

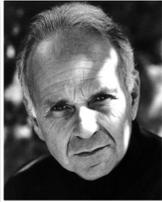
Class 3a
Technologies of the Self

Outline

- Constructing Meaning in a Postmodern World
 - Stanley Fish and arguments over what is “true”
- Constructing Meaning: From the group to the individual
 - how each of us constructs meaning
 - smartphones as proxies for the self
 - smartphones and virtual religion
- Returning to the Group: Introducing Social Semiotics

Constructing Meaning in a Postmodern World

- “Ways of reading” or styles of interpretation impact how we read
- We learn these sometimes consciously, sometimes unconsciously, from the culture around us
- Interpretive communities shape the interpretations and we choose (or find ourselves part of) those
- Everything is already in context; the context shapes meaning



Stanley Eugene Fish
1938-



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A HOOVER INSTITUTION JOURNAL

Fake News: Postmodernism By Another Name

by Victor Davis Hanson
 via Defining Ideas (Hoover Institution)
 Thursday, January 26, 2017

After the election, Democrats could not explain the inexplicable defeat of Hillary Clinton, who would be, they thought, the shoe-in winner in November. Over the next three months until Inauguration Day, progressives floated a variety of explanations for the Trump win—none of them, though, mentioned that the Clinton campaign had proven uninspired, tactically inept, and never voiced a message designed to appeal to the working classes.

When a particular exegesis of defeat failed to catch on, it was mostly dropped—and then replaced by a new narrative. We were told that the Electoral College wrongly nullified the popular vote—and that electors had a duty to renege on their obligations to vote for their respective state's presidential winner.

About the Author
VICTOR DAVIS HANSON
 Contemporary History
 International Conflict
 Military History
 Military Strategy

The New York Times

Opinion

THE STONE

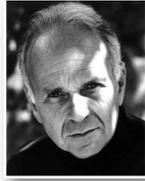
'Transparency' Is the Mother of Fake News

By Shelby Fish
 Mr. Fish is a legal scholar and author.
 May 7, 2018

For some time now everyone has been worrying about "fake news" or the world of "alternative fact" and wondering just how and why this unhappy phenomenon has flourished. My take on this question is simple, although I hope not simple-minded: Fake news is in large part a product of the enthusiasm — not to say rage — for transparency and absolutely free speech.

Stanley Fish on the Instability of "Texts"

The rise of fake news has been attributed by some to the emergence of postmodern thought. Victor Davis Hanson, a scholar at the Hoover Institution at Stanford University wrote in 2017 that fake news can be "traced back to the campus," specifically to "academic postmodernism," which Hanson says, "derides facts and absolutes, and insists that there are only narratives and interpretations."



Stanley Eugene Fish
1938-

That's not quite right. The insistence on the primacy of narratives and interpretations does not involve a deriding of facts but an alternative story of their emergence. Postmodernism sets itself against the notion of facts just lying there discrete and independent, and waiting to be described. Instead it argues that fact is the achievement of argument and debate, not a pre-existing entity by whose measure argument can be assessed. Arguments come first; when they are successful, facts follow—at least for a while, until a new round of arguments replaces them with a new set of facts.

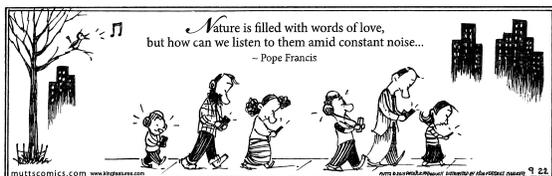
"Transparency" Is the Mother of Fake News,
The New York Times (7 May 2018)

Where Does This Leave Us?

- Facts are unstable, not stable
- They're the product of human processes, they don't lie outside of them
- To understand any "facts," therefore, we need to analyze the process by which they became facts
- This postmodern view of the construction of truth doesn't threaten truth claims *unless* you regard those truth claims as facts that lie outside of human discourse and control

From the Group to the Individual: How Each of Us Constructs Meaning

MUTTS | Patrick McDonnell



We shape ourselves by surrounding ourselves with the objects which, beside their utility, are used to define and emphasize our image.

Wagner, *Godwired*, 107-108

**From the Group to the Individual:
How Each of Us Constructs Meaning**

- Define *bricoleur*
- Consider...
 - How are you a *bricoleur* with technology?
 - How are people *bricoleurs* of spiritual practices?

**Smartphones as Proxies
for the Self**

- **Proxy** = someone or something that stands in for or acts on behalf of someone else
 - Is your smartphone a proxy for you?
 - What does it do for you, how does it represent you?
- What do the apps on your phone say about your desires and perceptions?

Smartphones and Virtual Religion

- 3 attitudes toward virtual religious encounters
- 6 types of religious apps

Returning to the Group:
Introducing Social Semiotics

- **Semiotics** = making meaning
- **Social semiotics** = how we do this in groups; how frameworks of meaning are constructed by "interpretive communities"
 - From this point on, this class will be about the Bible, but at the same time
 - the interpretive communities that wrote it
 - those who continue to interact with it
 - appreciating that this is always an individual and a collective act
