Metamorphoses of (New) Media

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Edited by

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INTRODUCTION

JULIA GENZ AND ULRIKE KÜCHLER

Definitions of 'medium' differ as much as the disciplines and discourses discussing them: we can look at media from a materialistic, communicative, technological, or aesthetic perspective. Media scholars sometimes even suggest media to comprise old, new, and digital media, that is to say, media in their entirety.

Old and New Media: Twins and Rivals

The emphasis of this collection lies on new media, albeit without being limited to them: there are no 'new media' without 'older', or even 'old media'. 'New' and 'old' media only exist in relation to each other, or, in other words: 'new' can only be a transitory description for a medium. This is why we decided to put the 'new' in the title of this volume in brackets.

Of course, beside all—materialistic, technological, functional, historical, aesthetic etc.—differences, old and new media share a lot of common ground. And of course, new media do not simply supersede old media. Rather, old and new media often coexist. But how can we describe such coexistence? To tackle this question, Marie-Laure Ryan introduces the concept of "twin media":

> From drama to film, photography to painting, architecture to music, virtually every 'old medium' has a new, digital twin, though whether or not this twin counts as an autonomous medium is a debatable question.[1]

This duplication process suggests both a certain continuity of the functions that new media 'inherit' from old media and a variation (and diversification) of the medial presentation over time ("from drama to film…"). These two sides of the same coin we refer to as 'metamorphoses' in the title of this volume.

Yet, by itself the idea of "twin media" does not fully describe the

[1] Ryan, *Narrative across Media*, 30.

relation between old and new media but rather raises an interesting follow-up question: What are the implications of "twin media", do they involve a correction process in which the newer medium amends the shortcomings of the older one? This is what Jay David Bolter's and Richard Grusin's concept of "remediation"[2] suggests:

> What is a medium? We offer a simple definition: a medium is that which remediates. It is that which appropriates the techniques, forms, and social significance of other media and attempts to rival or refashion them in the name of the real.[3]

Such rivalry between media and refashioning of media, however, implies a certain teleological perspective that involves an on-going medial optimisation process.[4]

Reciprocity of Old and New Media

From this teleological perspective, the concept of remediation implies that new media are developed to compensate the deficiencies of old media, suggesting a 'genealogical line of development' between those media.[5] In our collection, this thought is critically examined, amongst others, in Cathrin Bengesser's essay "Spectator, Player, 'Modder': The Transition from the Cinematic Cave to the Digital Dispositif". It examines the game-like viewing experiences of films in DVD formats and links them to Jenkins' notion of participatory culture.

Numerous examples in media history, however, lack such an unambiguous genealogical relation. The present-day functions of many new media are the result of various cross-medial experiments with different initial purposes. Take the telephone as an example: apart from transmitting the human voice, it has been invented to broadcast music and theatrical plays.[6] Moreover, the concept of remediation does not address

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[2] Bolter and Grusin, *Remediation*. Ryan (*Narrative across Media*, 31ff.) also discusses Bolter and Grusin's concept of remediation to support her own notion of "twin media".

[3] Bolter and Grusin, *Remediation*, 65.

[4] Cf. Ryan (*Narrative across Media*, 32–33) who discusses nine variations of remediation, eight of which understand the concept as a correction process.

[5] In the present context we use the notion of a 'genealogical line of development' in analogy to the comparative method of "genetical comparison" as proposed by Peter V. Zima, *Komparatistik*.

[6] Cf. Höflich, "Telefon," 188. See, for instance, Philipp Reis' music telegraph (1863) and Clément Ader's Théâtrophone (1882).

the question of why old media continue to exist alongside new media, as in the case of many non-digital media and their digital 'twins', such as printed books and e-books or records and mp3.

We therefore suggest complementing the concept of remediation with the following observations:

1. Similarities between old and new media not only result from intended improvements to old media but also from the (reflexive) process of new media development itself. Various contributions in this volume reflect this observation by showing how many media are not so much twins by genealogical relation than by retrospective, heuristic construction: it is only the magnifying glass of certain discourses and theories that uncovers their (typological) resemblances. In his essay "Bloomsday? On the Theory of Intermediality and the Production of Photo-Essays and Film-Essays", Christian Sinn shows how to apply the notion of writing essays to films. Similarly, in "Non finito: Fragmentary Narration in Films and Television Series", Susanne Marschall suggests to apply the concept of *non finito*, a 16th century concept originating from the fine-arts, to contemporary developments in film and online.

2. Similarities between old and new media can develop independently of each other, based on comparable structural conditions in media history and its related discourses. An example in this regard is Mary Nickel's discussion of "The Structural Transformation of the Cybersphere": she examines the emergence of the public sphere in the coffeehouses and salons of the 18th century and their 21st century equivalents in the age of social media.

3. As a result, we can describe the relation of old and new media as being determined by reciprocity rather than (teleological) linearity. While the influence of old media on new media is apparent in many cases, it is also old media that benefit from the emergence of new media.[7] With the emergence of new media, old media can adapt new functions while new media can employ the qualities and properties of old media. This results in a spiral of mutual influence. Also, the notion of reciprocity extends beyond the immediate relation between old and new media and their respective purposes and effects on the aesthetic and theoretical concepts related to those media. Using the examples of the digital and the literary, Nina Shiel's "Space, Change, and Statements in Literary Representations of Virtual Worlds" and Nina Peter's "Literary Reflections on New Media. Richard Powers' *Plowing the Dark* (2000)" discuss this mutual influence.

To capture these varied relations between old and new media we

[7] See for instance the current rise of the graphic novel in its relation to the digital turn.

therefore draw on the notion of ‘metamorphoses’ instead of the more narrow term ‘remediation’.

Discursive, Transmedia, and Fictional Metamorphoses

Considering the manifold possibilities of approaching metamorphoses of old and new media, the discussion in this volume will focus on three aspects that recur throughout the book, connecting the essays: 1) the social discourse that is dealt with and changed by media, 2) the transformations of media resulting from their transmedial interplay, 3) the aesthetic reflections on these metamorphoses of old and new media in literature and the arts. The three parts of this volume each focus on one of these aspects.

The essays in the first part, **Discursive Metamorphoses**, discuss the different functions and potentials of old and new media in various discourses. They are concerned with the macrostructural effects of the shifts in (recent) media history—in social, political, economic, and academic contexts.

In her essay “World Wide Web and the Emotional Public Sphere”, Raili Marling first discusses the ways in which the Web facilitates a release of tension between the private and the public sphere, and functions as a site of ironic, parodic, or intimate engagement with the rational public sphere. The Web is an important constituent of the “emotional public sphere”. Online forms of private involvement not only personalise social interactions but also have an impact on the functioning of society. They offer a means of empowerment for a private person achieved by ritually breaking taboos, mocking public myths, de-heroising leaders, and inverting power relations. Online communications contribute to the transformation of the public sphere and the development of counterpublics. The essay explores this topic through an analysis of parodic memes produced and distributed by Internet counterpublics on platforms such as Twitter during the 2012 US Presidential election campaign.

Mary Nickel’s discussion of “The Structural Transformation of the Cybersphere” takes a closer look at the social networking sites behind such online communications. She traces the trajectory of online communication and self-representation from their early stages, on USENET, to their present-day consolidation on social networking sites. Drawing on Habermas’ seminal discussion of *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, she shows how the mechanisms that led to the disintegration of the public sphere in the 20th century are also at work in today’s digital communities. Against this backdrop, the essay argues that it is the institutional arrangement of social networking sites and

the economic incentives that motivate their founders, which trigger these mechanisms. Although being very popular, devices such as the 'Like' button and the 'News Feed' may also promulgate particular detriments for democratic societies. The essay contends that, as a result, these devices further foster the individual self-segregation that already occurs offline, and therefore may not be as beneficial to democratic societies as they have been portrayed by some.

While the first two essays in this section examine the social, political, and economic effects of new media, David Beer examines their impact on the academic discourse. In "Algorithms in the Academy" he looks at the ways in which software algorithms are transforming the university sector. Drawing upon a range of works on the social implications and power of algorithms, the essay explores how these various algorithmic powers are now becoming implicit within the university sector: in research, in teaching, and in the general administration of university life. Beer argues that these transformations, which are often unnoticed, are quietly reshaping and re-sorting academic practices and experiences in various ways. As such these developments require attention in order for us to see how algorithmic and human agency now mesh in the context of the university and to see how algorithms might now already have some power in shaping research outcomes, teaching, and other parts of academic work.

The second part of this collection 'zooms in' and focuses on **Transmedia Metamorphoses**. From a more microstructural perspective on the transformation of the media landscape, the contributions examine examples where old media assume functions of new media, where new media employ the qualities of old media, and where theoretical approaches to old media are adopted for new media productively.

The section opens with Cathrin Bengesser examining the role of the DVD recipient in "Spectator, Player, 'Modder': The Transition from the Cinematic Cave to the Digital Dispositif". The essay traces the effects of the arrival of the DVD in the late 1990s, when film moved from the cinematic dispositif to computers and gaming consoles, and thus to the dominion of interactive entertainment. These new, interactive dispositifs still allow for traditional lean-back consumption of film, but they also offer additional, interactive pleasures for the viewer. This new dimension is not limited to DVD menus or extras but also reaches into the films themselves. Once inserted into a DVD drive or a gaming console, complex narratives with non-linear or branching storylines, conflicting perspectives, puzzling twists, or richness in references can be turned into 'game boards' by viewers who are familiar with the possibilities and pleasures of interactive media. The essay thus examines various game-like

pleasures of digital film consumption: immersion, navigation, discovery, puzzle solving, and competition. The examples of the ways in which viewers 'play' with film show how the success of interactive new media is ultimately working back on the old medium of film.

Adding a more production-oriented view to the mutual influence of old and new media, Martin Roussel examines the history of writing. In "How To Do Words With Things: Paul Auster's Typewriter and the History of Writing in the 20th Century" he draws a line from Walter Benjamin's *One-Way Street* (*Einbahnstraße*, 1928) to Auster's *The Story of My Typewriter* (2002). While the first was written at a time that marked the transition from handwriting to typewriting, Auster already reflects on his typewriter as an old-fashioned dispositif of writing. Yet, throughout the 20th century the typewriter has written its very own success story. Not only has the idea of authorship been closely tied to the typewriter. While the typewriter allowed for a measurement of literary productiveness, the process of typewriting also individualised printing techniques. In contrast to mass printing techniques, typewriting figured writing as a three-dimensional interaction of man and machine where the writer appears as a 'sculptor' chiselling text bodies (Adorno). Today, it is digital technologies that change the scene of writing. The new media dispositif thus helps to unveil the limitations but also the potentials of old media such as the typewriter.

The first two essays in this section thus contrast processes of transmedia production and reception: old media exploring functions of new media (Bengesser) and new media assuming and expanding qualities of old media (Roussel). There is, however, another interesting dimension to the mutual influence between old and new media, namely adopting theoretical approaches to old media for new media. Such a theoretical transfer and its aesthetic appropriation are central to Christian Sinn's discussion of conceptual parallels between written and visual essays in "Bloomsday? On the Theory of Intermediality and the Production of Photo-Essays and Film-Essays". Sinn first examines the rich historical background of essay-writing. Beginning with the Pyrrhonist scepticism in Michel de Montaigne's work he then draws a line to Theodor W. Adorno's dialectical notion of a philosophical essay as a "reciprocal interaction of its concepts" and to Walter Benjamin's more recipient-based approach to the essay as an emblematic form. Against this backdrop, Jens Schröter's typology of intermediality then provides a link to a "thinking in images" as it is also suggested by the two examples that wrap up the discussion: Bazon Brock's photo-essay *Bloom-Zeitung* (1963) and Jem Cohen's film-essay *Lost Book Found* (USA 1996).

In the light of transmedia production, reception, and criticism, the final essay in this section is concerned with the transmedia metamorphoses of an original work of art. In "Speaking Up in the Age of Media Convergence: Patrick Neate's *Babel* (2010) and Plan B's *iLL Manors* (2012)", Christoph Reinfandt traces the multi-medial fate of Patrick Neate's text *Babel* from its origins as a ten-minute piece of performance poetry to the twenty-five minute TV version of the text shown on Channel 4 in 2005 and on to the sixty-minute dance performance produced by avant-garde choreographers Liam Steel and Rob Tannion, which was touring in the UK in 2010 and led to the book publication of the text later in that year. The essay combines a close reading of the text with minute attention to the consequences the various media formats and discourse positions have for the act of speaking up *against* the discursive restrictions and determination imposed by these very same media formats and discourses. Hereby, the essay addresses the enabling and restricting impact of the contemporary mediascape on individual speaking positions and reflects upon the historical trajectory of media history behind this state of affairs. The essay refers back to the varying discursive functions of old and new media discussed in the essays at the beginning of this collection, and, at the same time, anticipates the poetic potential of old and new media that is central to the final part of our book.

In this last section, **Fictional Metamorphoses** take centre stage: metamorphoses of (new) media as an artistic subject and aesthetic technique—in films, novels, digital art etc.

Opening the discussion with a classic of both 'media fiction' and science fiction, Nina Shiel's "Space, Change, and Statements in Literary Representations of Virtual Worlds" traces the subject back to William Gibson's *Neuromancer* (1984). Not only has this work famously coined the notion of 'cyberspace', but it also offers an excellent starting point to discuss the cycle of mutual influence between the virtual and the real as suggested by Pierre Lévy. Against this background, Shiel argues that representations of virtual space in fiction have changed dramatically, as the general familiarity with its associated technology has increased. To test this hypothesis, the essay refers to Bertrand Westphal's concept of geocriticism and then examines three literary representations of virtual space, each from one of the three decades that have passed since the publication of Gibson's seminal novel. The essay thus draws a line from *Neuromancer*, where the virtual is still an alien (and frightening) realm of modern mythology, to Neal Stephenson's *Snow Crash* (1992) whose virtual world is already a social space for business and leisure activities, and closes with the multiplicity of different virtual ludic worlds in Charles

Stross' *Halting State* (2007)—which, ironically, closes with the protagonist's Game Over and return to the real world.

These three stages of virtual worlds in literary history provide an interesting framework for Nina Peter's discussion of a novel that has been published in a phase of transition and links the virtual space to questions of creation and authorship. In "Literary Reflections on New Media. Richard Powers' *Plowing the Dark* (2000)", Peter examines how the two narrative threads in Power's novel correspond to different motivations for creating virtual (and fictional) worlds: as an escapist endeavour and as a place of survival. In the novel, the virtual thus is a space of social consequence *and* a ludic utopia at the same time. Against this backdrop, the essay is particularly concerned with the functions that old and new media assume in art creation, the modes of representation in dealing with them, and the poetological potentials that arise. When dealing with Power's novel, the essay therefore first focuses on the creator-protagonists' desires for 'electronic transcendence' through digital technologies (based on their belief that digital media are superior to older media), then examines their strategies and techniques to create invented worlds, and finally outlines the contrast between the protagonists' poetics of escape and diversion and the novel's own poetological concept.

The next essay complements this authorship-oriented view on the aesthetic potential of the digital. Ulrike Küchler's "New Media—New Literacy? The Digital Reader's Creative Challenges" examines digital worlds of fiction that are, in their own ways, still based on literary modes of narration, but go far beyond them, and the role of the reader within them. The essay suggests to distinguish three different qualities of interaction that influence the individual approach to digital art: the instrumental, phenomenal, and aesthetic experience of the recipient. The argument then centres around three browser-based examples that set various tasks for the new recipient and focus on different aspects of new media literacy: *The 12 Labors of the Internet User* (2008) is a collaborative bilingual English-French project that translates the myth of the Herculean labors into technological challenges for the new media recipient. *Dadaventuras* (2004) employs these technological potentials of new media to link various pieces of Spanish-language literature—from 15th century Catalan poetry to popular culture—to the artistic modes of the Avantgarde and asks its recipients to trace and (re-)compose the history of literature and the arts. In the interactive narrative *Loss of Grasp* (2010), the reader finally assumes the role of the author and has to face the different stages of the process of transmedia storytelling itself.

With any 'old' medium once having been 'new', we can be sure that any discussion examining the *Metamorphoses of (New) Media* is certainly an interminable endeavour. Consequently, the section and this collection conclude with a look at the renaissance of the fragment as an aesthetic concept in new media. In "Non Finito: Fragmentary Narration in Transmedial Worlds", Susanne Marschall argues for a renewal of the fine-arts term *non finito* in interactive (mass) media. Fostered by phenomena such as fandom art and the rise of the paradigm of seriality, blockbusters such as the *Harry Potter* movie series link epic traditions with fragmentary storytelling. Inviting their audiences to the storytelling process, they initiate an infinite follow-up communication that continuously expands the story universe and develops countless parallel narratives, even creating entirely new genres such as mobisodes. Against this backdrop the essay explores how movies and series such as *Sita Sings the Blues* (2008), *Avatar* (2009), and *Lost* (2004-2010) explore the aesthetic potential of the fragment. In adopting strategies of myth-making, scientisation, and the re-reading of history, they transform into transmedia hypertexts that create a network of references between storylines and discourses.

This is also the place, where the discussion of the various fictional metamorphoses in the field of old and new media refers back to the beginning of our book and the relation between media metamorphoses and the challenging of established discursive structures. The eleven essays collected in this volume thus approach the *Metamorphoses of (New) Media* as an on-going process of change, in which the emergence of new media not only allows for a repositioning of old media but for a revaluation of related discursive, medial, and aesthetic models.

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PART I:

DISCURSIVE METAMORPHOSES

CHAPTER ONE

WORLD WIDE WEB AND THE EMOTIONAL PUBLIC SPHERE

RAILI MARLING

The media landscape of the Western world has undergone a radical change in the past decade. Traditional or 'old' media, especially major daily newspapers, are losing their audiences, while 'new media' are becoming increasingly dominant sources of information. Although new media derive many of their stories from the traditional media, the narratives are represented in a different format. New media (e.g. news aggregators like the Huffington Post or online news channels like Vice News) are able to react to events faster and with more emotional involvement. New media democratise knowledge production and also allow more interactivity to the readers/viewers.[1] As a result, the very definition of news and consumption of news is changing. This change has generated an active debate about the fragmentation of audiences and the potential impact of this fragmentation on the democratic process. Cass Sunstein believes that people can avoid meeting views different from theirs online and tend to retreat into "deliberative enclaves" which leads to social polarisation and fragmentation.[2] In contrast, other authors, like Douglas Kellner, see new media as an engine of greater democratic involvement that offers a wider range of opinions and critiques than traditional corporate media.[3] However, although new media may seem inherently more democratic, Dahlberg points out that online—like offline—discourses are dominated by corporate interests and users are often framed as passive consumers.[4] Many complex issues intersect in the discussion of new media and democracy and there is as yet little scholarly consensus.

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[1] Livingstone, "Audiences and Publics," 63.
[2] Sunstein, *Republic.com*, 67.
[3] Kellner, "Media and the Crises of Democracy," 51–52.
[4] Dahlberg, "Rethinking the Fragmentation of the Cyberpublic," 840–841. Dahlberg offers an interesting critique of Cass Sunstein's position.

The spread of new media has also led to wider debates about the public sphere and public debate. This essay seeks to contribute to that discussion by analysing the ways in which the Web functions as a site of ironic engagement with the rational public sphere. The Web is an important constituent of the "emotional public sphere".[5] Online forms of private involvement empower private individuals by allowing them to mock public myths, de-heroise leaders and invert power relations. Such forms of private participation reveal conflicts between tacit knowledge that guides people in everyday life and official hierarchies. The essay contends that Internet information communities and counterpublics, as conceptualised by Nancy Fraser, contribute to the transformation of the traditional public sphere.

The essay will, first, discuss the applicability of Habermas' notion of the public sphere and Mouffe's concept of agonistic public spaces for the discussion of the Internet as an emotional public sphere that encourages the creation of counterpublics. The theoretical framework will be tested on the example of parodic texts counterpublics created in the online emotional public sphere of the 2012 Presidential elections in the USA.

Rhetorical Public Sphere, Counterpublics, and the Web

Jürgen Habermas defined the public sphere as a collection of "private people gathered together as a public and articulating the needs of society within the state".[6] For Habermas the ideal public sphere is based on dialogue and rational-critical deliberation that results in a consensus. The Habermasian notion of the rational public sphere has faced serious challenges since its introduction[7] and critiques have increased after the advent of the Internet. The Internet age has not only radically altered the boundaries of the public and the private sphere but also challenged previous interpretations of the public sphere and public debate. On the one hand, the Internet seems to be a universal, democratic, and anti-hierarchical site of interaction, lauded by many as a means of empowerment and freedom.[8] Its many-to-many communication appears to have overcome the problems of limited participation in the bourgeois

[5] Richards, *Emotional Governance*, 57.
[6] Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, 176.
[7] Cf. Calhoun, *Habermas and the Public Sphere*.
[8] Even Habermas (*Between Facts and Norms*, 514) expressed optimism about a world public sphere. For contemporary research, see e.g. Dahlberg "Rethinking the Fragmentation of the Cyberpublic". The optimistic visions were especially visible in the analyses of the Arab Spring events (see e.g. Khondker, "New Media").

public sphere and enables a wider circle of people to express their opinions, speak back to power, or debate issues. On the other hand, critics have pointed out that the Internet serves to privatise politics, promote consumerism, and increase surveillance. [9] The Habermasian definition of the public sphere also imposes its own limitations, with its focus on rational deliberation, consensus, and a narrow definition of the public. Jodi Dean argues that "to territorialize cyberia[10] as the public sphere is to determine in advance what sort of engagements and identities are proper to the political and to use this determination to homogenise political engagement, neutralise social space, and sanitise popular cultures".[11] The notions of publicness, consensus, and debate that are derived from the model of the traditional bourgeois public sphere cannot be automatically transferred to the Internet. Dean believes it is more useful to see the Internet as a "zero institution",[12] one with no positive function but just signifying "the actuality of social institutions".[13] It, more specifically, allows very different constituencies to see themselves as belonging to the same global structure.

> It [the Web] provides an all-encompassing space in which social antagonism is simultaneously expressed and obliterated. It is a global space in which one can recognize oneself as connected to everyone else, as linked to everything that matters. At the same time, it is a space of conflicting networks and networks of conflict so deep and fundamental that even to speak of consensus or convergence seems an act of naiveté at best, violence at worst.[14]

This openness to expression and antagonism is important to this essay as well. Instead of trying to fit the multilayered Internet interaction into the Habermasian model, it would be more useful to rethink the public sphere and its politics. One possible alternative is Chantal Mouffe's concept of "agonistic public spaces" as "places for the expression of dissensus, for

[9] E.g. Buchstein, "Bytes that Bite"; Kahn and Kellner, "New Media and Internet Activism".
[10] To refer to the internet-based interconnected world, Dean uses the term 'cyberia' as a synonym to 'cyberworld'.
[11] Dean, "Cybersalons and Civil Society," 246–247.
[12] The term is borrowed from Slavoj Žižek (*Enjoy Your Symptom!*, 253–254), who in turn borrowed it from Claude Lévi-Strauss.
[13] Dean, "Why the Net Is Not a Public Sphere," 105.
[14] Dean, "Why the Net Is Not a Public Sphere," 106.

bringing to the floor what forces attempt to keep concealed".[15] Mouffe suggests that public spaces are always plural and that social actors passionately articulate different perspectives in them without reaching a definitive rational consensus. The public is exposed to a diversity of viewpoints in this agonistic struggle and this forms the basis of a truly pluralist democracy. Dean also emphasises the contestation and conflict characteristic for the Internet: its users "reject the fantasy of a public and instead work from the antagonisms that animate political life".[16] This focus on radical pluralism is well suited for the multiplicity of voices and positions on the Web and enables us to see the Web not merely as a public sphere but as an "information community".[17] However, although the Internet contains diverse public spaces and radical dissent, people are not using the choice they have been given and stay within their "deliberative enclaves" to reinforce their beliefs.[18]

Both the public sphere and the public space depend on the agency of social actors. In the present essay I am interested in the social actors who come together as publics. I use the term 'public' to refer to a group of people with an orientation towards collective action, not just in a political context but also more broadly in social life.[19] Participants in online discussions are not passive consumers of information and entertainment, but—at least potentially—also authors who shape the information community and, through that, also society at large. For example, Dayan argues that

> a public is not simply a spectator in plural, a sum of spectators, an addition. It is a coherent entity whose nature is collective; an ensemble characterized by shared sociability, shared identity, and some sense of that identity.[20]

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[15] Quoted in Carpentier and Cammaerts, "Hegemony, Democracy, Agonism and Journalism," 973. For a longer discussion, see Mouffe, "Deliberative Democracy".
[16] Dean, "Why the Net Is Not a Public Sphere," 108.
[17] MacKinnon, *The World-Wide Conversation*, 10.
[18] Carpentier and Cammaerts, "Hegemony, Democracy, Agonism and Journalism," 968; Sunstein, *Republic.com.*
[19] For a longer discussion, see Livingstone, "Audiences and Publics," 25. Livingstone points out that there is considerable conceptual confusion between the terms 'public' and 'audience'. Political science has tended to see publics as public and active, audiences as private and passive, but this contrast no longer holds in today's "mediascape", to use the term coined by Appadurai (1990), with its increasing blending of the public and the private (Livingstone, "Audiences and Publics," 18).
[20] Dayan, "Mothers, Midwives and Abortionists," 46.

The Internet, despite its commodification and co-optation into a global surveillance system, continues to promise greater access to the public debate than the traditional bourgeois public sphere. It appears as a platform for voicing their views not just for hegemonic groups, but also for a variety of counterpublics.[21] Nancy Fraser coined the term "counterpublics" to refer to "parallel discursive arenas" that create and circulate alternatives to the hegemonic public discourse.[22] According to Palczewski counterpublics generate "alternative validity claims", "alternative norms of public speech", "oppositional interpretations of needs", cultural identities, and even energy.[23] David Faris believes that new media, by creating spaces for counterpublics, "increase the carrying capacity of the public sphere".[24] Recent research has also suggested that Internet-based means of communication such as blogging are consciously being used to create counter-discourses and "engage in a contest for the representational resources that are necessary for redefining social reality".[25] In the present essay I am not interested in counterpublics that are allied in social movements or organised around certain social causes. My argument, rather, focuses on counterpublics as constellations of individuals who come together in unorganised, yet mutually energised online events or locations that challenge the dominant ideologies of today or point out their internal inconsistencies.

Warner elaborates that counterpublics are characterised by a "tension with the larger public": they are structured differently, they make different assumptions and are aware of their subordinate status.[26] This places counterpublics in a critical tension with power structures, be it in political stances or chosen speech genres and idioms. Warner believes that counterpublics "try to supply different ways of imagining stranger

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[21] Dean ("Why the Net Is Not a Public Sphere," 96–97) believes that just pluralising the notion of the public does not constitute a solution as the sharing of the same norms makes them the same public; not sharing the same norms makes them interest groups. However, I believe that the notion of counterpublics is valuable as it allows us to single out online publics that take an explicitly antagonistic stance towards the public consensus.

[22] Fraser, "Rethinking the Public Sphere," 67.

[23] Palczewski, "Cyber-Movements," 166–167.

[24] Faris, *Dissent and Revolution in a Digital Age*, 123. He also notes, however, that network connections also matter in the new media as it is better connected individuals who are more effective in getting their voices heard and spread.

[25] Eckert and Chadha, "Muslim Bloggers in Germany," 939.

[26] Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics*, 56. Warner himself, in his theoretical discussion, uses few explicit examples, but he does refer to gay/queer counterpublics.

sociability and its reflexivity".[27] They are "spaces of circulation in which it is hoped that the poiesis of scene making will be transformative, nor replicative merely".[28] Although he does not investigate it *per se*, Warner believes the Internet can change the understanding of the public sphere profoundly.[29]

Emotional Public Sphere

The present essay argues that developments in Internet communication, especially in social media, have made the Internet more dialogic than the traditional public sphere. This democratic public space has enabled not just citationality (from repostings to mash-ups) but also a web of interlocking responses that empower individual private persons by giving them a safe space for political speech, using new modes of expression like digital heckling and dialogue (commenting, reposting). More than anything, new media thus generate a more effective sense of reciprocity. Tropes and memes are generated, circulated, and re-performed in different Internet locations to different emotional ends. Emotions are crucial for the present essay because they are excluded from the Habermasian notion of the public sphere, but play an important role in public spaces, including Internet spaces, where antagonistic debates about different social issues take place. Moreover, it is shared passions that often fuel counterpublics in their challenges to social consensus.[30]

Discussions of the public sphere have focused on reason since Kant, who distinguished public and private uses of reason and associated only the first with enlightenment.[31] Emotions have been largely excluded from the discussions of political sense-making because of their association with irrationality. Media scholars have also viewed emotions with ambivalence, for example in criticising the emotionalisation of political life[32]. Widespread concern over the tabloidisation of the media and the attendant

[27] Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics*, 121.
[28] Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics*, 122.
[29] Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics*, 97.
[30] Kingston, *Public Passion*, 201. For a specific case study of the use of emotions in the creation of counterpublics, see Sziarto and Leitner, "Immigrants Riding for Justice".
[31] Cf. Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics*, 44.
[32] Thompson, *Political Scandal*; van Zoonen, "After Dallas and Dynasty".

"sense of declining cultural, educational and political standards"[33] is typical of the tacit belief in the need for rational public actors and unbiased, informative media. In research on the public sphere, emotions have been treated with, at best, caution and, at worst, disdain as sources of irrationality and manipulability.

However, in the study of new media emotions merit a new and closer look. Emotion and affect are among the academic buzzwords of the 2000s: in the humanities and social sciences we even talk of an affective turn.[34] In political sciences there has been increasing attention to the fundamental role of emotions in political decision-making.[35] Although media studies do not seem to have experienced an affective turn *per se*, media scholars have also taken considerable interest in emotions.[36] Thus, the attention to affect has generated more interest in affective communication and the role of emotion in mobilising action. "Emotions do not merely offer temporary and comforting communities of feeling […] but can also trigger public deliberation and public actions, for the latter only survive if held up by firm emotional commitment".[37] This is, for example, evident in public emotional outbursts like those following the deaths of Princess Diana, the Dutch film-maker Theo van Gogh, or the Swedish politician Anna Lindh[38] or after the events of 9/11.[39]

This link between the Internet as a space of deliberation and the increasing awareness of the role of emotions in public discussions raises the question of an emotional public sphere that manages emotional conflict and emotional responses—often by marginalised voices—to political issues in the public sphere. In media studies, the emotional public sphere has been analysed from the perspective of traditional media. Scholars have, for example, studied how traditional media create moral

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[33] Barnett, "Dumbing Down or Reaching Out," 75. These often alarmist critics of "dumbing down", as Barnett shows, ignore the fact that tablodisation has also created a less elitist form of media communication.

[34] See e.g., Thompson and Hoggett, *Politics and the Emotions*.

[35] Cf. Marcus, *Affective Intelligence*; Marcus et al., *The Sentimental Citizen.*

[36] Demertzis, "Emotions in the Media," 85. Demertzis claims that some sub-fields of media studies have engaged with emotions from their inception but that this interest does not extend to the discipline as a whole. Madianou ("Audience Reception," 334), in contrast, believes that media studies have been affected by the general affective turn in social sciences.

[37] Pantti and van Zoonen, "Do Crying Citizens Make Good Citizens?", 210.

[38] Pantti, "Masculine Tears, Feminine Tears".

[39] These emotions were also encouraged by political communications, as shown by Altheide, "Creating Fear".

panics and "impoverished images of the public"[40] or, in the context of talk shows, ironic engagement with rational public discussion.[41] Also, much of the research has focused on the traditional sphere of political participation, but in contemporary public life, spaces of debate and dissent exist in locations that are traditionally seen as apolitical. Recent work on, for example, the blogosphere demonstrates that emotions play a key role in spurring activist interventions and building communities. However, emotions can also have a deleterious effect as the anonymity of the online public sphere also unleashes emotionally heightened criticism, also by actors whose views cannot be articulated in the traditional public discourse.[42]

The present essay argues that it is in this emotional public sphere where we encounter ironic, parodic, or intimate engagement with the rational public sphere. As more of what has been recognised as the rational public sphere moves into the agonistic space of the Internet, traditional political deliberation comes into contact with the more anarchic and more emotional online commentary and debate.[43] It has to be remembered, however, that political parties and interest groups also use emotional online devices to stigmatise opponents or to promote their own candidates, at times disguised as members of the public or even counterpublics (e.g. through astroturfing[44]). Online counterpublics have the potential to not just raise topics and voice criticisms, but also to challenge the commonly accepted "feeling rules"[45] or "emotional regimes".[46] Online counterpublics may consciously violate social taboos and challenge social norms. One example is the questioning of the normative striving for individual happiness and material success in the current neoliberal consensus, which—despite the public celebration of material success—has become increasingly impossible to even middle-

[40] Richards, *Emotional Governance*, 72.
[41] Lunt and Stenner, "The Jerry Springer Show".
[42] E.g., Lopez, "Blogging While Angry," 422.
[43] E.g., Jenkins et al., *Spreadable Media*, 28.
[44] Astroturfing refers to hiding the sponsors of a political message and disguising it as the spontaneous product of grassroots citizens. Fake election ads have been discussed by Tryon ("Pop Politics"). Daniel Kreiss analysed the ways in which the presidential campaigns of 2012 used social media, specifically Twitter, to supply journalists with their interpretations of events. See Kreiss, "Seizing the Moment".
[45] Hochschild, *The Managed Heart*, 56.
[46] Riis and Woodhead, *A Sociology of Religious Emotion*, 11.

class Westerners. For instance, a website like Despair, Inc.,[47] which satirises the motivational language of today's corporations, is a means of channelling social and psychological aggression, but also of coping with failure by demonstrating the problematic premises of success. As "affect aliens", to use the term of Sara Ahmed[48], counterpublics offer emotionally charged challenges to the consensus of the rational public sphere, but also a potential form of social catharsis.

This catharsis is partly achieved by what could be seen as an extension of the Bakhtinian culture of laughter, with its liberating reversal of hierarchies and ridicule of authority.[49] Hariman suggests that "by doubling discourse into a self-consciously comic image of itself, and then casting that image before the most democratic, undisciplined, and irreverent conception of a public audience, parodic performance recasts the hermeneutics of public discourse".[50] The parodic forms, in other words, reveal the constructedness of institutional norms, values, and achievements. Hariman sees this parodic replication as a necessary element in the retention of a vibrant public speech: the ridiculing echo of public speech opens the latter up to a certain "semantic indeterminacy, a certain semantic openendedness, a living contact with the still-evolving contemporary reality".[51] In Hariman's opinion, this inevitability of display in other contexts expands public speech and thus also reduces official/elite control of public discussion.[52] The audience's active and critical engagement, which is revealed in mocking, is more relevant to vibrant democratic discussion than mute consensus that masks passivity and political inertia.

Some forms and structures of parodic texts achieve their effect by cognitive dissonance. Our social existence forces us to accept some elements of social life (e.g., power structures, triteness of political slogans,

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[47] For a detailed and ironic discussion of the rationale, see Kersten, *The Art of Demotivation*. The most recognisable products of Despair, Inc. are their Demotivators, posters that imitate the aspirational language and imagery of motivational speakers, but send the opposite message (e.g. 'Believe in yourself. Because the rest of us think you're an idiot', see http://despair.com/collections/demotivators/products/believe-in-yourself, accessed May 15, 2015).

[48] Ahmed, *The Promise of Happiness*.

[49] In this regard, my argument compares to that of Hess ("Purifying Laughter") who, also building on the work of Bakhtin, has analysed Jon Stewart's *The Daily Show* as a radical critique of the news industry.

[50] Hariman, "Political Parody," 255.

[51] Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, 7. Bakhtin speaks about novelisation, but Hariman applies this idea to the parodic.

[52] Hariman, "Political Parody," 258.

hypocrisies of people in power, etc.) that are inherently absurd. Online parodic texts, like the ones analysed below, uncover this dissonance and thus offer liberation through laughter. Parodic revelation of the vacuousness of public ideologies produces laughter that releases the grip of these ideologies over a person. Thus "the annihilating laughter at the momentary triumph of the absurd is a moment of freedom".[53] This freedom may translate into distancing oneself from alienating power structures but also potentially into increased political and public engagement. Parody nurtures healthy scepticism and hones critical skills by showing the constructedness of standard political content and ideologies. The public is released from the constraints of alienating political ideology and is encouraged to engage in their own proactive forms of political participation, either online (blogging, posting on social media websites) or offline (by voting).

New Emotional Public Sphere and Political Deliberation in the 2012 US Presidential Campaign

New media have become a staple of today's political campaigning. The 2008 US presidential campaign of Barack Obama was notable in its use of social media and also the social media's intervention in the campaign. It is impossible to say precisely what role social media played in the actual election results, beyond energising young voters, but they created a new and emotionally invested area of political campaigning and new forms of political dialogue. Social media were even more prominent in the 2012 election, with roughly 31.7 million political tweets, at 327,452 tweets per minute at times.[54] Barack Obama's Twitter account had 22,112,160 followers, Mitt Romney's 1,761,442 by Election Day.[55] The campaign of 2012 was a multi-directional information event that involved not just the traditional public sphere but also a multiplicity of counterpublics in the emotional public sphere of the social media. The 2012 US presidential elections also demonstrated that what could be called digital heckling, posting derisive content online to mock a candidate or a position, had matured as a form of popular political response. The present essay chose the presidential election because it is a contained media event and now also lies far enough in the past for us to have gained some perspective. Within the election campaign, presidential debates receive special national

[53] Hariman, "Political Parody," 257.
[54] Finn, "Election 2012".
[55] Kreiss, "Seizing the Moment," 6.