

EDITORIAL **CULTURAL** **PARTICIPATION,** **SOCIAL MEDIA AFFECT** **AND ART**

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This special issue of *Conjunctions* brings together seven academic articles that shed light on to two different fields: the affective and bodily dimension of social media participation and cultural participation in aesthetic activities, in-or outside institutions. The issue ends with a review of Nico Carpentier's book *The Discursive-Material Knot*.

The issue opens with Elena Pilipets' article, which explores the anomalous role that social media environments play in the dynamics of affective amplification through viral visual content. In her article "Between Bullshit and Faketuality: The Viral Anomaly of the Image of Laith Al Saleh", the analytical starting point is the image of Laith Al Saied that was posted on Facebook on September 3, 2015, by Peter Lee Goodchild, which went viral based on the false claim that it shows an IS fighter posing as a refugee. In his Facebook post Goodchild writes: "Remember this guy? Posing in ISIS photos last year – now he's a 'refugee' Are we suckers or what!" The image to which he refers is a side-by-side image in which the first photograph on the left shows a bearded man wearing military gear and holding an assault rifle in his hand, while the second photograph on the right side shows a similar-looking, perfectly shaved man wearing sunglasses, a backpack and a green T-shirt with the print, "Thank you". Below a text box in red suggests further context as follows: "Asylum seeker Macedonian border August 2015". The image received more than 70,000 shares, 7,000 likes and 2,500 comments within a short period of time. Using the image as a starting point, Pilipets argues that, affected by the post 9/11 logic of media securitization, the circulation of manipulated images and internet memes has created an atmosphere of controversial sentiments and irrational facts. It is against this background that Pilipets discusses how the viral spread of the image of Laith Al Saied during the so-called refugee crisis contributed to the emergence of the issue of 'terrorist refugee'. Exploring the infrastructures of media alert behind this issue, Pilipets addresses the re- and premediating forces at play in the circulation of the image as *faketual* and argues that rather than relying on the availability of valid sources, networked formations of faketuality feel true even if they are known to be fabricated. The argument is developed by adapting digital methods to reflect on the shifts in controversial relations of relevance/visibility as they unfold through our everyday encounters with search engines, online news media and social platforms.

In "Hillary-hating and the Politics of Ugly Memes" Emma Blackett investigates the many ugly memes that surround the American politician, former First Lady and 2016 presidential candidate Hillary Clinton. These images and memes include exaggerated goitres, deeply wrinkled scowls and clownish grins, sometimes with fangs dripping blood; bulging eyes, often reddened to look demonic or alien-green; and more complicated photoshop projects such as the devil-horned woman riding a donkey with weird sexual accoutrements, or tied to a stake above a burning fire. As a politician who became famous for being another politician's wife, Hillary Clinton has long been a lightning rod for American fears (and hopes) about the state of gender. Most commentators agree that she has been hated ubiquitously since 1992, but scholarship on Hillary-hating almost always considers it a male impulse. Blackett takes a different approach by asking why right-wing American feminists hate Hillary Clinton, and studying the six largest "Women for Trump" Facebook groups, which, altogether, have more than 520,000 subscribers. Posts and comments in the six Facebook groups were archived and coded according to dominant themes and they were scrutinized in the four weeks straddling the 2016 election (Oct 25 to Nov 22). WFT frequently describes themselves as feminists, and although they hate Hillary Clinton, their Hillary-hating is not reducible to the sort of sexism that is rooted in basic fear of female power. Blackett argues that Women for Trump's Hillary-hating is not driven by the sort of rational engagement with issues citizens tend to believe they perform, but rather freewheels around the intimate public (Berlant, 1997) of American politics as an indomitable emotional rejection of her. Blackett applies a 'memetic' analysis to look at the affective objectiveness of Clinton's image: where it travels, with what impetus, and what responses it provokes. Affect plays a crucial role in both sharing memes online and the workings of misogyny and racism in rightwing women's pursuit of the American dream, and Blackett argues that Clinton's images carries potent affective charges. This entails, argues Blackett, that 'Women for Trump' defend the ideal American coupling of whiteness and hetero-reproductivity and believe that this promises them a happy life. In this context the hatred of Hillary Clinton has little to do with political reason, and everything to do with boundary-dwelling bodies that disrupt feelings of safety and belonging to the national community, bodies that become unhappy objects by disrupting the collective sense of progress in the pursuit of happiness.

In "The Guilty Feminist Army: A Podcast for a refreshed Politics of Feminism" Natalie Diddams investigates the comedy podcast *The Guilty Feminist* (2015) and the ways in which its creators – comedians Deborah Frances-White and Sofie Hagen – use humor to discuss topics within and related to feminism. Diddams' object of study – *The Guilty Feminist* – has had more than 50 million downloads over the past three years and has received a number of award nominations. Since it first aired it has also

undergone a transformation. Hagen left in 2017, and Frances-White now co-hosts the show with a variety of high-profile women comedians such as Shappi Khorsandi, Jessica Fostekew and Aisling Bea. Episodes – which last approximately 60 minutes – refer to issues currently being discussed in the media, such as *Repeal the Eighth* (May 2018) and *Period Poverty* (December 2017), or center on timeless feminist issues, such as *Emotional Labour* (January 2018) and *Language* (November 2017). The topics are explored through conversations, stand-up comedy and panel discussions, which a range of invited guests participate in. As such the podcast is complex not only in its form, but also in its context. Diddams approaches the podcast by focusing on its complex relationship with the so-called fourth wave feminist movement and she investigates the ways in which listeners are offered the opportunity to qualitatively alter their experience of the everyday through laughter. As such women-led comedy is a form of contemporary feminist praxis. In prolongation of this, the paper argues for the reimagining of podcasts such as *The Guilty Feminist* as a burgeoning form of online activism which has the potential to intensify the emergence of a global, intersectional feminist community. Diddams argues that comedy podcasts such as *The Guilty Feminist* hold the potential to challenge the unpleasant intensities of fear connected with online hate, which “have the power to reroute the bodies of women and other others, and to diminish their ability to act, to speak, to challenge, and to engage” (Paasonen et al, 2018:5), because podcast listening is usually positioned by consumers as an entirely positive experience, aimed at relaxation and enjoyment. *The Guilty Feminist*, argues Diddams, provokes laughter and joy as opposed to fear and shame, opening the body to the world and increasing its capacity to act. Diddams discussions of *The Guilty Feminist* thus sheds light on the affective potential of laughter and on how laughter can lead to explosions of emotion in the public sphere, setting the body in motion and leading new ways of thinking, feeling and being.

In “Exploring the Affective Politics of Political Beauty: An Antagonistic Approach” Friederike Landau conceptualizes the intricate interconnection between politics and affect. In doing so she examines a performance by the Berlin-based artist collective Zentrum Für Politische Schönheit (Center for Political Beauty, ZPS), in which artist activists staged a horseback ride to fasten a manifesto of ten theses of political beauty on the façade of the German Bundestag. Landau approaches the affective dimensions of political difference as affective politics and she connects theories of political difference (Marchart 2010), which differentiate between the ontological realm of ‘the political’ and ontic realizations of ‘politics’, and political theories of affect. Furthermore, building on Bargetz’s (2014) “Political Grammar of Feelings” she situates the performance’s temporary institutions and interruptions of ‘politics’ and ‘the political’ as well as ‘feeling politics’ and ‘politics of feeling’ respectively, as affective encounters to experience or enact political beauty. As such, Landau argues that political beauty, in an antagonistic framework that foregrounds contingency, conflict and absence, mobilizes affects as inherently ambivalent and contentious. This is crucial because it entails that Landau’s notion of political beauty challenges the often-posed diagnosis of an inevitable post-political condition and that she discusses the potential of political beauty as affective politics to potentially re-politicize politics. It is from this outset that she conducts a spectral reading of ZPS’ ten theses and carves out three analytical vignettes – beauty, vitality and *sehnsucht* – in order to theorize political beauty as oscillating between the desire and hope for political change, which can never be fully satisfied, and a dismissal of (political) ugliness and death. In the end, she argues, political beauty escapes a definition because it is, after all, nothing but an impossible project for politics and affect of an unknown future.

In section two this focus on art and participation is continued. In the article “Towards a logic of encounter. Social art in the framing of an international conflict transformation initiative”, Marcel Bleuler investigates the alliances between the fields of social art and so-called international ‘development’ cooperation and NGO work. He questions the tendency to understand social art as a tool that results in conclusive effects, arguing that such expectations are based on a reductive notion of art and easily lead to paternalistic or even exploitative projects. The article focuses instead on the self-critical principles that social art contributes to the field of international cooperation, a field that is fundamentally based on asymmetries and inequality between ‘outside’ practitioners and the ‘insiders’ who inhabit the context where the development or transformation is implemented. Bleuler thus argues in favor of an analytical approach that, unlike the effect-oriented perspective understanding, concentrates on how social art practices depart from and reflect on (their own role) in this unequal and sensitive constellation. His empirical focus is the continuing project off/line: what can art do in Zemo Nikozi?, which he co-manages together with Georgian curator Lali Pertenava. Since 2016 off/line has invited artists to work in the framing of a long-term engagement for conflict transformation in the Shida Kartli region of Georgia. Discussing specific and highly diverse artistic practices that have taken place within the off/line project, he develops a typology based on their singular and openended encounters with the village and its residents. In the conclusion, he discusses the general implications of his analytical approach and the typology, first, for the idea of

art as a transferable tool to development, and, second, for the discursive logic that complements the effect-oriented discourse.

While Bleuler takes a critical approach of instrumentalization of and collaboration in social and participatory arts, Ditte Vilstrup Holm argues for positive potentials in a closer relationship between participatory art, participatory culture and cultural policy. She focuses in particular on how notions of artistic autonomy are affected when cultural policy promotes the value of participatory artistic practices. Her article, "Between 'freedom as autonomy' and 'freedom as potentiality' – artistic work in a participatory culture", questions the art community's widespread suspicion that government initiatives instrumentalize artistic practices to serve purposes other than those pursued by artists themselves. In her discussion, she explores the theorization of participatory art in art history and historical studies of the relationship of art to its heteronomous dependencies, as well as organization studies' critical reflections about modern and postmodern organizations. These sources combine to provide an analytical lens through which to view her empirical case: the way in which Danish cultural policy – and in particular an inspirational catalogue entitled 'The art of embedding: about participation in and communication of art projects in public spaces' (2015) – frames art's role in society. She sees the catalogue as an example of a cultural policy that renegotiates the role of art in contemporary society by taking advantage of contemporary opportunities for seizing artistic freedom and expanding collaborations with other fields of practice. Building upon organization studies' reflections about contemporary work life conditions, and drawing, in particular, on Christian Maravelias (2007) distinction between "freedom as autonomy" and "freedom as potentiality", the article promotes a potentially nurturing relationship between art and cultural policy rather than the possible exploitation of one by the other. Contemporary participatory culture, it is argued, conditions as well as promotes artistic practice, thus generating new artistic possibilities.

Like Bleuler and Holm, Sofia Lindström Sol explores various interests in and understandings of participation. In the article, "Equal access or empowerment? Understanding youth participation in cultural institutions through two Swedish case studies", she addresses how participation is conceptualized in cultural policy and by cultural practitioners who work to enhance young people's participation. Based on an empirical interview study of two cultural institutions in Gothenburg, a youth cultural venue, and the youth section of a public library, she analyses how participation is understood and made sense of by actors who wish to strengthen cultural participation among young people. Her study shows how the emphasis on equal access to culture at the policy level shifts to an empowerment emphasis at the level of the two institutions. Empowerment is understood as giving young people, as a marginalised group in the city, a voice through culture, and the civil servants share an understanding that it is both possible and important to distribute power from adults to young people through the questioning of cultural norms. This shift from access to empowerment mirrors a shift in cultural policy paradigms: from cultural democratisation to cultural democracy. In Sol's material, this is primarily set in motion 'from below', i.e. from the cultural institutions, where meaningful ways of facilitating the redistribution of power entail challenging cultural norms regarding the cultural space, value and quality, the creative young subject, the adult role and the cultural event. Participation is thus constructed as a relation-creating process with significant requirements for material and human resources, but while the questioning of normative notions surrounding culture and adult-young person relationships is fraught with risks, it is also made meaningful through its opportunities for distributing power and achieving empowerment.

The special issue concludes with Professor Emeritus Peter Dahlgren's book review of Nico Carpentier's *The Discursive-Material Knot*. Dahlgren presents and discusses Carpentier's work, while also introducing some of the key traditions dealt with by the book (e.g. discourse theory). Dahlgren describes the book as "an impressively rich and in many ways ground-breaking volume" that attempts to shift attention away from an older discussion concerning the relationship between the linguistic and the non-linguistic in favour of an exploration of the discursive-material "knot". The positive review ends with a range of questions – concerning the length of the book, the ontological status of "the knot" and the role of the unconscious and ideology – which will be addressed in a response by Nico Carpentier in the next issue of *Conjunctions*.