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ARTICLE

NODE: "AFTER THE POST-TRUTH"

On Altpedias: partisan epistemics in the encyclopaedias of alternative facts*

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Abstract

This article considers how online alternative encyclopaedias, or 'Altpedias', create and maintain their own universes of "alternative facts". We consider a selection of Altpedias that reject Wikipedia's celebrated 'neutral point of view' as an artefact of liberal consensus politics whilst regarding their own epistemics as inherently partisan. As opposed to disregarding objectivity or truth, Altpedias' 'alternative facts' may thus be understood as the product of competing normative standpoints concerning the use value of knowledge. In competing with Wikipedia, Altpedias ultimately attempt to give their partisan viewpoints universal standards, both in tone and in their very nature as wiki platforms. Empirically, the article uses visual network analysis and natural language processing in order to represent the vernacular worldviews of several far- and extreme-right Altpedias: Metapedia, Infogalactic and Rightpedia. Theoretically, the article frames these Altpedias' fractious approach to the study of knowledge in relation to Lyotard's 'general agonistic' and his speculations concerning the impact of computation on epistemics in the postmodern condition.

Keywords

Altpedias, post-truth, postmodernism, Lyotard, far right, general agonistics, epistemic rupture

Sobre las Altpedias: epistemología partidista en las enciclopedias de hechos alternativos

Resumen

Este artículo trata sobre cómo las enciclopedias alternativas, o altpedias, crean y mantienen sus propios universos de «hechos alternativos». Tenemos en cuenta una selección de altpedias que rechazan el celebrado «punto de vista neutral» que defiende Wikipedia como un artefacto de consenso político liberal, pese a que su epistemología es inherentemente partidista. En oposición a la objetividad desatendida o verdad, los hechos alternativos de las altpedias tienen que entenderse como el producto de los puntos de vista normativos rivales que afectan al valor de uso del conocimiento. Al competir con Wikipedia, las altpedias intentan básicamente dar sus puntos de vista partidistas como si fueran estándares universales, tanto en el tono como en su propia naturaleza de plataformas wiki. Empíricamente, este artículo utiliza el análisis en red visual y el procesamiento de lenguaje natural para representar las cosmovisiones vernáculas de varias altpedias de extrema derecha: Metapedia, Infogalactic y Rightpedia. Teóricamente, este artículo enmarca el enfoque díscolo de estas altpedias hacia el estudio del conocimiento con el concepto de «agonística general» de Lyotard y sus especulaciones sobre la repercusión de la computación sobre la epistemología en la condición posmoderna.

Palabras clave

Altpedias, posverdad, posmodernismo, Lyotard, extrema derecha, agonística general, ruptura epistémica

Introduction: Knowledge Beyond Neutrality

In what may be regarded as the founding text of postmodern theory, Jean-François Lyotard posited that epistemics would become detached from the great "metanarratives" that had heretofore organised modern Western thinking (1979). While Lyotard's argument was highly influential, what is less well appreciated is the fact that he saw the advent of computation as motivating this paradigm shift (1979, 12). For Lyotard, the advent of computation meant that knowledge would be processed as complex systems of information that the individual might then collect, organise and repurpose at will (1984, xviii). While 'modern' epistemics promised total (and totalitarian) interpretations of the world from above, the "postmodern condition" would facilitate a new epistemic based on redefining knowledge as information devoid of metanarrative qualities.

Lyotard's framing may retrospectively be seen to resonate with evocations of the web and various social media platforms as 'open' and democratic spaces. This latter perspective, referred to as the "peer-production consensus" account, has often taken as one of its central case studies the Wikipedia project (Kreiss et al. 2011). The epistemics of Wikipedia promises total access to an authoritative and ever growing inventory of knowledge. This feat is accomplished through a technical infrastructure that seeks to accommodate diverging interpretations while at the same time preventing the expression of ideological bias. In dialogue with Lyotard's theory of postmodern epistemics, we argue that the presence of alternative encyclopaedias, or what we call *Altpedias*, reveal the limitations of the epistemic project behind Wikipedia.

Entries that do not conform to Wikipedia's "neutral point of view" policy[1] often end up moving over to Altpedias, frequently started by editors banned from Wikipedia for having posted information judged unacceptable (in the cases discussed below often for racist or otherwise discriminatory content). The authors of the alternative Wikipedia entries tend to view their efforts from a partisan perspective as unpacking the 'hidden' or 'censored' knowledge of unaccepted speech. They are thus explicitly partisan encyclopaedias whose antagonistic politicization of knowledge undermines the premise that there can be any "neutral" consensus on knowledge production. Rather, from their standpoint, knowledge is normative good that is entwined within political projects that see themselves as engaged in counter-hegemonic struggles with the liberal mainstream — as represented by Wikipedia.

The political scientist Patrick Deneen sees liberalism as "political ecosystem", which surrounds us and yet of which we are essentially unaware, "like water for a fish" (2018, 4).[2] In Deneen's estimation,

"liberalism's innovations […] have undermined the realization of its stated commitments" (ibid, 5). An example of the latter may be seen in how, in the name of personal empowerment, peer production is said to "undermine our private autonomy by extending our professional lives into formerly private arenas" (Kreiss et al 2011, 250). Liberals, according to Deneen, tend to be so blind to their own ideology as to consider it as "an inevitable process, unstoppable by any individual or nation" (Deneen 2018, 10) — a rhetoric which may also be found amongst certain of the peer production consensus scholars (see Kelly 2016). As an ideology, Deneen argues that liberalism "pretends to neutrality, claiming no preference and denying any intention of shaping the souls under its rule" (2018, 5). If we shift the focus to the terrain of contemporary online epistemics, Altpedias we can see as making a similar criticism when it comes to Wikipedia's "neutral point of view" policy. While they advocate for radical standpoints, unlike liberals, the partisans of Altpedias do not claim the neutrality of their ideology.

In opposing to the false neutrality of Wikipedian epistemics, Altpedias' partisans see themselves as engaged in the preservation of knowledge deemed too controversial for the mainstream of hegemonic liberalism. As online communities, they view the process of knowledge production as essential and inextricably metapolitical. Altpedias function as a site of repository and even of *refuge* for otherwise 'rejected' knowledge, whose active contributors seek to redeem its value against active erasure by those Wikipedian editors who "are not politically sensitive" (Metapedia 2018b). While they use the same underlying software, the Altpedias in the case studies below thus appear to embrace *an epistemic politics based on dissensus and rupture,* which significantly differs from that of Wikipedia.

While Altpedias, like Wikipedia, *do* aim for exhaustive knowledge, they do so however only insofar as this knowledge is consistent with the ideological precepts that they form in response to their 'rejection' from the liberal epistemic consensus that they equate with Wikipedia. Thus, the epistemic guidelines they lay out to their editors regarding what content is true, correct or objective tends to associate values of objectivity to justice, particularly as a form of retribution for their rejection. This key feature is at the foundation of what we refer to as their *partisan* posture. As such, there is a significant difference between the scope and ambition of the epistemics of Wikipedia and that of the Altpedias discussed below. It is in an effort to elaborate on these differences that we will shortly proceed to examine Altpedias as *epistemics refuges* for forms of knowledge rejected by Wikipedia, and at least symbolically by the liberal mainstream. Before we proceed with our empirical study, it is however necessary to situate Altpedias as objects of study in relation to the current epistemological problematic of so-called "post-truth".

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1. Wikipedia: Neutral point of view https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Neutral_point_of_view.
2. While Deneen's account is focused on current crises in American politics, much of his central critique of liberalism can arguably be applied to Lyotard's "postmodern condition" more generally.

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Theory: Post-Truth as Postmodern Epistemics

A political autopsy genre has emerged in the wake of the right-wing populist insurgencies of the mid-2010s. These texts identify the crisis in liberal democracies with a crisis in epistemology in which truth and facts are losing their objective status (Kakutani 2018; McIntyre 2018). One of the favourite culprits in tracing the source of this problem of post-truth has been postmodernism. The argument presented in these texts finds postmodernism guilt of having 'caused' epistemological relativism initially as a hermeneutic method, which in turn spread out to (as it were) 'infect' the sanctity of knowledge production in contemporary Western liberal societies. According to this account, what began as an alternative way to read novels became a way for feminists to critique scientific hubris, which became a way for creationists and climate change sceptics to deny science, which in turn opened the door to 'fake news'. Humanities academics are thus imagined, like proverbial Dr Frankenstein, of having created a monster whose power they have failed to comprehend or adequately care for — a kind of "playing with fire by people who don't even know that fire is hot" (Orwell cited in McIntyre 2018). Implicit in this critique is also an accusation of moral failure, whereby incautious 'left-leaning' academics are pictured as having replaced a cherished and hard-won liberal notion of consensus with a new Rashomon-like reality where epistemological relativism has become the name of the game, and all the hard-won historical accomplishments of liberalism are thereby thrown into jeopardy (Kakutani 2018).

We argue, however, that these diagnoses of post-truth politics make an essential conceptual error in how they characterise, or better yet caricature, the contributions of 'postmodern theory'. While postmodern theory may have been applied programmatically by the acolytes of so-called 'French Theory' within Anglo-American academia (Cusset 2008), in its initial formulation, the notion of a *postmodern condition* was not intended as a normative prescription. It referred instead to a speculative diagnosis concerning the potential effects of computation on epistemology. It is thus in regards to this original diagnosis, which can be understood as having effectively inaugurated the whole discourse on postmodernism in Anglo-American cultural theory, that we would like to position our approach in the study that follows.

In 1979, Jean-Francois Lyotard inaugurated a new intellectual paradigm within critical theory with his famous characterisation of what he called *la condition postmoderne* (the postmodern condition). According to Lyotard's periodization argument, since approximately the mid-century, the "redeployment of advanced liberal capitalism" and the "blossoming of techniques and technologies" have "shifted the emphasis from the ends of actions to [their] means" (Lyotard 1984, 37). The dramatic result of this paradigm shift, according to

Lyotard, was that knowledge ceased to be an end in and of itself (Lyotard 1984, 5). He famously argued that the 'metanarratives' that stemmed from the nineteenth-century German model of knowledge, which married narrative to scientific knowledge (or education of the 'Spirit' with that of 'Reason'), lost their legitimacy in this new epistemic condition (Lyotard 1984, 32, 37). In place of narrative guidelines, Lyotard argued for computerisation as the organising principle of postmodern epistemics. The profound consequence of this shift was for knowledge to be redefined as information geared towards what Lyotard referred to as 'performativity' (Lyotard 1984, 11). For Lyotard, computerised knowledge abandoned unitary and totalising epistemics (Lyotard 1984, 6, 11-12) in favour of a "principle of a plurality of formal and axiomatic systems capable of arguing the truth of denotative statements" (Lyotard 1984, 43, 53). The idea of universality as associated with the former modernist metanarratives was not, however, altogether abandoned: it could be seen to persist in the instrumental aim of computation to organise, link and access data in their totality. Thus, under the postmodern condition, knowledge became redefined as universally accessible information, for which reason Lyotard suggested one might consider that "data banks are the encyclopedia of tomorrow" (Lyotard 1984, 43).

Lyotard's notion of postmodern epistemics offers insights into the current multiplication of truths online, for example in terms of 'fake news' and 'post-truth'. While the latter problem is typically framed in terms of malicious 'manipulation' by ill-intentioned actors (Lewis and Marwick 2017), through Lyotard's lens, we may also perceive some of these phenomena in terms of a broader *epistemic struggle* against the neutralisation of the 'paralogous' or pluralistic quality of knowledge and truth into a single coherent, consensus-based account (Lyotard 1984, 60). While the postmodern dimension of the Wikipedia project has been the subject of studies from a great many perspectives (Rodríguez 2008; Robertson 2013, 11; Leshnick and Livio 2016), Lyotard arguably offers a relatively unique perspective from which to critique the former as an essentially liberal technology of epistemological power. From Lyotard's agonistic perspective, to which we will momentarily return, it can be argued that Wikipedia effectively mollifies ideological dissent by subjecting knowledge to the liberal principle of consensus and neutrality.

In recent years, Wikipedia has gained competition from a number of alternative encyclopaedia wikis that make use of the same underlying MediaWiki software as Wikipedia, but governed according to different criteria. These wikis challenge what they perceive to be the liberal penchants of the majority of Wikipedia editors, often doing so in explicitly antagonistic political terms (Johnson 2007; Roose 2018; Sobel Fitts 2017). Although Altpedias are not limited to the following, for the purposes of this study we will consider: Metapedia, a self-described pro-European encyclopaedia espousing Holocaust denialist viewpoints; Infogalactic, a wiki created by 'alt-right' activist Vox Day; and Rightpedia, a wiki devoted primarily to extreme-right conspiracy

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theory.[3] Constituting many tens of thousands of topics each, these projects, particularly Infogalactic and Metapedia, have largely been created by dissenting Wikipedia editors wanting to publish information banned by other editors in Wikipedia for transgressing its ethical codes, particularly those sanctioning racist and pseudoscientific content (de Keulenaar *et al.*, 2018). Whilst on average they only have a few dozen active contributors (Infogalactic 2019a; Metapedia 2019a), Altpedias constitute *entire universes of alternative facts* standing in opposition to the epistemic limitations of Wikipedia — in spite of its resilient dispute resolution protocols.

Every Altpedia is an attempt to do justice to knowledge unknown, discredited or disbelieved by Wikipedia by default of its moral guidelines, in protest against what they perceive to be Wikipedia's limited spectrum of tolerance. Altpedians regard their wikis as both universal repositories of 'taboo' knowledge *and* places from which to make that type of knowledge universally plausible and accessible in the seemingly authoritative form of an encyclopaedia. However marginal these projects may be in comparison to Wikipedia, they are worthy of study as successful attempts at stepping out of Wikipedia as a knowledge platform, extending their alternative historical, political and social interpretations of world history into collective consensus building projects. To pick an extreme (although not atypical) example: Metapedia has as a premise that the Holocaust was not a central event of World War II, which forms the basis of their project to delegitimise the 'new world order' of all subsequent liberal-democratic international political and legislative culture (Metapedia 2019b).

In concluding our theoretical introduction, let us return to Lyotard's framework. If we consider Wikipedia as an example of non-narrative-based postmodern knowledge, then the presence of these marginal agonistic Altepedias may be understood as emphasising Lyotard's broader argument that the postmodern condition is above all characterised by questions of universal truth being displaced by competing language games — regardless of what those involved may or may not believe to be true. This premise has been proposed by Farkas and Schou, who examine the notion of fake news as a technique to radically challenge and eventually recast epistemic hegemonies (Farkas and Shou 2018, 302). From within Lyotard's epistemology one could say that the disqualification of information as 'fake' merely reveals the underlying 'general agonistics' of all forms of political discourse in which, Lyotard claims, that "to speak is to fight" (Lyotard 1984, 10). In refusing to compromise with the Wikipedian, the Altpedians thus seek to curate their epistemic territories on their own fundamentally agonistics terms.[4]

Method: Mapping the Partisan Epistemics of Altpedias

Before we can proceed with our political analysis of Altpedias, we must begin by first outlining our empirical method. Our empirical approach was divided into two steps, each with different objectives. The aim of the first of these was to gain a perspective as to why and how Altpedias branched off of Wikipedia. The aim of the second was to see how each wiki went on to build their own compendia of partisan knowledge, to investigate how they justify their role as repositories of knowledge (or, as online encyclopaedias), what purposes they find in being one, and how the normative dimension of their mission as encyclopaedia affects their conception of knowledge.

To examine how and why Altpedias branch-off or 'fork' from Wikipedia and from each other, we traced the history of one specific article on "Race and Intelligence" from Wikipedia all the way through its respective forks on Metapedia, Rightpedia, and Infogalactic.[5] We chose the page on "Race and Intelligence" because it was relatively popular in all our Altpedias, and because its history on Wikipedia involved instances when editors migrated to Altpedias due to unresolvable conflict or, so-called 'edit wars'.

In order to assess how pages on "Race and Intelligence" were edited across Altpedias, we first needed to determine where these pages originated. Through the APIs of Wikipedia and Metapedia, we were able to extract all text from the relevant pages, as well as their revision histories and size. Combined with a manual analysis of the page's history on other wikis, edit history, size and textual content, we traced page edits and their sizes. We then discovered that Wikipedia was the first to publish a page on the subject, and that, since then,
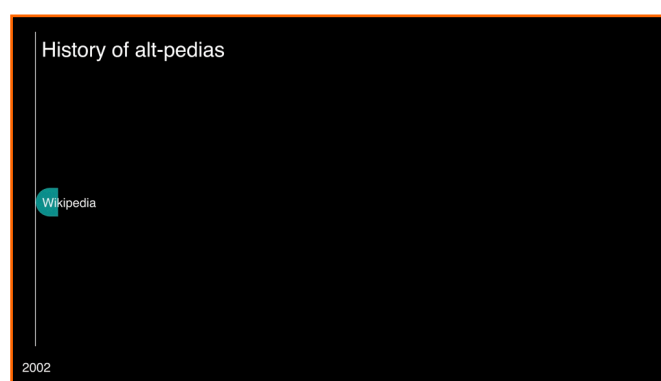
Figure 1. History of wikis and key dates where they forked from one another. Animation by Felipe Escobar.

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3. In November 2018, the service hosting the Rightpedia domain terminated its service, thereby taking the site offline.

4. Insofar as they frequently engage in forms of knowledge production that are profoundly bigoted, in relation to how these concepts are discussed in current political theory, the Altpedias studied here would be more accurately described as "antagonistic" as opposed to "agonistic" (see Mouffe 2013).

5. Forking refers to a computing term, which means the act of copying a local source of software that then becomes modified over time.

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only Metapedia and Infogalactic forked from it at various points until Metapedia's version was forked to Rightpedia.

To best determine the circumstances in which pages were forked from one wiki to another, we then focused on a closer reading of that page on every wiki. We manually tracked important moments in the course of the article's edit history, noting edit periods when significant amounts of text were deleted or added and taking note of the content of the interactions between editors. Significant editing moments were determined by a combination of edit size and important changes indicated by the history of a page's table of content.

Figure 2. Diagram of our first methodological step. Illustration by Tommaso Elli.
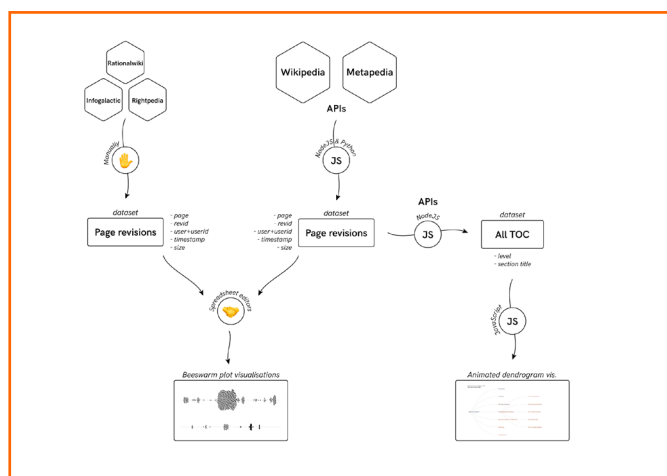
With this information, we manually determined specific ideological changes in edited sentences. We sought to better contextualise these changes by making a comparative text analysis of Wikipedia and Metapedia. Our scatter plot visualisation gave us an idea of how the language used to write each wiki's page diverged ideologically.
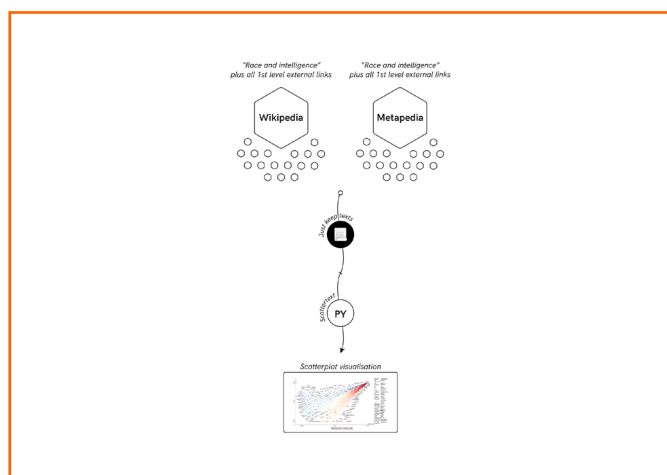

Figure 3. Diagram illustrating how we created our scatterplot to close-read changes between Metapedia and Wikipedia's pages on race and intelligence. Illustration by Tommaso Elli; scatterplot by Felipe Escobar.

Our second step consisted in examining how each Altpedia distinguished itself in epistemic terms. To do so, we focused our analysis on Altpedias' 'meta' pages, where they specify their mission statements, their reference page ('About'), and their content guideline pages. We identified these internal pages by their title, which would usually juxtapose the name of the wiki and the subject of each of these pages (for example, "Wikipedia: Manual of Style"). Seeing as these pages were too numerous to be studied through a qualitative close reading, we manually extracted key terms that refer to what content each wiki wants and does not want. Such terms would then range from concepts ('veracity', 'neutrality', 'clarity') to specific forms ('cited references', 'clear sentences') and conducts ('good faith editing', 'being nice'). To compare these terms across wikis, we made networks formed by connections between wikis having such concepts in common.

After having scraped the Altpedias, we aimed to gain a better grasp of the meaning of key concepts expressed in their mission statements and content guidelines. In spite of their opposition to Wikipedia, we found Altpedias also to paradoxically make use the concept of neutrality in their guidelines (as well as veracity, balance, and so on). The question, however, was how these rather abstract concepts were actually used. In order to answer this, we extracted the text from these pages and trained separate "word2vec" word embedding models that locate words in a vector space, thereby representing these words' local contexts of use — such that proximate words can be understood as close in meaning (see Mikolov et al. 2015). We then plotted the frequency count of words extracted from the content guidelines of each wiki using the scatter text term frequency algorithm (Kessler 2017; see figure 5). Finally, to capture the essence of contention between and within each Altpedia, we manually identified and compared terms each wiki uses to refer to one another (see figure 8).

Analysis: Altpedia Edit Wars as Epistemic Ruptures

In many respects, Wikipedia responds to the new epistemological parameters Lyotard outlines as part of postmodern societies. Since its inception in 2002, Wikipedia was designed to afford knowledge in all its diversity (be it in terms of information, sources, or historical and ideological perspectives) (Wikipedia 2018a; 2018b). It attempts to place users beyond dissent and irreconcilable points of views, particularly by way of affordances and written norms, conduct and content guidelines encouraging users to engage in dialogue and reach consensus about the content they publish and edit. Users usually convene in talk pages, where they discuss how and whether content attends to the rules and norms that the Wikipedia content guidelines outline, such as veracity, relevance, accuracy and neutrality. Rules of

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conduct such as good faith editing, as well as a designated hierarchy between a handful of levels of editors, guarantee that these 'general agonistics', in Lyotard's formulation, do not descend into the total antagonism of 'edit wars' wherein users fundamentally disagree and ceaselessly edit each other's edits. These rules designate both practical and epistemological affordances that delimit the criteria under which information is 'good', which edits are approved or disproved, which are rejected, and how and why editors are banned.

Despite its robust affordances the very existence of Altpedias reveal that Wikipedia does not, however, enjoy universal consensus over its epistemological legitimacy and moral authority. The presence of multiple wikis branching off of Wikipedia, each with their different idea as to what 'true' and 'just' knowledge is, reflects how different conceptions of knowledge are operationalised into different Altpedias. Wikipedia's content guidelines — which for example ban pseudoscientific content, misinformation, conspiracies and caution with fringe theories (Wikipedia 2018c) — as well as its rules of conduct provide the basis for contributions to be rejected and account to be banned. Once banned, contributors may fork onto alternative wikis, such as Infogalactic, Rightpedia or Metapedia. Once a topic has migrated to an Altpedia, these edit wars may however continue leading to further forks, as in the case of the topic of "Race and Intelligence" (as visualised in figure 4).

To illustrate the above-mentioned process with a specific example,

Figure 4. A history of forks of the page on Race and Intelligence from Wikipedia to Metapedia, Rightpedia, Infogalactic and Rational Wiki. Illustration by Tommaso Elli.

we briefly describe the case of a banned Wikipedia editor migrating to Infogalactic in 2016 (Wikipedia 2016). This particular editor was criticised for publishing perceived 'findings' about the correlation between race and intelligence. These were promptly deleted by editors who qualified his or her contributions as both objectively questionable and morally unsound, referring to these as "pseudoscientific

speculations" that subscribed to an "Aryan agenda" (Wikipedia 2018d). After proposing that his or her contributions be labelled as 'alternative opinions' rather than false claims, the editor in question is turned down and goes on to recast his or her preferred version of the Wikipedia article onto an Altpedia, Infogalactic, where he or she and other editors rewrite the page overtime.

Figure 5. History of the Race and Intelligence page from Wikipedia to Infogalactic. Animation by Felipe Escobar.

As the word-embedding model in figure 6 illustrates, once the article on "Race and Intelligence" forked from Wikipedia, it then shifts from being a detached historical debate around race, wealth and IQ (related for example to Nazism and the 19th century) into a list of 'scientific' evidence.

Figure 6. Semantic changes between Wikipedia and Metapedia's pages on Race and Intelligence. Scatterplot by Felipe Escobar.

In our analysis, we came to see that Altpedias could be understood as the product of schisms emerging from unresolved ideological disputes, or edit wars, which we call *epistemic ruptures*. To illustrate this process, the interactive link below shows the terms each wiki uses to refer to one another. Such terms reveal the motives of contention, and thus of rupture, between each of the Altpedias, and mark the boundary disputes by which they define themselves and question their

respective veracity. The motive of unresolved conflicts that separate one from another then becomes each of their very raison d'être.
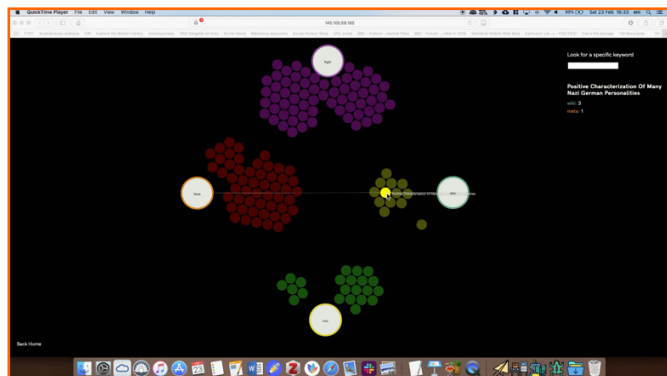

Figure 7. Bee swarm plot of adjectives each wiki attributes to one another[6]

Epistemic ruptures then provide the basis for every Altpedia to redefine itself as a better epistemic version of Wikipedia. As figure 8 illustrates, every wiki presents itself as a 'fairer', more 'balanced' and more just version of Wikipedia, in that it provides a refuge for knowledge rejected by the latter. As we have discussed above, they all reject Wikipedia's 'neutral point of view' as ideologically dishonest. Operating on the same underlying software as Wikipedia, Altpedias do, however, seek to preserve its same (authoritative) format in term of how they structure their content guidelines. Thus, while they do not themselves purport to be politically neutral, they do however use the concepts of fairness to redress the perceived imbalance of Wikipedia's hegemonic status in their own guidelines and mission statements, which are replete with epistemic terminology.

While the epistemic language of their metapages may make Altpedias appear strikingly similar to Wikipedia, topics worthy of inclusion are generally those that have been explicitly excluded from Wikipedia, for instance Holocaust revisionism, the correlation between race and IQ, and white supremacy; topics as if rescued from their general classification as objects of poor or gravely immoral knowledge.[7]

This tightly knit relation between knowledge, authority and justice echoes Lyotard's own description of what he called the 'delegitimation' of competing types of knowledge (Lyotard 1984, 37). At the source of the questioned legitimacy of a type of knowledge is a question of 'double legitimation': '[…] who decides what knowledge is, and who knows what needs to be decided?' (Lyotard 1984, 8-9). Both of these questions are answered by each Altpedia to various extents, always within declared opposition against those it sees as ignoring the types of content it considers legitimate. Just as Lyotard argued
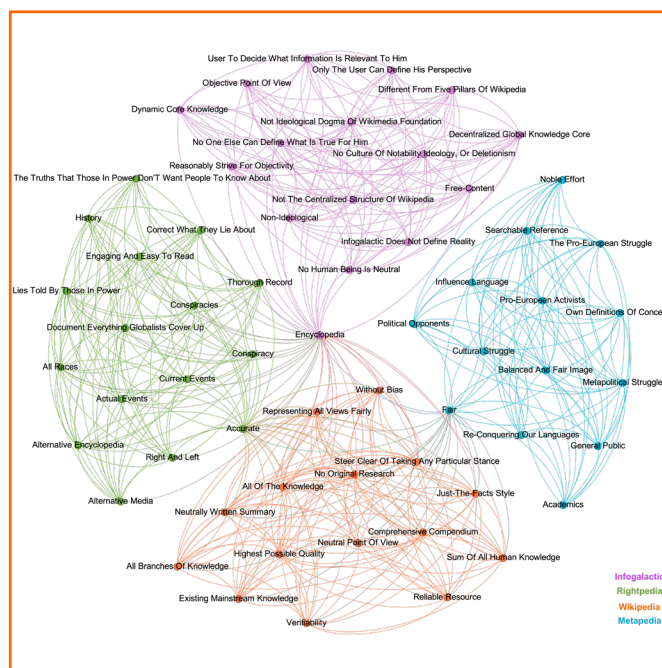

Figure 8. Network comparison of terms from wiki metapages

that knowledge is legitimised by laws promulgated as norms (Lyotard 1984, 8), Altpedias thus argue in favour of partisan norms that they seek to defend against what they see as Wikipedia's post-ideological liberal vision of knowledge free from irresolvable conflict.

Conclusion: The Future of Weaponised Knowledge?

As discussed at the outset, a post-truth autopsy genre has sought to pin blame on postmodern theory for having induced the current crisis in liberal democracies, finding the latter responsible for having infected epistemology with a fatal strain of relativism. Our case study of Altpedias, as exemplary sites for the production of alternative facts, suggests however that the philosophical premises of these arguments could be revised. It is not that partisan projects like Altpedias actively seek to undermine a consensus version of scientifically valid information as developed within modern Western liberal societies, nor for that matter that their criteria of truth are necessarily distinct from the latter. Altpedias are rather manifestations of worldviews expressed through 'language games' that attempt to do justice to information they perceive as not being well enough known, thereby re-establishing their own criteria as to what is and

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6. Also accessible via http://145.100.59.185/polimatter/faculties.htm.
7. Though Metapedia shares a similar lexicon in pages containing information about the notion of 'veracity', it associates 'veridic' information to its documentation of the Holocaust, which it considers a 'hoax' peddled by 'deniers'.

is not worth knowing. They can be taken as examples of a political instrumentalisation of facts that is not just marked by disagreements over content, but also over concerns about what qualifies as worthy of being known, and thus *knowable* by virtue of their partisan premises.

Lyotard was perceptive in speculating on "[d]ata banks [as] the encyclopedia of tomorrow" (1984, 43). But while Wikipedia may indeed represent the "principle of a plurality of formal and axiomatic systems capable of arguing the truth of denotative statements" (1984, 53), in their 'paralogous' definition of multiple worlds of truth (1984, 60), Altpedias in a sense represent more than postmodern encyclopaedias. As is the case in Altpedias, normative definitions of knowledge are still elucidated by different readings of history, and, in this sense, of narrative knowledge. While Wikipedia has been designed to host as many 'narratives' as possible, the argument posted by the Altpedias analysed here is that it does so within a limited spectrum governed by the normative criteria of liberal consensus which seeks to depoliticise epistemics as essentially 'neutral'. In contrast, the Altpedias analysed here view Wikipedia as the hegemonic representative of false neutrality and see themselves as engaged in a zero-sum game of *weaponised knowledge production*.

Thus, while they may indeed be used as resources to manufacture all manner of misinformation, it is inaccurate to conceptualise this problematic in terms of post-truth. Altpedias are not so much a sign of the obsolescence of truth, but rather evidence that compendia of knowledge designed to harmonise all knowledge and withstand epistemic ruptures are still delimited in their conceptions as to what acceptable knowledge is. Beyond Wikipedia lie the Altpedias, which seek to give those forms of knowledge excluded from the epistemic 'mainstream' the universal tone, format and functions of the utopian project of open source knowledge -- though in their own competing 'encyclopaedia of tomorrow'.

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CV
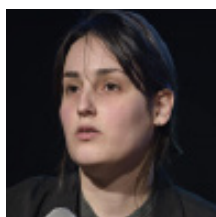
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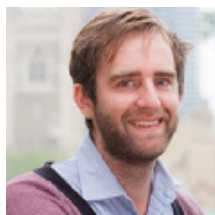
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