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Web Roundup: If it Ledes, it Bleeds

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By Emily Goldsher-Diamond

This contemporary moment begs the question: what is a fact? And how do facts circulate? These questions are [historical cornerstones](#) in the study of the production of knowledge, and scaffold work in disciplines from philosophy to anthropology; however, in a post-truth climate asking after the genesis and dissemination of facts takes on a new and curious significance. The production and transmission of facts also engages new questions: where and how do people discover facts? What is the relationship between a fact and its reader? What is a fact's effect?

The following will briefly think on the complexities of the fact as it has been thrown about in the past month, with special attention to the media (as a vector for transmission, [a group of people](#) and an [object of study](#)) that [specializes](#) in the [production](#) and [dissemination](#) of certain kinds of facts. These are [stories about stories](#), about [knowledge and power](#), and about the [particular leakiness of information](#)—if it *ledes* (a word for the opening text of an article) it is safe to say that it will likely [bleed far](#) from its initial and intended context. It is worth reflecting on what happens when a fact—a category already up for grabs—bleeds?

Harvard recently hosted an event entitled, “The Future of News: Journalism in a Post-Truth Era.” [Earlier this month, the Harvard Gazette posted a comprehensive report on the meeting](#) that convened reporters and thinkers from major outlets to weigh in on truth, facts and the media. The talks on “post-factualism” bridge the erosion of public trust in the media, what it means to be a reliable source, the notion of coastal elites and thinking carefully about language. Does being post-fact necessarily mean fake? [At NPR, George Lakoff seems to be drawing some important distinctions while pointing out what is at stake when we say news is fake.](#) It is also worth asking, of course, [whether the unity of the fact as a category is a human issue or a data issue.](#)

Some specific and likely dire consequences of the shakeup of facts and their circulation can be seen in the realm of ecology and health. If we are post-truth, [the LA Times asks, what will happen to the environment? In her op-ed, Barnett writes: “Regardless of alternative facts, fake news or scientific censorship, nature tells the truth.”](#) The Atlantic has an illuminating interview with climate scientist Andrew Weaver on turning to

politics. As a member of Canadian parliament, he has some choice words about the importance of bridging science and politics in the face of climate change. [Weaver says, “in science, the person with the best evidence wins. I think the public is ready for a more bottom-up, evidence-based approach to decision-making.”](#) If climate deniers are indeed here to stay, how will the future take shape? [Maybe the Lake Oroville near-disaster is a case study in what happens “when we manage society for how things were, not how things are.”](#)

[Over at The Hill, writers explore some troubling reporting from the International Agency for Research on Cancer.](#) What does it mean when a tangle of private and government interest and public health communication goes haywire? And how do our standards for truth in risk reporting take shape? What if our demand for a certain kind of factual narrative gets in the way of actual facts? [At Vice, Leyla Mei cuts down the Patient Zero myth.](#) Perhaps sounding the alarm isn't always the best strategy either—what if a lede bleeds out? [These are debates to watch.](#)

There are grave human costs to the shifting ontology of facts and truth that we must continue to track. [Over at Savage Minds, Nadia El-Shaarawi breaks down some of what it means when we talk about “extreme vetting” and refugees.](#) Her piece takes on the threatening figure of the refugee that continues to persist despite (or even because of) contradictory evidence.

More links of interest:

[“What We’re Fighting For”](#) – The New York Times

[“Sara Hendren: The Body Adaptive”](#) – Guernica

[“3D-Printed Prosthetic Limbs: the Next Revolution in Medicine”](#) – The Guardian

[“Do Cyborgs Have Politics?”](#) – PaxSolaria

[“Engagements with Ethnographic Care”](#) – AnthropologyNews

[“The \(Anthropological\) Truth About Walls”](#) – Scientific American

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