

Social Sciences, Arts, and Humanities in the Post-Truth Era

Social Sciences, Arts, and Humanities in the Post-Truth Era:

The Reality Machine

Edited by

V. Doğan Günay, Murat Kalelioğlu
and Sibel Bayram

Cambridge
Scholars
Publishing



Social Sciences, Arts, and Humanities in the Post-Truth Era: The Reality Machine

Edited by V. Doğan Günay, Murat Kalelioğlu and Sibel Bayram

This book first published 2024

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2PA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Copyright © 2024 by V. Doğan Günay, Murat Kalelioğlu, Sibel Bayram
and contributors

All rights for this book reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced,
stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means,
electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without
the prior permission of the copyright owner.

ISBN (10): 1-0364-0559-1

ISBN (13): 978-1-0364-0559-5

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Foreword	vii
Chapter One.....	1
The Semiotic Adventure from Truth to Post-Truth	
Züleyha Hande Akata and Yakup Yeşilyaprak	
Chapter Two	25
Not Knowing That You Don't Know: Performing Arts and Literature in the Age of Anger and Post-Truth	
Sibel Bayram and Muhammad Safeer Awan	
Chapter Three	39
Post-Truth Era and the Erosion of Trust: The Intersection of Politics, Media, Business, and Economy	
Muhammad Haroon	
Chapter Four	61
Construction of Society of the Spectacle and Publicity Images in the Post- Truth Era: Post-Truth Observations on Social Media	
Esra Saniye Tuncer	
Chapter Five	79
Truth and Post-Truth in Eco's Theory and Narrative Creativity	
Bujar Hoxha	
Chapter Six	91
Test of Socio-Emotional Development in Children using Digital Technology in the Era of Post-Truth: A Systematic Review	
Eda Yazgin	

FOREWORD

After the initial agitation and upheaval that ‘post-truth’ raised in our socio-political spheres, the academic world is now in a position to contemplate the degree and depth of its influence. How is it being (ab)used in the world of politics, media, economy, and other social concerns? We understand why post-truth eclipses truth, the politics surrounding the manufacturing of a chosen ‘truth’ or multiple ‘truths’, and the confusions that are peddled in the public sphere. While dealing with the shenanigans of post-truth, an important question is whether it is possible to write about it with ‘dispassionate neutrality.’ When we must challenge post-truth, a balanced and even approach is perhaps not possible, as creating a ‘false equivalence’ is its hallmark.

It is because post-truth is a strange phenomenon that creates and deals with multiple half-truths; that is, there is a hint of truth in its falsehoods. At least this is how it is felt by the public who are the ultimate victims of post-truth. Democracies the world over are consistently compromised; people’s trust in democracy is constantly eroding. In fact, disillusionment and apathy is growing about the future of humanity. There are lies and half-truths about the scope of environmental destruction, the way history is being rewritten and historiography as a discipline is being manipulated by politicians to inculcate hatred against their opponents. A case in point is the politics of the BJP in India. But unfortunately, that is not the only case in view; scores of right-wing political parties are doing the same even in some European locations.

The purpose of this book is to evaluate and dissect the ways in which post-truth operates in the public sphere and social media landscape. Without understanding and exposing the workings of post-truth and its uses by the politicians, media, and other ideological state apparatuses, a meaningful social change for the larger good of the masses, irrespective of time and space, cannot be imagined. Post-truth as a new machine of falsehood

works because once a statement is spread as fact, the public neither has the expertise nor the inclination to dig deep for the truth. The social media where such falsehoods are usually spread and believed makes matters worse. The politicians and the deep state know that the public is mostly credulous. So, even if the truth is eventually dug out, the damage has been done. It is like an accusation of being a witch and a subsequent trial by the Church during sixteenth-century America; until the truth is established, the accused is persecuted socially. As a result, truth becomes the greatest casualty. “This is not necessarily a campaign to say that facts do not matter, but instead a conviction that facts can always be shaded, selected, and presented within a political context that favors one interpretation of truth over another.”¹ It is because generally, people believe what they want to believe. This is cognitive bias and those who have control over the propaganda machine know it well.

Post-truth plays upon the fears of the public: fear of aliens (immigrants), fear of the future, fear of the enemy, fear of religious and cultural others, and so on. Even if social phenomena are not supported by hard, statistical facts, politicians, and the deep state, working in connivance with the mainstream media as well as with big business corporations, always try to beguile the public imagination by inculcating various fears.

Some people believe that post-truth is not a new phenomenon as falsehood had always worked in subtle ways throughout human history. As Lee McIntyre writes: “Some may wonder whether the idea of post-truth is really all that new. Isn’t it just synonymous with propaganda? Aren’t ‘alternative facts’ just falsehoods? But it is not that simple... To say that facts are less important than feelings in shaping our beliefs about empirical matters seems new...”² They also compare it with their understanding of postmodernism because, in their view, postmodernism also allows the possibilities of multiple interpretations of a single ‘reality’, as Nietzsche pronounced that there were no truths but only interpretations. It is

¹ Lee McIntyre (2018). *Post-Truth*. (E-book). The MIT Press. Cambridge, Massachusetts; London, England. P.17

² Ibid. p. 9

important to challenge this damaging and naïve linking of postmodernism with the politics of muddying the truth in our times.

The academic and intellectual responses to the idea and practice of post-truth have been numerous. So why yet another book on this much-debated subject? The aim is to bring together writers from various disciplines and genres to write how, while living in the era of post-truth, their disciplines have been influenced and what were the intellectual responses in their respective fields? As is evident from the book's chapters, the results are interesting and intriguing. Almost all disciplines have been impacted by the politics and operations of post-truth. It is not confined to the study of political and media discourses only.

Chapter One, "The Semiotic Adventure from Truth to Post-Truth" by Züleyha Hande Akata and Yakup Yeşilyaprak, is an attempt at tracing the history of semiotics as a science of interpretation and its relationship with contemporary debates on truth/post-truth.

Chapter Two, "Not Knowing That You Don't Know: Performing Arts and Literature in The Age of Anger and Post-Truth", provides an overview of the birth of post-truth and its impact on public discourse and decision-making. It explains how the rise of social media, the spread of fake news, the growing mistrust of authorities, and other factors have all contributed to the emergence of a political and social environment where objective facts are less influential than appeals to emotions and personal beliefs in swaying public opinion. The chapter also explores philosophical ideas that cast doubt on the idea of absolute truth and emphasize the value of unique viewpoints and circumstances, such as relativism, postmodernism, and perspectivalism. It demonstrates how these ideas have influenced areas like literature, the arts, and social sciences, and have generated a lot of discussion and criticism within philosophy. The chapter also examines how post-truth has affected the performing arts and how it has questioned the notion of a constant and objective reality, allowing for the investigation of novel kinds of performance and storytelling. It also talks about how post-truth performing arts have come under fire and been accused of fostering relativism and a lack of accountability for accurate and truthful creative depiction. The chapter concludes by looking at the performing

arts' hazy future and the ongoing conversations and disagreements among performers, viewers, and society at large. In determining the future of post-truth performing arts, it emphasizes the significance of technological advancements, alterations in public attitudes about truth and information, and the continual growth of artistic practices and processes.

As the reader might have realized through this introduction, the book consists of diverse sub-themes knitted around the main theme of the relationship between “Truth” and “Post-truth”. The penetration of post-truth as a socio-political phenomenon into other aspects of our global existence is undeniable; not only in media discourses and politics, which have received the major chunk of its influence, but our international relations as well as personal, individual relations have also gone through upheavals. That is why we live in an age of global, local as well as personal risks. The “Age of mis/dis/information” is here to stay for a long time.

In Chapter Three, “Post-Truth Era and the Erosion of Trust: The Intersection of Politics, Media, Business, and Economy”, the author discusses the post-truth era and the decline in trust that has taken place at the nexus of politics, media, business, and the economy. The current situation is referred to as the “post-truth era,” in which appeals to emotions, personal views, and opinions are more effective in influencing public opinion and decision-making than facts and reality. The emergence of social media has contributed to this trend by making it possible for false information, fake news, and conspiracy theories to propagate at an unprecedented rate. As it affects the legitimacy of organizations, people, and leaders, the decline in trust has enormous ramifications for democratic society. This chapter explores the causes of the erosion of trust, such as the decrease of traditional media sources, the emergence of social media echo chambers, and information manipulation by influential individuals. The nexus of politics, media, business, and the economy is also discussed in this chapter as it relates to how confidence has been eroded. Media channels have been increasingly utilized by political figures and corporations to influence public opinion, frequently at the price of unbiased reporting and truthful information. This trend has been made worse by the influence of money in politics and the consolidation of media ownership. The

chapter ends by emphasizing the need for greater accountability and transparency in the political, media, corporate, and economic systems as well as the significance of re-establishing trust in institutions and leaders. It makes the case that all social players, including governments, corporations, and members of civil society, must work together to repair confidence.

Chapter Four, “Construction of the Society of the Spectacle and Publicity Images in The Post-Truth Era: Post-Truth Observations on Social Media” by Esra Saniye Tuncer, uses the terminology of semiotics, such as ‘Image’ and ‘Spectacle’, to study the transition from the “New Image Era” to the “Fake Image Era” to analyse the values and myths that were made prominent in popular culture by the social change in the 1980s in Türkiye. Many simulative, virtual, fabricated, and mimetic platforms are at work to peddle the new myths for the profit and benefit of those in power.

Chapter Five, “Truth and Post-Truth in Eco’s Theory and Narrative Creativity” by Dr. Bujar Hoxha, studies the semiotics of truth and post-truth in the light of Umberto Eco’s claims that “semiotics is a science of lying”, especially in the realm of artistic creation. Invoking Eco’s encoding and decoding processes, he attempts “to reach the point of interpretation by exemplifying it to demonstrate disclosing the truth and ‘post-truth’ in various cultural and phenomenological circumstances.” In other words: "artistic realities" of various sorts show a different way of a "fictive reality".

Chapter Six, “Test of Socio-Emotional Development in Children Using Digital Technology in the Era of Post-Truth: A Systematic Review” by Eda Yazgın, provides a systematic review of the results of 20 articles that have been published between 2017 and 2022 and scientifically examines the impact of excessive screen exposure on children’s mental growth and cognitive functions. Additionally, the present study evaluates the results of the studies together with the recommendations of scientific health authorities and discusses these results within the framework of the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. Based on the results, this study provides evidence-based information about play-enriched developmental risk prevention and intervention programs for children, especially the use of

nature and art as effective tools that will impact the quality of relationships between child and parent and child and teacher.

To cope with these risks, there is a need to develop inclusive educational approaches, both home, and school-based, which are child-centered, and take into account the fact that children develop through their senses, one-to-one, and face-to-face with the direct participation of the child, peers, parents, and teachers. These approaches should also use the natural environment and tools and take advantage of the healing power of nature.

—Editors

Prof. Dr. V. Doğan GÜNEY³, Dokuz Eylül University, İzmir, TÜRKİYE

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Murat KALELIOĞLU, Mardin Artuklu University,
Mardin, TÜRKİYE

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Sibel BAYRAM, Düzce University, Düzce, TÜRKİYE

³ We are deeply saddened by the unexpected loss of Prof. Dr. V. Doğan GÜNEY, who had made significant contributions to science throughout his life, on 15 May 2023. Prof. Güney also contributed to this book collection as an editor. We respectfully commemorate him.

CHAPTER ONE

THE SEMIOTIC ADVENTURE FROM TRUTH TO POST-TRUTH

ZÜLEYHA HANDE AKATA
AND YAKUP YEŞİLYAPRAK

Introduction

What is real? In the post-truth era, there are many answers to this question. The age has invalidated *absolute truth* and *real* and replaced them with *appearances of truth* that represent many forms of *real*. In this age, it is almost impossible to establish a healthy *sign-signifier* relationship between real and truth. So how should the concepts of real and truth, which can be regarded as the knowledge and intuition of the real, be evaluated in the post-truth era? *Post-truth* essentially corresponds to a process of signification. In this process of signification, the issue of how fictional truth and, through this truth, the real is made meaningful is one of the research topics of semiotics. In the study, firstly, the concepts of *truth*, *real*, *reality* and *post-truth* are discussed by determining their fields of meaning. Subsequently, the concept of *post-truth* as a signification process is examined using the analytical methods of semiotics, taking into account its relations with other concepts. Moreover, the relativity of *real* in the reality of social life is discussed on the conceptual level of *post-truth*. The concepts of *real*, *truth* and *post-truth* are also evaluated by considering their relations with each other. After the evaluation of these concepts, the issue of *how the truth has become trivialized* is analyzed on the conceptual level by using semiotic methods such as the theory of enunciation, the subjects and modalities in the actantial schema, and the

semiotic square. This study aims to present an analysis of the situation in today's societies, where *truth* and *real* have been lost and replaced by *post-truth*, and an example of how a social analysis can be made through literary semiotics methods.

Real/Reality, Truth and Post-truth

There are different approaches to defining and naming the concepts *real/reality*, *truth*, *post-truth*. These concepts, which are related to subjects in many fields, such as ontology, semantics, epistemology or philosophy of language, gain different semantic values with different perspectives.

Real

Real refers to the existence of phenomena independent of the human mind. Real can be evaluated through two main definitions: “1. What exists, as opposed to what is thought, designed, imagined. 2. What exists independently of consciousness”.¹ As the definitions emphasize, *real* is a form of existence, and it is the subject of existential philosophy. *Real* is “what is about things as opposed to what is about images”² and its existence is certain and objective. It exists objectively on its own, outside of all human values and judgments. *Reality*, on the other hand, is semantically related to *real* and expresses the world of things as the referent of phenomena. Akarsu defines two types of reality: 1. *Existence that is the independent of consciousness and designs*. 2. *Things that have been experienced within a certain period and that are concretely encountered in experiences and experiments*.³ According to these reality types, reality means something that, in contrast to subjectivity, has objective validity.

In addition to these concepts, it is also possible to mention the concept of *linguistic reality*. There are two types of reality on the linguistic level:

¹ Bedia Akarsu, *Felsefe Terimleri Sözlüğü* [Dictionary of Philosophy Terms], (Ankara: Savaş Yayınları, 1984), 74.

² Afşar Timuçin, *Felsefe Sözlüğü* [Dictionary of Philosophy], (İstanbul: Bulut Yayınları, 2004), 228.

³ Akarsu, *Felsefe Terimleri Sözlüğü*, 74.

intra-linguistic reality and *extra-linguistic reality*. *Intra-linguistic reality* consists of the appearance of reality that has become a phenomenon by gaining existence on the linguistic plane. The question of whether a linguistic phenomenon corresponds to something in the real world can be answered through *extra-linguistic reality*. Intra-linguistic reality is the reconstruction of extra-linguistic reality through linguistic phenomena: “Extra-linguistic real referents gain function in the formation of the utterance, and they establish the context between the reality of the intra-linguistic world and the extra-linguistic world”.⁴ When it comes to a fictional narrative, there is not a *reality*, but an *intra-linguistic reality*. However, the fiction of intra-linguistic reality is provided by extra-linguistic reality.

The relationship established between *intra-linguistic reality* and *extra-linguistic reality* and explained by the principle of arbitrariness leads to the re-presentation of the real. In the similarities and contrasts between a narrative and the real world, it is seen that the fictional reality does not mean the real, but replaces it: “Language is not a simple and passive reflection of reality, but is the constitutive element of reality itself”.⁵ This is nothing more than fictional reality pretending to be real. It is the perception of a phenomenon that is not real but imitates real. In the intra-lingual reality, there is not the real itself, but a re-presentation of the real that resembles and imitates the real. Through the fictionalization, or the narrativization, of the real, it is just possible to create a perception of *real-likeness* and the *real-likeness* never means reality. It may refer to the real, and it may also mean the real to some extent, but this cannot change the fact that it is a re-presentation of the real, and it never directly means the real itself.

Truth

True can be defined as “The knowledge that is appropriate to reality. The thought that is appropriate to its object. The reflection of reality in

⁴ Ayşe (Eziler) Kıran and Zeynel Kıran, *Yazınsal Okuma Süreçleri [The Processes of Literary Reading]*, (Ankara: Seçkin Yayıncılık, 2011), 130.

⁵ Cafer Şen, “Dilbilim Okulları [Schools of Linguistics]”, *Türk Dili*, (2015): 95.

consciousness or its appearance in consciousness”.⁶ Here, one of the key elements of meaning is the word *appropriate*. True can be mentioned or value can be attributed to it in terms of its similarity and appropriateness to the real. As for truth, it is “the mental representation that is appropriate to real”.⁷ Truth is the appearance of real that has become a phenomenon by gaining existence on a fictional plane and is the subject of epistemology. Truth and real are related but different concepts and should not be confused. *Truth* can be considered as a perception, intuition or knowledge of the real. When it comes to fictions and phenomena, one speaks of *truth*, not of real. There is a relationship between truth and reality that is similar to the relationship between sign and reference.

Post-Truth

In a global age, the polycentric information and the easy accessibility of information have made the process of interpreting and evaluating information more valuable than the process of obtaining it. The ability to be aware of everything at any moment and the fact that this happens in a polycentric way has led to the emergence of many views of truth, making it more necessary to question what the real and the truth are. Therefore, post-truth is both a popular and controversial concept. Different approaches are seen in the definitions and evaluations of the concept. So, what is post-truth, which is the subject of many debates and has gained popularity? This concept is semantically related to many concepts like *real*, *reality*, *truth*, *dishonesty*, *deception*, etc. Since the evaluation of these concepts by associating them with each other would require another study, in this study they have been evaluated only in terms of their direct relevance to the topic. It has been concluded here that *post-truth*, which is a controversial concept, is a process in which many derivatives of truth emerge, and at the same time, it means the fading and trivialization of truth that is appropriate to the real.

⁶ Timuçin, *Felsefe Sözlüğü*, 159.

⁷ Yalın Alpay, *Yalanın Siyaseti [The Politics of Lying]*, (İstanbul: Destek Yayınları, 2022), 27.

The concept of *post-truth* was first used by Steve Tesich in his essay titled “A Government of Lies” published in *Nation* in 1992. Ralph Keyes has stated that he saw the concept for the first time in Tesich’s essay and titled his book, which he published in 2004, “The Post-Truth Era: Dishonesty and Deception in Contemporary Life”. These studies are accepted as the works that have the first examples of the concept. In 2016, the concept was chosen as the word of the year by Oxford dictionaries and defined as “relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief”.⁸ There are many reasons why this word was chosen as the word of the year by Oxford dictionaries, but the main ones are Donald Trump’s presidential election in the United States and the Brexit process in the UK. Although the emergence of this concept and its popularization and widespread usage is a recent development, and the situations associated with the concept seem to be a product of today’s society, it is possible to say that the concept of post-truth has a much longer history. McIntyre notes that *the roots of the post-truth go back thousands of years to the evolution of the cognitive irrationalities*.⁹ It can be put forward that the existence of this phenomenon has been revealed with different names in many different fields of study from the past to the present. In fact, the concepts that Barthes¹⁰ called *myth* and Baudrillard¹¹ called *simulacra* are functionally compatible with *the fictional truths* created in the post-truth era. These concepts, which basically express a process of signification, correspond to a meaning that replaces and invalidates the real. *Post-truth*, on the other hand, has become a phenomenon that has gained popularity as it affects wider masses and is made more visible through today’s developing communication technologies.

The dynamic structure of contemporary society requires constant change and transformation. Many factors in a social structure where the values of

⁸ *Oxford Languages*, Accessed on 02 June 2022, <https://languages.oup.com/word-of-the-year/2016/>.

⁹ Lee McIntyre, *Post-Truth*, (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2018), 14.

¹⁰ Roland Barthes, *Mythologies* (Trans. Annette Lavers), (New York, Farrar, Straus & Giroux: The Noonday Press, 1991).

¹¹ Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation* (Trans. Sheila Faria Glaser), (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1994).

previous periods undergo change and transformation can contribute to the explanation of *post-truth*. It is possible to search for the basis of the emergence of the concept of *post-truth* in phenomena such as *postmodernism*, *the new media order*, *the decrease in trust in democracy* and *populism*.¹² The transition from modernism to postmodernism is one of the main reasons for *post-truth*. McIntyre notes the theses of postmodernism as follows: “there is no such thing as objective truth” and “any profession of truth is nothing more than a reflection of the political ideology of the person who is making it”.¹³ These theses can be considered to be the main reasons for the *post-truth* situation. With postmodernism, truth, which is regarded as absolute in modernism, lost its value and has been replaced by derivatives of truth that vary according to everyone. According to postmodernism, there is no single truth about anything; there are countless truths.

Another main reason for the emergence of post-truth is the change in forms of communication as a result of technological developments. Every value that forms the social structure by cooperating with *the new media* has been exposed to a process of change and transformation in the new technology-based communication universe. New media technologies are the main tools that create the *post-truth*: “The truth is covered up with conspiracy theories, fallacies, scandals, distortions, fake news, tabloids, shocking posts, unverified information and content produced for populist purposes”.¹⁴ Although it would seem that with evolving technology and social media, individuals with all sorts of differences have had the opportunity to communicate on the same level, social media algorithms have instead created an unexpected communication environment. With

¹² Alpay, *Yalanın Siyaseti*, 36.

¹³ McIntyre, *Post-Truth*, 126.

¹⁴ Yücel Özdemir, “Post-Truth ve Folklor: Hakikat Sonrası Dönemde Gelenek Bilgisinde Sapmalar [Post-Truth and Folklore: Deviations in Knowledge of Tradition in the Post-Truth Era]” in *Dijital Kültür-3: Tradijital - Post Truth - Memetik - Kimlik - Medya - İnternet - Edebiyat ve Halkbilimi Araştırmaları* [Digital Culture-3: Tradigital - Post Truth - Memetic - Identity - Media - İnternet - Literature and Folklore Studies], ed. Uğur Durmaz, (Kocaeli: Arı Sanat Yayınları, 2021), 21.

filter bubbles and *echo chambers*, an antidemocratic communication environment has been created on social media where similar and close views are gathered together, rather than a democratic communication environment where differences coexist.

With the possibilities of digital media, post-truth corresponds to a process that is constructed not only on the linguistic level, but also at the visual and auditory level. Many elements of the real are used in the creation of truth. Through these elements, it is intended to establish a connection between the real and truth, and the elements no longer represent the real completely. People who are disconnected from real life through the constant production of fake news are enabled to create a perception of reality in which only their own truth is at the center. Moreover, transforming digital cultural elements into a consumption product and perceiving each phenomenon as consumable and replaceable has also changed the value of truth. Baudrillard says that *we live in a world where there is more and more information, and less and less meaning*.¹⁵ For the individuals of the modern age, who are exposed to unlimited information and do not know how to deal with this information, the *truth* has lost its importance and left its place to the appearances of truth devoid of *semantic* value.

Another main reason for post-truth is populism, which emerged as an opposition to democracy. The concept of post-truth, which emerged in a political context and is used to propagate political lies, creates a semantic value in the opposition of democracy and empowerment: “Populism has achieved an extraordinary harmony and articulation with the era of the trivialization of truth. Both concepts are against rational reasoning, feeding on factual data, elites and truth”.¹⁶ Populism takes advantage of both anti-reason and anti-science by displaying a political stance. It trivializes real and truth and replaces them with new *individual truths* by manipulating the *emotions* and *individual convictions* of its target audience: “If all the arguments are equally true, if everyone has their own truth, then there will be an alternative truth, not an absolute truth, and the politician will be able

¹⁵ Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, 79.

¹⁶ Alpay, *Yalanın Siyaseti*, 57.

to ‘sell’ his truth to his own voters”.¹⁷ In a situation where each group brings its own truth to the fore and ignores other truths, there is no possibility for evaluating the *truth* with an objective approach. Because of all these factors, *truth has become trivialized* in the modern age.

The Semiotic Adventure from Truth to Post-truth

Semiotics, which basically seeks to answer the question of *How is meaning formed?* aims to reveal how the processes of signification are formed and how they can be analyzed. Signification is primarily provided at the level of *intra-linguistic reality*. The meaning obtained as a result of the process of signification is transferred from the intra-linguistic reality plane to the real. The *intra-linguistic reality* plane corresponds to the *discursive structure* in the analysis process of semiotics. In the discursive structure, the fiction of *reality* represents the *truth*. At the level of intra-linguistic reality, *reality* is reconstructed in the appearance of *truth* through figures of *personification*, *temporalization* and *spatialization*: “It creates the ‘impression’ of referent at the level of language”.¹⁸ In other words, the fictional re-presentation of real is truth and truth is a process of signification. Semiotics aims to examine how fictional reality/truth and the *post-truth* that invalidates them are made meaningful in this process of signification.

Semiotics makes some inferences about *meaning* with the theories and methods that it develops in a subject-specific manner. While semiotics basically examines how meaning is formed, it evaluates the processes of signification by addressing both the generation and analysis processes. Algirdas Julien Greimas explains the signification process as the *generative course* (*Fr. parcours génératif*). The generative course consists of two levels, the *deep level* (*Fr. niveau profond*) and the *superficial level*

¹⁷ Emre Erdoğan and Pınar Uyan Semerci, “Hakikat Sonrası Tartışmalarının Gerçek Olmayan Varsayımlarını Ele Almak: Akıl, Bilim ve Demokrasi Karşıtlığı [Addressing the Unreal Assumptions of Post-Truth Discussions: The Opposition of Reason, Science and Democracy]”, *Pasajlar Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi* 4, (Ocak 2020): 97.

¹⁸ Kıran and Kıran, *Yazınsal Okuma Süreçleri*, 63.

(*Fr. niveau superficiel*).¹⁹ Greimas describes the generative course as a process which is followed from the deep level to the superficial level. Denis Bertrand, on the other hand, states that when a meaning needs to be analyzed, this process should be followed in reverse. When it comes to the analysis of a meaning, there is a three-stage structure in which the generative course is followed in reverse: *discursive structure*, *semio-narrative structure* and *deep structure*.²⁰ This generation and analysis process includes methods that can answer the question of *How is the truth trivialized?* in a multifaceted way. It is possible to see examples of the application of the theories and methods developed on the basis of *literary semiotics* in many different fields. These examples of application include analyzes specific to the *political* and *social* spheres. This study utilizes the theories and methods of literary semiotics to answer the question of *How is the truth trivialized?* In the study, *the theory of enunciation*, *the subject and modalities in the actantial schema*, and *the semiotic square* have been benefited in the analysis of the *post-truth* process.

The Theory of Enunciation

In the theory of enunciation, it is noted that *an utterance* gains a meaning in the context where it is located and generated. The signification process is evaluated by considering the network of relations of the generated utterance. Evaluation of *truth* as an utterance enables the analysis of both the truth and post-truth situations through *the theory of enunciation*. As an utterance created on the intra-linguistic reality plane, the network of relations of *the truth* that constitutes *the communicative relationship*, and *the situation of enunciation* gains a characteristic that determines the semantic value and sphere of influence of *the fictional truth*. *The individuals communicating, the speaker (the sender) and the receiver, who the speaker calls for, the moment of enunciation, the place of enunciation, and all objects that the speaker and the receiver can perceive*²¹ constitute

¹⁹ Algirdas Julien Greimas and Joseph Courtés, *Semiotics and Language: An Analytical Dictionary*, (Trans. Daniel Patte, James Lee, Edward McMahon II ve Gary Phillips), (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982), 134.

²⁰ Denis Bertrand, *Précis de Sémiotique Littéraire [Summary of Literary Semiotics]*, (Paris: Nathan, 2020), 29.

²¹ Kıran and Kıran, *Yazınsal Okuma Süreçleri*, 123.

the situation of enunciation. In other words, it is possible to say in a *truth* or *post-truth* situation, *the subject of enunciation*, *the subject of utterance*, *the receiver of enunciation*, *the moment of enunciation* and *the space of enunciation* are the elements that contribute to the signification process.

Truth, as an utterance, gains a semantic value depending on the context, time, and space of the society in which it is produced. In *post-truth*, on the other hand, these elements that enable *truth* and *real* to gain value have also become obscure and have been trivialized. In the post-truth era, many utterances are generated in the guise of *truth*. The subject of enunciation, that is, the source person of *the truth* generated as *an utterance*, has turned into a *polycentric structure* with the disappearance of knowledge and *truth* authorities in the modern age. In the generative process of *truth*, *the truth* generated by a single enunciation subject and presented to its receiver has been replaced by *an unspecified subject of enunciation*, consisting of polycentric and subjective truths. While talking about *the post-truth* process, Atalay draws attention not to an individual action but to a *collective action*.²² This *collective action* corresponds to the polycentric emergence of the act of enunciation. After being generated as an utterance, a truth becomes obscure and anonymized due to *the subject of enunciation*, *the moment of enunciation* and *the place of enunciation*, the generation environment of the utterance, the speed of diffusion offered by new media technologies, the form of the new media technologies and exposure to more than one *utterance* at the same time. The source of the utterance, which is produced in a polycentric way, becomes unclear and gains an untraceable quality. In addition, the existence of a source loses its importance in many cases. It can be said that this is the first stage where the truth becomes trivialized in semiotic analysis.

Despite the ambiguity of the subject of enunciation, in many cases the subject of the utterance can be specified. The bond between the subject of the utterance and the receiver of the utterance has a characteristic that will directly affect the judgment of the utterance: “If we are already motivated

²² Halime S. Atalay, “Hakikatin Önemini Yitirmesi ve Gündelik Hayatın Hoyratlaşan Dili [The Post-truth and the Harsh Language of Daily Life]”, *Pasajlar Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi* 4, (Ocak 2020): 186.

to want to believe certain things, it doesn't take much to tip us over to believing them, especially if others we care about already do so".²³ The answer to the question of *Who is the subject of the utterance?* directly determines the semantic value of the utterance. The position of the subject of the utterance and its effect on the receiver in terms of emotion and opinion can be directly associated with the utterance. In the *post-truth* situation, knowing the subject of the utterance or the subject of enunciation contributes to the negligibility of the utterance's relationship with *truth* and the *real*. The attitude towards the *truth* is determined in line with the sympathy, believability and reliability felt for the subject of the utterance. The belief and trust in the utterance is directly related to the value attributed to the subject of the utterance.

The receiver of the enunciation is the most important element of the situation of enunciation in the *post-truth*: "'you' is as important as 'me' in order to make sense of utterances".²⁴ This is because depending on the receiver's attitude and perception, there will be an opinion about *the real* and *the truth*: "Post-truth is not about reality; it is about the way that humans react to reality".²⁵ Therefore, the reception attitude of the receiver of the enunciation in the post-truth era constitutes the basic dynamic of this whole process. *The receiver of enunciation* is in a position to not question and care about *the subject, moment and place of the enunciation* in many cases. The receiver directly considers whether the *utterance* coincides with his own feelings and convictions. The receiver of the enunciation approaches the utterance with a *subjective* attitude and ignores reality: "Sometimes the subjective attitude tends to change the facts by reaching the limits of sentimentality and self-interest. In such a case, even in the face of concrete evidence, the subjective attitude may stubbornly reject the real".²⁶ A similar attitude is seen in *post-truth*. The subject rejects objective reality or other subjective truths in the face of his own

²³ McIntyre, *Post-Truth*, 62.

²⁴ Ece Korkut, *Söz ve Kimlik [Parole and Identity]*, (Ankara: Seçkin Yayıncılık, 2017), 65.

²⁵ McIntyre, *Post-Truth*, 172.

²⁶ Korkut, *Söz ve Kimlik*, 71.

subjective truths and only accepts *truths* and utterances that are suitable for his own subjective reality.

In post-truth, there is a transfer of an utterance to the plane of truth, not as a whole but in sections. The utterance is transferred to the plane of truth in a fragmentation that will obscure its relation with the real: “Every individual who uses language perceives this reality by dividing it into parts depending on his own interest, attention and even purpose”.²⁷ The fact that the receiver of the enunciation perceives the utterance in this fragmentation prevents him from seeing the utterance’s connection with the real as a whole. Each part is related to the real, but these parts appear as fictional truths, in the form of a distorted view of reality, and they look as if they are disconnected from each other. All of them have a connection with the real, but none of them is an objective sign of the real. The receiver of the enunciation fills the lack of knowledge of these parts of the truth with his own opinions. In this fragmentation and on the plane where the relations between the parts are broken, instead of a single *truth*, many different truths related to the real are mentioned, and this causes a situation where the question “What is *the truth*?” and accordingly “What is the real?” becomes *trivialized*.

In the post-truth era, the semantic value attributed to the *moment* and the *space of enunciation* loses its importance to a great extent. Through the change of communication styles and with the fact that communication can be provided at any time as a result of technological developments and that the communication space has gained a virtual quality, utterances becomes producible in different moments and spaces. *The moment of enunciation* that should make the utterance meaningful is *the post-truth age*. This moment of enunciation directly causes the utterance to lose its meaning. This is because the feelings of trust and belief in real and truth have been lost. There is a meaning, but the value of that meaning is relative. The place of enunciation, on the other hand, gains a transformable quality by becoming ambiguous. With the ambiguity of the situation of enunciation of the utterance, the utterance loses its semantic value. With the continuous change of the situation of enunciation of the utterance or its

²⁷ Kıran and Kıran, *Yazınsal Okuma Süreçleri*, 63.

presentation in different ways, the semantic value of the utterance turns into a slippery semantic value that constantly changes and transforms. The process of receiving this utterance by the receiver of enunciation also varies depending on the enunciation situations.

The Actantial Schema, The Subject and The Modalities

Semiotic methods can also be used in social and daily life analysis. Günay notes that the descriptions used in semiotic analysis, such as *the narrative program*, *the model of the actors*, and *the modalities*, can be applied to real events as well as to fictional structures and can be used to make sense of daily lives.²⁸ In the concept of *post-truth*, the subject, who positions himself as *an individual* against the truth, and his narrative can be analyzed through semiotic methods. When it comes to a narrative in semiotics, it is possible to mention a basic narrative program. If human life is evaluated as a basic narrative program, it can be said that human beings try to reach *the value object* throughout their lives. Although this value object is different for each person, it can be explained by *the search for meaning* or *the search for truth*, which is basically the individual's effort to make his or her life meaningful. For human beings, who live in a chain of signification throughout their lives, the search for meaning or truth continues consciously or unconsciously. Therefore, if the human being is considered as the subject of the narrative of life, this truth becomes his value object.

²⁸ V. Doğan Günay, *Göstergebilim Yazıları [Semiotic Essays]*, (İstanbul: Multilingual, 2002), 122.

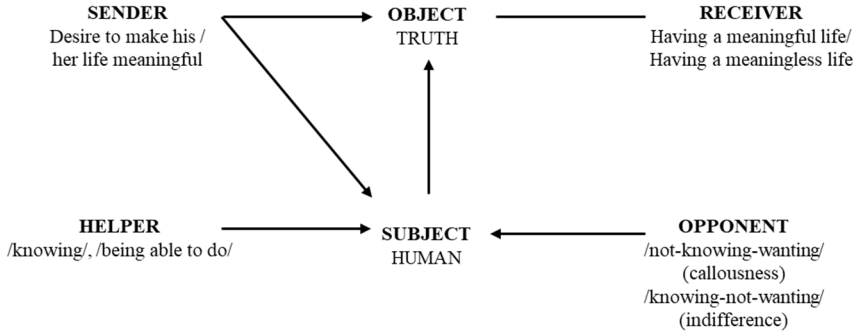


Figure 1: Actantial schema

There are two types of objects that human beings try to reach throughout their lives: the *modal object* and the *value object*.²⁹ The *modal object* corresponds to the *modalities* that the subject must possess in order to perform the act (/knowing/, /being able to do/). These modalities are helpers of the subject. The *modal object* is the precondition for the subject to reach the value object. In the actantial schema, the modalities /not-knowing-wanting/ (callousness) and /knowing-not-wanting/ (indifference) are the subject's *opponents*. The *value object*, on the other hand, corresponds to the goal or the phenomenon that the subject wants to reach, obtain or realize. The meaning and function of the value object is shaped by its relation with the subject. In the actantial schema, which is about the life of human beings, the *value object* is *the truth*. A human being's *desire to make his life meaningful* is his sender. This is the force that drives him and leads him to seek. In the event of a positive outcome of this narrative, the human being will have a meaningful life; in the event of a negative outcome, he will be subjected to a *meaningless life*.

When a human being is considered as *the subject* and truth as *the value object*, the relation between them is basically of two types: *conjunction* and *disjunction*. If the *subject* successfully realizes his search for truth and reaches it, a relation of *conjunction* will be established. If the subject cannot reach the truth, which is his value object, there will be a relation of *disjunction* between them. These relations are also divided into subgroups.

²⁹ Günay, *Göstergebilim Yazıları*, 69-70.

For the conjunction, there are two subgroups: *appropriation* and *contribution*; for the disjunction, there are also two subgroups: *renunciation* and *dispossession*.³⁰ In the subject's search for truth, the subject is *the operator subject* and the relation of *appropriation* is established between the subject and the object. If the subject is not in search of the truth, but the truth is presented to him by another operator subject, a *contribution* relationship is established between the subject and the object. In *the post-truth* era, the fact that the situation subject is conscious to question the relation of *the truth* with the real, to which he has a *contribution* relation, corresponds to *the ideal subject*. In *the renunciation* relation, the subject renounces *the truth* while possessing it. In *the dispossession* relation, on the other hand, *the truth* that the subject has is taken away from him. As a matter of fact, in the modern age, all values that the individual accepts as absolute truth have been taken from him and replaced with truth derivatives on the basis of insecurity and disbelief.

The post-truth-era subject is a situation subject. In *the post-truth* process, there is no *intention* or coercion in the creation of different truths and their influence on the subject: "A person who believes what is said, who does not pursue the truth by searching from other sources, chooses to remain outside the truth, not going beyond the truth".³¹ This kind of subject has the modality of /knowing-not-wanting/ (indifference). The subject has the modality of /knowing-wanting/ (desire to learn) and the modality of /being able to do/ to reach *the truth* through reason and science by researching, but he overrides these modalities with the modality of /not wanting/: "The modality /wanting/ forms the basis of the theory in semiotic analysis. A person who is not willing to act cannot act even if he has all other modalities".³² The subject's lack of the modality /wanting/ prevents the

³⁰ Groupe d'Entrevernes, *Analyse Sémiotique des Textes: Introduction, Théorie, Pratique* [Semiotic Analysis of Texts: Introduction, Theory, Practice], (Lyon: Presses universitaires de Lyon, 1988), 24-26.

³¹ Milay Köktürk, "Post-Truth ya da Mağaraya Dönüş [Post-truth or Return to the Cave]", *Pasajlar Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi* 4, (Ocak 2020): 41.

³² V. Doğan Günay, "Bilen Özne, İsteyen Özne, İstemededen Bilen, Bilmeden İsteyen Özne [Knowing Subject, Wanting Subject, Involuntarily Knowing Subject, Unknowingly Wanting Subject]", *Düşünbil* 92, (2020): 17.

realization of the act and the axis of wanting is not established between the subject and the object in the actantial schema. Köktürk compares the digital society in *which the truth is trivialized* to a digital cave similar to Plato's cave and calls the subject of this society *homo digitalicus*: "homo digitalicus knows what truth is and despises it. He turns his back on what exists, thus committing a fault against the truth".³³ *Homo digitalicus*, a situation subject, prevents the act, that is, its own search for *truth*, with the modality of /knowing-not-wanting/ (indifference).

/Wanting/ is one of the subject's potential modalities and is related to the subject's intention to act. It is necessary for the subject to perform the act. In a situation where the subject does not possess the modality /wanting/, one cannot speak of an operator subject: "Since the modality /wanting/ is directly related to the subject's own will, it can be said that the relation between 'I' and /wanting/ is stronger than other modalities".³⁴ The lack of the modality /wanting/ in the operator subject corresponds to *unwillingness*, and in the case of the modality /not wanting/, one cannot speak of a narrative. Post-truth is not "a psychological situation, an illusion, an artificial/forced signification that is indoctrinated/convinced. It is a form of perception/reality in which the subject actually perceives and sees that it is so, perceives and knows the concrete reality on which the object of perception is based, but considers this basis as insignificant/meaningless, and sees the 'perceived world' as its real shelter".³⁵ The position of the subject on the basis of inertia in *the post-truth* period is also a sign of a transition from an active society to a passive society.

As a result of the damage to the relation between *the truth* and *the real*, the loss of first the *absolute truth*, and then *the reality*, corresponds to the mental permanence of the truth derivatives. Baudrillard explains the disappearance of phenomena from the plane of reality with the fact that they have a permanent appearance in the mental universe and gives the disappearance of the subject as an example:

³³ Köktürk, "Post-Truth ya da Mağaraya Dönüş", 48.

³⁴ Günay, *Göstergebilim Yazıları*, 106.

³⁵ Köktürk, "Post-Truth ya da Mağaraya Dönüş", 43.

Then there is the disappearance of the subject, for example, which is, to some degree mirror image of the disappearance of the real. In fact, the Subject is dying out. The subject that is an agency of will, freedom and representation, the Subject of power, knowledge and history is vanishing, giving way to a diffuse, floating, insubstantial subjectivity that is an immense reverberation surface for a disembodied, empty consciousness. As a result, everything now radiates out from an objectless subjectivity, with each monad and molecule caught in the trap of a definitive narcissism, a perpetual image-playback. This is the image of an end-of-the-world subjectivity, from which the subject as such has disappeared, a victim of that fatal twist to which, in a sense, nothing stands opposed any longer - neither object, nor real, nor other.³⁶

The subject of *the post-truth* era lacks the modality /wanting/ necessary to act: (/not wanting/). The subject does not always want to possess the object, sometimes he may renunciate possessing it (dispossession). It can be said that a subject who is deprived of his object and whose wanting relation with his object has disappeared, in fact, does not exist on the plane of reality. With the end of the subject's search for *truth*, *a subject deprived of an object* emerges and this invalidates the possibility of talking about the subject.

When the subject turns towards *the absolute truth*, which is his object, he will encounter many derivatives of *truth*, and he must have the necessary equipment, the modality of /knowing-wanting/ (the desire to learn), to be able to distinguish the absolute truth. When the subject has the modality /not-knowing-wanting/ (callousness), the subject has the modality /wanting/. In other words, the act takes place, but with /not knowing/, the subject cannot obtain the correct information about the act to be performed and obtains *the derivative of truth*, not *the absolute truth* that it should reach. In the relation between subject and object, when there is not a single object, that is, an absolute truth, but many *truths* that are equal/similar to each other, an object is chosen: "Value will be in question when the situation subject chooses among multiple objects ... which one is the better object can be revealed with *the verifying modality* (*fr. modalité*

³⁶ Jean Baudrillard. *Carnival and Cannibal, Or The Play of Global Antagonism* (Trans. Chris Turner), (London / New York: Seagull Books, 2010), 45-46.

véridictoire)”.³⁷ In the *post-truth* era, where there is more than one *truth*, the subject does not use *the verifying* modality in the selection of the object and turns towards the object that is suitable for his own feelings and convictions. The ideal subject is expected to differentiate truth derivatives with *the verifying modality* and reach absolute truth. This means that *the post-truth* era does not have an ideal subject.

The Semiotic Square

The semiotic square “can be used as a valid analysis tool in all areas of meaning, from the basic meaning structure of any system to the interactions of different systems”.³⁸ The network of connections and relations is explained through the *semes* determined in the semiotic square. In the semiotic square, relations between *semes* such as *contrariness*, *contradiction*, *implication* and *supposition* are shown by being embodied. The network of relations between *semes* is established according to a certain rule. According to this rule, there is no direct transition between the contrary *semes*. The transition from a *seme* to a contrary *seme* is only possible with the first transition to the contradictory *seme*. In the semiotic square, complementary elements are essential because it is they who transform basic structures into mediation structures, not just opposition.³⁹ A complementary basic structure is created not only by oppositions but also by complementary *semes* that mediate between the opposite *semes*. For example, in the semiotic square, in order to move from *lie* (*a*₂) to *truth* (*a*₁), a transition to *not lie* (*-a*₂) must first be provided. This transition can be provided by a sequence of the form of *a*₂ → *-a*₂ → *a*₁. Similarly, in the transition from *truth* (*a*₁) to *lie*, a sequence in the form of *lie* (*a*₁) → *not lie* (*-a*₁) → *truth* (*a*₂) will be followed. These opposites and mediation structures reveal the holistic structure with the complementary approach of semiotics.

³⁷ V. Doğan Günay. *Bir Yazınsal Göstergebilim Okuması: Kuyucaklı Yusuf* [*A Literary Semiotics Reading: Kuyucaklı Yusuf*], (İstanbul: Papatya Bilim Yayınevi, 2018), 160.

³⁸ Tahsin Yücel, *Yapısalcılık* [*Structuralism*], (İstanbul: Can Yayınları, 2020), 143.

³⁹ Jacques Fontanille, *The Semiotics of Discourse*, (Trans. Heidi Bostic), (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2006), 28.