

ABSTRACT

SWIFT, JEFFREY CHARLES. *Flash Publics: A Rhetorical Recuperation of Public Sphere Theory in a Digital Age*. (Under the direction of Dr. Carolyn R. Miller).

This dissertation explores the idea of “flash publics” as a useful model for interrogating the roles and practices of rhetoric in the digital age. When it comes to a public sphere, digital rhetoric has the potential to be more about community organizing than Habermasian rational persuasion. In this sense, my project is less interested in how movements use symbolic messages to persuade audiences, but is instead concerned with how citizens use new communication technologies to “flash” themselves into political relevance and existence, creating an ethic of “we weren’t here yesterday and we won’t be here tomorrow, but we still matter today.”

This dissertation argues that Habermas’s idea of the public sphere is again relevant, even after significant practical and theoretical postmodern critiques, in an age of the digital. To demonstrate this renewed appropriateness, I locate a digitally appropriate theoretical frame, informed by a refocusing and recuperation of public sphere theory. This project explores flash publics through the lens of a reanimated public sphere ideal based on natural evolutions of Habermas’ ideas, and proposes three characteristics of public spheres: they are agonistic, compositional, and procedural.

I explore this rhetorical reconceptualization of the public sphere as it is understood through flash publics—digitally augmented, flexible, and for the most part passive but ultimately activist, collectives of democratic engagement. These flash publics build networks that are then ready to take action when the time is right.



Flash Publics: A Rhetorical Recuperation of Public Sphere Theory in a Digital Age
by Jeffrey Charles Swift
is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0
International License.
May 2014

Flash Publics: A Rhetorical Recuperation of Public Sphere Theory in a Digital Age

by
Jeffrey Charles Swift

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty of
North Carolina State University
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

Communication, Rhetoric, & Digital Media

Raleigh, North Carolina

2014

APPROVED BY:

Dr. Carolyn R. Miller
Committee Chair

Dr. Victoria Gallagher

Dr. Matthew May

Dr. David Rieder

DEDICATION

To Sheri, Michael, and Matthew. You wrote this more than you know. Also to my parents, Charles and Denise Swift, who have been writing this dissertation since my first paper in elementary school. And who are now old enough to have a son with a PhD.

BIOGRAPHY

Jeff entered Brigham Young University at age 16, graduating from there with a BA in English and an MA in Rhetoric and Composition. His research focuses include digital rhetoric, democratic theory, networked activism and deliberation, and community building. He has experience as digital consultant, having worked on two successful City Council campaigns in two different cities. He has also advised nonprofits on digital strategy, served as community organizer for a place-based social network, and done broad political consulting work. As a graduate student, he taught courses in first-year and advanced writing, argumentation and advocacy, digital satire, and persuasive writing. He lives in Raleigh, North Carolina with his wife and two sons.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First and foremost, I want to thank the chair of my dissertation committee and founder of my doctoral degree program, Dr. Carolyn R. Miller. Her tireless guidance, abundant and always accurate marginalia, and theoretical steering have brought this project to where it is now. My committee, Dr. Matt May, Dr. Victoria Gallagher, and Dr. David Rieder, have provided friendship and mentoring alongside Dr. Miller's that have shaped my dissertation experience in unmistakable and immeasurable ways. I also want to acknowledge North Carolina State University, and particularly the Communication, Rhetoric, & Digital Media program, for the institutional and academic support they so generously provide. This innovative program has enabled and prepared me to pursue a project that I care about and which has challenged me in productive scholarly directions. Finally, I am grateful for my family's help and support in all its forms: reading drafts, listening to ideas, and playing racecars.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES	vii
Chapter 1 Democratic Engagement in a Digital Age	1
Vignette 1: The Arab Spring.....	1
Vignette 2: We the People.....	3
Vignette 3: The London Riots.....	4
A Shift in Democratic Engagement.....	5
Augmented Engagement.....	7
Flash Publics	12
The Public Sphere and its Critics	16
Consensus.....	17
“The” Public Sphere.....	20
Universal Procedures.....	23
Recuperating a Public Sphere Ideal.....	24
Agonistic.....	25
Compositional.....	28
Procedural.....	33
Chapter Previews	38
Chapter 2: Case Study of Flash Publics and the SOPA Protests.....	39
Chapter 3: Case Study of the Internet Defense League.....	41
Chapter 4: Futures of Open Source Democracy.....	44
Conclusion: Rhetoric and Flash Publics.....	49
Chapter 2 Case Studies of Anti-SOPA “Flash Publics”	51
Reddit: Operation Pull Ryan.....	61
Affordances of Deliberation on Reddit.....	68
From Reddit Deliberations to Agonism.....	74
The Wikipedia Blackout	79
Affordances of Deliberation on Wikipedia.....	84
From Wikipedia Deliberations to Agonism.....	87
Flash Publics in online public sphere interactions.....	88
Conclusion	93
Chapter 3 Compositional Flash Publics: The Reconstitutive Potential of the “Internet Defense League” and the “Action Network”.....	97
Compositional public sphere networks.....	99
Compositional digital activism	103
Antifragile Activism.....	105
Fragile activism.....	106
Robust activism.....	107
The Internet Defense League	109
Action network	111
Distraction.....	114
Uncommitted Participants.....	118
Lack of Immediate Results	121

Conclusion	124
Chapter 4 Open Source Democracy: Procedures for Two Online Flash Publics..	127
The People's Lobby: A Model for Online Activist Deliberation.....	134
Introduction.....	134
Problem Identification	135
Proposal Details	136
Conclusion	145
The Call Together Tool	147
Conclusion	153
Chapter 5 Futures and Flash Publics.....	155
Surveillance.....	160
Little brother: commercial surveillance.....	161
Big brother: state surveillance.....	164
Mobility.....	167
Global access.....	167
Real time social sphere	169
Maps and locative technologies.....	170
Monopoly	172
Conclusion	175
REFERENCES.....	177
APPENDICES.....	201
Appendix I: Rules of Reddiquette	202
Appendix II: Call Together Wireframes.....	207

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: The Wikipedia community’s vote on action to be taken against SOPA/PIPA (“SOPA initiative”).....	83
Figure 2: Action Network tools have been adopted by a variety of groups and causes, primarily in late 2013. Their concrete results have yet to be seen, but the framework is promising (“Action Network”).....	112
Figure 3: The Internet Defense League distributes code to enable participation in its initiatives (“Members”).....	116
Figure 4: When the IDL’s code is activated, the participating website displays information about the relevant issue (“Members”).....	117
Figure 5: The IDL’s network contains a wide variety of influential blogs and websites (“Members”).....	123

Democratic Engagement in a Digital Age

النظام إسقاط يريد لشعب
“the people want to bring down the regime”
(popular slogan of Arab Spring revolutions)

Vignette 1: The Arab Spring

Between December of 2010 and May of 2013, protest movements gained significant traction in Bahrain, Syria, Algeria, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Morocco, and Sudan, and succeeded in ousting the governments of Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, and Yemen (“The Arab Spring”; Ryan). This enormous uprising, referred to in general as “The Arab Spring,” has been, to some degree effective at toppling corrupt regimes in some locations and its effects will likely influence the entire region for generations to come. Many Arab Spring protests were carried out almost entirely in person, with strikes, vigils, mobs, and marches carried out in town squares and thoroughfares throughout the region on a regular basis (Blight, Pulham, and Torpey). These protests were driven by in-person community and public interactions.

But there was a significant digital component to this democratic engagement¹ as well. Much has been made of the influence of digital media in these uprisings, with some

1 While the term “democratic engagement” could refer to a variety of different types and styles of intervention, for the purposes of this dissertation I use it to refer broadly to political intervention driven by people (rather than by money, access, or institutions).

commentators and spectators significantly overstating their effects (for a widely cited popular critique of these overstatements, see Gladwell "Small Change"). Studies have found, however, that social media did in fact play a significant role in the uprisings. For example, almost nine out of ten Facebook users in Tunisia and Egypt reported that Facebook was primarily being used to organize protests or raise awareness about them, and that "many of the calls to protest in the Arab region were initially made on Facebook" ("Civil Movements" 4, 6). Despite the low penetration rates for Facebook in most of the countries seeing protests (only 32% of the population in Bahrain was on Facebook at the beginning of the Arab Spring, and no other country had more than 18%) all but one of the protests called for and organized on Facebook ended up happening, and those protests were carried out in nine different countries ("Civil Movements" 4–5). Likewise, another study of social media used during the Arab Spring found that they shaped larger political discussions, were strongly related to "major events on the ground," and helped spread information across political borders (Black). Despite the dangers of overhyping the role of new, digital communication media, it seems safe to say that many significant physical protests and marches were organized and facilitated online.

While the role of people in the streets and squares must not be overlooked, the frequency and efficacy with which these physically present protesters were able to organize and inspire via social media is also significant. They were not a highly structured membership organization, nor were they a developed activist group. And yet, their communication tools allowed them to band together, disappear, and then re-band together the next day, or the next week after the curfew was lifted, or the next month. Rather than relying

on established organizations' communication networks, participants enacted a democratic potential by way of grassroots political participation. Regardless of the outcomes of the protests, some of which have since been stifled or co-opted by other interests, the fact that they were able to be organized and advertised via digital media suggests a potential for people to organize meaningfully by way of digital media.

Vignette 2: We the People

On the other side of the world, and much less radically, in 2012 the White House website announced a digital form of democratic participation ambitiously named “We the People,” an online petition service where individuals can create and sign petitions on various issues (“We the People”). What makes this service different from other existing online petition services was its immediate and synchronized effect: once a petition had at least 25,000 signatures it would get an official response from the White House. The scope and immediacy of this access to the chief executive of the American government was alluring, and citizens all across the country began submitting petitions.

This initiative was so popular, in fact, that it was not long until it became too easy to get 25,000 signatures: in January of 2013 the White House announced a raise in the minimum to 100,000. Hundreds of thousands of Americans had signed petitions, which required giving their name and home address in order to create an account on the site. The people were engaging their government directly, but were also engaging it indirectly: everyone who signs up on the site adds to an emerging, and often dormant, “We the People” public, while everyone who signs a petition joins and contributes to the creation of a more active issue-specific public.

The dormant activism seen in the We the People tool suggests a model of what I will describe as “on-again off-again” engagement that might seem unsustainable—activism, especially activism that creates publics, requires sustained *action*. One of the biggest critiques of digital activism is that it tends toward “clicktivism” (i.e. expressing support for a cause with a simple mouse click) or “slacktivism” (e.g. using Twitter, Facebook, or other digital media as the only means of participation in a cause) rather than “actual” activism (Gladwell, “Small Change”; Morozov, “Slacktivism”; Christensen). But the active inaction present in democratic participation platforms like We the People, what might best be described as an “inactivist” model, is a central part of the phenomenon that motivates this study and will be discussed in depth later in this chapter.

Vignette 3: The London Riots

In early August 2011, police in Tottenham (a suburb of London) shot a young black man instead of arresting him.² His family organized a march to the local police station a few days later that started out peacefully but quickly turned violent, resulting in 26 injured police officers, vandalized shops, and widespread looting in the area. Then, seemingly inexplicably, similar riots and looting started happening across the area. The rioters set fire to buildings and shops, injured police officers, and, to the frustration of law enforcement, continually evaded capture.

After all was said and done, Britain had experienced “the worst rioting in decades,” defined by images of “outmaneuvered police in heavy riot gear pitted against mocking,

² For accounts of the London riots, see “The BlackBerry riots”; Errett; Yelaja; “The fire this time.”

mobile and mostly young gangs of violent looters” (“The Fire This Time”). The rioters’ success in outsmarting the police has been attributed to BlackBerry Messenger (BBM), a service that allows users to send free, largely private, messages to individuals or groups: Tottenham MP David Lammy even called for BBM to be blocked: “[BBM] is one of the reasons why unsophisticated criminals are outfoxing an otherwise sophisticated police force” (Errett). BBM allowed individuals to coordinate the site of riots, announce the arrival of law enforcement, and then plan the location for the riot to reconvene. These digital connections facilitated multiple interventions spread out over time.

These riots have been compared to “flash mobs,” phenomena that are described as organic, well planned, and narrowly-targeted (Wasik). Bill Wasik, the social media critic who coined the term, described the “flash riots” of London as an offshoot of the flash mob, where rioters deliberately coalesced for a specific purpose, disbanded, and then came back together when another action was deemed necessary (Wasik). This combination of careful organization and fluid spontaneity is the flash riot’s defining characteristic: while carefully choreographed and organized via communication technologies, the moment the actual intervention begins all that organization is converted into something both unpredictable and powerful. The participants strike, disband, communicate about the next target, and then begin the cycle again.

A Shift in Democratic Engagement

The three vignettes above highlight different capacities of people and technological innovations in a digital age. The events range from revolutionary violence to establishment power engaging the masses, and this breadth of capacity and cause raises questions about

democratic engagement and constitution in a digital age. In the Arab Spring we see the power of individuals to organize agonistic protests via social media, the We the People tool demonstrates the increasing prevalence of on-again, off-again engagement, and the London riots suggest the potential for people to form digital connections that facilitate multiple interventions over time. Do these processes suggest a shift in democratic engagement, especially when considered alongside the decline of “social capital” organizations such as churches, political parties, and organized labor (Putnam)? Is there more to these protests than a rejection of traditional hierarchical organizations?

In this dissertation I provide preliminary answers to these questions, using public sphere theory to explore these new processes and media of democratic engagement. I will reengage the concept of agonistic protests facilitated by social media in Chapter 2, on-again, off-again engagement in Chapters 2 and 3, and digital connections that facilitate multiple interventions over time in Chapter 3. I will also revisit all three of these in the proposals found in Chapter 4. I propose to show that despite critiques of public sphere theory, it retains unrealized potential for theorizing contemporary activist movements that seek to constitute themselves through democratic processes even as they seek to intervene within, and often against, the actually existing structures of democratic representation. Because issues of structural exclusion are so often related to capitalism, it might seem that some variety of Marxist theory would be better prepared to address this this type of issue. Indeed, I will rely heavily on Marxism and Marxist-inspired theoretical perspectives in my summary of critiques of Habermasian public sphere theory below in this chapter. This dissertation as a whole, though, focuses not on Marxism, but on public sphere theory because of the theory’s

idealism and its timeliness. There are ideals being offered in public sphere theory that seem worth holding on to, and which do not seem available in Marxist theory (ideals of deliberation, for example, and compromise), and I want to test such idealism to see if it still has productive potential. I am also testing public sphere theory in light of claims that the internet is revitalizing and reinvigorating the public sphere. Even after critiques from many theoretical perspectives (including Marxism), there has been a resurgence in interest in “the public sphere” in our digital age, and this project seeks to determine to what extent that interest is accurate or usable, rather than merely nostalgic. In sum, this project suggests a recuperation of public sphere theory for the digital age by looking at case studies and proposing applications that demonstrate and embody it.

These claims have particular relevance now, as the labor union—one of the gold standards of 20th century American democratic engagement—is on the decline (Goldfield, *Organized Labor*; Western and Rosenfeld). In its place, as described above, we can observe the beginnings of a 21st century model—which might have the potential to do for creative labor what the industrial union did for industrial labor—enacted through digital media technologies and characterized by quick and seemingly temporary engagements that build connections and empower multiple interventions. Ultimately, this dissertation will explore the rhetorical form and consequences of the flash public as a type of public intervention, augmented by the affordances (and constraints) of digital media tools.

Augmented Engagement

Throughout this chapter, and the balance of the dissertation, I will be exploring and proposing various examples of digital communication technologies and exploring their

consequences on political advocacy, mobilization, and coordinated action. Scholars in a variety of fields have begun studying this phenomenon in general from a wide variety of perspectives.³ The general phenomenon of political action via online and digital media can be referred to as “digital activism” (Joyce, “Preface”), “activist new media” (Lievrouw), or “digitally enabled social change” (Earl and Kimport). These definitions introduce three main foci in scholarship: exclusively on the digital, on information/communication technologies in general, and more narrowly focused on the internet. Before I engage these three and explain where and how this projects sits in relation to them, I will stake a position regarding a fundamental question about the nature of digital media.

Social media theorist Nathan Jurgenson suggests that whatever our focus when studying it, we acknowledge that digital engagement cannot be viewed as *solely* digital: “[t]he perspective that physicality and digitality are separate has always been, and is increasingly, false. . . . [T]his ‘digital dualism’ could be profitably replaced by viewing the on and offline as enmeshed, what I call augmented reality” (88). Rather than looking at digitally mediated activism as solely a digital phenomenon (a Twitter revolution!), or solely as a physical phenomenon which happens to be using digital tools (which do not substantially change anything about the protests), Jurgenson’s theoretical frame of “augmented dissent” encourages us to look past simple binaries and causal relationships and instead explore how

3 For example, communication (Rheingold; Hestres; Bennett and Segerberg; Bimber, Stohl, and Flanagan; Fisher and Boekkooi), political science and international studies (Lagos, Coopman, and Tomhave; Nielsen; Bimber and Davis), and sociology (Etling, Faris, and Palfrey; Shirky, *Here Comes Everybody*; Morozov, *The Net Delusion*; Pariser).

the digital and physical are mutually influential.⁴ I will use this frame in my approach, acknowledging implicitly that the digital/new media tools are a part of—and have an effect on—activism just as much as did analog/old media tools. New media, digital media, and the internet are not simply tools that activists use, but they also play a role in shaping the activism even as they facilitate it.

Studies of online engagement often take this augmented dissent view, but with a focus on “digital activism.” These tend to look broadly at digital technologies and “instances of social and political campaigning practice that use digital network infrastructure” (Joyce, “Preface” ix). Scholars and practitioners have, for example, explored political engagement (De Zuniga, Veenstra, and Vraga), disruption (Lindgren), and resistance (Ensemble), all broadly using the term “digital” to encompass technologies which “encode and transmit information as the digits 1 and 0” and “make use of the low-cost scalability of the global digital network” (Joyce, “Preface” ix). Joyce defines digital activism as “the expanding use of digital technologies—mobile phones and internet-enabled devices, for example—in campaigns for social and political change” (vii) and further distinguishes it from “cyberactivism,” which is focused solely on internet-based activism, “social media for social change,” which is limited to social media software applications, and “e-activism,” which considers both digital and analog electronic devices (“Preface” ix).

4 This view has been expressed in rhetorical studies as well, as scholars who reject Bitzer’s (situations cause rhetoric) and Vatz’s (rhetoric causes situations) causal models of the rhetorical situation have proposed models where situations and rhetoric unfold together (see B. A. Biesecker; Rice).

Other scholars focus their research on “new media” rather than on digital technologies in general. Lievrouw, a scholar of information studies, defines this focus: “alternative/activist new media employ or modify the communication artifacts, practices, and social arrangements of new information and communication technologies to challenge or alter dominant, expected, or accepted ways of doing society, culture, and politics” (19). This focus on new media branches out beyond the “digital” in some ways, encompassing practices and arrangements, but is also limited by the somewhat vague modifier of “new,” which might exclude some digital technologies and which begs the question of when they cease to be “new.” Other scholars have added to the research on new media activism, looking at how they are used in politics (Warnick and Heineman), how they facilitate emotions that encourage and discourage democratic engagement (Davis), and how they encourage engagement via remixing and remediating content (Bolter and Grusin).

A third focus for scholars interested in online/digital/new media engagement and activism certainly overlaps the previous two significantly, but focuses primarily on internet-based engagement. For example, sociologists Earl and Kimport look at “Web activism,” and “online actions” of “activists and the politically engaged” (23). This focus on internet-mediated engagement does not consider digital or electronic media that are not internet accessible, but this focus instead allows them to explore the networked affordances of the many examples of internet activism and engagement (e.g. Gurak and Logie; Hestres; Nielsen; Bimber and Davis; Papacharissi; Dahlberg; Karpf; Castells; Kreiss). This project will focus primarily on networked internet activism, or activism facilitated by online networked tools. I will not be focused on all digital tools (e.g. internet-enabled smartphones, GPS devices, or

tablets), but on internet-based networked engagement as employed by one particular type of group (the flash public). I selected this type of activism for its widespread success during the anti-SOPA/PIPA protest and its innovative application in similar post-SOPA protests. There are surely many groups and processes I could have focused on with comparable goals and strategies, but the combination of success, organizational style, and impact make these groups prime artifacts for rhetorical study.

So far I have focused solely on the “augmented” half of Jurgenson’s “augmented dissent,” but more must be said about the second half. The model I am proposing in this dissertation is interested in dissent, but more generally in democratic engagement. In this sense, when I use the words “dissent” or “activism” I am not simply referring to a picket line, a march, or an angry mob. Instead, I follow the lead of Joyce in looking at digital activism as the use of digital technologies broadly in “campaigns for social and political change” (*Digital Activism Decoded* vii). To a certain degree, this means that I am treating “democratic activism” and “democratic engagement” as functionally synonymous, since both concepts provide a lens for examining how “we the people” engage with each other and our political systems. But it goes further than that, as I will describe below, because it deals fundamentally with the composition of “the people” and with those political systems. I realize this overlooks many situations in which such compositional engagement is entirely separate from activism (it might be a stretch to consider voting in an election an “activist” endeavor, for example), but for the purposes of this project I am interested in exploring how individuals and groups use the online networks to engage in the democratic process by sharing perspectives,

advocating for positions, and lobbying elected officials. In other words, I will be studying “augmented engagement.”

One of the key questions I will be exploring about these augmented engagements is the extent to which they are different from 20th century activism, and how we can understand them as phenomena of rhetorical democracy. In order to begin to engage with these issues, I will now turn to the concept of flash publics.

Flash Publics

I have coined the term “flash public” to highlight what is different (in comparison with 20th century activism) about the augmented activist interventions described at the beginning of this chapter and throughout the rest of this dissertation. The remainder of this chapter will be focused on the emergence of flash publics, a particular instantiation of public sphere ideals that are similar to, though distinct from, Hakim Bey’s Temporary Autonomous Zones and Canetti’s crowds. Whereas Bey’s TAZ is a temporary utopia separated from society (Bey), and Canetti’s wide variety of crowds are generally unorganized and are not concerned with governance or activism, often devolving into a view of the crowd as having a “hunting pack” mentality (50), the flash public is an engaged activist and procedurally deliberative phenomenon. I will illustrate this idea through two anecdotes, the first pre-digital and the other fully facilitated by digital tools. I introduce the concept with both digital and pre-digital examples to highlight the fact that the flash public is not a new phenomenon, but that it has been augmented by digital technologies.

The American Revolution exhibits characteristics of a flash public. Every school child in America is taught the story of Paul Revere, the political revolutionary and

blacksmith by occupation who alerted the Massachusetts countryside that the British army was planning an invasion. What is less well known, though, is the reason for his great success: he had built a powerful network all throughout the state. Gladwell explains more about how this network was activated on Revere's ride:

Revere [had become] a kind of unofficial clearing house for the anti-British forces. He knew everybody . . . [W]hen Revere set out for Lexington that night, he would have known just how to spread the news as far and wide as possible. When he saw people on the roads, he was so naturally and irrepressibly social he would have stopped and told them. When he came upon a town, he would have known exactly whose door to knock on, who the local militia leader was, who the key players in town were. He had met most of them before. And they knew and respected him as well. (*The Tipping Point* 57–58; see also Fischer)

Revere's ride was the culmination of his lifetime of work. His relationships with people across the countryside made his famous horse ride a success—without them, he would not have succeeded in his goal. The reason we can say this with confidence is because of the experience of another man, William Dawes, who raced through a different part of the Massachusetts countryside that same night, carrying the very same message. His ride was such a failure that it created problems for historians:

Dawes's ride didn't set the countryside afire. The local militia leaders weren't alerted. In fact, so few men from one of the main towns he rode through—Waltham—fought the following day that some subsequent historians concluded that it must have been a

strongly pro-British community. It wasn't. The people of Waltham just didn't find out the British were coming until it was too late. (Gladwell, *The Tipping Point* 36)

Why did Dawes' ride not become the stuff of children's songs and history books? Gladwell's answer is simple: he did not know people. He seized the moment brilliantly, but had not done the necessary preliminary work to make his intervention effective. Despite the fact that Dawes visited the cities of Roxbury, Brookline, Watertown, and Waltham, Gladwell says, the Bostonian failed “[b]ecause Roxbury, Brookline, Watertown, and Waltham were not Boston. And Dawes was in all likelihood a man with a normal social circle, which means that—like most of us—once he left his hometown he probably wouldn't have known whose door to knock on” (Gladwell, *The Tipping Point* 59). Revere's network was a prime example of a “flash public,” one that lay dormant until the need arose for action.

In this way flash publics exhibit characteristics of what White has called “Kaironomia,” a combined logic of tradition and spontaneity. Rather than relying solely on established “transtemporal knowledge” to govern rhetorical interventions, or relying solely on timely “determinations of its own occasion,” Kaironomia combines *kairos* and *nomos* to take advantage of the rhetorical affordances of each (E. C. White 42). Both Revere and Dawes took great advantage of their moment in history (*kairos*), but only Revere was prepared with the groundwork laid by his lifelong relationships (*nomos*).

Revere's flash public was powerful, but online flash publics have affordances simply not available to a blacksmith in the late 18th century. For example, contemporary flash publics are able to maintain synchronized connections over larger geographic areas and for longer periods of time. They are able to connect instantaneously rather than after a three-hour

horse ride. In addition, and with compelling effects, the communicative or rhetorical action that holds flash publics together can be archived online in full. This archive-ability allows new participants to catch up with previous discussions, past participants to jog their memory about the discussions, and overall provides the community with a community not constrained by memory or time.⁵ While flash publics are certainly not unique to digital media, their scope, speed, and potential are greater when facilitated by World Wide Web-based communications technologies.

It is also important to note that the internet itself is by no means a “public sphere.” As Jodi Dean has argued, the internet was long since taken over by private corporate interests (Dean). Indeed, as McChesney has argued,⁶ the internet itself started out with potential for egalitarianism and democracy, but has since been co-opted into little more than an extension of a profit-obsessed logic that is at odds with ideals of democracy (McChesney). While these arguments tend to overlook some of the most innovative and non-market influences of the internet, they do complicate the claims that the internet is inherently democratizing (M. Sifry). My project takes this complication as a given and works toward an understanding of how internet tools can be wielded in such a way that they empower the people, even if they also end up making money for advertisers and web oligopolies in the process.

5. This is, of course, not an unmitigated positive for activists. As Morozov argues, this potential for permanence also empowers oppressors to track (and punish) dissidents and activists (Morozov, *The Net Delusion*).

6. For similar arguments, see Bagdikian; McLeod; Lessig.

The decline of established organizations of social capital and increasing prevalence of these digitally augmented interventions suggest a shift in public democratic engagement. Instead of relying on the *nomos* of tradition and continuity found in traditional organizations, these “flash publics” incorporate more timely and adaptable *kairos* into their ethic of public sphere engagement. Considering these changes, rhetoric provides us with tools to engage questions of activism and democratic theory in the fast moving digital world: activist campaigns can rise and fall in the course of a day. In order to adapt to this fast-paced digital realm of rhetorical interventions, I propose that flash publics provide space for considering this digital, flexible, and deliberative public sphere rhetoric. But the theory of the public sphere has faced serious critique, making it necessary to reconsider and establish its value in this situation.

The Public Sphere and its Critics

Many histories have been written of the idea and various embodiments of the Habermasian bourgeois public sphere, and while it is outside the scope of this argument to similarly trace a full history, I will outline three major principles of his original theory that have since been disputed by many scholars: the idea of the unitary public sphere, the exclusive focus on dialogue, and the ideal of universal norms of rationality. While there are many other principles of Habermas’ original theory of the public sphere, many arguably more theoretically noteworthy, I argue that these three are the most important for a rhetorical understanding of flash publics. After introducing each one, I will outline the main critiques and then describe replacements and recuperations of each concept or principle.

Consensus

Habermas centers his theory of the public sphere on opinion-molding (and consensus-seeking) dialogue (see, for example: *Structural* 36–37, 219, 239). This model requires, as rhetorical scholars Brian Jackson and Jon Wallin put it, a certain amount of back-and-forthness (375). Habermas explains this in the latter sections of *Structural Transformation*, contrasting the public sphere’s focus on dialogue with its misuse as a platform or locus for less democratic ends such as advertising and manipulation (*Structural* 181, 222). Habermas was, as Calhoun summarized, interested in the public sphere as a “source of reasoned, progressive consensus formation rather than an occasion for the manipulation of popular opinion” and public opinion itself as “the views held by those who join in rational-critical debate on an issue” (Calhoun 28, 17). Not only was back-and-forthness important, but such exchanges were meant to ultimately lead toward some kind of harmonic consensus: “[e]ngagement in the public sphere was the means by which the conflicting private wills of rational people could be brought into harmony” (Calhoun 18). Habermas was clear that these engagements and exchanges were meant to be carried out in the spirit of learning and collaboration, even consensus, rather than negotiation or bargaining (Calhoun 22, 27). As soon as the dialogue turned into a competition rather than an exchange of ideas, according to Habermas, the public sphere lost its democratic power and turned into yet another marketplace (*Structural* 204).

While more than one theory can be used to critique this focus on back-and-forth dialogue, I will discuss one particular critique that has been particularly potent among postmodern scholars. These scholars advance Guy De Bord’s argument that society is

ultimately governed by spectacle rather than deliberation, rhetoric, or language (Debord). For example, Kevin DeLuca, Rita Raley, and Christine Harold argue in different ways that commandeering the hegemonic media structures is the way to empower the many against the few (DeLuca and Peeples; Raley; Harold, “Pranking rhetoric: ‘culture jamming’ as media activism”; Harold, *OurSpace*). For example, “Tactical Media Activism,” inspired by De Certeau, is designed with the express purpose of using what is corporate, profit-centered, and hegemonic for what is open, cooperative, and distributed (“Fighting the Terrorists”; see also De Certeau). This tradition of understanding the society of the spectacle holds that unless an argument can make it past the commoditized jumble of advertising and distraction and into the public consciousness, or the “public screen,” the public won't be motivated enough to demand change (DeLuca and Peeples). In other words, idealized back and forth dialogue becomes a distraction from meaningful change. Because of this, the public needs to use the corporate media tactically against itself in order to seize the attention of the distracted masses and mobilize for change.

The view that society is governed by spectacle is based in part on the assumption that back and forth deliberation/dialogue is not enough to bring about meaningful change. Setting their theory in opposition to Habermas's ideal deliberative speech situation (127-31), and basing their analysis on the 2000 WTO protest in Seattle, which might be the best paradigm exemplar of this orientation toward public policy and activist change, DeLuca and Peeples argue that the masses' contributions to contemporary public discourse must break through distracting spectacle in order to be heard (134). They advocate “imagefare,” the use of

images in symbolic warfare to break into the single dominant public sphere that is controlled by the screens of television, computer, and the front page of newspapers (131; 139).

Violence and incivility are key to their analysis: “the symbolic violence and the uncivil disobedience fulfilled the function of gaining the attention of the distracted media” (144). As they demonstrate, the violence of the Seattle WTO protests actually helped spread the content of their arguments by increasing the news coverage of the substantive arguments leveled against the WTO (140). This critique by spectacle allows otherwise stifled voices a delivery mechanism to contribute to the discussion—without these actions, they argue, the arguments would never make it to the public sphere. In this sense, DeLuca and Peebles are not critiquing the Habermasian public sphere as such, but rather critiquing the ideals of two-way consensus-based dialogue that Habermas claimed govern the public sphere. For them, the quality of the argument is irrelevant if there is not a way to get that argument to the required audience—if the argument cannot begin circulating in the public sphere, it will never turn into meaningful action. This view of deliberation and discourse in public explains how some groups are able to come up with the best ways to get arguments (i.e. spectacles and tactical interventions) in front of relevant audiences, and then remind them of how those artifacts got there.

I am not embracing all of the solutions suggested by these theorists, particularly DeLuca and Peebles’ open embrace of violence, which goes too far in the other extreme to the extent it disregards the power of deliberation. I do, however agree the overall critique of a Habermasian focus on consensus seeking and exclusive reliance on deliberation. I will

propose more fully in chapter 2 a place for the combative nature of their suggestion in a reconceptualized understanding of public sphere theory.

“The” Public Sphere

As Habermas stipulated, his analysis of the public sphere was primarily bourgeois, and was exemplified by 18th century European coffeehouse discussions where individuals (read: middle class landowning men) were able to have critical debates about public matters. The “sphere” was a social or physical space where people would come together to discuss issues of public concern. Habermas refers to “the” public sphere quite often as he introduces his theory. His use of the singular definite article suggests an understanding that the public sphere is the mediating entity between civil society and the state (*Structural* 30). In this formulation, there is one state, one civil society, and therefore only one public sphere. Just as the state’s authority extended to everyone in the geographic boundaries, his theory went, and just as society encompassed everyone equally, the public sphere was automatically and equally universal (*Structural* 19, 23, 28; see also Calhoun 10). This idea of the single unitary, universal public sphere has caught on in popular discussions, as well, with public opinion polls dedicated to discovering what “the public” thinks (see Desilver), interest groups devoted to guiding “public discussions” (see Unger; Phillips), and companies worry about causing a “public outcry” to their products or decisions (see Meyers and Friess; Wortham). The quantitative study of “public opinion” has produced a wide variety of theories about where that opinion comes from, how it is formed, and who guides it (Kinder; Zaller; Hillygus and Shields; Popkin). Despite this contemporary interest in studying *the* public, I will

demonstrate below the theoretical and practical worries with this mindset and provide a refiguring of the concept that allows for the critiques.

Many rhetorical critiques of Habermas's notion of a public sphere largely focus on his conception of a single unitary public sphere. They worry that his conception of the public sphere is hopelessly naïve and ultimately counterproductive. Nancy Fraser's landmark 1990 piece criticizing Habermas's public sphere was among the first of many to dispute it, laying out the main criticisms and setting the counter-Habermasian counterpublic agenda ever since. Fraser introduces the very important idea of multiple competing publics, made up of dominant publics and “subaltern counterpublics” of the disenfranchised and disadvantaged (123). This argument has been taken up and advanced by Michael Warner and others, and has become the theory of choice for many scholars when discussing public deliberations and debates.⁷

Whereas the paradigm exemplar of the Habermasian public sphere is the coffeehouse, one corresponding exemplar of the counterpublic theory is marginalized LGBTQ communities as described by Michael Warner. These publics are not allowed in to the discussions or debates of the dominant public(s), and so are left to seek rhetorical legitimacy through other means (Warner). This is a far cry from the egalitarian and idealistic civic-minded deliberations envisioned by Habermas. Fraser's critique of Habermas's public, and the counterpublic theories of individuality it inspired, set up a model of public spheres that is

⁷ For other examples of rhetorical scholarship interrogating publics/counterpublics rather than “the” public sphere see Stob; Doxtader; Robert Asen, “Seeking”; Warner; Robert Asen, “Ideology”; Brouwer; Porrovecchio; R. Asen and Brouwer.

governed by dominant and subaltern publics, a system defined largely by partisanship and exclusions.

Scholars have since expanded Fraser's critique into a study of counterpublics. For example, Robert Asen defends the argument that there is a multiplicity of publics rather than one unitary public sphere ("Seeking" 425). Among the problems with theorizing a single public sphere in a democratic society is the fact that a dominant public's norms will inevitably exclude those who do not meet the norms, thus effectively removing their ability to participate democratically in governance. These scholars believed that a theory of multiple publics would open up the space for a wide enough variety of publics that any individual would be able to find at least one public from which she or he is not excluded. These publics are organized, according to Asen, through shared "alternative discourse practices and norms" ("Seeking" 427). It is easy, Asen says, to assume the "counter" comes through people (identities, class status), places (media or locations of discourse), or topics (needs, desires) injected in public discourse (Robert Asen, "Seeking" 431; 432; 435). Asen disagrees, though, pushing to reconceptualize deliberation to focus not on exclusion, but on how that exclusion shows up in participants' invented arguments and discourses ("Seeking the 'Counter' in Counterpublics" 437).

These critiques, by Fraser, Asen, and others, are well founded, since it is unclear there has ever been a "public sphere" that is all-inclusive: minority voices have tended to be disregarded across eras and societies, and states have tended, throughout history, to permeate all corners of civil society. Even Hauser, who is still interested in

discourse and mutual problem solving, discusses publics rather than a unitary public sphere (32; See also Crick).

It is important to note here that this tension between counterpublics and publics mirrors one between pre-rhetorical partisanship and rhetorically situated identifications. Rousseau argued that the “general will” is pre-rhetorical and immune to rhetorical interventions (Garsten 63), while many deliberative democrats disagreed. For example, Manin argues for a procedural understanding of democratic legitimacy: “[T]he source of legitimacy is not the predetermined will of individuals, but rather the process of its formation, that is, deliberation itself . . . We must affirm, at the risk of contradicting a long tradition, that legitimate law is the *result of general deliberation*, and not the *expression of the general will*” (Garsten 188; quoting Manin). Whether it is referred to as the general will, predetermined partisanship, or institutional allegiances, this principle can justifiably be opposed by deliberative democrats and rhetoricians alike. Indeed, this conceptualization tends to privilege pre-rhetorical partisanship over rhetoric, suggesting that individuals with pre-formed identifications and permanent societal roles use rhetoric to try to renegotiate their relationship with the dominant public. As I will demonstrate below, this perspective elides important digital and democratic potential.

Universal Procedures

Finally, alongside a single public sphere and a dedication to back-and-forth dialogue, Habermas’ model relied on universal norms for those discussions. This primarily meant a reliance on reason: “[t]his procedural rationality is fundamentally a matter of basing judgment on reasons” (Calhoun 2, summarizing Habermas, *Moral Consciousness* 4). This

rationality was fleshed out more with Habermas' theory of "ideal speech situation," which is based on inclusion in discourse, introducing or questioning any assertion, expressing needs, and protecting rights ("Discourse Ethics" 86). Habermas argued for a fundamental reliance on these ideals in order to help overcome class differences, encourage open participation, and ensure that neither the state nor the social hierarchy were able to have undue influence on the discussions (*Structural* 36).

There are a number of critiques of Habermasian interest in procedures, and I will discuss one here and another more substantively below as I propose a way forward. Chantal Mouffe gives voice to postmodern critiques of procedural rationality, arguing that the only rules to be followed are of democracy itself rather than public sphere procedures or deliberative rules. She suggests we should be "fostering a plurality of forms of being a democratic citizen and creating the institutions that would make it possible to follow the democratic rules in a plurality of ways," and that "space needs to be provided for the many different practices in which obedience to the democratic rules can be inscribed" (73). In her argument, democracy is all the procedures we need, and any additional layers of procedures will artificially limit the scope and potential of democracy itself.

Recuperating a Public Sphere Ideal

These three principles—back-and-forth consensus-seeking dialogue, the unitary public sphere, and universal norms of reason and procedurality—provide the foundation for a renewed understanding of public sphere theory that can help explain dynamics of digital engagement and flash publics. As I have demonstrated above, Habermas's idea of the public sphere was embraced and honed by many scholars. It quickly fell out of favor, however, with

the rise of postmodern thought. I propose that it is again relevant in an age of the digital, which introduces significant affordances previously inaccessible to large numbers of people (e.g. instantaneous communication, easier access to broadcasting tools, social networking over large space that can endure over time, etc.). To demonstrate this renewed appropriateness, I will locate a digitally appropriate theoretical frame, including or informed by a refocusing and recuperation of public sphere theory.

In order to understand digitally augmented engagement, I have relied on a recuperated public sphere theory that can be used to help explain the intersection of digital media and public engagement. I propose that we cannot entirely rely on the original theory of the public sphere, nor on theories that have critiqued it, to explain what is going on with the *kaironomic* ethic of augmented activism I explore by way of flash publics. As I described above, this dissertation focuses on examples of contemporary flash publics that can be better understood through the framework of three characteristics that are founded on and adapt the Habermasian ones introduced and critiqued above. This project explores flash publics through the lens of a reanimated public sphere ideal based on (what I claim are) natural evolutions of Habermas' ideas, drawn from scholarship that moves beyond the binaries outlined above and proposes three characteristics of public spheres that build on and vary from the three principles mentioned at the beginning of this section: they are agonistic, compositional, and procedural.

Agonistic

A recuperated public sphere theory relies on messy public discourse, as Brian Garsten calls it, rather than Habermasian consensus or the spectacle-driven clash of hardened

opinions held by sworn enemies (Garsten). Indeed, as Allen argues, a rhetorical view on differences leaves space, even requires, engaging with opponents (Allen). This renewed understanding avoids framing dissent in “tragic terms: uncivil, irrational, deranged, pathological, and even criminal,” instead taking a more Burkean angle on the discussions: “a comic perspective wherein opponents are seen as merely mistaken rather than as evil, a worldview that acknowledges the 'rowdiness' of public argument . . . endemic in any free society” (Tonn 417). This rowdiness often has an activist bent—aimed at persuading as well as understanding, at disagreement that composes new realities rather than consensus-driven deliberation or spectacle-oriented antagonism.

In fact, this combination of activism and agonistic confrontation might actually be what drives productive deliberation. Political philosopher and democratic theorist Chantal Mouffe makes a distinction when dealing with such confrontation that I will adopt throughout this dissertation:

[W]hat I call ‘agonism,’ . . . is a different mode of manifestation of antagonism because it involves a relation not between enemies but between ‘adversaries,’ adversaries being defined in a paradoxical way as ‘friendly enemies,’ that is, persons who are friends because they share a common symbolic space but also enemies because they want to organize this common symbolic space in a different way. (13)

For Mouffe, neither pure consensus nor pure opposition is the goal of democratic engagement, but *agonism*. Rather than the unforgiving clash of “others,” Mouffe’s agonism requires an understanding that disagreements, while often involving “clashes” of opinions and identities, are based on a driving ethic of friendship between enemies. Whereas an

antagonistic theory of the public sphere might prize clashes for their role in reaffirming identity, an agonistic theory of the public sphere would prize clashes for their potential to expose or establish shared symbolic space that, while maybe never fully uniting the disagreeing parties, can create potential for future democratic engagements.

Habermasian deliberation has often been characterized as exclusively focused on consensus and agreement (e.g. Mouffe 86), but I propose that a recuperated notion of the public sphere invites a broader definition of the term deliberation. This deliberation writ large can encompass individual acts of “civility” as well as “incivility,” and specific instances of deliberation might best be understood, via Garsten, to be similar to what Mouffe describes as “agonism”: clash of opposing viewpoints tempered by rhetorical audience-awareness. This care for rhetorical opponents opens the door for the public sphere deliberative ideal to be a productive one. Rather than the impossible search for pure consensus, or the clash of hardened opponents who have absolutely nothing in common, this is a clash of rhetorical opponents who are at least able to learn about their challengers enough to converse with them:

What does this project require of us? Not that we become brothers or comrades, nor that we befriend those with whom we disagree, nor even that we join them in a contract. It requires instead that we pay attention to our fellow citizens and to their opinions. The politics of persuasion asks that we look to understand the commitments, beliefs, and passions of the other side if only for the purpose of trying to bring them to our side—or, more often, for the purpose of trying to rebut their views in front of people who have no settled position of their own. The effort of

attention that persuasion requires is thus often motivated by our partial and political passions, but it nevertheless draws us out of ourselves. Trying to persuade others requires us to step outside our particular perspectives without asking us to leave our particular commitments behind. (Garsten 210)

If Habermasian deliberation is focused primarily on understanding, and if antagonism is often focused on creating spectacles in order to defeat an opponent, then the agonism of Mouffe, Tonn, and Garsten fuses the two extremes. The result is an understanding of public sphere deliberation in which arguments can be engaging and understanding as well as passionate and confrontational.

Compositional

A recuperated public sphere theory as I describe it is not focused on a single unitary public sphere or in a group of counterpublics, but rather in a dynamic system of rearrangement and re-constitution of power relations. Hauser agrees in general with this view, arguing that public sphere theory should be focused less on a unitary public sphere or on publics as “entities” (as the counterpublic theories assume) and more on publics as vernacular and situated “processes.” These processes are governed by judgment that is situated (similar to *kairos*) rather than reasoning that is abstract (as is *nomos*): “their awareness of issues is not philosophical but eventful” (64). This view relies neither on a single unitary sphere nor a number of antagonistic and hardened counterpublics, but suggests the conditions of possibility for people and groups to rearrange themselves and society in general. Rhetorical scholars have long recognized that rhetorical action is not merely mediation between two pre-formed entities, but rather a process in which identities,

situations, and arguments are composed. This process can be the composition of rhetorical situations as rhetorical action is formed and being formed by events (B. A. Biesecker; Rice), isolated hobos coming together via rhetorical practice to form a powerful union (May), or a declaration that rhetorically composes “a people” from a marginalized class (see Charland). These engagements that I am exploring, then, are fundamentally about composing that elusive and constructed entity “the people” as well as the power dynamics, relationships, and structures they live with.

Herein lies the power of rhetorical engagement, which is to social relations what a metaphor is to linguistic relations. Both move two things closer together. Meanings are rearranged so as to become closer to one another, and new relationships are composed. This takes creativity, or what Goodnight and Olson call “*ingenium*,” which they observed among “ordinary, untrained rhetors deliberating their common future” as a tool to resist stereotypes (33). Goodnight and Olson report on a study of citizen deliberations concerning a proposed Disney theme park in Virginia. While the account of the debates is theoretically rich, the most relevant for this study is their theory of *ingenium* and its role in public deliberation. Many critics of deliberation are worried about the inability to overcome differences, the idea that having set procedures for deliberation will solidify or exacerbate existing societal differences. Goodnight and Olson suggest that the participants in this particular debate were able to use an inventional strategy to creatively recompose societal relations in the process of deliberation (34).

While some public sphere theories focus on the invention of new ideas, or questions about policy, Gronbeck favors the arrangement of political relations, or questions about

polity (Gronbeck). Loehwing and Motter agree, basing their argument on the idea that Fraser's response to the Habermasian public sphere not only introduces a different aspect of public sphere theory (the idea of counterpublics), but relies on a fundamentally different understanding of democracy than does Habermas's (231). Loehwing and Motter place rhetoric at the center of Habermas's notions of democracy, arguing that his understanding of democracy “only make(s) sense in terms of a strong notion of rhetoric as a constitutive social praxis” (222). The difference between the Fraserian counterpublic and Habermasian views of democracy can be summarized as “the difference between a problem-solving model of democracy and a culture-generating paradigm. Since the former cannot incorporate the most vital function of rational-critical debate, the transformation of domination through critical publicity, Habermas pursues the normative justification of the latter” (Loehwing and Motter 232). According to them, then, the Habermasian public sphere is not so much about solving problems as it is about composing culture and renegotiating and transforming domination. The rational-critical requirement of Habermasian public sphere theory is not so much about rules of engagement, but is more about the arranging and rearranging of political power (see 224). Put another way,

For Habermas, then, the remarkable capacity of rational-critical debate is not to objectively weigh various alternatives that preexist their engagement in public spheres—that find their origins in the market, for example, or in the realm of the private—but to generate intersubjectivities and conditions for identification that rearticulate issues of common concern so that they can be critically engaged and judged by all participants. (Loehwing and Motter 231–32)

In these issues of common concern lie the potential for the people, or at least “all participants,” to exert influence on the political process.

This arrangement of democratic power is fundamentally rhetorical because of its focus on the rhetorically-minded management of “contingency, indeterminacy, and incommensurability” and “civic discursive engagement, identification, and judgment” (Loehwing and Motter 227; 238). On the other hand, according to Loehwing and Motter, counterpublic theory tends to view “political conflict in terms of the distribution of political goods, and situates publics as contenders in a struggle to achieve the same recognition, legitimation, and allotment of resources as the rest,” while “the democratic potential of public spheres—their ability to subvert domination by reinventing publicity and authority—winters as distinctions between different forms of power are leveled and subsumed under the state’s distributive functions” (229). The problem with this aggregative combative formulation of democratic theory, they argue, is that it leads toward refeudalization rather than political contestation—it’s about competition among groups rather than the rearranging and compositional *reconstitution* of public power relations (234). In this sense, neglecting the “public sphere” relegates the various counterpublics, interest groups, and activist networks to fighting with each other rather than creating new potentialities to fight for substantive political change.

In sum, the difference between counterpublic and public sphere (as interpreted through Loehwing and Motter) theories is the difference between an interest group or counterpublic orientation and a rhetorical focus for public deliberation. The former is a model that places those hardened interest groups as the drivers of democracy, while the latter

places democratic culture as the *precursor* to partisan interest groups (236). Instead of oversimplifying the situation with a universal public sphere, or leaving the public to the mercies of competing counterpublics, Loehwing and Motter argue that public sphere engagements compose and re-arrange these interests and affiliations through public uses of rhetoric.

Eric Doxtader presents a similar view of such compositional and inventional engagements as he examines the transition in South Africa from apartheid and the role of a document known as the *Kairos Document* in that transition. He argues that “the success of South Africa's transition derived largely from the ability of oppositional forces to channel the animosity bred from years of incredible violence and other forms of injustice into processes of oppositional argument and deliberation” (19). Bringing this transition into the realm of rhetoric, Doxtader asserts that they were able to channel this animosity via the *invention* of several “modes of communication” (61). The *Kairos Document* was able to help organize a counterpublic through the language it employed, inventing the people even as it rallied them.

He adds to this rhetorical turn in public sphere scholarship, suggesting that counterpublic theory should be more than an exploration of confrontational politics: “Counterpublic theory seeks to unveil the productive heterogeneity of public deliberation without dissolving its form” (61). This is an important point for him, as he posits a “double telos” of counterpublic theory: “the desire to introduce oppositional argumentation into the public sphere but to do so in a manner that preserves the consensual nature of deliberative democracy” (62). Doxtader is interested in foregrounding the inventive processes of public sphere deliberation insofar as it clarifies “the relationship between public deliberation and

democratic representation” (62). Doxtader's final suggestion is for a rhetorical understanding of counterpublic theory, one that does not assume the fixed identity of excluded groups but acknowledges their foundations in rhetoric itself (75). This rhetorical turn might best be enacted by a return to a public sphere as the descriptive model for transferring public opinion into political change.

The issue here is not the search for a perfectly equitable “public sphere,” one that gives voice to everyone equally and completely disregards material inequalities while discussing only things that matter to everyone. Instead, a rhetorical understanding of a public sphere suggests a possibility for citizens to band together and make public changes. Citizens can do that via a public sphere—in DeLuca and Peoples' terms, by making it onto the “public screen.” This public sphere holds the market, church, and state accountable, and is open to whomever can get it (it is not limited to a certain income level, religion, or political party). A public sphere ideal means “we the people” have the potential to make change. As an ideal, it is indisputably unattained and almost definitely unattainable, so it is primarily useful as a metric by which to judge the present.

Procedural

With this orientation toward public sphere theory, procedures become rhetorically important as the means for keeping engagements democratic and open. Procedurality is often critiqued for being blind to real issues of exclusion and power; of focusing too much on form while not paying enough attention to content, all while ultimately keeping the face of power hidden. Ideals of procedurality can be productively compared to the rhetorical understanding of “style.” Like procedure, style is often criticized as being merely superficial, subservient to

the more meaningful substance. But, like *style*, procedure cannot so easily be separated from its more content-based partners such as ideology, participants, and deliberations. Brummett and Lanham rescue style by arguing that substance is a function of style, and the same can be said for procedures: the ideologies, participants, and deliberations are all a function of the procedures of public sphere interactions (Brummett; Lanham, *Economics*; Lanham, *Electronic*; Lanham, “Digital rhetoric”). The choice faced by public sphere scholars and practitioners is not between procedurality and content-centric norms, but ultimately between different types of procedurality—all linguistic interactions are governed by procedures of one sort or another. This admission is important for public sphere studies, because it demands that style remain a focus of the rhetorical study of publics and public spheres.

For example, while not as focused on public norms of reason, or rules of critical and rational debate, the deliberations described by Goodnight and Olson were structured—they did not allow everyone to say (or do) just anything. Procedural limitations guided the engagements, but did not stop the participants from inventing creatively in such a way that helped them learn about each other despite their differences (59). They were able to do this by first finding and highlighting the common ground that they already held. They then worked from those pre-existing common opinions, assumptions, and histories to discover their similarities with the “other,” which in turn enabled them to discuss the matter at hand (in this case, the proposed Disney park in Virginia). This type of deliberative interaction creates metaphors, expressing difference within recognition, and makes the invisible visible. Their experience showed that, in order for deliberative encounters to productively invent new social relations, they must first circumvent passionately guarded antagonism. In other words,

participants must view themselves as participants in a public sphere rather than as partisan and oppositional counterpublics. This vision creates the necessary conditions of possibility for power relations to be rearranged, for identities to be reformed, and for deliberations to move from territorial battles to materially constitutive collaborations.

Mari Boor Tonn adds a component to the discussion of procedurality in rhetorical deliberation. She suggests that if the rules governing an interaction are too fluid or changeable they become more harmful to the participants than if there were strict rules—even those that masked the face of power. Tonn thoroughly defends deliberation from the onslaught of structureless conversation. Due to the fact that conversation lacks a predefined goal, “a public conversation may engender inertia as participants become mired in repeated airings of personal experiences without a mechanism to lend such expressions direction and closure” (Tonn 408). Similarly, public conversations and dialogues risk becoming substitutes for policy formation necessary to correct structural dimensions of social problems” (408). These impotent conversations do nothing but provide the trappings of inclusion, change, and productivity while serving as little more than an escape valve for pent up feelings of injustice. This escape valve ultimately “nourishes hegemony by inviting political inaction” (412). Conversations do this by enacting what Jo Freeman calls “the tyranny of structurelessness” which allows an informal tyranny to dominate discussions rather than allowing appropriately situated deliberative norms to steer them, creating “an open-ended process lacking mechanisms for closure [which] thwarts progress toward resolution” (Tonn 408; 418).

One of the key differences between conversation and deliberation, according to Tonn, is the fact that the former is artificially positive and amiable while the latter is messy and rough. This messiness, however, is still constrained by situation-specific procedures: “Marked by disagreement—even pain—democratic deliberation contains transparent prescribed procedures governing participation and decision making so as to protect the timid or otherwise weak” (406). On the other hand, participants in conversation are often more concerned with “forging and maintaining relationships” and therefore avoiding conflict “even when conversational partners violate norms or make outlandish claims” (409). Conversation is more about the relationship than the argument, and as such fails to adequately discuss an *issue* even while strengthening group friendships. In order to protect a community, “self appointed group mindguards” will spring up to police the borders between “us” and “them” (410). This focus on community lowers the bar to what counts as valid reasoning: “whereas in social and therapeutic talk, personal experience, opinion, and individual well-being reign supreme, the force of ‘opinion’ in a democracy demands allegiance both to reasonableness and to the larger collective good” (412).

The problem with this conversation-centric view of public debate is that it ignores important elements of deliberation. Schudson points out, for example, that “Democracy is deeply uncomfortable,” a fact that necessarily places democratic deliberation at “odds with the social convention prescribing divisive issues such as politics and religion as off-limits in ‘polite conversation.’” (410). This messiness does not come from a lack of procedures, though: “democratic processes and public problem solving necessarily diverge from social conversations by articulating objectives at the outset; adhering to formal rules for

participating in, managing, and achieving problem resolution; and documenting outcomes” (411).

Tonn values “conflict in social conversations,” quoting Kenneth Burke's idea that “democratic argument . . . is necessarily a mixture of “competition” and “cooperation.” (410). Tonn later fleshes out this idea even more, suggesting that “genuine democracy “institutionaliz[es] the dialectic process by setting up a political structure that gives full opportunity for the use of competition to a cooperative end” (417). While this might seem dangerously close to what Habermas would call a feudalization of interests, Tonn and Burke are arguing for a situated Habermasian procedurality added to a Fraserian acknowledgement of oppositional forces and confrontations.

One of the most important implications of this shift away from conversation and back to procedural engagements is the fact that the former inadvertently removes blame from governments, systems, and oppressors: “a therapeutic framing of social problems threatens to locate the source and solution to such ills solely within the individual, the “self-help” on which much therapy rests” (Tonn 412). On the other hand, the procedural view of deliberation acknowledges that structural problems require structural solutions—it's not enough to just become “better people” in order to right structural wrongs that always manage to exist. The recuperated public sphere theory I am proposing, then, allows for procedures that are vernacular and situated rather than universal, creating the conditions of possibility for a public sphere that fosters the uncomfortable messiness of democracy while ensuring that the rules are context-specific and appropriate.

Chapter Previews

This dissertation explores the idea of “flash publics” as a useful model for interrogating the roles and practices of rhetoric in the digital age. When it comes to a public sphere, digital rhetoric has the potential to be more about community organizing than it is about Habermasian rational persuasion. In this sense, my project is less interested in how movements use symbolic messages to persuade audiences, but is instead concerned with how citizens use new communication technologies to “flash” themselves into political relevance and existence, creating an ethic of “we weren’t here yesterday and we won’t be here tomorrow, but we still matter today.” In order to understand the democratic constitution of these flash publics, we must emphasize the agonistic, compositional, and procedural dimensions of public sphere theory. These recuperated principles, I argue, can emerge from critiques of public sphere theory.

This dissertation features an analysis of two case studies of augmented public sphere engagement, focused on understanding the nature of flash publics as they embody the three principles of a recuperated public sphere. The first case study will explore examples of “flash publics” that coalesced, struck, and then faded away; the second will look at an organization built using the strengths of this set of “flash publics” in order to overcome (or, rather, embrace) some of the biggest problems identified with political activism. Throughout these case studies I will discuss the rhetorical implications and discursive potential for a public sphere ideal found in each, particularly focusing on the extent of their compositional, procedural, and agonistic interventions into societal deliberations. I will then transition from theoretical analysis to practical application, as I provide a demonstration and design

description of two online systems that enact the successes of the previously described activism and organization into the digital format. I will conclude with thoughts on the futures of online deliberation and public sphere engagement in a digital age.

Chapter 2: Case Study of Flash Publics and the SOPA Protests

This chapter will study two instances of flash publics congregating online, following procedures of deliberation, and intervening agonistically in a political issue. Both examples come from activism in opposition to legislation that was feared to substantially change the internet. Because of the internet-centered focus of the legislation and subsequent activism, communities around the internet mobilized in large-scale action culminating in a widespread internet “blackout.” In this descriptive account, I trace a key segment of the movement against the Stop Online Piracy Act (SOPA), a piece of legislation introduced in late 2011 aimed at limiting online piracy. This case study explores the nature of flash publics by analyzing the dynamics and implications of the SOPA protest as it was engaged in by two of the web's most active communities: Wikipedia and Reddit. Both are large communities with a great deal of participation related to this issue. These two cases will provide a description of a model of public debate that includes both agonism and deliberation in interrelated interactions. I argue that public online debate can be made up of both agonism and deliberation, and that the digital realm is unique in its ability to empower groups to come together through deliberation in order to intervene agonistically in the public debate.

Wikipedia and Reddit ultimately created communities bound together by deliberation rather than advocacy groups brought together by activism. If these communities were all they had created, though, they would never have had an effect on the larger discussion. They had

to actually engage in the agonistic advocacy, clashing with their ideological opponents, before they could be effective. This deliberative combination of back-and-forth collaborative dialogue and passionate agonism is essential: I echo the belief that deliberation is necessary for a well-functioning democracy, but also that healthy democracy requires competitive clashes of ideas. Focusing entirely on consensus creation too often postpones decision-making and artificially privileges the status quo, while focusing entirely on agonism circumvents the important constitutive power of deliberation. This constitutive power is most healthy, I argue, in interactions of smaller communities and publics: someone will always end up left out of one group, but will find a place in another. In the cases studied here, there is the potential for inclusivity on the internet-wide level because while not everyone chooses to be a member of every group (e.g. Reddit or Wikipedia), everyone is still able to join whichever group or groups they choose.

The SOPA protests serve as an example of a system of public argument in which some interactions are deliberative and others are agonistic. They are deliberative to the extent they approximate the criteria for Habermas's "ideal speech situation," which were based on inclusion in discourse, introducing or questioning any assertion, expressing needs, and protecting rights (Habermas, "Discourse Ethics" 86). While the deliberations come close to Habermas's ideal at times, they are often far more agonistic than deliberative, no longer seeking inclusion or consensus but exerting persuasive pressure on opponents to change (see Mouffe 74). The internet communities that took on the powerful pro-SOPA interests were able to utilize technological affordances in order to coalesce, organize, plan, and strike, fading back into their larger communities as soon as their work was done. Digitally

deliberating rather than physically rioting, these “flash publics” were enabled by technology, powered by deliberation, and legitimized by resounding political victory: SOPA and PIPA suffered not only official legislative defeat as its cosponsors dropped support, but also public sphere defeat as tens of thousands of people were mobilized and angered by the bills.

The cases discussed here provide an analysis of flash publics in action, exposing a more realistic approach toward deliberation and agonism that combines the affordances of both types of rhetorical interventions. In the case of the SOPA actions, this combination resulted in fluid and dynamic flash publics that took advantage of the affordances of digital technology to avoid bulky hierarchy and forge a powerful network of rhetor-activists. These flash publics justify hope in the deliberative democratic experiment, demonstrating the possibility of digitally connected citizens to continuously create and re-create their own democratic potential.

Chapter 3: Case Study of the Internet Defense League

In this chapter I argue that a recuperated understanding of the public sphere is neither limited to a single “public sphere,” nor bound by a set of unchangeable counterpublics, but is instead a model of the composition and reconstitution of power relations in society (see: Loehwing and Motter). In this chapter I will analyze the Internet Defense League’s and the Action Network’s flash public activism, focusing on whether and in what ways it composes and recomposes power dynamics related to a particular issue. I will suggest that the IDL and AN both retain compositional potential that allows them to overcome obstacles previously considered major hurdles for activist groups, further expanding the theoretical notion of a flash public in meaningful and practical ways.

The activism explored in this chapter illustrates how digital media can empower compositional digital activism. Whether it is a network of likeminded blogs, a social network on Facebook, a collection of Twitter commenters, or a narrowly focused web forum, digital activist networks are assembling, reconstituting, and then fading away. When something meaningful happens that requires intervention the groundwork has already been laid for rhetorical action via these networks, allowing people and groups to shape events as they unfold. This groundwork is based on the concept of phatic communication, popularized by linguist Roman Jakobson in the 1960s (Jakobson). Similarly, sociologists refer to the phenomenon of “ambient awareness,” or the type of communication that exists to perform social roles and solidify relationships rather than to transmit information (Kaplan and Haenlein). Online phatic updates about lunch, children, pets, or other seemingly banal events build relationships across the network so that when information needs to be transmitted the necessary connections are already in place.

In this chapter, I will argue that online phatic communication establishes networks based on relationships and that represent the possibility of timely and substantive action. The individuals and activists who build digital networks with phatic communication create their own decorum, timeliness, and context as they go, adding to them with each seemingly insignificant meme or inside joke: the network values what its members value *because they are part of the network*. This exposes the real power of digital activism: as ideas are composed and recomposed within these networks, new webs of relationships are woven. Whenever something is caught in that web—a pressing current event, a cry for help, an invitation to join a protest—the whole group feels it and is prepared to participate.

The Internet Defense League has tapped into this potential in such a way that it is able to overcome some of the biggest pitfalls of activist causes. In this chapter, I explore the organization and potential of the Internet Defense League as a case study for flash public augmented engagement. The organization, born out of the efforts of the SOPA/PIPA protests, is a meta-entity dedicated essentially to organizing the internet. Similarly, Action Network is a model of activism based on dynamic overlapping networks built by way of small, sometimes seemingly slactivist, actions. Such online community organizing is less like a social movement and more like a digital network—an often-dormant web of interested individuals rather than an interest group based on a single cause or issue. In order to draw out the similarities and differences between the IDL’s and AN’s nature as flash public and previous activist organizations’ focus on other types of activism, I will compare IDL/AN, examples of what can be seen as a potential 21st Century type of activist organization, to a particularly successful and well established example of 20th Century organized activism: the labor union.

This analysis of the IDL as a case study example of a flash public allows for a deeper understanding of the recuperated notion of the public sphere I am advocating. In this chapter I will use Nassim Taleb’s notion of the “antifragile” to expand a theoretical understanding of the flash public as a compositional activist force. The IDL, I will argue, demonstrates a compositional alternative to Habermas’s unitary public sphere and to theories of fragmented counterpublics, while also following situated procedures and establishing a large activist network.

Chapter 4: Futures of Open Source Democracy

Up to this point in the project, flash publics are explored through the theoretical lens of a recuperated understanding of the public sphere. The first chapter conceptualizes this recuperated understanding as it plays out through flash publics, the next two complicate and expands on that relationships, and chapter four demonstrates and lays out design principles for digital tools that align with the characteristics of that recuperated theory. One of most pressing practical exigencies driving this analysis is the contemporary tendency to embrace a cynical distrust of the masses in order to justify a version of democracy more responsive to money and power than deliberation or activism. This chapter begins by suggesting that the SOPA protests and the Internet Defense League represent a model of rhetorical activism that intervenes via flash publics in a public sphere by creating networks and relationships in order to create change. The trouble, though, is that these relationships are up against stiff competition: the 2010 Supreme Court decision known as “Citizens United” has continued a long tradition of money being allowed to influence the American electoral process, increasing the influence of wealthy PACs, SuperPACs, and “nonprofits” as they tilt the political playing field in the favor of the wealthy (Toobin). This trend, combined with business-friendly lobbying powerhouses such as ALEC, suggests that speech is really only free for those who do not care if our voices are heard: the paid variety is far more effective at every level of government. In other words, a moneyed sphere seems to have taken the place of a public sphere as the avenue for meaningful public change. Of course, this change is nothing new: Citizens United represented a very small step in the always-existent creep of money into American politics (“Evolution of Campaign Finance Reform”; Gastil 1). What is

new, however, is the type of technologies we have at our disposal to oppose this creeping disenfranchisement of the people. The bulk of this dissertation can be seen as an exploration of the potential for these digital tools to facilitate a re-instatement of the people at the head of the political system.

This troubling trend of everyday citizens' voices being increasingly drowned out by those with more resources is somewhat counterintuitively paralleled by an increase in the accessibility of free publishing tools that enable anyone with an internet connection to share their opinions with the world. As scholars have argued, however, the internet is not always a democratizing force. Far from achieving the democratic reforms many hoped for, the internet has reestablished the control of the media and opinion elites, empowered oppressive regimes, and created a culture where big businesses track every piece of online data and algorithmically construct silos of agreement that hide opposing viewpoints and stifle deliberation (Hindman; Morozov, *The Net Delusion*; Pariser). With this in mind, it is imperative that we build technologies and processes to harness and channel the power of the masses. In creating this type of “deliberation technology,” we must critically evaluate the combination of deliberation and technology in order to create a process that does not fall prey to these inequalities (Pfister and Godana). Pfister and Godana stipulate, however, that deliberation technologies will be more than the “hardware of communication” but instead include thoughtful innovation of digital media models that facilitate deliberation (2). This sort of concerted effort is imperative if we hope to take advantage of the largely untapped potential of these new communication technologies to enable digital deliberation and empower democratic reforms.

This chapter explores the capability of digital tools to enact the principles of public sphere theory outlined above, and does so by way of addressing questions of ownership: Who owns digital rhetoric? Who owns digital activism? Finally, Who owns democracy? Thomas Jefferson wanted the people to own democracy, arguing that the people should “rule themselves without a master” (Hardt and Jefferson 24). This type of democracy is about citizen ownership of the government rather than proprietary ownership by the elite, wealthy, well connected, or educated. I argue that this citizen-ownership of democracy is possible only if and when the multitude owns digital activism and digital rhetoric and is prepared to make use of them via carefully designed deliberative processes.

This chapter will begin by defining the term “open source democracy,” establishing why the former relies on the latter. I then suggest that one of the most important current battles over open source rhetoric is online, where the ultimate ownership is still in the balance. This chapter proposes the conceptual frameworks and core functional dynamics of two platforms to approach “open source” applications of public sphere engagement.

The People’s Lobby

The first platform is based in the flash public variety of public sphere engagement as defined by the characteristics of the recuperated public sphere theory discussed above, combining those characteristics with the principle of the open source software and proposing a digital process for open source democracy that will compose its participants into an agonistic force for public change. I present a model for a “People's Lobby,” a digital combination of deliberation and activism that allows we the people to have voices heard on important political issues. No tool or procedure will be a permanent answer to the enduring

questions facing the project of deliberative democracy, but a combination of new media tools and carefully designed deliberative processes can help citizens create the tension necessary to retake control of an important part of the political process. This proposal is inspired by recent success of Oregon's Citizens' Initiative Review to empower deliberative bodies to inform and influence the larger population. Using this model, I will outline the processes and platforms of People's Lobby, justifying the decisions and strategies based on the extent to which they take advantage of the affordances of digital media and facilitate augmented citizen engagement (“The Citizens’ Initiative Reivew”).

Call Together

As a good deal of the feasibility of such a platform would rely on interaction with and acceptance by the political system, I will also outline a simple demonstration of the political logic of flash publics. This section will describe—via an annotated wireframe design—a web application built to facilitate citizen involvement in the political process, particularly in the process of lobbying elected representatives. This application will be fundamentally a set of procedures (as are all digital applications and platforms) that are meant to compose new power dynamics of and among constituents. In other words, this application will be an embodiment of a recuperated public sphere theory, and will demonstrate one way to use this theory in the design and implementation of systems of augmented engagement. Specifically, this web app will provide a way for individuals to build activist relationships to directly engage with their representatives as a network.

The web app will focus on direct contact with legislators, using the “assurance contract” first theorized in 1987 by economists and made popular by internet companies like

Kickstarter and Groupon (Bagnoli and Lipman). This model requires a certain number of participants to pledge their participation before a specific action is taken—i.e. if the limit is set at ten people and only nine sign up, nothing happens (“FAQ: Kickstarter”; Cohen). This model transfers well into political action: despite the fact that calls to legislators do have a significant impact,⁸ people often fear that their phone call will not matter all by itself. This web app will work to make this type of political action a social experience rather than a solitary and seemingly fruitless one.

As I provide more detailed and visual wireframe models of this service, I will explain and demonstrate how it will allow people to first select a specific cause or piece of legislation, then pick from two actions (call or write), select a minimum number of participants, and finally indicate at which representative the action will be directed. After these options are selected, a summary will be listed online with a unique URL that the person can then share with friends or social networks in search of additional people willing to participate. Once the minimum number of participants is met, an email notification will be sent to each participant with a reminder of the action they pledged to complete and a way to report back once the action has been completed.

In this way, the app proposed would allow individuals to band together and take a specific and narrow political action. The real usefulness of the app, however, will come in the

⁸ Activists Lori Silverbush & Kristi Jacobson make this argument in a recent interview (Stewart). They say, in fact, that many congressional offices believe that for every six phone calls in favor of a specific bill there are 1,000 supporters. Because legislators are so motivated to secure reelection, this much support among their constituency becomes substantial motivation.

networks established by a particular action: the app will remember which individuals took actions together, and will allow participants to contact each other to organize future actions. As these connections are formed on the app, they will facilitate future interventions and interactions in a way that echoes the principles of flash publics described above. There are a number of web services that provide similar options, but there is nothing that combines them in this way or facilitates the long term network-building provided here (“Why PopVox Works”; “About”; Gilliam; “FAQ: The Point”).

Combined with the model described in the first part of this chapter, these platforms will be designed on the theoretical principles explored in the previous case studies, and are meant to demonstrate how these theories can be applied to a very specific and mundane part of the political process.

Conclusion: Rhetoric and Flash Publics

Throughout this dissertation I will explore the extent to which digitally augmented political engagement can be better understood through the lens of a rhetorical reconceptualization of public sphere theory. In the conclusion I argue that, while no longer defined by a single public sphere, a sole devotion to back-and-forth consensus-seeking, or a set of universal critical-rational norms and procedures, public sphere theory is a powerful framework for explaining some features of contemporary digital activist movements.

It would be easy to say that believers in digital activism were vindicated when the United States Senate dropped debate on the controversial SOPA legislation. Here was an example where activism that originated online and was powered largely by online communities caused the highest governing body in the United States to change course.

Scholars and opinion leaders who were derided for suggesting that the Arab Spring was driven by digital revolutions suddenly had proof to back up their optimistic assertions about the power of digital media to restructure power relations.

It turns out, however, that the SOPA/PIPA protests also had significant organizational and corporate support. This support, from groups such as Google and Wikipedia, might have actually provided the influence ultimately responsible for the death of the bills. So there is a chance that, even for all its grassroots, ground up, autonomous digital activism, the anti-SOPA movement was simply a case of companies (who happen to make money online) strong-arming other companies (who once made much more money selling CDs and DVDs than they do now).

The questions of digital activism and augmented engagement are fundamentally issues of rhetoric and its role in democracy: how can people engage with each other in such a way that ostensibly governmental entities will respond? If elected officials are paying more heed to those who argue with money rather than with words and actions, and if our public sphere(s) are punctured by surveillance, the role of compositional, agonistic, and procedural entities—including, but not limited to, flash publics—is vital not only to their particular interests but also to the role of rhetoric and the viability of democracy. In the conclusion I will suggest three future directions for rhetorical studies of flash publics and a public sphere, based on current discussions exploring the future of digital media: surveillance, mobility, and monopoly. I will explore how these areas of future concern and inquiry are established by recent trends in research and practice and to what extent they build on the theories, applications, and cases discussed in the previous chapters.

Case Studies of Anti-SOPA “Flash Publics”

*The senators were right: The Internet really is out of control.
But if we forget that, if we let Hollywood rewrite the story so it was just big company
Google who stopped the bill, if we let them persuade us we didn't actually make a difference
. . . then next time they might just win.
-Aaron Swartz*

On the 18th of January 2012, internet users united in protest against a set of regulations referred to as PIPA and SOPA.⁹ Many internet communities were passionately opposed to the regulations, believing they would not “Protect Intellectual Property” or “Stop Online Piracy,” as the acronyms suggested, but would instead cripple the very foundation of the internet by limiting access and stifling creativity. The bills were strongly supported, however, by big media advocates such as the Motion Picture Association of America, tired of losing millions of dollars in revenue every year to piracy. As two journalists for *Politico* explain, these companies had strong motivation to intensely lobby for this legislation: it would give them substantial power:

If the Justice Department **or a copyright holder** believed a site was directing users to pirated content, they would go to court. Depending on who's complaining, different

9 The act was known as the “Protect Internet Property Act” in the Senate and the “Stop Online Piracy Act” in the House. In the popular coverage of the bills, as well as in this paper, these are referred to collectively as “SOPA.”

remedies could come into play: In some instances a judge could order an Internet service provider like Verizon to cut off access to a site. In others, a search engine like Google could be directed to delete links to an infringing site. The idea is to starve the offending sites of the web traffic that keeps them in business. (Zapler and Hart emphasis added)

What initially looked to be a simple plan to limit crime online had quickly become controversial. Internet experts warned that this bill would essentially give private companies the power to “cripple sites that allegedly — but not conclusively — steal copyrighted content”(Zapler and Hart). These experts were worried about the power to cripple sites even *suspected* of piracy, a power that suggested the internet would be substantially changed were copyright holders allowed such latitude as they “protected” their intellectual property. These experts were unable to stop the initial bill in the Senate despite their well-informed worries. And then the internet's communities took interest in the bill:

It looked like SOPA was going to sail through Congress. Remember that in May, its sister bill PIPA passed out of the Senate Judiciary Committee in just two weeks and with almost no opposition. But then the Internet—its for-profit companies and non-profit allies—woke up. Wired.com and BoingBoing and Ars Technica started to cover the story in greater depth. Redditors were suddenly very interested in these bills. The tech community became aware of this problem. The efforts of protesters . . . convinced most in Silicon Valley that they had to do something about these bills' progress. (Madrigal)

Once these internet publications and communities got involved late in 2011, they quickly moved the debate into the national spotlight. In opposition to content creation companies like Disney and NewsCorp, internet companies that benefit from largely unregulated content distribution such as Google, Wikipedia, Reddit, and Tumblr united in opposition to the bill and began to mobilize against its passage. In early 2012, after a large online “blackout” protest in which many of these sites darkened their front pages and asked visitors to contact their congressional representatives to oppose SOPA, the bill was shelved—“the internet” (internet-based companies and communities) had won.

This legislative victory was groundbreaking: never before had “the internet” banded together in such a decisive show of strength-in-numbers to overcome the interests of large media corporations. But there was more to their involvement than a legislative success. Their involvement serves as a useful case study to explore the scope of public sphere engagements. A close analysis of unfolding democratic practices exposes a complex interaction of deliberation and advocacy that does not easily fit in Habermasian public sphere theory. Habermas was a champion of the “ideal speech situation” aiming for participants to follow established rules of rationality without falling victim to differences such as race, class, religion, or position (*Structural* 86). This ideal is not a practical possibility but is the motivating goal for many traditional views of public sphere interactions. On the other hand, Chantal Mouffe argues, that the better normative ideal would be “agonistic pluralism” (Mouffe). For her, public argument must not aim for consensus, civility, or rationality, as does Habermasian deliberation, but must instead foster a combative clash of ideas. While these two perspectives might seem completely incongruous, in this chapter I argue for a

recuperated conceptualization of public sphere theory that allows for agonism as well as deliberation. The SOPA flash publics demonstrate an example of how both types or approaches may be found in a given intervention or set of interactions. Consensus-seeking discussion and confrontational agonism are often presented as two entirely different and unconnected rhetorical situations, perhaps even mutually exclusive, with differing audiences, forums, rhetors, and exigencies. This view, however, does not accurately account for the fluidity of democratic engagements possible both online and off. Democracy is embedded in practices and constituted by deliberative interactions as well as by agonistic interactions. In this chapter I will forward an understanding of rhetorical public sphere intervention that conceptualizes a process spanning multiple rhetorical situations. The deliberative process that gives rise to the agonisms described here is not required for all agonistic interventions—many agonistic interventions do not come from any level of deliberation, internal or external. The agonism described here, as I will show in this chapter, however, does engage or include Habermasian deliberation even as it results in Mouffian agonism.

In this account, I trace a key segment of the movement against SOPA, looking at a variety of flash public that is both guided by deliberation and results in agonism. Specifically, this chapter explores the dynamics and implications of the protest as it was engaged in by two of the web's most active communities: Wikipedia and Reddit. The SOPA protests demonstrate an unfolding public sphere debate that incorporates the rules and procedures of back-and-forth deliberation while also maintaining robust and passionate clashes of agonism. Because of the tools made so cheaply and widely available by the internet and digital media, it is much easier for any group to deliberatively form what I call a flash public, often in order

to engage in agonistic debate. Digital media have not made deliberation easier, but as I will show in this chapter, they have increased the possibility for groups to constitute themselves through back-and-forth deliberation and then advocate for their causes agonistically.

In the first chapter, I suggested a recuperated understanding of public sphere theory based on agonism, composition, and procedures. While in the next chapters (3 and 4) I explore composition and procedures in depth, in this chapter I focus on agonism in public sphere interventions. In what follows, I will offer a view of public sphere engagement that explores how two specific online platforms and communities engaged in confrontational agonism that was guided by deliberations. I build on the idea of “flash publics” introduced in the first chapter to describe democratic engagement facilitated and shaped by digital communication technologies in a number of ways that I will describe in this chapter. The engagement facilitated by these technologies can be related to “flash mobs,” in which large crowds carry out some kind of public spectacle, usually posting the results on YouTube. Bill Wasik, the critic who coined the term, describes them as being organic, well planned, and narrowly-targeted (Wasik). He described the “flash riots” of London as an offshoot of the flash mob, where riots deliberately coalesce for a specific purpose, disband, and then come back together when another action is deemed necessary (Wasik). This combination of careful organization and fluid spontaneity is the flash riot's defining characteristic: while carefully choreographed and organized via proper communication technologies, the moment the riot begins all that organization is converted into something both unpredictable and powerful. The participants strike, disband, communicate about the next target, and then begin the cycle again.

While similar in many respects to flash riots, the flash publics I describe below also exhibited characteristics of back-and-forth consensus-driven deliberation. This type of deliberation is based on an open-minded exchange of ideas with the pragmatic purpose of cooperating to solve disagreements, and requires cooperation, respectful engagement, humility, and then results in better understanding and stronger social ties (Bohman 27; Jasinski 162; Gerald A. Hauser 65; Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca 47; Loehwing and Motter 221–22). It not only provides rules and expectations, but also allows us to better understand other points of view and refine our own opinions as we continually reconstitute ourselves as a democratic polis (Loehwing and Motter).

Some suggest that this type of deliberation does not exist without heavy intervention. For example, James Fishkin sets up small and representative deliberative polls that approximate the above description for the simple reason that the larger public is “not effectively motivated to [deliberate]” (“Consulting” 131). Fishkin believes that letting the people speak in inclusive, thoughtful, and heavily moderated settings creates an engagement that can be beneficial to participants, invaluable to pollsters, and promising to practical understandings of democracy (*When the People Speak*). In addition, John Gastil has been involved in proposing and setting up multiple deliberative forums that approximate ideal speech situations. Gastil's deliberative bodies are made up of people who are paid to come together for a set period of time and engage in moderated deliberation over topics such as legislation, initiatives, or elected officials (Gastil; see also “Healthy Democracy Oregon”).

There are significant criticisms of this particular type of deliberation, though, that have in part fueled the recent focus on agonism. Seeking for procedural consensus is

problematic, some counter, because its focus on rules and procedures inevitably excludes minority voices unable or unwilling to abide by those particular rules (Roberts-Miller; Hogan and Tell; Fraser). The ideal of consensus-based deliberation therefore stifles the explosive agonistic collisions necessary for democracy to incorporate competing perspectives¹⁰ (Mouffe 86, 104). Indeed, proponents of rhetorical agonism favor its “messy public discourse” and “rowdy rhetorical spirit” over the “strictly rational model of deliberation that masks elite privilege and power” (Garsten 211; Ivie 283–84). This line of argument follows a contemporary distrust of goals like “consensus” and “rationality,” both of which postmodern theorists believe deliberative democrats rely upon too heavily (Mouffe 11; see also 22, 45). For Mouffe and others, “rationality” is never pure or universal, but rather situated, biased, and exclusive. Far from allowing everyone to participate on a universally “rational” foundation, attempts for “consensus” and “rationality” cement existing power relations and support oppression.

In addition to a worry about exclusion and power relations, another underlying factor in this distrust of back-and-forth consensus deliberation is the belief that divisions in society are unbridgeable by rhetoric and are therefore antagonistic, or intractably “radical” (Scott and

10 It is important to note, however, that theorists of agonism are not in favor of antagonism: the goal is to “keep agonistic relations between adversaries from degenerating into antagonistic battles between enemies” (Ivie 284; see also Mouffe 74). Neither Ivie nor Mouffe delves deeply into the differences between antagonism and agonism, each allowing this dichotomy to largely speak for itself. This chapter will use Mouffe’s term “antagonism” to also reference what Scott and Smith call “radical divisions” (Scott and Smith). Rather than looking at political opponents as viable members of the community, the radically divided—or antagonistic—believe that political opponents are fundamentally enemies. The alternative, as explained briefly on the pages by Ivie and which Mouffe cited above, is for political opponents to be recognized as legitimate fellow participants in society.

Smith). Public argument is needed, then, not to *bridge gaps* between ideologies, but to *stimulate clashes* between them—arguments can be understood to be like wars waged by antagonistic generals leading opposing armies devoted to victory, an understanding very common in the classical tradition (Miller, “Public” 26). Whether the divisions between these groups are ideological, economic, religious, or social, this view postulates that divisions cannot be overcome by any type of engagement: the echo chambers are just too closed off, the class boundaries too inflexible, the identity politics too passionate. The theory of “radical division” defines the boundary across which rhetoric cannot go, an extra-rhetorical no-fly zone separating different groups of people. This view of radical division is the motivating theory behind some rhetorical research, which assumes that already established and mutually exclusive groups compete against each other for attention, decision-making power, or inclusion (Asen, “Seeking”; Downey and Fenton; Roberts-Miller and Palczewski; Asen, “Ideology”; Porrovecchio).

But assuming pre-rhetorical identities or ideology ignores the role rhetoric plays in attitude and identity formation and limits it to a second-rate player in the public sphere, something that comes *after* all the important things. Those theorists who resist this limitation argue that, rather than being pre-rhetorical or defined by their pre-existing opinions, audiences are created (interpellated) by rhetoric (Charland 137). Audiences are able to take advantage of rhetoric's nature as “remedy” for incommensurability between positions, to overcome “deep disagreement” through careful rhetorical practice (Harris 4; Zarefsky 78). Put another way, while some divisions are indeed created through what Wayne Booth calls “win-rhetoric” (rhetoric obsessed with “winning” the argument rather than advancing it),

there is the potential for “rhetorology,” or the open-minded approach toward arguments that eases the strain across divisive disagreements (Booth). Indeed, David Zarefsky echoes the argument of Nora Heidlebaugh, suggesting that even radical divisions are influenced, even constituted, by rhetoric (Zarefsky 79; Heidlebaugh 74). According to this understanding, rhetoric is not a second-class player on the stage of disagreements, but constitutes the ideologies and partisanship that often seem to result in radical divides, deep disagreements, or incommensurable positions.

Some theories seem to see consensus-based deliberation at intractable odds with passionate advocacy. On the one hand is deliberation: consensus-oriented, rule-based, and constitutive. On the other is agonism: explosive, dedicated to inclusions and exclusions, and sensitive to pre-rhetorical divisions. William Keith summarizes this distinction by dividing public argument into two general modes: debate and discussion. He lays out a useful chart describing both, suggesting that debate is adversarial and focused on strategic decision making, while discussion is cooperative and focused on reflective problem solving (Keith 256). These two, Keith argues, are different modes of discourse active at different times. There is, therefore, a way out: we do not have to choose between “argument and dialogue, between endorsing a rowdy rhetoric and dispassionate deliberation,” Darren Hicks agrees, if we accept a variety of forms of public argument as valuable (Hicks 256). Rather than banishing deliberation to the postmodern scrapheap, this chapter suggests a role for procedural back-and-forth consensus seeking as part of a process that can shape and compose agonistic advocacy and competition.

If Habermasian deliberation is focused primarily on understanding and consensus, and if Mouffian agonism often focuses instead on clashes of friendly enemies, then flash publics as I define them alternate between the two. This happens by way of a set of digital communication technologies that allow the ability to manipulate time and shift scope. These affordances, as I will describe, drive and shape these flash public interactions. The result is an understanding of public sphere deliberation in which interventions can be planned and shaped by deliberation while ultimately resulting in advocacy. The SOPA protests serve as an example of a system of public argument in which some interactions are consensus-driven and others are agonistic. They approximate the criteria for Habermas's "ideal speech situation," which were based on inclusion in discourse, introducing or questioning any assertion, expressing needs, and protecting rights ("Discourse Ethics" 86). While the deliberations come close to Habermas's ideal at times, they also often result in interventions that are far more agonistic than deliberative, not seeking inclusion or consensus at all but instead exerting persuasive pressure on opponents (see Mouffe 74). The internet communities that took on the powerful pro-SOPA interests were able to utilize technological affordances in order to deliberate (coalesce, organize, and plan) and then engage in agonism (threaten, intervene, and advocate), fading back into their larger communities as soon as their work was done. Digitally rather than physically intervening, these flash publics were enabled by technology, powered by deliberation, and legitimized by resounding political victory that resulted from their agonistic interventions.

Reddit: Operation Pull Ryan

One example of an online alternation of consensus-seeking deliberation and agonism, in which back-and-forth discussions established the conditions of possibility for an agonistic intervention in the public debate, took place on Reddit.com's politics forum. I will first outline select features and procedures of the Reddit forum model, highlighting the norms of deliberation that are enforced in the community. I will then describe recent collective action that was influenced by the forum.

Reddit is a robust community-driven link-sharing website with hundreds of forums, or “subreddits,” dedicated to topics ranging from funny cat pictures to obscure political ideologies and everything in between. There are well-known community rules governing posting, commenting, voting, and moderating behavior (for a complete copy of the rules of Reddit, known as “Reddiquette,” see Appendix 1.). These rules of “reddiquette” are “an *informal* expression of reddit's community values as written by the community itself” (“Reddiquette” emphasis in original). These rules set up a deliberative process, not quite as thorough as Gastil or Fishkin might want, but binding and regulative nonetheless. For example, one highly-cited rule guides users in voting behavior: “Don’t downvote an otherwise acceptable post because you don't personally like it” (“Reddiquette”). This procedural rule proceeds to encourage participants to vote on relevance rather than personal taste: “Think before you downvote and take a moment to ensure you're downvoting someone because they are not contributing to the community dialogue or discussion” (“Reddiquette”). This rule, based on procedures rather than content, attempts to guide the community to create a space for opposing viewpoints. If an opinion is shared that does not agree with whatever

the majority happens to think, reddiquette encourages the majority to respond to the comment rather than downvote it to oblivion. Many of the procedures listed on the reddiquette page have the goal of encouraging disagreement and making space for various viewpoints. Enforcement primarily falls on individual subreddit moderators, but also relies on participants to police each other. The result of these rules and their distributed enforcement is a widespread effort to allow a wide variety of thoughts and opinions. The Reddit community and all its subreddits generally abide by these rules, shaping their behavior on the site. If a post blatantly disregards the community standards it is often marked as spam and, occasionally, the offending user is even blocked from posting to the site (“Reddiquette”).

While these rules do set up the basis upon which Reddit's deliberation can take place, they do, as Nancy Fraser worries, exclude people from participation in the Reddit community. The list of rules contains a substantial number of stipulations and suggestions, and while there are rare cases of top-down moderation, the community mostly self-moderates by way of a simple voting system. When a redditor agrees with a post, he or she can click a small up arrow next to the title of the post, giving it an “upvote” (also called “Karma” on Reddit—post a lot of popular links and your number of “Karma” points will increase on your Reddit profile page). Likewise, when a post is considered irrelevant to the discussion, redditors have the option to click a small arrow pointing down, thus removing one “Karma” point from the submission.¹¹ When a post has too many “downvotes,” it will disappear from the thread, while posts with a large number of “upvotes” float to the top. Therefore,

11 As an example, if a user posts something to the forum and ten people “upvote” it but ten (other) people “downvote” it, that post will end up with 0 Karma.

Redditors and their posts gain credibility in the community insofar as they meet the community's standards, and become literally irrelevant to the discussion when they do not.

In order to explore the public sphere engagement that started on Reddit and was guided by the rules and procedures of the site, I will now walk through a recent example of collective action and then discuss how the rules and procedures create the conditions of possibility for such a deliberative coordination to happen. It all started on December 28th, 2011, when a user named digitalboy posted in the politics subreddit. The existence of typos in his post suggests the speed with which the post was constructed. This was likely not something digitalboy had been planning very long, nor was it an idea that required careful strategizing before it was made public. On the contrary, it seems more likely that digitalboy had an idea, dashed it off, and quickly clicked “submit,” typos and all. This allowed the idea to go to the community before it was fully formed, giving the community a substantial say in its development. Digitalboy posted the following, reproduced with typos from the original: “Let's pick ONE Senator of voted for NDAA/SOPA and destroy him like we're doing for GoDaddy. Relentlessly investigate and find skeletons in his closet, money bomb is opponents, etc.” with the subtitle: “It we could unseat someone and destroy their career it would have massive repercussions” (digitalboy). Over the next few hours, hundreds of comments proposed various sitting Senators for this “unseating” attempt. Senators Bob Corker, Lindsay Graham, and Scott Brown were proposed, as were Representatives Lamar Smith and Paul Ryan. The discussion was hotly contested, garnering over 1,600 comments and tens of thousands of votes (over 10,000 upvotes and about 8,000 downvotes) on the

discussion thread.¹² A few hours after digitalboy's post, a redditor called meatspace posted the following to the politics subreddit: "Based on a vote in another thread, we have voted that Senator Lindsey Graham of SC is to be the beta test of reddit's ability to influence mainstream opinion about Congressional candidates" (meatspace). Whether or not this post was accurate about the consensus, Redditors joined in the discussion. Some proposed names for the attempt to unseat Senator Graham, others discussed strategies, and many made arguments for and against unseating Graham. A new subreddit was quickly formed, somewhat cleverly titled "GrahamCracker."

While many Redditors jumped on board Operation Graham Cracker, others were not convinced. A user called Proudhorn posted an appeal for the group to focus on Paul Ryan that was apparently quite persuasive: not only did the appeal garner hundreds of comments, but it also earned over 6,422 upvotes (with only 3,850 downvotes for a net difference of 2,572) ("Comment"). Proudhorn started another discussion by posting proof that Paul Ryan was the "highest ranking member of Congress that can be defeated in 2012" ("Highest"). In this discussion thread, redditors debated the merits of trying to unseat Paul Ryan. One particular thread weighed the merits of supporting a Democratic challenger to Paul Ryan. User SamFury made a long post arguing against any Reddit intervention, suggesting that unseating Ryan would be an impractical goal:

12 While the Reddit algorithm does not always represent exact voting numbers in an effort to stop spamming (spammers will not always be able to see if their vote has been counted or if they have been blocked, making it much more difficult to spam Reddit over an extended period of time), it is clear that the Reddit community is not a mindless echo chamber or hive mind. There is substantial disagreement on the site in a variety of forms, evidenced here through the use of the downvote.

You say that the votes are there to defeat Ryan based on the 2008 presidential election? I just don't see it; a lot has changed since 2008. Have you looked at Ryan's election results? Paul Ryan was born and raised in the district, and he has won with nearly 60% of the vote in his last seven elections. In 2008, Obama did have a very strong showing in the First District, but Ryan was still able to win his election rather overwhelmingly. In 2010, the last election, he gained an impressive 68% of the vote. The First District has also been Republican controlled since 1995, I think. I also think that going after Ryan would be an extremely difficult, up-hill battle. To be honest, if I were a Democrat, I would focus more heavily on the recall elections and Herb Kohl's vacant Senate seat. (The_Bard et al.)

SamFury made a follow-up comment arguing that Paul Ryan's opponent, Rob Zerban, was virtually unknown and therefore very unlikely to unseat the well-known Ryan (ibid).

The_Bard responded to this argument with a link to polling data, pointing out that "Zerban trails by only 6 points even though he is virtually unknown" (ibid). Redditor bananasplits chimed in, agreeing with SamFury that Ryan seemed untouchable, but suggesting that a Reddit intervention could make the difference: "the reason you haven't heard about Rob Zerban is because his campaign hasn't spent enough money to reach you. Reddit can change that" (ibid). Redditor falcojr chimed in, self-identifying as a member of Ryan's district and then adding, "I think the main thing going against him is how overly partisan he's become in the past couple years," and that "this has the ability to turn some of his previous loyal followers against him. I still think it's a long shot though" (ibid). Other users joined in, arguing things like "It's extremely possible to defeat him," and "I don't think it's a

COMPLETE long shot” (ibid). There is no way to determine how many people viewed this exchange, but whoever read it was exposed to a number of arguments and counterarguments to the idea of using Reddit to focus an attack on Representative Paul Ryan. This back-and-forth only represents a handful of the 273 comments and 8,000+ votes on the thread and its comments—at the end of December 28th, 2011, this was one of the many discussions focused on the merits of a targeted Reddit operation to threaten an elected official for supporting the SOPA legislation.

Not long after Proudhorn's post, one of the new moderators of the GrahamCracker subreddit set up a poll to determine whether Senator Graham was indeed the group's desired target (THEvil30). Another user expressed concern that Senator Graham would not be the best target and directed people to join discussions threads about each of the proposed candidates, eventually starting yet another thread to debate the resulting support for targeting Paul Ryan (“I'm concerned”; “Alternate”). At the same time, another user emailed Paul Ryan’s election opponent, Rob Zerban, to determine his position on SOPA and other issues of the day, and then posted Zerban’s response on the site (Niehaus). Zerban’s response made clear that he was “not a fan of the bill” (Niehaus). This post sparked another 13,500+ votes and 290 comments, some debating whether Zerban’s language was strong enough opposition to the bill, others examining whether the email author’s original email was written in a way to get an honest answer, and still others proposing that this email was enough to win Zerban their support (Niehaus). Zerban’s campaign, alerted to Reddit’s discussions about him and his opponent, signed in to Reddit and held a question and answer session about his candidacy and his opposition to SOPA. After 500 comments and close to 20,000 votes, Zerban

succeeded in winning a number of Redditors over to his cause. Users said, for example, “I think you'll fit in well here,” “Damn, this is what I like to see, politicians that aren't afraid of the public and aren't scumbags. Right on, Rob Zerban,” and “I just donated \$10. I hope other redditors with the means will similarly show their gratitude” (RobZerban).

This question and answer session coincided fortuitously for Zerban with Redditors considering whom to focus their anger about SOPA on: commenters had suggested that targeting Graham would be risky because of a lack of adequate alternative. One argument that was repeated often was that “Lindsey Graham is a hard target, and people in South Carolina are just as likely to return us someone less predictable and more crazy” (meatspace). Other users pointed out that “Getting [Graham] unseated in 2014 is a great goal, but that is a long way off” (meatspace). Because Zerban was a viable and trustworthy alternative, because Paul Ryan was up for reelection in 2012, and because Ryan looked vulnerable, Paul Ryan began showing up in multiple threads as a more viable candidate than any of the others (see, for example meatspace; Proudhorn, “Comment”; EagleFalconn).

Discussions like these happened in multiple places on the same day, and many of them behaved similarly to the discussions excerpted above, moving closer toward acceptance of Paul Ryan as a target. Based on the posted poll and the series of discussion threads on the topic, the “GrahamCracker” group reached consensus that Representative Paul Ryan, not Senator Lindsay Graham, was the favorite for Reddit’s oppositional attention. Upon seeing this turn of events, meatspace updated the original Lindsay Graham post with “Our community has moved forward with different plans. This plan is outdated. Please keep your eyes open for what's next” (meatspace). At news of the shift from Graham to Ryan, the

quick-moving new owner of the website www.operationgrahamcracker.com announced “I’m getting information that the target is changing from Lindsey Graham to Paul Ryan” and redirected visitors to the newly formed website www.pullryan.com (“Operation Graham Cracker”). While there are frequent accusations on Reddit of herd mentality among fellow redditors, this series of threads suggests the possibility that these redditors are assessing arguments and ultimately supporting the ones they find strongest. While the evidence I have does not allow me to make a confident assertion about whether or not redditors are actually assessing arguments, it does show that the opportunity is there. This series of threads seems to have created the conditions of possibility for various “unplanned encounters” between disagreeing perspectives, building upon the Reddit-based “common experiences” shared among participants in this growing movement (Sunstein).

Affordances of Deliberation on Reddit

Deliberation online is not the same as deliberation offline, nor is it the same across all web platforms. Reddit, in particular, approximates many of the criteria for the “ideal speech situation,” which Habermas summarized as follows:

1. Every subject with the competence to speak and act is allowed to take part in a discourse. 2a. Everyone is allowed to question any assertion whatever. 2b. Everyone is allowed to introduce any assertion whatever into the discourse. 2c. Everyone is allowed to express his [sic] attitudes, desires and needs. 3. No speaker may be prevented, by internal or external coercion, from exercising his rights as laid down in 1 and 2. (“Discourse Ethics”)

As I point out in the previous chapter, and deal with more thoroughly in the next, this universal norm (“competence”) is one of the reasons a single unitary public sphere is theoretically problematic for Fraser and others. At this point, however, I will focus on Habermas’ idea of an “ideal speech situation,” exploring how and to what extent Reddit provides various situated affordances necessary for such a situation to emerge; affordances that are different from other platforms, whether digital or face-to-face. I will discuss five of Reddit’s affordances, related to Habermas’s ideal speech situation but applied in a situated Reddit context, that were evident in the discussions leading to the formation of OPR. These affordances are, I argue, fundamental to understanding the resulting agonism. Without the deliberations, guided by the procedures of the Reddit community, it is likely that the intervention would have ended up with a different target, purpose, motivation, and/or feel. In this section, I examine the extent to which Reddit’s affordances enable situated versions of Habermas’s ideal speech situation and ultimately shaped the group’s activism.

First, the setup of Reddit allows redditors to respond directly to a specific section of a previous post, thus meeting parts of the first and second criteria indicated above. In many ways, these interactions on Reddit exhibit the traits of oral communication while also keeping the material realities of text-based communications. For example, sometimes people are excluded from oral conversations simply because they are not able to fit a word in at the relevant point of the conversation. With Reddit, if someone wants to respond directly to a *portion* of another individual’s post, they copy the section and paste it into their own post, indicating that it is a quote by putting a greater-than sign > at the beginning of the quotation. They are then able to respond directly to a given section. People often make long and

elaborate arguments, whether online or face-to-face, but in a face-to-face discussion the majority of the argument may simply not be addressed because of one or more of the following: it is often difficult to question assertions because interlocutors are unable to remember every specific point to which they initially wanted to respond; interlocutors wanted to respond to multiple points but could only respond to one at a time; or interlocutors feel they would completely derail the conversation if they commented on anything other than the main point at hand. Reddit addresses all of these issues: there is a written record of the whole debate making it easy to address any specific points without having to remember them all; any single post can respond to multiple issues at once by using the > sign for every specific quote; and simultaneous debates can occur at the same time and on the same thread, allowing the main conversation to continue even as smaller ones flare up and die down. These features allow for more fluid, thorough, inclusive, and open conversations, with discussions happening on multiple levels at the same time.

This introduces the second affordance of deliberation on Reddit: threaded discussions. Because people are able to respond to specific sections of a post, there are often a variety of different responses to any given post: anyone is allowed to make any assertion, question any assertion, and express needs and/or desires. Often, a particularly compelling post will begin multiple threads of discussion—someone will comment on a specific point, another will disagree with the respondent, a fourth will jump in, and the author of the original post will chime in, and the debate will go on. At the same time, someone else entirely will comment on the original post and start another thread that behaves like the first. These threads enable discussions to be simultaneous, wide-ranging, and thorough, if often fractured

and distracted by tangents. Most importantly, though, for the purposes of Habermas' ideal speech situation, is that no one is excluded or hindered from expressing their opinions simply because the conversation has “moved on” or because there is already another conversation going on at that given time.

These threads also make possible the third affordance of Reddit deliberations, which is that there is no limit to the number of participants speaking at any given time (and signing up for an account is a comparatively (in relation to other internet fora) easy process that does not even require an email address). In traditional face-to-face settings, it is highly unproductive and contentious if ever more than one person speaks at a time but on Reddit the most discussed topics are defined by multiple contributors adding their voices to the conversation at the same time. While this does increase the instances of confusion or distraction, it also increases the breadth and depth of the discussion as well as the number of people who can join in on the discussion, moving these conversations closer to Habermas' ideal.

The fourth affordance of this type of online discussion is based on time. Face-to-face discussions generally have time limits: the coffee shop will eventually close, the “town hall” meeting will adjourn, and the janitor will come to shut off the lights in the City Council chamber. There are no such constraints on Reddit's deliberations, allowing discussions to be as long or as short (a single day, in the case of the establishment of OPR as described above) as the community makes them. Partly due to this freedom, Reddit users are able to organize and participate in what I will call “breakout sessions” of the discussion. These breakout sessions, the fifth affordance of Reddit's online discussions, were put into action in the

example detailed above in the responses to digitalboy's original comments. Multiple discussion threads sprang up across the site in response, discussing various parts of the same issue. There are, of course, breakout sessions in face-to-face meetings, but people must choose one in which to participate: no one can be in multiple places at the same time. In contrast, in Reddit's forums users are able to participate in multiple simultaneous discussions. Again, this provides more breadth and depth to the discussions, allows more participation and more participants, and enables discussions judged important by the community to gain prominence and spread. Each of these elements enables the third criterion of Habermas' ideal speech situation to come close to being met, as each reduces the number of external and internal forces limiting participants' ability to question, assert, and express themselves. Some of these affordances are not unique to Reddit, and there are certainly drawbacks to discussions on Reddit, including incivility due to anonymity, lack of visual conversation cues, loss of the materiality of physically sharing a space during a debate, and the difficulty with which online discussions are converted into physical action. Any medium or platform will add some affordances and reduce others, but it is important to recognize that digital deliberations on Reddit provide a powerful mix of conditions approximating an ideal speech situation, even if that ideal is never fully or entirely attainable.

Whereas these affordances are important to consider on their own merits, there might be even more reason to consider them in relation to the agonism that they preceded. After and in response to the discussions, the Reddit community created interventions that suggest influence by the previous deliberations. For example, the agonistic interventions were formed through the deliberations of the community at large (rather than a few leaders at the top), the

final decisions were based upon a variety of perspectives, and the process was, at least to a large extent, transparent. Possibly most important to our understanding of the relationship between agonism and deliberation, however, is that those participating in the agonistic intervention had also taken part in a deliberative experience. They were not able to single-mindedly pursue their own agenda without first listening to others' perspectives. These occasional reminders that others have valid ideas and perspectives help democratic engagements occur between what Mouffe would call “friendly enemies” rather than angry antagonists (13).

Due in part to the features described above (capacity for archived replies, threaded comments, unlimited number of participants, and asynchronicity), Reddit's deliberations are reasonably inclusive, remain at least procedurally, if not always in practice, open to counterarguments and various viewpoints, and do a relatively good job of respecting the rights of other deliberating Redditors. They certainly are not perfect, but measure up respectably well to Habermas's model for ideal speech situations. The gap between the Reddit deliberations and the ideal speech situation is filled by the fluidity of those deliberations: the moment the discussion began to stray too far from the deliberative ideals, the community was able to rein it in. For example, as explained above, the community was able to change directions multiple times over the course of the discussions about targeting an elected representative, modifying the goals of the group based on the persuasive claims of the participants. To the extent it helps avoid exclusion and oppression, the responsive fluidity that characterizes the Reddit deliberations is the mark of Habermasian deliberation as described above.

What is most interesting about the Reddit case, for my study, is the legitimately Habermasian dialogue as a precursor to activist agonism. It is important to my argument that these discussions approximated Habermas' norms, because that approximation shaped the ensuing activism—in which the community put pressure on a member of the United States House of Representatives—and made it all the more striking. The discussion was wide-ranging and included many counterarguments, with thousands of comments and tens of thousands of votes spread across Reddit. While it is impossible to know for sure, these discussions might have added weight and credibility to the intervention. Their activism was not Habermasian or deliberative: it was essentially a threat. This combination suggests a role for deliberation as well as agonism in flash publics: the deliberation shapes the agonism, and together the two provide an enactment of the recuperated model of the public sphere I outlined in the first chapter.

From Reddit Deliberations to Agonism

In the course of a single day, the Reddit community *almost* coalesced around targeting Senator Lindsay Graham, to the point that they had a new subreddit, a domain name, and significant support, but then were swayed by the arguments of those who were advocated the targeting of Representative Paul Ryan. It is important to note, however, that while the group came together very quickly, it was not without significant discussion: In the main threads I discussed above there were well over 60,000 individual votes cast, hundreds of comments, and multiple new subreddits, each of which contained numerous discussion threads. Over the course of these discussions, the group shifted focus from a Senator, as originally proposed, to a Representative, and narrowed its immediate focus from unseating

him to pressuring him to vocally oppose SOPA. Had the community decided on the focus and goals of their agonistic intervention without this wide deliberation, it is possible that the decision would have been significantly different. The community announced its intent later on that day with a press release on its newly-built website:

On Wednesday, December 28th (2011), members of the online Internet community Reddit coalesced around the idea of working to pressure a member of the US Legislature who has supported the Stop Online Piracy Act Calling themselves “Operation Pull Ryan,” they are a non-partisan coalition with the sole intent of protecting Internet-based free speech from legislation such as SOPA, PIPA, and the 2012 iteration of the NDAA. (“Reddit Users Launch”)

The community ultimately selected Representative Ryan for a number of reasons that were spread out, as demonstrated above, in multiple discussion threads throughout Reddit. This presented somewhat of a problem for the group, because without further clarification neither the congressman nor potential supporters of the newly formed opposition movement would know why Ryan was targeted. The group, now calling itself “Operation Pull Ryan” (OPR), released a statement on its official webpage explaining the selection of Representative Ryan:

Though the initial discussions within the movement suggested a campaign against a sponsor or co-sponsor of SOPA, it was not the only criteria. The fact that Mr. Ryan was not sponsoring the bill became apparent to OPR in the early stages of formation. Congressman Ryan was chosen for several reasons that we felt were strategic to our goals, and we stand fully behind our decision. These factors, coupled with the

ambiguity of his stance on SOPA, made him a viable candidate for our first campaign.

(Whalen)

Over the course of those few hours, the group had evolved from a group of people deliberating about whom to target to an activist organization with a website and a series of press releases—comparable in speed and immediacy to Wasik's flash riots. This quick advancement to confrontation meets Mouffe's ideal that agonistic democracy will allow, even encourage, friendly enemies to engage with each other on issues that matter to both: "[t]his will of course create conflict and it would be a mistake to expect all those different understandings to coexist without clashing" (Mouffe 74). While OPR's actions were quite Mouffian, their action did not meet the Habermasian criteria set out above. For example, they never reached out to Paul Ryan's campaign to invite them to "take part in a discourse" about the issue. They immediately pressured Ryan. Whether or not Paul Ryan's camp took this into consideration, they did respect the movement enough to attempt to stifle its efforts by arguing that he did not actually sponsor (or even vocally support) the bill in the House. The OPR website was quick to respond:

While it is true that Congressman Ryan was not the sponsor of SOPA, his efforts to remain neutral about the caustic piece of legislation are extremely discouraging. This, coupled with the fact that Ryan has received \$288,600 from supporters of SOPA and only \$39,950 from groups who oppose it, seems to suggest that it is still very possible the congressman will vote in support of the legislation. Rob Zerban, Congressman Ryan's opponent in the coming 2012 election, has publicly stated that he is against SOPA. ("Our Mission")

This last sentence marks the shift from a focus on consensus to one of agonism. OPR is no longer interested in cooperative problem solving or collaboration, as they were with their fellow Redditors on the various discussion threads. They are now decisively adversarial and strategic, putting pressure on Representative Ryan to do what they want or be in danger of long-term political pressure. Just as they did not meet Habermas' first criterion by not seeking discourse or allowing Paul Ryan to take part in a meaningful discourse, the action limited his abilities to question their assertions or introduce his own perspective into the discourse. They did they by issuing press releases—without the capability to comment or share an alternative viewpoint—and by immediately supporting Ryan's opponent. Had they been interested in Habermasian ideal communication, they might have reached out to Ryan privately with a question, or offered Ryan the opportunity to amend his position before being attacked in public. This example from Reddit includes both sincere open-minded discussion that led to agonistic argumentum ad baculum.

After this shift, Paul Ryan made some halfhearted attempts at placating SOPA's critics, but ultimately caved to anti-SOPA demands on January 9, 2012 with this official press release:

The internet is one of the most magnificent expressions of freedom and free enterprise in history. It should stay that way. While H.R. 3261, the Stop Online Piracy Act, attempts to address a legitimate problem, I believe it creates the precedent and possibility for undue regulation, censorship and legal abuse. I do not support H.R. 3261 in its current form and will oppose the legislation should it come before the full House. (“Concerns”)

The Reddit community apparently chose wisely, as they were able to help force a very high-profile Republican to take a strong stand against legislation that once looked like a guaranteed win for the recording and film industries. Supporters of OPR were aware that they were not the only ones who put pressure on Paul Ryan, but they were full aware of the implications of such a resounding success:

While Operation Pull Ryan does not take full credit for Paul Ryan's recent explanation of his stance on SOPA, the impact of the movement on Paul Ryan's decision cannot be ignored. The success of Operation Pull Ryan demonstrates the growing power and potential for political mobilization in the age of technology.

("Statement")

What began as a discussion on Reddit turned quickly (over the course of 12 days) into an activist force that changed the public position of an influential Representative, brought added attention to a pending (and all but unknown to the general public) bill, and emboldened other internet communities to get involved. In this sense, it became a flash public the moment the Reddit discussion mobilized a network of support and facilitated multiple interactions over time. Because of the site's design and established procedures (which I discussed in the previous section), it is a space proven to enable rhetorical deliberation that ultimately shaped, and created the groundwork for, the ensuing agonism. I will next explore an example of a similar interaction that started with deliberation and expanded to activism.

The Wikipedia Blackout

This Wikipedia Blackout began about two weeks before digitalboy sparked the formation of OPR. On December 13, 2011, the Wikipedia user Crazynas started a page on Wikipedia titled “SOPA Initiative.” On it he posted the following paragraph:

This is a project page to determine what action is required on the part of the Wikipedia community regarding the SOPA bill and our response to it (if any). Jimbo Wales asked for community input on a possible database lock, similar to what the Italians did in October in response to a proposed bill in their parliament. Although opinion is divided on the issue, there appears to be broad support that “some” form of response is needed. This is a workshop to explore various alternatives. (“SOPA Initiative: Difference”)

Over the following month, Wikipedians discussed, on this page and on Wikipedia founder Jimmy Wales' discussion page, whether/how Wikipedia should take action on this issue. At issue was whether Wikipedia should be involved at all, whether they should shut down Wikipedia with a “database lock” that would make the site inaccessible, and whether that database lock should be limited geographically (i.e. only in America) or international in scope. Eventually a voting and comment system was set up with a relatively simple method of collecting opinions and fostering discussion. A number of options were posted as a list: “(1) Blackout US only, global banner¹³ (2) Global blackout and banner (3) Blackout and

13 The phrase “global banner” refers to a suggestion that there be a small protest banner on the top of Wikipedia's home page in every language, as opposed to a “global blackout” which would completely black out the entirety of Wikipedia in every language.

banner both US only (4) No blackout, global banner (5) No blackout, banner US only (6) No blackout and no banner” (“SOPA initiative/Action”). Wikipedians who supported a particular option would sign their name under it, usually offering a sentence or two as justification. These justifications often responded directly to other commenters, but most looked like user Jasonlee's opinion under the second proposal, a global blackout and banner: “Support - I prefer a complete total global blackout. This is an issue that is focused on the United States right now but other countries around the world are considering similar measures. A global blackout would mean raising awareness so we don't reach this tipping point in the future” (“SOPA initiative/Action”). The “rules” or established process limited input to a few short phrases in support or in opposition, keeping the discussion on topic and helping it move forward.¹⁴

The voting moved then to the next step, which was to determine the specifics of the global blackout, such as its degree, practical setup, and date. Again, the same process was followed under each question, this time with an additional section for comments. These comments sections often included back-and-forth discussions, with Wikipedians clarifying issues to each other or addressing specific points of disagreement. For example, one of the arguments that came up many times in this discussion dealt with Wikipedia's policy of

14 The rules were not as elaborate or detailed as Gastil or Fishkin's deliberative bodies, leading to what appears to be a majority-rules process: while two proposals gained significant numbers of votes (“Blackout US only, global banner” had 479 votes in support, while “Global blackout and banner” had 591 votes), the community moved forward with the global blackout and banner as if everyone agreed. While not an “ideal speech situation” striving for pure consensus, this deliberation does seem to have included diversity of opinion and fostered thoughtful interactions among participants.

having a “Neutral Point of View” (NPOV). Many Wikipedians felt that NPOV prohibited them from stating a position on a public issue. For example, user “Dratman” argued against intervention:

The long-term political safety of Wikipedia could be endangered. Consider the (admittedly imperfect) analogy with U.S. public radio, whose effectiveness as an information medium was severely impacted, beginning in the 1980s, by politicians seeking revenge against an organization perceived to oppose certain policies and viewpoints. I am strongly in favor of protest against these terrible bills by individuals and by other organizations which are not constrained to provide a neutral point of view. (“SOPA initiative/Action”)

Wikipedian HectorMoffet disagreed with Dratman, arguing that “We're immune to political pressure-- our nonprofit status isn't going anywhere. If SOPA passes, we'll have to pull servers out of the US anyway (or worse)-- we owe it to our lawmakers to help them understand the gravity of this threat,” and “Trödel” agreed: “Additionally, public radio took stands on things that were unrelated to public radio. Taking a stand on an issue that relates directly to wikipedia's continued existence is much different” (“SOPA initiative/Action”).

The debate continued, with some arguing that NPOV standards prohibited intervention, while others insisted they did not. While there is no proof that individual commenters changed their minds over the course of the discussion, the back-and-forth that happened throughout this discussion means that disagreeing perspectives were at least given a chance to be seen and considered. The ultimate decision was to move forward with intervention, even despite NPOV worries.

A similar discussion occurred on the topic of whether to have a worldwide blackout or limit the blackout to the United States. For example, user Mike Peel thought it should be limited: “if there has to be a blackout, then it should only take place in the US, since there's no benefit to blacking out those in any countries (they can't do anything to solve the problem, since it's a US law that only US citizens can appeal against, so why punish them by taking away their Wikipedia access?)” (“SOPA initiative/Action”). User Mathias Schindler agreed, but with a caveat: “I agree with Mike Peel. However, expatriats [sic] and citizens of other countries should be informed to take part in the conversation and the opposition to SOPA from abroad, for example by calling the local US embassy and mention the concern. Since many SOPA supporters are international companies, there are local offices of these companies abroad, too” (“SOPA initiative/Action”). User FT2 supported “per Mathias Schindler's thoughts based on Mike Peel's comment. Reluctantly as I'd like a bigger impact but in this case targeting might be how to get that bigger impact. (Night w makes a similar point I have to agree with, too - US lawmakers don't seem to much care if the rest of the world disagree[sic] when it comes to US security.)” (“SOPA initiative/Action”). Back-and-forth discussions like these occurred multiple times throughout the page, as users registered their support for various proposals and gave reasons, often citing others’ opinions as relevant, if not influential or formative, to their own.

The discussions on these topics and many others eventually added up to over 90,000 words on every aspect of Wikipedia's proposed intervention regarding SOPA. According to the discussion summary posted by the page’s editors, this discussion was record breaking:

Over the course of the past 72 hours, over 1800 Wikipedians have joined together to discuss proposed actions that the community might wish to take against SOPA and PIPA. This is by far the largest level of participation in a community discussion ever seen on Wikipedia, which illustrates the level of concern that Wikipedians feel about this proposed legislation. The overwhelming majority of participants support community action to encourage greater public action in response to these two bills. Of the proposals considered by Wikipedians, those that would result in a “blackout” of the English Wikipedia, in concert with similar blackouts on other websites opposed to SOPA and PIPA, received the strongest support. (“SOPA initiative/Action”) Garnering an “overwhelming majority” (see Fig. 1), this robust discussion led to a global site blackout on January 18, 2012, expressly encouraging Americans to pressure their

Option	Total Votes	Registered Users	Autoconfirmed Users
1. Blackout US only, global banner	479	443	395
2. Global blackout and banner	591	558	497
3. Blackout and banner both US only	24	24	22
4. No blackout, global banner	20	18	18
5. No blackout, banner US only	19	17	16
6. No blackout and no banner	76	72	67

Figure 1: The Wikipedia community’s vote on action to be taken against SOPA/PIPA (“SOPA initiative”).

representatives to drop support of SOPA. Again we see a clear shift between discussion and advocacy. This Wikipedia discussion about whether, when, and how to protest eventually facilitated a hardline advocacy stance on the part of the discussion’s participants. The issue community formed, decided on a course of action, and then took that action against an

intended audience. While the intended audience of the Reddit intervention was a legislator, the intended audience of Wikipedia's pressure was legislators' constituents. Wikipedia opted not to directly pressure the bill's supporters in Congress, but instead to engage the general public to pressure their own elected representatives. This intervention, however, was still prompted by deliberation and still ended up in a direct, non-deliberative (they were not interested in discussing SOPA, but killing it) pressure on an audience.

Affordances of Deliberation on Wikipedia

Discussions on Wikipedia have advantages not available to face-to-face discussions, advantages that bring participants closer to Habermas' ideal speech situation than is often possible in face-to-face discussions. However, just as Reddit.com's rules of reddiquette exclude many, likewise did the general rules of Wikipedia and the specific rules of this particular case discourage and even prohibit some from participating. This discussion was not open to all, as at least some basic functional knowledge of wiki editing was necessary to participate. Despite this exclusivity in the deliberations, it is important to consider that there was still a public phase of the debate not limited to just Wikipedia members (or redditors, for that matter). There might not be an entirely inclusive deliberative platform, organization, or setup, so the opportunity to participate in the larger discussion must be left as open as possible. Not every agonistic interaction will be preceded or shaped by deliberations, nor will all deliberations lead to agonism. The unique combination of deliberation and agonism in these two examples demonstrates the potential of digitally augmented flash public interventions.

Like Reddit, Wikipedia has the flexibility of asynchronous discussions not limited by time and the freedom for multiple participants to add their voices to the discussion at the same time. In addition, Wikipedia provides other affordances not available on Reddit. I will suggest the three most important here. First, Wikipedia discussion leaders' progression through discussion topics kept every participant on topic and focused on providing reasons for or against each proposal. Face-to-face discussions are often dominated by disagreements that are not germane to the issues at hand and thus hinder the deliberative body from progressing by excluding individuals interested in moving the discussion forward, violating the first requirement of an ideal speech situation. While discussion leaders provided a strict framework for discussion, they were also very flexible about creating new topics within that framework. This second affordance allowed participants to generate and participate in various subtopics related to the issue at hand, each governed by the framework but varied enough to allow a wide variety of participation and perspectives. This freedom to add topics and raise questions, while obviously not perfectly implemented, came close to meeting requirements 2a (everyone is allowed to question every assertion), 2b (everyone is allowed to introduce any assertion), and 2c (everyone is allowed to express themselves) of an ideal speech situation.

The third affordance is the fact that the entire Wikipedia discussion can be found on one page. Unlike Reddit, which automatically collapses some threads and shows others, Wikipedia collects every comment and displays them all in the same place. Unlike the majority of informal face-to-face deliberations, which are ephemeral and unarchived, the Wikipedia debate was recorded as it was happening. This removes another internal constraint

limiting participants from expressing themselves or contributing to the discussion, allowing participants to peruse previous comments to better inform their additions to the discussion while giving them the freedom to contribute wherever (and, often, whatever¹⁵) they want. Taken collectively, these affordances ultimately created a community bound together by deliberation rather than an advocacy group brought together by the common goal of agonism.

Like Reddit's deliberations, the deliberations on Wikipedia were inclusive to anyone with an account and Wikipedia knowledge and, as demonstrated above, contained a large number of opinions and some back-and-forth discussions. Wikipedia's organization allowed individuals to participate freely but also constrained participation to a single page, protecting individuals' ability to be heard in the discussion by not relegating any arguments to a separate page. Wikipedia's deliberations were not without fault,¹⁶ of course, but still measure up respectably well to Habermas's ideal for speech situations. While Reddit's deliberations are defined by fluidity, Wikipedia's are more focused and methodical. This style allows the site to approximate Habermasian ideal speech situations by guiding debate carefully, keeping deliberators discussing the questions at hand—a necessity when all the deliberations were taking place on a single page. This accessibility, organization, and focus creates another site

15 It is impossible to tell, but it is not unreasonable to assume that there were posts deleted by the Wikipedia talk page moderators, simply judging by the strict framework they set up.

16 One of the key faults in the Wikipedia discussion was the requirement that they take place on Wikipedia, immediately disqualifying anyone who was not familiar with Wikipedia editing procedures (which are arguably more complicated than simply posting a comment on Reddit). Another fault is the fact that a wiki page is not the ideal place to have a debate since it is essentially a word processing document with very little by way of discussion threads, reply tracking, or other features that make up for the lack of body language, intonation, etc.

in which people are communicating in a way that largely enacts Habermas's ideal speech situation.

From Wikipedia Deliberations to Agonism

While the discussions held within the pages of Wikipedia are a compelling (and fully archived) example of a type of deliberative democracy at work, the result of this action is compelling in its immediacy and breadth.¹⁷ “The Wikipedia page about SOPA and PIPA was accessed more than 162 million times during the 24 hour period,” while “[m]ore than eight million looked up their elected representatives' contact information via the Wikipedia tool. The Senate's web site was unable to accommodate the number of citizens attempting to use its contact forms” (“SOPA initiative/Learn More”). A broad coalition, not limited to Wikipedians or Redditors, of anti-SOPA citizens had come together with the help of interventions from websites like Wikipedia and Reddit, coalescing into a force that helped move Congress to abandon the bills. Because so many people decided to take action in this way, the result was a fluid and temporary “flash” organization. It is worth noting the difference between the number of participants in the Wikipedia deliberations (1,800), and the number of times the activist message was accessed (162 million). This discussion among a small number of Wikipedians quickly ballooned into an activist force that spread to millions, demonstrating the potential for flash publics to engage in significant public sphere

17 Note: while Wikipedia as a whole was “blacked out” for the entire day, the article describing SOPA was left entirely uncensored. Because of this, Wikipedia's article on SOPA was able to be accessed even during the blackout.

interventions. It was pragmatic, short-lived, and existed primarily in its action on a particular issue on a particular day.

Whereas the deliberations held on Wikipedia met or approximated a number of Habermas' standards for ideal speech situations, the advocacy resulting from that deliberation were far from Habermas' ideal. Like the Reddit example, Wikipedians held true to Mouffe's vision of democracy that features "a vibrant clash of democratic political positions" (104). This vibrant clash violated the first rule of ideal speech situations by not allowing "every subject with the competence to speak and act ... to take part in a discourse." These phone calls to elected officials were not invitations or questions, but were rather statements in opposition to SOPA. Those participating in the action were invited to make statements, not seek for understanding of the other viewpoint. In a similar manner, the blackout left little room for assertions to be questioned or introduced by those who disagreed. Proponents of SOPA were not given a voice on the blacked out Wikipedia page, nor were their assertions represented in the calls to congress prompted by that blacked out page. In short, while the deliberations on Wikipedia were quite Habermasian in nature, the agonism they directed were far from Habermas' ideal speech situation.

Flash Publics in online public sphere interactions

Many have argued that the internet has not lived up to its potential to be a "democratizing" force (Hindman; Gilbert, Bergstrom, and Karahalios) or a deliberative tool (Sunstein; Garrett). It is not difficult to locate instances where divisions occur online that seem fundamentally opposed to healthy public sphere interactions. Examples include a political blogosphere that is partisan and ideologically divided (Benkler and Shaw; Adamic),

social networks like Facebook and Twitter that break into partisan cliques (Robertson et al.; Westling), and ideological isolation that is hardwired into the very core of our internet search algorithms (Pariser). Indeed, as we look at our patterns of political engagement in recent years, it seems clear that agonism is the driving force—compromise appears, at times, a relic of the past, while dogmatic talking points rigidly dominate public debates.

Indeed, Cass Sunstein argued early in the 2000s that the internet was trending toward what rhetorical scholar William Keith summarized as “*too much* community” (Keith 319). According to Sunstein, the internet empowers individuals to create dangerous communities of likemindedness—he critiques Nicholas Negroponte’s utopian vision of the “Daily Me,” the individual who technologically filters out arguments he or she disagrees with (Sunstein 4). Sunstein worries about the negative consequences of such filtering, made ever more possible with the continued personalization of each social network or search engine. Of course, individuals have always been able to ignore opposing viewpoints, but the internet has made it easier for opposing viewpoints to be not only *ignored* but also *replaced* by a wide variety of arguments that cement the reader’s preconceived notions.¹⁸ This access limits “unplanned, unanticipated encounters,” and suppresses “common experiences,” both of which, he argues, are required in a system of deliberation (5). These features of public life are increasingly neglected due to the decline of “general interest intermediaries”—inclusive venues that incorporate divergent views and interests. Sunstein posits the traditional newspaper as an example of such an intermediary, as it gives readers the opportunity to at

18 For a chilling account of the algorithmic filter bubble constructed by online search engines and social media giants, see Eli Pariser’s book *The Filter Bubble*.

least come in contact with more than one opinion, taste, or interest. Such media play a crucial role in providing unplanned access to useful information and counterarguments, as well as providing common experiences a society can share (13). Without these intermediaries, people are more easily able to avoid topics and viewpoints they dislike and will therefore be less likely to have shared experiences with their fellow citizens and political opponents.

Because of these dynamics, Sunstein and others suggest that deliberation is becoming increasingly impossible online. Based on the cases studied here, it is clear that deliberation does happen online and can be replicated. However, it is important to note the limits of this deliberation: in both cases, the only conversations took place within the internet communities that hosted the discussions. In other words, it did not include the voices of anyone outside of Reddit/Wikipedia. While this is certainly a weakness, in practice there will never be perfectly inclusive deliberations, especially in a large, heterogeneous representative democracy like the United States. Ideally, participants in these web discussions will be exposed to a wide variety of perspectives and viewpoints, but a discussion among members of already-existing Reddit and Wikipedia communities is by definition limited. The fact that Redditors and Wikipedians were at least exposed to the opposing viewpoints that could be found within their own ranks (and, as the examples described above demonstrate, there was disagreement among both communities) means that at least some level of deliberation was included in the process. In other words, while the participants are likeminded enough to be using the same web portal, they are not entirely likeminded in their perspectives on all the issues at hand. At the same time, there seems to be a necessity for deliberations to begin with at least some sense of agreement (see, for example, Perelman; Crosswhite; Hauser; among many others). For

example, in the cases discussed above, Reddit and Wikipedia users were already united in opposition to SOPA—their deliberations never considered the quality of SOPA, but were instead focused on how their shared opposition should be voiced. Even then, the very act of engaging with someone, even a fellow member of a favorite web community, means that the resulting action is at least informed by multiple viewpoints and shaped by some level of discussion. This opens the possibility that agonistic engagements can allow for (indeed, can be formed by) Habermasian consensus-seeking deliberation.

These instances of deliberation are focused on already-existing communities of internet users who deliberate about and then take agonistic action on specific political issues. Even though these deliberations are not perfectly inclusive, these internet users are not bound together by an institution and they have no hierarchy to answer to. This still meets core goals of deliberation in a democracy, “allow[ing] us to understand our own decisions” and creating adherence among participants (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca 47). Participants in the discussions on Reddit and Wikipedia understood their groups' decisions, as they participated in their formation and were able to watch as the group settled on one course of action rather than another. The deliberations were experiences shared by all who participated, creating a level of identification that, I argue, helps determine the particular form and direction of any resulting agonism.

Like the one started on Reddit, the flash public coordinated on Wikipedia's pages is interesting because of its combination of Habermasian deliberation and Mouffian agonism. In both cases, the online community discussions engaged with opposing viewpoints fairly and, to some extent at least, deliberatively. Once a direction was decided on, the community then

left the confines of their deliberations and moved to action. In the Reddit case the ensuing agonism was at least immediately confined to Reddit users, but in the Wikipedia situation the agonism was significantly more far-reaching, bringing in millions of readers and inspiring thousands of phone calls to Congress. These specific examples demonstrate the relevance of flash public interventions that can shape public sphere debates with back-and-forth followed by activism.

Throughout this chapter I have suggested that the deliberations found in the Wikipedia and Reddit examples shaped the interventions that followed them. I am not necessarily claiming that the interventions were wholly or entirely different than they would have been otherwise, though future studies might analyze the differences between agonism preceded by deliberation and agonism with no apparent deliberation. The claim I am making, however, is that the deliberations played a role in the formative *process* of these particular agonistic interventions. For example, the purely procedural process of allowing anyone in the community to comment means that a wider variety of opinions could be heard from in a short amount of time than would be possible without the deliberative phase. In addition, the back-and-forth consideration of arguments and opinions might or might not have fundamentally altered the resulting agonism, but it did engage the participants in a discussion that exposed multiple viewpoints. This deliberation shapes the resulting action: even if we cannot say the resulting action is entirely dependent on the deliberation, we can say that the process itself is different.

While Wikipedia and Reddit were not alone in their agonistic interventions against SOPA, their version of back-and-forth discussion is not always employed by activist

organizations governed by top-down hierarchies and decision makers. On the one hand, SOPA woke a sleeping giant: according to a New York Times report, “Fight for the Future, a nonprofit organization that helped organize the protests, said more than 115,000 Web sites participated, and three million people e-mailed Congress to voice their opposition to the bills” (Wortham). Many social media sites joined the debate in an agonistic capacity (advocating their cause rather than listening or seeking feedback), led by Tumblr and other social media sites in a kind of phone tree pattern with an ambiguous beginning and yet a solid and measurable effect: the bill was killed (Wortham). What makes the processes exemplified by Wikipedia and Reddit so relevant to this study is the fact that their interventions in the public sphere had back-and-forth deliberative processes as foundations. Not all groups or organizations wielded both deliberation and agonism. Indeed, judging by the number of advocacy groups, Super PACs, issue campaigns, activist email lists, and other partisan organizations that are not seeking deliberation among their members, it is safe to say that many public advocacy groups do not even attempt the type of internal deliberation exhibited in the Wikipedia and Reddit cases.

Conclusion

The understanding of flash publics as a combination of Habermasian consensus-seeking and Mouffian agonistic activism I have demonstrated here suggests that, while some deliberations do not lead to agonism just as there are agonistic interventions not preceded by deliberation, the two are interconnected in the model employed by Wikipedia and Reddit. The combination of the two has proven to be rhetorically effective, inclusive, deliberative, and agonistic—attributes found in multiple instances rather all in one. I argue that it is

impossible to meet all of these deliberative ideals in one single interaction. For example, Reddit's deliberative discussions were not agonistic nor did they include those who were not members of the site. Likewise, OPR's pressure on Representative Ryan did not seek to engage him in dialogue and was thus limited to an agonistic intervention. But, taken as a preparation/action combination, the Reddit example demonstrates the possibility for the combination of deliberation and agonism to produce not a traditional public sphere but the new phenomenon of the flash public. This flash public model's deliberations incorporate some disagreement and help the participants plan a unified action, while the model's ensuing agonism help spread the group's decisions to wider audiences.

Wikipedia and Reddit ultimately created communities bound together by deliberation rather than an advocacy group brought together by the common goal of agonism. If the latter were all they had created, however, they would never have had an effect on the larger discussion. They had to actually engage in the agonistic advocacy, clashing with their ideological opponents, before they could be effective. This relationship between deliberation and agonism is key: I echo Habermas, Gastil, and Fishkin's belief that deliberation is possible in a well-functioning democracy, but I also agree with Mouffe that healthy democracy requires competitive clashes of ideas. Focusing entirely on consensus too often postpones decision-making and artificially privileges procedures, while focusing entirely on agonism circumvents the important constitutive potential of deliberation.

The discussions about the Wikipedia blackout were thoroughly consensus-based, while the site's blackout was not. The Reddit community's confrontational pressure on Paul Ryan was powered by the back-and-forth that happened behind the scenes on the Reddit

forum. While not introducing a shift toward something previously impossible, digital media do empower groups to enact this type of engagement as they band together, deliberate, and then advocate in ways previously limited by cost or access: the activists of Reddit and Wikipedia formed communities that would not have been the same had they been offline. The individuals who were a part of these online activities were motivated to come together by the deliberations on the topic, and as soon as the bill was shelved they faded back into the larger Reddit/Wikipedia community to await the next political exigency. This ability to regroup is a distinguishing feature of Wasik's flash riots. When a riot lacking the technology and unity exhibited by London's flash riots is disbanded, rarely is it able to regroup. Much in the same way, the Wikipedia and Reddit communities coalesced into separate “flash publics” relying on the participants (rather than on a hierarchical institution) for a specific purpose and then fading away when their work was completed. But, just as Wasik's flash riots were able to regroup when another action was deemed necessary, the Wikipedia and Reddit communities are empowered to do the same by the technology (their respective platforms) and their unity (created from their shared membership in a particular web community as well as through deliberation). In the next chapter, I will explore an example of agonism without this type of significant deliberation beforehand, exploring the extent to which flash public agonism can function without deliberation and what such interactions expose about flash public interventions in general.

The cases discussed here provide a descriptive analysis of a more realistic approach toward deliberation and agonism that works across instances and combines the affordances of various types of rhetorical interventions. The flash publics are formed and inspired by

deliberations and then achieve their goals by pivoting from these interactions into more agonistic interventions. In the case of the SOPA actions, this combination resulted in fluid and dynamic flash publics that took advantage of the affordances of digital technology to avoid bulky hierarchy and forge a powerful network of rhetor-activists. These flash publics justify hope in the deliberative democratic experiment, demonstrating the possibility of digitally connected citizens to continuously create and re-create their own democratic potential. Indeed, the fact that these flash publics can appear as quickly as they can disappear means that their potential to reconstitute themselves in response to various issues or exigencies is never entirely gone: “A crowd that's always connected can never really be dispersed. It's always still out there” (Wasik).

Compositional Flash Publics:
The Reconstitutive Potential of the “Internet Defense League”
and the “Action Network”

Try again. Fail again. Fail better.
Samuel Beckett

In July of 2012, the silhouette of a cat laughing was projected onto buildings in New York City, San Francisco, and Ulan Bator, Mongolia (Collier). The signal’s creators hoped that the symbol would come to function as the “bat signal” does for DC Comic’s Batman superhero—an urgent and public call to action. The effort celebrated the beginning of a loose organization of internet activists known as the “Internet Defense League,” whose stated mission was to “[m]ake sure that the internet never loses. Ever” (“Internet Defense League”). Their ambitious goal was inspired in part as a response to the recently defeated U.S. House and Senate anti-piracy bills, the Stop Online Piracy Act (SOPA) and Prevent Real Online Threats to Economic Creativity and Theft of Intellectual Property Act (PROTECT IP or PIPA). In order to defeat the bills, many of the web's biggest sites, including Wikipedia, Reddit, Tumblr, and Google, banded together to fight what they saw as burdensome and creativity-stifling regulation. As described above in more detail, early in 2012 each of the participating websites “went dark” on the same day, restricting access to their homepages and

encouraging their visitors instead to join them in expressing disagreement with objectives of SOPA and PIPA (Madrigal). After an overwhelming response, elected officials in both chambers of Congress chose to drop the bills entirely, giving the loose coalition of corporations and web communities some colloquially (and somewhat imprecisely) referred to as “the internet” its first big legislative victory.

As described in the previous chapter, this victory for the internet was driven by rhetorical public sphere deliberations that included agonism shaped by consensus-seeking back-and-forth. I argued that agonism is a key component of a recuperated model of the public sphere. In this chapter, I will explore another variety of procedure-driven agonism, this time without any large-scale deliberation to shape it. The focus of this chapter will be to expose and discuss another facet of the recuperated public sphere model I introduced in the first chapter: an alternative to both Habermas’s single unitary public sphere and to the feudal counterpublic alternative offered by many scholars reacting to Habermas. Instead, as I suggested in the first chapter, a recuperated understanding of the public sphere is neither limited to a single “public sphere,” nor bound by a set of unchangeable counterpublics, but is instead a model of the reconstitution of power in society (see Loehwing and Motter). In this chapter I will describe two flash public activist models, the Internet Defense League and Action Network, focusing on whether and in what ways the flash public behavior they enable reconstitutes power dynamics related to a particular issue. I suggest that these networks’ compositional potential allows their activism to overcome obstacles previously considered major hurdles for activist groups, further expanding the theoretical notion of a flash public in meaningful and practical ways.

In order to explore the rhetorical viability of a recuperated theory of the public sphere, the previous chapter analyzed two specific actions taken by communities. Close analysis of these actions highlight the agonistic and deliberative characteristics of a recuperated theory of the public sphere. This chapter, rather than focusing on analysis of specific activist actions taken by communities, instead focuses on two broader systems or networks of activism: the Internet Defense League and the Action Network. Activists build these networks by way of phatic communication, strengthening the network with each cute cat video or “selfie” photograph. This might be one of the most innovative affordances of digital activism: such online activist communities are less like a social movement and more like a digital union, a dormant web of interested activists ready to take action at a moment’s notice. In order to draw out this distinction more fully, I will not focus my analysis on specific campaigns or individual interactions, but instead on two frameworks for activism. I do this in order to analyze the next criterion of a recuperated theory of the public sphere: it should be compositional. These two systems of activism (one an activist network, the other a set of tools built for activists) are not driven by a single unitary public sphere nor hardened counterpublics, but instead by compositional and digitally augmented flash publics that reconstitute and recompose societal power structures.

Compositional public sphere networks

This chapter will focus on broad principles of two existing models for internet activism rather than specific instances of interventions. The purpose of this analysis is not to examine the dynamics of interventions driven by these models of activism, but rather to explore the theoretical and practical implications of available activist tools such as these,

governed by what I will refer to as a logic of composition. The logic of composition, as will be demonstrated, is in direct contrast to the logics governing the frameworks employed in theories of the single unitary public sphere and also in theories of counterpublics. In order to better differentiate these logics, I seek to demonstrate that the single unitary public sphere adopts a logic of expression and that counterpublics theory adopts a logic of antagonism, neither of which is fully adequate to describe digital activism.

The notion of a single unitary public sphere, critiques of which were summarized in Chapter 1, assumes that it is possible for everyone to be represented in a single discursive space. All it takes to participate is the willingness to obey the rules and the desire to express oneself. The shortcomings of this notion of the public sphere have already been discussed, but can be summarized by quoting Nancy Fraser:

Insofar as the bracketing of social inequalities in deliberation means proceeding as if they don't exist when they do, this does not foster participatory parity. On the contrary, such bracketing usually works to the advantage of dominant groups in society and to the disadvantage of subordinates. (120)

Fraser goes on to suggest that some kind of *un-bracketing* is preferable, and is actually embraced by Habermas himself in his later work (120). The issue here is that a single unitary public sphere is plagued by the very oppression and marginalization it attempts to overcome. Rather than allowing the expression of participants, it fosters an expression of power and privilege. The logic of expression is turned back on itself. Activist models built on this logic quickly succumb to opposition that they are not equipped to handle. These models ultimately

exclude the very people and groups who might benefit most from activism, and often cannot even coordinate meaningful activist intervention due to an overemphasis on consensus.

The theoretical response to the single unitary public sphere was to open up the model to a plurality of competing publics, subaltern publics, counterpublics, and otherwise alternative publics. Rather than focusing on expression, these were governed by what I will call a logic of antagonism. If one did not fit in with the dominant public, there was an oppositional public with which to unite. In fact, many of the counterpublics described by rhetorical theorists are rooted in elements of identity that are seen as unchanging or unchangeable: feminist counterpublics, LGBTQ counterpublics, impoverished workers in a capitalist system, etcetera (Warner; Lundberg; Asen and Brouwer; Asen, “Seeking”). Rather than looking to include everyone via a logic of expression, this model looks to highlight antagonisms and divisions.

While a logic of antagonism does overcome at least some of the flaws of the logic of expression, it also introduces new problems by creating the conditions of possibility for the minimization, or even erasure, of common symbolic space. There is often no reason to value such space, because the very recognition of such space is seen as a capitulation to the opposition. The logic of antagonism may lead to closed (echo)chambers of symbolic space rather than open or expanding symbolic space. Rather than using symbolic space to build upon or advance shared goals, it may be used instead to oppose and attack. In such cases, when two competing counterpublics are, in Mouffe’s words, antagonistic “enemies” rather than agonistic “adversaries,” they are not true to their rhetorical or democratic potential (13). The logic of antagonism too often creates silos of unfriendly enemies rather than messy

mosaics of Mouffe's *friendly enemies* (13). Models governed by a logic of antagonism effectively defend marginalized groups from unchecked oppression, but are ultimately built on a model that is not adaptable to change and thus might eventually buckle under the pressure of cultural or technological change.

This chapter proposes an alternative to these two flawed logics: a logic of composition. Rather than aiming to create an all-inclusive expression zone or an amalgam of antagonists, this model suggests a focus on the processes of rearranging power relations in society (see Loehwing and Motter). This flexible model (which is, as I will describe below, an *antifragile model*) of activism creates the conditions of possibility for people to reconsider and reshuffle societal power dynamics. Such fluidity, in theory, provides opportunity for oppressive structures to be challenged, for common symbolic space to be designed and renegotiated through the processes of disagreement, dialogue, and clashes among friendly enemies. Such symbolic and rhetorical interactions have the potential to bring about significant change in political systems. As democratic theorist Étienne de La Boétie has argued, oppression is always fundamentally enabled by the consent of the masses (12). The oppressors, “a small minority of the society” in a democracy as well as in a dictatorship (13, 35), ultimately succeed in oppressing the people not through force or coercion, but through express consent.¹⁹ Because of this consent, toppling tyranny does not necessarily require violence against the tyrant as much as it requires ceasing violence against oneself:

19 For example, the masses outnumber the minority, and the minority only controls such assets as military power with the consent of the people in the military.

it is not necessary to deprive [the tyrant] of anything, but simply to give him nothing; there is no need that the country make an effort to do anything for itself provided it does nothing against itself. It is therefore the inhabitants themselves who permit, or, rather, bring about, their own subjection, since by ceasing to submit they would put an end to their servitude. (46)

For La Boétie, then, a renegotiation of power relations can happen as the people decide to *stop doing something they are doing*. David Hume agrees, as he writes in the forward to La Boétie's treatise, "as Force is always on the side of the governed, the governors have nothing to support them but opinion. It is therefore, on opinion only that government is founded" (13). A logic of composition accepts the power of opinion in particular, and of the symbolic in general, to restructure power relations in a society. Whereas capitulation is central to a logic of expression, and uncompromising rigidity is key in a logic of antagonism, symbolic restructuring and engagement is the driving force in a logic of composition. This unfolding process of composition and recomposition is made possible when activists learn from and adapt to opposition instead of avoiding or opposing it. The activist network tools I will describe are enactments of early attempts at using digital networking capabilities to create these compositional relationships.

Compositional digital activism

The activism of the IDL and Action Network illustrates how digital media can enable compositional digital activism. Whether it is a network of likeminded blogs, a social network on Facebook, a collection of Twitter commenters, or a narrowly focused web forum, digital activist networks are assembling, reconstituting, and then fading away. When something

meaningful happens that requires intervention, the groundwork has already been laid for rhetorical action via these networks, allowing people and groups to shape events as they unfold. This “groundwork” is based on the concept of phatic communication, an idea popularized by linguist Roman Jakobson in the 1960s (Jakobson). Similarly, internet experts refer to the phenomenon of “ambient awareness,” or the type of communication that exists primarily to perform social roles and solidify relationships rather than to transmit information (see Thompson). Online phatic updates about lunch, children, pets, or other seemingly banal events build relationships across the network so that the necessary connections are already in place when information needs to be transmitted.

For instance, late in 2012 a New Jersey teen tweeted a request for help just before going missing: “There is somone in my hour ecall 911” (Staff). Her spelling errors notwithstanding, within 18 hours her account had over 100,000 followers and her friends and newfound followers had set up a hashtag (#helpfindkara) in order to help find her (Staff). Kara was quickly located and returned home safely after a tweet—to her previously small network of friends interested in her seemingly inconsequential everyday musings—sparked a citywide search operation that was ultimately effective in locating her. Similarly, two years ago on Christmas Eve, a Utah woman posted the following to her Facebook profile: “Hello, Is anyone out there? I am having a serious problem and me and [my son] will be dead by morning” (Hollenhorst). One of her Facebook friends reported her surprise: “With Facebook you usually get on and gossip, and [see] stupid little cartoons and this and that But this was something serious” (Hollenhorst). Dozens of Facebook comments poured in, friends tried in vain to contact the victim, and within a few hours, a friend living more than 2,000

miles away in South Carolina provided the victim's home address, and a Utah firefighter was ultimately able to call the police with the necessary information. Authorities visited the house and arrested an abusive live-in boyfriend, rescuing the victim along with her young child (Hollenhorst). In each of these situations, social networks—normally thought of as useful only for things like gossip and “stupid little cartoons”—became instruments for cooperation and for focused social action.

As can be seen by these examples, online phatic communication establishes networks based on relationships that create the possibility for timely and substantive action. Users strengthen their networks with each seemingly insignificant meme or inside joke: the network values what its members value *because they are part of the network*. This exposes the real power of digital activism: as ideas are composed and recomposed within these networks, webs of relationships are strengthened. Whenever something is caught in that web—a pressing current event, a cry for help, an invitation to join a protest—the whole group is alerted and is prepared to participate.

The Internet Defense League and Action Network have tapped into this potential in such a way that they are able to overcome some of the biggest pitfalls of activist causes. Building on the logic of composition I described above, the next section introduces a theoretical model for understanding the practical implications of compositional networks such as these.

Antifragile Activism

Nassim Taleb, a philosophy professor at the University of Oxford, proposes the idea of “antifragile” systems as a way to rethink the capabilities and potential of societal systems

in general (Taleb). His idea suggests that while *fragile* systems break upon encountering “stress, disorder, volatility, and turmoil,” *robust* systems attempt to resist such opposition in order to stay the same (31). Antifragile systems, on the other hand, embrace opposition and draw strength through their interaction with those opposing forces. Taleb refers to this opposition as “harm,” arguing “the fragile is the package that would be *at best* unharmed, the robust would be *at best* and *at worst* unharmed. And the opposite of fragile is therefore what is *at worst* unharmed” (31). While robust systems are able to withstand opposition they are also unable to benefit from it. In other words, avoiding harm, failure, and uncertainty can be significantly detrimental. On the other hand, antifragile systems welcome the stress that comes from oppositional confrontations and benefit from it as their parts and relationships adapt under the pressure. As Taleb demonstrates with examples in finance, government, dieting, medicine, and even punditry, this counterintuitive proposition can be applied to a wide variety of fields.

Fragile activism

Taleb’s argument about the value of the antifragile can be related to activism in general—many activist causes utilize, often to their disappointment, fragile means. These efforts fail to hold the attention of their supporters and are generally unable to turn that attention into meaningful commitments. Without these key developments, their efforts flounder. Other causes are able to attract committed participants but are ultimately unable to translate this support into actual change. Examples of this type of activism are difficult to come by because, by their very nature, they never really make a mark on public discourse.

One recent example of fragile activism is, I argue, the Occupy Wall Street movement of 2011 and 2012. The movement's initial days and weeks were overflowing with successes—the protests dominated news media narratives, creating spectacles of pepper spraying police officers, marches, and arrests. At least initially, the protests seemed destined to bring about substantive changes. While the movement survived a variety of problems, the combination of police raids, legal threats, and cold New York winter weather contributed to the occupation's demise (see van Gelder; Lye). The fact that the organization had no concrete demands made it easier, initially, to recruit supporters, but in the long run made it more fragile, as it was difficult to keep attention and maintain and/or build a base of active support (see Roberts; Reeves). Ultimately, Occupy Wall Street was unable to make any substantive changes in the area of New York they occupied, or in the country at large. While innovative and promising, the Occupy movement is a good example of fragile activism to the extent this lack of clear agenda made the movement unable to stand up against the pressure of a variety of countervailing forces that ultimately won out.

Robust activism

Other causes see the danger of this kind of failure and turn instead to robust forms of operation. Robust activists are skilled at keeping the attention of their participants and frequently succeed in their goals. Whereas Occupy Wall Street, I argue, failed to meet its goals due to confusion about what those goals were, robust alternatives may also fail to meet their goals due to inflexible concentration on those goals. Historically, labor unions have served as excellent examples of this kind of activism (see Hirst and Delgado). Some unions have benefited from mandatory membership, guaranteeing them participants and

automatically increasing negotiating power. Additionally, union hierarchies work to ensure enough funding to keep the public focused on issues relevant to member interests (see Peters). Their lobbyists worked to keep their causes at the forefront of legislators' minds such that, in the past, their endeavors saw a great deal of success (see "Laborers Union"). But the downside of robust systems such as this, according to Taleb, is their inability to cope with change or learn from failure (Taleb). To put this in other terms, these unions (much like counterpublics) simply reinforce existing divisions and relations. As a result, these robust systems risk losing relevance when confronted with any substantial or systemic change: faced with increasing mechanization, changes in political preference, and a decline in desire to participate in civic-minded or activist organizations, labor unions have seen a steep decline in their effectiveness over the past four decades (Goldfield, *Organized Labor*; Putnam). Labor unions' inability to embrace change perceived as harmful has been a large contributor to their succumbing to it, as evidenced by decreasing membership rates, increasing legislative failures, and crippling inability to adapt to modern American economic realities.

If fragile activism is immediately destroyed by failure, and robust activism is unable to embrace it, antifragile activism is able to endure and recompose itself because of failure. There are many ways for an activist cause to fail, but in the next section I will expand upon the three key areas already alluded to: distraction, uncommitted participants, and lack of results. Drawing on the IDL and Action Network as case studies, I will then explore how antifragile activism is able to confront each of these common failures and embrace them, composing themselves and therefore larger societal power dynamics in the process.

The Internet Defense League

If critics are to be believed, the internet is the ultimate tool of distraction, with hyperlinks and pictures of cute kittens inevitably tempting our attention away from informative journalism and deep thinking (Carr, *Shallows*; Carr, “Stupid”; Morozov, *Delusion*; Morozov, “Slacktivism”). Individuals are bombarded by digital requests, invitations, and various demands to the point where they are unlikely to do much more than “click” to demonstrate their support for any one of them. If critics are correct, this “slacktivism” lacks the power to bring about the kind of change most activists hope for, such as legal, legislative, social, economic, or political change of some kind. Malcolm Gladwell influentially argued that digital tools have little effect compared to sit-ins, protests, or strikes (Gladwell, “Small Change”). Regardless of the degree to which we agree with the conclusions of Gladwell, Carr, and Morozov, it is worth seriously exploring the role digital activism can play in achieving social change.

While the SOPA/PIPA protests were primarily driven by urgency, the IDL is oriented more toward building relationships. The IDL is set up to build a coalition of sympathetic organizations, websites, and interested individuals. Once in place, the IDL identifies impending threats—usually legislative—and alerts the various groups to organize direct action. According to a recent piece in *Wired Magazine*, IDL steering committee member Alexis Ohanian argues that this model provides exceptional strength due to its adaptability:

At a moment of notice, this kind of digital bat signal will go up in the air and you’ll get notified and have the opportunity to take action however you see fit on your site . . . It could be a slew of buttons that give links to whatever we’re doing, a call to action

to sign a petition, or a couple of lines of code that you put on your site that allows someone to call their senator. It will be up to the web owner to decide . . . We're trying to encourage as much from the bottom up, because that's how the internet works. (Zetter)

In the event of a threat, members of the IDL are encouraged to make phone calls, send tweets, write letters, post alerts on their websites, or take various other protest actions. As the IDL's network gains more bloggers, website moderators, and content curators, all bring along their own communities of friends, readers, and supporters to expand the network's reach. The IDL hopes to serve as a call to arms for "all the people who are creating something online," Ohanian told reporter Jon Brodtkin, because "[t]hey all have a community they want to keep strong" (Brodtkin). In order to rally all these different groups, the IDL works to build a network of networks, a coalition of communities held together by phatic communication that exposes a shared interest in protecting their respective corners of the internet.

The digital tools and methods the IDL uses to distribute their message are unique and tap into communities in ways that would have previously been highly cost prohibitive, if not logistically impossible. What makes the IDL such an interesting case study of a digital activist model is not just the tools and the medium with which it is carried out, but its embrace of an antifragile model focused more on building a network than seizing a moment. This model embraces the very failures that cripple so many other activist efforts. After I introduce Action Network, I will explore how the combination of digital tools and

compositional networks provides activists with means to embrace the failures of distraction, lack of commitment, and lack of immediate results.

Action network

Officially launched to the public in September of 2013, Action Network is a set of tools designed to empower activists to build their own networks. This new set of tools works to address a gap in currently existing activist tools: “With most toolsets, even if your ally down the block is using the same toolset as you, that doesn't make it any easier to work together, publish joint actions, or share email lists and names. We think that's silly” (“Action Network”). Indeed, email lists, petition drives, get out the vote efforts, and other types of activism tend to use tools that create closed silos of activism. When two organizations work on the same projects, the resulting email lists and supporter information are not automatically shared between the organizations. If they are ever shared, that sharing comes despite the limitations of the tools they were using to facilitate such sharing. The Action Network makes the sharing a part of the process.

One of the challenges of observing and analyzing the activist model of a tool so recently released to the public is the dearth of information on the successes or failures of activists who have employed the tool (see Fig. 2). The Action Network framework, however, suggests principles that are promising in and of themselves, whether or not this particular digital embodiment ends up facilitating success in the future. For example, the Action Network framework makes sharing a part of their activist process by enabling cooperation and then tracking the resulting referrals, sign ups, and participation. Participants create invitations for activist actions (petitions, forms, or events), and then any other Action

Network member who shares that invitation has the potential to benefit: “When activists click those links and take action, they will be added to both your list and the list of the person who created the action” (“Action Network”). The best way to understand this in practice is



Figure 2: Action Network tools have been adopted by a variety of groups and causes, primarily in late 2013. Their concrete results have yet to be seen, but the framework is promising (“Action Network”).

by considering the relationship between *members* and *groups* using Action Network. A group can be formed for a large national cause, for example, with a number of supporting participants throughout the country. The group can create an action and collect the resulting supporters, or an individual member can create an action and easily get it officially sponsored by the group. Then, activists who engage with this member’s action will be added to the member’s personal email list as well as the sponsoring group’s email list (“Action Network”). This allows causes to be as decentralized or spread out as necessary, while also building a large and latent network of supporters that can be activated at a moment’s notice. The Action Network information page explains the implications of this design:

This sets up a useful federated structure -- you can imagine local field staff or volunteers being members of your group and creating their own local petitions, events, and forms under the group's brand to help win the local campaigns they're working on. Over time, these local members are building up their personal email lists,

so they can easily keep in touch with their local activists. But all of those activists are also added to your group's national email list, which you as an administrator have access to so you can keep in touch with those activists about national campaigns.

(“Action Network”)

In this way, individual activists and local groups can curate a flash public network while at the same time building out a larger movement that takes advantage of every participant's efforts. The Action Network tools are built first and foremost to build networks in the process of seizing moments—even if a given action is a “failure” (if a petition fails to change a law, for example), it can be a success to the extent that it adds to the network. Mailing and email lists have long been governed by this dynamic of network building, but Action Network decentralizes that benefit and creates a distributed network of potential flash publics.

These tools were made available to the public in late 2013, but they were used by Action Network's nonprofit designers, Corporate Action Network (CAN), to organize a 2012 strike of Wal*Mart. According to CAN's website, the strike resulted in big numbers over the Thanksgiving weekend of 2012: “30,000 people came out to support Walmart workers at 1,197 events in 44 states on Black Friday alone” (“Walmart Workers”). The website also points out that individual workers were empowered to “[take] direct action independently” using the tools that would later be released as “Action Network” (“Walmart Workers”). This marks a remarkable shift in online organizing toward something somewhat unremarkable: physical, IRL (in real life) labor activities have always empowered individual workers to take direct action independently. This is nothing new. But the combination of individual direct actions taken independently (much like IRL labor activism) and the online networks of

support (akin to email lists) suggests potential for flash public activism to both create networks and facilitate decentralized grassroots support to redistribute power and compose societal relations in ways previously impractical.

In the next sections, I will examine how the IDL and Action Network models create a combination of digital tools and networks that composes new power relations as it provides activists with means to embrace the failures of distraction, lack of commitment, and lack of immediate results.

Distraction

One of the most enduring and persuasive critiques of the internet has been how overrun it is by the banal—pornography, grammatical errors, pictures of puppies, and bad arguments are so widely accepted as fundamental to the internet, even the rule rather than the exception, that they are codified in its (only partially tongue-in-cheek) “laws” and “rules” (13375p33k; Chivers). Scholars and health experts are increasingly worried about the dangers of this distraction, often focusing their concern on digital multitasking's effects on our social skills, political knowledge, family life, and brain capacity (Ritchel; Connelly; Sunstein; Pariser; Parker-Pope). Even an anecdotal trip to a favorite web page can justify this worry—sidebars are cluttered with flashy advertisements, social networks full of acquaintances announcing what they had for lunch, message boards overflowing with links to inside jokes, and provocative images unsafe for work. This level of distraction would have been bad enough in a pre-digital age with less competition for attention but, in our time of information overload, attention itself becomes our most valuable asset (Lanham, *Attention* 6, 223). If the monopolies of the attention economy dominate our attention to the extent that we

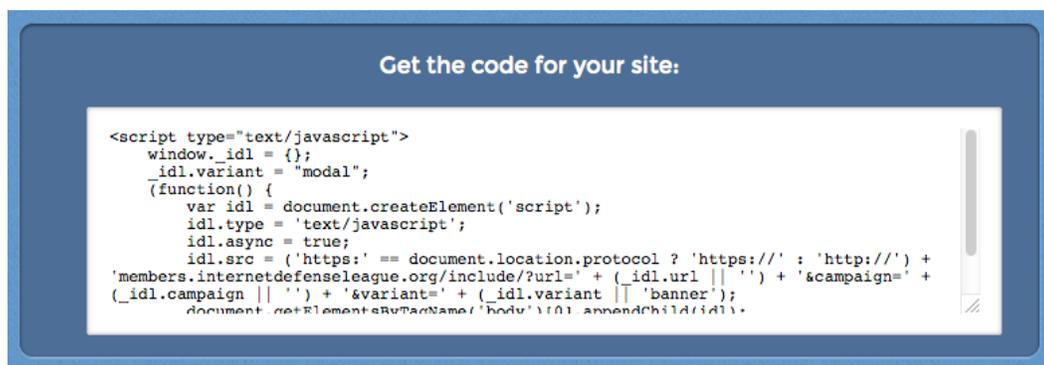
cannot discover meaningful information, then activist causes will be unable to convince us to even hear them out. We will be too busy dancing Gangnam Style to pay them any attention.

One of the unique (and counterintuitive) elements of the internet is that distractions can actually end up serving a substantive role in digital activism. The seemingly meaningless bits of communication so many scholars and critics rightfully worry about can in fact be examples of phatic communication. These insignificant rhetorical acts add up over time to create a solid web of relationships, online as well as off (Manovich 185). If attention monopolies dominate through heavy-handed advertising or shameless tactics, the more meaningful players of the internet earn our attention through personal relationships even if our interactions with them are often phatic in nature.

In addition, it is worth considering whether the web's distractions are actually a marker, and perhaps even guarantor, of its own openness and accessibility. Web researcher Ethan Zuckerman argues that the very tools that make it possible to share frivolous pictures of cats are the same ones that enable meaningful digital protest:

It's important that these tools are generally used for banal purposes. If internet entrepreneurs created "Protestr" as a web 2.0 tool for activists, no repressive government would leave it unblocked. But blocking a tool that is mostly used for amusement or communication between friends has consequences – the users looking for cute cat videos get annoyed that YouTube is blocked... and learn about their government's willingness to constrain speech. This cost doesn't mean that governments won't choose to block these tools, but it makes the calculus more complicated. (Zuckerman)

Ironically, the videos and memes that show up on Tumblr, Reddit, Twitter, and weblogs are the very things that make those tools effective vehicles for an protests, like the IDL’s of the last two years. When the IDL needed to mobilize, it distributed code for banners and buttons to participating owners and moderators across the web, distracting regular visitors by presenting them with compelling calls to action (see Fig. 3). In this sense, the website owners *and* website visitors can become participants in the digital activism—the former alerting the



```
Get the code for your site:

<script type="text/javascript">
  window._idl = {};
  _idl.variant = "modal";
  (function() {
    var idl = document.createElement('script');
    idl.type = 'text/javascript';
    idl.async = true;
    idl.src = ('https:' == document.location.protocol ? 'https://' : 'http://') +
'members.internetdefenseleague.org/include?url=' + (_idl.url || '') + '&campaign=' +
(_idl.campaign || '') + '&variant=' + (_idl.variant || 'banner');
    document.getElementsByTagName('body')[0].appendChild(idl);
  })();
</script>
```

Figure 3: The Internet Defense League distributes code to enable participation in its initiatives (“Members”).

latter, in the spirit of Paul Revere’s ride, so that all might engage in the protest. While distraction from substantive issues is, by definition, a failure for most causes, in a truly antifragile manner the IDL framework uses distraction to enable the phatic creation of activist networks. Rather than giving up (fragile) or uncompromisingly moving to monopolize attention (robust), the IDL model of digital activism embraces the distraction and thereby becomes all the more powerful and effective in increasingly competitive economies of attention.

Likewise, the Action Network framework can turn the failure of distraction into a strength, and moves beyond the distraction of participants and even embraces organizer distraction. While the IDL creates a latent network of activists who spring into action when the organizer recognizes a need and activates the network, Action Network creates a latent network of *organizers* (see Fig. 4). Organizers are entirely independent, meaning that each

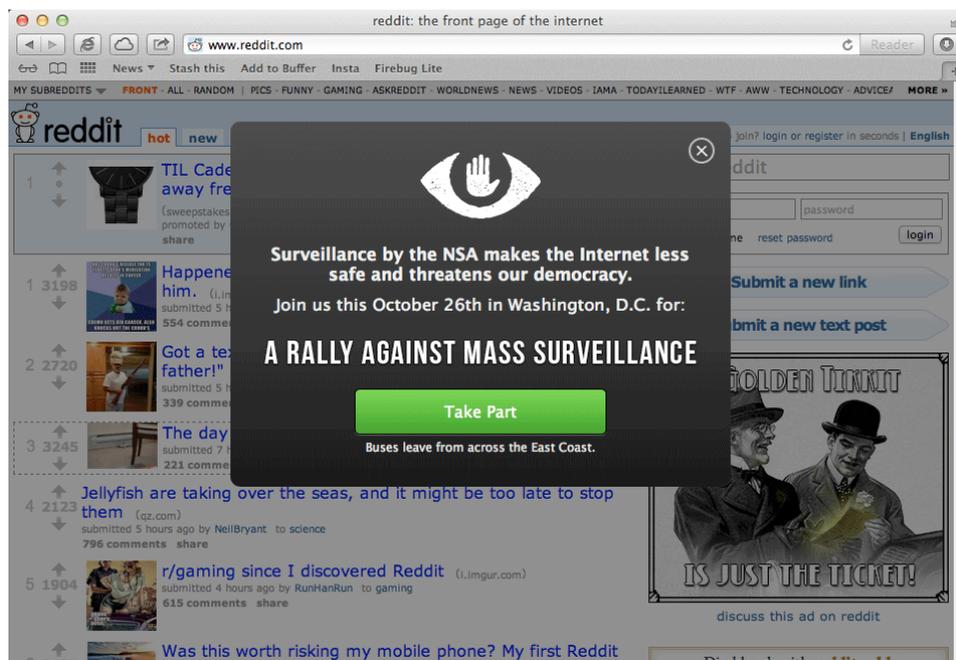


Figure 4: When the IDL's code is activated, the participating website displays information about the relevant issue (“Members”).

organizer is able to operate on a different schedule and using different strategies. Activists are not immune to the internet’s cute cats, and many organizers likely are forced to hold “day jobs” that further distract them from their organizing. In this way, the Action Network framework has the potential to embrace the failure of vocational distraction and turn it into a latent army of network organizers.

Uncommitted Participants

Attracting and developing fully committed participants is almost always one of the biggest hurdles for activist projects to overcome. Gladwell argues that most online activism does not clear this hurdle: “Facebook activism succeeds not by motivating people to make a real sacrifice but by motivating them to do the things that people do when they are not motivated enough to make a real sacrifice” (“Small Change”). In other words, if activists are not ready to engage substantively, and willing to *sacrifice*, there is no reason to believe their goals will be met. Digital activism is seen as fostering a level of engagement more likely to result in meaningless mouse movements than substantive real-world action. Morozov refers to this as “slacktivism” and argues no matter how heightened digital activist efforts become, they will never match the fervor of a civil rights march, or a picket line, and likewise never have the same direct effects (“Slacktivism”). Further, many worry that the pseudo-engagement rampant in digital media will ultimately serve as a release valve for feelings of solidarity that once drove people to protest in the streets (Gladwell). Rather than actually doing something, digital “clicktivists” will instead move a mouse and fill in a text box and feel that they have done their part (M. White).

This lack of substantive commitment would stop fragile activist causes completely and serve to slow and severely hamper robust activism as well. Many activist strategies attempt to address the dangers posed by a lack of engagement. For example, newsletters, picket lines, town meetings, witty slogans, high-priced advertising, marches, sit-ins, occupations all serve, not only to get the message out, but also to build a sense of investment and solidarity in the participants. As soon as an individual actually stands shoulder-to-

shoulder with comrades and compatriots, their personal dedication to the cause is all but ensured. Because online activism is entirely confined to the digital realm, it can easily seem hopeless.²⁰

Slactivism, if we are going to call it that, would likely lead to failure if found in robust or fragile activist systems. Antifragile activism, on the other hand, seems able to embrace failure and become stronger because of it—the IDL is a great example of this to the extent that it embraces uncommitted slactivism. The IDL’s initial call to action asked supporters only to type in the address of a website, provide an email address, and then indicate their country of residence (“Internet Defense League”). Their second call to action was not much more impressive, either. When the organization identified a serious threat, members were asked to copy/paste code onto their website. Participants were then given a few different choices for how to incorporate this code. The code allowed them either to feature a simple banner or pop-up window or to use the general code that, in their own words, turned “itself off after the campaign, and activate[d] automatically for the next one” (“Campaigns for Internet Freedom”). For the IDL, participating is literally as simple as cutting and pasting. Their action page prompts participants to, “tell the world that you are a member of the league” by placing one of six badges to use on their own websites, blogs, or profiles (“Campaigns for Internet Freedom”). These badges help track participation, but also serve as a sort of digital bumper stickers to help get the word out about the IDL’s mission.

20 Scholars have begun defending digital “slactivism,” however, exposing additional potential for social media to enable meaningful change (Christensen; Radsch).

Certainly, it is hard to see how any cause could be successful with this level of (un)commitment.

However, the IDL's antifragile model embraces this slactivism, leveraging it to create powerful networks of supporters. The more people join the IDL and copy and paste code to their own websites, the more this slacktivism can result in direct contact with legislators (e.g. phone calls, letters/emails to legislators, etc). For example, when the IDL activated their cat signal in April 2013 to protest a cyber-security bill known as CISPA, over 30,000 websites joined in to voice opposition (Fitzpatrick; Thier; “Press Release: Internet Defense League”). Due in large part to this massive participation, the IDL also gathered 300,000 signatures to their online petition opposing CISPA (Fitzpatrick).

Likewise, the Action Network delivers results that revolve around what is traditionally known as slacktivism—petitions and forms. They do facilitate planning and advertising activist events (in-person rallies, etc. but even those are driven by slactivist online RSVPs. Like the IDL, though, Action Network subsidizes action by providing a way for these seemingly meaningless actions to create a powerful network. This email-based network is more limited than the code-driven IDL, in that emails can end up in a spam folder or otherwise not be opened by the intended receiver, but Action Network makes up for that lack by making the expansion of the network simple. Because each activist can start petitions under the umbrella of the larger activist collective, each signature or click turns into another member of the collective's network.

A traditional organization built on the robust model might eschew such efforts. For them, if an activist is not out in the streets or donating money, they are not fully committed.

The Action Network's success in organizing the Wal*Mart strikes, and the IDL's antifragile activism,²¹ both suggest that this slactivist model can get results. But, in many cases, even progressing toward the desired end is not enough to maintain a movement.

Lack of Immediate Results

Even after identifying people who agree with their goals and express interest in participating, activist organizations struggle to maintain people's interest and attention. Supporters' attention can begin to wane if they believe the cause to be hopeless, or that it has succeeded, even if neither is fully accurate. Perhaps a better name for this kind of failure would be "getting results, but not the ones aimed for." Valocchi, for example, categorizes activist aims as either "cultural" or "political" (164). In the former, goals include consciousness-raising, attitude change, and identity change (68), while the latter entails changes in legislation or official practice (62). Activists often have multiple goals fitting into one or the other of the categories, and sometimes overlapping both. One of the central questions for any activist campaign revolves around how to deal with activists' high expectations. Valocchi summarizes the dilemma this way, "do we accept management's 'last and final offer' even though it is not all we wanted and risk alienating the more radical [participants] or do we accept the offer, define it as success, and risk cooptation?" (1). If a lesser result is accepted as "success," participants can easily feel that their work is finished and then disengage before achieving the real goal. But if this less-than-ideal offer is accepted

21 While it is unlikely that the IDL's signatures were the deciding factor, the IDL's signatures at least demonstrated widespread opposition to this type of internet regulation. Soon after the IDL's signatures were delivered, CISPA passed in the US House of Representatives but stalled in the Senate, effectively ending its progress (Koebler).

as a compromise, participants often get disillusioned and move on to find more promising causes (or more funny YouTube videos).

Powerbrokers are generally aware of this cycle and often use it to co-opt causes by diluting their demands by including them in strategically worded bills that seem to do what the activists want but really only provide surface-level and temporary solutions. Fragile activist models, unable to maintain interest after compromising or being co-opted, fall out of influence as quickly as they fell into it. Robust models, on the other hand, might battle against compromise and co-optation by diversifying their demands, perpetually pushing for more, or having goals that require such social upheaval that achieving them is all but impossible. Digital tools enable digital activists to embrace the all but inevitable failure that follows a “resolution” of an issue and use that failure to grow stronger still. The IDL, for its part, builds a network of supporters dedicated to the principle of defending the internet, so that when a particular campaign is resolved, there is still a standing (albeit dormant) network of activists ready to spring into action (see Fig. 5). Supporters lie dormant until needs are identified, at which point they engage in support (or opposition), and fade back into the woodwork.

The AN and IDL type of activism calls to mind “flash mobs,” where large crowds carry out public spectacles, often posting footage on YouTube or other video websites. One distinguishing feature of a flash mob is the ability to reconstitute itself quickly. Digital communication technologies empower online activists to maintain loose connections based on phatic memes or simple email lists. Thus, when opportunity arises, these connections can enable flash public activism as activists turn to their already-existing networks for support

and then fade away once their work is completed. Just as flash mobs are able to regroup when new actions are deemed necessary, digital activist communities like the IDL are able to engage in flash public activism through the use of their own digital tools.

While most activist efforts measure success by the number of victories, for antifragile digital activism *the composition of the network itself is the success*. Rather than legislative or



Figure 5: The IDL's network contains a wide variety of influential blogs and websites (“Members”).

electoral victories, antifragile activism measures success by the strength of the resulting network and its potential for future action. The IDL's network includes many of the internet's most prominent websites, such as Mozilla, Wordpress, CraigConnects, Reddit, the Electronic Frontier Foundation, imgur, and nearly 30,000 other organizations and individuals (“Members”). The IDL’s well-placed interventions stir up media coverage and create the possibility of vastly expanding the group’s membership. While the Action Network has not been around long enough to have as many concrete successes as the IDL, it is built to facilitate a network that is self-replicating with a large number of organizers, and self-

reinforcing with a large number of small calls to action. As these networks solidify, so does their potential to create change. Since these antifragile models focus on constituting a network of supporters, the IDL and Action Network each has a much better chance of challenging devoted and moneyed opponents. Thus their network ties strengthen their potential to act even before events have taken place.

The digital tools of both frameworks are a central part in their network-building operation. For example, while membership lists have long been a part of activism, the IDL has built a network by utilizing a wide variety of distribution platforms—Tumblr blogs, subreddits, Twitter streams, and weblogs are all immediately included, creating the potential for any participant’s action to be magnified and spread virally online. The Action Network has turned an email list from a static collection of emails that can only be expanded by way of the central hierarchy into a fluid network able to be added to with each supporting request sent to each participant’s friends. Once the network is established the activists are much better equipped to create interventions and respond to threats, thereby composing themselves and the societal power dynamics by means of digitally mediated relationships.

Conclusion

Using Taleb’s idea of antifragility to explore the dynamics of activism governed by a logic of composition, it is clear that the dedication to network building serves as an example of antifragile activism. This type of activist network is what I am calling “compositional”: it benefits from the failure and disorder that regularly cripple more traditional activist organizations and uses that “failure” to reconstitute power relations and compose new potentials. For the IDL and Action Network, seemingly meaningless distractions *enable*

substantive engagements, and slacktivism engages the unengaged. The network itself then, with its compositional potential, serves as barometer of success regardless of acceptance or rejection by outside forces.

It is important to note, however, that the very dynamics that make such compositional activism so potential powerful also contain the conditions of possibility for that potential to be thwarted. For example, a network of potential activism can quickly turn into a hit list for an authoritarian government, or threatened corporation, with the power of digital surveillance. Latent networks of activists that use tools controlled by any of the large internet companies are potentially compromised when they oppose something that would benefit the internet monopolies. I will discuss such issues in more depth in chapter 5, but it is important to note here that this variety of antifragile and compositional activism is subject to significant dangers that traditional or non-digital activism simply does not have to consider in the same way.

While the SOPA/PIPA protests demonstrated the influence of a loose coalition of internet users who were dedicated to defending the internet, the IDL has transformed this coalition into a force with the potential to both create opportune moments and respond to them. Action Network, similarly, has transformed simple acts of slacktivism into recruiting tools that expand large networks while at the same time facilitating small and discrete networks. Far from the Habermasian critical/rational discussions in a single unitary public sphere, and much different from a handful of interest groups grappling over positioning, these activists proactively constitute a network so they can be ready to reshape themselves even as they intervene about particular issues.

The potential of this type of people-driven activist power exists in realms other than activist causes defending the internet, as demonstrated by the Action Network tools: the fact that this antifragile activism can appear as quickly as it disappears means that its potential to recompose itself in response to a wide variety of issues or exigencies is never entirely gone. As Wasik says, “a crowd that's always connected can never really be dispersed. It's always still out there” (Wasik). The IDL and Action Network models are built on a fundamental acceptance of this power of the crowd, and as I will suggest in the next chapter, represent a possibility that “we the people” might eventually have our own digital lobbying arm to pressure politicians without needing the support of high-powered lobbyists or big-spending donors. Because this antifragile process relies only on digital connections built upon advertising-based social networks, participants’ up-front financial costs are low. Because of this low barrier to entry, the potential increases for effective political activism that empowers the people to build networks for countering the efforts backed by the money and influence of the well-connected.

Open Source Democracy:
Procedures for Two Online Flash Publics

*Yes, political structures do need to be changed.
But we may have to let their replacements emerge from the myriad of new
relationships that begin to spawn once people are acting and communicating in the present,
and on a realistic scale, instead of talking about a fictional future.*
Douglas Rushkoff, *Open Source Democracy*

Linux is subversive.
Eric S. Raymond

Eric S. Raymond begins his book *The Cathedral and the Bazaar*, which has become a seminal text in the Open Source software movement, with the above claim about Linux. This open source computer operating system is managed and designed by “part-time hacking by several thousand developers all over the planet, connected only by the tenuous strands of the Internet”(29). Raymond’s assertion that it is subversive is most understandable when considered in comparison to its primary competitors: Apple’s Mac operating system and Microsoft’s Windows. Both of these large, corporate-sponsored and profit-driven products are undoubtedly the industry leaders, but Linux is subverting this order. Rather than relying on corporate-controlled programmers, Linux relies on an open group of volunteers. Rather

than requiring managers and middle managers and bureaucrats, Linux thrives by relying, at least in part, on a fluid and open structure.

This open source phenomenon relies on a fundamental trust in openness and participation, and an increasing number of studies suggest that trust is not misplaced (Shirky, *Here Comes Everybody*; Shirky, *Cognitive Surplus*; Surowiecki; Tapscott and Williams, *Wikinomics*; Tapscott and Williams, *Macrowikinomics*; Rushkoff). These and other researchers have found that, under certain circumstances, groups are able to qualitatively and quantitatively outperform closed-source proprietary efforts in a variety of given fields. There is not consensus on what those certain circumstances are, but they include self-selection (Raymond 42), a focus on improving an existing product rather than creating a new one (Raymond), recognition of individual contributors (Lanier), tempering by expert opinion (Lanier), and smart and targeted platforms (Tapscott and Williams, *Wikinomics* 192). The important element uniting all of these is a trust that strategic and careful procedures can make the difference between proprietary elitist efforts and transparent open collaboration.

Throughout this dissertation, I have explored the flash public as a rhetorical phenomenon that is governed by people in an open and participative way. In this way, then, the flash public can be seen as an “open source” variety of rhetorical engagement, with interactions governed by procedures that ensure broad participation and openness. This chapter serves as a thought experiment as it lays out the procedures governing two proposed digital projects: the People’s Lobby and Call Together. These two proposals are meant to serve as examples or potential futures for increasingly open-source democracy—as opposed to the proprietary

variety governed by gerrymanderers and deep-pocketed Super PAC donors—based on the flash public principles of a recuperated public sphere theory.

So far in this dissertation I have discussed in depth two of the three flash public principles, explained in the first chapter, relevant to this recuperated public sphere theory. In chapter two I explored the agonistic nature of public sphere engagements as exemplified by what I have called “flash publics.” I argued that the SOPA/PIPA protests, as deliberated about and then carried out by communities on Reddit and Wikipedia, can be best understood in light of a public sphere theory that includes deliberations as well as agonistic interventions. The inclusion of deliberation and agonism replaces the Habermasian consensus-based model that had previously defined the public sphere. In chapter three I argued that the Habermasian norm of a single unitary public sphere is not adequate for a recuperated public sphere model in a digital age, nor is a counterpublic claim to perpetually competing subgroups defined by prefabricated and/or permanent identifications. Instead, I traced the flash publics of the Internet Defense League and Action Network, arguing that they demonstrate a fluid and compositional public sphere model that is neither all-encompassing nor permanent. This shifts the focus of public sphere theory from scope of membership (a single all-encompassing public sphere) to the compositional organization and reorganization of power relations in society.

In this chapter, I address the third characteristic: procedurality. Habermas’s theory of the public sphere relied on universal procedures and norms of rationality. His public sphere worked, he argued, because it was governed by these principles and norms that applied everywhere and excluded no one. This universality led to a reliance on reason: “procedural

rationality is fundamentally a matter of basing judgment on reasons” (Calhoun 2, summarizing Habermas, *Moral Consciousness* 4). This rationality was fleshed out more with Habermas’ theory of the “ideal speech situation,” which is based on a series of procedures such as inclusion in discourse, introducing or questioning any assertion, expressing needs, and protecting rights (“Discourse Ethics” 86). Habermas argued for a fundamental reliance on these procedures in order to help overcome class differences, encourage open participation, and ensure that the neither the state nor the social hierarchy were able to have undue influence on the discussions (*Structural* 36).

This focus on process is often critiqued for being blind to real issues of exclusion and power; of focusing too much on form while not paying enough attention to content, all while ultimately keeping the face of power hidden. In response, some have suggested a structureless model of interaction that was therapeutic in its lack of procedures. According to Mari Boor Tonn, there is an equally large problem with such supposed structurelessness, as it seems to remove blame from governments, systems, and oppressors, and instead “threatens to locate the source and solution to such ills solely within the individual, the “self-help” on which much therapy rests” (Tonn 412).

In focusing this chapter on the procedures of the two proposals explained below, I argue that the choice faced by scholars and practitioners is not between relying on procedures and avoiding them, but between different configurations of procedures. Video game theorist and rhetorician Ian Bogost defines procedurality as “a way of creating, explaining, or understanding processes” (3), and argues that processes “define the way things work: the methods, techniques, and logics that drive the operation of systems” (3). Procedurality, for

him, involves creating and explaining the processes that make things work the way they do. Bogost's processes are primarily expressed as digital systems such as those governing gameplay in video games. For him, processes are consciously designed if not always critically evaluated, and Bogost invites critical evaluation of the arguments implicit in processes. This chapter enacts the argument that carefully structured procedures are a necessary aspect of flash public engagements by carefully structuring two flash publics.

On the one hand, Habermas' public sphere engagements were governed by norms of rationality, the egalitarian requirements described in the previous chapter, and a universalism that forced the same rules on every public sphere engagement. I propose, on the other hand, that the procedures that govern public sphere interactions do not need to meet these criteria in order to produce the kind of public sphere interactions that are agonistic and compositional. Instead, the procedures I suggest enable flash public interactions and are critical, strategic, situated. While there might be other manifestations of a recuperated understanding of public sphere theory than flash publics, this dissertation focuses exclusively on the elements and dynamics of flash publics.

This chapter explores, then, which procedures can facilitate flash publics in a recuperated public sphere theory. These procedures might be situated and focused on composing and reorganizing power relations rather than achieving abstract and universal norms of rationality. These two proposals will be practical how-to guides, but will also serve as thought experiments for the role of procedures in a public sphere theory that includes flash publics and eschews Habermasian universalism.

In order to explore these thought experiments, I will outline the procedures for two different digitally augmented public sphere engagements, proposing procedures for a large system and a small-scale tool, each with the intent of “communicating in the present” on a “realistic scale,” which Raymond argues for in the passage I quoted at the beginning of this chapter. The People’s Lobby is a macro level political process, whereas Call Together is a specific micro level activist-to-activist tool. Both rely on strategic governing procedures to guide their implementation, but the procedures governing the People’s Lobby are on a larger scale and do not depend on specific tools. Call Together, on the other hand, is governed by procedures at the level of the tool itself, and is therefore focused primarily on how those procedures shape specific smaller-scale activist interventions. These two are designed to create the situated and specific procedures for two different types of democratic governance not reliant on money or special interests, or what I am calling “open source” democracy.

Procedures can be used for more than just limiting or guiding behavior. Bogost suggests that procedures can be used to actually create arguments, a phenomenon he calls “procedural rhetoric.” For him, this represents “the practice of authoring arguments through processes” (28–29). The flash public processes I describe in this chapter create an argument about democratic public sphere engagement. Democracy itself is supposed to be open source, in that “the people” (*demos-*) are supposed to rule (*-ocracy*). So, in this sense, “open source democracy” is redundant. But, I am using this phrase to call attention to the fact that there is a form of democracy that has abandoned open source principles, one that has been corrupted (see Lessig, *Republic, Lost*). The flash publics procedures I describe make an argument about

the openness of democracy: the voices of the people need to be heard over the influence and money of the few.

The first proposal, the People's Lobby, works to provide a process for citizens and constituents to propose legislation and lobby legislators for its passage. The description goes into great detail about metrics for success and potential pitfalls, and includes detailed scholarly backing for each major decision. Because the People's Lobby process is focused on developing procedures governing large-scale interactions among citizens, deliberators, and legislators, the proposal below is explained without screen shots or visuals, which would draw attention to the tools for interaction and from the larger procedural principles. The second, Call Together, focuses on developing procedures for assembling a simple network of activists interested in pressuring lawmakers across time about a variety of issues. Because its focus is on delimitating the processes and procedures of a smaller scale tool, and is limited to activist-to-activist communication rather than macro socio-political procedures, its description is more visual and includes detailed wireframe mockups. Both, despite their different presentation strategies, are meant to be detailed enough to make implementation by advocacy organizations or activist groups possible without a great deal of additional explanation.

The People's Lobby: A Model for Online Activist Deliberation

*It is rather for us to be here dedicated to
the great task remaining before us . . . that government
of the people, by the people, for the people,
shall not perish from the earth.*
Abraham Lincoln

the creation of tension [is] a part of the work of the nonviolent resister.
Martin Luther King, Jr.

Introduction

Lincoln's ideal of a people-centered democratic government has become a useful measure of success at achieving a functioning democracy. Since his Gettysburg Address, however, corporations have become legally recognized in the United States as persons and money has become recognized as speech, mirroring trends in other liberal democracies of corporations gaining outsized political influence. This trend threatens to stifle the very deliberation that could help temper its more controversial effects.

This section presents a model for a “People's Lobby,” a digital process of deliberation and activism that allows we the people to have voices heard on important political issues. It will, like the Wikipedia and Reddit cases in chapter 2, facilitate deliberation and agonism, and will, like the IDL and AN models in chapter 3, build a dormant network of citizens that can be called to action when needed. No tool or procedure will be a permanent answer to the enduring questions facing the project of deliberative democracy, but a combination of new media tools and carefully designed deliberative processes can help citizens create what Martin Luther King, Jr. called “tension” between progress and the status quo in order to

retake control of an important part of the political process. This proposal is inspired by recent success²² of Oregon's Citizens' Initiative Review (“Citizens’ Initiative Reivew”) to empower small deliberative citizen assemblies to inform and influence the larger population. The People's Lobby (PL) is not focused on reviewing initiatives or influencing the larger population, however: based on a combination of Gastil and Richard's deliberative “Citizen's Assembly” which proposes legislation, and “Policy Jury” which advises legislators on existing legislation (Gastil and Richards), the People's Lobby is designed to take advantage of the affordances of digital media in order to facilitate citizen input directly to legislators.

Problem Identification

Many liberal democracies across the world are being confronted with money's influence in the political process (Peev; Rowbottom; Ip). For example, the 2010 Supreme Court decision known as “Citizens United” has prompted a great deal of worry—and loss of public trust—over the influence of money in the American electoral process (Mackinder). This worry is well founded in light of increasing influence of wealthy PACs, SuperPACs, and other shadowy “nonprofits” dedicated to tilting the political playing field in the favor of the wealthy (Bennet). This trend, combined with business-friendly lobbying powerhouses such as ALEC,²³ represents an opportunity for deliberative democracy to be proven as a viable alternative.

22 The Citizens Initiative Review is the focus of an increasing body of literature. For example, see (Katherine R. Knobloch et al.; Gastil and Knobloch; K. R. Knobloch et al.; Gastil et al.; Moses and Farley; Gastil and Richards; Binder, Boudreau, and Kousser; Knobloch and Raabe; Archer)

23 For more on the efficacy of the lobbying organization known as ALEC (American

This troubling trend of everyday citizens' voices being drowned out by those with more resources is somewhat counterintuitively paralleled by an increase in the accessibility of free publishing tools that enable anyone with an internet connection to share their opinions with the world. As mentioned in the previous chapter, however, scholars are beginning to argue that the internet is not a democratizing force (Hindman; Morozov, *The Net Delusion*; Pariser). Far from achieving the democratic reforms many hoped for, the internet has reestablished the control of the media and opinion elites (Hindman), empowered oppressive regimes (Morozov), and created a culture where big businesses track every piece of online data and algorithmically construct silos of agreement that hide opposing viewpoints and stifle deliberation (Pariser). With this in mind, it is imperative that we heed the call of Pfister and Godana for the careful and informed creation of “deliberation technology” (Pfister and Godana). They stipulate, however, that deliberation technologies will be more than the “hardware of communication” but instead include thoughtful innovation of digital media models that facilitate deliberation (2). This sort of concerted effort is imperative if we hope to take advantage of the largely untapped potential of these new communication technologies to enable digital deliberation and empower democratic reforms.

Proposal Details

The People’s Lobby supports an iterative process, with each iteration made up of the three phases: selection, deliberation, and accountability. Each iteration will select a different issue, but will go through each of the three phases. The PL officially begins as citizens

Legislative Exchange Council), see Beckett.

collaboratively select relevant issues to weigh in on. The second phase advances to an online moderated deliberation. After the deliberations, the process begins transitioning into activism with a presentation to the wider public of the results of the deliberations. The final, and most activist-oriented, phase involves holding politicians accountable to the published results.

While the specifics of funding the PL are outside the scope of these procedures, it is important to note that participants should be compensated based on local average weekly income (as determined by PL organizers), and that the People's Lobby should not get funding from the legislators it aims to influence—an activist entity will lose credibility if it gets its funding from the target of its activism. Instead, it should be funded entirely by private philanthropy and individual donations but should give funders no influence whatsoever in the PL process. In this case, as well as in a number of other cases I will note below, the PL design follows the example of the Citizen's Initiative Review (CIR) implemented in Oregon (for a description of the CIR's private funding, see Katherine R. Knobloch et al. 13). The Citizens Initiative Review is a process by which a body of citizens deliberates about an initiative set to be on the ballot ("The Citizens' Initiative Reivew"). The participants listen to the testimony of various experts suggested by the collection of specialists and scholars organizing the CIR as well as those called by the deliberators themselves. Participants then spend a set amount of time discussing the initiative, and ultimately come up with a detailed recommendation as to whether the initiative should be adopted or rejected. They present this recommendation in the form of a written statement, which is then included in the voter guide that goes out to each voter before Election Day. The CIR has seen great success across a

variety of metrics (Gastil and Richards), and for the purposes of this chapter I will mention a number of similarities between the procedures of CIR and PL.

Even with the limitation on funding opportunities outlined above and shared with the CIR, the procedures I describe are broad enough to be adapted to various countries or districts around the world. In this way, this process will follow Pfister and Godana's requirement that no deliberative technology be a one-size-fits-all set of rules, but rather a flexible framework that can be adapted by moderators and participants for particular situations (1). As such, it suggests a procedurality that is neither universal nor structureless, but rather situated, flexible, and specific. This process is specifically tailored for use at the intermediate level between local and national governments (i.e. anything from US states to Canadian provinces), but can be adapted for counties, cities, towns, or even neighborhoods. Ideally, the People's Lobby process will be repeated on a regular basis in a given state, compounding its effectiveness by increasing visibility, participation, and buy-in from the general population.

Phase 1: Selection

The PL will take place in between legislative sessions, soon enough after the previous session to give the process enough time to be completed before the beginning of the next. In addition, participants will be made aware that once an issue has been the subject of a PL process, it cannot be the subject of a PL again for at least two full legislative cycles. This safeguard will ensure that competing proposals will not be active at the same time, which would dilute the claims of the People's Lobby of being representative of the will of the people. Part of the power of the People's Lobby is the assertion that it is governed by the

people's will rather than by established influence, money, or power. The People's Lobby is designed to approximate the will of the people through deliberation and activism, and as such needs to present a single decision or opinion at the end of the process. This will also decrease the ability of outside interests to use discord within PL recommendations to quickly overturn those recommendations before they can take effect.

In order to make the PL transparent and people-driven, the selection phase begins by collaboratively deciding on the issues to be considered by the People's Lobby. Organizers, who are selected on a case-by-case basis by an informal and independent panel of deliberation scholars, will present residents of the state with some form of an online poll to determine which issues will be covered.²⁴ This poll will be shared via social media and will be advertised in public buildings with free internet access (e.g. libraries and schools). Participating in the poll will require demographic and geographic information to enable tracking by organizers to ensure that a sufficiently diverse population participates. If a particular demographic population is underrepresented in this phase, the organizers will increase outreach appropriately until demographic parity is achieved. The platform will ask for participants to submit the issues they find most pressing, and then prompt them to rate other submissions.²⁵ The entire list of issues will then become the pool from which that PL's

24 For an already existing example of the technology described here, see Google Moderator (<http://moderator.appspot.com>).

25 The process will include a "merge issues" option that participants can control and that PL organizers can instigate if needed. For example, "gun control," "ban handguns" and "more gun free zones" will all be merged into one issue for deliberation. There will be as little moderation in this stage as possible, allowing individuals free rein to select exactly what worries them. Ultimately, the deliberative issue selection will give the participants the

topic will be selected. This safeguard will not completely prevent well-organized or well-financed factions from attempting to manipulate the process (e.g. by packing this stage of the PL with their supporters to steer issue selection), but will dilute their influence by leaving the final topic selection up to the deliberative collection of People's Lobby participants selected in the next stage (the transparency of which is meant to earn and keep public trust). While some might worry that the possibility of a deliberation populated by opinionated participants raises too big a risk of passion triumphing over logic, Garsten argues that successful deliberations can and must be based on interested persuasion rather than norms of universal logic or reasonableness (189). It will be important for the People's Lobby to have no restrictions on participants' membership in relevant interest groups or political parties, as passionate opinion is a necessary feature of People's Lobby deliberations.

PL participants will be drawn from the body of people who participate in the topic selection phase by submitting ideas or voting on others' submissions. Following the direction of Gastil and Richards regarding the size and sampling appropriate for a selected group tasked with drafting legislation (4), a group of 50 individuals will be selected from this body of participants through stratified random sample (governed by demographic quotas, as decided upon by local organizers).²⁶ This means that the initial process of advertising and gathering participants must reach every demographic, as any demographic with no

freedom to even merge issues at that point, if needed.

26 The process of random sampling from a group of self-selected individuals is similar to the process adopted by California's recent redistricting commission. While a growing number of scholars and practitioners have examined the commission in general (Pierce and Larson; Reyes; Donald), the particulars of the selection process ended up being quite successful due to targeted outreach after an unrepresentative start (Lagos).

representation in the initial submission/voting process will be excluded from any potential deliberations. The organizers will be transparent about this process in the final report. An honest assessment will admit that perfect representativeness will be unlikely. Therefore, in keeping with the transparency necessary to win public trust, the demographic makeup of the PL will be frankly addressed in the final report. Even if the first round of PL participants is not as demographically diverse as desired, each future PL iteration will use and expand upon the same body of participants (excluding anyone who is selected to participate as a deliberating member of a PL for at least one year after participation, to reduce the potential for abuse or manipulation of the system) in order to produce a cumulative effect of increasing diversity and potential for the entire state population to be represented. For example, if 1,000 citizens submit ideas for a particular state's first People's Lobby, the participants in that PL's deliberative phase will be drawn from those 1,000 individuals. The state's second People's Lobby will start with and expand upon those 1,000 accounts: each iteration will broaden the base of participation and encourage more individuals to be involved. Because each PL selection process will draw from an increasingly large body of participants, as outreach and advertising will be designed to draw more participants for the selection phase of each subsequent People's Lobby, each pool can be perceived as fresh and fair.

After the 50 people have been selected, they will be presented with the list of issues selected by the larger state population. They will then decide, through the initial round of online deliberation, which issue to deliberate upon as a body.

Phase 2: Deliberation

In order to keep the PL process moving quickly while also providing the PL organizers time to prepare the research and expert testimonies, the PL will begin no sooner than two weeks after the issue has been selected. The PL participants will then have two weeks to research and discuss the issue at hand. This will take place entirely online²⁷ and under the direction of a facilitator (selected and trained by the organizers) whose training will prepare him or her to moderate this type of asynchronous deliberation by encouraging participation, familiarizing participants with the technology, and establishing deadlines with the group. The facilitator will introduce the initial set of research and expert testimonies compiled by PL organizers (carefully and transparently so as to reduce as much as possible procedural bias or undue influence from any faction) from relevant stakeholders, think tanks, and universities. In navigating these difficult issues, organizers will follow the example of the Oregon Citizens Initiative Review by providing a fair range of research and expert testimony and remaining open to participant requests and input. No process will be purely impartial, and for this reason participant research will be encouraged and incorporated into the process. For example, if participants decide to bring in outside sources, they will be asked to supply a link so that the entire group can engage the provided source. Aside from a mandatory initial training with the facilitator, the deliberation will be entirely asynchronous, allowing individuals with difficult work or family schedules to still participate.

²⁷ As an example of what the digital tool used in these deliberations might look like, see the free and open-access tool at [Loomio.org](https://loomio.org).

While the participants and facilitators will have the ultimate say on this procedural decision, the schedule will break down into two broad sections:

Week 1: initial training, topic selection, research

Week 2: policy proposal, supplementary research, final document

At the end of the allotted time the PL will produce a final document (via collaborative online document-creation software such as Google Docs or Etherpad) that represents their policy recommendation on the issue. The document will present a piece of plain language²⁸ model legislation agreed upon by a two-thirds majority of participants. Taking into consideration the size of the deliberative group and the finality of the model legislation (Gastil and Richards 12; Gastil), this high supermajority threshold will provide yet another safeguard to prevent the process being gamed by special interests, and will demonstrate to the public a piece of legislation supported by a wide cross-section of their peers. The final document will be published online immediately after the deliberations have concluded. This publication begins the activist portion of the People's Lobby deliberative activism by working to advocate for a citizen-endorsed proposal to the extent that legislators only ignore it at their own electoral peril.²⁹

28 Plain language for two reasons: 1) a stratified random sampling of citizens cannot be expected to be fluent with the legal language of legislation, and 2) to ensure that legislators are held accountable to a standard understood by the general population. As needed, based on the issue being discussed, PL organizers could arrange for legal counsel to work with the participants to translate the plain language text into language appropriate for official legislation.

29 Groups have traditionally engaged in this kind of advocacy to varying degrees of success (Beckett; Shapiro).

Phase 3: Accountability

This phase of the PL will focus entirely on the activist goal of getting the legislation passed. After the PL for a particular issue is disbanded, but before the associated legislature begins its next session, participant names, deliberation transcripts, and related research will be posted online in full. This transparency will place additional pressure on the participants, and will need to be assessed on a regular basis to determine whether the risk (of inhibiting frank deliberation and of enabling blowback against participants) is worth enduring for the payoff (i.e. building a level of trust in the PL process that will encourage future participation and increase the potency of the final results of each subsequent PL). Participants will be encouraged to talk about their experience with the media, and will be supplied with fact sheets about the PL process (including demographic breakdown, participant statistics, etc.).

PL organizers, facilitators, and participants will track the state's elected officials to see how closely they follow the PL's findings. A simple online “score card” will present the extent to which each officeholder's actions are in line with past PL decisions. During the subsequent election season, the organizers will ask challengers how they stand on the issue(s) the PL has weighed in on and then publicize the answers along with the incumbent's score card. This will pressure both incumbents and challengers to at least respond to the findings of the PL's opinions and/or model legislation.

The participants and organizers will begin the lobbying process by holding a press conference in the lobby of the legislative hall (drawing attention to the origin of the word “lobbyist”). At this press event, participants will present legislators with a copy of their model legislation and formally request it be passed as soon as possible. Participants and

organizers will also encourage the public to pressure the legislators via phone calls, emails, petitions, etc. This two-stage lobbying (directly lobbying and encouraging the public to lobby) has the potential to create the pressure or, in King's words, the "tension" needed to ensure that legislators are sufficiently convinced of the PL's proposals.

Conclusion

The People's Lobby is governed by procedures that make flash public interactions dynamic, people-driven, transparent, and flexible. These procedures shape the interactions of PL flash publics with legislators and other deliberative citizens, assuring that the deliberations will be followed by activism and that the discussions are not limited to consensus seeking but will drive agonistic interventions in the political realm.

These procedures are meant to both enable democratic public sphere engagement and serve as embodied arguments about democratic public sphere engagement. As they create and enable variations on the flash public model described in Chapters 2 and 3, they argue for a democracy more open to the people, one in which public sphere engagements drive decisions. The People's Lobby is built on deliberation and activism (like the examples from Chapter 2), as well as on the ability of citizens to organize themselves periodically and also remain connected over time (as was described in Chapter 3). There are clear differences, of course, especially considering the fact that the People's Lobby has scheduled interactions and cannot necessarily spring into existence as quickly or as often as the Internet Defense League or Action Network allows. The PL is another variation of the flash public model described in this dissertation.

It is important to note, also, that the PL has a potential point of weakness that other examples previously discussed do not have. Whereas those interactions took place through websites designed for a purpose other than alternating between deliberation and agonism, the People's Lobby will take place within a framework specifically meant to empower deliberation and encourage agonism. The danger with this sort of focus, of course, is that it will attract the attention of those whose power it challenges. As discussed in Chapter 3, it is often advantageous for activism to take place on websites built for, and primarily used for, the popular and non-political, such as cute cats. The People's Lobby is a risk, but the procedures outlined above give an outline of what is gained as well as what is risked: a system optimized for opening the source code to a political environment governed by money back up to the public.

A government perfectly of the people, by the people, and for the people will always be an unattainable ideal. But processes like the People's Lobby can be implemented, assessed, and revised with the aim of empowering the people to have a stronger say in every point of the legislative process. Whether or not corporations are persons or our friends, they certainly have well-funded lobbyists fighting for their causes in state houses across the country. The People's Lobby procedures described above might not completely counteract their effects, but if it increases the impact of citizens' voices even marginally it will be well worth the expense and effort.

The Call Together Tool

“[help] users be heard by saying something together”
Thunderclap.it

As the feasibility of the People’s Lobby process would rely on large-scale interaction with and acceptance by the political system, I will also outline a simple demonstration of a smaller in scale lobbying tool that is driven by the rhetorical logic of flash publics. This tool, which I have named “Call Together,” demonstrates procedures that can empower flash publics to emerge and then reconstitute power dynamics in society through deliberation and agonism. This section will describe—with an accompanying annotated wireframe mockup in Appendix II—a web application built to facilitate citizen involvement in the political process, particularly in the process of lobbying elected representatives. Like previous flash publics described so far, it will facilitate deliberation as well as agonism, and it will enable participants to create networks of likeminded activists that can be activated at a moment’s notice. This tool will fundamentally be a set of strategic governing procedures designed to reconstitute the power dynamics of and among constituents. In other words, this tool will be an embodiment of a recuperated public sphere theory, and will demonstrate the use of this theory in the design and implementation of systems of augmented engagement. Specifically, this web app will provide a way for individuals to build activist relationships to directly engage with their representatives as a network.

“Call Together” (CT) will focus on direct contact with legislators, using the “assurance contract” first theorized in 1987 by economists, and made popular by internet

companies like Kickstarter and Groupon (see Bagnoli and Lipman). This model requires a certain number of participants to pledge their participation before a specific action is taken. For example, if the limit for participation is set at ten people and only nine sign up, nothing happens—action only takes place once minimum criteria have been met (Bagnoli and Lipman, see also “FAQ: Kickstarter”; Cohen). I will argue that this model transfers well into political action. Despite the fact that some experts assert that calls to legislators do have a significant impact,³⁰ people often fear that their phone call will not matter all by itself. Call Together works to make these types of actions—calls to senators, emails, and other similar methods—an enduringly social experience rather than a one-time or solitary one. It also serves to alleviate the feeling of fruitlessness that often accompanies a single call.

As I provide visual wireframe mockups of this service, I will demonstrate how it will allow people to first select a specific cause or piece of legislation, then pick from two communication media (phone or Facebook), select a minimum number of participants, and indicate which representative will be the target of the action. After these options are selected, a summary will be listed online with a unique URL that the person can then share with friends or on social networks in search of additional people willing to participate. Once the minimum number of participants is met, an email notification will be sent to each participant

30 Activists Lori Silverbush & Kristi Jacobson make this argument in a recent interview (Stewart). They say, in fact, that many congressional offices believe that for every six phone calls in favor of a specific bill there are 1,000 supporters. Because legislators are so motivated to secure reelection, this much support among their constituency becomes substantial motivation.

with a reminder of the action they pledged to complete and a way to report back once the action has been completed.

In this way, the app will allow individuals to band together and take a specific and narrow political action. Its real usefulness, however, will come from the networks established by a particular action. The app will remember which individuals took actions together, and will allow participants to contact each other to organize future actions. As these connections are formed, they will facilitate future interventions and interactions in a way that echoes the principles of flash publics described above. While there are a number of web services that provide similar options, there is nothing that combines them or facilitates the long term network-building provided here (see, for example: “Why PopVox Works”; “About”; Gilliam; “FAQ: The Point”). The remainder of this chapter will be a wireframe mockup of this app, complete with backend specifications, general design characteristics, and plans for social media integration.

The opening page will feature a short introductory video explaining the assurance contract at the center of the tool. The page will be sparse, drawing attention to the video and to the two options for moving forward—represented by buttons at the bottom of the page. The “view ongoing campaigns” option will direct the user to a page with a listing of all the public campaigns in the user’s geographic area. The “start a campaign” option will direct the user to begin the process of putting together a pledge drive. Both of these pages will be addressed below, after a description of the sign-in page.

Signing up for an account will require a full street address, which will allow for creative geotargeting of campaigns. This will also work to stave off inflation: if it is easier to

organize call in campaigns, there is a danger that congressional offices will begin to see calls as less meaningful. By limiting participation to a particular Senator or Representative's constituency, the offices will be forced to at least acknowledge that the calls are coming in from people who will be voting in their next election. Even if the tool evolves and eventually allows non-constituents to join campaigns (for example, to organize people from multiple states to call the co-sponsors of a particular bill, even if those co-sponsors are not in the callers' states), having the street address of Call Together members will allow for more targeted campaign design and more detailed reports.

The sign-in page will also prompt the user to link various social media accounts to their Call Together account. This will enable tracking and metrics for campaigns, but will also make it easier for users to spread the word about the campaigns they start or support. The issue of privacy will certainly be one of the primary concerns when users view this page, so a clear and concise privacy statement will be featured prominently on the right of the sign-in form. The privacy policy will also specify that the social media account integration is solely for the collection of metrics for the user's benefit, will include safeguards so that it will never be shared or viewed by anyone else, and will not ever share or post without the user's explicit consent.

The front page button "view ongoing campaigns" will direct to a listing of ongoing public campaigns. If the user is signed in, the listing will be specific to their geographic location, and if they are not they will simply get a listing of all ongoing campaigns. The list will be sorted by elected official and by general topic, and clicking on the links will direct to the campaign's profile page (see the sample below). There will also be a search bar to enable

visitors to explore the campaigns by keyword, location, or legislator, and an option to start an entirely new campaign.

Clicking on “start a campaign” on the front page, or “launch a campaign” on the campaigns page will direct users to the campaign creation page. When starting a campaign, the user will select a name, a pledge deadline (by which the minimum number of pledges must be obtained in order for the campaign to advance), a call date (one or two days after the pledge deadline to give the campaign administrators opportunity to make sure everyone is prepared to make the call, and to coordinate times), a minimum number of pledges required, and a congressional target. There will also be an opportunity to make the campaign private. This means that only people who are personally invited to view the campaign will be able to see it. While it remains to be seen if this feature will be utilized, a private campaign could maintain the element of surprise, and could also ensure the calls are accepted by the legislator as authentic (rather than a pseudo-grassroots “astroturf”³¹ campaign).

Scrolling down will reveal two text boxes, both of which will prompt the campaign administrator to draft paragraphs of text. The first box will be the public-facing campaign description, which visitors to the site will use to determine whether or not they support this particular campaign. The other box will give the administrator a chance to draft a script or talking points for the actual call. This information will only be visible to people who have

31 Many kinds of mass action risk looking like they are overly choreographed or manipulated. The Call Together app is designed with a focus on live interactions over the phone in order to decrease this danger, but any time coordination is involved there remains a danger that legislators will write an interaction off as sponsored by special interests and thus not worthy of consideration.

pledged to call, and can be used to coordinate messages, share research, and decide on strategy. Anyone who pledges will be prompted to both make changes to the proposed script and to vote on which version of the script the group should use.³² This feature will allow for some limited deliberation to guide the activist ends of each Call Together action.

Before participants are allowed to comment on the script, however, they must navigate to the public-facing campaign page and pledge to make the call. Each campaign will have a page like this to showcase the campaign description, the call date and pledge deadline, and some short instructions on what will happen if the campaign reaches its pledge goal by the deadline.

Each campaign will also have a backend dashboard that can only be seen by the founder of the campaign (as well as anyone else designated as “admin” by the founder). This dashboard will give basic statistics and metrics about the campaign’s performance, and will go into detail about the performance of the campaign on various social networking sites. The dashboard will also suggest other related campaigns, and link to them in order to facilitate communication among administrators of similar endeavors. Ideally, administrators that have been put in contact with each other in this way will share best practices and potentially even join forces on future campaigns.

Like the campaign admin page, each member will be have a personal page that displays information about campaigns they have participated in and the number of campaigns

32 Depending on how this feature is used, in future versions of the tool there might be some kind of threaded discussion feature that will allow users to discuss the proposed edits more deeply.

collaborated on with each individual friend. This feature will, of course, require robust security measures to prevent undesired backdoor access, as well as simple privacy options that will allow the user to set exactly what is visible to the public. The social network aspect of this page will guide members to build relationships, to enlist friends' support, and to reciprocate support on future campaigns.

Conclusion

The procedures for the two tools outlined above are not meant to represent the only procedures that can foster or stimulate flash public sphere interactions. They are merely two iterations of the practical and immediately applicable idea that the procedural design of the tools that empower public sphere interactions matter a great deal in shaping the quality and effect of those interactions.

This chapter describes two set of procedures designed as arguments about democratic public sphere engagement. With these procedures, I suggest that democracy can become more accessible and open, or that it can become more "open source." The procedures outlined in this chapter begin the process of brainstorming, innovation, and implementation that must precede a project as ambitious as open source democracy. Habermas' norms of rationality, egalitarian consensus-seeking, and universalism forced the same rules on every public sphere engagement, and critics rightly critiqued these restrictive procedures. In this chapter, I have described the process and procedures that are critical, strategic, situated, and that enable agonistic and compositional flash public interactions. These procedures are flexible and built to empower the people rather than limit them. Both sets of procedures outline situated and specific strategies for opening up access to the tools for restructuring

power relations so that they favor the people rather than the wealthy or well connected. In this sense, there is another argument posited by the PL and CT descriptions above: that active participation is required in the creation of the procedures governing our public sphere engagements. We cannot let the problems with Habermas' procedures, as glaring as they are, turn us from actively working to create conditions of possibility for democratic public sphere engagements. To put this another way, flash publics are governed by procedures, and the more we can understand and replicate them, the closer we will move toward democratic openness. These ideas are the beginning, but the true measure of their success can only be found in attempts at their implementation. It is my hope that these two tools are implemented, tested, and improved upon in an open and transparent way true to the goals of open source democracy.

Futures and Flash Publics

*We are beginning to see that as network citizens
we have power in political decisions*
-Jeremie Zimmerman

*[W]e can, in fact, must build the tools
of a new democracy*
-Julian Assange³³

In late 2012, flash public activism succeeded in saving a school in Rio de Janeiro from being bulldozed and replaced by a parking lot for an Olympic stadium. It began when a young student petitioned the advocacy group “Meu Rio” for help in saving her school (“Escola Friedenreich!”). The group turned to its already-established network and quickly secured almost 20,000 signatures petitioning the city government to stop the school’s demolition (Rachel). Despite their petition, and increasing scrutiny by journalists, the demolition was not halted. At this point, Meu Rio changed their tactics toward the flash public style of advocacy that has been described in the previous chapters:

They set up a webcam at an apartment across the street from the school, and monitored the school 24/7 through a website with a live feed from the camera. People

33 Both quotes come from the book *Cypherpunks*, pages 150–51.

could sign up to be a “guardian” of the school and watch the feed, and if bulldozers showed up, those watching could press a red button to contact Meu Rio, which would send out text messages to followers in order to physically protect the school. (Rachel)

Over the next two months, at least one of the 3,000 guardians of the school was watching the live feed at all times, ready to call the entire network (comprised at least of the 20,000 petition signatories, including any more won over to the cause) to action to protect the school (Rachel). Like Paul Revere, Meu Rio combined a network of supporters with a timely call to action, but this time facilitated by digital media tools. Neither the network nor the digital tools could have brought about this networked effect alone, but together they empowered significant change: the city called off the demolition of the school and is committed to work with city residents on an agreeable solution (Rachel).

This dissertation has explored a number of such anecdotes and case studies to explore the extent to which a recuperated public sphere theory can be understood in new ways considering the contemporary digital age. Chapter 2 highlighted and expanded upon an understanding of the agonistic nature of flash publics—these groups engaged in deliberation and then agonism. These deliberative and agonistic interactions were guided by rules and norms, some of which pre-dated the interventions, and some of which arose from it. Chapter 3 highlighted and expanded upon an understanding of the compositional nature of flash publics. Rather than being part of some unitary “public sphere,” or merely representing another pre-fabricated “counterpublic,” Action Network and the Internet Defense League are built in such a way to re-arrange the power dynamics about issues through the composition of people and groups into a fluid and largely dormant network of activists. Again, this

composition was guided and facilitated by rules and norms, some of which arose from the interventions themselves. But, unlike the Wikipedia and Reddit SOPA interventions, the IDL was not particularly deliberative on any large scale. Likewise, unlike the IDL's interventions and Action Network's guerilla networks, the Wikipedia and Reddit interventions were not particularly compositional, resulting in relatively non-fluid agonistic interventions.

Chapter 4 highlighted and expanded upon a vision of flash publics whose procedures create an augmented engagement that is both agonistic and compositional. In this chapter, I set out the design principles for two different procedural combinations of agonism and composition, representing the possibilities and unrealized potential of true flash publics. I do not claim that these two are perfect flash publics, or even that they represent the full potential of enacted engagements based on recuperated public sphere principles. I simply worked to combine the three attributes—agonism, compositionality, and procedurality—and apply them together in ways that can help us re-theorize democratic public sphere engagements in the digital age.

I have suggested, in this dissertation, that Habermas' conception of the public sphere needs to be rethought if the public sphere is to have relevance in a digital age. Its failings have been argued by theorists quoted herein and elsewhere, and includes problems with the impossibility of a truly inclusive public sphere, dangers of an exclusive focus on consensus, and problems with universal procedures. At the same time, the need for the idea of the public sphere itself has been implicit in every chapter of this project. As I suggested in the introduction, there are public sphere ideals and principles that are worth holding on to. For example, while this dissertation proposes agonism as a key addition to public sphere theory,

it also retains deliberation, a core public sphere offering, as a foundational principle. Public sphere theory values deliberation in a way it is not valued elsewhere: the very idea that language, rhetoric, can close *some* gaps and even *occasionally* work toward agreement or compromise represents offerings that are not generally as well represented outside public sphere theory. The central premise of the American democratic system is that there can be at least some kind of coming together, an *e Pluribus Unum*, to encourage us to come together for a higher cause than our own. Public sphere theory is built on similar idealism, and that idealism is the positive foundation this dissertation seeks to understand better. Is such an ideal possible after such theoretical critiques as have been summarized in chapter 1 above? Is such an ideal possible in a digital age?

The case studies in this dissertation have suggested a preliminary answer in the affirmative to both of these questions: throughout each section of this dissertation I have explored the extent to which public sphere ideals can be applicable and possible in a digital age. In addition to the ideal of deliberation that is still relevant and worth holding on to, I have also suggested that a recuperated conceptualization of the public sphere is built on agonism, democratic composition, and strategic governing procedures, and is theoretically relevant and practically achievable in a digital age, at least in the flash public cases listed above. I argue, however, that such a conceptualization is both relevant and achievable in broader contexts.

I have primarily explored the recuperated conceptualization of the public sphere as it is understood through what I have called flash publics—digitally augmented, flexible, and for the most part passive but potentially activist, collectives of democratic engagement. These

flash publics build networks that are then ready to take action when the time is right.

Whether the Wikipedia and Reddit opposition to SOPA, the Internet Defense League or the Action Network models of activist engagement, or the theorized and proposed People's Lobby and Call Together procedures, flash publics demonstrate some of the varieties and potentials available in this recuperated public sphere conceptualization. A key limitation of this theory, however, is its adoption of and reliance on the public/private binary. Flash publics, and indeed the entire recuperated public sphere theory, implies that there is a difference between public and private. This economic and social assumption to some degree ignores the rich conceptualization of "the commons" (see May). While theorizing digital activism and exploring flash public interactions through the lens of the common might yield compelling insights, this dissertation has adopted the public/private binary as it has explored the variety of flash publics discussed above. Future studies might explore flash publics through the lens of the commons—"flash commons," perhaps.

Another important potential avenue for future study is opened due to my contention that flash publics are not the only possibilities for a recuperated public sphere conceptualization. It is conceivable that there might be other embodiments of public sphere engagement that are agonistic, compositional, and procedural, but that are not built on passive activism or that are not even digitally augmented. Such embodiments might look like an encampment or an occupation of a public park. They might look like a regularly scheduled march on a state legislature. A democratic engagement that includes agonism, actively composes and recomposes identities and power relations at some level of society, and is

governed by strategically designed procedures, is a democratic engagement that can be better understood by a reconceptualized understanding of the public sphere.

But as I have chosen to focus on flash publics, it is important to consider the extent to which they are based on current media technologies. Once the internet no longer looks like Wikipedia, for example, will flash publics still be relevant artifacts for study or practical models of activism? In the remainder of this conclusion, I will explore the extent to which flash publics might remain relevant in light of three main areas of future concern and inquiry established by recent trends in research and practice. While there are many important areas ripe with potential for future research dealing with recuperated public sphere theory and flash public activism, I selected these three based on current discussions exploring the future of digital media: surveillance, mobility, and monopoly.

Surveillance

In *The Net Delusion*, Belarusian internet theorist Evgeny Morozov argues that digital technologies empower oppressors even more than they empower the oppressed, specifically citing surveillance and privacy violations as examples (Morozov, *The Net Delusion*). The central issue with surveillance in the digital age is the drastic increase in surveillable actions. Wikileaks founder Julian Assange argues that our everyday social interactions can now be captured and stored to an extent previously impossible: “All these new types of communication *that would previously have been private* are now being mass intercepted” (Assange et al. 22, emphasis added). Because of this fundamental increase in data ripe for surveillance, Assange agrees with Morozov’s claim that the internet might be empowering the powerful even more than the weak: “The internet, our greatest tool of emancipation, has

been transformed into the most dangerous facilitator of totalitarianism we have ever seen. The internet is a threat to human civilization” (Assange et al. 1). He goes on to predict that global civilization is headed toward a series of “transnational surveillance dystopias” (5). If this is true, it will have troubling implications for the future of flash publics, and recent revelations seem to support his worries in both the commercial and governmental realms.

Little brother: commercial surveillance

Many internet companies make money by collecting, repackaging, and selling the personal information of internet users (Newman). Eli Pariser reports that private companies have a significant amount of information on ordinary Americans, specifically naming one such private data mining company called Acxiom:

Acxiom alone has accumulated an average of 1,500 pieces of data on each person on its database—which includes 96 percent of Americans—along with data about everything from their credit scores to whether they’ve bought medication for incontinence. And using lightning-fast protocols, any Web site—not just the Googles and Facebooks of the world—can now participate in the fun. (7)

Private companies—at least those wealthy enough to afford it—are increasingly able to surveil ordinary citizens at a scale previously unimaginable. This surveillance enables companies to offer personalized content based on user profiles. One effect of this personalization is called “persuasion profiling,” which is essentially the behavioral psychology of persuasion (Pariser 119–28). In other words, private companies are able to plug measurable (and surveillable) behavior into algorithms that determine what type of argument will be most persuasive to a particular shopper or internet surfer. This knowledge

will then enable such private companies—again, only the ones that can afford it—to engage in what Pariser suggests amounts to digital age subliminal messaging:

Consider the implications, for example, of knowing that particular customers compulsively buy things when stressed or when they're feeling bad about themselves, or even when they're a bit tipsy. . . . Understand someone's identity, and you're better equipped to influence what he or she does. (122-23)

These private companies, who have very few legal requirements to protect our data, have the power to understand us better than we understand ourselves. This big data profiling means that powerful companies will be a step ahead of digital and offline activists for the near future: while activists are attempting to organize using digital tools, these companies will have the knowledge and ability to essentially digi-subliminally distract potential followers and supporters. Flash public activism requires a large number of distributed and networked participants, and if companies are able to disrupt those connections via well-placed persuasive disruption, the activism might never come to fruition.

In addition, this data collection leads to the kind of online personalization that Pariser calls a “filter bubble,” in which users are forced unknowingly into an online experience that is tailored specifically for them, feeding their passions, nursing their prejudices, and showing them only what they already know they want to see (Pariser 109). Again, this silo-creation, purposely orchestrated by large companies but largely out of the public eye, can work to counteract the networking capabilities of the internet, twisting the open and distributed nature of the internet into a disconnected system of warring silos.

Finally, this dissertation has suggested that corporate-controlled web tools—Facebook, Twitter, many email clients and services—can help slactivism have real effect and help online communities organize substantial protests. If these actions are directed against corporations or corporate interests (particularly the corporations or interests controlling the web tools themselves), research such as Pariser’s suggests that the companies will know everything about the protest. As privacy activist Jacob Applebaum says in a conversation with Julian Assange, the courts have said that “on the internet you have no expectation of privacy when you willingly reveal information to a third party, and, by the way, everyone on the internet is a third party” (Assange et al. 55). Applebaum suggests that the government believes it has the right to take the data collected by internet companies and use it however it wants.

And, while corporations are not overtly collecting the data to help any government surveil its citizens, Applebaum does not let them off the hook: “If you build a system that logs everything about a person and you know that you live in a country with laws that will force the government to give that up, then maybe you shouldn’t build that kind of system” (Assange et al. 58). If this kind of system continues to be built, however, it will simultaneously achieve two effects. First, it will become increasingly easy to connect with people using financially inexpensive tools. Corporations often provide “free” services in exchange for data, and they have become adept at providing us the service of using our data to connect us with other people like us (read: whose data matches our own). So in this sense, the future of flash publics is a bright one, full of robust networks facilitating democratic

engagements run by likeminded and well-organized activists brought together by opt-in surveillance.

On the other hand, such surveillance might also make meaningful flash public activism impossible if corporations are able to use their information to control or stop flash publics of whose arguments they do not approve. The chilling effect of the filter bubble and big data surveillance on digital activism cannot be overstated, and must be studied more thoroughly in the future to fully understand the implications. It turns out, however, private companies are not alone in surveilling.

Big brother: state surveillance

Former government contractor and current whistleblower-in-hiding Edward Snowden began leaking secret government documents to the press in June 2013.³⁴ His work has shed light on the extent to which the United States and its allies are spying on people around the world using digital technologies. For example, a government spy system known as XKeyscore allows the government to wiretap nearly anyone in any country (Greenwald). Another revelation demonstrated that even encrypted data could be intercepted and cracked by the NSA and its British counterpart GCHQ (Lee). The NSA is able to access personal data directly from Apple, Windows, Android, and Blackberry smartphones (Rosenbach, Poitras, and Stark). The NSA gathers “data on social connections of US citizens,” including metadata information effectively able to “identify [citizens’] associates, their locations at certain times,

34 For more information on this, zdnet.com has an excellent ongoing timeline of revelations and leaks originating from Edward Snowden (Whittaker), and the Electronic Frontier Foundation has compiled an exhaustive NSA explainer (“NSA Spying on Americans”).

their traveling companions and other personal information” (Risen and Poitras). The NSA and GCHQ also have access to foreign and domestic users’ address books, giving an even more full picture of social networks (Gellman and Soltani).

With this all but unrestricted access to personal data, metadata, social networks, and address books, these governments have access to information far out of the reach of activists. Governments already infiltrate and spy on peaceful IRL protests such as Occupy Wall Street and North Carolina’s Moral Monday (Blythe; M. Biesecker; Lye), and now they will be able to continue the practice in the digital realm. Not only can they punish activists they do not approve of, but they would also have enough knowledge to substantially hinder digitally organized or implemented activism. For example, research has shown that social network analysis is enough to identify key participants, who can then be neutralized or discredited to weaken the network or slow down the collaborations: simple social network analysis of metadata³⁵ has been demonstrated to easily pick out Paul Revere as a central figure in the American Revolution (Healy; Han). Just as enduring and dormant networks is a strength of digital activism, as described in Chapter 3 above, it is a liability when those long-lasting dormant connections can be mined and monitored by the very governments (and corporations) who are often the focus of the protests to begin with.

It is important to note here that surveillance is not always a detriment to principles to free and open digital interactions. Privacy activists such as Assange, Applebaum, and

35 The difference between “data” and “metadata” is important here. If two dissidents make a series of phone calls to each other over a certain period of time, the “data” would be the content of their conversations, while the “metadata” would include frequency of calls, the days/times the calls were placed, the duration of the calls, the location of the two participants.

Zimmerman argue that the Fourth Amendment of the United States allows, for example, for targeted surveillance of a specific suspect or criminal networks, and can be used to aid in stopping child exploitation (Assange et al. 41; 135–36; 146). The mantra of many privacy activists is “privacy for the weak, transparency for the powerful,” suggesting that not every action must be entirely secret, but that the default should be for citizens and internet users to retain their privacy with occasional targeted surveillance, rather than the occasional moments of privacy that punctuate perpetual surveillance.

A society in which the government has the power of such robust digital surveillance might not allow flash public dynamics to work. Part of Habermas’ conception of the public sphere was that it should be separate from government, and a government that sees all interactions might result in the erasure of the line separating “government” from the rest of everyday life. Even with a reconceptualization of public sphere theory, this separation from government is vital to the extent that it allows people to organize and oppose government interests without repercussions. Flash publics must be free to create tension, in Martin Luther King’s words: they must be allowed to engage in agonistic interventions that have the potential to meaningfully restructure and compose power dynamics in a society. In other words, flash publics will be largely impotent if government power is protected to the extent that people are not allowed to compose themselves in new agonistic and democratic ways.

Future studies of flash publics in a digital age might explore the extent to which internet surveillance discourages participation in activist causes or efforts perceived as opposing governments or corporate practices. Likewise, this dissertation has not explored the differences or similarities between activism focused on government policies and activism

focused on corporate behaviors. Is there a difference in activists' confidence when facing off against Wal*Mart's low wages when compared to facing off against SOPA? If so, does the difference have anything to do with perceived or real levels of surveillance carried out by Big (governments) and Little (corporations) Brothers? Finally, future studies should explore the question of the impact of various kinds of digital activism: to what extent is anonymous activism, such as the efforts carried out by Reddit/Wikipedia more or less effective than activism in the open?

Mobility

According to a 2012 U.N. Telecom Agency report, by the end of 2011 there were approximately 86 cellular telephone subscriptions for every 100 people in the world ("Agency Report"; see also Goggin 1; Titus). Mobile networked technologies are reaching into parts of the world that are still unconnected to the internet, and examples of mobile-based activism described above suggest that the realm of mobile networking, computing, and telephony are areas ripe for discussions of flash publics.³⁶

Global access

Increasingly global access to mobile technologies has important implications for the future of flash publics across the world. As Ling and Donner argue in their book *Mobile Communication* in the Digital Media and Society series, "mobiles help people and organizations be more productive, by allowing the quick transmission of information, by

36 Gerard Goggin has an excellent and related overview of the nature of publics and mobile media that is compelling even while it uses a different definition of "public" than does this dissertation (157–175).

substituting for journeys, by increasing security and for coordination of events at a distance” (73). This global access means that interventions such as the 2011 London BlackBerry Messaging riots described in the first chapter are becoming technologically possible just about everywhere.

The global access facilitated by increasing mobility of digital connectivity might be the most promising for the future of flash public interactions, even with the increase in private and state capacity for surveillance. As more and more people across the world get access to mobile connectivity technologies, they are more able to be surveilled, but they are also more able to organize and carry out flash public type interactions to outsmart or counteract such corporate and government power grabs. Future studies should expand this study’s analysis of mobile technology and its ability to compose and redistribute political power in developing, as well as technologically advanced, parts of the world. For instance, what happens when flash publics organize using nothing but SMS messages? Is there a role for phatic communication in an SMS system limited to 160 characters with little (or no) social sharing features? And, if flash publics can be organized with this type of tool, is it as antifragile as ones organized by more flexible social media?

Another key avenue of inquiry is the potential to create worldwide networks of connectivity, or what Ling and Donner refer to as the “global information society” (72). Most importantly, what does transnational flash public activism look like? Social action can be organized via social tools when most of the participants live in a particular geographic area and speak the same language, but what potential exists for coordinated social action using digital media across geographical, political, and linguistic borders? Are flash publics limited,

or can they ever be as large as a multinational corporation? What would be gained/lost from that increased scope?

Real time social sphere

Many popular social networking tools are available to users in real time increasingly via mobile phones and tablets (see Goggin 128). Before such mobile internet access, Facebook was limited to desktops/laptops, and Twitter was relegated to a series of text messages. The increasingly real-time access to digital networks expands the sphere that such networks can influence, thus increasing the scope of flash public interventions. Ling and Donner argue that mobile communication itself is in the process of restructuring our society in a similar fashion to the introduction of automobiles (143–44). If they are correct, then such a restructured society will feature a changing relationship with activists and activism: real time communication via mobile devices could change a strike into a network, a violent protest into an extended campaign, an online petition into a passive community ready to take action at a moment's notice.

The increase in the spread and accessibility of mobile technologies means that these changes might be in flux for the foreseeable future. As protesters, and the organizations and institutions they protest, learn how to take advantage of near-instantaneous, mobile, networked communication, flash publics might be formed in a wider variety of ways than can even be theorized at this point. Future studies should explore the effects and dynamics of such real-time mobile innovations.

Maps and locative technologies

Another aspect of mobile communication technologies that might have an effect on the future of flash public sphere interactions is the increasing use of such technologies to create real-time spatial digital artifacts. Technologies like Foursquare, Yelp, Facebook, Twitter, and Google+ all incorporate some level of location reporting and tracking, allowing users to mark their location on a map by “checking in” with a mobile device. Combined with the previous two elements of mobile technologies, the result is a crowdsourced, global, and real-time, potential to map protests, problems, and/or events.

Created in 2008 by a group of Kenyan programmers and developers, open source platform Ushahidi is currently the predominant international and technology for producing maps about natural disasters, election fraud, disease outbreaks, gang violence, or any other location-specific data (“Ushahidi”). Users are able to contribute to these maps via SMS, smartphone multimedia messages (with pictures/videos), and desktop access. As digital culture expert Jason Farman explains in a chapter dedicated to maps and locative technology, this technology has a wide variety of applications, from art and memorializing to biomapping and war casualty tracking (35–55). With this range of uses, this technology is full of flash public potential.

One particularly compelling use is exemplified by a tool similar to the flash public tools and platforms described in this dissertation. The tool is called “Sukey” and is built to counteract the police tactic of containing, or “kettling,” protesters by dividing them into small groups and restricting their movement, thus fragmenting the protest or march. Guardian reporter Patrick Kingsley explains Sukey and its power:

Sukey's main goal is to stop people getting kettled. On the day of a protest, founders collate information from individual protesters – tweets, texts and GPS positions – about what is happening on the ground. The Sukey team then updates an online live-map of the protest, accessible from smartphones. Simultaneously, they tweet and text brief summaries of events to all their subscribers, telling them where other protesters are situated, and – most significantly – where kettles are forming. (Kingsley)

While Sukey is, at this point, controlled from a centralized team, the existence of this technology suggests the potential for future flash public innovations that combine Ushahidi and Sukey to allow protesters to contribute information real-time and maintain a decentralized information source for protesters to avoid areas of violence and brutality, or even just avoid police attempts to break up the protests. There is ample room for future research exploring whether and to what extent locative technologies empower location-based flash publics, and to what extent such flash publics are as effective as their more web-based contemporaries.

While these mobile technologies can empower protesters, they can also facilitate real time location-aware counter-protests, policing, and/or surveillance. While police have been significantly behind the technological curve in recent years,³⁷ there is a possibility that they will begin using technologies like Sukey or Ushahidi to counter the flash public infrastructure such technologies help establish. At least one security analyst report suggests that police are learning about the power and potential of such tools:

37 Kingsley even reports that the police were communicating via slips of paper while the protesters were using Sukey (Kingsley).

The proliferation of highly capable handheld ‘smartphones’ now makes it easy for protest organizers to communicate by voice, text and images, even with real-time video. The protesters may have more watchers and observation points than the police, and actually outpace the police in quantity and quality of intelligence. [. . .] Having a real-time map, complete with satellite photos, of where everyone is at any one moment is almost as good as having your own helicopter overhead — maybe better, if you can distract the crew of the helicopter. (Dees; quoted in Meier)

This real-time mapping capability, enabled by digital technologies and improved by location-aware mobile devices, creates the conditions of possibility for significant social action that would have previously been easily quashed by overpowering helicopter-guided resistance. While flash publics are different from simple riots, this analyst’s report demonstrates a concrete way in which digital interaction and interventions are changing the dynamics of crowdsourced social action. Future research might consider the existence and extent of the advantage provided to flash publics in comparison with the more slow-moving responses led by those being protested.

Monopoly

Just as surveillance and mobility suggest a complex future for digitally augmented flash public engagement, no analysis of the future of digital interventions would be complete without a consideration of the internet’s relationship to monopoly power. I will start with the current situation as described by Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist Ben Bagdikian: “Five global-dimension firms, operating with many of the characteristics of a cartel, own most of the newspapers, magazines, book publishers, motion picture studios, and radio and television

stations in the United States” (3). These five media companies, while not a pure monopoly (which by definition requires one dominant company), are an “oligopoly,” in which a small number of giant corporations behave essentially like a single monopoly. Communications scholar Robert McChesney quotes a telecom industry analyst named Jeff Kagan to demonstrate the existence of such an oligopoly among media conglomerates in the digital age: “These companies aren’t competing anymore. Now they’re partners” (McChesney 113). Such monopolistic behavior is generally understood to be undesirable in a capitalist economy, but, according to Bagdikian, the problem is particularly pressing for a study of activism and democratic participation:

No imperial ruler in past history had multiple media channels that included television and satellite channels that can permeate entire societies with controlled sights and sounds. The leaders of the Big Five . . . like any close-knit hierarchy, find ways to cooperate so that all five can work together to expand their power, a power that has become a major force in shaping contemporary American life. (Bagdikian 4)

The extent to which this major force shapes contemporary American life might be difficult to quantify, but any effect seems to have more or less smoothly transitioned into the digital age, according to McChesney: “at what seems like every possible turn, the internet has been commercialized, copy-righted, patented, privatized, data-inspected, and monopolized; scarcity has been created” (218). And this privatization and monopolization, according to McChesney, has a significant impact on power dynamics in a society, making them more difficult to compose or rearrange: “Today, the internet as a social medium and information system is the domain of a handful of colossal firms,” including Apple, Facebook, Google,

Microsoft, Amazon, and a few Internet Service Providers (ISPs)” (137). The fact that these companies all but control the internet allows for more effective surveillance (as described above), protects against activist changes in power dynamics, and means that digital resources can be controlled more easily. For example, these internet companies combine to control large numbers of significant social connections via social networking and email (Facebook, Google, Microsoft), large percentages of online retail (Amazon, Apple, Microsoft), information organization and management (Google, Microsoft), and internet access itself (ISPs). A situation in which a small number of entities control a large percentage of the resources is a situation in which activists are always at least potentially at risk, particularly if they are creating networks that can potentially implicate a large number of people at the same time.

Tim Wu, a professor at Columbia Law School, has chronicled this media consolidation and argues that the cycle inevitably leads to monopoly conditions (Wu). His historical analysis of this cycle suggests that regulation and/or innovation can break up a monopoly and make way for more equal playing fields for competitive participation in the media landscape.³⁸ Wu suggests that these monopolies can be challenged, but Micah Sifry, internet scholar and editor of TechPresident.com, argues that the situation is not as dire as either Wu or McChesney suggest. While they are correct that the internet is dominated by monopolies to some extent, Sifry argues, there are also significant non-capitalist digital

38 It is notable that Wu does not simply suggest an entirely government-run solution, as the government often acts like a monopolist (for further discussion of this idea, see Leonhardt).

alternatives already in place online (M. L. Sifry). He cites sharing-based companies and decentralized service providers like Zipcar, Airbnb, Wikipedia, Craigslist, CouchSurfing, BlaBlaCar, Etsy, and Freecycle, as proof that the internet is not entirely taken over by monopolistic forces (Sifry). This counterpoint to Wu and McChesney's pessimism suggests that there is still potential for the kind of decentralized activism described and proposed in the previous chapters of this dissertation. Without this opening, monopolies and oligopolies would make the compositional work of digital flash publics all but impossible.

Future studies of digital activism carried out by flash publics should expand on Wu's suggestion that regulation and innovation can smash monopolies and explore whether and to what extent flash publics could facilitate either. While I have not explored here the role of the online sharing economy, future studies of flash public activism should compare the differences between activism organized on for-profit websites (Facebook, Twitter) as opposed to nonprofit sites (Wikipedia, Wikileaks). Alternatively, future studies could explore the claim by Zuckerman, included in Chapter 3, stating that platforms dedicated to activism are doomed to fail. Does successful activism have a higher success rate when it is organized or enacted using technologies that were not necessarily built for activism? Or, could tools be designed that would specifically enable activism in new and provocative ways? Finally, what is the future of an internet that features monopolies and activists constantly clashing? Will one side ultimately "win" control of the internet? Can the internet even be controlled?

Conclusion

I began this dissertation by suggesting that current digital technologies alter the means and modes of digitally augmented democratic public sphere engagement in significant

ways, making practical what was previously impractical by enabling collaboration at a speed and scope previously impossible. These changes provide the exigency for a re-examination of public sphere theory in order to explore the extent to which it can be recuperated and applied to contemporary digital deliberation and online activism. Whereas Habermas' conceptualization of the public sphere is a good starting point, with its focus on deliberation, engagement, and procedures, it is not robust enough to be applicable in a postmodern and digital age. In order to overcome the theoretical and practical constraints of such an era, public sphere theory must be augmented by agonism, a focus on democratic composition and recomposition, and a strategic and situated use of governing procedures.

Over the course of this project I have attempted to demonstrate, explain, and explore contemporary events and potential future ones with an eye toward providing an initial answer to theoretical questions about the relevance of public sphere theory, the relationship of digital media tools to democratic engagements, and the potential power of networked participants in a latent network of potential action. While I do not presume to issue a final statement on the issue, I argue that these anecdotes, theoretical applications, case studies, wireframe mockups, and rhetorical analyses suggest a use for a reconceptualized public sphere theory in a digital age.

REFERENCES

- 13375p33k. "Rules of the Internet." *UrbanDictionary.com*. N. p., 2008. Web. 15 Jan. 2013.
- "A Statement Regarding Paul Ryan's Opposition to SOPA." *PullRyan.com*. N. p., 2012. Web. 10 Apr. 2012.
- "About." *Thunderclap.it*. N. p., 2012. Web. 3 Mar. 2013.
- Adamic, Lada. "The Political Blogosphere and the 2004 U. S. Election : Divided They Blog." *Workshop on the Weblogging Ecosystem*. Chiba, Japan: N. p., 2005. Print.
- Allen, Danielle S. *Talking with Strangers: Anxieties of Citizenship since Brown V. Board of Education*. Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 2004. Print.
- Archer, L. "Evaluating Experts: Understanding Citizen Assessments of Technical Discourse." *Paper Presented at the Annual Conference of the Great Plains Society for the Study of Argumentation*. Iowa State University, Ames, Iowa.: N. p., 2012. Print.
- Asen, R., and D. C. Brouwer. *Counterpublics and the State*. Ed. Robert Asen and Daniel C. Brouwer. State University of New York Press, 2001. Print.
- Asen, Robert. "Ideology, Materiality, and Counterpublicity: William E. Simon and the Rise of a Conservative Counterintelligentsia." *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 95.3 (2009): 263–288. Web. 16 Sept. 2011.
- . "Seeking the 'Counter' in Counterpublics." *Communication Theory* 10.4 (2000): 424–446. Print.
- Assange, Julian et al. *Cyberpunks: Freedom and the Future of the Internet*. New York: OR Books, 2012. Print.

- “Assine a Carta de Apoio Aos Pais E Alunos Da Escola Friedenreich!” *Meu Rio*. N. p., 2012. Web. 17 June 2013.
- Bagdikian, Ben H. *The New Media Monopoly*. Beacon Press, 2004. Print.
- Bagnoli, Mark, and Barton L. Lipman. “Provision of Public Goods: Fully Implementing the Core through Private Contributions.” *Review of Economic Studies* 56.4 (1987): 583–601.
- Beckett, Lois. “Our Step-By-Step Guide to Understanding ALEC’s Influence on Your State Laws.” *ProPublica*. N. p., Aug. 2011. Web. 8 Jan. 2013.
- Benkler, Yochai, and Aaron Shaw. *A Tale of Two Blogospheres : Discursive Practices on the Left and Right*. N. p., 2010. Print.
- Bennet, James. “The New Price of American Politics.” *The Atlantic* Oct. 2012.
- Bennett, WL, and A Segerberg. “The Logic of Connective Action.” *Information, Communication & Society* 15 (2012): 739–768. Print.
- Bey, Hakim. *T.A.Z.: The Temporary Autonomous Zone*. Brooklyn: Autonomedia.
- Biesecker, Barbara A. “Rethinking the Rhetorical Situation from Within the Thematic of Differance.” *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 22.2 (1989): 110–131. Print.
- Biesecker, Michael. “Plain-Clothes Officer Attended Moral Monday Planning Meetings.” *wral.com*. N. p., 2013. Web. 2 Dec. 2013.
- Bimber, Bruce A., and Richard Davis. *Campaigning Online: The Internet in U.S. Elections*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, USA, 2003. Print.

- Bimber, Bruce A., C Stohl, and AJ Flanagin. "Technological Change and the Shifting Nature of Political Organization." *Routledge Handbook of Internet Politics*. Ed. A Chadwick and PN Howard. New York: Routledge, 2009. 72–85. Print.
- Binder, M., C. Boudreau, and T. Kousser. "Shortcuts to Deliberation? How Cues Reshape the Role of Information in Direct Democracy Voting." *California Western Law Review* 48 (2011): 97–128. Print.
- Black, Guy. "The Arab Spring and the Impact of Social Media." *albanyassociates.com*. N. p., 2012. Web. 14 May 2013.
- Blight, Garry, Sheila Pulham, and Paul Torpey. "The Path of Protest." *The Guardian*. N. p., 2012. Web. 2 Mar. 2013.
- Blythe, Anne. "Police Were on Lookout for Anarchists at Moral Monday Protests." *newsobserver.com*. N. p., 2013. Print.
- Boétie, Étienne de La. *The Politics of Obedience: The Discourse of Voluntary Servitude*. Ed. Murray N. (Translator) Rothbard. Auburn: The Mises Institute, 1975. Print.
- Bogost, Ian. "Procedural Rhetoric." *Persuasive Games The Expressive Power of Videogames*. MIT Press, 2007. 1–64. Print.
- Bohman, J. "Reflexive Public Deliberation: Democracy and the Limits of Pluralism." *Philosophy & Social Criticism* 29.1 (2003): 85–105. Web. 26 Jan. 2011.
- Bolter, Jay David, and Richard Grusin. *Remediation: Understanding New Media*. 1st ed. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999. Print.
- Booth, Wayne C. *The Rhetoric of RHETORIC: The Quest for Effective Communication*. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2004. Print.

- Brodkin, Jon. "Internet Defense League Creates 'Cat Signal' to Save Web from next SOPA." *Ars Technica*. N. p., 2012. Web. 14 Jan. 2013.
- Brouwer, D. C. "Communication as Counterpublic." *Communication As... Perspectives on Theory*. Ed. J. St. John and T. Striphas. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage, 2006. 195–208. Print.
- Brummett, Barry. *A Rhetoric of Style*. Southern Illinois University Press, 2008. Print.
- Calhoun, Craig. "Introduction." *Habermas and the Public Sphere*. Ed. Craig Calhoun. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992. 1–48. Print.
- Canetti, Elias. *Crowds and Power*. Ed. Translator: Carol Stewart. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1962. Print.
- Carr, Nicholas. "Is Google Making Us Stupid?" *The Atlantic*. N. p., 2008. Web. 26 Apr. 2013.
- . *The Shallows: What the Internet Is Doing to Our Brains*. New York: Norton & Co, 2010. Print.
- "Case Study: Standing up for Walmart Workers." *corporateactionnetwork.org*. N. p., 2013. Web. 8 Oct. 2013.
- Castells, Manuel. *Networks of Outrage and Hope: Social Movements in the Internet Age*. New York: Polity Press, 2012. Print.
- Charland, Maurice. "Constitutive Rhetoric: The Case of the Peuple Québécois." *The Quarterly Journal of Speech* 73.2 (1987): 133–150. Print.
- Chivers, Tom. "Internet Rules and Laws: The Top 10, from Godwin to Poe." *The Telegraph*. N. p., 2009. Web. 15 Jan. 2013.

- Christensen, Henrik. "Political Activities on the Internet: Slacktivism or Political Participation by Other Means?" *First Monday* 16.2 (2011): n. pag. Print.
- "Civil Movements: The Impact of Facebook and Twitter." *Arab Social Media Report* 1.2 (2011): n. pag.
- Cohen, Deborah L. "Virtual 'Tipping Point' Leverages Group Deals." *Reuters*. N. p., 2009. Print.
- Collier, Kevin. "Internet Defense League Unveils Cat Signal." *The Daily Dot*. N. p., 2012. Web. 14 Jan. 2013.
- "Congressman Paul Ryan Voices Concerns with H.R. 3261." *paulryan.house.gov*. N. p., 2012. Web. 11 June 2012.
- Connelly, Marjorie. "More Americans Sense a Downside to an Always Plugged-In Existence." *The New York Times* 6 June 2012 : n. pag. Print.
- Crick, Nathan. "Rhetoric, Philosophy, and the Public Intellectual." *Philosophy & Rhetoric* 39.2 (2006): 127–139. Print.
- Crosswhite, James. "Universality in Rhetoric: Perelman' S Universal Audience." *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 22.3 (1989): 157–173. Print.
- Dahlberg, Lincoln. "Re-Constructing Digital Democracy: An Outline of Four 'Positions.'" *New Media & Society* 13.6 (2011): 855–72. Web. 16 June 2011.
- Davis, Jenny. "Social Media and Experiential Ambivalence." *Future Internet* 4.4 (2012): 955–970. Web. 14 May 2013.
- De Certeau, Michel. *The Practice of Everyday Life*. Ed. Steven: (Translated) Rendall. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984. Print.

- De Zuniga, H, A Veenstra, and E Vraga. "Digital Democracy: Reimagining Pathways to Political Participation." *Journal of Information Technology & Politics* 15 (2010): 36–51. Print.
- Dean, Jodi. "Why the Net Is Not a Public Sphere." *Constellations* 10.1 (2003): 95–112. Print.
- Debord, Guy. *The Society of the Spectacle*. Ed. Donald (Trans) Nicholson-Smith. Zone, 1995. Print.
- Dees, Tim. "Rioters Using Google Maps for Real-Time Information." *policeone.com*. N. p., 2010. Web. 5 Dec. 2013.
- DeLuca, Kevin Michael, and Jennifer Peeples. "From Public Sphere to Public Screen: Democracy, Activism, and the 'Violence' of Seattle." *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 19.2 (2002): 125–151. Print.
- Desilver, Drew. "Supreme Court's DOMA Ruling Comes as Majority Now Supports Same-Sex Marriage." *Pew Research Center*. N. p., 2013. Web. 29 June 2013.
- digitalboy. "Let's Pick ONE Senator." *Reddit.com*. N. p., 2012. Web. 11 June 2012.
- Donald, Karin Mac. "Adventures in Redistricting: A Look at the California Redistricting Commission." *Election Law Journal* 11.4 (2012): 472–489.
- Downey, John, and Natalie Fenton. "New Media, Counter Publicity and the Public Sphere." *New Media & Society* 5.2 (2003): 185–202. Print.
- Doxtader, Erik. "In the Name of Reconciliation: The Faith and Works of Counterpublicity." *Counterpublics and the State*. Ed. Robert Asen and Daniel C. Brouwer. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001. 59–86. Print.

EagleFalconn. "I'm Concerned about Our Choice of Target." *Reddit.com*. N. p., 2011. Web. 11 June 2012.

Earl, Jennifer, and Katrina Kimport. *Digitally Enabled Social Change*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2011. Print.

Ensemble, Critical Art. *Digital Resistance*. Brooklyn: Autonomedia, 2001. Print.

Errett, Joshua. "The BlackBerry Riots." *nowtoronto.com*. N. p., 2011. Web. 14 May 2013.

Etling, Bruce, Robert Faris, and John Palfrey. "Political Change in the Digital Age : The Fragility and Promise of Online Organizing Political Change in the Digital Age : The Fragility and Promise of Online Organizing." *Human Rights* (2011): n. pag. Print.

"Evolution of Campaign Finance Reform." *Congressional Digest* 69.10 (1990): 227. Print.

"FAQ: Kickstarter." *Kickstarter.com*. N. p., 2013. Web. 2 Mar. 2013.

"FAQ: The Action Network." *actionnetwork.org*. N. p., 2013. Web. 8 Oct. 2013.

"FAQ: The Point." *ThePoint.com*. N. p., 2013. Print.

Farman, Jason. *Mobile Interface Theory*. New York: Routledge, 2012. Print.

"Fighting the Terrorists." *rtMark*. N. p., 1998. Web. 19 Apr. 2013.

Fisher, DR, and M Boekkooi. "Mobilizing Friends and Strangers." *Information, Communication & Society* 13 (2010): 193–208. Print.

Fishkin, James S. "Consulting the Public through Deliberative Polling." *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management* 22.1 (2003): 128–133. Web. 23 Mar. 2011.

---. *When the People Speak*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, USA, 2009. Print.

Fitzpatrick, Alex. "Internet Activists Deliver 300,000 Anti-CISPA Signatures to Congress." *Mashable*. N. p., 2013. Web. 26 Apr. 2013.

- Fraser, Nancy. "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy." *Social Text* 26.25/26 (1990): 56–80.
- Garrett, R Kelly. "Echo Chambers Online?: Politically Motivated Selective Exposure among Internet News Users." *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 14 (2009): 265–285.
- Garsten, Bryan. *Saving Persuasion: A Defense of Rhetoric and Judgment*. Harvard UP, 2009. Print.
- Gastil, John. *By Popular Demand: Revitalizing Representative Democracy Through Deliberative Elections*. University of California Press, 2000. Print.
- . "Hearing a Public Voice in Micro-Level Deliberation and Macro-Level Politics: Assessing the Impact of the Citizens' Initiative Review on the Oregon Electorate." *Paper Presented at the Annual Conference of the National Communication Association*. New Orleans, Louisiana: N. p., 2011. Print.
- Gastil, John, and K. Knobloch. *Evaluation Report to the Oregon State Legislature on the 2010 Oregon Citizens' Initiative Review*. Seattle, WA: N. p., 2010. Print.
- Gastil, John, and Robert Richards. "Making Direct Democracy Deliberative through Random Assemblies." *Paper Presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Sociological Association*. Denver, Colorado: N. p., 2012.
- Gellman, Barton, and Ashkan Soltani. "NSA Collects Millions of E-Mail Address Books Globally." *washingtonpost.com*. N. p., 2013. Web. 25 Nov. 2013.
- Gilbert, Eric, Tony Bergstrom, and Karrie Karahalios. "Blogs Are Echo Chambers : Blogs Are Echo Chambers." *HICSS*. N. p., 2009. Print.

- Gilliam, Jim. "We Need a Groupon for Volunteering." *3dna.com*. N. p., 2011. Web. 3 Mar. 2013.
- Gladwell, Malcom. "Small Change: Why the Revolution Will Not Be Tweeted." *The New Yorker*. N. p., Sept. 2010. Web. 20 Nov. 2010.
- . *The Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference*. Boston, MA: Little Brown and Co, 2002. Print.
- Goggin, Gerard. *Global Mobile Media*. New York: Routledge, 2011. Print.
- Goldfield, Michael. *The Decline of Organized Labor in the United States*. Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 1987. Print.
- . *The Decline of Organized Labor in the United States*. Chicago, IL: University Of Chicago Press, 1989. Print.
- Goodnight, G Thomas, and Kathryn M. Olson. "Ingenuim--Speaking in Community." *New Approaches to Rhetoric*. Sage, 2004. Print.
- Greenwald, Glenn. "XKeyscore: NSA Tool Collects 'Nearly Everything a User Does on the Internet.'" *theguardian.com*. N. p., 2013. Web. 25 Nov. 2013.
- Gronbeck, Bruce E. "Citizen Voices in Cyberpolitical Culture." *Rhetorical Democracy*. Ed. Gerard A. Hauser and Amy Grim. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 2004. 17-31. Print.
- Gurak, Laura J., and John Logie. "Internet Protests, from Text to Web." *Cyberactivism: Online Activism in Theory and Practice*. Ed. M. D. Ayers and M. McCaughney. New York: Routledge, 2003. Print.

- Habermas, Jürgen. "Discourse Ethics: Notes on a Program of Philosophical Justification." *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action*. Ed. Christian Trans. Lenhart and Shierry Weber Nicholson. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1990. Print.
- . *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992. Print.
- . *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*. Boston, MA: MIT Press, 1989. Print.
- Han, Shin-Kap. "The Other Ride of Paul Revere: The Brokerage Role in the Making of the American Revolution." *Mobilization: An International Quarterly* 14.2 (2009): 143–162. Print.
- Hardt, Michael, and Thomas Jefferson. "Introduction." *Michael Hardt Presents The Declaration of Independence*. Ed. Michael Hardt. New York: Norton & Co, 2007. 1–34. Print.
- Harold, Christine. *OurSpace: Resisting the Corporate Control of Culture*. University of Minnesota Press, 2009. Print.
- . "Pranking Rhetoric: 'culture Jamming' as Media Activism." *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 21.3 (2004): 189–211. Web. 15 Sept. 2011.
- Harris, Randy Allen. "Introduction." *Rhetoric and Incommensurability*. Ed. Randy Allen Harris. West Lafayette: Parlor Press, 2005. 3–148. Print.
- Hauser, Gerald A. *Introduction to Rhetorical Theory*. 2nd ed. Waveland Press, 2002. Print.
- Hauser, Gerard A. *Vernacular Voices*. Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1999. Print.

- “Healthy Democracy Oregon.” N. p., 2012. Web. 8 June 2012.
- Healy, Kieran. “Using Metadata to Find Paul Revere.” *kieranhealy.org*. N. p., 2013. Web. 14 Nov. 2013.
- Heidlebaugh, Nola J. *Judgment, Rhetoric, and the Problem of Incommensurability: Recalling Practical Wisdom*. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2001. Print.
- Hestres, L. E. “Preaching to the Choir: Internet-Mediated Advocacy, Issue Public Mobilization, and Climate Change.” *New Media & Society* (2013): n. pag. Web. 7 Apr. 2013.
- Hicks, Darrin. “The Promise(s) of Deliberative Democracy.” *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 5.2 (2002): 223–260. Print.
- Hillygus, D Sunshine, and Todd G. Shields. *The Persuadable Voter: Wedge Issues in Presidential Campaigns*. Princeton University Press, 2008. Print.
- Hindman, Matthew. *The Myth of Digital Democracy*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009. Print.
- Hirst, Ellen Jean, and Jennifer Delgado. “It’s back to School Again for Chicago Students.” *Chicago Tribune*. N. p., 2012. Web. 16 Jan. 2013.
- Hogan, J. Michael, and Dave Tell. “Demagoguery and Democratic Deliberation: The Search for Rules of Discursive Engagement.” *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 9.3 (2006): 479–487.
- Hollenhorst, John. “Sandy Woman Held Hostage Is Rescued after Posting Plea on Facebook.” *Deseret News*. N. p., 2011. Print.
- “Home: Ushahidi.” *ushahidi.com*. N. p., n.d. Web. 5 Dec. 2013.
- “Internet Defense League.” N. p., 2012. Web. 14 Jan. 2012.

- Ip, Po-Keung. "Corporate Social Responsibility and Crony Capitalism in Taiwan." *Journal of Business Ethics* 79 (2007): 166–177. Print.
- Ivie, Robert L. "Rhetorical Deliberation and Democratic Politics in the Here and Now." *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 5.2 (2002): 277–285. Print.
- Jackson, Brian, and Jon Wallin. "Rediscovering the 'Back-and-Forthness' of Rhetoric in the Age of YouTube." *College Composition and Communication* 61.2 (2009): 374–396. Print.
- Jakobson, Roman. "Closing Statement: Linguistics and Poetics." *Style in Language*. Ed. Thomas Sebeok. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1960. Print.
- Jasinski, James L. *Sourcebook on Rhetoric*. Sage, 2001. Print.
- "Join Our Campaigns for Internet Freedom." *InternetDefenseLeague.org*. N. p., n.d. Print.
- Joyce, Mary, ed. *Digital Activism Decoded: The New Mechanics of Change*. New York: Idebate Press, 2010. Print.
- . "Preface." *Digital Activism Decoded: The New Mechanics of Change*. Ed. Mary Joyce. New York: International Debate and Education Association, 2010. vii–xi. Print.
- Karpf, David. *The MoveOn Effect: The Unexpected Transformation of American Political Advocacy (Oxford Studies in Digital Politics)*. New York: Oxford University Press, USA, 2012. Print.
- Keith, William. "Democratic Revival and the Promise of Cyberspace: Lessons from the Forum Movement." *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 5.2 (2002): 311–326. Print.
- Kinder, Donald R. "Diversity and Complexity in American Public Opinion." *The State of the Discipline*. APSA Press, 1983. 389–425. Print.

- Kingsley, Patrick. "Inside the Anti-Kettling HQ." *theguardian.com*. N. p., 2011. Print.
- Knobloch, K. R. et al. "Did They Deliberate? Applying an Evaluative Model of Democratic Deliberation to the Oregon Citizens' Initiative Review." *Journal of Applied Communication Research* 21 n. pag.
- Knobloch, K., and R. Raabe. "Exploring the Effects of Deliberative Participation through Panelist Self-Reports." *Paper Presented at the Annual Conference of the National Communication Association*. New Orleans, Louisiana: N. p., 2011. Print.
- Knobloch, Katherine R. et al. "Evaluation Report on the 2012 Citizens' Initiative Reviews for the Oregon CIR Commission." (2012): n. pag.
- Koebler, Jason. "ACLU: CISPA Is Dead (For Now)." *US News and World Report*. N. p., 2013. Web. 26 Apr. 2013.
- Kreiss, Daniel. *Taking Our Country Back: The Crafting of Networked Politics from Howard Dean to Barack Obama (Oxford Studies in Digital Politics)*. New York: Oxford University Press, USA, 2012. Print.
- "Laborers Union: Lobbying." *OpenSecrets.org*. N. p., n.d. Web. 16 Jan. 2013.
- Lagos, Marisa. "Critics Say Redistricting Panel Needs Diversity." *San Francisco Chronicle*. N. p., 2010. Web. 27 Mar. 2013.
- Lagos, T. G., T. M. Coopman, and J. Tomhave. "'Parallel Poleis': Towards a Theoretical Framework of the Modern Public Sphere, Civic Engagement and the Structural Advantages of the Internet to Foster and Maintain Parallel Socio-Political Institutions." *New Media & Society* (2013): n. pag. Web. 28 May 2013.

- Lanham, Richard A. "Digital Rhetoric: Theory, Practice, and Property." *Literacy Online: The Promise (and Peril) of Reading and Writing with Computers*. Ed. Myron Tuman. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1992. 221–243. Print.
- . *The Economics of Attention*. Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 2006. Print.
- . *The Electronic Word: Democracy, Technology, and the Arts*. Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 1993. Print.
- Lanier, Jaron. "DIGITAL MAOISM: The Hazards of the New Online Collectivism." *Edge*. N. p., 2006. Print.
- Lee, Michael. "UK, US Able to Crack Most Encryption Used Online." *znet.com*. N. p., 2013. Web. 25 Nov. 2013.
- Leonhardt, David. "From Hobby to Industry." *nytimes.com*. N. p., 2010. Web. 2 Dec. 2013.
- Lessig, Lawrence. *Free Culture: The Nature and Future of Creativity*. New York: Penguin, 2005. Print.
- . *Republic, Lost: How Money Corrupts Congress--and a Plan to Stop It*. Twelve, 2012.
- Lievrouw, Leah A. *Alternative and Activist New Media*. Cambridge, MA: Polity Press, 2011. Print.
- Lindgren, Simon. *New Noise : A Cultural Sociology of Digital Disruption*. New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2013.
- Ling, Rich, and Jonathan Donner. *Mobile Communication*. Cambridge, England: Polity Press, 2009. Print.
- Loehwing, Melanie, and Jeff Motter. "Publics, Counterpublics, and the Promise of Democracy." *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 42.3 (2009): 220–241.

- Lundberg, Christian O. "Dueling Fundamentalisms." *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies* 4.1 (2007): 106–110. Web. 29 Nov. 2011.
- Lye, Linda. "FOIA Documents Show FBI Was Watching Occupy Protestors, Some Docs Still Secret on National Security Grounds." *aclu.org*. N. p., 2012. Web. 2 Dec. 2013.
- Mackinder, Evan. *Some of Our Favorite Money-in-Politics Stories of 2012*. N. p., 2013.
- Madrigal, Alexis. "The SOPA Blackout Created a Big Problem." *The Atlantic* Jan. 2012 : n. pag. Print.
- Manin, Bernard. "On Legitimacy and Political Deliberation." *Political Theory* 15 (1987): 351–52. Print.
- Manovich, Lev. *The Language of New Media*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002. Print.
- May, Matthew S. "Hobo Orator Union: Class Composition and the Spokane Free Speech Fight of the Industrial Workers of the World." *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 97.2 (2011): 155–177. Web. 25 Nov. 2011.
- McChesney, Robert W. *Digital Disconnect: How Capitalism Is Turning the Internet against Democracy*. New York: The New Press, 2013. Print.
- McLeod, Kembrew. *Freedom of Expression: Resistance and Repression in the Age of Intellectual Property*. University of Minnesota Press, 2007. Print.
- meatspace. "Operation Graham Cracker. Alternately: Reddit Goes to Congress." *Reddit.com*. N. p., 2011. Print.
- Meier, Patrick. "Maps, Activism and Technology: Check-In's with a Purpose." *irevolution.net*. N. p., 2011. Web. 5 Dec. 2013.
- "Members." *InternetDefenseLeague.org*. N. p., n.d. Web. 26 Apr. 2013.

Meyers, Steve, and Jessica Friess. "Tech Frets Public Outcry: Is My Email Still Private?"

Politico. N. p., 2013. Web. 29 July 2013.

Miller, Carolyn R. "Rhetoric and Community: The Problem of the One and the Many."

Defining the New Rhetorics. Ed. Theresa Enos and Stuart C. Brown. London: Sage, 1993. 79–94.

---. "The Public Work of Rhetoric." *The Public Work of Rhetoric: Citizen-Scholars and Civic*

Engagement. Ed. John M. Ackerman and David J. Coogan. Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2010. 19–37. Print.

Morozov, Evgeny. "Foreign Policy: Brave New World Of Slacktivism." *NPR.org*. N. p.,

2009. Web. 16 Jan. 2013.

---. *The Net Delusion*. New York: PublicAffairs, 2011. Print.

Moses, M. S., and A. N. Farley. "Are Ballot Initiatives a Good Way to Make Education

Policy? The Case of Affirmative Action." *Educational Studies* 47 (2011): 260–279.

Mouffe, Chantal. *The Democratic Paradox*. London: Verso, 2000. Print.

Newman, Nathan. "You're Not Google's Customer -- You're the Product: Antitrust in a Web

2.0 World." *Huffington Post*. N. p., 2011. Print.

Niehaus. "I E-Mailed Rob Zerban, the Opponent of Paul Ryan (R-WI) Asking Him for His

Stance on SOPA. This Was His Reply." *Reddit.com*. N. p., 2011. Web. 3 Sept. 2013.

Nielsen, RK. "Mundane Internet Tools, Mobilizing Practices, and the Coproduction of

Citizenship in Political Campaigns." *New Media & Society* 13 (2011): 755–771. Print.

"NSA Spying on Americans." *eff.org*. N. p., 2013. Web. 25 Nov. 2013.

"Operation Graham Cracker." N. p., 2011. Print.

- “Our Mission.” *PullRyan.com*. N. p., 2011. Web. 11 June 2012.
- Papacharissi, Zizi. “Democracy Online: Civility, Politeness, and the Democratic Potential of Online Political Discussion Groups.” *New Media & Society* 6.2 (2004): 259–283. Web. 14 Aug. 2010.
- Pariser, Eli. *The Filter Bubble: What the Internet Is Hiding from You*. New York: Penguin, 2011. Print.
- Parker-Pope, Tara. “An Ugly Toll of Technology: Impatience and Forgetfulness.” *The New York Times* 6 June 2010.
- Peev, Evgeni. “Ownership and Control Structures in Transition to ‘Crony’ Capitalism: The Case of Bulgaria.” *Eastern European Economics* 40.5 (2002): 73–91. Print.
- Perelman, Chaim. *The Realm of Rhetoric*. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1982. Print.
- Perelman, Chaim, and Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca. *The New Rhetoric*. Ed. J. Wilkinson and P Weaver. University of Notre Dame Press, 1969. Print.
- Pfister, Damien S, and Getachew Dinku Godana. “Deliberation Technology.” *Journal of Public Deliberation* 8.1 (2012): Article 10.
- Phillips, Macon. “A National Discussion on Health Care Reform.” *Whitehouse.gov*. N. p., 2009. Web. 29 June 2013.
- Pierce, Olga, and Jeff Larson. “How Democrats Fooled California’s Redistricting Commission.” *ProPublica*. N. p., 2011. Web. 27 Mar. 2013.
- Popkin, Samuel. *The Reasoning Voter: Communication and Persuasion in Presidential Campaigns*. Second. Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 1994. Print.

- Porrovecchio, Mark. "Lost in the WTO Shuffle: Publics, Counterpublics, and the Individual." *Western Journal of Communication* 71.3 (2007): 235–256. Web. 16 Sept. 2011.
- "Press Release: Internet Defense League Raises Cat Signal to Stop CISPA before It Can End Privacy." N. p., n.d. Web. 26 Apr. 2013.
- Proudhorn. "Comment: Lindsey Graham Isn't up for Reelection." *Reddit.com*. N. p., 2011. Web. 11 June 2012.
- . "Rep. Paul Ryan: The Highest Ranking Member of Congress That Can Be Defeated in 2012." *Reddit.com*. N. p., 2011. Web. 3 Sept. 2013.
- Putnam, Robert D. *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 2001. Print.
- Rachel. "Interview with Meu Rio's Alessandra Orofino." *Adventures of a Gringa*. N. p., 2013. Web. 17 June 2013.
- Radsch, Courtney. *Unveiling the Revolutionaries: Cyberactivism and Women's Role in the Arab Uprisings*. N. p., 2012.
- Raley, Rita. *Tactical Media*. University of Minnesota Press, 2009. Print.
- Raymond, Eric S. *The Cathedral and the Bazaar*. Sebastopol, CA: O'Reilly Media, 1999. Print.
- "Reddiquette." *Reddit.com*. N. p., n.d. Web. 21 Oct. 2013.
- "Reddit Users Launch Operation Pull Ryan." *PullRyan.com*. N. p., 2011. Web. 10 Apr. 2012.
- Reeves, Jeff. "Failed Occupy Wall Street Movement Needs to Wake Up." *Huffington Post*. N. p., 2012. Web. 9 Dec. 2013.

- Reyes, Kevin. *Redistricting or Rethinking? Why Proportional Representation May Be a Better Solution than California's Independent Redistricting Commission*. Vol. 20. N. p., 2008. Print.
- Rheingold, Howard. "Using Participatory Media and Public Voice to Encourage Civic Engagement." *Civic Life Online: Learning How Digital Media Can Engage Youth*. Ed. Lance Bennett. MIT Press, 2008. 97–118.
- Rice, Jenny Edbauer. "Unframing Models of Public Distribution: From Rhetorical Situation to Rhetorical Ecologies." *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 35.4 (2005): 5–24. Print.
- Risen, James, and Laura Poitras. "N.S.A. Gathers Data on Social Connections of U.S. Citizens." *nytimes.com*. N. p., 2013. Web. 25 Nov. 2013.
- Ritchel, Matt. "Attached to Technology and Paying a Price." *The New York Times* 6 June 2010.
- Roberts, Alasdair. "Why Occupy Failed." *Prospect*. N. p., 2012. Web. 9 Dec. 2013.
- Roberts-Miller, Patricia. "Democracy, Demagoguery, and Critical Rhetoric." *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 8.3 (2005): 459. Web. 24 Jan. 2009.
- Roberts-Miller, Patricia, and Catherine Helen Palczewski. "Counterpublics and Public Argument." *The Review of Communication* 3.2 (2003): 127–130.
- Robertson, Scott P et al. "Off the Wall Political Discourse : Facebook Use in the 2008 U . S . Presidential Election." *Information Polity* 15 (2010): 11–31.
- RobZerban. "I Am Rob Zerban, Challenger to Rep. Paul Ryan (R-WI) in 2012. AMA." *Reddit.com*. N. p., 2011. Web. 3 Sept. 2011.

- Rosenbach, Marcel, Laura Poitras, and Holger Stark. "iSpy: How the NSA Accesses Smartphone Data." *derspiegel.de*. N. p., 2013. Web. 25 Nov. 2013.
- Rowbottom, J. *Democracy Distorted. Wealth, Influence and Democratic Politics*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2010. Print.
- Rushkoff, Douglas. *Open Source Democracy*. New York: Demos, 2003. Print.
- Ryan, Yasmine. "How Tunisia's Revolution Began." *AlJazeera*. N. p., 2011. Web. 9 Apr. 2013.
- Scott, Robert L., and Donald K. Smith. "The Rhetoric of Confrontation." *The Quarterly Journal of Speech* LV.1 (1969): 1–8. Print.
- Shapiro, Eliza. "Mayors Against Illegal Guns Plans New Scorecards After Gun Bill Defeat." *The Daily Beast*. N. p., 2013. Web. 13 Feb. 2014.
- Shirky, Clay. *Cognitive Surplus: Creativity and Generosity in a Connected Age*. New York: Penguin, 2010. Print.
- . *Here Comes Everybody: The Power of Organizing Without Organizations*. New York: Penguin, 2008. Print.
- Sifry, Micah. "Book Review: Is the Internet Just Another Example of Monopoly Capitalism At Work?" *TechPresident.com*. N. p., 2013. Print.
- Sifry, Micah L. "Book Review: Is the Internet Just Another Example of Monopoly Capitalism At Work?" *TechPresident.com*. N. p., 2013. Web. 2 Dec. 2013.
- "SOPA initiative/Action." *Wikipedia*. N. p., 2012. Web. 2 Mar. 2012.
- "SOPA initiative/Learn More." *Wikipedia*. N. p., 2012. Web. 2 Mar. 2012.

- “SOPA initiative/Post-Blackout Community Review.” *Wikipedia*. N. p., 2012. Web. 2 Mar. 2012.
- Staff, CNN Wire. “Girl Missing after 911 Tweet Found Safe, Police Say.” *CNN.com*. N. p., 2012. Web. 16 Jan. 2013.
- Stewart, Jon. “Lori Silverbush & Kristi Jacobson.” *The Daily Show*. N. p., 2013. Web. 2 Mar. 2013.
- Stob, Paul. “Kenneth Burke , John Dewey , and the Pursuit of the Public.” *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 38.3 (2005): 226–248. Print.
- Sunstein, Cass R. *Rhetoric.com 2.0*. Princeton University Press, 2009. Print.
- Surowiecki, James. *The Wisdom of Crowds: Why the Many Are Smarter Than the Few and How Collective Wisdom Shapes Business, Economies, Societies and Nations*. New York: Doubleday, 2004. Print.
- Taleb, Nassim Nicholas. *Antifragile: Things That Gain from Disorder*. New York City: Random House, 2012. Print.
- Tapscott, Don, and Anthony D. Williams. *Macrowikinomics: Rebooting Business and the World*. New York: Penguin, 2010. Print.
- “The Arab Spring.” *Wikipedia*. N. p., n.d. Web. 14 May 2013.
- “The BlackBerry Riots.” *The Economist*. N. p., 2011. Print.
- “The Citizens’ Initiative Reivew.” *Healthy Democracy Oregon*. N. p., 2009. Web. 8 Jan. 2013.
- “The Fire This Time.” *The Economist*. N. p., 2011. Web. 14 May 2013.

- The_Bard et al. "Comment Thread: You Say That." *Reddit.com*. N. p., 2011. Web. 3 Sept. 2013.
- Thier, Dave. "The Reddit Revolution : How a Site for Sharing Lolcats Became a Major Political Player." *Forbes* 24 Jan. 2012.
- Thompson, Clive. "Brave New World of Digital Intimacy." *NY Times Magazine* Sept. 2008.
- Titus, Marian Stewart. "Staying Connected: How Adult Literacy, Education and Income Influence Mobile Phone Use: A Comparative Analysis of 30 Countries from 2001-2009." *Mobile Media Practices, Presence and Politics: The Challenge of Being Seamlessly Mobile*. New York: Taylor & Francis, 2013. 63–82. Print.
- Tonn, Mari Boor. "Talking Conversation, Dialogue, and Therapy Public." *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 8.3 (2005): 405–430. Print.
- Toobin, Jeffrey. "Money Talks." *The New Yorker*. N. p., Apr. 2011. Web. 9 May 2012.
- Unger, Mike. "Public History Project Aims to Foster Discussion about Race and Racism." *Penn Current*. N. p., 2013. Web. 29 June 2013.
- Valocchi, Stephen. *Social Movements and Activism in the USA*. New York: Routledge, 2010. Print.
- Van Gelder, Sarah, ed. *This Changes Everything: Occupy Wall Street and the 99% Movement*. San Francisco: BK Publishers, 2011. Print.
- Warner, Michael. *Publics and Counterpublics*. MIT Press, 2010. Print.
- Warnick, Barbara, and David S. Heineman. *Rhetoric Online: The Politics of New Media*. 2nd ed. New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2012. Print.

Wasik, Bill. “#Riot: Self-Organized, Hyper-Networked Revolts—Coming to a City Near You.” *Wired* Dec. 2011.

“We the People.” *Whitehouse.gov*. N. p., 2013.

Western, Bruce, and Jake Rosenfeld. “Unions, Norms, and the Rise in U.S. Wage Inequality.” *American Sociological Review* 76.4 (2011): 513–537.

Westling, Mike. “Expanding the Public Sphere: The Impact of Facebook on Political Communication.” *Society* 2007 : n. pag. Print.

Whalen, Jeromie. “Response and Clarification to Our Choosing of Paul Ryan.” *PullRyan.com*. N. p., n.d. Print.

White, Eric Charles. *Kaironomia: On the Will-to-Invent*. New York: Cornell University Press, 1987. Print.

White, Micah. “Rejecting Clicktivism.” *Adbusters.org*. N. p., 2010. Web. 16 Jan. 2013.

Whittaker, Zack. “NSA Mass Surveillance Leaks: Timeline of Events to Date.” *znet.com*. N. p., 2013. Web. 25 Nov. 2013.

“Why PopVox Works.” *Popvox.com*. N. p., 2013. Web. 3 Mar. 2013.

“Wikipedia:SOPA Initiative: Difference between Revisions (Revision as of 06:06, 13 December 2011).” *Wikipedia*. N. p., 2011. Web. 11 June 2012.

Williams, Anthony D., and Don Tapscott. *Wikinomics: How Mass Collaboration Changes Everything*. Portfolio Hardcover, 2006.

“World Has About 6 Billion Cell Phone Subscribers, According To U.N. Telecom Agency Report.” *Huffington Post*. N. p., 10 Nov. 2012.

- Wortham, Jenna. "Public Outcry Over Antipiracy Bills Began as Grass-Roots Grumbling." *The New York Times* 19 Jan. 2012.
- Wu, Tim. *The Master Switch: The Rise and Fall of Information Empires*. New York: Knopf, 2010. Print.
- Yelaja, Prithi. "U.K. Riots Reveal Social Media Double Standard." *CBC.ca*. N. p., 2011. Web. 14 May 2013.
- Zaller, John R. *The Nature and Origins of Mass Opinion*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1992. Print.
- Zapler, Mike, and Kim Hart. "What Is SOPA? - Mike Zapler and Kim Hart." *Politico* Feb. 2012 : n. pag. Print.
- Zarefsky, David. "The Appeal for Transcendence: A Possible Response to Cases of Deep Disagreement." *TOPICAL THEMES IN ARGUMENTATION THEORY*. Ed. Frans H. van Eemeren and Bart Garssen. Vol. 22. Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands, 2012. 77–89. Web. 6 June 2012.
- Zetter, Kim. "Kapow! The Net Gets a Bat Signal for Fighting Government and Hollywood Bad Guys." *Wired*. N. p., 2012. Web. 14 Jan. 2013.
- Zuckerman, Ethan. "The Connection between Cute Cats and Web Censorship." *EthanZuckerman.com*. N. p., 2007. Web. 14 Jan. 2013.

APPENDICIES

Appendix I: Rules of Reddiquette

Note: The following is the entire collection of rules known collectively as “Reddiquette” as captured in November 2013. It is a fascinating document in its own right, and future studies might compare these rules to Habermasian rules and norms, or might study to what extent these rules are obeyed or modified by individual groups across Reddit. For the purposes of this paper, it is important to have a static archive of the complete rules of the forum under consideration.

Reddiquette is an **informal** expression of the values of many redditors, as written by redditors themselves. Please abide by it the best you can.

Please do

- **Remember the human.** When you communicate online, all you see is a computer screen. When talking to someone you might want to ask yourself "Would I say it to the person's face?" or "Would I get jumped if I said this to a buddy?"
- **Adhere to the same standards of behavior online that you follow in real life.**
- **Read the rules of a community before making a submission.** These are usually found in the sidebar.
- **Read the reddiquette.** Read it again every once in a while. Reddiquette is a living, breathing, working document which may change over time as the community faces new problems in its growth.
- **Moderate based on quality, not opinion.** Well written and interesting content can be worthwhile, even if you disagree with it.
- **Use proper grammar and spelling.** [Intelligent discourse requires a standard system of communication.](#) Be open for gentle corrections.
- **Keep your submission titles factual and opinion free.** If it is an outrageous topic, share your crazy outrage in the comment section.
- **Look for the original source of content,** and submit that. Often, a blog will reference another blog, which references another, and so on with everyone displaying ads along the way. Dig through those references and submit a link to the creator, who actually deserves the traffic.
- **Post to the most appropriate community possible.** Also, consider cross posting if the contents fits more communities.
- **Vote.** If you think something contributes to conversation, upvote it. If you think it does not contribute to the subreddit it is posted in or is off-topic in a particular community, downvote it.
- **Search for duplicates before posting.** Redundancy posts add nothing new to previous conversations. That said, sometimes bad timing, a bad title, or just plain bad luck can cause an interesting story to fail to get noticed. Feel free to post something again if you feel that the earlier posting didn't get the attention it deserved and you think you can do better.
- **Link to the direct version of a media file** when the page it was found on doesn't add any value.

- **Link to canonical and [persistent URLs](#) where possible**, not temporary pages that might disappear. In particular, use the "permalink" for blog entries, not the blog's index page.
- **Consider posting constructive criticism / an explanation when you downvote something**, and do so carefully and tactfully.
- **[Report](#)** any spam you find.
- **Browse the [new submissions page](#) and vote on it.** Regard it, perhaps, as a public service.
- **Actually read an article before you vote on it** (as opposed to just basing your vote on the title).
- **Feel free to post links to your own content** (within reason). But if that's all you ever post, and it always seems to get voted down, take a good hard look in the mirror — you just might be a spammer. A widely used rule of thumb is the 9:1 ratio, i.e. only 1 out of every 10 of your submissions should be your own content.
- **Posts containing explicit material such as nudity, horrible injury etc**, add [NSFW](#) (Not Safe For Work) for nudity, and tag. However, if something IS safe for work, but has a risqué title, tag as SFW (Safe for Work). Additionally, use your best judgement when adding these tags, in order for everything to go swimmingly.
- **State your reason for any editing of posts.** Edited submissions are marked by an asterisk (*) at the end of the timestamp after three minutes. For example; a simple "Edit: spelling" will help explain. This avoids confusion when a post is edited after a conversation breaks off from it. If you have another thing to add to your original comment, say "Edit: And I also think..." or something along those lines.
- **Use an "Innocent until proven guilty" mentality.** Unless there is obvious proof that a submission is fake, or is whoring karma, please don't say it is. It ruins the experience for not only you, but the millions of people that browse reddit every day.
- **Read over your submission for mistakes before submitting**, especially the title of the submission. Comments and the content of self posts can be edited after being submitted, however, the title of a post can't be. Make sure the facts you provide are accurate to avoid any confusion down the line.

Please don't

- **Engage in illegal activity.**
- **Post someone's personal information**, or post links to personal information. This includes links to public Facebook pages and screenshots of Facebook pages with the names still legible. We all get outraged by the ignorant things people say and do online, but witch hunts and vigilantism [hurt innocent people too often](#), and such posts or comments will be removed. Users posting personal info are subject to an immediate account deletion. If you see a user posting personal info, [please contact the admins](#). Additionally, on pages such as Facebook, where personal information is often displayed, please mask the personal information and personal photographs using a blur function, erase function, or simply block it out with color. When personal information is relevant to the post (i.e. comment wars) please use color blocking for the personal information to indicate whose comment is whose.

- **Repost deleted/removed information.** Remember that comment someone just deleted because it had personal information in it or was a picture of gore? Resist the urge to repost it. It doesn't matter what the content was. If it was deleted/removed, it should stay deleted/removed.
- **Be (intentionally) rude at all.** By choosing not to be rude, you increase the overall civility of the community and make it better for all of us.
- **Follow those who are [rabble rousing](#) against another redditor without first investigating both sides of the issue that's being presented.** Those who are inciting this type of action often have malicious reasons behind their actions and are, more often than not, a troll. Remember, every time a redditor who's contributed large amounts of effort into assisting the growth of community as a whole is driven away, projects that would benefit the whole easily flounder.
- **Ask people to [Troll](#) others on reddit,** in real life, or on other blogs/sites. We aren't your personal army.
- **Conduct personal attacks on other commenters.** Ad hominem and other distracting attacks do not add anything to the conversation.
- **Start a flame war.** Just report and "walk away". If you really feel you have to confront them, leave a polite message with a quote or link to the rules, and no more.
- **Insult others.** Insults do not contribute to a rational discussion. Constructive Criticism, however, is appropriate and encouraged.
- **Troll. [Trolling](#)** Does not contribute to the conversation.
- **Take moderation positions in a community where your profession,** employment, or biases could pose a direct conflict of interest to the neutral and user driven nature of reddit.

In regard to voting

- **Downvote an otherwise acceptable post because you don't personally like it.** Think before you downvote and take a moment to ensure you're downvoting someone because they are not contributing to the community dialogue or discussion. If you simply take a moment to stop, think and examine your reasons for downvoting, rather than doing so out of an emotional reaction, you will ensure that your downvotes are given for good reasons.
- **Mass downvote someone else's posts.** If it really is the content you have a problem with (as opposed to the person), by all means vote it down when you come upon it. But don't go out of your way to seek out an enemy's posts.
- **Moderate a story based on your opinion of its source.** Quality of content is more important than who created it.
- **Upvote or downvote based just on the person that posted it.** Don't upvote or downvote comments and posts just because the poster's username is familiar to you. Make your vote based on the content.
- **Report posts just because you do not like them.** You should only be using the report button if the post breaks the subreddit rules.

In regard to promoting reddit posts

- **Hint at asking for votes.** ("Show me some love!", "Is this front page worthy?", "Vote This Up to Spread the Word!", "If this makes the front page, I'll adopt this stray cat and name it reddit", "If this reaches 500 points, I'll get a tattoo of the Reddit alien!", "Upvote if you do this!", "Why isn't this getting more attention?", etc.)
- **Conduct polls using the title of your submission and/or votes.** These methods are not reliable because of [vote fuzzing](#) and are in that regard just asking for upvotes.
- **Send out IMs, tweets, or any other message asking people to vote for your submission** — or comply when other people ask you. This will result in a ban from the admins. Your submission should get points for being good, not because the submitter is part of a voting clique.
- **Ask for upvotes in exchange for gifts or prizes.** "Upvote me to the top and I'll give away ..."
- **Create mass downvote or upvote campaigns.** This includes attacking a user's profile history when they say something bad and participating in karma party threads.

In regard to new submissions

- **Use the word "BREAKING" or other time sensitive words in your submissions.** By the time your post reaches the front page, it probably won't be 'breaking' anymore.
- **Post hoaxes.** If snopes.com has already declared something false, you probably shouldn't be submitting it to reddit.
- **Flood reddit with a lot of stories in a short span of time.** By doing this you flood the new queue. Be warned, your future submissions may be automatically blocked by the spam filter. Shadow banning (you can see your posts and votes, but no one else can) can, and will, take place in more severe cases.
- **Write titles in ALL CAPS.**
- **Editorialize or sensationalize your submission title.**
- **[Linkjack](#) stories:** linking to stories via blog posts that add nothing extra.
- **Use link shorteners to post your content.** There are few reasons to hide what you're linking to, and most of them are sneaky (if you are, use the "preview" feature that those services offer).

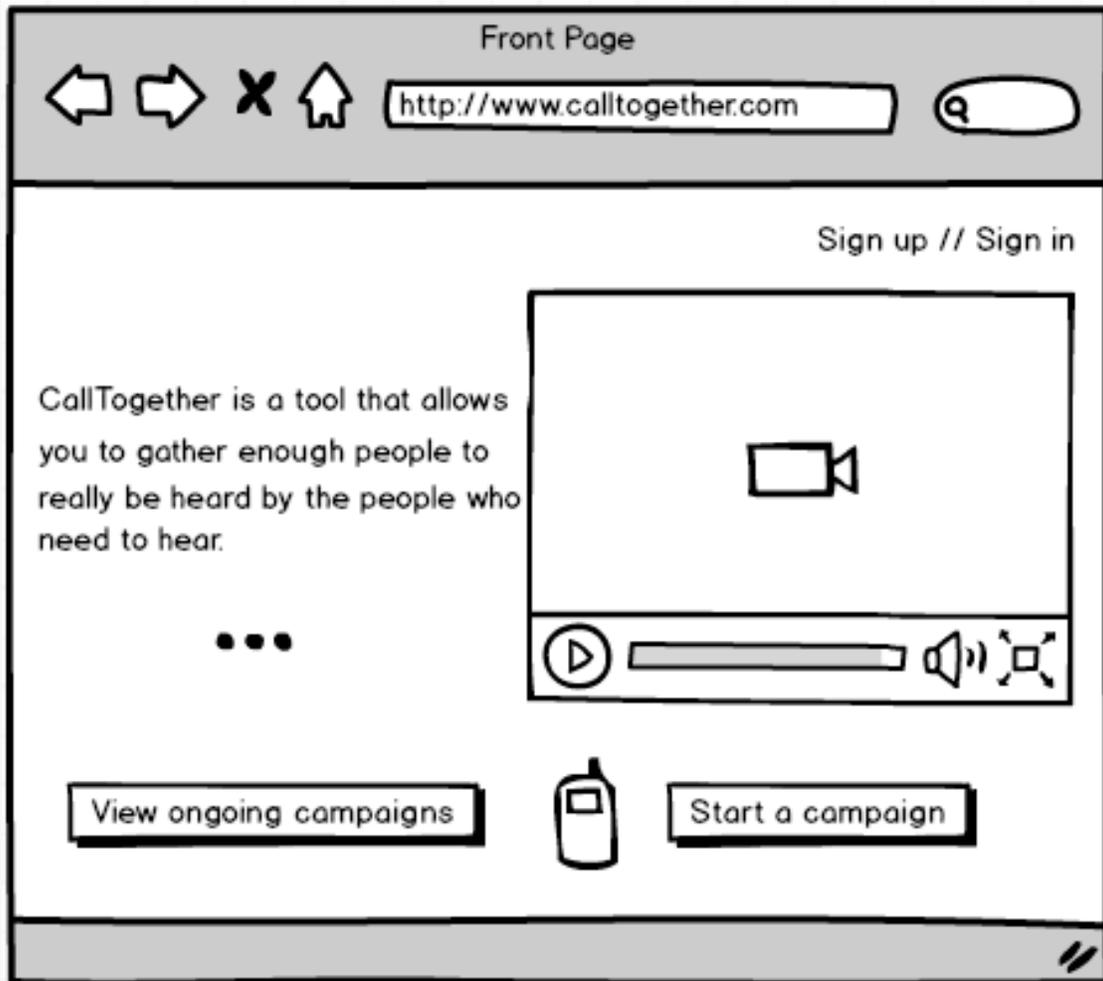
In regard to comments

- **Make comments that lack content.** Phrases such as "this", "lol", and "I came here to say this" are not witty, original, or funny, and do not add anything to the discussion.
- **Announce your vote ([with rare exceptions](#)).** "Upvote" and "Downvote" aren't terribly interesting comments and only increase the noise to signal ratio.
- **Complain about other users reposting/rehosting stories, images, videos, or any other content.** Users should give credit where credit should be given, but if someone

fails to do so, and is not causing harm whatsoever, please either don't point it out, or point it out politely and leave it at that. They are only earning karma, which has little to no use at all.

- **Complain about the votes you do or do not receive**, especially by making a submission voicing your complaint. You may have just gotten unlucky. Try submitting later or seek out other communities to submit to. Millions of people use reddit; every story and comment gets at least a few up/downvotes. Some up/downvotes are by reddit to fuzz the votes [in order to confuse spammers and cheaters](#). This also includes messaging moderators or admins complaining about the votes you did or did not receive, except when you suspect you've been targeted by vote cheating by being massively up/downvoted.
- **Complain about reposts. Just because you have seen it before doesn't mean everyone has.** Votes indicate the popularity of a post, so just vote. Keep in mind that linking to previous posts is not automatically a complaint; it is information.
- **Complain about cross posts.** Just because you saw it in one place, doesn't mean everyone has seen it. Just vote and move on.

Appendix II: Call Together Wireframes



Call Together front page. The front page will provide a brief description of the tool and give the option to view ongoing campaigns or start a new campaign. It will also feature a short video that introduces the tool.

Sign up page

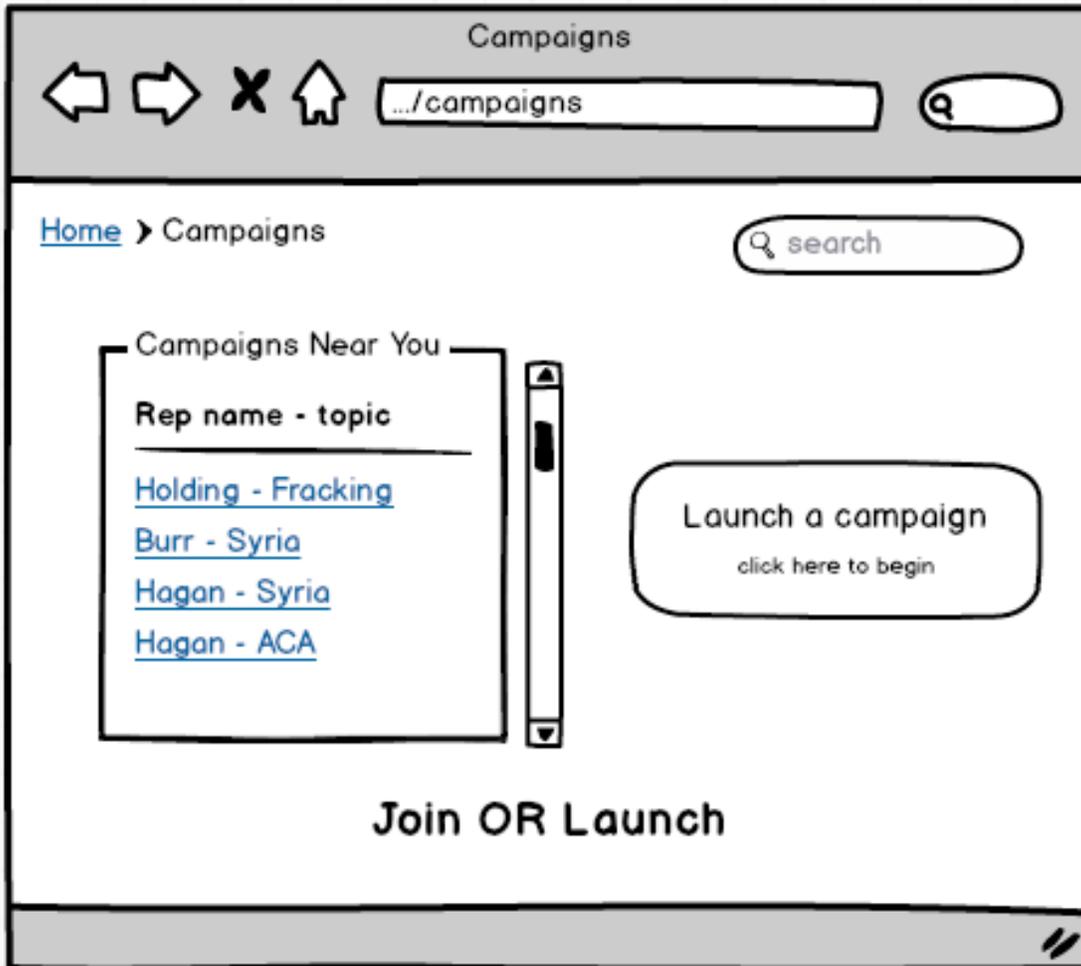
[Home](#) > [Members](#) > [New](#)

? Your address will never be shared with anyone for any reason. We ask for, and verify, your physical address in order to shape participation according to campaign design. For example, if a campaigner wants, they can design a campaign that is limited to a certain State Representative's constituency, and we need to be able to honor that request.

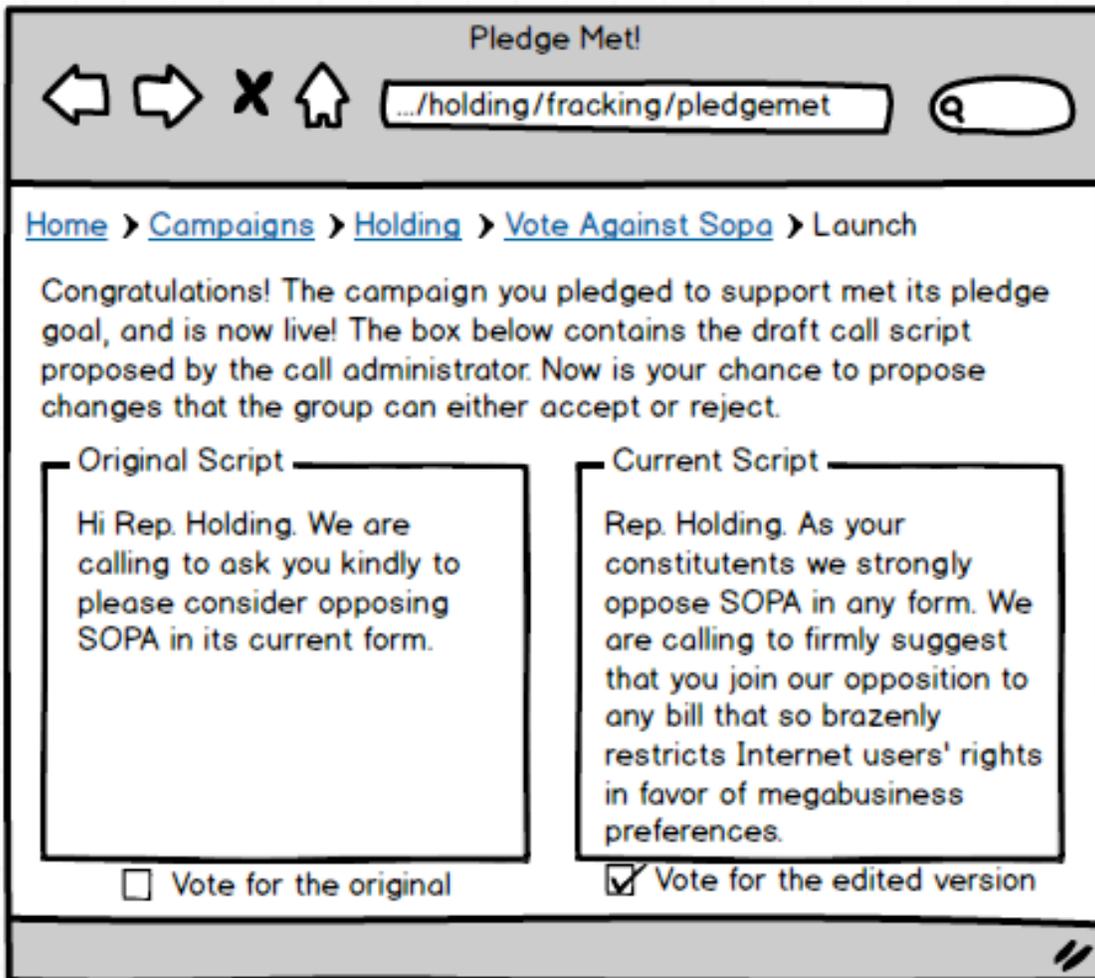
Linked accounts

 <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ON	 <input type="checkbox"/> OFF	 <input type="checkbox"/> OFF	 <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ON
---	---	---	---

Call Together sign-up page. When signing up for an account, the user will need to enter a valid address, and will also have the opportunity to select which social networks to link to their account.



This page will work to decrease redundancy by showing a list of relevant campaigns already in the works.



After pledging to join the action, the user will be prompted to give input on the call script and vote on which edits to keep or reject.

Start a Campaign

Home > Campaigns > New

Name campaign (e.g. "Vote Against SOPA")

Pledge Deadline / /

Call Date / /

Minimum pledges 12

Target

- Sen Hagan
- Sen Burr
- Rep Holding

Private

Describe the Campaign

This is the description that will show up on your campaign page and will largely determine how many pledges you get.

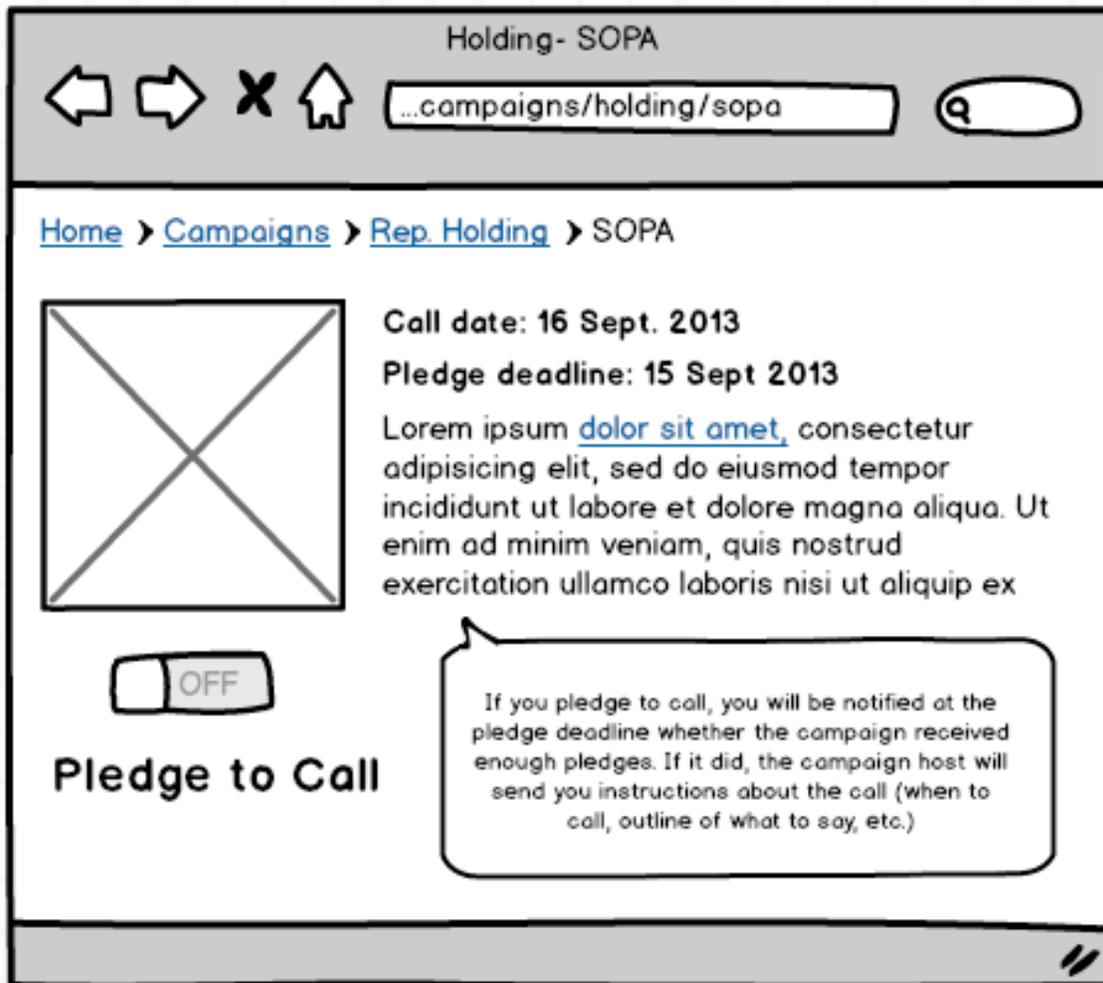
Draft a Script

You don't have to have a full script until the deadline you've chosen above, but it's smart to begin drafting talking points/collecting research/etc. early.

Start Campaigning!

f t g+ in r e

Many aspects of the campaign can be controlled from this dashboard, including the action date, target, and social media integration.



The public-facing campaign page will give the action date and target, and will explain what pledging to participate will entail (thus also serving as a recruiting tool).

Jeff Swift: CallTogether

http://calltogether/swiftj

Home > Members > Your Account

Jeff Swift

Campaign Stats

Successful Calls

Met deadline

Make this public Make this public

Friends

- C. Miller [cmiller29](#) (10 campaigns)
- V. Gallagher [vgh\\$\\$\\$](#) (4 campaigns)
- M. May [May](#) (9 campaigns)
- D. Rieder [DRead](#) (8 campaigns)

Make this public

Campaigns Started/Supported

25 campaigns started ([see list](#)) Make this public

62 campaigns supported ([see list](#)) Make this public

Privacy settings will be of utmost importance to many activists, and the privacy page will allow granular control of who can see what.

Vote Against Sopa - Admin View

[Home](#) > [Campaigns](#) > [Holding](#) > [Vote Against Sopa](#) > Admin

Track your campaign	—————	Related Ongoing Campaigns
Total pledges needed:	15	Stop SOPA (VA) contact
Pledges obtained to date:	12	Vote No on PIPA (WV) contact
Pageviews since launch:	127	Support SOPA (not available)
Pledges per pageview:	.094	
Pledges from friends	7	

Your Facebook post promoting this campaign had 12 likes and 29 comments, and drove 32 visits to your site. These visits turned into 10 signatures.

[Facebook](#) / [Twitter](#) / [LinkedIn](#) / [Reddit](#) / [Email](#)

Call Together will include detailed analytics and tracking tools.