# Public Spheres of Resonance

To understand the profound changes in the modes of public political debate over the past decade, this volume develops a new conception of public spheres as spaces of resonance emerging from the power of language to affect and to ascribe and instill collective emotion.

Political discourse is no longer confined to traditional media, but increasingly takes place in fragmented and digital public spheres. At the same time, the modes of political engagement have changed: discourse is said to increasingly rely on strategies of emotionalization and to be deeply affective at its core. This book meticulously shows how public spheres are rooted in the emotional, bodily, and affective dimensions of language, and how language – in its capacity to affect and to be affected – produces those dynamics of affective resonance that characterize contemporary forms of political debate. It brings together scholars from the humanities and social sciences and focuses on two fields of inquiry: publics, politics, and media in Part I, and language and artistic inquiry in Part II. The thirteen chapters provide a balanced composition of theoretical and methodological considerations, focusing on highly illustrative case studies and on different artistic practices.

The volume is an indispensable source for researchers and postgraduate students in cultural studies, literary studies, sociology, and political science. It likewise appeals to practitioners seeking to develop an in-depth understanding of affect in contemporary political debate.

**Anne Fleig** is professor of Modern German Literature at Freie Universität Berlin.

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## Routledge Studies in Affective Societies

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*Routledge Studies in Affective Societies* presents high-level academic work on the social dimensions of human affectivity. It aims to shape, consolidate, and promote a new understanding of societies as Affective Societies, accounting for the fundamental importance of affect and emotion for human coexistence in the mobile and networked worlds of the 21st century. Contributions come from a wide range of academic fields, including anthropology; sociology; cultural, media, and film studies; political science; performance studies; art history; philosophy; and social, developmental, and cultural psychology. Contributing authors share the vision of a transdisciplinary understanding of the affective dynamics of human sociality. Thus, *Routledge Studies in Affective Societies* devotes considerable space to the development of methodology, research methods, and techniques that are capable of uniting perspectives and practices from different fields.

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# Public Spheres of Resonance

## Constellations of Affect and Language

Edited by
Anne Fleig and
Christian von Scheve

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Chapter 1

# Introduction

## Public spheres of resonance – constellations of affect and language

*Anne Fleig and Christian von Scheve*

The second decade of the 21st century has brought substantial transformations of the public sphere that are closely linked to broader and enduring processes of social and cultural change. Globalization has not only fostered the spatial and transnational mobility of goods and human beings, but also of less tangible things such as capital, communications, commerce, languages, cultural repertoires, and social practices. Transnational migration certainly is among the most profound changes witnessed in contemporary societies. Often propelled by causes such as armed conflict, flight and expulsion, poverty and deprivation, it reacts to global economic inequality and contributes to cultural diversity, both of which pose challenges to receiving societies and host countries alike. The financial crisis since 2007 and the European debt crisis since 2008 have had repercussions on a global scale, posing almost unprecedented economic and financial challenges to many countries and acting as amplifiers of the manifold other challenges societies are facing. Digitalization has changed profoundly how people work and communicate with each other, how commerce and finance are carried out, and how basic social institutions operate. Digitalization is often seen as a catalyzing agent for the many other transformations that are taking place at an accelerated pace.

All of these developments are driving social and political change on a significant scale. The rise of populist parties, not only in Europe, but also in the United States and many other countries, is but one particularly noteworthy development, as are mounting contestations of the idea of liberal, open, and democratic societies. Lively political debate and public controversies are raging over questions of how societies are supposed to cope with transnational migration, how global financial capitalism and rising inequalities can be kept in place, how climate change can be stalled in favor of sustainable societies and practices, and how the many distinct cultural identities and lifeforms can be preserved and recognized.

These controversies could simply point at the well-established workings of a political culture that emphasizes open debate, public deliberation, and the exchange of arguments. However, what is really striking in view of these

controversies is that it is not just the broad range of critical and pressing issues that are being addressed at the same time, but that the style of the debate is in itself changing and becoming a matter of discussion. This holds especially true for language as a matter of speech itself (e.g., Butler, 1997) and for the affective dynamics in political mobilization amplified through social media. The public sphere – in the singular, pertaining to all communications and exchange that are publicly accessible – continues to be the most important space where these changes and developments and their implications for social coexistence, belonging, and solidarity are debated and negotiated by various actors. Traditional views have portrayed the public sphere as a locus of communicative rationality, deliberation, and the exchange of different arguments. Importantly, language in this view is primarily understood as a medium but not – as we and the contributors to this volume argue – as a key to create affective publics with voices, words, or images resonating with each other, building a public space in itself.

In doing so, this volume builds on and further extends scholarship that has criticized understandings of the public sphere as a primarily normative concept, instead advocating a perspective that is more strongly rooted in descriptions of empirical reality (e.g., Papacharissi, 2015). Politics and political debate are increasingly characterized by processes of group polarization, that is, the essentializing and uncompromising antagonization of interest and identity groups, but also by the ambivalence of affective movements and uprisings (Ayata & Harders, 2018; Gould, 2009). In conjunction with this, a new style of "post-truth" or "post-factual" (populist) politics has emerged that is less bound by facts, evidence, and science-backed policy insights, but rather relies on intuitions, gut feelings, and simplistic views of complex challenges for purposes of political persuasion (Hendricks & Vestergaard, 2018). Along with this, the discursive arenas and media of these controversies have changed profoundly through processes of digitalization and, most importantly, the advent of new social and networked media in which mostly uncurated many-to-many communications have substituted the one-to-many communications, agenda settings, and gatekeeping of traditional journalism. But also traditional news outlets have been accused of riding this train, allegedly relying more on features and advocacy journalism than on straight news.

A common and widely discussed feature of these developments is that they are supposed to employ various strategies of emotionalization and are said to be deeply affective at their core. Furthermore, many political commentators and academics lament that this emotionalization and affectivity is not yet properly understood and that this gap prevents societies from addressing issues of polarization, populism, and illiberalism. The present volume addresses these issues and concerns in a twofold manner: On the one hand, it acknowledges the demand that affect and emotion need to be better understood, in these debates and elsewhere. On the other hand, it firmly rejects the view that affect and emotion are in any way novel or recent

additions to political debate and public discourse. Instead, the contributions assembled in this volume share a view that *affect* is fundamental to human social coexistence and that no discourse or debate can be conceived of as "affect free". Admittedly, we concede that there is, at present, a heightened attention toward the affective and the emotional and that they recently have become more reflexive and attracted increasing attention in social and political life very generally (Illouz, 2007). Also, specific publics and forms of public articulation and protest are especially geared toward affect and the incitement of emotions. But the public sphere – and its contemporary multiplicities – are, and have always been, spaces of affect and emotion as much as spaces of rational deliberation.

Importantly, conceptions of the public sphere as arenas of calm communicative deliberation are not solely due to corresponding characterizations on the side of theorists of the public sphere (e.g., Fraser, 1991; Habermas, 1989; for a general overview see Ferree, Gamson, Gerhards, & Rucht, 2002), but also on the side of theorists of affect. On the side of theories of the public sphere, the scientific debate for a long time centered on questions concerning the structure and function of the public sphere and its role for deliberative democracy as bound by a national polity. Taking Habermas's (1989) historical account and normative theory of the public sphere as the main reference point, scholars have extensively quarreled with issues concerning its (implicitly) Western conception; its tendency to exclude women, minorities, and non-citizens; its functionalist core in terms of supporting the demos; its territorial and national or even nationalistic bias; and its assumption of the unity of a public sphere (Fraser, 2007, pp. 9–10). Fraser (2007) has summarized these strands of critique as pertaining either to assumptions of the legitimacy of public political opinion or to its efficaciousness in terms of ultimately being translated into legislative action. But this critique usually also articulates a further concern, one that has often stayed implicit. This is the assumption that Habermas's model of the public sphere rests on acts of "communicative action", action that is rational insofar as it strives for understanding and, ultimately, consensus. This assumption has forcefully been questioned by scholars of radical democracy, such as Laclau (2005) and Mouffe (2018), who echo Fraser's notion of counterpublics as arenas of marginalized voices who are not only marginalized in terms of social and economic inequality, but also because of their "aesthetic-affective modes of discourse" (Dahlberg, 2005, p. 111).

These modes of discourse are thought to be related to everyday communications and to include "rhetoric, myth, metaphor, poetry, theatre, and ceremony", as Dahlberg (2005) notes. Critics of Habermas's account of the public sphere contend that these modes of discourse stand in opposition to his model of communicative rationality and that they are, among other things, the reasons why specific groups are excluded from political discourse in the public sphere. Young, for example, argues that non-Western and female subjects are excluded because they, more so than Western and

male subjects, rely on aesthetic-affective modes of communication (Young, 1996, p. 124; see also Dahlberg, 2005; Warner, 1991). This is of course an important aspect of criticizing a specific normative conception of the public sphere. First, this relates to the argument of exclusion, and, second, to aesthetic-affective modes of discourse that are just as important to understanding and achieving consensus as is communicative rationality (Brader, Marcus, & Miller, 2011).

We contend, however, that this critique is misguided in two important ways. First, it hardly acknowledges the genealogical character and historical bounds of Habermas's argument situated in 18th-century Europe, which is at least as pronounced as the normative thrust of his argument. In this sense, we also need to acknowledge the ambiguity of Habermas's concept of the public sphere (von Mücke, 2015, p. XXII): The term "sphere" refers to a physical and virtual space and an institutional setting alike, experienced by writers, readers, speakers, and audiences in public places, for example, salons, taverns, and coffee houses. Habermas in his own writings emphasizes the affectivity of socially and spatially situated dialogue, conversation, and debate.

The critique is misguided, second, in that the very opposition of thought, deliberation, and rationality, on the one hand, and affect and emotion, on the other hand, are fundamentally at odds with decades of research on how thought, decision-making, deliberation, affect, and emotion are constitutively linked (e.g., Tappolet, 2016). Any form of discursive exchange therefore bears both deliberative and affective aspects, although certain performative and communicative styles will emphasize one over the other, as has been shown for populism (Moffitt, 2016). As Young puts it:

> There is no place in his [Habermas's] conception of linguistic interaction for the feeling that accompanies and motivates all utterances. In actual situations of discussion, tone of voice, facial expression, gesture, the use of irony, understatement or hyperbole, all serve to carry with the propositional message of the utterance another level of expression relating the participants in terms of attraction or withdrawal, confrontation or affirmation. Speakers not only say what they mean, but they say it excitedly, angrily, in a hurt or offended fashion and so on, and such emotional qualities of communication contexts should not be thought of as non- or prelinguistic.
>
> (Young, 1987, p. 72f.)

The present volume therefore extends existing criticisms of conceptions of the public sphere as a domain of deliberation and communicative rationality. First, it specifically seeks to address the affective modes of discourse and how they are deeply inscribed into language-based communications. "Affective modes" generally refer to those modes of discourse characterized

by bodily, emotional, material, sensory, and enactive aspects of exchange and communication instead of focusing on issues of thought and deliberation. Second, it aims to understand the affective dynamics of speech and writing as a complex framework of bodily practices, linguistic norms and rules, different types of texts, and their respective audiences. In doing so, the volume seeks to bring together two strands of research that have hitherto remained – by and large – unconnected: accounts of the public sphere that emphasize the importance of affect and emotion for public political deliberation and works in cultural studies (and parts of the social sciences) that have developed sophisticated theories of affect (see, for related efforts, Dahlgren, 2018; Papacharissi, 2015).

Part of the challenge in bringing together these lines of inquiry lies in the fact that affect, at least in the cultural studies heritage of the concept, has traditionally been portrayed as a prelinguistic, non-discursive dimension of the social, in itself being "asocial" but not presocial (Massumi, 1995, p. 91). Evidently, part of the very idea of the "affective turn" (Clough & Halley, 2007) and the "material turn" (Latour, 2005) was to understand the social and the cultural *not* primarily through language and discourse. Instead, scholars were increasingly intrigued by the idea of bodily and material forces and intensities shaping our world. The pioneering scholarship in this tradition drew strongly on insights from psychology and the neurosciences that had discovered the "primacy of affect" (Zajonc, 1982) and the importance of preconscious bodily processes for thought, feeling, and behavior. But this, as many critics have argued (Hemmings, 2005; Leys, 2011; Wetherell, 2012) and recent work in the Collaborative Research Center (CRC) *Affective Societies* at Freie Universität Berlin has shown (e.g., Kahl 2019; von Scheve, 2017; Slaby & von Scheve, 2019), came at a price.

Although a fruitful and welcome correction of existing bias toward an overreliance on linguistic categories in the humanities and social sciences, the two turns sometimes overstepped the mark in their rather bold disregard for language as a social phenomenon. Since then, a range of more reconciliatory approaches has gained foothold. These approaches propose perspectives on affect that are not in stark opposition to language and discourse, but rather emphasize how they are mutually constitutive (Ahern, 2018; Butler, 2015; Riley, 2005). This includes, among other things, writing and literary language, where recent developments in affect theory have suggested a variety of ways in which language and affect become tightly intertwined, producing resonances between text, body, and world (Fleig, 2019; Gibbs, 2015; Richardson, 2016).

For one, the pragmatics of language in as much as they involve context, conversation, bodily interaction, and speech acts, are an inherently bodily endeavor and the intensities and potentialities for action to which the concept of affect refers, become most evident looking at language in use, be it in speaking or writing, from casual conversation to literary texts. Second,

language itself has the power to affect beyond knowledge, representation, and semantics. Engaging the world through signs and language is a highly specific way of engagement that differs notably from engagement through the senses. From a structuralist viewpoint, language as a medium of engagement with the world impinges and channels how one is affected by the world, irrespective of, though not independently from, its semantics. Third, language and discourse are integral to action, as is evident in speech acts or social practices, and action always bears a bodily and thus affective dimension. Language and discourse therefore contribute to the formation of bodies and their potential to affect and to be affected in socially meaningful ways. Fourth, language, like affect, has to be understood as genuinely relational in its capacity to convey meaning and to produce structures of feelings with regard to social categories, such as race, class, and gender. Meaning in this sense is also not restricted to propositions and denotations, but crucially involves connotative, associative, and bodily sources. Finally, the public sphere, albeit in many accounts leaning heavily on text and language, is also made up of a universe of images, symbols, and objects with the capability to affect beyond deliberative and representational logics. New media and online social networks consist of large amounts of audiovisual material, much of which becomes part of political debate.

The present volume therefore aims at bringing together these two lines of hitherto disparate scholarship to advance our understanding of public spheres from a perspective that emphasizes the emotional, bodily, and affective dimensions of language in public political debate. In this sense, the volume joins critics of exclusively normative views of the public sphere and proposes to conceive of contemporary public spheres as often fragmented spaces of affective resonance that emerge from the power of language to affect and to ascribe and instill collective emotions. The book's title *Public Spheres of Resonance* departs from the basic assumption that language in its capacity to affect and to be affected, through different speech acts or even single words, establishes dynamics of affective resonance, in both consonant and dissonant ways. Resonance as an analytical concept originates in the physics of mechanic or acoustic vibration and oscillation and has recently been adopted, often in a somewhat metaphorical sense, in cultural studies and the social sciences. Rosa (2019), for example, proposes a concept of resonance in the tradition of critical theory that refers to an emancipatory world relatedness as opposed to an "alienated" way of being in the world. Erlmann (2010) has examined the role that resonance and aurality play in modern conceptions of rationality, and Paasonen (2011) uses the concept of resonance to portray the affective qualities of online pornography (see also Paasonen, this volume).

Given that the research on affective resonance is still in its infancy, it is important to us that resonance does not necessarily imply a normative notion of belonging or sameness. Here, we rather use the concept to refer to a

specific kind of relational dynamics of affecting and being affected that also includes, for example, non-belonging and dissonance. Closely linked to the concept of affect, our understanding of resonance emphasizes the "reciprocal modulation" (Mühlhoff, 2019, p. 189) of intensities of affect between different kinds and types of actors. Resonance is thus a genuinely relational and processual phenomenon of "coupling" or "entrainment" rather than a phenomenon of state or unilateral transmission (see Mühlhoff, 2019, for a detailed exposition). In line with this understanding, affective resonance is conceived of not only as interrelating a number of human and/or non-human actors, but bears a significant *formative* potential. Being affectively entrained and coupled in resonant ways potentially changes and transforms actors' very modes of being and existence. In other words, affectively resonant couplings and relations hardly leave the actors' involved unchanged. They are thus not conceptualized as fixed entities, but as mutually affecting and thus forming and (re-)configuring each other.

Although Mühlhoff (2019) applies the concept primarily to face-to-face encounters and small groups, he does not rule out that resonance can occur in larger-scale networks, media spaces, or online interactions. This conjecture is particularly relevant for understandings of public spheres as spheres of affect, in which the concept of resonance is of twofold interest. On the one hand, public spheres can be conceived of as spaces that enable or facilitate, and at times also prevent, the emergence of resonance among actors. In this sense, public spheres form the backbones or infrastructures of public communication and interaction, both of which are preconditions for resonance to occur. On the other hand, the very fabric and makeup of public spheres is directly implicated in the emergence of resonance in that particular publics, for example, on social media or in public places, are more or less conducive to establishing affective resonance. Moreover, public spheres can in themselves be elements of resonant couplings, not merely facilitating resonance but being fundamental parts of resonant relations. Importantly, given our understanding of resonance, this implies that different (types of) public spheres that are elements of resonant relations, or facilitate/prevent resonance, have a substantial formative potential for social and communal life. As already suggested by Habermas (1989), public spheres are not just arenas in which social life is represented or negotiated, but they are arenas that constitute social life.

The chapters assembled in this volume thus capitalize on the role of language in establishing or preventing resonance in a broad range of public spaces – mediatized, material, digital as well as analog – that form a multitude of distinct and often overlapping and mutually constitutive public spheres: transient spheres during protests or gatherings; the episodic public spheres of theater and various performing arts; channels, rooms, and groups on social media networks; broadcast and journalistic media; literature and literary spaces; websites and Internet blogs.

The book brings together authors from broad disciplinary backgrounds in the humanities and the social sciences who investigate affect and affective resonance not only with regard to spoken language, but in view of different types of texts as the constituencies of different public spheres and counterpublics in which the terms and conditions of social coexistence are reflected and negotiated, for instance, politics, media, and the arts. In doing so, the chapters focus on issues of belonging, the recognition and accommodation of difference, equality, and participation and explore how affect interferes with, undermines, or fortifies established and esteemed rules of political engagement.

The volume thus makes a threefold contribution to the existing literature. First, it extends and further develops traditional conceptions of public spheres in that it emphasizes the non-deliberative and non-argumentative dimension of public debate. It acknowledges the emergence of multiple public and counterpublic spheres not only in traditional spaces and media of debate, but also in digital spaces and networked media. Second, it brings together scholarship on affect and emotion that has often been confined to the humanities and the social sciences, respectively. For example, emotions have been an essential part of studies on social movements in the social sciences, whereas affect has been a fundamental part of aesthetics, literature, and media studies, with only little cross-fertilization happening between those approaches, although the conceptual overlap is obvious. Third, the volume advances affect theories to more comprehensively account for the role of language and discourse. The contributions to this volume refrain from portraying affect as diametrically opposed to language, but instead argue that discourse, practice, performativity, and affect form a tightly connected field of mutual influence.

## Structure of the volume

The contributions are the outcomes of the Second International Conference of the CRC *Affective Societies*, held at Freie Universität Berlin in April 2017. The chapters therefore not only present an innovative body of research from different disciplines, but also reflect upon and extend the lively and fruitful discussions at the conference. Continuing the conference's overall narrative, we have organized the chapters in this volume into two main parts, each of which is opened by a brief editorial introduction. Preceding these two parts, we have invited renowned artist Kathrin Röggla to reflect on issues of affect and language in public spheres from a genuinely artistic point of view. Kathrin Röggla is the author and director of numerous theater and radio plays, performance events, of prose and political commentary, having received a number of prestigious awards for her work. Since 2015, she is vice president of the Academy of Arts, Berlin. Her opening chapter for this volume, *It's the language, stupid!* – the English translation of her conference's opening

lecture – begins with reflections on affect in democratic political debate. Using the case of the court trial against the "National Socialist Underground", a German neo-Nazi terrorist group exposed in 2011, she illustrates the unexpected affective charging of formally strict legal language. Passing through different examples, Röggla argues that the effects of language in the age of populism become more and more visible as the established norms and conventions of public debate and articulation tend to dissipate. Finally, she reminds us that, after all, it is still language that profoundly defines us and that we should thus have a keen eye on it.

### *Part I: Publics, politics, and media*

The chapters in Part I of the book, "Publics, politics, media", then address foundational issues in conceiving of publics and counterpublics as genuinely affective publics. In her chapter *Affective publics: understanding the dynamic formation of public articulations beyond the public sphere*, Margreth Lünenborg argues for an inclusion of affect and emotion into an appropriate understanding of today's conflictual, dynamic, and often antagonistic constellations of publics as "affective publics". Critiquing understandings of the public sphere that stand in a Habermasian tradition, she discusses the limits of an exclusively rational concept of public discourse. In particular, Lünenborg argues for an understanding of public spheres that emphasizes digital, networked forms of mediated communication that no longer privilege established institutions, such as journalism, to frame relevant issues of political debate, but rather empower a broad range of actors to articulate their interests. In her view, these performative publics emerge along specific temporal dynamics and attract attention or lose relevance over short periods of time. This fluid and almost ephemeral character of emerging publics challenges traditional concepts of public discourse and their established hierarchies. Instead, their affective dynamics are characterized by antagonistic powers. On the one hand, they reflect emancipatory articulations, as is evident, for example, in feminist hashtag activism. On the other hand, they also characterize and propel anti-liberal and antidemocratic discourse, as is evident in contemporary right-wing populism.

The following chapter continues this line of argument, even further capitalizing on digital publics. In doing so, Susanna Paasonen introduces the concept of *Resonant networks*, the title of her chapter, as a constitutive element of public spheres. Resonance echoes connotations of richness and significance, of strong emotions, and of systems mutually oscillating at self-sustaining frequencies. Importantly, for Paasonen, resonance first and foremost refers to instances of affecting and being affected: to connectivity and contact between objects, ideas, and people as they impinge on one another. As a dynamic relation of varying intensities and speeds where the affective and the emotional stick and cohere, resonance in her view gives

shape to online connections and disconnections, proximities and distances between both human and non-human bodies. In her chapter, Paasonen explores the affordances of the notion of resonance in analyzing the networked circulation of data and the affective intensities it entails. More specifically, her contribution deploys resonance in unpacking the notions of virality and memes in ways that both detach them from biological premises and make it possible to account for their power to affect the people engaging with them.

In the third chapter of this first part of the volume, *A sentimental contract: ambivalences of affective politics and publics*, Brigitte Bargetz develops the figure of the sentimental contract in order to identify crucial affective moments of politics and publics and their powerful repercussions. She starts from the assumption that modern Western thought has largely excluded affect and emotions from politics and publics and sought to delegitimize emotions and those characterized as emotional. In response, feminist, queer, and postcolonial scholarship has critically engaged with these attributions, exclusions, and delegitimizations and unfolded both the significance and power of affect and emotion. This scholarship, she argues, has shown how Western modern dichotomies such as rationality/emotionality, public/private, culture/nature, and mind/body have contributed to create a hierarchical order and to mobilize and fortify the patriarchal Western capitalist state. Following this critique and in reference to Lauren Berlant's work on national sentimentality, Bargetz aims at showing that and how the figure of the sentimental contract alludes to an ambivalent affective politics in terms of belonging, solidarity, and political promises and how it may help analyzing and criticizing contemporary reconfigurations of affective politics and publics.

Britta Timm Knudsen in her chapter *Rhythm, gestures, and tones in public performances: political mobilization and affective communication* takes up the lead on affect and political power, drawing on the case of 18-year-old Emma Gonzalez, a survivor of the Parkland school shooting in Florida, USA, that caused the deaths of 17 students and staff members and the injury of 15 persons on February 14, 2018. Analyzing two of Emma González' speeches, she investigates how González' particularly endangered body transformed into the political leadership of the anti-gun movement *March for Our Lives*. In doing so, her chapter focuses on the symbolic breakdown and affective outbursts out of language that are capable of "electrifying" and attuning audiences politically. Looking at a largely forgotten archive of affect – the works of linguist and psychoanalyst Julia Kristeva – the chapter aims at contributing to a methodological toolbox capable of reading affect in language. Investigating rhythm, tone, and gestures in language, Timm Knudsen shows that it is possible to detect paraverbal, nonverbal, and performative elements in language below the level of the sign and to thus contribute to a better understanding of political mobilization.

This focus on how public forms of language and affect can be investigated methodologically is taken up by Christian von Scheve and Robert Walter-Jochum in their chapter *Affective dynamics of public discourse on religious recognition in secular societies.* Their chapter focuses on public debates about the status and recognition of religious minorities in contemporary Western societies. These debates frequently evoke the notion of "religious feelings", although it is hardly ever clear what these feelings are and who actually experiences them. Drawing on analyses of selected debates in German public discourse, the chapter proposes a theoretical and methodological approach to understand invocations of religious feelings primarily as elements of the affective dynamics of public discourse on religious recognition in secular societies. The chapter draws on the links between language, recognition, and affect and on existing studies on religious feelings and injury to suggest four analytical perspectives on understanding the affective dynamics of public discourse: First, the use of emotion words and concepts in language, second, the recourse to religious feelings as a novel kind of discourse operating beyond the established political language, third, varieties of hate speech, and fourth, the phenomenal experience of feelings and emotions.

### *Part II: Language and artistic practice*

Part II of the volume, "Language and Artistic Practice", then focuses on those publics that are generated and maintained by different artistic practices like literary writing, performances, music, or theater plays. To characterize and better understand the performative quality of language, Anna Gibbs in her chapter *Put a spell on you: poetry, politics, and affective resonance in the age of the algorithm* highlights the mode of sound and spell in political songs like Laurie Anderson's *Empty Places* performances of 1989/1990 that consist of catchy hooks and rhythms trying to seduce rather than to persuade. Gibbs argues that a refrain or ritornello attunes to an affective state, resonates with it and amplifies it, renders it contagious, and reperforms it until it becomes habit. But not only political or literary language works in the mode of the spell: This chapter demonstrates that all language is rather about action than about truth. Here, the work of language in the U.S. election of 2016, where Donald Trump campaigned on rhetoric rather than record, represents an extreme, but not an exception. Her chapter examines the affective powers of language as it interfaces with human and the non-human agencies of viral media, the algorithm, and the image.

The following chapter traces changing publics with regard to the German tradition of "Sprechtheater", a term which cannot be easily translated into English. It means "speech theater" or "spoken theater" and serves as a kind of umbrella term for different types of dramatic theater, as they are distinguishable from opera, musical, and dance. Historically, though, the concept is closely connected to the development of a "national theater" in Germany

in the 18th century. In their chapter *German 'Sprechtheater' and the transformation of theatrical public spheres*, Friederike Oberkrome, Hans Roth, and Matthias Warstat show how the affectively highly charged concept of the "national theater" was related to language and speech. This special relationship was first challenged no sooner than in the second half of the 19th century with Richard Wagner's nationalistic vision of a theatrical "Gesamtkunstwerk". Although from then on many projects of the historical avant-garde have constantly attacked the idea of a "Sprechtheater", they argue that the concept has been preserved in Germany until far into the 20th century, particularly in rather bourgeois, identity-oriented theater discourses. Against this backdrop, the chapter discusses which conflicts but also new spaces of experience the traditional relationship of theater and language can create nowadays in the context of theater and migration. It focuses on recent changes and diversifications of the theatrical public sphere, in which, for instance, the experience of multilinguality takes center stage and draws on the audience's various relationships to the connection of language, identity, and memory.

The search for a vocabulary of political feelings lies at the heart of Ann Cvetkovich's chapter *The Alphabet of Feeling Bad: environmental installation arts and sensory publics.* Based on her collaboration with Berlin-based artist Karin Michalski on the video/installation *The Alphabet of Feeling Bad* (2012), Cvetkovich asks for a vocabulary of affect providing a place of language and affect in the public sphere. Their video/installation develops an abecedary of political feelings and has been exhibited in Berlin, Karlsruhe (Badischer Kunstverein), and Sweden (Umea and Goteborg), as well as being distributed in print and audio media. The project aims to create affective and sensory, rather than rational publics, by making space within the public sphere for a range of feelings, including negative ones, often confined to private and intimate experience. While questioning these oppositions, the chapter also discusses how *The Alphabet of Feeling Bad*'s expanded vocabulary of affect has served as a point of departure for writing workshops and salons that provide public forums for collective experiences of "feeling bad".

The issue of multilinguality is also taken up in the chapter *Affect and accent: public spheres of dissonance in the writing of Yoko Tawada* by Marion Acker, Anne Fleig, and Matthias Lüthjohann. Drawing on both Yoko Tawada's literary writing and Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of heteroglossia, the authors try to rethink the relationship of language and affect and the notion of a public, democratic dialogue that consists of different voices and opinions placed in different institutions. Often, as in the influential theory of Jürgen Habermas, this dialogue is understood to be an encounter of partners with equal rights relying on the democratic rationality of consensus-oriented discussion. Focusing on Tawada's essay "Akzent" (2016), they argue that Tawada develops a perspective that goes beyond the limited notions of affect-free rationality and "unaccentuated" voice. The chapter demonstrates that language, in literature as well as in public, is at least twofold:

words in their affective relational entanglement respond to other words and become themselves part of the responses that follow their articulation. It is for this reason that dialogical engagement is never free of affect, dissonance, and polemic.

To go beyond an opposition of language and affect is also the aim of Claudia Breger's theoretical approach in her chapter *Affect(ive) assemblages: literary worldmaking in Fatma Aydemir's Ellbogen*. She proposes a syncretic model that allows to investigate the multifaceted productivity of affects in the literary communication circuit. Drawing on a dialogue between notions of worlding and worldmaking in contemporary affect and narrative theory along with Bruno Latour's proposals for intertwining ontology and rhetoric, Breger conceptualizes both composition and reading as multidimensional, processual assemblages of entangled affects and tropes, sensations, and cultural memories. Her chapter details these ideas in a reading of Fatma Aydemir's novel *Ellbogen* (2017), with a particular focus on the novel's literary deployments of hate speech, on fictionality as a reassembly of piecemeal actuality, and the distribution of nonsovereign agency in the loops of literary worldmaking. The chapter is framed with a discussion of the productivity of such literary worldmaking – as a reconfiguration of the sensible in Jacques Rancière's sense – within a broader public sphere conceptualized as a realm of affective circulations.

The final chapter by Michael Eng takes different traces of the opposition between language and affect or rational discourse and publics of feelings on a new, self-reflexive level, highlighting the neoliberal University itself as a complex player in the public sphere. His chapter *Theory's affective scene: or, what to do with language after affect* provides a critical assessment of the affective turn in the humanities and social sciences that has emerged as a supposed antidote to the linguistic and cultural turns of previous decades and presents itself as a sign of intellectual progress. Eng argues that we are no longer stuck in language or culture, as we are – with the discovery of affect as the new theoretical object – finally back to the real matter of things. In addition to hearing such claims as expressions of an affective attachment ("Gefühlsbindung") to Theory, his chapter regards them as harboring a desire to reassert the authority of the critic against the neoliberal University's dismantling of humanistic research. It takes the University as a central, yet often overlooked (at least in the current U.S. situation), site of the public sphere, and the affective turn as a moment in the public sphere's contestation.

## Conclusion and acknowledgments

Taken together, the 13 chapters in this volume contribute to a novel understanding of public spheres as spaces of resonance made-up of specific constellations of affect and language. The chapters go beyond established normative conceptions of public spheres as arenas of language-based

deliberation and the rational exchange of arguments, instead emphasizing that language in itself bears a significant potential to affect and to be affected. It is a key medium in establishing – or preventing – affective resonance through which human and non-human actors become entangled. The volume therefore not only adds to recent conceptualizations of "affective publics" (Papacharissi, 2015), but also makes a notable contribution to affect theory in cultural studies and the social sciences. This contribution highlights the close interplay of affect, language, and discourse, an interplay that in many strands of affect theory has rather been disregarded. As editors, we are convinced that an understanding of public spheres as spaces of affective resonance is desperately needed to better come to terms with recent social and political developments, in particular issues related to political populism, polarization, and the various contestations of liberal democratic societies.

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