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Nudges, emojis, and memes: Mapping interpassivity theory onto digital civic culture

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ABSTRACT

Once lauded for liberating audiences from their passive state by granting voice, the digital public sphere today increasingly resembles a cacophony of disjointed voices datafied for the gain of giant tech firms. Instead of bemoaning the co-optation of users' activity, we might find it timely to reconsider the possibility that users' passivity might be at stake, the key assumption of interpassivity theory implying a delegation of one's affective subject position under seeming interactive practices. This article reviews burgeoning research on interpassivity and brings it to bear on pervasive phenomena in digital interactive environments: nudges, emojis, and memes. Tracing the artificial canned laughter of the broadcast era to the famous internet adage, Poe's law, I argue that strategic ambivalence, vitriolic joking, and irony weaponized by far-right online subcultures exploit the interactive nudge logic of social media affordances. The means of expressing authentic feelings afforded by digital media entail a fissure that trades in illusions which users disavow. This explains how surprising phenomena beyond belief, such as "meme magic," gain symbolic power. The theoretical takeaway upends the key premise of cultural participation theory suggesting that rather than serving as a precondition, relentless interactivity might paradoxically undermine the democratic ethos of participatory culture.

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Introduction

The emancipatory shift from the passive role of a spectator to that of an interactive user brought about by the emergence of the internet came with a set of expectations that still define the normative thrust of the relationship between media, digital technology, and society at large. This set of expectations manifests in the valorization of interaction as a matter-of-course incentive for adopting interactive technologies for strengthening the civic public sphere, the "extra-representative" layer deemed to enhance democratic participation, accountability, and transparency of institutional representative politics.[1] On the side of digital design, users' data – attention, activity, and input – are required for delivering the surmounting expectation for interactive media affordances invariably

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personalized and integrated throughout different sites, platforms, and devices. Users remain implicated in the cybernetic feedback loops despite the apparent fact that the majority remain non-participants, or lurkers, preferring not to engage.[2] While interactivity remains the set default of the internet, the populist turn and radicalization tendencies facilitated by the interactive affordance architecture of social media platforms call into question interactive citizenship and the very notion of the active citizen as desirable democratic ideals.[3]

The early hype surrounding the democratic potentials of interactive digital technology may have betrayed a more realistic view of the demands and drawbacks it entails. Already in the 1990s, the premise of the interactive user had come under scrutiny by psychoanalytical theorists Robert Pfaller and Slavoj Žižek. Their proposed counter-notion of interpassivity would prove prolific in the subsequent decades by casting light on a wide array of prevalent, yet counterintuitive, phenomena that upset our intuitions about user agency and choice opportunities granted by interactive media. Deploying Jacques Lacan's notion of "decentrement" to casual daily rituals and practices, it explains how our active engagement with objects displaces modes of passive reception and feeling onto them, which in turn objectively (i.e., on the level of appearances) perform this reception in our place. Rather than turning us into passive consumers, Pfaller and Žižek worried that new media might "deprive us of our passivity, of our authentic passive experience, and thus prepare us for mindless frenetic activity."[4] A decade later, political philosopher Gijs van Oenen historicized interpassivity as a post-interactive phase marking the demise of interactivity as a democratic principle based on reciprocity. According to van Oenen, interactive affirmation of our civic norms and duties has become exhausting, which explains our preference to delegate it to digital technology as "a machine that would go of itself," or, as noticed by Jodi Dean, "[circulate] for its own sake."[5] Devoid of any ulterior purpose, digital technology trades on the gratification it procures for the user, who in turn remains prone to internalizing an instrumental attitude towards politics itself, increasingly perceiving it "as an object for use."[6] Symbolic efficacy of meme symbols such as Pepe the Frog, for example, might be understood in terms of the instrumentalization of memes as cultural-political objects that need not be taken seriously or wholeheartedly believed in to exert their symbolic or rhetorical force. Through collective irony and vitriolic joking, the interactively generated symbols are retrospectively construed as magical – in reference to meme magic – displacing users' active, instrumental role in bringing them about.

In this article, I revisit interpassivity theory, arguing that the interpassive delegation or outsourcing of affective reception, emotion, or belief to symbols now serves as interactive digital media affordances subservient to the logic of nudging or direction, as opposed to distanced reflection. The inherent risks of ambivalence or context collapse, in turn, make online environments conducive to this logic and pervade the communicative use of visual symbols such as memes. Used in the service of vitriolic joking and irony, they can be conceived as a rhetorical strategy of weaponizing this ambivalence to splinter publics and mobilize supporters.[7] In speech-act theory terms, emotive symbols, emojis, and memes as stand-ins for the audience help to bridge the illocutionary and perlocutionary functions of speech, thus aiding in the parodying of political adversaries and excluding them from meaningful dialogue or deliberation. In turn, the recent

anti-democratic developments coinciding with the rise of social media such as political polarization and far-right-wing resurgence solicit critical attention to the relentless interactivity demanded by digital environments at the neglect of passion, passivity, and reflection.

The main takeaway of my analysis upends a common assumption of participation theory by suggesting that instead of serving as its condition of possibility, interactivity might frustrate participatory culture and paradoxically undermine its democratic ethos.[8] This view finds support in research on dark participation in participatory journalism reliant on interactive digital media affordances and dispersed decision-making.[9] Simultaneously, my aim is to integrate burgeoning, yet somewhat scattered, research on interpassivity and bring it to bear on the digital transformation of civic culture. Empirically, I focus on the pervasive phenomena of online environments: nudges, emoticons or emojis, and memes. As seemingly innocuous cultural artifacts and tools of digital rhetoric, they represent an ongoing digital transformation – or mediatization – of civic culture now that digital platforms serve as the main gateway for public debate, political mobilization, and avenues for participation in their own right. Although interpassivity theory has proved fruitful in the domains of social anthropology, cultural studies, cybernetics, and marketing, the political and democratic merits of interpassive phenomena remain undertheorized in the field of media and communication studies. In view of this research gap, the article advances theoretical discussions by bringing interpassivity into dialogue with participation theory as developed by Nico Carpentier.[10]

It should be noted that the application of interpassivity is far from straightforward given different intellectual traditions – psychoanalytical Lacanian and critical political theory – that inform its distinctive interpretations. Widely diverse examples brought under the purview of this concept leave the sense and degree of activity entailed by interpassivity somewhat underdetermined. The rehearsal of distinct understandings of this notion is, therefore, necessary to probe its further applicability in digital communicative contexts without doing away with its theoretical origins. As I will try to show, the operative principles – of gamification and nudging – dovetail with different interpretations of interpassivity and thus promise an insight into communicative dynamics online. Given the ambition, the analysis remains exploratory and recursive, relying on incisive juxtapositions and analogies in line with an abductive research approach. The argument is structured by a simple heuristic – follow the smiley! – that brings different communicative contexts and instances of digital rhetoric under research purview.

In the following section, I present two accounts of interpassivity, first by Pfaller and Žižek, and then by van Oenen. I then proceed by situating interpassivity within the democratic theory of cultural participation grounded in the "negative-relationalist" distinction between access, interaction, and participation.[11] In the third section, I turn to internet culture and outline three cases that exemplify interpassive propensities, specifically:

1.Nudging as a gamification feature of social media architectures.

2. The emoji as a communicative-symbolic tool of interactive online participation.

3. Political memes as cultural artifacts circulated and driven viral by reliance on such tools. In the discussion, I summarize my argument by exploring the implications of interpassivity theory for digital civic culture.

Revisiting interpassivity theory

Before dwelling on the surprising corollaries of the interpassivity thesis – it has not taken off in digital media studies despite its broad explanatory value elsewhere – let me briefly recount W. Lance Bennett's observation regarding an intergenerational shift in civic roles:

> Modern era dutiful citizens were urged by educators, politicians, civic leaders, and other authorities to follow the news, join community organizations, and, above all, vote. [...] Despite continuing efforts of institutional authorities to press dutiful practices and ideals on younger generations, they are increasingly unlikely to find receptive audiences.[12]

As we shall see, interpassivity may be read precisely as a theory of a missing audience; or a theory that aims to explain how communication might ensue, and even thrive, in the absence of a direct recipient or Lippmann's "deaf spectator in the back row," whereby its role is "objectively" performed by some third entity in the eyes of a presumed virtual observer.[13] Although the notion first appears in Mona Sarkis's and Simon Penny's essays in 1993, Pfaller is credited with coining the term, which a few years later appears in psychoanalytical philosopher Žižek's essays.[14] Here, interpassivity accounts for the phenomenon of a simulated audience that we have come across already in the Chorus of ancient Greek tragedy, its contemporary equivalent – the artificial laughter track or "canned" laughter in TV sitcoms, and hired funeral weepers also known as professional mourners.[15] In all these cases, emotive reception is being reinscribed into the symbolic-communicative act, thus relieving the actual audience from direct, potentially intense, emotion and offering an inner space of liberating retreat.[16]

Other, more mundane examples where direct enjoyment or reception is delegated or perpetually delayed seem to affirm the interpassivity thesis: recording films on a videocassette recorder (VCR) instead of watching them, printing pages on a Xerox machine or buying books that are never read, turning Tibetan prayer wheels as a way of "outsourcing" our prayers, or bookmarking pages rather than reading them.[17] As seen from these anecdotal examples, there is a counterintuitive thrust to interpassive phenomena since they purport to externalize private and subjective, if often pre-reflexive and fleeting, experience. If we feel this is overly figurative or too speculative a proposition, consider how seldom we actually laugh along with the canned laughter. By distinction, interpassivity suggests that it laughs in our place, to the effect of granting us a certain pleasant relief, as if we have done it.[18]

For Žižek, such interpassive substitution is inherent in human subjectivity even if its manifestation might seem anecdotal and transient as exemplified by the curious cases above. Importantly, the interpassive object does not simply reflect our role in the symbolic order of representation, it is "never simply a tool or means of communication, since it 'decenters' the subject from within, in the sense of accomplishing his [*sic*] act for him."[19] Such an explanation echoes more recent research insights on collective affect. As noted by Egil Asprem in his study of the magic of political memes, affect here figures "not [as] an internal property unique to the individual, but a relational one that is shared socially between individuals as well as in relations between persons, things, signs, and situations."[20] Interpassivity theory, however, conceives of this sharing in terms of delegation and traces it to the psychoanalytical notion of fetishist disavowal. Pfaller notices how

the performative nature of an interpassive exchange trades in illusions – who believes that canned laughter actually laughs on our behalf? – that interpassive subjects disavow or displace onto a naive observer.[21] Their overt behavior driven by the pleasure involved in such interpassive outsourcing betrays their own better rationale as evinced by more recent applications of interpassivity to idle gaming, willful ignorance afforded by political memes, false equivocation of personal identity to social media profiles, or reification of nationalism in Indian fashion design.[22] As I hope to demonstrate in the following sections, interpassivity remains instructive for probing well-researched phenomena within digital rhetoric whose illusory nature is not yet well understood, such as the perlocutionary or performative function of emojis and the curious workings of Poe's law, the famous internet adage positing the utter impossibility of distinguishing sincere from sarcastic expressions online.[23]

Another take on interpassivity advanced by political philosopher van Oenen offers a historical backdrop for understanding its implications for citizenship and political culture at large. Van Oenen notices that Žižek's and Pfaller's examples deviate from the prevailing norm or principle of civic culture in late modernity to be understood in terms of "interactive citizenship" or "interactive policy."[24] Interpassive phenomena identified by Pfaller in the domain of arts, or anecdotal examples by Žižek, signify a demise of democratic culture based on the expectation of interactive reciprocity among citizens and public institutions. Such reading makes Bennett's observation about the intergenerational mismatch of civic roles pertinent for our understanding of how interactivity turns into interpassivity, as literally signifying a passive retreat or failure to fulfill norms and expectations through an interactive exchange.[25] Simultaneously, it helps us better understand why the advent of digital interactive technologies has permeated collective imagination with democratic and emancipatory potentials. For van Oenen, the ideal of active participation in the interactive public sphere explains the relative success of the democratic welfare state in delivering long-sought emancipation and civil rights around its heyday in the 1960s.

Accordingly, the next cultural turn towards interpassive diversion or "interactive fatigue" is characterized by citizens' experience of interactive citizenship as increasingly burdensome. As van Oenen notes,

> small cracks and fissures [...] develop as a result of a structural overstressing of our interactive capabilities and responsibilities. This results in the kind of "malfunctioning" or "resistance" that characterizes interpassivity: incidents in which we literally fail to act on norms we ourselves subscribe to.[26]

The halt of "interactive citizenship" roughly coincides with the rise of the internet around the early 1990s. This is where van Oenen locates Žižek's critique of the early hype of the "new" interactive media and its promise to liberate users from their passive state by granting them choice possibilities, or, in the democratic vein, a voice. But seen from van Oenen's historical perspective, technology here assumes a more pragmatic role of assisting or guiding rather than liberating citizens; hence, more ordinary examples, such as the so-called sleeping policemen reminding citizens "to act in accordance with our own norms."[27] Two decades later, we might factor in algorithmic and increasingly artificial intelligence (AI)-reliant digital technologies, considering that the interpassive turn implies a delegation not only of

tasks but of interactive responsibilities onto objects or "persuasive technology" "scripted" to steer our behavior.[28] Here, van Oenen distinguishes between the directive function of interpassive objects and the reflective one, assigning the latter to the domain of art and thus accommodating somewhat conflicting implications of Pfaller's interpassivity examples drawn from the art field.[29] This difference, as I suggest in the following sections, helps to account for a paradigmatic shift in the audience position that has taken place since the rise of social media, which we can trace by heuristically comparing the broadcast-era canned laughter with the interactive function of emojis.

In contrast to the psychoanalytical Lacanian account, interpassivity in van Oenen's case remains incomplete as we are not relieved from the interactivity prerogative, but persist in it – although for reasons no longer directly tied to any conventionally political goals or actions. The locus of the interactive public sphere shifts onto technology whose interactive functioning exerts fascination, rewarding users with the affect generated by the interactive experience itself.[30] Here we might consider numerous examples of the psychological appeal of new social media platforms. Crucially, the media fascination takes over or misplaces the proper interactive locus of enacting and realizing ourselves as citizens rather than simply users. As such, interpassivity in van Oenen's case remains entangled and overlapping with interactivity but signifies a broader socio-cultural transformation marked with incapacitation that also helps explain the rise of fetishism and certain pathologies in culture subject to psychoanalytical theory. Emancipatory promise does not completely disappear but is now more conveniently understood in terms of user agency and at least in principle – having a voice.

The remaining difference between interpassivity and interactivity, however, hinges on the divergent attitudes user-citizens take on in relation to interactivity itself. Hagen Schölzel's observation is apt here, illuminating the distinction between those who maintain an earnest belief in interactively constituted norms and those who disavow them.[31] For my part, I recast Schölzel's point as pertaining to the legitimacy of dialogue, which distinguishes between users who enter discussions online in good faith and those who disavow the point of interaction under the painfully familiar practices of trolling and shitposting online. This distinction, however, does not easily translate into neat normative insights, yet remains instructive for understanding why the internet remains such an ambivalent place, with users entertaining wildly different expectations regarding the very aims of their interactive exchange.[32] As the example on meme magic will demonstrate, the fascination with memes as cultural products of interactive medium suddenly takes on a political character, mobilizing – or directing – masses of radicalized user-citizens caught in a belief of the occult.

Situating interpassivity in participation theory

As noted by media theorist Geert Lovink, almost three decades of theorizing interpassivity have turned a blind eye to the developments of digital media. Furthermore, interpassivity has never been implemented in code, attesting to our unfortunate situation of remaining affixed to the set default of interaction.[33] In other words, interpassivity has not secured a liberating passage from the private to the public sphere, as envisaged by Pfaller.[34] Rather, it has remained in line with Žižek's fear of deprived passivity as a flipside of false action, whereby digital media begets activity for its own sake, feeding off the affective drives,

compulsions, and anxieties all too familiar from a casual glimpse into the present-day digital milieu. The historical countertendencies to interactivity fleshed out by van Oenen serve as critical leverage for understanding the recent discontents in the digital public sphere such as a hostile debate climate, increasing political polarization, and hyper-partisanship that have coincided with the rise of social media.

Before turning to digital culture, it is worthwhile to consider the productive tension between the interpassivity thesis and the participation theory developed by Nico Carpentier. Both react to the notion of interactivity: the former critiques interactivity discourse and the latter, wary of this discourse's conflation with participation in daily language, appeals to critical theory to reveal the power dynamics inherent in participatory processes that the focus on interactivity obscures.[35] What might seem a mere verbal quibble emanates from the complicated status and history of the concept of participation which is intricately related to the notions of equality, democracy, and ideology, all of which, in turn, concern power relations often occluded by the common-sense, "floating" signification of the term. To preserve its critical edge, Carpentier conceptually distinguishes participation from access and interaction (AIP model) through what he calls "negative-relationalist" strategy.[36] Both access and interaction are conceived as necessary, yet insufficient, conditions of possibility, lacking dimensionality of power and decision-making connoted by the notion of participation.[37] The conceptual distinction between interactivity and participation is informative, but not radical enough to account for the post-interactive turn envisaged by van Oenen. His claim that "interactivity no longer serves the purpose of realizing some – common – goal [but] continues mostly for its own sake" might indeed be simply read as affirming Carpentier's understanding of interactivity as a required, yet insufficient, condition for democratic participation.[38] Whereas Schölzel's analysis seems to take an indeterminate stance – interactivity need not imply participation – in van Oenen we find a historically grounded account of why interactivity no longer sustains the norms and ideals of participatory culture despite the widespread means for interactive engagements granted by digital technologies. Boncardo's reading of Pfaller is instructive as he suggests that we should not rule out participation outright but employ interpassivity critique "[to] clarify what forms of participation in public and political life we should actually strive for."[39] This leaves room for dialogue and cross-fertilization between these two admittedly divergent ways of approaching the notion and theory of participation.

We should be careful, however, not to overlook two sources of tension that complicate this attempt. First, interpassivity is not just the unmasking of "false interaction," "corroborating the progressive character of real interactivity as a desirable social practice."[40] This is important since it designates diametrically opposed evaluative assumptions underpinning the two conceptual frameworks. Briefly put, interpassivity remains very much a critique of interactive participatory culture within the current neoliberal historical juncture. This does not rule out participation as such, but historizes the demise of "the progressive character of interactivity," revealing (in van Oenen's analysis) how it has turned into a burden.[41] If, according to the AIP model, interactivity implies the necessary yet insufficient condition of participation, interpassivity theory upsets the normative vector implicit in the AIP model by leading us to consider the possibility of "interactive overreach." In other words, following interpassivity theory, we might cast doubt on interactivity and see it as robbing participation of its democratic ethos by encroaching on the passivity of participants. Carpentier's suggestion that democracy does not

progress linearly but remains always "in the making" hints in the right direction, by shifting attention from the quantitative *more is better* premise of participation, to its legitimacy conditions.[42]

This brings me to the second point of tension: the delegation or outsourcing implied by interpassivity aligns it with acts of representation, albeit of a peculiar symbolic-affective kind, drawing us into the democratic participation-representation dilemma. Briefly put, interpassivity implies a minimum form of representation within the symbolic sphere where an object-proxy facilitates the passive role of its owner – for example, a smartphone observing art while its owner is preoccupied with taking photos – to ensure their activities are being reinscribed in the digital register. This makes interpassivity a relevant concept through which we can understand digital technology's role in symbolically representing – as well as enacting – various participatory activities.

I try to overcome both tensions with the following qualification: conceived as a critique of interactive participatory culture, the theory of interpassivity unsettles the lopsided choice at the heart of participatory democracy. Namely, the choice between the desirability of active participation in the public sphere and the right not to participate is endlessly deferred or suspended by interpassive phenomena. My use of *lopsided* pertains to the leeway this second, *free-not-to* condition secures for a hefty challenge of the former, that of motivating or enthusing citizens for active engagement. The challenge at stake, rightly pinpointed by Carpentier, of safeguarding authentic and lively participation against the risk of "post-political reduction of participation to a mere technique" in turn holds onto a more tenuous distinction between persuasion and invitation, ushering in "invitational social change."[43] Although invitation remains a solemn requisite of any democratic culture, it also serves a much more ideological function of interpellation – reminding its subjects, who already know and hence are compelled by their reason, to do the right thing, such as follow civil movements, exercise their voice, and actualize themselves as responsive citizens.

Nudges: Gamified choice architectures that displace users' choice

One may readily notice how the apparent difficulty of ensuring legitimacy of participatory practice echoes the burden interactive democracy exerts on its subjects in van Oenen's analysis. If we do indeed know but just fail in the effort, then *invitation* gains legitimacy by virtue of compelling us according to, rather than against, our own will. This bypassing of persuasion may be conceived as a readily pervasive feature of our digital devices – that of nudging.[44] As summarized by Mari Gloppen Hunnes, the idea of nudging cuts across reflective and directive functions of interpassive objects conceived by van Oenen:

> [O]ur reflective system is required throughout the entire process to reach these [desirable] goals, making it mentally exhausting to live according to our own wishes. As choice architects get greater insight into these facts it should be possible to design environments that make choosing for our own greater good a more frictionless and straightforward way of life.[45]

As anyone who has tried to opt-out of a social media platform knows, repetitive questions and reminders of the loss of benefits make it a burdensome choice, asymmetrical to the ease of signing up. But the point here is not that our choice is disrespected. The paradox

is that even the choice of disconnection which sustains the legitimacy of free – and thus democratic – participation is alleviated or deferred by nudging.

In the digital era, "the right of citizens not to participate, which permanently frustrates the developmental capacity of participation," is gradually outsourced to the system itself in the form of digital well-being apps and usage alerts embedded in the algorithmic architecture of the platform or a digital device.[46] Crucially, such managed disconnection maintains our presence in the cybernetic system. This is how we should understand Jan De Vos's claim that you need a Facebook account to disconnect in the first place.[47] Democratic expansion from institution to culture, which in its latest iteration stares back at us, post-enlightened citizens, through the eyes of our ritualistic – smart, patient, normative – digital devices, carries with it this irreconcilable juncture of inclination to stay in the loop, on the condition of strict optionality. In other words, nobody forced you to come on a social media platform despite the dawning fact that online presence conditions participation in public social life itself as digital media is an ever deeper ingrained facet of the public sphere. The ambiguity inherent in optionality, thus, stems not from choice options, as the techno-optimist discourse would have it, but in accruing pressure to make use of potentialities afforded by technology. Users will not renounce these choice possibilities since they promise them a certain degree of agency, as held by van Oenen. Rather, the paradoxical insight of interpassivity theory is that the pressure to self-actualize draws technology back in to relieve users from making the very choices they increasingly experience as burdensome.

Retrospectively, this recasts their agency as, at least partly, illusory. As observed by sociologist of pedagogy, Thomas Ziehe:

> The mode of optionality, i.e. the *possibility* and at the same time the *necessity* of choosing and deciding for one's self, has become part of everyday life, and individuals grow right from childhood into this in youth mode. Optionality includes the possibility of choosing as well as of not choosing. It has become easier in everyday culture to say "no" to any expectations from outside which are experienced as unpleasant or risky.[48]

The possibility of not choosing but delegating our choice-making to the system is the basis of the interpassivity thesis as the flipside of the interactive fatigue inherent in the commonplace invitations to interact. It is not just a dismissal of choice, however, as the possibility of not choosing presumes a possibility of sorts. It is rather the burden of choice that is being circumvented – tempered, deferred, or substituted – by AI-driven algorithms which are now part and parcel of the architectures of social media platforms. Although they are to a large extent interactive and thus reliant on user input, after a certain period of "learning" the algorithm takes over, if only in gradual steps towards personalized auto-play, auto-reply prompts, automated content feed, and so on.

Interpassivity theory has proved instructive for conceptualizing such personalized automation trends whereby digital technology anticipates users' behavior and facilitates interactivity on their part, at least partially alleviating the need to click.[49] Yet it does not relieve them from the need to feed data into the system. This arrangement does not reach the interpassivity ideal understood in the emancipatory or liberating sense of the term. Instead, it remains at the forefront of halting – and holding – interactivity.

Consider, in contrast, reflective nudges proposed by De Liddo et al. to promote audience interaction and, indeed, reflection in political TV debates.[50] Reminiscent of

Žižek's and Pfaller's examples of the broadcast era, TV audiences of a live debate are presented with a pre-determined set of verbal reflections or reactions which, instead of steering their behavior in a specific direction as in typical cases of nudging, "preserve [audience's] autonomy of choice."[51] Such reflective nudging corresponds neatly with van Oenen's reading of the interpassive historical phase where citizens' direct engagement is no longer needed for the participatory arrangement as it was in the interactive phase, but neither does it remain as it was in the pre-interactive one.[52] Rather, reflective nudging represents a gamified experience of the interpassive sort in the sense that anticipated reactions of a hypothetical participant are inscribed in the interface, relieving the TV audience of the trouble – but also joy – of coming up with the interpretations themselves.[53] Ready-made reflections on the debate feature as options in the TV interface, prompting, but not strictly requiring, audience interaction as it does not affect the outcome of the TV debate. Such reflective nudging in TV debates provides for its own reception, whereby interactivity is no longer a central but a partly simulated or appended feature.[54] The interpassive takeaway is to recognize the reflection as already outsourced. Unlike the archetypal examples of interpassivity, the deceptive implication of reflective nudging is that the viewer remains the locus of reflection while in reality merely interacting "with the political debate content."[55]

We might consider comparable phenomena such as the widespread appeal of idle games that are played by the computer itself, yet reward users with interpassive pleasure despite their limited input. Similar, and just as a prevalent, is the tendency to retreat from active gaming and observe others play online games instead.[56] While these examples of interpassivity exemplify the passivized, TV-like style of internet use which stands in stark contrast to the early hype of its interactive potentials, they nevertheless remain excessive or rather exceptional cases from the perspective of the gamified choice architecture of online environments.

As recently noted by Johanssen and Krüger, the interpassive pleasure of constructing one's passive experience through another while performing small acts on the interface helps to understand the psycho-social appeals of gaming as an emerging paradigm of mediatization.[57] Gamification refers to the blurring boundary between the in-game world and its outside as game elements are being deployed in non-game worlds. C. Thi Nguyen coins this a logic of "value capture" in his analysis of the gamification of Twitter: "the gamified design of Twitter influences discourse by inviting its users to change the goals of their participation in discourse – to simplify those goals in exchange for pleasure."[58] The interpassive pleasure of watching "numbers rising in the background," in the case of idle gaming, brings us back to the architectural features of social media platforms where our digital interactions are rewarded in quantified metrics and symbolized in emojis themselves – the most blatant facet of the gamified social media experience premised on users' interactivity.[59]

Emojis: From canned laughter to Poe's law

The very idea of socio-technological affordances as "'actionable possibilities' that are made possible (but not determined) by technology" suggests that our direct involvement is required by design once we come on board the platform.[60] Or, as put by Geert Lovink, active engagement remains the set default of the internet without which nothing

happens.[61] We may conceive this point by contrasting the sitcom canned laughter to social media affordances for expressing approval or disapproval through interactive affordances (i.e., reacting via a set of emojis). Although the former pre-empts or pre-mediates our reaction in advance, we should notice how the absence of choice here accommodates the liberating effects of interpassivity. The "simulated audience" in the canned laughter may enjoy in our place, exempting us from the need to follow up a silly laugh prompt – the show can go on without our involvement.[62] This is unlike the case of a data-hungry algorithm which requires and prompts our engagement in constant "affective modulation" or "affective feedback loops" that characterize the typical social media experience, whose operative logic requires our – albeit limited – input to personalize our feed.[63] To put it evocatively, the affordances of social media platforms compel us to perform the simulated audience ourselves: "either we like a Tweet or we don't."[64]

Paradoxically, the shift from no choice to an algorithmically assisted choice signifies a devolution of interpassivity from its archetypical liberating examples of canned laughter to canned laughter becoming the affordance of social media that we ourselves come to actively accommodate. It is a case of interpassivity still, as our displaced emotion – in so far as we do not actually laugh – may now be located in the laughing emoji or a viral meme, as meticulously reasoned by literary theorist Clint Burnham.[65] Yet it does not relieve us from the expectation and imperative of interactivity but compels its constant reinscription in the symbolic register, itself quantified and increasingly gamified for surplus pleasure.

Existing examples of interpassive symbolism, such as marketing emails from the collaborative platform Miro (Figure 1), seek to draw users back to the platform by promising that emojis emote in their place while they are absent. As such, they signify the rule-affirming exception, noted by others, that digital environments "involve a minimal form of interpassivity."[66] Yet few have considered the implications of the shifted balance from reflective to directive forms of interpassivity in light of the democratic merits of our interactive participation on the platform.

By turning back to canned laughter as the archetypical interpassivity example of the broadcast era, I would like to suggest that this altered balance, spurred by the digitalization – personalization, automation, and gamification – of media, coincides with the shift in audience perception of interpassive objects or symbols and their purported function. The lesson to be drawn from the artificial canned laughter is that its very artificiality – the plainness, univocality, dullness – preserves the distinction between a hypothetical or imaginary naive observer and the real audience, allowing the latter a reflective retreat, saving it from the patronizing sense of being nudged or directed, in analogy with the right not to participate or the right to silence. The apparent fact that canned laughter is today perceived mostly as a condescending annoyance of a bygone age is telling not so much of the expanded range of communicative tools but of the shift in audiences' sensibility, which perceives interpassive objects as instrumental or directive rather than symbolic or reflective.

The difference in perception might seem subtle yet remains key for appreciating the correct insight from the writings on interpassivity. As Žižek's emphasis on the performative, rather than the communicative, role of interpassive objects makes patently clear,[67] they fulfill our role in the eyes of the naive observer, a stand-in for the big Other that sustains the very symbolic order of representation.[68] The naive observer, not

Figure 1. Marketing email from digital collaboration platform Miro.

to be confused with the real audience, is the bearer of the illusion that accompanies the interpassive exchange – that is, that objects feel and believe in our place – which interpassive subjects tend to pleasantly disavow. In analogy with following a mere convention such as turn-signaling when driving, canned laughter stands for signaling itself rather than signposting or directing a particular audience reaction. By fooling the naive observer ignorant of users' intentions, but merely concerned with overt appearances, it relieves the audience of the expectation to express its approval, disapproval, or the like.[69]

Today we may find the equivalent of canned laughter – the emoji – in Poe's law, the hallmark of an inherent ambivalence of the internet.[70] Reminiscent of a netiquette rule to "avoid sarcasm and facetious remarks" on Usenet, the early predecessor of internet forums, Poe's law attests to the apparent impossibility of distinguishing a parody from a sincere expression online without "a winking smiley."[71] It has incited widespread curiosity among internauts and even made it into a viral meme by offering an explanatory grip for numerous examples in popular culture where intentionally parodic communication is perceived as an earnest claim.

What makes Poe's law pertinent to our analysis is its infinitely regressive ambiguity or ambivalence that casts its law-like stability onto a slippery slope. Notably, once we

recognize the indeterminate function of emojis in online spaces prone to context collapse, we might subject the deemed solution of relying on a winking smiley as a blatant display of humor to Poe's law itself. As argued by Dresner and Herring, emoticons often function neither as "vehicles for emotive expression" nor as propositional content, but as a metalocutionary, contextual cue "on par with punctuation marks," signaling sarcasm or some other intent of the speaker pertaining to the illocutionary function of speech act.[72] The performative or perlocutionary effect of emojis is much more difficult to presume, however, as it relies on audience reaction, and hence self-identification, rather than speakers' intent. Turning on the premise of interpassivity, the performative or reflective function of interpassive objects act as stand-ins for the audience.[73] This is where we should reverse the logic of Poe's law considering examples where satirical or parodic intents of communication are not disambiguated by the emoji but rather the opposite – further inoculated against disambiguation. Indeed, as observed by digital ethnographer Sahana Udupa, playful vitriol and sarcasm, common among far-right groups online, thrive on their ambiguation with objective norms of journalism that grant distance and deniability to their claims.[74] Here, the winking smiley doubles down on ambiguity, concealing fervent acceptance of patently ironic gestures and oftentimes offensive or racist remarks as earnest truths by radicalized groups.

Udupa's emphasis on fun and vitriolic play as meta practices of bonding and mobilization among the far-right is instructive for understanding how seemingly innocuous gamified media affordances such as emojis serve to secure group loyalties by splintering imagined publics, notably, those who understand the intended meaning of a symbolic utterance and exclude those who do not. Whether used as a purely expressive speech act conveying one's emotion, a contextual cue instructing a correct interpretation of an utterance or performatively instantiating its reception, the ambivalence of emojis mirrors erratic participatory dynamics online, where sincerity and sarcasm, well- and ill-intended motivations, desirable and dark forms of participation, abound and overlap. The so-called dog whistling example demonstrates how selective words, symbols, and contextual markers present in a conventional speech splinter publics, "[excluding] those who do not understand its actual meaning" and limiting "the possibility of deliberate dialogue."[75]

This points us back to the context collapse attested by Poe's law where speech alone can no longer ensure unambiguous communication without an interpassive directive – the winking smiley, given the overlapping and collapsing contexts of speech. In the next section, I turn to political meme symbols as interpassive objects that exemplify the shift in users' perception, namely, the internalized expectation of direction or nudging, by mobilizing fervent adherence among far-right groups online. Notably, the presumed naive observer is confused with real members of society parodied by or excluded through meme symbolism, which helps explain reactionary tendencies in civic culture and the hardening of illusions into extreme political beliefs.

Memes and meme magic

Thus far I have focused on interactivity and nudging as design principles that structure social media experience and shape communicative dynamics online. In this section, I employ Pfaller's insight of disavowed illusions that accompany interpassive practices to explain how interpassive objects acquire symbolic efficacy, or, more specifically,

trigger the phenomenon of meme magic. One might notice how the workings of archetypical cases of interpassivity, such as canned laughter reminiscent of the Chorus in the ancient Greek play, presuppose a cultivated and to some extent acquired predisposition by the audience that defies a purely functional explanation of the interpassive object. In the early stage of broadcasting, canned laughter may indeed have served as a prompt for audiences that were no longer present during a play-act and only later acquired its performative role of relieving the audience.

Following van Oenen's historical interpretation and drawing on Pfaller's anthropological account, I suggest that the symbolic function of an interpassive object is generated by, and thus subsequent to, frenetic interactivity. By analogy to my previous note on algorithmic automation that at some point takes interactivity over from the user, we might think of viral memes as the symbolic force generated by a prior interactive exchange. In his recent analysis of politicized COVID-19 memes, Scott Krzych argues that interpassive humor lets participants delegate fearfulness of COVID-19 onto real "naïve" believers, thereby pre-empting the possibility of democratic disagreement and discussion.

> By making a joke – not of the virus but of people who believe in the virus – conservative political discourse thereby refuses to make an argument or take a position on the crisis as such, attuning itself to the algorithmic structure of digital media to ensure the habitual circulation of its particular brand of humor and the jouissance this circulation makes possible.[76]

Understanding a meme in its compressed form, according to Krzych, "requires an excess of explication (to outsiders) in inverse proportion to the efficiency by which it makes its point (to insiders)."[77] This explains the functioning of a meme as an in-joke, dovetailing with the strategic ambivalence afforded by interactive symbols such as emojis, which, as we saw, can help to splinter publics and grant deniability to offensive speech. As rightly observed by Krzych, effective circulation of memes relies on exploiting algorithmic infrastructure and thus saving participants from making any claims subject to disagreement.[78] Crucial for understanding the difference of this case based on the directive form of interpassivity to the liberating or reflective one is the role of illusions and their bearers. Krzych admits that COVID-19 memes help their sharers to disavow the "horrific reality" of the virus and thus procure "willful ignorance."[79] In this case, the belief in the virus is outsourced to deemed naive others, but there is no harborer of such a delegation, no naive observer as it figures in Pfaller's model.

Material algorithmic infrastructure – standing in for the observing agency – facilitates the circulation of memes by nudging other users to drive them viral via interactions, yet they do not acquire symbolic efficacy, which is to say, they do not become fully interpassive objects. By contrast, the famous meme character, Pepe the frog, has been described as "an in-joke of sorts, a stand-in for users' own feelings."[80] First used as an interactive tool or "a vessel for participation,"[81] Pepe acquired symbolic efficacy in the so-called memetic warfare through a technique called "charging a symbol," which enables the meme to act "as a proxy for a clandestine plan."[82] In the case of the alt-right appropriation of Pepe, the meme was "imbued with a magical power [...] to bring Trump into office."[83] Meme magic is "the hypothetical power of sorcery and voodoo

supposedly derived from certain internet memes that can transcend the realm of cyberspace and result in real-life consequences."[84]

Occult practices surrounding meme magic have been studied by Egil Asprem who notes "partly spontaneous and partially deliberate" efforts by the alt-right "to create 'collective effervescence' and galvanize a movement around a charismatic authority."[85] Associated with Pepe and the Egyptian deity Kek, the Kek cult even more patently exemplifies belief in meme magic driven by online interactions that are interpassively disavowed. As a Korean translation of "lol," the laugh-out-loud acronym, Kek turned into an occult symbol associated with a fascination with repeated digits:

> When someone posts a message or picture on a 4chan thread, their entry is marked with a multiple-digit, randomly-generated number in the comment thread, like a personal UPC. In other words, no one knows what the number will be beforehand. So Pepe enthusiasts started betting that posts featuring Pepe would end in double digits. When those posts did in fact end in double digits, the community believed to have found its greatest validation yet. It was as if the internet was saying yes, meme magic exists, and the electronic medium is standing by to spread the message that Donald Trump should be president.[86]

Meaningless numbers running in idle games or randomly generated digits assigned to users' posts mesmerize affective networks fascinated with digitalization of the communicative medium itself. As if memes and occult symbols reproduced through users' own interactions nudge them further into interactive oblivion, which is in turn endowed with mystical powers.

Tellingly, the symbolism of Pepe and Kekistan, an imaginary state of Kek, featured in the Capitol Hill attack on January 6.[87] It would be absurd to assume that the rioters themselves subscribed to the belief that Kek or Pepe were acting through them, as did some of Trump's supporters, claiming that "the cartoon frog was speaking through [the psychology professor Jordan] Peterson."[88] Yet it is hard to explain the communicative dynamic that brought digital occultism to the streets without the Lacanian notion of belief through the other. The practice of believing acquires its social validation by reference to a real, if only presumed, believer, without the need for one's own inner investment. This helps explain why absurd or derogatory claims are neither rejected nor affirmed by the majority of users but recirculated with an ironic distance which then serves as a symbolic vehicle for radicalization and a conspiratorial mindset among fringe online communities.

Vitriolic joking behind mindless interactivity, which is required to drive memetic symbols to go viral, affirms Octave Mannoni's take on the magic of belief that precedes "belief in magic."[89] Appeasing the wishes of their mystic idols through their own interactions reverses the premise of reflective or liberating kind of interpassivity, whereby users no longer let symbols feel and believe in their place, but identify with and actively do it for them. This dovetails with the tendency characteristic of faith cultures, as argued by Pfaller, to exalt an illusion into one's ego ideal that is then faithfully obeyed.[90] Lastly, as seen from the Kekistan manifesto, the fervent adherence to the illusory belief in meme magic behind interactivity doubles as a symbolic vehicle for racialized parodies of other members of society.[91] The act of believing in a frivolous symbol is attributed by interpassive users either to naive interactive insiders or to political adversaries. But the

illusion – the content of the belief – is being exalted into one's own ideal by fusing ancient mythology and the deemed powers of the medium itself. The exclusion of the other, premised on racialized prejudice, hereby galvanizes radicalized groups online and mobilizes them around a political authority figure to represent them.

Concluding discussion

Almost three decades of writings inspired by the curious notion of interpassivity present us with a new twist on the well-versed trope of the passive masses bemoaned by the key political commentators of the 20th century. Walter Lippmann, Hannah Arendt, Theodor W. Adorno, and Max Horkheimer, all in their own ways, premised the political subject on the notion of political action, inadvertently anticipating the promise of digital technology, to liberate passive audiences by granting them a voice. In this article, I explored the implications of interpassivity theory calling into question the common-sense appreciation of activity that still harbors naive idealism about digital means for constituting the civic public sphere. Although interpassivity does not imply a stark deviation from the motivating concerns of these theorists, it offers a timely corrective suggesting that the pathway to true action might lead through passivity, notably, the interpassive locus of subjectivity premised on listening, witnessing, silence, and, not least – the choice to abstain, or, as in Melville's Bartleby – prefer not to. The design principles of nudging and gamification considered in this article run counter to these very conditions that lend online participation its democratic footing. As a reflexive kind of interpassivity devolves into a directive one, to borrow van Oenen's distinction, the expectation for direction or nudging permeates the sensibilities of the interactive users.[92] We succumb to the canned laughter-turned-emoji, in other words, by perceiving it as a prompt without which we no longer know how to proceed – the once disinterested passive spectator falls prey to digital interpellation, "the insatiable craving for esteem created through an affective feedback loop within a 'culture of likes'."[93]

The corollaries of interpassivity contravene implicit assumptions of participation theory outlined in Carpentier's AIP model.[94] Interactivity as a precondition for participation turns out to be just as potent a source of frustration, posing the question of what kind of engagement qualifies as participation and, by extension, civic participation. This question should be cast in light of the *set default* of spatially and temporally decentered communications in digital interactive environments. Asynchronous messaging and rhizomatic circulation of data beget new cultural techniques of which the interactive emoji is the most commonplace example, a part of the broader shift towards gamified media experiences enabled by automated algorithmic systems of quantification. Van Oenen's observation that "citizens feel ever more deeply 'involved,' but their commitment is in fact ever decreasing" echoes Krzych's conclusion that political memes "demonstrate a minimal gesture of social participation, not a full-throated act of democratic engagement."[95]

The digital binary logic behind seemingly infinite choice opportunities alters communicative contexts and in an indirect way shapes communicative dynamics online.[96] Nguyen's evocative quip – "either we like a Tweet or we don't" - can be extended to memes: you either get it or you don't. This echoes latent frustrations with self-expression turned into a burden that defines political engagement on social media among young people.[97] As I learned from in-depth interviews with young Norwegians, the ease of

flagging one's political opinions by altering profile pictures frame drives conformism and fuels a latent sense of moral aversion, even among users committed to the political cause. Not following the crowd effectually signals your siding with the adversary, leaving no room for retreat, or one's right to silence, as pressure to respond is created by such communicative dynamics.

Despite the interactive affordances that facilitate our self-expression, the expectation to maintain one's civic identity on social media becomes frustrating in the long term, echoing van Oenen's "emancipatory strain," the possibility turned burden to interactively affirm one's better self.[98] What makes these cases curious is that the sense of moral aversion or ambivalence arises not from disagreement, but the possibility turned imperative to continuously affirm views one readily subscribes to. As young adults of conservative political orientation revealed to me, their political standing changed not because they initially disagreed with their progressive peers, but because they felt pressured to agree.[99]

These observations dovetail with the premise of nudging, conceived not in terms of human-computer interaction, but as a media logic that guides users' interaction through commonplace appeals to emotion, save the actual emoting subject. Aligning with the media logic rather than embodying the subject, digitally empowered users employ interactive means – if only unwittingly – to nudge other users for amusement.[100] While we should be careful not to generalize this point beyond the surveyed examples, the potential of such media effects to shape civic culture at large deserves media scholars' attention. As observed by researchers of far-right media ecologies, "gamified contexts of scoring on social media trendometers" reward the "creative participatory labor" that goes into creating playful outrage for amusement.[101] In turn, online fun as "metapractice" grants deniability to outrageous claims, bypassing deeper reflection and foreclosing the possibility of dialogue with parodied subjects, persuasion, or disagreement; notably, the very qualities that make up a robust democratic public sphere.[102]

If the default premise of the internet – interactivity – can be seen as a source of apparent discontent in the civic sphere, how can we envisage an alternative? Caught up in collective effervescence, users click out of interactive inertia, but who is the actual believer in the symbolic products of their interactions? Does democratic participation require real receptive subjects or should we embrace the ultimately illusory nature of the symbolic order of which virtual space is merely its most overt example? Lastly, should we deem interactive participation democratic because of its interactively dispersed decision-making power, even if its aims openly defy democratic values?

Interpassivity does not offer clear-cut normative guidance to these and related questions, but it does help to consider their normative implications afresh. Insofar as it articulates and builds on ideas that have been sidelined in media and communication studies, the implications of interpassivity theory are bound to appear counter-intuitive, limited to exceptional or excessive cases in popular culture. But this is hardly a good reason to forgo further interdisciplinary engagement with the writings on interpassivity, for media and communication studies have a lot to gain from them. As noted by François Cooren, scholars of interaction have systematically ignored the "passive dimension of any action."[103] Stanley Cavell's effort to redeem the perlocutionary function of the speech act, hesitantly glossed over by John L. Austin, similarly turns to the affective side of passion and passivity, in the psychological and metaphysical senses of these terms, respectively.[104] By noticing that perlocutionary effect,

unlike illocutionary act, is not built into the perlocutionary verb, Cavell stumbles on the premise of interpassive objects feeling in our place and the reverse possibility of us acting in the service of symbols or objects, as "if we are expression machines [. . .] virtually never turned off."[105] Confronted with the pervasive feature of communicative capitalism aptly phrased by Jodi Dean "as talk without response," we might find it timely to redeem the response-ability that is being outsourced to our smart, digital, patient devices.[106]

Notes

1. Feenstra and Casero-Ripollés, "Democracy in the Digital Communication Environment"; Ojala et al.,, "Networked Publics as Agents," 2449.
2. Kushner, "Read Only"; Jensen and Schwartz, "Return of the 'Lurker'."
3. Lovink, "Geert Lovink" ; Al-Rawi, "Kekistanis and the Meme War," 12–32.
4. Žižek, "Will You Laugh for Me," para. 6.
5. Van Oenen, "Machine That Would Go"; Dean, "Affective Networks," 42.
6. Van Oenen, "Machine That Would Go," 55.
7. Phillips and Milner, *Ambivalent Internet*.
8. Carpentier, "Concept of Participation," 172.
9. Westlund, "Advancing Research"; Lutz and Hoffmann, "Dark Side of Online Participation."
10. Carpentier, "Concept of Participation," 172.
11. Ibid.
12. Bennett, "Personalization of Politics," 30.
13. Lippmann et al., *Essential Lippmann,* 35.
14. Sarkis, "Interactivity Means Interpassivity"; Penny, "Consumer Culture and the Technological Imperative"; Pfaller, "Die Dirge Lachen an Unsere Stelle"; Žižek, "Interpassive Subject," para 7.
15. Žižek, *Plague of Fantasies,* 160.
16. Pfaller, *On The Pleasure Principle In Culture*.
17. Žižek, *Plague of Fantasies,* 141, 149.
18. Žižek, *Sublime Object of Ideology*, 33.
19. Žižek, "Interpassive Subject," para. 9.
20. Asprem, "Magical Theory of Politics," 35.
21. Pfaller, *On The Pleasure Principle In Culture*.
22. Fizek, "Interpassivity and the Joy"; Gekker, "Let's Not Play"; Krzych, " 'There Is No Pandemic' "; Muhr and Pedersen, "Faking It on Facebook"; De Vos, "Fake Subjectivities"; Kuldova, "On Fashion and Illusions."
23. Dresner and Herring, "Functions of the Nonverbal," 253.
24. Van Oenen, "Three Cultural Turns," 300, 301.
25. Van Oenen, "Interpassivity Revisited," 2.
26. Van Oenen, "Three Cultural Turns," 302.
27. Van Oenen, "Interpassive Agency," 15.
28. Ibid., 6, 16, 13, 16.
29. Ibid., 16.
30. Van Oenen, "Machine That Would Go."
31. Schölzel, "Backing Away from Circles," 197–198.
32. Phillips and Milner, *Ambivalent Internet*.
33. Lovink, *Stuck on the Platform*.
34. Schölzel, "Backing Away from Circles," 194.
35. Carpentier, *Media and Participation*.
36. Carpentier, "Concept of Participation," 172.
37. Carpentier, *Media and Participation,* 354.

38. Van Oenen, "Machine That Would Go," 10; Carpentier, "Concept of Participation," 195.
39. Boncardo, "Interpassivity and the Impossible," 306.
40. Carpentier, *Media and Participation*; Schölzel, "Backing Away from Circles," 189. Interestingly, this is the sense in which interpassivity figures in Carpentier's own text hinting at Penny's invocation of interpassivity, preceding Rykeby's point that "[w]e trade subjectivity [. . .] for the illusion of control,"116. Such interpretation does not fully capture interpassivity theory developed later, for which authentic subjectivity might be better said, following Schölzel, to thrive in illusions of control.
41. Schölzel, "Backing Away from Circles," 189.
42. Carpentier, *Media and Participation,* 352.
43. Carpentier, "Concept of Participation," 167.
44. Törnberg and Uitermark, "Tweeting Ourselves to Death," 7, 9.
45. Hunnes, "Nudging," 7.
46. Carpentier, *Media and Participation,* 26.
47. De Vos, "Fake Subjectivities."
48. Ziehe, " *'Normal Learning Problems' in Youth*" (emphasis added).
49. Chen et al., "Interpassivity Instead of Interactivity?"; Hollanek, "Non-User-Friendly."
50. De Liddo et al., "Democratic Reflection."
51. Ibid., 26.
52. Van Oenen, "Interpassive Agency," 9–11.
53. Van Oenen, "Interpassivity Revisited," 9.
54. Pfaller, *On The Pleasure Principle,* 16–18.
55. De Liddo et al., "Democratic Reflection," 26. In my reading, De Liddo et al.'s suggestion that reflective nudging induces people to think "out of the box" should be understood literally as taking place outside the box of the mind, or subversely, as remaining inside the television box.
56. Kuldova, "Interpassive Phenomena,"; Fizek, "Interpassivity and the Joy."
57. Johanssen and Krüger, *Media and Psychoanalysis,* 204–205.
58. Nguyen, "How Twitter Gamifies Communication," 416.
59. Kuldova, "Interpassive Phenomena," 40.
60. Roberts, *Participatory Technologies*. We should understand van Oenen's remark that interactivity in the interactive citizenship turns into an obligation just as in the interactive art it imposes "an imperative to participate" less as overdetermined claim on interactive culture at large and more as an idea of an interactive art or a system being incomplete without our participation.
61. Lovink, "Geert Lovink."
62. Žižek, *Plague of Fantasies,* 147.
63. Karppi, "Disconnect," 113; Boler and Davis, "Affective Politics," 84.
64. Nguyen, "How Twitter Gamifies Communication," 417.
65. Burnham, *Does the Internet Have an Unconscious?* 105–122.
66. De Vos, "Fake Subjectivities," 22.
67. Žižek, "Interpassive Subject."
68. Pfaller, *On The Pleasure Principle In Culture,* 55.
69. Ibid., 23.
70. Phillips and Milner, *Ambivalent Internet*.
71. Schwarz, "Emily Post for Usenet"; Aikin, "Poe's Law, Group Polarization.
72. Dresner and Herring, "Functions of the Nonverbal," 253.
73. Ibid., 258, 253.
74. Udupa, "Extreme Speech| Nationalism," 22.
75. Bhat and Klein, *Covert Hate Speech*, 167.
76. Krzych, " 'There Is No Pandemic'," 9.
77. Ibid.
78. Ibid.
79. Ibid., 8.
80. Score esports, *Story of Pepe*.

81. Ibid.
82. Spencer, "Trump's Occult Online Supporters."
83. Ibid.
84. Know Your Meme, *Meme Magic.*
85. Asprem, "Magical Theory of Politics," 15.
86. Spencer, "Trump's Occult Online Supporters."
87. Simon and Sidner, "Decoding the Extremist Symbols."
88. Spencer, "Trump's Occult Online Supporters."
89. Mannoni, " 'I Know Well, but All the Same," 81.
90. Pfaller, *On The Pleasure Principle In Culture,* 138, 257.
91. Know Your Meme, *KEK Manifesto | Kekistan.*
92. Van Oenen, "Interpassive Agency," 16.
93. Boler and Davis, "Affective Politics." 84. Boler and Davis's use of the phrase "positive passions" for social media affordances of "like," "love," "laughter," and "sad" accords with Pfaller's reference to passivity in terms of affect attesting to the traction of the concept of interpassivity.
94. Carpentier, "Concept of Participation."
95. Van Oenen, "Languishing in Securityscape"; Krzych, " 'There Is No Pandemic'."
96. Picone et al., "Small Acts of Engagement."
97. Mozdeika, "Between Civic Virtue and Vice."
98. Lovink, "Ups and Downs of Interpassivity," 3.
99. Mozdeika, "Between Civic Virtue and Vice."
100. For future reference to Pfaller's psychoanalytical account of interpassivity, it is important to distinguish between the deep, potentially traumatic emotion or belief that is outsourced in an interpassive exchange and the pleasure or amusement gained by avoiding the direct confrontation that gives rise to such feelings. This calls to more carefully reflect on the exchange of personal emotion and collective affect when applying interpassivity theory in mediated communicative contexts.
101. Udupa, "Extreme Speech| Nationalism" 3153; Milner, "FCJ-156 Hacking the Social."
102. Udupa, "Extreme Speech| Nationalism,"," 3153; Krzych, " 'There Is No Pandemic'," 9.
103. Cooren, *Action and Agency in Dialogue,* 41.
104. Cavell, "Passionate and Performative Utterance," 187–188.
105. Ibid., 196.
106. Dean, *Democracy and Other Neoliberal Fantasies,* 22.

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