Science & Justice Research Centre - Starting a research cluster on Objectivity & Justice

Karen: in a moment when the CDC has cancelled their scheduled conference on the effects of climate change, “alternative facts”, attacks on academia, the gag order on public agencies sending out information. Media black-outs, etc. Many of us have been critical of the discourse of “facts” in various ways; STS as grounded in the insight that facts are mediated, made, (right there in the etymology of the word!), and that objectivity arises out of accountability, responsibility, taking a view from somewhere.

Introductions; 28 people present, ranging from 2nd year undergrads to Emerita profs, and wide range of science/humanities/social-science folks. Lots of shared concerns about the political context in which we find ourselves, shared objects of interest, and really rich complexity in what people are bringing to the question of objectivity, facts, truth.

Sally Lehrman; thinking about journalism and its treatment of truth/Truth. Description of her work on the “Trust Project” (http://www.thetrustproject.org/) - thinking about journalism as partially a cycle of trust; journalists trust people to tell them the truth, receivers trust journalists to be earnest in their reporting, and then can rely on what’s reported. Working with a consortium of media and institutions to create some markers to indicate that an article is a good source, if it has transparent author, news source, commitments to diversity/justice, correctability, is this news/analysis/opinion/advertising etc.

Discussion about:

- advertising, monetization of news, how trust in the media connects with trust in scientific research.
- Lindsey Dillon’s work with the Environmental Data & Governance Initiative (https://envirodatagov.org/). Also discussion of the ways that people working with the EPA and other agencies are under some governments made to put their findings through review, not able to speak directly to reporters, and the harms of that.
- Shifts in literacies and how different generations of people assess what is trustworthy - how are people taught to understand quantitative data, which connects to what approaches are able to teach (if it’s not cleared by the What Works Clearinghouse https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/, teachers not able to use other methodologies).
- How to think about the Common Core and what/how to teach, how to shape kid’s/people’s capacities to think.
• Also a problem for people in older generations, who may have skewed understandings of how skewed something being “on the news” or “on the internet” can be. Where do people go for knowledge?
• How conceptions of “the real world” include deep structural, cultural, political differences - for many people, environmental science perspectives are experienced as not being part of the real world, which includes experiential belief in a Christian God, the centrality of being able to actually grow potatoes, wheat, etc, and so on.
• The deep connection between the current administration’s direction for the world and long-standing US imperialist practices outside of the continental US - physical practices, CIA psych warfare, doublespeak,
• Observation-based research?
• Approaches starting from listening to peoples who have been living under intense state repression - abroad, Indigenous peoples including within North America, people of color - for doing inquiry without assuming that the state is an ally or to be trusted.
• Whether having a closer attention to the epistemic context for statements would help? (The difference between climate scientists, who are focusing on broad trends, and climate deniers, who are focusing on today’s weather). Need to develop better vocabularies, ways to talk about terms that is accessible and clear beyond the academy.
• Discussion of implicit understanding and how knowledge is not just about what is said, or giving people more and better information, but includes how we feel, commonsense understandings, etc.
• Different ways that people determine and experience facts - how to think about that? Intuition as valuable in determining facts?
• Opportunity project - teaching journalists how to report on structural issues.
• Scientific method as a human-created method, a consensus. Discrepancy between public and scientists perhaps coming to a belief that there isn’t a method that should or could take priority.
• Importance of translation work in thinking about these issues.
• Various possibilities for intervening, which also then have all different audiences. All science is invested in certain ways, and yet there are facts.

Possible sub-clusters?
• Media
• Archiving data
• The ways the state is involved with objectivity and justice?

Possible projects?
• Using science news as a laboratory for thinking about how to build trust
• Contributing to promoting a positive vision for environmental and scientific governance?
- Creating webspace for sharing the work and thinking of this group? Blogs, notes, reading lists?
- Sharing/collaborative learning as a research cluster?

Possible structure? Monthly meetings, run as a lab meeting, perhaps with smaller project groups reporting back and open space for discussion?

Next meeting: February 7\textsuperscript{th}, 4-6, Oakes 231
Send Karen short possible readings for half-hour discussion next time, suggestions for possible clusters,