Research Article

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This Pussy Grabs back: Humour, Digital Affects and Women's Protest

Abstract: The "affective" turn has enabled many scholars to theorise media representations not only as texts that can be distantly decoded but also as a matter of emotional attachments, intensities of feelings, synesthetic sensations, and embodied experiences. Yet, what has been less often theorized is how this affective meaning-making is (re)shaped by the dynamic and interactive nature of social networking systems such as Facebook or Twitter. How do images and the affective qualities that "stick" to them, travel and transform through user engagement where "users grab images and technologies by which they are grabbed in return" (Paasonen, *Carnal Resonance* 178; Senft 2008). We aim to explore this question further through examples of humorous images from the January 2017 Women's March, considered within the digital contexts of Facebook and Twitter. Social movement scholars argue that emotional engagement can be a powerful and positive motivating factor in getting people involved in political life, and we here suggest that these humorous images can move the reader in new critical directions, encouraging them to challenge systems of inequality and oppression in contemporary society.

Keywords: online humour, affect, activism, feminism

The Women's March was an international protest event on January 21, 2017, advocating for legislation and policies on issues such as women's rights, racial equality, LGBTQ rights, immigration reform, healthcare reform, climate change, freedom of religion, and workers' rights. The rallies took place the day after President Trump's inauguration and took aim at his statements and positions that many regarded as misogynistic, racist or otherwise offensive. Protesters participated in almost 700 marches across the world, making it one of the biggest human rights demonstrations in history. Social media networks played a crucial role in the preparation, organisation and communication of this multi-sited event. Our study explores one key aspect of this communication, which was the widespread circulation of humorous feminist images from the march on Facebook and Twitter. We want to examine this practice to reflect on some of the opportunities and limitations for using digital humour to communicate political messages and struggles.

By bringing critical humour studies into dialogue with contemporary scholars of affect, digital media and political communication, the article explores the affective and sensuous relationship between humorous online images of protest and social/political change. Rather than understanding these humorous images merely as a product and commodity of a new form of affective capitalism (which they are!), we suggest that they can also have the capacity to move "users" in new critical directions, encouraging them to challenge systems of inequality and oppression in contemporary society. This potentiality lies in the complex ways in which humour and the affective force of these online representations can move and touch the offline reading body.

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Our article uses three case studies to explore key aspects of this online/offline practice. First, we consider important limitations attached to affective engagement with online political communication. Second, we investigate how the networked laughter invited by humorous feminist images can help sustain people's activism by extending their affective engagement beyond the moments of marches, and by offering a sense of belonging to a feminist collective. Third, we examine how humour, along with the specific technological affordances of Facebook and Twitter, allow for the layering or intensification of affect that is a necessary ingredient for social change. The article concludes by reflecting on how our findings can contribute to our understanding of the affective and sensory dimensions of digitally mediated protest. We stress the importance of seeing such practice as "one in which political feeling and political action are not oppositions but complexly intertwined" (Pedwell 1).

Theorising Humour in Digitally Mediated Protest

The "turn to affect" is often accredited with providing scholars in media and cultural studies with a new critical vocabulary that allows us to rethink representations not only as texts that can be distantly decoded but also as a matter of emotional attachments, intensities of feelings, synesthetic sensations, and embodied experiences (e.g. Paasonen, "Between Meaning and Mattering"; Grusin). In this context, new media scholars have investigated how this affective quality of online media and our continuous search for "affective jolts" feed into the circuits of neoliberal communicative capitalism (e.g. Dean, "Blog Theory"; Graefe, "The Work of Humour in Affective Capitalism"; Pybus). From such a perspective, the potential of online media for *real* political change is limited because political action is here reduced to feeling political (Pedwell). Contrary to this there is a body of scholarship that explores how "being moved" might lead to meaningful self and social transformation. In their introduction to the collection *Networked Affect*, Hillis, Paasonen and Petit argue that online affect "can be a mediating and mobilizing force that has the capacity to stir social action', thus constituting "a potential channel for political agency" (3). Similarly, Rentschler and Thrift illustrate how humorous feminist memes that are produced and circulated on Tumblr, Facebook and even shopping sites such as Amazon.com "create online spaces of consciousness raising and community building" (329). Through the use of funny memes, they argue, activists employ humour and other forms of sensorial resonance to mobilise feminists who might be geographically dispersed but emotionally and politically close. These affirmative approaches are not only based on the idea that digital technologies can connect people across social and geographical boundaries in ways that can enhance political organisation and consciousness-raising, but also that the technological and affective affordances of digital media may have the power to move us in new, critical ways.

Humorous images lend themselves to such an emotive and sensory examination because humour is a highly affective practice: humour can move us in emotional and physical ways, for instance when we shake with laughter, smile with amusement, or frown and turn away with feelings of hurt or shame. These contradictory feelings may even coexist as Kyrölä points out: "humour that has potential to 'hit close' and hurt us the most may also be the kind that makes us laugh the hardest" (76). Thus, rather than conceiving humour merely as a discursive practice, locating the various possible functions of humour first and foremost in texts and/or images, we draw attention to the sensuous and somatic component of humour and its online representations. The social media user is invited to feel part of a wider community of protesting feminists who use humour to position patriarchal structures and practices as objects of ridicule and to confront and reject the shame inscribed on "unruly" female bodies (Karlyn).

The role of emotion in active citizenship has been debated extensively in the field of political communication studies, too. Originally, liberal democratic theorists argued that a prosperous democracy was dependent on rationality and deliberative compromise. In this perspective, emotion was considered dangerous because it could potentially contaminate the deliberative decision-making processes of creating political change (e.g. Habermas; Christiano). In contrast, Marcus asserts that politics is a subject that connotes passion and anger, and so it is unlikely that emotions only exist outside of the deliberative reasoning process. This view has gained support from social media scholars, who have argued extensively

that emotion, and anger, in particular, can empower citizens and encourage different forms of political action (e.g. Wahl-Jorgensen; Dahlgren). For political communication scholars, the study of humour has focused particularly on American late-night TV (e.g. Baym; Jones). However, as the field has become more fluid, scholars such as Chvasta and Young have also started to explore the possibilities that humour and emotion offer social movements in publicising their cause.

Analysing Networked Affect

Although posts about the Women's March circulated across a range of different online spaces, we chose to focus our study on Facebook and Twitter because of these social media platforms' widespread popularity and because they are frequently used for political communication and activism (e.g. Enli and Skogerbø). The Women's March on Washington was initiated via Facebook by Hawaiian citizen Teresa Shook, and numerous groups and individuals subsequently participated in the organisation and promotion of this march and its many sister marches, through Facebook and other social media platforms. On January 22, Twitter announced that there had been 11.5 million #WomensMarch posts over the past 24 hours (Cohen). Ruest collected all #WomensMarch tweets sent between January 12 and 28, which included "14,478,518 unique tweet ids from 3,582,495 unique users."

Our study focuses on public Facebook and Twitter posts that used the #WomensMarch hashtag promoted by march organisers. Using the site tools, we identified our sample by conducting searches for public posts that were initially submitted on the 21st and the 22nd of January 2017, and by sorting this content so that the "top" posts were displayed first. Scrolling through the resulting streams of content, we saw photographs of crowds, of smaller groups of marchers, and of the signs protesters were carrying, many of which were humorous. Focusing on this latter category, we collected 200 posts from each platform and conducted a thematic analysis to identify key patterns in the data. We identified three recurring themes: The ridicule of Trump's body; the locating of the march within wider historical contexts; and a focus on women's bodies, including their "pussies." Within each theme, we selected one representative, popular image that had been shared widely. These three images provide the focal points for our discussion here.

We are, of course, unable to assess "the potential effects of one image . . . in isolation." Instead, we want to examine "networked affect" as "the affective relations among multiple, changing digital files and configurations" (Pedwell 19). We approach this "tangle of potential connections" (Stewart 4) by examining posts within the context of their platform's technological affordances and within the context of user responses articulated through "likes," emojis, "shares" and comments.

Networked Affect and the Public Sphere

Drawing on scholars such as Gitlin and Murdock, we begin by questioning the political efficacy of mediated protest, through the analysis of our first case study image:

This post was shared on the HuffPost Latino Voices Facebook page, which is a subsidiary platform of *The Huffington Post* that provides Hispanic-American perspectives on current events in the U.S. It includes a photograph that shows a protest sign featuring a presidential portrait of Donald Trump. Presidential portraits are meant to capture the "essence" of the leader of the free world, but here Trump's eyes have been blacked out. This dehumanises Trump, constructing him as a figure of evil more closely aligned with a horror film character than with "our" expectations for a U.S. president. The portrait is combined with the slogan "We Shall Overcomb," a pun that offers two levels of meaning. First, "overcomb" gestures to the term "comb-over," which describes a hairstyle used by balding men to conceal their hair loss. This pokes fun of Trump's hairstyle and inscribes him with a vain and ridiculous masculinity. The second level meaning of the pun has a more serious political tone. It is a play on the historically significant phrase "We Shall Overcome," which was used in Pete Seeger's song with the same title, and which later became the anthem of America's civil rights movement. Martin Luther King also used the phrase in his famous political speeches, and it became a rallying cry for the disenfranchised to rise up and work together to overcome prejudice and claim

their civil rights. The pun, with its historical reference point, connects the civil rights movement to a call for action against Trump's racist proposals, such as the travel ban and the building of a wall between the U.S. and Mexico. The sign, then, combines modalities of horror, parody and satire, suggesting that Trump is simultaneously terrifying and laughable. This affective incongruity operates as a form of relief humour that offers the user temporary respite from the pressures of the current political environment by inviting them to laugh at an abject figure of power. As Bakhtin writes: "[l]aughter demolishes fear and piety before an object, before a world, making of it an object of familiar contact and thus clearing the ground for an absolutely free investigation of it" (23). We now turn to this potential for investigation.

Dahlgren and Gould both suggest that emotional engagement cannot be overlooked as a powerful factor in motivating citizens to get involved in political life. Affective responses to the "overcomb" image are constrained by the affordances of Facebook, which recorded 1303 reactions to this specific post. These comprise 994 "likes," 159 amusement reactions, 149 "love" reactions and one that demonstrated shock/amazement. Some comments also indicated strong, positive affective responses to the sign's use of humour, such as "OMG I saw this [the sign] today, absolutely brilliant," and "Absolutely love the 'overcomb sign.'" The image was shared 107 times. The affective engagement suggested by these responses do not necessarily indicate active political participation. Instead, it might be limited to what Žižek identifies as passive demonstrations of communicative action. In Internet culture, this behaviour is referred to as "slacktivism"; a method of political participation that involves minimal personal effort, yet serves to increase the feel-good factor of participants (Morozov). Passive gestures of slacktivism, like "click-labour," can be a significant threat to conventional forms of political participation because they create the false illusion of meaningful engagement. Instead, expressing political feelings through passive actions, such as hitting the "like" button, align with the commercial goals of the Facebook brand (Hintz) because this free, affective labour drives further engagement with social media. As Dean suggests, Internet users get "captured" in the "loop" of "drive," in our "movement from link to link, the forwarding and storing and commenting, the contributing without expectation of response but in hope of further movement" ("Affect and Drive" 98). This "snare" is problematic for social movements because it pushes active engagement out of reach. We constantly need to know *more* before we take action: "[o]utraged, engaged, desperate to do *something*, we look for evidence, ask questions, and make demands, again contributing to the circuits of drive" (99).

Within this digital environment, communicative capitalism accelerates short-term loyalties to single-issue politics (Couldry) but undermines more time-consuming activities that are needed to create and sustain long-term political opportunities (Dean, "Technology").

The "overcomb" image also garnered a series of other comments on the HuffPost Latino Voices Facebook page, but none of these made reference to the depicted protest sign. Instead, a conversation ensued between pro-Trump and anti-Trump Facebook users that illustrated one of the many problems facing American democracy: The issue of partisanship and political animosity amongst citizens. Here, one user questioned why there was so much hatred aimed at Trump and the subsequent thread was rife with insults: The thread starter was described as "stupid." Trump was described as an "orange chupacabra" (chupacabras are legendary, blood-sucking creatures) and compared to Hitler. The HuffPost Latino Voice Facebook page was accused of "[l]ies, exaggerated ideas, self-segregation, and pure hatred towards anyone who opposes their view." And a commenter included an article from *Fox News* that included Madonna's speech about wanting to "blow up" the White House. The evolving network of emotive responses that erupted in this space demonstrates that the use of humour in digitally circulated images can encourage participation and amplification. However, it also indicates that such affective engagement does not necessarily enhance the political efficacy of humorous images.

The Internet has the capacity to offer a democratizing space, enabling faster modes of political mobilization and new forms of collectivity and communication between users. These traits liken the digital environment to Habermas' concept of the public sphere; a space of deliberative knowledge exchange where public opinion can be formed. However, a precondition of the public sphere is the practice of rational discussion to enable members to reach a reasonable consensus. For Habermas, subjectivity and emotional expression have no place in the public sphere because they contaminate deliberative decision-making processes. In this perspective, the series of emotive, partisan exchanges and name-calling that followed the "overcomb" post is destructive to the process of reasoning within the public sphere because participants were merely shouting into their respective political echo chambers and abstaining from deliberative dialogue. More recently, political communication scholars (e.g. Pariser; Jamieson and Capella) have argued that mediated filter bubbles and echo chambers cultivate restrictive partisan sentiments and are leading to the demise of deliberative compromise essential for the development of creating political change.

Nevertheless, partisan politics should not simply be dismissed. For example, Mutz suggests that emotive attachment to political ideas can bring like-minded communities together and encourage forms of affective political action. Similarly, in her work on the antagonistic public sphere, Mouffe argues that the combination of emotion and alternative political opinions can expand the possibilities of democracy and civic involvement. However, Mouffe and Dean ("Technology") tend to favour traditional platforms of civic involvement, like face-to-face gatherings, over the digital environment. This is because the latter is seen to nurture unproductive forms of communication that obstruct the political antagonism necessary for a democracy of vibrant political positions:

> the more opinions or comments that are out there, the less of an impact any given one might make (and the more shocking, spectacular, and new a contribution must be in order to register in order to have an impact). In sum, communication functions symptomatically to produce its own negation. (Dean, *Democracy and Other Neoliberal Fantasies* 26).

In this Facebook post, then, the message of inclusivity and community associated with the original "We Shall Overcome" slogan was replaced by a divisive tactic that encouraged negative deliberation in a period of intensified political partisanship: The pun's use of disparagement humour to shame Trump's body functions as a form of liberal antagonism that cements the division between left and right.

Shared Laughter, Shared Anger and Belonging

The second pattern we identified was the prevalence of signs that located the march within wider historical contexts. To examine this theme, we focus on a Twitter post that shared an image depicting three white women who are dressed up as suffragettes:

From the London #WomensMarch
#TheResistance

6:46 AM - 22 Jan 2017

1,771 Retweets 3,066 Likes

30   1.8K   3.1K

A street sign in the background locates them in London, and the women are wearing period costumes in the green and purple colour scheme associated with the suffragette movement. They have straw hats with ribbons and sashes with the text "VOTES FOR WOMEN," and they stand still, smiling, behind a placard that says "SAME SHIT. DIFFERENT CENTURY." The widespread resonance of these protesters and their sign is suggested by response patterns on social media. It was tweeted by a male, U.S. scientist with 72,3K followers, accompanied by the text "From the London #WomensMarch #TheResistance." His post was "liked" 3,066 times and retweeted 1,771 times. Another image, where the same women look straight into the camera, had been posted by the Bernie Sanders support organisation @people4bernie, which has 87,9K followers. This post had been "liked" by 2698 users and retweeted by 4741 users. @people4bernie had also shared this image on Facebook, where it got 114K likes and 78,257 shares. Different photographs of these protesters were posted by Twitter users with smaller numbers of followers, and some were published in media stories about the Women's March. We here want to examine the post shared by the U.S. scientist as an example of how humorous images from the #WomensMarch streams on Twitter and Facebook invite platform users to feel a sense of belonging to an imagined feminist community that is historical and international.

First, the ironic use of period costumes connects the 2017 protesters to the suffragettes of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century and invites feminist Twitter users to feel part of a long history of women's protest. However, this also constructs a comic incongruity based on the temporal clash between the original context of the suffragettes and the present-day context of these protesters. The incongruity is reinforced by the "suffragettes" apparent use of profanity and modern slang. The word "shit" constructs patriarchal oppression as abject, articulating anger at a lack of satisfactory change since the early twentieth century. This creates a second comic incongruity between Trump's regressive, patriarchal politics and contemporary expectations for women's rights, inviting us to feel outrage that *this can be happening to us now*. The protesters, then, are investing humour with a corrective function (Bergson), using it to identify a gap between Trump's behaviour and the behaviour "we" expect from a president, and to inscribe him with a laughable lack of human dignity (Kjus and Kaare).

Finally, the sign and the costumes employ gallows' humour to invite us to laugh at the horror of attacks on women's rights. Here, humour is an affective strategy for self-defence in a difficult situation (Freud). As Mellencamp (2003) argues, the pleasure of gallows humour helps contain negative affective responses to a situation that would otherwise be "too painful." So, the protesters have adopted a complex affective

strategy that offers a certain "comic insulation" (Palmer 45) as a barrier against overwhelming negative affects, such as despair, which can otherwise prevent critical engagement and action (Bore and Reid). This strategy creates a safer space for humorous engagement with a challenging issue (Neale and Krutnik). At the same time, the use of humour as a corrective, and the political context of the march ensure that this engagement is not confined to the realm of humour. Instead, the protesters invite "us" to join in the angry, defiant laughter of "unruly" women (Karlyn) who work to destabilise patriarchy.

The articulation of anger is contrasted by the women's facial expressions. They are smiling and appear to be posing for a photographer to the right of the person who took this image. It is a sunny day, and the protesters' cheerfulness constructs the encounter and the march as positive experiences, inviting us to feel good about the protest. The image, then, invites a range of affective responses: Anger and humorous defiance at patriarchal oppressors, alongside feelings of warmth towards the protesters and their supporters. This is an invitation to feel a sense of belonging, through the affective experience of shared laughter (Medhurst 20). However, this invitation also draws boundaries between "us" and "them." The #WomensMarch label constructs "us" as a community of feminist activists and other citizens who are concerned that the Trump administration's policies represent a threat to women, whereas "they" include Trump, his team and his supporters. The street sign and tweet text locate the protesters in London, which constructs "our" community as an international movement that unites feminists through shared causes, shared feelings and shared unruliness. This privileges gender identities over national identities, circulating affects across territorial contexts and suggesting that solidarity and collaboration increase the power and significance of this protest movement.

Such affects were mobilised and made explicit in different ways by different Twitter users. Tweets that added the hashtag #WomensMarch connected the suffragette image to other tweets about the event, reinforcing the sense of a feminist community. The hashtag #TheResistance also located the image, and the Women's March, within a community of anti-Trump activists. Other Twitter users articulated affective responses to the image, or to the event. This included expressions of anger and defiance, such as #ICantKeepQuiet and #HearMeRoar, as well as positive affects of support for the protesters, such as "I love it!" The protesters' use of humour, then, can facilitate productive tensions between anger and joy, inviting others to feel a pleasurable sense of belonging to wider protest movements, to feel angry, energised and unruly together, and to laugh defiantly at patriarchy together. The invitation is reinforced and extended beyond the time and place of the London march, as images of the "suffragettes" are circulated across social media platforms. Here, recorded "shares," "retweets," "likes," emojis and comments function as traces of a wider feeling community.

This mediated affect of belonging can be contrasted with comments that responded to the two most frequently shared images of the "suffragette" protesters. The male scientist's tweet received 31 comments. Although a few were positive, most comments were angry or dismissive, arguing that women have no need to protest now, or that (presumably Western) women should instead be protesting the treatment of women in Muslim countries. Here, Twitter's comment facility was used as a mechanism to delegitimise the women's marches and liberal or left-leaning activists more broadly.

The tweet by @people4bernie received 36 comments. Alongside angry, dismissive posts we here also found supportive comments, which is probably because the politics of the account's followers tend to be broadly aligned with the left-leaning politics of Bernie Sanders. However, some commenters underlined that the suffragette movement was associated with racism, suggesting that there could only be a connection between suffragettes and *white* protesters in the 2017 marches:

HAHAHAHAHAHAHHAHAHAHAHAHHAHAHHAA. REMEMBER WHEN SUFFRAGETTES WOULDN'T LET BLACK WOMEN MARCH WITH THEM BECAUSE RACISM???

This critique ridiculed the depicted protesters (and, by implication, @people4bernie) for their attempt to connect a diverse 2017 Women's March to a white, racist suffragette movement. It drew attention to white feminism and raced systems of oppression *within* the 2017 Women's March movement, and demonstrated that, although feelings of belonging can be reinforced by practices and interactions that suggest shared

identities and values, they can also be disrupted. Here, the disruption was caused by an apparent failure to recognise white privilege within "our" community.

Affective Intensity, Stickiness and "the Grab"

Considering the capacity of humorous online images to move us in new and salient ways also requires us to draw closer attention to the technological affordances of digital media. According to boyd, four affordances, in particular, shape many of the mediated environments that are created by social media. These are persistence (the durability of online expressions and content), visibility (the potential audience who can bear witness), searchability (the ability to find content) and spreadability (the ease with which content can be shared) (11). These material and technological affordance dictate not only how we get in contact with images from the women's march but also what we can do with them. Thus, they shape the affective reactions and interactions of the sensing, searching body "in front" of the screen. Online environments such as Twitter or Facebook remind us also that viewing images online implicates not only looking but also touching (the keyboard, the mouse, the screen) while being (emotionally or physically) touched (Graefer "Reading through the Skin"). Thus, when we aim to explore the affective power and political efficacy of online images from the women's march, we have to account for the specificities of online media where "users grab images and technologies by which they are grabbed in return" (Paasonen "Carnal Resonance" 178, see also Senft).

In order to unpack this further, we will focus on an image from the L.A. Women's March that was shared by the LGBTQ organisation PRIDE's Facebook page, under the text "Resist #womensmarchla #womensmarch:"

Here, a young woman holds up a bright pink sign that reads: "MEOW" and "PUSSY GRABS BACK." The young woman smiles solemnly and does not look into the camera, but somewhere far away in the crowd.

Her long, wavy, dark hair is visible under a bright pink pussy hat that matches the colour of the poster she holds over her head with outstretched arms. She is surrounded by a calmly protesting crowd, and, in the background, we see colourful posters and people with pussy hats and sunglasses. It might be easy to conclude that this photo was taken and widely shared online because the young lady is conventionally pretty. Even though she is holding up a sign that can be read as a warning (her pussy grabs back), she seems unthreatening and cheerful. The bright colours of the picture, but especially the pink that dominates, make the image easy identifiable as feminine, pleasurable and hip. Yet it could also be argued that it was the humorous slogan that motivated people to spread this image online. The humour of this particular poster references a recording in which Trump said he grabbed women he desired by their pussy. This recording could have ended Trump's run for the presidency, but it was largely dismissed as locker-room talk by white, middle-class women, as well as the wider public, and then quickly forgotten.

The protest sign uses humour to challenge the suppression of Trump's misogynistic statement, playing with the different meanings the term "pussy" can refer to A cat, female genitals or a derogatory term for women. Incongruity theories of humour suggest that people laugh at what is unexpected or out of place; something that does not seem to fit the patterns and expectations that we have in our minds (Bergson). Out of context, this slogan does not make sense. Neither a cat nor a vagina can grab back, so we have to leave this pattern of association and link the term to women. This sudden change is what evokes, according to incongruity theory, a comical effect (Kant). On a second level, we can argue that the poster invokes laughter because it transgresses gendered norms by inverting the patriarchal binary in Western ideology that associates women with passivity and men with activity. The sign states in big letters that this pussy (equals women) grabs back: Women will no longer be silenced and manhandled (symbolically and physically). They will take action and grab back, fighting sexism and fighting a sexist president.

The intended audiences of fellow protesters and the wider public are assumed to be informed about Trump's scandal and therefore "in on the joke." The high number of likes (over 2000) and of laughing and loving emojis (538) illustrates how people form online politicised bonds that coalesce around in-jokes. As we discussed above, it could be argued that it is exactly such commenting, reacting and sharing that entraps us within the circuits of neoliberal communicative capitalism–a process that continuously replaces political action with political feeling, forever turning activity into passivity (Dean, "Communicative Capitalism"). Yet these numbers also show that there is something about this images that *sticks out* of the constant stream of online content on Facebook feeds; something that arrests our attention (if only for a moment), provides us with a pleasurable affective jolt and motivates us to engage with it by clicking the "like" button, sharing the image or commenting on it. We suggest that humour can play a crucial role in making online content "sticky," which means "content that attracts audience attention and engagement" (Jenkins *et al.* 4). Humour can make online content "stick out" because it requires our attention to decode it and because it holds the promise of a pleasurable affective jolt. The reward for our attention work of decoding is felt in the body (when we smile) and might motivate us to interact. Thus, humour works here like a lubricant for online social interaction: The funnier we find an image to be, the stronger we might be affected by it, and so impelled to act. However, this is clearly not an automated and inevitable result, because humour is slippery. It is often difficult to discern what makes humour succeed or fail in a particular situation and to predict what affective reactions a humorous image will engender. And yet, humorous online content seems to *grab us* better or stick out better than most other content because of the intensities it affords (Paasonen, "A Midsummer's Bonfire").

And this affective intensity, so we argue, becomes further amplified, through online interaction which is afforded by social networking sites such as Facebook. In other words, humorous images, such as the "pussy grabs back" image, amplify their stickiness and affective intensity through user engagement and participation. The higher the interaction, the higher the affective layering of a particular online image and, in turn, its capacity to "grab us" (Graefer, "The Work of Humour in Affective Capitalism"). This can be explained through Ahmed's concept of "affective economies." Here, Ahmed draws on Marx's theory of capital to develop a framework that illustrates the way in which affect "travels" and accumulates value through circulation. She writes:

> Affect does not reside in an object or sign, but is an effect of the circulation between objects and signs (= the accumulation of affective value). Signs increase in affective value as an effect of the movement between signs: the more signs circulate, the more affective they become. (Ahmed, "The Cultural Politics of Emotion" 45)

Even though Ahmed does not refer here directly to digital media, scholars such as Tyler have illustrated how Ahmed's theorisations of "affective economies" translate into online environments. In the context of a humorous image on Facebook, we could then say that a funny image accrues affective value when many users interact with it and touch it virtually through their commenting and re-posting. Hence, it could be argued that such digital resonances and interactions between the image, digital platforms and users, work to amplify and intensify affective laughter that highlights the political inadequacy and sexism of President Trump.

Even though this image received high numbers of likes and shares, its particular use of humour was not always received with enthusiasm by Facebook posters. One post asked for more seriousness in the protest:

> I am all for the protests and the freedoms we have to speak against the clown now in office. However, when I was participating in the protests . . . I was never fond of this saying . . . I find it to be nonsensical and not really something that makes sense.

Examples like this signal contention between those who use humour as a viable mode of feminist critique and those who perceive serious, rational, critical dialogue (e.g. Habermas; Christiano) as the best avenue for changing the terms of electoral debate around women's issues. Similar concerns about a lack of feminist seriousness and nuance were echoed across other comments below the image:

> Omfg enough of the cissexism!!!!! Vagina≠woman
> And you accomplished what???
> As long as we realize that Democrats elected Trump by nominating Clinton........ March on

Whereas some critics call out feminists for being killjoys, for being too serious and "spoiling the happiness of others" (Ahmed, "Promise of Happiness" 581), those quoted above criticise feminists for the opposite reason: For having too much fun, for being "silly," and for erasing trans people by using "pussy hats" to symbolise "women." Our premise is that humour, as communicated through these images, is affective and, as such, drives online exchanges and attaches people to particular platforms, threads or groups. A direct, tangible and measurable "effect" of activism might not be easy to locate, yet it would be wrong to ignore results like the production of feeling, which, we argue, is necessary for social change.

Conclusion

Through an analysis of humorous protest images from the women's march, this article has argued that interaction with these online images reveals a collective affect that is both political and fun. Far from locating these online images as causing direct and immediate political change, we have problematised the significance of humorous #WomensMarch posts as a form of participation in political debate. By reflecting on the possibility that repetitive click labour might prevent active political participation, and that the use of disparagement humour can encourage divisive slanging matches, rather than productive exchanges of ideas, we highlighted the limitations of such online practices. And yet, we have also considered how the circulation of these images across social media platforms can facilitate productive tensions between anger and joy. The practice can invite other social media users to feel an enjoyable sense of belonging to wider protest movements, to feel energised, angry and disruptive together, and to participate in shared, defiant laughter. Here, recorded "shares," "retweets," "likes," emojis and comments function not only as traces of a wider feeling community (with unknown, ever-changing contours) but they also contribute to a layering of affect that makes these online images "sticky" with various feelings and emotions which in turn might help to animate the movement beyond the actual march.

We maintain that the study of humour offers a useful way into thinking about digitally mediated protest because it demonstrates that meaning is not only communicated through visual and verbal content but also through the affective and sensuous experiences we have through our interaction with online representations. This is because *sensing* and *making sense* always go hand in hand (Kavka 2008). Social media engagement with humorous #WomensMarch images and their political messages demonstrate the significance of networked communicative action for feminist and anti-Trump movement building and is an affective experience that can generate a quotidian citizenship that is resistant and unruly. Energised by funny and biting political commentary, these online protest images provided a technological, cultural and affective network that enabled participants to connect with feminism and other political issues, and, importantly, to experience them *together*, across their differences, in shared online spaces of consciousness raising. We argue, then, that the key value of humorous images like the #WomensMarch posts is not their contribution to political debate and deliberative exchange of knowledge. Instead, it is the possibility that they can help sustain activists' energy (Stein 2017) by reminding them that they are part of wider communities of feminist feeling, and by helping them overcome despair through defiant, unruly laughter.

Copyright: All images are cited objectively for the purpose of scholarly criticism and fully referenced. All images from the march are readily available in various places on the Internet and believed to be in public domain. Images posted are believed to be posted within our rights of fair dealing according to the UK Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988 (c. 48, Section 30 and Section 32). We have secured consent from two of the contributors to reproduce their social media posts here. We did not succeed in getting a response to our third enquiry, which was to the HuffPost Latino Voices Facebook page. However, because this page represents a major media organisation, rather than an individual, we have still chosen to include it. None of the three posts displays the comments, user handles or profile pictures of other social media users.

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