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Michael Demers April 10, 2018

A Philosophical Study of Contemporary Political Media

by

Michael Demers

Cynthia Willett
Adviser

Philosophy

Cynthia Willett
Adviser

John Johnston
Committee Member

Susan Bredlau
Committee Member

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Cynthia Willett
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Abstract

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By Michael Demers

In the thesis “A Philosophical Study of Contemporary Political Media,” I argue that a philosophical analysis of contemporary political media must account for the epistemological, affective, and formal conditions of emerging political media environments, which I consider by drawing from the work of Henri Bergson, Baruch Spinoza, and Pierre Bourdieu respectively. In particular, I analyze the forms of knowledge involved in phenomena such as “alternative facts” and the conservative denial of climate science, the affective force of ideas and information circulated through political media, and the formal qualities of particular political media platforms such as television.

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Introduction

"The difficulty in explaining the present is that there are too many factors. The world has, in effect, been hit by a Blitzkrieg of forces ranging from reasserted plutocrats, failures of neoliberalism, continued fantasies of neoconservatism, misinformation overload, assaults on truth, evidence, and principles of verification, cyber-espionage, global racism, persisting wars, climate threats, and many more—crucially, all at once. […] Fighting back requires understanding, at least, the gravity and dynamics of our historical situation. Social scientists will continue exploring their accounts. Political thinkers, especially those of the philosophical variety, however, have some immediate resources from which to draw."

—Lewis Gordon, "Perilous Times"[1]

The 2016 American presidential election has left many trying to understand the untimely convergence of unfolding trends in the production and exchange of knowledge in political media discourse. This coincidence has manifested in the development of unforeseen political media environments and a rapidly growing economy of information and advertising[2] that have harbored the proliferation of so-called "alternative facts"[3] and the expansion of conservative political media networks, like Fox News and Breitbart, as well as moderate and more liberal political media networks, such as CNN and MSNBC.

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[1] Gordon, Lewis. "Perilous Times." *The Con*, 2017.

[2] Roberge, Jonathan and Robert Seyfert. "What are algorithmic cultures?" *Algorithmic Cultures: Essays on meaning, performance, and new technologies*. Routledge, 2016.

[3] The phrase "alternative facts" became widespread after Counselor to the President Kellyanne Conway's January 2017 interview on NBC's "Meet the Press" during which she defended then-White House Press Secretary Sean Spicer and President Trump's claim that the size of the crowd at his inauguration was the largest in history, stating that "Sean Spicer, our press secretary, gave alternative facts." Quoted in "'Alternative facts' tops the 2017 'Yale Book of Quotations'", Axios, 2017.

Moreover, a recent paper in the Columbia Journalism Review[4] describes Breitbart as "a distinct and insulated media system, using social media as a backbone to transmit a hyper-partisan perspective to the world." The result, the paper claims, is "an environment in which the President can tell supporters about events in Sweden that never happened, or a presidential advisor can reference a non-existent 'Bowling Green massacre'." More so, the paper suggests that "rather than 'fake news' in the sense of wholly fabricated falsities, many of the most-shared stories can more accurately be understood as disinformation: the purposeful construction of true or partly true bits of information into a message that is, at its core, misleading." So, rather than simply a void of knowledge, the emerging conservative political media environment is better understood as a platform involving not only out-right falsities but also forms of disinformation by which notions of factual reality are invoked and circulated, but only to be obfuscated and exploited for the social, political, and economic goal of manufacturing a state of misunderstanding, which serves the goal of continued viewership and the interests of various conservative political formations. The distinction between the absence of any factual knowledge and manipulating factual knowledge to produce series of half-truths is subtle and compels consideration of the epistemological and affective conditions that make such manipulation possible. As such, this thesis explores how the phenomenon of proliferating "alternative facts" emerges from not only unfolding political conditions, but also the complex, evolving set of epistemological and affective conditions unique to political media, which concern the quality of different forms of knowledge circulated in political media, how such forms of knowledge are formed, and how political media significantly filters public experience and conception of political reality.

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[4] Benkler, Yochai, Robert Faris, Hal Roberts, and Ethan Zuckerman. "Study: Breitbart-led right-wing media ecosystem altered broader media agenda." *Columbia Journalism Review*, 2017.

The philosophical exploration of the epistemological and affective dimensions of contemporary political media and its effects on politics and society more generally is divided into three chapters, which engage the work of Henri Bergson, Baruch Spinoza, and Pierre Bourdieu respectively. The method of interpreting and applying the work of these thinkers to the problem of contemporary political media draws from Gilles Deleuze's notion of radical empiricism, as a method for evaluating concepts, as well as Lauren Berlant's use of cultural theory as a temporal mode of interpretation that enables a philosophical, historical conception of the unfolding present moment. Accepting the singularity of all of these three thinkers, the goal is not be to unite them with the magic of a pure synthesis capable of resolving all of the possible differences between them. At the same time, the differences between them will not be figured as an insurmountable barrier to philosophical conversation, but instead the very condition for bringing them into conversation. Instead, by holding them in tension and in view of their differences, the possibility of a multi-dimensional approach capable of offering generative insights concerning political media can be realized without sacrificing such differences. As such, the following paragraphs first outline the influential aspects of Deleuze's radical empiricism and Berlant's cultural criticism and philosophy of the present for this thesis' application of key ideas in the work of Bergson, Spinoza, and Bourdieu to the problem of political media and its epistemological and affective dimensions before forecasting the topics of each chapter.

Deleuze & Radical Empiricism

In the afterword of *Bergsonism*, entitled "A Return to Bergson", Gilles Deleuze writes that "a 'return to Bergson' does not only mean a renewed admiration for a great philosopher but a renewal or an extension of his project today, in relation to the transformations of life and

society, in parallel with the transformations of science."[5] Furthermore, Deleuze adds, following from his broader notion of the virtual dimension of reality as a multiplicity unfolding in often imperceptible ways, that such transformations are not simple, linear progressions, but rather "new lines, traces, leaps, [and] dynamisms."[6] The question, then, becomes how, or by what conceptual means, is Bergson's philosophy extended in a way that can begin to account for the complex epistemological conditions of the circulation of particular forms of knowledge, like "alternative facts," in political media, which was possible only by the expansion of mass media environments.

For Deleuze, the means of renewing and extending Bergson in view of societal transformation coincides with his broader method and conceptual orientation known as radical empiricism. In the translator's introduction to Deleuze's 1988 book *Bergsonism*, Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam write that "Deleuze has himself taken up and transformed these Bergsonian notions in his own […] campaigns for constructive pluralism" in which he referred to himself "as an empiricist engaged in tracing the becomings of which multiplicities are made up."[7] By foregrounding attention to pluralism and multiplicity in the process of interpreting and renewing a thinker's body of work as well as in the formulation of a conceptual approach towards contemporary transformations, Deleuze enacts "a series of transformations of concepts", which are "borrowed" from a diverse set of thinkers and conceptual disciplines.[8] The result of transforming and adapting concepts, as Deleuze describes in a 1985 conversation published

[5] Deleuze, Gilles. *Bergsonism*. Originally published in 1966. Translated by Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam, Zone Books, 1988. Page 115.
[6] Deleuze, *Bergsonism*, 117.
[7] Deleuze, *Bergsonism*, 8.
[8] Deleuze, *Bergsonism*, 9.

under the title "Mediators"[9], is the construction of "intellectually mobile concepts"[10] suitable for an "analysis in terms of movements, [or] vectors."[11] Serving as a key methodological influence for this thesis' applied study of political media, Deleuze's radical empiricism provides the insight necessary for mobilizing the concepts of Bergson, Spinoza, and Bourdieu in the formation of a multi-dimensional study of political media and its epistemological and affective dimensions.

Before transitioning to a description of the three chapters, it is important to add that the insights of radical empiricism suggest the necessity of problematizing not only standard interpretations of particular ideas, but also the general categories used to organize systems of thought. This is not to say that there are no similarities or connections between philosophies that share a historical moment or conceptual orientation, but that the specificity of such connections is often over-shadowed by the presupposed meanings that general categories accrue. This is also not to say that such categories should be thrown out altogether, but that, in their use, they, and especially any particular characteristics they've come to connote, should at the same be problematized and placed in question. For this reason, Jacques Derrida is able, during "The Final Interview" in 2004, to speak of the common understanding of his intellectual generation and suggest, when it comes to the moniker of that generation, that "all of [it] is not, if you want to be rigorous about it, true", and, at the same time, insist he is not "objecting to it entirely."[12]

Furthermore, the names "Post-Structuralism" and "Post-Modernism" have been used to denote a category of philosophical thinkers from the 1960s and 1970s, but, in many instances, have come to connote a very particular set of theoretical qualities, many of which are not, as

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[9] Deleuze, Gilles. *Negotiations*. Translated by Martin Joughin, Columbia University Press, 1995, page 121.
[10] Deleuze, *Negotiations*, 122.
[11] Deleuze, *Negotiations*, 121.
[12] Derrida, Jacques. *Learning to Live Finally: The Last Interview*. Interviewed by Jean Birnbaum, translated by Pascal-Anne Brault and Michael Naas, Melvin House, 2011.

Derrida puts it, rigorously true. One such connotation, which seems to be circulating especially frequently after the 2016 American presidential election and is particularly pertinent to this thesis' topic, is that so-called "Post-Structuralism" and "Post-Modernism" entail a simplistic, absolute rejection of all fact and truth, which would imply that the insights of a thinker like Deleuze would be antithetical to a study of the phenomenon of "alternative facts" and political media more generally. For example, Daniel Dennett, in a recent interview, has said, "what the postmodernists did was truly evil. They are responsible for the intellectual fad that made it respectable to be cynical about truth and facts."[13] In a recent interview, Wendy Brown's response to this charge, as well as the interpretation of "Post-Structuralism" that informs it, is instructive:

> It is very funny to imagine that post-structuralism was so powerful and influential that it produced Donald Trump's orientation towards truth. I wish it were true that post-structuralism had that much power, as we actually could have produced a better world and it would have nothing to do with a post-truth world. What's really being said here? Those people who never liked or fully understood these challenges to foundational truths — have now found a correspondence between the unsettling of truth's foundation at the philosophical level and the lack of interest in facticity among a certain current of politicians and journalists. Correspondence is not a very interesting claim unless you can figure out why that correspondence might be there. […] Is climate change real or is it bogus? What about scientific facticity? Post-structuralist thought never argued against facticity; rather, it argues that facts are always discursively organized and interpreted. Post-structuralists (such as Derrida, Foucault and others) never claimed that everything was simply invented. Their claim is a more important and interesting one: human beings

[13] Dennett, Daniel. Interview with Carole Cadwalladr, *The Guardian*, 2017.

> cannot simply name truth without doing so through language, and language is not just descriptive or nominative, but always interpretive.[14]

Here, the stakes of problematizing interpretations and conclusions formed through overly general interpretations of particular ideas and entire bodies of work are clear; such over-generalizations are not only patently false, but politically dangerous because their vacuity easily lends itself to the haphazard misrepresentation of diverse movements and complex, unfolding conditions that characterizes mono-causal interpretations of political transformations.

Moreover, another significant misinterpretation associated with the titles "Post-Structuralism" and "Post-Modernism" is the simplistic, absolute rejection of the concept of structure, or the notion of a general system of organization. Radical empiricism involves no such rejection of the notion of structure, but instead explicitly recognizes and traces contours of the system of organization in which all concepts are implicated. The question, then, is not the denial, or overcoming, of the existence of structures, but how best to consider the conceptual terms of such structures and how best to transform them through the re-organization and re-articulation of concepts. In a 1980 interview published under the title "On a Thousand Plateaus"[15], Deleuze plainly rejects the misconception that equates all thought associated with "Post-Structuralism" and "Post-Modernism" with a nihilistic rejection of the existence of structures. More so, Deleuze draws attention to the nuance involved in the theorization of "open systems", which transform how the relationships that make up systems are understood as well as how time is figured within systems:

> It's become a commonplace these days to talk about the breakdown of systems, the impossibility of constructing a system now that knowledge has become so fragmented

[14] Brown, Wendy. Interview with Alvina Hoffman, *E-International Relations*, 2017.
[15] Deleuze, *Negotiations*, 31-32.

> ("we're no longer in the nineteenth century. . . "). There are two problems with this idea: people can't imagine doing any serious work except on very restricted and specific little series; worse still, any broader approach is left to the spurious work of visionaries, with anyone saying whatever comes into their head. Systems have in fact lost absolutely none of their power. All the groundwork for a theory of so-called open systems is in place in current science and logic, systems based on interactions, rejecting only linear forms of causality, and transforming the notion of time. […] What I and Guattari call a rhizome is precisely one example of an open system. […] I think, anyway, that philosophical thinking has never been more important than it is today, because there's a whole system taking shape, not just in politics but in culture and journalism too, that's an insult to all thinking.

Here, Deleuze also gestures to "a whole system taking shape, not just in politics but in culture and journalism too, that's an insult to all thinking." This is a clear indication of the significance of considering the convergence of politics, culture, journalism, and media more generally as part of a broader societal system that presents serious concerns for collective patterns of thought. Moreover, shortly after in the same interview, Deleuze considers the implications of the notion of an open system for the consideration of philosophy—understood as a collection conceptual systems or "set[s] of concepts" that are "acting on the flows of everyday thought"—and suggests that a philosophical system becomes open "when the concepts relate to circumstances rather than essences."[16] The notion of an open system, then, transitions from the understanding in which the conceptual elements of a philosophical system are considered to be fixed, metaphysical "essences" to an understanding in which the conceptual elements of a philosophical system are

[16] Deleuze, *Negotiations*, 32.

considered to be embedded in complex, unfolding "circumstances" that involve the convergence of unfolding movements and trends in society[17]. In this way, concepts are figured not as self-sufficient, meta-physical forms, but embedded in societal circumstance. For this reason, Deleuze insists that "nothing's good in itself, it all depends on careful systematic use."[18] Finally, by drawing out the transformative potential of concepts, in tandem with the consideration of society as an open system comprised of evolving circumstance rather than that of closed, metaphysical system comprised of immutable essences, Deleuze articulates the political stakes of concept-creation and analysis, writing, "a concept's full of a critical, political force of freedom."[19]

Berlant, Cultural Theory, & Philosophy of the Present

Furthermore, in her 2011 book *Cruel Optimism*[20], Lauren Berlant develops a notion of "historical sense" as a way of "conceiving of a contemporary moment from with that moment."[21] Historical sense of the contemporary moment, according to Berlant, begins with the present "not at first an object but a mediated affect[.]"[22] Mediated by historical sense, Berlant adds that the present "is also a thing that is sensed and under constant revision, a temporal genre whose conventions emerge from the personal and public filtering of the situations and events that are happening in an extended now."[23] In this way, Berlant's consideration of "the personal and public filtering" of the structures, processes, and events of the present that inform historical sense

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[17] It is important to note that the influence of the present moment's societal circumstances in shaping the conditions of an open system also means that "open" is in no way synonymous with "free" or "formless", but rather that it remains open to change and transformation, that is, it is not metaphysically "closed" or over-determined to exist in a single, fixed state.
[18] Deleuze, *Negotiations*, 32.
[19] Deleuze, *Negotiations*, 32.
[20] Berlant, Lauren. *Cruel Optimism*. Duke University Press, 2011.
[21] Berlant, 4.
[22] Berlant, 4.
[23] Berlant, 4.

provides a powerful conceptual frame for the consideration of the stakes of political media as a key example of the filtering of the present that is constitutive of historical sense.

Forecast

In the following chapters, key ideas in the work of Bergson, Spinoza, and Bourdieu are applied to the problem of political media, serving to illuminate the epistemological dimensions, affective dimensions, and formal dimensions of political media, the latter of which are related to particular media platforms such as television.

Chapter one, entitled "One or Many Crowds: the Limits of the Intellect, the Method of Intuition, and the Formation of False Problems", employs the epistemology of Henri Bergson as outlined in his 1903 work *Introduction to Metaphysics*. More specifically, this chapter applies Bergson's theorization of the limits of the human intellect in order to analyze the epistemological conditions of political media and the peculiar form of knowledge referred to as "alternative facts", a phrase that emerged during the debate over the size of the crowd at President Trump's Inauguration. Through reference to Deleuze's 1966 work *Bergsonism*, key problems such as the relationship between the intellect and intuition are considered. Finally, the stakes of Bergson's analysis of human intellect and the process of forming different types of knowledge are established by considering the ways that the circulation of particular forms of knowledge in political media, like "alternative facts," often preclude understanding of the facts of the present.

Chapter two, entitled "Ideas are not simply Ideas: the Mind-Body Relation and the Power of Affect", considers Baruch Spinoza's philosophy of affect as developed in his 1677 work *Ethics*, focusing especially on Spinoza's analysis of the mind-body problem and the entanglement of affects and ideas. More specifically, this chapter argues that Spinoza's consideration of the affective force not only of bodily gestures but ideas is well suited for the

consideration of the circulation of affects in political media. Building on Étienne Balibar's 1998 work *Spinoza and Politics*, this chapter forwards an interpretation of the importance of affect for understanding political media as a system of communication and transmission of ideas.

Chapter three, entitled "The Spin Zone: Television and the Formation of Political Vertigo," explores the particularity of televised political journalism as a form of political media through an analysis of Pierre Bourdieu's theory of television offered in his collection *On Television*. More specifically, this chapter considers Bourdieu's account of the dangers associated with televised political journalism's rapid temporality and epistemology of insider information, which produce an affective state of vertigo. Moreover, the broader stakes of televised political journalism and political media more generally are established by interpreting political media as a key genre through which "historical sense" of the unfolding events of the present, as theorized by Lauren Berlant in *Cruel Optimism*, is developed.

In the conclusion, the connections between each of the three chapters and the stakes of the philosophical study of contemporary political media are established. Bergson's consideration of the intellect's reliance on partial images to describe reality is read as a conceptual basis for interpreting Bourdieu's account of the media's fragmentation of thought, Spinoza's analysis of affect is interpreted as a robust account of what Bergson identifies as the interests and bias of the intellect, and Bourdieu's analysis of the circulation of fear and anxiety through televised political journalism is considered as an example of Spinoza's account of the sad affects associated with inadequate ideas and the imitation of affects more generally. In this way, a philosophical study of contemporary political media as a structuring system of communication and exchange of information with unique epistemological, affective, and formal conditions is offered as an essential feature of the broader philosophical conception of the present.

Chapter One—One or Many Crowds: the Limits of the Intellect, the Method of Intuition, and the Formation of False Problems

"One of the characteristics of the Last Man is that he is also a little man. A little man is not a matter of physical size. It's also not a matter of his lack of financial or social capital. A little man is so because of his lack of imagination, insecurity, stupidity, resentment—in short, because of the displeasing truths of what he is. Such a man thus seeks a better image of himself in pleasing falsehoods. He imagines himself great."

—Lewis Gordon, "Perilous Times"[1]

In order to understand the epistemological dimensions of contemporary conservative political media, this chapter explores some of the key insights of Henri Bergson's epistemology. Bergson was a 20th-century French thinker whose account of human experience and knowledge is well suited for the aims of this chapter not only because of its truly expansive exploration of the multiple different forms of experience and knowledge, such as concepts, quantitative information, and false problems, but also because of its attention to the mediating effects of images, bias, and quantitative symbols. In particular, this chapter explores Bergson's account of the relationship between what he identifies as the two principal ways humans are able to experience and come to know the external world, *intellect* and *intuition*, according to which Bergson draws out the limits of knowledge emerging from the intellect. Furthermore, while Bergson entertains intuition as the path to a superior form of knowledge, this chapter does not assume the full strength of Bergson's appraisal of intuition as a path to complete, metaphysical knowledge. Instead, by drawing from the interpretation offered in Gilles Deleuze's *Bergsonism*,

[1] Gordon, Lewis. "Perilous Times." *The Con*, 2017.

the following analysis refigures intellect and intuition as inseparable, co-constitutive epistemological processes before transitioning to the task of analyzing the quality and characteristics of different forms of knowledge, such as "alternative facts," as they emerge from the entanglement of intellect and intuition in contemporary conservative political media discourse. Ultimately, this chapter suggests that Bergson's epistemology can improve the consideration of the epistemological dimensions of contemporary political media by offering conceptual tools for analyzing emergent forms of knowledge, such as "alternative facts," and problematizing the prominent interpretation of the present as "post-truth."

In the 1903 essay "An Introduction to Metaphysics,"[2] Henri Bergson details his approach to some of the most fundamental problems of epistemology, including the complex interplay between intellect and intuition as distinct ways of knowing reality and key questions concerning the question of relativity, uncertainty, and bias, the possibility of absolute knowledge, and the potential of metaphysics as a discipline founded upon absolute knowledge. Because the essay is meant to serve as an introduction to Bergson's work on other topics such as the psyche, time, biological science, and politics, it emphasizes many of the most fundamental dimensions of Bergson's epistemology, which form the conceptual orientation for his applied studies. In the translator's preface, T.E. Hulme says as much, claiming "it has… more importance than a simple introduction would have, for in it M. Bergson explains, at greater length and in greater detail than in the other books, exactly what he means to convey by the word intuition."[3] For this reason, an exposition and analysis of the key claims in Bergson's essay "An Introduction to

[2] Bergson, Henri. "An Introduction to Metaphysics." Originally published in 1903. Translated by T.E. Hulme, edited by Thomas A. Goudge, Bobbs-Merrill, 1980.
[3] Hulme, T.E. Preface. "An Introduction to Metaphysics," by Henri Bergson. Originally published in 1903. Translated by T.E. Hulme, edited by Thomas A. Goudge, Bobbs-Merrill, 1980.

Metaphysics" is a helpful first step in the consideration of the implications of Bergson's epistemology for the consideration of contemporary political media.

Before explicating the key claims of Bergson's essay "An Introduction to Metaphysics", it is necessary to consider the argumentative form of Bergson's essay and how that style has been received and considered historically. In the 1949 introduction to Bergson's essay, Thomas A. Goudge deems Bergson's philosophy a form of mysticism that is "unsympathetic to logic"[4]. More so, Goudge also includes a remark from American philosopher George Santayana, describing Bergson as "'persuasive without argument'"[5]. Demonstrative, logical proof of concept, however, which forms the basis of formal argument, is not the only way to argue a point and communicate an idea. The study of rhetoric, literature, painting, music, and other forms of expression provide more than enough evidence for this point. So, rather than accepting Santayana's description of Bergson as "persuasive without argument", which suggests that Bergson's work simply does not argue its points, it is more accurate and fruitful to modify Santayana's description to say that Bergson is persuasive without *formal* argument, that is, without the methodical construction of logical, philosophical proofs, using instead another form of argument to establish his claims, which is not simply opposed to logic and must be considered on its own terms.

More specifically, Bergson draws from what he terms "intuition"[6], or the intuitive method. Bergson introduces the notion of intuition through reference to the distinction between absolute and relative knowledge upon which, according to Bergson, "philosophers, in spite of

[4] Bergson, 20.
[5] Bergson, 20.
[6] Bergson, 23.

their divergences, agree,"[7]. Here, it is necessary to point out that while it may be correct that many in the history of philosophy have recognized a distinction between absolute and relative knowledge, there is in no way a stable historical consensus on the existence of this distinction nor on the particular figure of this distinction among those that recognize its existence. For example, some thinkers, such as the figure of Socrates in certain Platonic dialogues, have recognized an absolute, ontological distinction between absolute and relative knowledge, locating absolute knowledge in a-priori forms and relative knowledge in the imperfections of bodily experience and the sensory faculties. Moreover, others, such as Nietzsche, have denied the existence of absolute, a-priori knowledge altogether and therefore displace the existence of the distinction between absolute and relative knowledge as well, claiming that all knowledge is relative. Furthermore, others, such as Kant, have recognized the distinction between absolute and relative knowledge, but qualified only particular domains of knowledge where absolute knowledge is possible. While Bergson gestures towards historical consensus, perhaps to ease the introduction of his claim by beginning with a possible point of agreement, he too therefore has a particular account of the distinction between relative and absolute knowledge in mind.

Bergson explains that absolute knowledge and relative knowledge each correspond with "two profoundly different ways of knowing a thing"[8]. Here, Bergson distinguishes absolute knowledge from relative knowledge according to the process through which each form of knowledge is established, suggesting that the quality of the method one uses to cultivate knowledge thus determines the quality of that knowledge. For Bergson, relative knowledge "implies that we move round the object" and "depends on the point of view at which we are

[7] Bergson, 21.
[8] Bergson, 21.

placed and on the symbols by which we express ourselves,"[9] while absolute knowledge implies "that we enter into [the object]" and "neither depends on a point of view nor relies on any symbol."[10] The points of view and symbols, such as "systems of axes" or other "points of reference"[11], on which relative knowledge depends are characteristic of the method of scientific "analysis"[12] and its use of the intellect's capacity for quantitative calculation and concept formation, while absolute knowledge's independence from symbols and particular points of view is characteristic of the method of intuition. Rather than describing the object of study from an external point of view through reference to a set of symbols that translate the observer's perception, as in the use of analysis, Bergson claims that the method of intuition allows one to "enter into" the object's "interior", or "state of mind", through "an effort of the *imagination*" that allows one to "possess the original"[13] rather than the translation. In other words, intellect can only grant one indirect access to the truth of the reality one experiences through concepts, while intuition is capable of granting one direct experience to the truth of reality through intuitive imagination.

In this way, Bergson challenges the longstanding, rationalist tendency to reduce the complex process of knowledge production to the divine, infallibility of the human intellect as well as the more recent psychological, economic theories of information processing and rational choice according to which humans are presumed to be perfectly rational in the interpretation of information. Bergson suggests that the intellect, which serves as a general concept for multiple inter-related intellectual processes including the use of language, critical thinking, idea

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[9] Bergson, 21.
[10] Bergson, 21.
[11] Bergson, 21.
[12] Bergson, 23.
[13] Bergson, 21.

formation, and quantitative calculation, is limited by the finite points of view from which we experience reality, bias and other forms of interestedness, as well as the mind's dependence on the ambiguities of language and specialized systems of symbols and images to express its insights. Furthermore, Bergson suggests that the intellect's dependence on systems of grammar and images produces a tendency to consider reality in stable terms despite the fact that all aspects of experience are subject to change, variability, and movement.

Bergson makes the stakes of the distinction he is forwarding between intellect and intuition clear. Intuition is capable of achieving absolute, metaphysical knowledge of the object itself—the object's original and the interior state of mind—and is therefore the source of the truths that the intellect translates into conceptual facts. Intuitive imagination of reality precedes the intellect's formation of concepts to describe reality. While for the rationalists, the intellect is the path to truth, for Bergson, the intuition is the way to truth.

Here, it is necessary to introduce the particular deployment of Bergson's epistemology offered in this chapter. This chapter assumes, like Bergson, that there is a true, external reality. In contradistinction to Bergson's faith in the completion of the metaphysical project, however, this chapter leaves the question of whether or not pure intuition and absolute, metaphysical knowledge are possible undecided; that is to say, it is not assumed that the mediation of our experience of that reality by our relative points of view and dependence on language can be fully overcome such that a total, metaphysical truth explaining the foundation of all dimensions of reality can be discovered once and for all. Rather, it is assumed that knowledge must be continuously refined such that, while it remains indirect and incomplete, it can nonetheless offer a relative, proximate description of particular, objective facts constituting reality. The contemporary use of climate models illustrates this point; well-designed climate models are

capable of producing a relatively accurate prediction of particular dimensions of the climate such as temperature within a certain range. That is to say, one can be relatively certain that the temperature within a certain set of conditions will be within the predicted range, but within that range, one remains relatively uncertain about exactly what the temperature might be[14]. Moreover, this also means one can be relatively certain of the truth of particular objective facts such as the force of gravity and remain confused about precisely how consciousness developed as it did in human beings; in other words, the lack of total understanding of reality from the perspective of a singular metaphysical truth doesn't disqualify the possibility of true knowledge of reality altogether since reality in all its multiple, inter-woven dimensions is irreducible to any one of the objective facts it involves. Reality is not reducible to the objective fact of the force of gravity, but also involves facts regarding the states of matter, radiation, energy, socio-economic inequality, and so on, which are irreducible to any one particular fact about reality such as the force of gravity.

Furthermore, by suspending the search for an exclusive form of knowledge capable of perfect, metaphysical truth, this consideration of Bergson's epistemology resists the tendency to envision intellect and intuition as fundamentally separate modes of understanding that one can simply choose between. Instead, regarding intellect and intuition as co-constitutive, this interpretation of Bergson's epistemological work considers the formation of knowledge as a simultaneously intellectual and intuitive process. The question, then, becomes not, which forms of knowledge possess the complete truth of reality instead of translating it into relative terms, but why does some knowledge translate and inflect the truth of reality more accurately than others

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[14] Center for Research on Environmental Decisions. *The Psychology of Climate Change Communication: A Guide for Scientists, Journalists, Educators, Political Aides, and the Interested Public.* 2009.

and what can Bergson's consideration of the relative limits of the intellect offer in the way of explanation? That is, what does Bergson's analysis of the limits and biases of the intellect suggest about the epistemological conditions of political phenomena such as the denial of climate change and the phenomenon of "alternative facts"? Furthermore, how can Bergson's notion of intuition improve the consideration of facts related to phenomena like climate change and wealth inequality?

The interpretive move to decenter the question of a pure, unmediated, metaphysical truth, which tends to posit intellect and intuition as separate and distinct faculties, is informed by Gilles Deleuze's work on Bergson contained in his book *Bergsonism*[15], which was originally published in French in 1966. In *Bergsonism,* Deleuze articulates his interpretation of intellect and intuition as co-extensive, supplementary forms of knowing in Bergson's epistemology, suggesting that intellect and intuition are not suspended in a fundamental opposition from which one can simply choose the positive form and dispense with the negative form. In this way, Deleuze's interpretation is instructive for this chapter's claim that Bergson's analysis of intellect and intuition is helpful for understanding both the potential limits of knowledge, exemplified by the phenomenon of "alternative facts", and, at the same time, the descriptive, pedagogical potential of knowledge to explain facts, such as those pertaining the complex environmental process of climate change. In this sense, this interpretation of Bergson's epistemology suspends the contest between the rationalist faith in metaphysical truth understood through human intellect, the relativist rejection of any possibility of true knowledge of objective facts, and the mystical faith in metaphysical truth perceived through human intuition.

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[15] Deleuze, Gilles. *Bergsonism*. Originally published in 1966. Translated by Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam, Zone Books, 1988.

In the first chapter of *Bergsonism* entitled "Intuition as Method", Deleuze insists that intuition "is neither a feeling, an inspiration, nor a disorderly sympathy, but a fully developed method" that "Bergson relied on […] to establish philosophy as an absolutely 'precise' discipline, as precise in *its field*, as capable of being prolonged and transmitted as science itself is"[16]. Bergson's formulation of intuition as a method, which "involves a plurality of meanings and irreducible aspects" rather than simply transitory feeling, provides an answer "the most general methodological question" accompanying Bergson's formulation, which goes as follows: "How is intuition – which primarily denotes an immediate knowledge (*connaissance*) – capable of forming a method, once it is accepted that the method essentially involves one of several mediations?"[17] In other words, the general methodological question is moving beyond the question of the value of intuition, in juxtaposition with the intellectual method, as a useful analysis of the limits and problems associated with the intellectual method, to the question of how intuition, in light of intuition's connotation of immediate feeling, nonetheless constitutes a complex method involving multiple "rules" mediating the "acts" of the method.[18]

Among the multiple dimensions of meaning involved with Bergson's methodological notion of intuition, Deleuze identifies "essentially three distinct sorts of acts that in turn determine the rules of the method: The first concerns the stating and creating of problems; the second, the discovery of genuine differences of kind; the third, the apprehension of real time." In reference to the first activity consisting in "the stating and creating of problems", which will be the primary activity of the intuitive method considered here, Deleuze states the first rule: "*Apply the test of the true and false to problems themselves. Condemn false problems and reconcile*

[16] Deleuze, 14-15.
[17] Deleuze, 14.
[18] Deleuze, 14.

truth and creation at the level of problems."[19] Deleuze juxtaposes the rule of applying the test of true and false to the articulation of problems to the prejudice of believing "that the truth and the false can only be brought to bear on solutions"[20]. According to Deleuze, the prejudice of believing that only solutions are open to the test of true and false is a "social" prejudice because "society, and the language that transmits its order-worlds [*mots d'ordre*], 'set up' [*donnent*] ready-made problems, as if they were drawn out of 'the city's administrative filing cabinets,' and force us to 'solve' them."[21] Immediately, it's clear that the first rule of the intuitive method—necessitating the consideration of the truth value of the very articulation and description of problems—is essential for the consideration of political media and the particular phenomenon of "alternative facts", which emerges from a media constellation involving specific ways of articulating and creating problems that are not simply neutral and objective, but shapes what is determined to be a problem in the first instance and offers the terms through which a problem can be understood.[22] For this reason, Deleuze states, "it is the solution that counts, but the problem always has the solution it deserves, in terms of the way in which it is stated (i.e., the conditions under which it is determined as problem), and of the means and terms at our disposal for stating it […]"[23]

The question then becomes "how can this constitutive power which resides in the problem be reconciled with a norm of the true?"[24] In response, Deleuze identifies a secondary rule, which is "complimentary" to the first rule stated above, that offers criteria for identifying false problems: "False problems are of two sorts, 'nonexistent problems,' defined as problems

[19] Deleuze, 15.
[20] Deleuze, 15.
[21] Deleuze, 15.
[22] Deleuze, 15.
[23] Deleuze, 16.
[24] Deleuze, 16.

whose very terms contain a confusion of the 'more' and the 'less'; and 'badly stated' questions, so defined because their terms represent badly analyzed composites."[25] The first kind of false problem—the non-existent problem—is exemplified by the traditional formulation of the notion of nonbeing as a problem for the notion of being, which ignores that "there is not *less*, but *more* in the idea of nonbeing than that of being" because within the notion of nonbeing "there is in fact the idea of being, plus a logical operation of generalized negation, plus the particular psychological motive for that operation (such as when a being does not correspond to our expectation and we grasp it purely as the lack, the absence of what interests us)."[26] Here, the formulation of an opposition between nonbeing and being is the creation of a nonexistent problem, which assumes that there is less contained in nonbeing, i.e. the lack of any connection to being, than there actually is. The second kind of problem—the poorly stated problem whose terms represent incorrectly analyzed composites that "arbitrarily group things that *differ in kind*"[27]—is exemplified by the notion of intensity: "Whether the quality of the sensation is confused with the muscular space that corresponds to it, or with the quantity of the physical cause that produces it, the notion of intensity involves an impure mixture between determinations that differ in kind, so that the question 'by how much does the sensation grow?' always goes back to a badly stated problem."[28] Here, the formulation of a general notion of intensity without an account of the different kinds of intensity corresponding to different types of things, such as the quality of a sensation in a muscular space and the quantified force of a physical cause, exemplifies the creation of a poorly stated problem.

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[25] Deleuze, 17.
[26] Deleuze, 17.
[27] Deleuze, 18.
[28] Deleuze, 18-19.

In this way, Bergson's epistemology enables an analysis of the formation of false problems in contemporary political media. For example, dismissals of climate science by conservative political media in the United States frequently involve the creation of the first kind of false problem—a nonexistent problem, which mirrors what Benkler identified as outright falsities—involving confusions of "more" and "less". Exemplifying the creation of a non-existent problem, climate science skeptics have frequently deployed the existence of uncertainties related to particular climate models and predictions—such as the lack of confirmation in observational data for the prediction based on climate models that the troposphere would increase in temperature faster than the earth's surface—as a disqualification of the science of climate modeling altogether[29]. That is to say, the dismissal of climate modeling due to the particular instances of uncertainty mistakes relative, particular uncertainty for more uncertainty than is actually present in climate science, so much more that climate modeling is dismissed as fundamentally and completely uncertain altogether, which is to say, as unscientific. At the same time, the particular imagination of a normative ideal of a fully certain science against which the science of climate modeling is judged in such dismissals mistakes the relative, probabilistic certainty of science for more certain than it actually is, so much so that any particular instance of lingering uncertainty is said to be antithetical to science. Another example of a non-existent, false problem is current (as of March, 2018) Counselor to the President Kellyanne Conway's reference to a non-existent "Bowling Green Massacre"[30], which consisted only of the false assertion that "[t]wo Iraqi nationals came to this country, joined Isis, traveled back to the Middle East to get trained and refine their terrorism skills, and come back here, and

[29] O'Lear, Shannon. "Climate Science and Slow Violence: A View from Political Geography and STS on Mobilizing Technoscientific Ontologies of Climate Change." *Political Geography,* 2016.
[30] Benkler et al. 2017.

were the masterminds behind the Bowling Green massacre of taking innocent soldiers' lives away."[31] In this case, it assumed that there is more implied by the phrase "Bowling Green Massacre" than there actually is, that is, that it actually refers to a real event.

Furthermore, the particular problem in discussion of which the phrase "alternative facts" was first used—the controversy over the size of the crowd at President Trump's Inauguration—is an example of the creation of the second kind of false problem, defined as a poorly-stated problem involving an incorrectly analyzed composite of things that differ in kind, which mirrors what Benkler referred to as disinformation. In the particular deployment of the term "crowd size" or "audience" in conservative political media discourse surrounding the phenomenon of "alternative facts", the term maintains no fixed, clearly defined meaning or object of reference. In Trump's statement on crowd size, it's immediately clear that while he presents the statement with the air of an objective determination of the quantity of people who were present at the National Mall during his Inauguration, he actually refers only to his memory of his visual perception of the crowd that he attempted to evaluate quantitatively only in a haphazard fashion:

> And I was explaining about the numbers. We did a thing yesterday at the speech. Did everybody like the speech? (Applause.) I've been given good reviews. But we had a massive field of people. You saw them. Packed. I get up this morning, I turn on one of the networks, and they show an empty field. I say, wait a minute, I made a speech. I looked out, the field was — it looked like a million, million and a half people.[32]

Here, it is clear the notion of crowd size involves a messy composite of things differing in kind, including Trump's vacuous reference to "the numbers" that functioned as a stand-in for

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[31] Quoted in: Smith, David. "Kellyanne Conway's fictitious 'Bowling Green massacre' not a one-time slip of the tongue." *The Guardian*, 2017.

[32] Trump, Donald. "Remarks by President Trump and Vice President Pence at CIA Headquarters." January 21st, 2017, CIA Headquarters, Virginia, *WhiteHouse.gov*, 2017.

lack of any objective basis for the estimation[33], Trump's visual perception of the crowd during the Inauguration from the place he was standing, Trump's arbitrary estimation of the number of people in the crowd based on his visual perception, Trump's memory of his visual perception and subsequent estimation as he recounted it during his remarks the day after, as well as Trump's psychological and socio-political interest in there being a large crowd present at his Inauguration.

Moreover, the statements of Trump's then-Press Secretary Sean Spicer and Kellyanne Conway only thicken the confused composite of dissonant elements invoked by the term "crowd size" in conservative political media discourse. Spicer followed Trump's comment with the declaration that the Inauguration's crowd "was the largest audience to ever witness an inauguration – period – both in person and around the globe."[34] Here, the term is extended beyond the people present in the field of the National Mall to include anyone observing the speech anywhere around the globe. Conway's statement makes the implications of the semantic shift in which the composite invoked by the term "crowd size" is extended to refer to those watching globally, which is also to say, digitally:

> And on this matter of crowd size I think it is a symbol for the unfair and incomplete treatment that this president often receives. I'm very heartened to see Nielsen just came out with the ratings, 31 million people watching the inauguration. President Obama had 20.5 million watching his second inauguration four short years ago. So we know people are also watching the inauguration on different screens and in different modes. And that

[33] Robertson, Lori and Robert Farley. "The Facts on Crowd Size." *FactCheck.Org*, 2017.
[34] Quoted in: Kessler, Glenn. "Spicer earns Four Pinocchios for false claims on inauguration crowd size." *Washington Post*, 2017.

> there was, I mean, for me there was a prediction of a downpour of rain. I think that deterred many people from coming.[35]

Here, the composite invoked by the term "crowd size" retains its complicated appeal to the people physically present at the Inauguration—as is clear from Conway's mention of the possibility of rain—but is extended to encompass all those observing the Inauguration digitally around the globe, thereby complicating the matter even further.

The consideration of the poorly-stated problem, which is so not simply by a neutral accident but because of poor analysis embedded in a particular perspective and socio-political interests, illustrates the composite form of false knowledge produced in the operation of disinformation, as understood by Benkler and explicated in the introduction as a manipulation of particular facts to produce hybrid half-truths, which is able to exploit the limits of knowledge by captivating individuals with the truthful veneer of particular facts—i.e. that there was a crowd at Trump's Inauguration—that are compounded with false inductions, visual distortions, arbitrary judgments, lapses of memory, psychological and socio-political interest, conspiracies, and prejudices. In other words, it is the limited nature of our knowledge, that is, the fact that one can know particular facts related to a given matter but not all of them, that disinformation exploits. In these ways, conservative political media discourse very much so involves the creation of the different kinds of false problems analyzed in Bergson's epistemology.

With Bergson's epistemology in mind, conservative political media discourse and its invocation of "alternative facts" should not be considered an external aberration distorting a previously sound basis of human knowledge and ushering in a foundationally distinct epistemological era, like some of the many declarations of a newly inaugurated "post-truth"

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[35] Sinderbrand, Rebecca. "How Kellyanne Conway ushered in the era of 'alternative facts'." *Washington Post*, 2017.

world seem to suggest, but a particularly damaging intensification and manipulation of the already present potential for misinterpretation and partiality that is endemic to the epistemological conditions of human knowledge. In this way, the consideration of Bergson's epistemology improves the consideration of the phenomenon of "alternative facts" in conservative political media discourse and the epistemological conditions of political media more generally by situating them within an account of the conditions and limits of knowledge and the formation of the false problems. In this way, Bergson's epistemology enables a refinement of what is considered a true problem in political media.

Chapter Two—Ideas are not simply Ideas: the Mind-Body Relation and the Power of Affect

"Spinoza's philosophy is, in a strong sense of the term, a philosophy of communication - or, even better, of modes of communication – in which the theory of knowledge and the theory of sociability are closely intertwined."

—Étienne Balibar, *Spinoza and Politics*

The previous chapter explored the implications of Henri Bergson's epistemology for the consideration of the epistemological dimensions of contemporary political media through an analysis of the particular forms of knowledge present in contemporary conservative political media discourse, including the quality and constitution of the forms of knowledge involved in the phenomena of climate change denial and "alternative facts." In order to consider the affective dimensions of the particular forms of knowledge transmitted in contemporary conservative political media discourse and contemporary political media more generally, this chapter explores some of the key ideas of Baruch Spinoza's philosophy of human affects. Spinoza was a 17th-century Dutch thinker whose theory of the significance of the affects in human life is helpful for the task of this chapter because of his account of the embeddedness of human beings in social, natural environments and especially his theory of the mind-body relation. Spinoza formulates his theory of the mind-body relation in *Ethics*[1], where he considers mind and body as "one and the same thing"[2], referring only to particular, but nonetheless inter-related attributes of the same substance rather than opposed substances existing on fundamentally distinct planes of reality.

[1] Spinoza, Baruch. *Ethics.* Translated by Edwin Curley, Penguin Group, 1996.
[2] Spinoza, 72.

For Spinoza, the unity of mind and body means that the force of the affects cannot be enclosed within a purely bodily domain isolated from the realm of mind, ideas, and thought. In my interpretation, the consideration of mind and body as one is necessary for the theorization of the affective dimensions of political media, which is irreducible to purely bodily gestures understood to be outside of language and mind. That is to say, the consideration of the affective dimensions of media must account for the transmission of ideas and information as a form of affection. For this reason, this chapter claims that Spinoza's philosophy of affect can help refine the consideration of the affective dimensions of political media, establish the stakes of a non-dualist understanding of affect, and finally draw out the importance of theorizing the affective dimensions of political media.

As part of his philosophy of affect, Spinoza, in part three of *Ethics* entitled "Of the Affects", formulates a critique of the Cartesian belief in the capacity of the mind's will to freely and absolutely determine the body and its actions[3]. The first aspect of Spinoza's critique concerns how the Cartesian doctrine of free will conceptualizes the relationship between humans and the environment. Here, Spinoza explains that rather than understanding the human as subject to the common laws of Nature, Descartes considers the human to exist outside of nature "as a dominium within a dominium"[4] within which the will of the human mind enjoys absolute power. Rather than existing in the shared universe, humans are assumed to exist within its own distinct sphere, or dominium, within but nevertheless closed off from Nature. Furthermore, because the dominium of humans, according to Descartes, is not subject to natural laws, "the cause of human

[3] Spinoza, 69.
[4] Spinoza, 68.

impotence and inconstancy"[5] must be attributed to the truth of a foundational failure or vice of humanity.

In response, Spinoza forwards a different understanding of the relationship between humans and the natural environment according to which human beings must be conceived as emanating from universal, natural laws, "according to which all things happen" and which "are always and everywhere the same"[6]. Since, for Spinoza, Nature is synonymous with God, and insofar as everything follows from natural laws, it follows that "singular things are modes by which God's attributes are expressed in a certain and determinate way, that is, things that express, in a certain and determinate way, God's power, by which God is and acts."[7] Humanity, then, does not constitute a closed dominium in which the human enjoys free, absolute power, but is rather a part of the infinite, natural environment where its essential nature, which consists in its power and striving to persevere in its established form[8], is determined by common, natural laws.

Contrary to the autonomous dominium of the Cartesian free will, Spinoza considers the natural environment, in which the essential natures of all things are determined and actualized through striving, as a dynamic, inter-related system of cause and effect. Here, Spinoza draws a distinction between the notion of an adequate cause, whose effect can be understand "clearly and distinctly"[9] through it alone, and the notion of an inadequate cause, whose effect cannot be conceived through it alone. From the distinction between adequate and inadequate causes, Spinoza derives his understanding of action and passion. According to Spinoza, a human acts when one is the adequate cause of something by which they're affected, but when one is an

[5] Spinoza, 68.
[6] Spinoza, 69.
[7] Spinoza, 75.
[8] Spinoza, 75.
[9] Spinoza, 69.

inadequate cause of something by which they're affected, a passion, or external cause, acts upon the human[10]. Following from the claim that the human is a part of and determined by the natural environment, Spinoza draws two important conclusions that invalidate the Cartesian doctrine of free will. The first is postulate two of part four of *Ethics*, which states "we are acted on, insofar as we are a part of Nature, which cannot be conceived through itself, without the others."[11] The second is postulate three of part four of *Ethics*, which asserts, "the force by which a man perseveres in existing is limited, and infinitely surpassed by the power of external causes."[12] The human, then, according to Spinoza, cannot be considered to freely and absolutely determine its own nature independently of the infinite other elements and causes constitutive of nature, but instead is determined and continually acted on by external causes such as other human persons and natural creatures as well as the natural laws. Because "the force of each affect is defined by the power of the external cause compared with our own"[13], the human is always subject to passions insofar as its power is limited and inevitably overtaken by the power of external causes.

The second aspect of Spinoza's critique of the Cartesian doctrine of free will concerns the relationship between the mind and the body. For Descartes, the mind exists independently from the body, both in existence and essence, and possesses absolute power over it. The duality between the mind and the body is evident is Descartes' belief that "the soul, or mind, was especially united to a certain part of the brain, called the pineal gland, by whose aid the mind is aware of all the motions aroused in the body and of external objects."[14] Here, it's clear that Descartes considers the mind and the body separate substances that are united only by way of a

[10] Spinoza, 70.
[11] Spinoza, 118.
[12] Spinoza, 118.
[13] Spinoza, 171.
[14] Spinoza, 161.

special organ, rather than distinct attributes of the same thing that are one and the same in the first instance. Moreover, the notion that the will of the mind is able to move the special gland in order to determine the motions of the body and the "animal spirits that strike against it"[15] suggests that the strivings, power, and affects of the mind and body are distinct and separated to such an extent that the unique will of the mind is able to act on and determine the affects of the body. Descartes' presumption of a separation between the mind and body is also clear from his account of passions, which defines them as emotions of the soul that are generated by the animal spirits of the body. Here, the passions stem from the animal spirits of the body in opposition to the will of the human mind and its actions. From the Cartesian notion of free will that posits a separation between the mind and body through which the mind possesses absolute power over the body, it therefore follows that "Nature is only considered to be corporeal, and what the body can do only if it is determined by the mind."[16]

Furthermore, Spinoza rejects the dualistic model of Descartes, in which the mind and body are of distinct, separate substances and the mind possesses absolute power over the body, insisting instead "that the mind and the body are one and the same thing, which is conceived now under the attribute of thought, now under the attribute of extension."[17] If the mind and the body are one and the same thing of which thought and extension are simply different attributes, it follows that "the order, or connection, of things is one, whether Nature is conceived under this attribute or that; hence the order of actions and passions of our body is, by nature, at one with the order of actions and passions of the mind."[18] Moreover, if the mind, body and their respective constellations of actions and passions are understood to be all one and the same, the basis for the

[15] Spinoza, 161.
[16] Spinoza, 71-72.
[17] Spinoza, 71.
[18] Spinoza, 71.

Cartesian presumption that the mind possesses absolute power over the affects is no longer coherent because, since the power and affects of the mind and body are one and the same, the mind possesses no power independent of the body nor one through which it could determine the body as if it were an external cause that is not subject to precisely the same passions of the body it seeks to determine and root out. In this sense, the mind is subject to what Descartes calls the animal spirits in exactly the same fashion the body is, that is, following not from a defect or vice of human nature, but from the embodied conditions of human beings. Spinoza asserts the inability of the mind to determine the body plainly, postulating that "the body cannot determine the mind to thinking, and the mind cannot determine the body to motion, to rest, or to anything."[19] The mind and its capacity for imagination and recollection are therefore co-extensive with the body[20].

Moreover, Spinoza addresses and responds to two specific arguments in favor of the Cartesian notion of free will. The first of the two arguments in favor of the notion of free will that Spinoza considers asserts that the fact that the body is inactive without the activity of the mind demonstrates the power of the mind's free will over the body. Spinoza responds by insisting that the reverse of the first claim is also true, which is to say that the mind is inactive without the activity of the body and therefore neither the mind nor the body possess determinative power over each other. Rather, the power and activity of the mind and the body are one and the same. Spinoza demonstrates the dependence of the mind on the activity of the body through the example of sleep during which mind and body are in a state of relative rest. Moreover, Spinoza argues that the entanglement of the activity of the mind with that of the body is further demonstrated by the fact that human memory cannot consider and recollect the same

[19] Spinoza, 71.
[20] Spinoza, 77.

object with the same clarity through time and thus often depends, as it does in the first instance, on the affection of bodily attributes by that object in order to form and maintain memory[21]. This point is clear from the fact that the mind's recollection of a past experience of the scent of an orange most often pails in comparison to the affection of bodily attributes by the scent of an orange in the present. Moreover, rather than the mind being the sole source of creativity, Spinoza suggests that even human artifacts such as buildings and paintings cannot be considered fundamentally distinct from the natural environment when one carefully considers the ingenuity of other animals and the complexity of the human body that emerges from that environment. More so, Spinoza asserts that there are many things that the body does that cannot be deduced from any free will of the mind, such as the phenomenon of sleep walking, which occurs without any free will of the mind. Spinoza therefore rejects the claim that the dependence of the body on the mind demonstrates the free power of the mind over it, demonstrating that the mind is also dependent on the body[22].

The second of the two arguments in favor of the Cartesian notion of free will that Spinoza addresses asserts that the fact the mind is able to freely determine whether or not the body speaks or is silent demonstrates the absolute power of the mind's free will over the body. Spinoza responds by demonstrating that experience overwhelmingly suggests the opposite claim, which is that people do not control their speech by any absolute power of the mind's free will. Here, Spinoza offers a few demonstrative examples including the figure of the chatterbox and the child, each of which cannot control whether or not the body speaks in any absolute manner.[23]

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[21] Spinoza, 72.
[22] Spinoza, 72.
[23] Spinoza, 73.

Spinoza thus dismisses the claim that the mind's free will possesses absolute power to determine whether or not the body speaks.

Furthermore, the third aspect of Spinoza's critique of free will concerns the Cartesian presumption that the mind is capable of freely determining its affects, which is to say that the mind is never affected or acted upon by passions and rather only acts and is affected by only by its free actions. Here, Spinoza defines the notion of affect as "the affections of the body by which the body's power of acting is increased or diminished, aided or restrained, and at the same time, the ideas of these affections."[24] Put another way, Descartes' claim concerning the free will of the mind necessitates that the mind always knows the adequate cause of its affects[25]; in other words, the Cartesian free will hypothesis necessitates that the mind be made up of only adequate ideas through which its power to act, which consists in understanding, is increased. In order to be made up only of adequate ideas, the mind must possess complete understanding such that each idea's corresponding affect can be understood clearly and distinctly through it.

For Spinoza, it is impossible for the mind to possess only adequate ideas because of the fact that each human "is necessarily always subject to passions, that he follows and obeys the common order of Nature, and accommodates himself to it as much as the nature of things requires."[26] Furthermore, insofar as the mind and body are one and the same, and insofar as the human is a part of the social, natural world and therefore always limited and acted on by external causes, the mind's striving, or will[27], which concerns the formation of ideas[28], cannot be said to freely possess exclusively adequate ideas and is rather always determined by natural laws,

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[24] Spinoza, 70.
[25] Spinoza, 70.
[26] Spinoza, 119.
[27] Spinoza, 76.
[28] Spinoza, 171.

subject to passions, and involves inadequate ideas, which are distinguished by "the privation of knowledge"[29]. Because each human's striving is shaped through external forces of their social, natural environments, it follows, for Spinoza, that "we neither strive for, nor will, neither want, nor desire anything because we judge it to be good; on the contrary, we judge something to be good because we strive it, will it, want it, and desire it."[30] What people determine to be good, then, is not the pure choice of free will and true judgment of the good, but is only an effect of its striving and desire. It follows by necessity that "the decision of the mind and the appetite and the determination of the body by nature exist together—or rather are one and the same thing."[31] More specifically, each human's striving, which consists of the will of the mind and the appetite of the body understood as one and the same thing, thus favors affects of joy, by which mind and body pass to a greater perfection through an increase in the power to act, and avoids affects of sadness, by which mind and body pass to a lesser perfection through a decrease in the power to act[32]. The human affects, such as the passions of love, hate, and anger, act upon the mind and body as one and the same thing and therefore problematize the Cartesian notion of the mind's free will and transcendent domain of ideas autonomous from the forces of affect. Through the consideration of the human as part of and determined by social, natural environments, the understanding of the oneness of the mind and body, and the acceptance of the necessary existence of the human passions, Spinoza effectively problematizes Descartes' notion of free will, which posits that the mind's free will possesses absolute power over the body and its affections.

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[29] Spinoza, 171.
[30] Spinoza, 76.
[31] Spinoza, 73.
[32] Spinoza, 77.

In this way, Spinoza's account of affect is well suited for the consideration of the affective dimensions of political media and the transmission of ideas and information therein. In particular, Spinoza's exploration of the "imitation of affects"[33], which refers to the social process of affective mimicry in which "we imagine a thing like us, toward which we have had no affect, to be affected with some affect, [and] we are thereby affected with a like affect"[34], in tandem with the understanding of ideas as a form of affection of mind and body[35] is apt for reflection on the mass circulation of affects, especially those of sadness, hatred, and despair emanating from the discourse of Donald Trump and the reactionary, conservative movement in the United States circulating through contemporary political media. Since the power of the mind consists in understanding, the affection of the mind by an inadequate idea—one characterized by a lack of knowledge and understanding—produces a form of sad affect because the mind's power of understanding is decreased. Following from the understanding of sadness as an affect through which the powers of mind and body to act are decreased, Spinoza defines the affect of hate as "nothing but sadness with the accompanying idea of an external cause."[36] That is to say, people frequently hate those who they falsely assume, by way of inadequate ideas, to be the cause of their sadness and decrease in power. In this sense, the many inadequate ideas circulated by Trump through political media that consist in the racist, xenophobic scapegoating of racial others[37] produce the misidentification of an external cause of social conditions of sadness, such

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[33] Spinoza, 84.
[34] Spinoza, 84.
[35] Spinoza, 84: "The images of things are affections of the human body whose idea represent external bodies as present to us (by IIP17S), that is (by IIP16), whose ideas involve the nature of our body and at the same time the present nature of the external body."
[36] Spinoza, 78.
[37] During his presidential announcement speech, Trump stated: "When Mexico sends its people, they're not sending their best. They're not sending you. They're not sending you. They're sending people that have lots of problems, and they're bringing those problems with us. They're

as unemployment, drug addiction, socio-economic inequality, and gun violence to name a few. The mass circulation of racist, inadequate ideas is, then, at the same time, the mass circulation of affects of hate.

Furthermore, following from Spinoza's definition of the affect of pride as "joy born of the fact that a man thinks more highly of himself than is just,"[38] any imagined threat to racial pride, which is entangled with the affect of scorn that "stems from thinking less highly of another than is just,"[39] is figured as the external cause of the loss of joy and power associated with racial privilege and the resulting sad affects, which produces an affect of hate targeted at the perceived, external threat.

Such examples of the mass circulation of sad, hateful passions through political media serve to demonstrate the significance of Étienne Balibar's observation, in his 1985 book *Spinoza and Politics*, that "[p]assion and reason are both, in the final analysis, modes of communication between bodies and between ideas of bodies[…] [and that] [i]n the same way, political regimes should be thought of as orders of communication."[40] In this sense, the transmission of affects is a fundamental feature of political media as a mode of communication. Moreover, Balibar suggests that the affective dimension of political ideas problematize the separation of knowledge and praxis according to which "knowledge and praxis relate to one another as numerically distinct powers, as if knowledge were a 'State within the State'[,]" noting that "Spinoza was all too familiar with the use (and perversion) of knowledge in regimes organised around 'theocratic'

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bringing drugs. They're bringing crime. They're rapists. And some, I assume, are good people." Quoted in "Here's Donald Trump's Presidential Announcement Speech." *Time Magazine*, 2015.

[38] Spinoza, 84.
[39] Spinoza, 84.
[40] Balibar, Étienne. *Spinoza and Politics*. Translated by Peter Snowdon, Verso, 1998, page 95.

superstition"[41] presumably in reference to Spinoza's well-known excommunication from the Portuguese, Jewish community in Amsterdam.[42] Balibar thus concludes that because "communication is structured by relationships of ignorance and knowledge, superstition, and ideological antagonism, which are invested with human desire and which express an activity of our bodies themselves, then we must also agree that knowledge is a praxis, and that the struggle for knowledge (that is, philosophy) is a political praxis."[43] In short, in so far as knowledge and ideas transmit affects, which in turn act on and shape the activities of those affected, knowledge and ideas are co-extensive with the practices and activities of political society.

In this way, Spinoza's non-dualist account of affect offers significant explanatory power for the affective dimension of political media's transmission of ideas and information. In particular, Spinoza's accompanying account of the mind-body relation establishes the necessity of theorizing ideas as not simply related to or in exchange with affects, but ideas themselves as productive of affect. Moreover, Spinoza's account of the imitation of affects is particularly helpful for the consideration of the widespread circulation of hateful and sad affects through political media emerging from the contemporary conservative movement frequently referred to as "Trumpism." In this sense, affective imitation emerges as a fundamental dimension of the formation of socio-political groups that is profoundly amplified by the power of political media. Furthermore, Spinoza's treatment of specific forms of affect such as sadness, hate, and pride, enable san analysis of the particular affective dimensions of appeals to external causes of suffering that characterize the outwardly racist, xenophobic discourses scapegoating marginalized communities that are circulating in contemporary conservative political media

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[41] Balibar, 97.
[42] Nadler, Steven. "Why Spinoza was Excommunicated." *HUMANITIES*, volume 34, number 5, 2013.
[43] Balibar, 98.

discuourse. Spinoza's account of affect thus enables a thorough conception of the affective dimensions of political media as a mode of communication, which serves to establish the political, affective stakes of political media.

Chapter Three—The Spin Zone: Television and the Formation of Political Vertigo

"The socio-technological study of the mechanisms of control, grasped at their inception, would have to be categorical and to describe what is already in the process of substitution for the disciplinary sites of enclosure, whose crisis is everywhere proclaimed."

—Gilles Deleuze, "Postscript on the Societies of Control"[1]

The previous two chapters, treating Henri Bergson's epistemology and Baruch Spinoza's philosophy of affect respectively, analyzed the epistemological and affective dimensions of particular forms of knowledge circulating in contemporary conservative political media discourse as well as those of political media more generally. In this chapter, the singular form of producing and transmitting affective knowledge that is televised political journalism, which, as will be demonstrated, significantly shapes the particular epistemological and affective dimensions of political media, is explored in detail. In order to consider the specificity of television as a form of political media, this chapter explores French sociologist philosopher Pierre Bourdieu's analysis of televised political journalism offered in the 1996 collection *On Television*.[2] In *On Television*, Bourdieu articulates an account of political journalism not simply as a neutral transmission of purely objective information, but as a "field"—constituted by "invisible structures and mechanisms"—that "produces and imposes on the public a very

[1] Deleuze, Gilles. "Postscript on the Societies of Control." *Negotiations*. Translated by Martin Joughin, Columbia University Press, 1995.
[2] Bourdieu, Pierre. *On Television*. Originally published in 1996.Translated by Priscilla Parkhurst Ferguson, The New Press, 1998.

particular vision of the political field[.]"[3]

Furthermore, this chapter draws out the stakes of televised political journalism and political media more generally as a formative element of contemporary society by turning to American philosopher Lauren Berlant's notion of "historical sense", as developed in in her 2011 book *Cruel Optimism*,[4] understood as the conception "of a contemporary moment from within that moment."[5] Moreover, because of its attention to affect and a Bergson-inspired notion of intuition, Berlant's consideration of historical sense also elaborates the stakes of the previous two chapters.

In the opening to *On Television* entitled "Journalism and Politics", Pierre Bourdieu outlines a few of the general characteristics of televised political journalism, or what he calls the "the journalistic field[.]"[6] Among them, Bourdieu notes "a tendency to equate what is new with what are usually called 'revelations'; an emphasis on that which is most obvious in the social world, meaning individuals, what they do, and especially what they do wrong; and, finally, a readiness to denounce or indict."[7] Moreover, Bourdieu also notes a few additional tendencies generated by "competition within the journalistic field itself", including "the obsession with 'scoops[,]' […] the unquestioned bias in favor of the news that is the newest and hardest to get[,] […] the predisposition to overstatement that comes from attempting offer over the subtlest and strangest interpretation[,] […] [and ritualistically playing] the predictions game, [which is] made possible by a collective amnesia about current events" and "the rapidity with which the

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[3] Bourdieu, 2.
[4] Berlant, Lauren. *Cruel Optimism*. Duke University Press, 2011.
[5] Berlant, 4.
[6] Bourdieu, 2.
[7] Bourdieu, 2.

journalistic report is forgotten amid the rapid turnover of events."[8] The effect, Bourdieu argues, is the preclusion of "an understanding of the invisible structures and mechanisms (here, those of the journalistic field) that influence the actions and thoughts of individuals", which converges with the audiences' "predisposition to focus on an analyst's (supposed) 'conclusions' rather than the method by which those conclusions were reached."[9]

According to Bourdieu, the journalistic field's rapid temporality and tendency to overstate unfolding events as decontextualized surprises, focus on the actions of individuals, and form haphazard predictions as the well as the public audience's tendency to concentrate exclusively on a particular commentator's conclusion without consideration of method, which inhibit reflection on the journalistic field's imperceptible configurations and functions shaping not only the actions and thoughts of individuals in the audience but the form and content of journalism itself, emerge from the same conditions. Here, Bourdieu suggests that the tendencies of the journalistic field and its audience emerge from "a world ruled by the fear of being boring and anxiety about being amusing at all costs, [such that] politics is bound to be unappealing, better kept out of prime time as much as possible", but "insofar as it does have to be addressed, this not very exciting and even depressing spectacle, which is so difficult to deal with, has to be made interesting."[10] That is to say, politics must be cultivated as a form of entertainment.

Furthermore, Bourdieu suggests that the audience's demand for everything to be entertaining shapes the journalistic field's tendency to transmit "mindless talk show chatter between 'approved' and interchangeable speakers", known as "panelists" in the United States, who "must present their positions in uncomplicated, clear, and striking terms" in order to "avoid

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[8] Bourdieu, 6.
[9] Bourdieu, 2.
[10] Bourdieu, 2-3.

the quagmire of intellectual complexity" associated with the consideration of "real information, analysis, in-depth interviews, expert discussions, and serious documentaries[.]"[11] Moreover, Bourdieu adds that the fear of being boring and the anxiety about being entertaining, which give rise to the journalistic field's normative recourse towards entertainment over intellectual rigor and study of reality, are not simply natural features of human audiences and journalists alike, but rather emerges from journalists "projecting onto the public their own inclinations and their own views."[12] As such, Bourdieu suggests that the analysis of journalists reflects a greater interest in "the tactics of politics than in the substance" and a greater concern with "the political effect of speeches and politicians' maneuverings within the political field (in terms of coalitions, alliances, or individual conflicts) than with the meaning of these."[13] In this way, the tactical form of politics becomes disconnected from the substantial meaning of politics for society.

More so, the journalistic field's "policy of demagogic simplification" is marked by a fundamental failure to realize "the democratic goal of informing or educating people" and coincides with the self-reinforcing, structural preference for journalists who "opt for confrontation over debates, prefer polemics over rigorous argumentation, and in general, do whatever they can to promote conflict."[14] More so, Bourdieu adds that political journalists' "claims to competence are based more on their claims to close contacts in the political realm, including access to insider information (even rumors and malicious gossip), than on the objectivity of their observation and investigation[.]"[15] In this way, anonymous chatter tends to eclipse the pursuit of objectivity through analysis and research. As such, political journalists

[11] Bourdieu, 3.
[12] Bourdieu, 3.
[13] Bourdieu, 4.
[14] Bourdieu, 3-4.
[15] Bourdieu, 4.

embody "a spontaneous form of a philosophy of doubt"—a kind of Cartesian relation to politics that "sees history as an absurd series of disasters which can be neither understand nor influenced"[16]—which "leads them to ascribe the sincerest convictions and most disinterested political positions to interests tied to particular positions within the political field (such as rivalries within a party, or participation in a 'trend')."[17] Analysis of the interests and values of political actors, positions, and events is thus lost in the extreme reversals between a form of skeptical, surface-level narration that casts a false veil of neutrality over the political field and a form of theatrical, moral condemnation of particular individuals that abstracts them from their structural context.

Furthermore, the skeptical, simplified vision of politics emerging from the journalistic field reflects a "cynical" perspective on politics that reduces the political field to "an arena full of hyper-ambitious people with no convictions but with a clear sense of the competitive situation and of their opposing interests."[18] The lack of detailed analysis of the socio-ethical meaning of political events, which stems from a skeptical, cynical orientation masquerading as neutrality, is dangerous not simply because journalists have the power to bestow politicians "vital symbolic support"[19], but because that power is growing as "[p]olitical success increasingly depends on adapting to the demands of the journalistic field, which becomes a 'caucus' increasingly responsible for 'making' both politicians and their reputation."[20] In this way, the skeptical cynicism of the journalistic field generates "a break […] with the segments of the public most concerned with the real consequences of these political positions on their lives and on society at

[16] Bourdieu, 8.
[17] Bourdieu, 5.
[18] Bourdieu, 5.
[19] Bourdieu, 4.
[20] Bourdieu, 5.

large[,]" which is intensified by the distorting effect of "the social distance that comes with high economic and social status"[21] associated with many political journalists. At the same time, the journalistic field itself is hierarchically organized and complicated by "the growth of a vast journalistic subproletariat, forced into a kind of self-censorship by an increasingly precarious job situation."[22]

More so, Bourdieu contends that the consequences of the journalistic field's skeptical, simplifying vision of politics reach beyond elections to produce "a general effect of depoliticization or, more precisely, disenchantment with politics"[23] in the face of "a litany of events with no beginning and no real end, thrown together only because they occurred at the same time" such that "an earthquake in Turkey turns up next to proposed budget cuts, and a championship sports team is featured alongside a big murder trial."[24] Stripped of ethical, socio-political meaning, coverage of politics is frequently reduced to montages of decontextualized events that alienate the public. In this way, unfolding events narrated by the journalistic field "are reduced to the level of the absurd because we only see those elements that can be shown on television at a given moment, cut off from their antecedents and consequences."[25] The epistemological conditions of the journalistic field are thus informed by "a patent lack of interest in subtle, nuanced changes, or in processes that, like the continental drift, remain unperceived and imperceptible in the moment, revealing their effects only in the long term[,]" which "repeats and reinforces the structural amnesia induced by day-to-day thinking and by the competition that

[21] Bourdieu, 5.
[22] Bourdieu, 6.
[23] Bourdieu, 6.
[24] Bourdieu, 6.
[25] Bourdieu, 6-7.

equates what's important with what's new[.]"[26] Analysis of the meaning of particular events within the broader socio-economic, political, and historical conditions of society is therefore not simply absent but precluded by the vision of politics frequently offered by televised political media.

More so, televised political journalism's rapid temporality and lack of thorough analysis, which results from the demand for a continual stream of new entertainment and the dependence on insider information obtained from anonymous "sources", render the political journalistic field incapable of doing "what would be necessary to make events (say, an outbreak of violence in a high school) really understandable, that is, [it] cannot reinsert them in a network of relevant relationships (such as the family structure, which is tied to the job market, itself tied to governmental hiring policies, and so on)."[27] Characterized by an overwhelming tendency to remove events from the context of their constitutive relationships with other elements and processes of society, the journalistic field generates a vision that is "at once dehistoricized and dehistoricizing, fragmented and fragmenting" such that even those who remain interested in understanding the meaning and consequences of political events for affected communities and society as a whole must struggle against "a climate hostile to action whose effect is visible only over time."[28] Televised political media's montages of decontextualized events, "having appeared with no explanation," therefore "disappear with no solution[.]"[29]

Moreover, the journalistic field not only discourages understanding and consideration of possible responses to complex problems that are embedded in broader, often imperceptible socio-economic, political, and environmental conditions and processes, such as poverty, climate

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[26] Bourdieu, 7.
[27] Bourdieu, 7.
[28] Bourdieu, 7.
[29] Bourdieu, 7.

change, gun violence, police brutality, and structural racism, but through its dehistoricizing, fantastical vision of politics, the journalistic field amplifies and worsens such problems. Here, as an example that is more timely than ever, Bourdieu considers the way that televised political journalism "shows us a world full of ethnic wars, racist hatred, violence and crime—a world full of incomprehensible and unsettling dangers from which we must withdraw for our protection"[30]—as an example of the dangerous, amplifying effect televised political journalism often produces. The decontextualized, fragmented narration of racial violence serves "not to mobilize or politicize", but instead "only increases xenophobic fears, just as the delusion that crime and violence are always and everywhere on the rise feeds anxieties and phobias about safety in the streets and at home."[31] In this sense, televised political journalism is not a neutral medium through which pre-existing affects and ideas percolate without modification, but one of the constitutive elements of the epistemological and affective conditions of depoliticization, disenchantment, fear, and anxiety in which the phenomena of "alternative facts" and the mass circulation of racialized pride and hatred are embedded.

Engaged in the production of a particular relationship to time, according to which time is always scarce, rapidly passing, and experienced as a sort of vertigo, by way of the fleeting succession of dramatized, fragmented images and simplified, conjectural information, televised political journalism and political media more generally are also involved in the formation of what Lauren Berlant calls "historical sense", which refers to the conception of a present moment from within that moment. The notion of historical sense is well suited to articulate the stakes of the unique form of televised political journalism as well as its particular epistemological and affective dimensions since, for Berlant, historical sense encounters the present as "not at first an

[30] Bourdieu, 8.
[31] Bourdieu, 8.

object but a mediated affect" that "is also a thing that is sensed and under constant revision, a temporal genre whose conventions emerge from personal and public filtering of the situations and events that are happening in an extended now."[32] The question, then, concerns contemporary political media as generative of a particular, disenchanting historical sense of the present.

Through the "policy of demagogic simplification" structuring the mass transmission of political information and its attendant depoliticizing effect on the public, the journalistic field is an example of the personal and public filtering of the present from which forms of historical sense emerge. Furthermore, because of the incredible significance of political media not only for the symbolic status of politicians but the public's perception and disposition towards politics more generally, the consideration of political media is fundamental for understanding how historical sense of the emerging present is formed in contemporary society more generally. In this way, political media is a key field in which people encounter "simultaneous, incoherent narratives of what's going on and what seems possible and blocked in personal/collective life" and experience "anxiety about how to assess various knowledges and intuitions about what's happening and how to eke out a sense of what follows from those assessments."[33] In this sense, political media produces a historical sense of the present shaped by overwhelming confusion and anxiety in the face of contradictory accounts of reality and epistemic uncertainty about what information to trust. More so, following from the idea that forms of historical sense "provide an affective expectation of the experience of watching something unfold,"[34] televised political journalism as a form of political media in particular can be said to produce an affective predisposition towards unfolding political events marked by cynicism, fear, anxiety, anger, and

[32] Berlant, 4.
[33] Berlant, 4.
[34] Berlant, 6.

confusion.

Among the temporal genres constitutive of the present, Berlant includes the situation, which is defined as "a state of things in which *something* that will perhaps matter is unfolding amid the usual activity of life" as well as "a state of animated and animating suspension that forces itself on consciousness, that produces a sense of the emergence of something in the present that may become an event."[35] Moreover, Berlant adds that what is unique about the situation as a temporal genre is that one "can't have fidelity to a 'situation' because they don't know what it is or how to be in it [such that], if one follows Badiou's idiom, the event is that element in the situation that elaborates the potential good in a radical break, [while] the antisovereign effect of the situation that undoes the subject and general sureties threatens ethical action."[36] Here, through reference to Pierre Badiou's notion of the event as "a drama that shocks being into radically open situations" and thereby "constitutes the potential for a scene of sociality[,]"[37] the suspended state of anticipation and uncertainty that the temporal genre of the situation produces, referred to as "the antisovereign effect of the situation," destabilizes the orthodox foundations of certainty, such as the habituated faith in government as an inherent force of justice or in the inherent stability of financial markets, through which the subject constitutes itself and by which the subject is assured and able to act. In this way, the situation is "a genre of social time and practice in which a relation of persons and worlds is sensed to be changing but the rules for habitation and the genres of storytelling about it are unstable, in chaos."[38] The situation thus produces a generalized uncertainty in response to the perception of changes that can't be understood.

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[35] Berlant, 5.
[36] Berlant, 5.
[37] Berlant, 5.
[38] Berlant, 6.

Berlant notes, however, "while sometimes situations organize into world-shifting events or threaten the present with their devastating latency, mostly they do not."[39] For Berlant, the persistent failure of the situation to become an event raises questions concerning how "we learn to process *x* happening as an emerging event" as well as how "the conventional genres of event potentially foreclose the possibility of the event taking shape otherwise, as genres *y* and *z*, which might hover as possibilities but end up being bracketed and stored somewhere until repetitions call them back[.]"[40] Here, the analysis of how televised political journalism detaches events from their "political necessity"[41] and produces a historical sense of the present marked by a depoliticizing feeling of cynicism and disorientation that in turn constitutes how people encounter and learn about the emerging situations of the political field helps explain why so many political situations, even when they're repeatedly referred to as transformative events, never actually become events in the ethical-political sense of a radical transformation towards a new sociality invoked by Badiou. Moreover, the rapid, simplified montage of overstatements that Bourdieu observes in televised political journalism can be considered productive not only of the genre of situation, but also what Berlant refers to as "the genre of crisis", which "can distort something structural and ongoing within ordinariness into something that seems shocking and exceptional."[42] In this sense, CNN commentator Wolff Blitzer's show "The Situation Room" is just that, a situation room, that is, an echoing space in which the uncertainty of situations is invoked and suspended before they have the chance to become events. In this way, Berlant's notion of historical sense establishes the broader stakes of Bourdieu's analysis of televised political media and the philosophical study of contemporary media more generally.

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[39] Berlant, 6.
[40] Berlant, 6.
[41] Bourdieu, 7.
[42] Berlant, 7.

Conclusion

The three preceding chapters are intended to serve as particular analyses of specific dimensions of political media—including its epistemological dimensions, its affective dimensions, and its formal dimensions—as well as elements of a broader philosophical study of contemporary political media. As elements of a philosophical study of contemporary political media, each chapter's analysis is designed with the goal of offering supplementary insight to the analyses of the other chapters.

As such, Bergson's theorization of the limits of human intellect, such as its reliance on partial, fixed images that struggle to account for processual change, serves as a broader epistemological perspective through which Bourdieu's account of the media's fragmentation of thought can be interpreted as a contingent amplification of the limits of the intellect. Moreover, Spinoza's analysis of affects, such as joy, sadness, hatred, and desire, provides a thorough account of another limit of the intellect that Bergson identifies, consisting in the distorting effect of particular interests and desires. More so, Bourdieu's analysis of the circulation of racialized fear and anxiety through televised political journalism instantiates Spinoza's conception of the sad, hateful affects associated with fragmented, inadequate ideas as well as the social imitation of affects as a fundamental dimension of political communication.

Furthermore, following from Lewis Gordon's recent observation that "[f]ighting back requires understanding, at least, the gravity and dynamics of our historical situation[,]"[1] this philosophical study of contemporary political media strives to offer an improved understanding of one of the most important dynamics of the current historical moment, the dangers it presents, as well as its stakes for the consideration of the affective, epistemological, and political

[1] Gordon, "Perilous Times."

conditions of society more generally. At the same, through the application of key ideas in the work of Bergson, Spinoza, and Bourdieu as well as significant, secondary commentaries to problem of contemporary political media, this study seeks to contribute to the on-going discussion and interpretation of the continued significance of each of these thinker's work. Finally, this philosophical study of contemporary political media hopes to further establish the theorization of political media as a necessary feature of the broader philosophical conception of the present.

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