies, though not all contributors address them explicitly. Infrastructures (Bowker et al. 2019; Larkin 2013; Niewöhner 2015) – such as networking platforms, social media enterprises, troll farms, Telegram groups, or official state-driven media – are "made up of many interacting agents and components" (Edwards 2017: 327). At the same time, they are co-constituted and co-constructed by infrastructuring practices (Edwards 2003). The emphasis on infrastructure shows how such technologies are part of everyday life, components of generic systems that appear to be "just normal" (Star 1999; 2002). How

are technologies of truth-making maintained, shaped, and installed? How do seemingly disparate practices from the realms of political and everyday life exist side by side – posting fake news while eating breakfast, say? And how do these technological systems develop a reach that extends beyond national borders?

Practice theory (Nicolini 2013; Reckwitz 2002; Hui, Schatzki & Shove 2016) emphasizes that "behind all the apparently durable features of our world there is always the work and effort of someone" (Nicolini 2013: 3). It highlights that truth is fundamentally *made*, a product of practices and routines; and *emotional* practices shape what people feel to be true (Scheer 2012). Among other insights, practice theory foregrounds the role of the body in truth-making practices (Latour 2004; Mol & Law 2004; Niewöhner & Beck 2017): How does it feel to have the "right" truth? How are our bodies affected when confronted with something we consider to be "false"? In short: how are truths and untruths materialized and performed through bodily practices?

The way we understand digital truth-making is indebted to the above perspectives and their lines of questioning: digital truth-making is a process that builds on the affordances of digital infrastructures to entangle information with social, cultural and emotional dynamics in a way that co-constitutes beliefs and convictions about the world. Shaped by cultural, economic, and technological conditions, digital-truth making shapes these conditions in return. At its heart is a process that co-constitutes what intrinsically *feels right* for individuals and groups in specific contexts.

The contributions in this issue do not only follow digital truth-making across a diverse range of empirical fields; they also demonstrate the multi-faceted methodological approaches of digital anthropology. Several of the articles (by Alexandra Deem, Pia Schramm & Julia Molin, Raquel Campos Valverde and Chenyang Song) are based on the primary method of digital anthropology: digital and internet ethnography (Geismar & Knox 2021: 10–12; Hine 2015; Pink et al. 2016). The strength of ethnographic work in this area lies in its ability to generate knowledge through participation and interaction, allowing researchers to develop an emic understanding of the practices and experiences of their research participants. While ethnographies of social media cultures typically involve a digital interface between researchers and their interlocutors, they still feature the immersive, interactive, and experiential qualities of ethnographic analysis. They give researchers the power to describe digital truth-making from within, not only in terms of individual subjectivities, but also in terms of truth-making's situatedness within specific social, cultural, political and digital contexts. However, the interdisciplinary nature of the field has also prompted us to include additional perspectives: narrative analysis (Stefan Groth), documentary method (Nils Kumkar), and mixed methods (Chenyang Song). The multi-dimensionality of digital anthropology's methods, the

way it integrates ethnographic approaches, content analysis and quantitative data, and the richness of its empirical insights are where its true potential for the analysis of digital truth-making lies.

The Contributions

The research of Alexandra Deem (2023) takes us to the world of antifeminist women who identify as "trad wives" and act as influencers on social media to fight the dangers of feminism. In her ethnographic study of interviews and hashtags, she argues that these women's practices cannot be understood as a "blanket opposition" to feminism. Rather, the affordances and infrastructure of social media facilitate a kind of *truth management*, whereby women try to reconcile conflicting emotions and beliefs about feminism and what is truly traditional. Women who are not "white enough" to be "trad" offer key insights into these truth management practices.

Raquel Campos Valverde (2023) introduces us to the truth regimes of contemporary Spain. She claims that the institutionalization of the country's fascist history is an example of "post-truth" that predates current debates. Via her intensive online field research, Campos Valverde examines the affordances of digital technologies to show how Francoist narratives about history are maintained and reproduced. The "old-regimes of post-truth," she argues, can still be found in the present-day practices of "far-right denialism." Forms of truth-making that draw on post-memory practices and testimonies emerge as potentially anti-fascist strategies.

Chenyang Song's article (2023) reflects on long-established political beliefs in a very different context than the other submissions. He shows how young Chinese online nationalists bring together popular culture and political practices on Chinese social media to foster nationalistic truths. The article combines ethnographic and quantitative methods to detail how social media users employ technological affordances to shape the legitimacy of political stances, offering illuminating insights into China's online political sphere.

Stefan Groth (2023) investigates digital truth-making related to Brexit. Online, the UK's leave campaign and its Euroskeptic narratives centered around an advertisement on the bus of the National Health Service (NHS) and its claim that money for the EU would be better spent on Britain. Combining narratological approaches with digital anthropology, Groth illuminates how such "kernel narratives" can scale up and become "truthy" or "sticky" depending on what works in a story and what is appropriate online.

The article by Julia Molin and Pia Schramm (2023) investigates German anti-Muslim Twitter users and their everyday online practices. The authors examine discourses

while taking into account Twitter's specific affordances (e.g., the emotional practices enabled by emojis). They add ethnographic context to practices that do not only push hate into the sphere of the digital but also build networks, create communities of beliefs, foster belonging and forge political agendas. They emphasize the way in which these processes draw on the emotional affordances of the platform.

In his article, Nils Kumkar (2023) considers how the German right-wing political party Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) has employed "alternative facts" for specific communicative purposes. He argues that "alternative facting" can be understood as an identity performance, a form of "digital un-truthing" that people engage in collectively. His documentary method, which investigates the organizing principles of conversations on social media, represents a meaningful addition to the toolbox of digital anthropology, one that sheds light on specific communicative strategies behind digital truth-making practices.

We hope that the articles in this special issue will provide analytical inspiration for investigating the phenomenon of digital truth-making. While this special issue focuses on right-wing politics and social media, the ambit of digital truth-making is much broader. Similar investigations are needed for universities, museums, schools, and other institutions that traditionally govern knowledge. What our special issue shows is digital anthropology's ability to enhance the study of these fields by identifying particular practices of digital truth-making within intricate, everyday contexts.

This task requires multipronged approaches like those used by our contributors. Ethnographic methods, attentive listening, participant fieldwork, and qualitative engagement with interlocutors are essential to anthropological studies of digital truth-making. But as our contributions demonstrate, the approaches can also comprise quantitative methods for mapping macro-patterns of interaction and narratological or documentary approaches in arriving at granular descriptions of online communication and its role in truth-making.

By bringing together various approaches, fields, and methods, the special issue furthers broader discussions about anthropology's role in a "post-truth" world. Although we remain critical of the notion of "post-truth" (see above), we recognize that we live at a time where truths are becoming more and more fractured, difficult to grasp, and uncertain. What is the purpose of anthropology in the midst of such change? As James Clifford (1986: 25) argued back in 1986, anthropology and ethnography can only ever reveal "partial truths". Though Clifford's argument is about methodology, it also raises questions about the role of anthropology in contemporary societies more generally. If anthropology is not in the business of co-producing *the* truth, what can it

contribute to the struggles over contested truths in "post-truth" societies? The short answer is: Anthropology can critically reflect on how truths are made, enabling a more nuanced debate about the politics that shape truths in contemporary societies. This special issue aims to contribute to this larger goal by illuminating digital truth-making in the context of right-wing politics and social media.

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