Make Campaigning Great Again

Fan's Appropriation of the Mythology of Trump's

2016 Presidential Campaign

By

Kimberley Johanna Arendina Sieders

Table of Contents

Abstract

The media circus of the 2016 US presidential elections invited political constituencies to organise themselves as fandoms, as Liesbet van Zoonen (2004) theorized, engaging in what Henry Jenkins (2008) and Katherine E. Morrisey (2013) call typical fan practices, such as the making of fan videos, fan accounts on social media, or the online sharing of so-called memes. Situated in between discussions of an evolving public sphere and with fandoms increasingly at the center of discourse on media production and consumption, this research project conceptualizes what happens when fans move into the realm of politics. "Darth Trump" and "300: Make America Great Again" are fan made videos that use the resources of popular culture to critique the political ideology of Donald Trump. This research then aims to conceptualize the ability of political fans to challenge or alter political myths by critically analysing and comparing the discourse of Trump's audiovisual campaign ads and the fan made videos "Darth Trump" and "300: Make America Great Again."

Key words: public sphere, entertainment politics, fan labor, 2016 presidential campaigns, transmedia campaigning

1. Introduction

Donald Trump's rise in politics illustrates the increasing similarity between news and entertainment media according to Matt Taibbi, who covered the 2016 election cycle for *Rolling Stone*.[1] The contemporary format of news networks seems, as Taibbi argues, eerily indistinguishable from reality TV shows such as *The Apprentice*: both aim to show a version of reality, scripted to be sexy and violent, and produced to sell.[2] Furthermore, for both news and reality TV, their financial viability relies on providing their viewers with enough scandals and sensation in order to hold their attention. Matt Taibbi argues that the presidential campaign fits "like a glove into the new demands of the news business."[3] With networks such as CNN and Fox News forced to fill 24 hours a day with sellable news content, Taibbi argues that it was a sound business decision to fill those with Trump's sexy pitch of "hate, violence, xenophobia, racism, and ignorance."[4]

Trump not only dominated news coverage, but more importantly, the news media itself. While his rallies attracted hordes of journalists from every network, all ready for the next "breaking news" segment to be filled with whatever Trump could come up with, Trump

---

[1] Matt Taibbi, *Insane Clown President*, xiii.
[2] Ibid., xxviii.
[3] Ibid., xxvii.
[4] Ibid.

was constantly belittling and condemning the media for that very act.[5] No matter what the media threw at him, whether it be his political incorrectness, inexperience or infactuality, Donald Trump "blasted [the media] as the embodiment of the class that had left regular America behind."[6]

This message of "crooked people in the press" and "dishonest" media illustrates how both the media and politicians actively construct realities in which factuality is arbitrary.[7] Oxford Dictionaries' President, Casper Gratwohl, argues that this degradation of factual information as "less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief" is characteristic of contemporary society.[8] Therefore, "post-truth" became the Oxford Dictionaries' Word of the Year in 2016.[9] The irrelevance of truth is neither new to this age nor to political campaigning, but in the 2016 presidential elections, post-truth became a widely used term due to the fact that it worked to delegitimize not only the politician, but furthermore the news media itself.[10] Political campaigns, and their very real consequences, seem to ask of their audiences the same willingness to suspend one's disbelief as fictional narratives do in entertainment media.

Furthermore, as Van Zoonen argues, the contemporary politician may have become more and more reminiscent of a popstar, entertaining cheering crowds with performances and shows.[11] In the case of Donald Trump, his political following, or rather, "fans," engage in activities typical of contemporary entertainment fandom: fan accounts on Twitter celebrate Trump and his ideology, fans create T-shirts and dolls with Trump's image, posters of Trump adorn living rooms, fans create and participate in cosplay of Trump, fans tattoo Trump's face on their bodies, and some hardcore fans have even gotten into fights with the "opposing team."[12] The fan societies of entertainment media and the political involvement of contemporary constituencies are, as Liesbet van Zoonen illustrates, increasingly similar: for both their devotion is dependent on the strength of the performance, the (online) activities of fans and political activists are rooted in the same exercises central to democratic

---

[5] Matt Taibbi, *Insane Clown President*, xxiii.
[6] Ibid., xxiii.
[7] Ibid.
[8] Gratwohl qtd. in "Oxford Dictionaries'," par 1-4.
[9] Ibid., par 1.
[10] Ibid., par 1-4.
[11] Van Zoonen, "Imagining Fan Democracy," 43. Van Zoonen juxtaposes a pop star in concert and a politician on election night: both draw huge crowds, stage light-shows and music, and when the pop star or politician arrives, "the scenes of crowds yelling and cheering are not so different" from each other.
[12] "Extreme Donald Trump Fans," *CBS News*.

participation, and finally, the strength of the relationship between fans and their object of fandom, and political activists and their political party or politician, "is built on corresponding emotional investments."[13]

Political fans, similar to fans of entertainment media, express their affinity with their object of fandom through different fan practices, such as the creation of videos in which the image of politicians such as Donald Trump is mixed with popular film franchises. In such a special adaptation of the 2007 film *300*, Donald Trump, embodying the role of King Leonidas, kicks a messenger wearing the face of Barack Obama into a deep pit after repeating his campaign chant "we are going to make America great again!"[14] In "Darth Trump," a remix of Trump's voice with the popular *Star Wars* franchise, Trump takes on the role of villain Darth Vader, bragging about his deals with China whilst force-choking a soldier of the Empire.[15] These videos, made by both supporters and protesters of Trump's presidential campaign, use his image and voice in order to engage in critical and emotional political debates.

By comparing Donald Trump's campaign messages and the videos created by fans, this research aims to assess the extent to which fans can challenge a political myth through the use of fan practices. In questioning, "How do fan made videos challenge the political myth of Donald Trump as constructed by his audiovisual campaign messages?", this research project aims to conceptualize the ability of political fans to challenge or alter political myths by critically analysing and comparing the discourse of Donald Trump's 2016 presidential campaign videos and the fan made videos "Darth Trump" and "300: Make America Great Again."

---

[13] Van Zoonen, "Imagining Fan Democracy," 46.
[14] Aryan Wisdom, "300: Make America Great Again," 00:04:58.
[15] Auralnauts, "Darth Trump," 00:01:56.

2. Theoretical Framework

By assessing fan videos about Donald Trump created during the 2016 presidential elections, this research delineates how fans use language to create, reproduce and challenge ideologies. The theoretical background to this paper builds on the conceptualization of publics and counterpublics in the context of contemporary politics and digital communication. Scholars such as Michael Warner, Paul Stenner and Peter Lunt, Peter Dahlgren, and Lincoln Dahlberg will be invoked in their discussion of the contemporary functioning of the Harbermassian public sphere, focussing on the impact of the commodification of news media, digital communication, and the fusion of public debate and entertainment.[16] What Stenner and Lunt describe as Jürgen Habermas' pessimism towards the commodification of the public, contradicts the concept of democratic ownership that scholars such as Henry Jenkins and Katherine E. Morrissey argue to be persistent to fan studies' conception of the power relations in the digital sphere.[17]

Therefore, this theoretical framework will first conceptualize the functioning of fan made videos in their ability to afford public debate in the 2016 presidential elections. The creation of dominating mythologies in presidential campaigns can cause alternative or subordinate responses that, secondly, will be framed as fannish practices in order to account for the emotional, rather than rational-critical, political engagement characteristic of the digital sphere.[18] Finally, there will be a discussion of the fans' ability, as alternative counterpublics, to engage with the dominant political mythology or ideology.[19]

Therefore, the Habermassian concept of the public sphere will first be assessed in its functioning in the digital sphere, in order to conceptualize the functioning of fan videos in contemporary political activism. Writing in 1962, Jürgen Habermas first conceptualized the public sphere as a social space existing between civil society and the state, where private citizens engaged in rational-critical debates centered around public interest, without influence

---

[16] Dahlberg, "Computer-Mediated Communication." Dahlgren, "The internet, Public Spheres." Stenner and Lunt, "*The Jerry Springer Show*." Warner, "Publics and Counterpublics."

[17] Stenner and Lunt, "*The Jerry Springer Show*," 64. Jenkins, *Convergence Culture*. Morrisey, "Fan/dom."

[18] Dahlberg, "Computer-Mediated Communication." Dahlgren, "The internet, Public Spheres." Fraser, "Poetic World-Making." Jenkins, *Convergence Culture*. Stenner and Lunt, "*The Jerry Springer Show*." Van Zoonen, "Imagining Fan Democracy." Warner, "Publics and Counterpublics."

[19] Barthes, *Myth Today*. Fraser, "Poetic World-Making." Warner, "Publics and Counterpublics."

from the state.[20] The public sphere, for Habermas, presupposes three conditions: first, the bracketing of individual interest and social status of all the participants of the debate; second, a focus on the "'common concern' of public critical attention" without the governance of church or state; and third, the establishing of the public as inclusive and accessible.[21] In his *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, Habermas delineates the "rise and decline of a historically specific and limited form of the public sphere," the liberal bourgeois public.[22]

However, when applying the Habermassian concept of the public sphere to contemporary society, the digitisation of communication and the commodification of media have transformed this initial notion of the public sphere. The Internet provides a space for debate which is, as Dahlberg and Dahlgren argue, not necessarily rational or critical,[23] and furthermore to various extents governed by the state or corporations, thus undermining the Habermassian principles of the public sphere as being free from corporate governance and individual private interests.[24] Stenner and Lunt argue that contemporary media, such as talkshows, rather have the possibility of functioning as emotional public spheres, where the Habermassian ideal of rational-critical debate is paralleled by a more emotional-driven debate.[25] This paper will build on these critiques of the Habermassian concept of the public sphere, in order to develop a theory on the underlying power relations of the contemporary media landscape in regard to the commodification of political communication in light of the 2016 presidential elections.

2.1. Mediated Worldbuilding in Politics

First, as Warner argues, "[publics] do not exist apart from the discourse that addresses them," and therefore there is a linguistic practice implicit in the creation of political narratives, imagined publics and mediated realities.[26] Norman Fairclough, in writing about political rhetoric and the constitution of political power as partly the power over the dominant language, argues that "language has become significantly more important over the past few decades because of social changes" such as the increased interdependency of politics,

---

[20] Habermas, *Structural Transformation*, 27.
[21] Ibid., 36-37.
[22] Fraser, "Rethinking the Public Sphere," 58.
[23] Dahlberg, "Computer-Mediated Communication," 28. Dahlgren, "The Internet, Public Spheres," 156.
[24] Habermas, *Structural Transformation*, 36-37.
[25] Stenner and Lunt, "*The Jerry Springer Show*," 63.
[26] Warner, "Publics and Counterpublics," 416.

government and mass media.[27] For example, as Taibbi demonstrates, the 24/7 news format creates an interdependency between news media and politics, in which media corporations rely on spectacular content such as presidential elections to fill their programming, while politicians rely on the media's coverage of the election cycle to reach their public.[28]

Political ideologies are, as Fairclough argues, "constantly being talked into being."[29] Fairclough theorizes that, through language, politicians, political parties or governments can create certain 'realities' without those realities having to be rooted in factuality.[30] As linguistics scholar Teun van Dijk argues, "[lexicalization] is a major and well-known domain of ideological expression and persuasion as the well-known terrorist versus freedom-fighter pair suggests."[31] In this exemplification, by choosing to refer to the same group of people as either "terrorists" or "freedom-fighters," language users make a choice that, according to Van Dijk, can reflect personal context, social context, and sociocultural context.[32] The deliberacy of lexical choice in political speech can, thus, on the one hand create political ideologies, and on the other hand provide the tools needed to research these ideological expressions.[33]

Indeed, this "poetic world making" does necessitate the pre-existence of the beliefs that it aims to circulate or the people that it attempts to reach.[34] As Michael Warner argues,

> There is no speech or performance addressed to a public that does not try to specify in advance, in countless highly condensed ways, the lifeworld of its circulation; . . . Public discourse says not only, 'Let a public exist,' but 'Let it have this character, speak this way, see the world in this way'. It then goes out in search of confirmation that such a public exists, with greater or lesser success.[35]

However, according to Nancy Fraser, Warner's implied focus on the speaker or performer as the conveyor of meaning needs more nuance in order to formulate a holistic theory on the creation of meaning through public discourse. To take the author as the origin of meaning, as Fraser argues, "tends to leave aside the role of the consumer."[36] The text, to paraphrase Wimsatt and Beardsley in their delineation of this "intentional fallacy," belongs to the public

---

[27] Fairclough, *New Labour, New Language?*, 3.
[28] Taibbi, *Insane Clown President*, xxiii.
[29] Fairclough, *New Labour, New Language?*, 4.
[30] Ibid.
[31] Van Dijk, "Discourse Analysis as Ideological Analysis," 25.
[32] Ibid.
[33] Ibid.
[34] Warner, "Publics, Counterpublics,"*,* 422.
[35] Warner, "Publics, Counterpublics,"*,* 422.
[36] Fraser. "Poetic Worldmaking", 163.

for it is created through and with the language of the public and about the subject of the public, as humans and objects of public knowledge.[37] Public discourse, thus, has to do with both the making of worlds and the making sense of the world.[38]

In the case of contemporary politics, politicians rely on the affordances of mass media platforms to broadcast their message to their public, often using a combination of "traditional" and "new" media platforms.[39] Habermas, in 1962, characterized the mediation of public discourse by media corporations as detrimental to the public sphere.[40] The evolving newspaper business of the second half of the nineteenth century proves for Habermas how the capitalist undertaking of marketing the news results in a growing interdependency of the editorial and advertising sections.[41] Newspapers, in their search for profit, no longer served the public alone, but private interests as well. The commodification of news became, as Habermas argues, "the gate through which privileged private interests invaded the public sphere."[42] Therefore, the commodification of news media undermines the Habermassian pinciples of the public sphere as being free of corporate governance and individual private interests.[43]

Habermas' strong contrast between the rational-critical debate of the public sphere on the one hand, and the corporate governance of institutions and emotional private interests of individuals on the other hand, is critiqued by recent scholars, such as Fraser, Warner, Dahlgren, and Stenner and Lunt. These academics aim to reconcile the Habermassian ideal of an autonomous space for rational-critical debate, with the reality of what Fraser calls "Actual Existing Democracy."[44]

---

[37] Wimsatt and Beardsley, "The Intentional Fallacy," 472. Wimsatt and Beardsley argue that the text "is detached from the author at birth and goes about the world beyond his power to intend about it or control it." The tendency to value the author's authority over the public's decoding of the text has been widely criticized by the New Criticism movement. Another notable author of the New Critics is T.S. Eliot, who, in an interview with the Paris Review, famously remarked: "I wonder what an 'intention' means!" (Hall, Donald. "T.S. Eliot, The Art of Poetry No. 1." 1959). Fraser, in her "Poetic Worldmaking," illustrates her critique of Warner using Roland Barthes' "The Death of the Author," which communicates a similar point to the "intentional fallacy" of the school of New Criticism.

[38] Hall, *Encoding/decoding*, 130-131. Here, Stuart Hall's theory of encoding and decoding is implied. In this model of communication, the public's decoding of the encoded meaning of a text depends on the individual's cultural and personal background (p. 130). The media corporation's encoding and the public's decoding are not necessarily symmetrical, and through these distortions the relative autonomy of a text may be theorized (p. 131).

[39] Towner and Munoz, "Boomers versus Millennials," 3-4.

[40] Habermas, *Structural Transformation*, 192.

[41] Ibid., 185.

[42] Ibid.

[43] Ibid.

[44] Fraser, "Rethinking the Public Sphere," 56.

In discussing the Internet as providing spaces for deliberative democracy, Dahlgren argues that "it is in the tension-filled crevices deriving from the changes in the media industries, in sociocultural patterns, and in modes of political engagement that we can begin to glimpse new public sphere trends where the Internet clearly makes a difference."[45] The Internet, however, does not necessarily provide the Habermasian ideal conditions of debate in the public sphere.[46] As recent scholars such as Dahlgren and Dahlberg argue, the nature of debates on the Internet is not necessarily rational or civil,[47] and the commodification of the cyber sphere "threatens the autonomy of public interaction online."[48]

Indeed, the corporate control of cyber spaces, such as Facebook or YouTube, illustrate this tension between the individual's ability to shape the tools of digital media to serve their purpose, and the digital media's ability to shape individual identities in return.[49] As Pariser argues, the algorithms employed by media corporations to personalize Facebook timelines or YouTube feeds, select what and how much content individual users are exposed to.[50] In Habermasian terminology, the influence companies such as Facebook and YouTube have in the formation of both individual identities and public debate, is known as the refeudalization of power.[51] As Warner argues, this refeudalization

> limits citizens to instrumental political action to pursue their interests and secure their needs, rather than facilitating the kind of public discursive engagement that enables citizens to generate the rhetorical culture in which their communicative action alters institutional judgement by challenging and reinventing the nature of a political power that would lay claim to the

---

[45] Dahlgren, "The Internet, Public Spheres," 155-156. The idea of deliberative democracy is influenced by the Habermasian theoretical tradition, and points to "the procedures of open discussion aimed at achieving rationally motivated consensus."

[46] Ibid., 156. Dahlberg, "Computer-Mediated Communication," 28. Habermas, *Structural Transformation*, 36-37. Habermas defines the ideal conditions of the public sphere as, most importantly, the bracketing of individual interests, the absence of influence by state or corporations, and the inclusivity and accessibility of the space.

[47] Dahlgren, "The Internet, Public Spheres, and Political Communication*,*" 156.

[48] Dahlberg, "Computer-Mediated Communication," 28.

[49] Pariser, *The Filter Bubble*, 184.

[50] Ibid., 188. Pariser calls the filtering of content through corporations' use of algorithms the "filter bubble," since it creates a personal bubble in which the public performance of an individual's identity is shaped in part by the media's control of the content the individual is exposed to (p. 188). Pariser argues that the Internet brings contemporary society on "the verge of self-fulfilling identities, in which the Internet's distorted picture of us becomes who we really are" (p. 188).

[51] Habermas, *Structural Transformation*, 142, 195. Habermas argues that when the "powers of 'society' themselves assumed functions of public authority," (p. 142) the distribution of power becomes to resemble again some feudal society. As Habermas states: "[for] the kind of integration of mass entertainment with advertising, which in the form of public relations already assumes a 'political' character, subjects even the state itself to its code" (p. 195).

final authority on all matters, private or public.[52]

However, as critics such as Dahlberg, Dahlgren, and Stenner and Lunt have argued, the
Internet is part of an evolving public sphere, facilitating a digital space which affords debate
among citizens, engagement with political and cultural matters, and the tools to express and
broadcast personal and public statements.[53] As Dahlberg argues, even though state and
capitalist influences undermine the autonomy of an online public sphere, digital spaces
already afford a foundation for public deliberation.[54] Full autonomy, Dahlberg explains, "is
not required before the online discourse that currently exists in restricted form can begin to
contribute to the development of rational-critical discourse and the public sphere at large."[55]

Thus, even though the full potential of a digital public sphere remains, for now, an
Utopian ideal, the groundwork already provides citizens with the tools to participate in public
debate. This study aims to illustrate how fans of politicians use the tools of contemporary
digital media to engage with politics in an online public sphere.

2.2. Political Fandom

The following section will assess the potential of the Internet in general, and social
networking sites specifically, in facilitating a space to debate politics and challenge political
public speech. According to Milner, political engagement on social media platforms such as
Twitter, Facebook or YouTube often takes the form of ironic images, satirical videos or
so-called memes.[56] This "political fandom," or political engagement based on affective or
humorous communication, contradicts the Habermasian rationalist bias that underlies the
concept of the public sphere.[57] However, this focus on rational-critical debate tends,
according to Dahlgren, "to discount a wide array of communicative modes that can be of
importance for democracy, including the affective, the poetic, the humorous, the ironic, and
so forth."[58] Therefore, the fans of contemporary politicians and their use of fan practices such

---

[52] Warner, "Publics, Counterpublics," 232
[53] Dahlgren, "The Internet, Public Spheres, and Political Communication," 160
[54] Dahlberg, "Computer-Mediated Communication," 7.
[55] Ibid.
[56] Milner, "Pop Polyvocality," 2362. Milner argues that "memes, as strands of populist discourse, are mediated
expressions of members of the public" and therefore "a worthy case to use to assess the scope and depth of pop
polyvocality in the mediated public sphere."
[57] Milner, "Pop Polyvocality," 2362 Milner suggests that "the predominant purpose of image memes on these
sites is satirical humor for public commentary." Habermas, *Structural Transformation*, 36-37.
[58] Dahlgren, "The Internet, Public Spheres, and Political Communication," 157

as the creation of audiovisual fan fiction, are a prime example of emotional, rather than rational-critical, engagement with politics.

Fandom has for a long time existed only in what Jenkins calls "the invisible margins of popular culture," and is still often solely associated with branches of entertainment , such as sports, television and music;[59] however, recent media scholars such as Davis, Jenkins and Scott have noticed fandom migrate away from the sidelines, and "into the center of current thinking about media production and consumption."[60] Fans themselves, too, as Jenkins argues, have accepted their role as "active participants in these new media landscapes, finding their own voice through their participation in fan communities [and] asserting their own rights even in the face of powerful entities."[61] The digital fan communities of the contemporary media landscape seem, thus, to function in a similar way as the Habermasian public sphere. Stenner and Lunt, in assessing the potential of entertainment media as public spheres, argue that talk shows, for example, can function as "an emotional public sphere that parallels the rational critical public sphere in the way it encourages, manages and reflects upon emotional conflict in a public context."[62]

Furthermore, the mediatisation of politics has rendered political activism increasingly similar to the practices of fan societies.[63] In contemporary politics, as Liesbet van Zoonen argues, the constituencies of political parties and candidates are subjected to the same "social and cultural fragmentation considered so typical of the postmodern condition."[64] It is no longer social class, level of education or even gender that determines how a constituency is made up; rather, political constituencies are increasingly unpredictable and unstable, sharing "no more than their appreciation of the performance of that party and its candidates."[65] In her 2004 article "Imagining Fan Democracy," Van Zoonen argues that this dependency on the strength of a performance is the first of three dimensions that illustrate how the fan societies of entertainment media and the political involvement of contemporary politics are increasingly similar.[66]

---

[59] Jenkins, *Convergence Culture*, 12.
[60] Ibid.
[61] Ibid., 205
[62] Stenner and Lunt, "*The Jerry Springer Show*," 63.
[63] Van Zoonen, "Imagining Fan Democracy," 43, 46
[64] Ibid., 43.
[65] Ibid.
[66] Van Zoonen, "Imagining Fan Democracy," 43-46.

Secondly, the activities associated with both fans and political activists are rooted in the same "customs that have been laid out as essential for democratic politics: information, discussion and activism."[67] Recent academic scholars, such as Jenkins and Davis, have progressively argued for and agreed on the reach and power that fandoms can have, both in the realm of entertainment and in the politics of the life-world.[68] Fans' investment in and discussion of the text, and the grassroots creativity and immaterial labor inspired by the text, exemplify, as Van Zoonen argues, the accessibility of information, the possibility of debate, and the right of activism.[69]

Finally, Van Zoonen argues that both the strength of the relationships between fans and their object of fandom, and political activists and the political party or ideology they belong to, "is built on corresponding emotional investments."[70] Van Zoonen illustrates this last point by juxtaposing a pop star in concert and a politician on election night: both draw huge crowds, stage light-shows and music, and when the pop star or politician arrives, "the scenes of crowds yelling and cheering are not so different" from each other.[71]

Furthermore, contemporary consumer participation presents itself as the central paradox of convergence culture.[72] As Jenkins argues, the traditional gatekeepers of media corporations and political campaigns "seek to hold onto their control of cultural content," while fans seek to gain control over the same texts.[73] In externalizing their own interpretations of the text, fans are able to damage a brand's, company's or author's reputation, undermine product value, or in any other way delegitimize the authority of the brand, company or author as the origin of meaning.[74] Therefore, fans "have dealt with takedown notices from corporate lawyers"[75] and other measures "designed to control audience expression" for decades, in attempts to incorporate fans into media businesses.[76] This illustrates the tension between on the one hand the democratization of both the creative ownership of fan practices and the digital communication through social networking sites,

---

[67] Van Zoonen, "Imagining Fan Democracy," 46.
[68] Davis, "Audience Value," 182; Jenkins, *Convergence Culture*, 167-168.
[69] Van Zoonen, "Imagining Fan Democracy," 46.
[70] Ibid., 43.
[71] Ibid., 46.
[72] Jenkins, *Convergence Culture*, 204.
[73] Ibid..
[74] Davis, "Audience Value," 182.
[75] Morrissey, "Fan/dom," 3.4.
[76] Davis, "Audience Value," 182.

and on the other hand the top-down corporate control that seeks to reinforce cultural hierarchies.[77]

In sum, both fans and "The Powers That Be"[78] seek to create or hold control over the text. In politics, this struggle can be translated to the politician, on the one hand, creating a dominant ideology or mythology; and fans, on the other hand, seeking to confirm, alter, challenge or refute this ideology.

2.3. The Myth of the Politician

In the following section the politician as the creator of myth and the enforcer of cultural dominance will be juxtaposed with the fan's position of relative powerlessness as part of a subordinate counterpublic.

Myths, as Barthes conceptualized, arise when a sign becomes the signifier of cultural meaning.[79] "Wine," for example, as a sound-image, signifies in De Saussure's model of the sign the fermented alcoholic beverage; however, in French society, as Barthes argues, "wine" also signifies health, relaxation, and entitlement.[80] The myth of wine is embedded in French society to such an extent that there is "no situation involving some physical constraint (temperature, hunger, boredom, compulsion, disorientation) which does not give rise to dreams of wine."[81]

Myths are perceived as "natural" or "the truth," because myths are designed to present cultural constructs as natural facts.[82] Barthes argues that this presentation of myths as the status quo is the ideological abuse of the bourgeoisie in naturalizing their ideology in language.[83] Myths construct a "reality" which borders the range of possible interpretations of a text.[84] According to Barthes, this move from reality to ideology, to a world that is made out

---

[77] Scott, "The Trouble with Transmediation," 30-31.
[78] A phrase used in fan studies to describe those who have authority over the text.
[79] Barthes, *Myth Today*, 113. Barthes builds upon the model of the sign as outlined by De Saussure. The first order of signification, as Barthes argues, correlates with De Saussure's model of the sign, where the sound-image signifies a concept or meaning. In the second order of signification, this sign becomes the signifier. When a sign becomes a signifier of cultural meaning, it becomes a myth.
[80] Barthes, *Myth Today*, 60.
[81] Ibid.
[82] Ibid., 140.
[83] Ibid.
[84] Ibid.

of signs, "is defined as that from an anti-physis to a pseudo-physis."[85] In other words, that which is known as "reality" is in fact a world of signs that denies people the ability to change the world in a manner that would upset the status quo.

The question of why a culture accepts, emphasizes and promotes certain myths, meanings and practices, while others are neglected, excluded, reinterpreted or diluted, is conceptualized in Gramsci's notion of hegemony.[86] As Williams reinterprets Gramsci's concept, hegemony supposes in its core a sense of reality governed by the

> whole body of practices and expectations; our assignments of energy, our ordinary understanding of the nature of man and of his world. It is a set of meanings and values which as they are experienced as practices appear as reciprocally confirming. It thus constitutes a sense of reality for most people in the society, a sense of absolute.[87]

That is not to say that there is no opposition to be found in the dominant culture. On the contrary, as Williams explains, the dominant culture can tolerate alternative meanings, values, opinions, attitudes and worldviews, as long as they are to some extent incorporated within the dominant culture.[88] In the context of political opposition, Williams argues that "whatever the degree of internal conflict or internal variation, they do not in practice go beyond the limits of the central effective and dominant definitions."[89]

Similarly, in the context of the public sphere, Warner's distinction between publics and counterpublics offers a conceptualization of the position of (political) fandom in contemporary society's hegemonic hierarchy.[90] Warner's counterpublic is, in some way or another, always aware of "its subordinate status,"[91] as it manifests itself against the dominating public, finding itself "in conflict not only with the dominant social group but with the norms that constitute the dominant culture as a public."[92] As Warner argues,

> Counterpublic discourse is far more than the expression of subaltern culture . . . Fundamentally mediated by public forms, counterpublics incorporate the personal/impersonal address and expansive estrangement of public speech as their condition of their common world. Perhaps nothing demonstrates the fundamental importance of discursive publics in the

---

[85] Barthes, *Myth Today*, 141.
[86] Williams, "Base and Superstructure," 39.
[87] Williams, "Base and Superstructure," 38.
[88] Ibid., 39.
[89] Ibid.
[90] Warner, "Publics and Counterpublics," 424. In fandom, as in Warner's example of youth culture, "participants are not subalterns for any reason other than their participation in the counterpublic discourse."
[91] Ibid.
[92] Fraser, "Poetic Worldmaking," 159.

modern social imaginary more than this – that even the counterpublics that challenge modernity's social hierarchy of faculties do so by projecting the space of discursive circulation among strangers as a social entity, and in doing so fashion their own subjectivities around the requirements of public circulation and stranger sociability."[93]

In line with Warner's definition of counterpublics, John Fiske calls fandom "a sort of 'moonlighting'" in the cultural sphere, in the sense that "fan culture is a form of popular culture that echoes many of the institutions of official culture, although in popular form and under popular control."[94] The subordinate status of fan cultures is evident whenever the systems of production and distribution of what Fiske calls the "shadow cultural economy" and the dominant cultural industries clash:[95] as Jenkins argues, fans, in facing the forces of dominant culture, often have no legal, monetarian or even symbolic authority or ownership over their expressions of fandom.[96]

In sum, ideologies are created through language – conceptualized, for example, by Fairclough's political discourse or Barthes' mythologies.[97] The creation of political imaginaries in presidential campaigns can spur alternative or subordinate responses that, in the contemporary media landscape, often take the form of fannish practices.[98] The question central to this research is to what extent political fans, from their subordinate position as a counterpublic, can challenge or alter the dominating myth of the politician.

The fan videos created of Donald Trump function as an emotional public sphere, as conceptualized by Stenner and Lunt, in that such videos afford debate (in the comment-section, discussion boards, on social media, and between video responses) based on the fusion of popular culture with politics. In doing so, they use communicative modes which Dahlgren theorized as essential to democracy, such as the affective, the ironic and the humorous, bridging the divide between rational-critical debate and emotional political engagement.[99] By analysing these fan videos, this research aims to provide a more in-depth analysis of to what extent fan made videos influence the mythologization of Donald Trump as a presidential candidate in the 2016 elections.

---

[93] Warner, "Publics and Counterpublics," 424.
[94] Fiske, "The Cultural Economy of Fandom," 33.
[95] Ibid., 30.
[96] Jenkins, *Convergence Culture*, 204.
[97] see '2.1 Mediated Worldbuilding in Politics' and '2.2 The Myth of the Politician.'
[98] see '2.3 Political Fandom.'
[99] Stenner and Lunt, *"The Jerry Springer Show*, 63. Dahlgren, "The Internet, Public Spheres, and Political Communication," 157.

3. Method

According to Davis, the fan practices of vidding and video-edits enable fans to express their personal vision of a text and challenge the authority of the Powers That Be.[100] This research project will assess to what extent fans can challenge a political myth through the use of video, by answering the research question, "How do fan made videos challenge the political myth of Donald Trump as constructed by his audiovisual campaign messages?" First, the expression of Donald Trump's ideology and constructed political identity will be analysed using the messages communicated through his campaign videos. Subsequently, the fan videos will be assessed in their ability to use discourse to reinforce or challenge the political myth constructed in the sample of Donald Trump's campaign videos, and thus to what extent this denounces the authority of the dominant myth.

In order to answer the research question, both the campaign videos and the fan made videos will be assessed using Critical Discourse Analysis. This research method will not only clarify the situated meaning of the language used in the campaign's or fan made media messages, but furthermore explicate the whole discourse within which it is uttered. The focus on the dialectical relationship between language constituting "the social world and [being] constituted by other social practices" is what makes discourse analysis as a method critical[101]: the goal of a Critical Discourse Analysis is to demonstrate how language, whether oral, written, or visual structures identity and social practices in society, and how, in turn, social practices and identity structure language.[102]

Ideologies, as Van Dijk argues, can be "expressed in text and talk," and "discourses similarly function to persuasively help construct new and confirm already present ideologies."[103] Therefore, this analysis will focus on prominent expressions of ideological content and identity construction.[104] This results in the analysis of four linguistic aspects of the videos: text structure, personal deixis, lexical choice and the performance.

---

[100] Davis,"Audience Value," 182.
[101] Gee, "Discourse Analysis," 28.
[102] Ibid., 37.
[103] Van Dijk. "Discourse Analysis as Ideology Analysis." 22.
[104] Ibid. Van Dijk here distinguishes between more and less relevant discourse structures to efficiently express ideological meanings. As Van Dijk argues, "headlines in newspapers, taken as prominent expressions of the overall meaning . . . of a news report in the press, form a special discourse category that is probably more likely to express or convey ideological content than, for instance, the number of commas in a text."

3.1. Text Structure

While not always carrying explicit meaning on their own, linguistic scholar Teun A. Van Dijk argues that text structures are strategically used "to emphasize or attract attention to specific meanings."[105] Repetition, for example, can can be used to make favourable information prominent, or thread information together through the use of repeating sentence structure.[106]

Another aspect of text structure that is prominent in the corpus of this research project is digression. As Schwehr argues,

> Digression can be defined as the speaker's temporary departure from his topic, or, more specifically, as the interruption of a given pattern of discourse by some extraneous element.[107]

These text structures may thus "express and convey special operations or strategies," which will be assessed in the first category of this analysis.[108]

3.2. Personal Deixis

The use of pronouns and similar linguistic elements function to locate the speaker, the audience and how they relate to each other. The first-person plural pronoun "we," as Zupnik argues,

> may fulfill a powerful persuasive function since [it has] the potential to encode group memberships and identifications: speakers may index different groups as included in the scope of the pronoun 'we' while excluding others.[109]

The inclusive and exclusive "we" also work to encode another common structure in political speech, the "us versus them" dichotomy. As Van Dijk argues, the "us versus them" structure "usually [has] the social function of legitimating dominance or justifying concrete actions of power abuse by the elites."[110] Analysing the use of personal deixis in Donald Trump's campaign videos and fan videos thus enables the assessment of the construction of Donald Trump's identity and that of his audience.

---

[105] Van Dijk. "Discourse Analysis as Ideology Analysis." 23.
[106] Ibid., 29.
[107] Schwehr, *Discourse Analysis*, 19.
[108] Van Dijk, *Language and Pace*, 23.
[109] Zupnik, *A Pragmatic Analysis*, 340.
[110] Van Dijk, *Language and Pace*. 23.

3.3. Lexical Choice

The choice of specific content words is, as Van Dijk argues, a "major and well-known domain of ideological expression and persuasion."[111] Van Dijk invokes the well-known example of choosing to use "terrorist" or "freedom-fighter" in order to describe the actant of an act of terror.[112] The negative connotation of the word "terrorist" will frame the expression differently than the positive connotation of the word "freedom-fighter."[113]

Furthermore, in the context of politics the choice of content words also establishes the accessibility and comprehensibility of political discourse.[114] The complexity of a sentence can, as Van Dijk argues, be used to "restrict comprehensibility" and thereby "control access to public discourse."[115] The lexical choice, thus, is not only an expression of ideology, but also establishes a hierarchy between the speaker and their public.

3.4. The Performance

This last category will account for the visual elements of the videos. In analysing the campaign videos the visual elements taken into consideration are the use of colors and the subject of the visual material. Since the fan videos combine visual material of popular film franchises with audiovisual bites from political figures, the elements taken into consideration when analysing fan videos are narrative structure, "casting," and the direct object of the featured scenes.

---

[111] Van Dijk, *Language and Pace*, 25.
[112] Ibid.
[113] Ibid.
[114] Ibid.
[115] Ibid.

4. Analysis

This analysis finds that through the discourse of the campaign videos, the Trump campaign has created a myth of Donald Trump: his message is anti-establishment and cements him as "one of the people." The political imaginary that is created through these videos focuses on the notion of "Trump's America": an America with strong borders, a focus on national growth and progress, and belonging to the "working middle-class Americans."[116]

The analysis further demonstrates that this message is adapted and strengthened by the fan video "300: Make America Great Again," in which the editors depict Donald Trump as a champion of the people, fighting against an invading empire that seeks to control the nation for personal (financial) gain.[117] In contrast, the analysis shows that the Auralnauts depict Donald Trump as the exact opposite: in "Darth Trump," Trump is portrayed as a disheveled bad guy, a pawn in another's game to take over the galaxy. In making the video, the Auralnauts have used satire and humor to ridicule Trump's reactionary rage against globalism and his political incorrectness.[118]

The analysis will thus argue that both fan videos use contemporary fan practices in order to challenge or reinforce the political myths of Donald Trump and therefore participate in public debate. By fusing popular culture and heavy political issues, such as the racial supremacy message in "300: Make America Great Again" and the denunciation of Trump's "America First" policy in "Darth Trump," these videos function, to a certain extent, as public spheres.The evolving public sphere, as theorized by Dahlgren, facilitates a (digital) space which affords public debate, engagement with political and cultural matters, and the tools with which to express and broadcast public statements.[119] This analysis will exemplify how these fan videos function as a public sphere and how both the pro-Trump and anti-Trump videos challenge the dominant political myth of Donald Trump.

---

[116] See 4.1. "Campaign Videos."
[117] See 4.2. "300: Make America Great Again."
[118] See 4.3. "Darth Trump."
[119] Dahlgren, "The Internet, Public Spheres, and Political Communication," 160.

4.1. Campaign Videos

During the presidential elections, Donald Trump aired 24 audiovisual campaign ads. Sixteen of those videos were published between May 2016 and November 2016, thus eliminating any ads from before Donald Trump became the official Republican nominee. In order to focus on a qualitative, in-depth analysis, four of those sixteen videos will be used in this research project. The four videos selected represent many of the major points of Donald Trump's campaign: tax reform, "draining the swamp," bringing manufacturing jobs back, renegotiating NAFTA, and putting "America first."[120] Therefore, these four ads will provide a basic understanding of the political ideology of Donald Trump's campaign and of Donald Trump's public myth. All four ads are 30 seconds long and were aired on national television.

A main characteristic of the discourse in the Trump campaign videos is the notion of "Two Americas": there is, for example, Clinton's America versus Trump's America, the old dominating global superpower versus the America that needs to be great again, and the America that is led by Washington elites and special interests versus the working people's America. This juxtaposition between the two Americas is evidenced by the structure of the text, the use of personal deixis and pronouns, the lexical choice, and audiovisual clues.

4.1.1. Text Structure

The structure of Trump's campaign videos are filled with repetition, often taking the shape of juxtaposing Trump's campaign promises with the Washington track record of the Clintons. In "Two Americas: Economy," for example, the clear repetition of this notion of two Americas works to condemn one version while praising the other:

> "In Hillary Clinton's America, the middle class gets crushed, spending goes up, taxes go up, hundreds of thousands of jobs disappear. . . . In Donald Trump's America, working families get tax relief, millions of new jobs created, wages go up, small businesses thrive."[121]

In "Change" too, repetition of sentence structure is used to paint Trump's America against Clinton's:

---

[120] Qiu, "Donald Trump's Top 10 Campaign Promises."
[121] Team Trump, "Two Americas: Economy," 00:00:01-00:00:20.

> "A vote for Hillary is a vote for more of the same . . . A vote for Donald Trump is a vote for change . . ."[122]

The first sentence points back to an earlier point in the text, where the campaign video tells the audience why Hillary Clinton won't change Washington, thus repeating not only sentence structure in order to emphasize the juxtaposition, but furthermore to emphasize the central concept of "change" and who will bring it on:

> "Hillary Clinton won't change Washington. She's been there thirty years: taxes went up, terrorism spread, jobs vanished, but special interests and Washington insiders thrived."[123]

By juxtaposing the stagnation of the political status quo under Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump's promise for change, the campaign video associates the negative qualities of stagnation with the Washington insider Hillary Clinton, while positively identifying Trump as an outsider to the political playing field. The repetition of sentence structure here works to strengthen this "us versus them" narrative.

4.1.2. Personal deixis and pronouns

The use of personal deixis and pronouns locate the audience, the speaker and how they relate to each other. In the campaign videos, personal deixis is used to further cement Donald Trump as a champion of "Americans," as opposed to special interests or Washington insiders. In "Deals," for example, the possessive pronoun "our" works to identify both Trump's audience and his relationship to them:

> "Our economy once dominated the world and our middle-class thrived. Today, jobs are gone, factories closed, because of bad trade deals pushed by The Clintons, that sent our jobs to other countries."[124]

The implied "we" in "our" is exclusive: Donald Trump has never been part of America's middle-class nor has he ever been at risk of losing his job due to the outsourcing of labor. However, this use of "our" suggests that Trump shares the values, hardships and goals of this audience. In "Deals" the audience is identified as "the American Worker," in "Change" the audience is identified as "Americans" in general, and in "Consumer Benefit" specifically as

---

[122] Team Trump, "Change," 00:00:18-00:00:21.
[123] Ibid., 00:00:01-00:00:11.
[124] Team Trump, "Deals," 00:00:01-00:00:13.

21

"families making $60,000 a year," "working moms," and "business owners." Across the videos it therefore becomes apparent that, through the strategic use of "our," the Donald Trump campaign aims to include Donald Trump as part of the "working middle-class American" identity.

4.1.3. Lexical Choice

This identity is strengthened by the use of simple and unambiguous words in the campaign videos. In "Deals," for example, the Trump campaign proposes Donald Trump's plan as follows:

> "Renegotiate NAFTA, stop foreign nations from cheating us, cut taxes to reopen factories."[125]

"Change" and "Two Americas: Economy" feature similar simple, often monosyllabic words that leave no room for ambiguity: "great," "bad," "up," "down," "thrive," "close," "dominate," "vanished." The keywords of sentences are active verbs: in the example above, "renegotiate," "stop," "cut," and "reopen". In the context of the quoted sentence these words speak to Donald Trump's audience, who have been established as the "working middle-class Americans," for these words promise action and stay away from convoluted political jargon of Capitol Hill. As Dan Schill argues, the political jargon of Capitol Hill is "such a part of the culture that an expression for the jargon itself has sprung up over time – 'hill speak.'"[126] The use of simple, often monosyllabic words not only strengthens Donald Trump's relationship with the working-class identity, but moreover works to further disassociate his campaign from the general political convention in which, as Schill argues, rhetoric is "infused with colorful and historical turns of phrase and anecdotes."[127]

Furthermore, all campaign videos focus on business. All videos mention "tax" or "taxes" at least once, resulting in a total of seven times. The word "jobs," too, is mentioned in all videos, totalling five mentions. And finally, all videos identify the audience as some variant of middle-class Americans: "middle class," "working families," "families making

---

[125] Team Trump, "Deals," 00:00:16-00:00:22.
[126] Schill, "A "Hill Speak" Primer," 831.
[127] Ibid. Schill argues that on Capitol Hill, "sentences are often composed of a series of slang terms: a "staffer" will try to get "face time" with his or her "boss" so that he or she can get "sign off" on the "red line" "language" and attach the bill to the "chairman's mark" or the next "germane" "vehicle." Jargon is such a part of the culture that an expression for the jargon itself has sprung up over time- "hill speak.""

$60,000 a year," "working moms," "business owners," "Americans," and "the American Worker." All resulting in the message that "Donald Trump knows business and he will fight for the American Worker." This focus on business, instead of for example environmental issues or cultural identity politics, stresses once again that Donald Trump is not a politician, but a businessman.

4.1.4. The performance

The video material further emphasizes the distinction between two Americas: in "Two Americas," for example, the color scheme of Clinton's America is grey and gloomy and the actors appear sad, while the transition to Donald Trump's America is a bright flash of color, resulting in cheering and smiling actors, colorful establishing shots and the hoisting of the star-spangled banner.

Similarly, in "Change" the Trump campaign argues that Hillary Clinton won't bring about any change, since she has already been in Washington for thirty years.[128] To emphasize Hillary Clinton's track record as part of the political elite, the video uses a filter that desaturates the colors and projects horizontal stripes over the video material, as if the footage was indeed thirty years old. When Donald Trump enters the narrative, the colors return and the horizontal stripes disappear. This repeated use of coloring filters not only accentuates the difference between Donald Trump's America and Hillary Clinton's America, but furthermore establishes the divide as a dichotomy between bright and dim, colorful and grey, innovation and stagnation.

The positive qualities of color, cheering crowds and brightness symbolize Trump's campaign, while all visual clues that can cause negative connotations are directly linked to the Clinton campaign, such as the muted colors and sad faces. The use of establishing shots that portray Donald Trump as speaking directly to factory workers,[129] cheered on by crowds during rallies,[130] or in front of his private plane,[131] emphasize Trump's political identity as a spokesperson for middle-class Americans and a businessman.

---

[128] Team Trump, "Change," 00:00:04.
[129] Team Trump, "Deals," 00:00:21. Team Trump, "Change," 00:00:12. Team Trump, "Two Americas: Economy," 00:00:16.
[130] Team Trump, "Change," 00:00:14. Team Trump, "Consumer Benefit," 00:00:01. Team Trump, "Deals," 00:00:18. Team Trump, "Two Americas: Economy," 00:00:25.
[131] Team Trump, "Change," 00:00:28. Team Trump, "Deals," 00:00:16.

Throughout the discourse of the campaign videos, in both the audio and visual text, Donald Trump is established as an outsider to the political establishment who fights for the American worker. The campaign videos furthermore promote Trump's political ideology by stating what he will change: bad trade deals, Washington insiders, the spread of terrorism, and globalism. The discourse of his campaign videos establish Donald Trump's political identity as a business-savvy, anti-establishment champion of "the American worker;" a myth that is both strengthened and challenged by the fan videos.

4.2. 300: Making America Great Again

In the fan video "300: Make America Great Again" the creators, the YouTube account Aryan Wisdom, have edited sound bites and video material from politicians such as Donald Trump, Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama within the 2006 film *300*. The film tells the story of King Leonidas who leads 300 Spartans into battle against the invading Persian army. The fan video casts Donald Trump as King Leonidas, Barack Obama as a Persian messenger, and Hillary Clinton as an advisor to the Persian god-king. The fan video follows the narrative of Donald Trump fighting against the political establishment and for the American people, as evidenced by both the used sound bites and the casting of Donald Trump as King Leonidas.

The YouTube account Aryan Wisdom is part of the website *AryanWisdom.com*, which describes itself as "dedicated to the traditions, challenges and continued evolution of the European people."[132] The name itself and the description on the "About" page of the website indicate that this website, and therefore the video, is affiliated with white supremacist ideology.[133] The editor's choice for *300* specifically hints at a similar message of racial supremacy: the Spartans are characterized as brave warriors and their outfits reveal their perfectly chiseled white bodies, whereas the evil Persian army of Xerxes is made up of black, brown and disfigured people. The synchronisation of the popular slogans "this is Sparta!" and "make America great again," emphasize what Daniel Bessner and Matthew Sparke have called "Trump's race-supremacist hyper-nationalism."[134]

---

[132] Aryan Wisdom. "About."
[133] Ibid. As the editor of the website and the video claims, "the word Aryan is often translated to mean noble, which also captures the goal of this web site. We aim to give you the inspiration, motivation and knowledge that you need to become a better man and deserve to be called Aryan."
[134] Bessner and Sparke, "Nazism, Neoliberalism, and the Trumpist Challenge," 5.

Aligning Trump with the Spartan forces in order to spread a message of white supremacy is, however, a seemingly dubious choice, since the Spartans lost the Battle of Thermopylae portrayed in the film. However, as Douglas S. Tung and Teresa K. Tung illustrate, the Battle of Thermopylae "was a pyrrhic victory for Xerxes," since "it offered Athens the invaluable time to prepare for the decisive naval Battle of Salamis," after which Xerxes and his forces retreated.[135] The sacrifice of King Leonidas thus eventually ensured victory for the Greeks, and although the Spartans might not have survived the battle, their allies and ideology did.

4.2.1. Text Structure

Similar to the campaign videos, Aryan Wisdom use repetition of key phrases and concepts to strengthen Donald Trump's "outsider" status. In these three examples below, the words "special interest," "donors," and "lobbyists" are used repetitively:

> "The establishment, the media, the special interest, the lobbyists, the donors, they're all against me."[136]

> "We're self-funding the campaign, no special interest, no donors."[137]

> "These are special interest folks, these are lobbyists, these are people that don't necessarily love our country, they don't have the best interest of our country at heart."[138]

In doing so, the concept that Donald Trump is not a part of the establishment is emphasized, while the establishment itself (characterized by special interest, lobbyist and donors) is "against" Donald Trump and his campaign promises. By repetitively distancing himself from the political establishment and claiming that these Washington insiders do not have the best interest of the United States at heart, the editor creates a positive connotation for his "outsider" status.

Another related theme that reoccurs throughout the video is the concept that the United States and its people are in need of saving. As Donald Trump's campaign slogan

---

[135] Tung and Tung, *36 Stratagems Plus*, 239.
[136] Aryan Wisdom, "300: Make America Great Again," 00:00:31-00:00:38.
[137] Ibid., 00:00:56-00:01:00.
[138] Ibid., 00:01:14-00:01:22.

promotes, and the discourse of this fan video and the campaign video suggest, America needs to be made great again:

> "We have to stop it. We are now going to make it for your benefit, we're going to make the deals for the American people."[139]

These statements thread the narrative of the used sound bites together to fit the overarching theme of "making America great again". The repetition strengthens the promise and cements Donald Trump as the person who sees what is wrong with the United States and plans to make it better.

4.2.2. Personal Deixis

The vilification of the political establishment (here characterized by "special interest," "lobbyists," "donors") is further emphasized through the use of personal deixis. The use of pronouns in the Donald Trump sound bites locate Trump's audience and his relation to them:

> "These are special interest folks, these are lobbyist, these are people that don't necessarily love our country, they don't have the best interest of our country at heart. When you see the kind of deals made in our country, a lot of those deals are made because the politicians aren't so stupid, they're making them for their benefit. We have to stop it."[140]

The use of our/we and they/their creates an apparent "us versus them" dichotomy in the selected sound bites, in which Donald Trump implies himself to be a part of the "us," associated with positive properties, while distancing himself from the political establishment. The Washington elite, or "the politicians," are the "them" in this "us versus them" dichotomy, associated with negative properties such as making deals for personal benefit. The positive properties that Donald Trump promotes, in turn, are love of one's country and the wish to better this country. By stressing the political establishment's abuse of power, here characterized by making deals for personal benefit and the acceptance of donor money, the editor legitimizes Donald Trump's anti-establishment campaign and his political identity as a Washington outsider.

---

[139] Aryan Wisdom, "300: Make America Great Again," 00:01:34-00:01:42.
[140] Ibid., 00:01:14-00:01:34.

4.2.3. Lexical Choice

The content words of the sound bites used by the creators of the fan video fit the overall militaristic narrative of the *300* film. The first scene Aryan Wisdom used for their fan video, for example, shows King Leonidas speaking to his army in order to prepare them for battle. In the fan video, the creators have used a snippet of a Trump speech that functions almost similar to a military speech:

> "The people of this country are absolutely incredible people and I'm honored to be with you tonight, it's like this all over the place. We're gonna take our country back folks, we're gonna take it back."[141]

In other instances as well, the image of a battle is invoked:

> "We will no longer surrender this country or its people to the false song of globalism."[142]

> "We're gonna win, we're gonna win it for the people, we're gonna win it for our country."[143]

The use of content words such as "surrender," "take back" and "win" in the context of a political leader discussing the fate of a country, suggests that there is some form of battle to be fought. Here, the lexical choice for militarian content words work to clearly distinguish between positive and negative qualities of political power. Winning, for example, has an unambiguously positive connotation, and is used here to create a positive identity for Trump and his campaign. Similarly, phrases with negative connotations, such as "surrender" and "false," are used to identify the actions of his political opponents (here represented by "the false song of globalism," and in the video represented by Barack Obama). Therefore, the Aryan Wisdom account here represents Donald Trump's campaign as a just fight against the establishment, celebrating him as an outsider of the political establishment.

Furthermore, the editor's inclusion of the word "globalism" in this video, stresses a message of racial supremacy. As Douglas Kellner argues, "the term 'globalism is often used as a code word that stands for a tremendous diversity of issues," and in the case of the far right describes their fear "of a rapidly encroaching world government."[144] The lexical choice

---

[141] Aryan Wisdom, "300: Make America Great Again," 00:00:05-00:00:22.
[142] Ibid., 00:04:32-00:05:58.
[143] Ibid., 00:04:52-00:05:58.
[144] Kellner, "Theorizing Globalization," 300-301.

for "globalism" in the context of this video, as it is created by the editor(s) of Aryan Wisdom and using video material from a film with a clear racial supremacist message, suggests that the Donald Trump myth created in this particular fan video is a myth of not just anti-establishment and nationalism, but of racial supremacy as well.

4.2.4. The Performance

The message of "a just fight" is furthermore emphasized in the video material itself, where Donald Trump's character fights an actual war against Barack Obama and George Soros.[145] In the film, King Leonidas defends his homeland against an army of invading Persians, led by the god-king Xerxes.[146] In the fan adaptation, Donald Trump takes on the role of the hero, King Leonidas. Barack Obama portrays the messenger and puppet of the god-king, who is portrayed as George Soros. Hillary Clinton, Ben Shapiro, Sumner Redstone and Michael Eisner, amongst others, play minor roles.

In the beginning of the fan video, Donald Trump says the following:

> "I see all of this money being poured into commercials and it's not their money, it's special interest money, and this is on both sides. This is on the Republican side, the democrat side. These are special interest folks, these are lobbyist, these are people that don't necessarily love our country, they don't have the best interest of our country at heart."[147]

The visual material in this scene starts with Donald Trump talking to his advisors and the Spartan warriors, only to cut to a shot of gold coins falling onto a pile.[148] Hands begin to grab the money and the next shots shows Ted Cruz, Hillary Clinton and George Soros enjoying aforementioned riches.[149]

The soundbite and the video material work together to establish Cruz, Clinton and Soros as the villains of this fanvideo: when Trump says "these are people that don't necessarily love our country," the video material clearly identifies Cruz, Clinton and Soros as "those" people. By juxtaposing Trump's message of the Washington elite making bad trade deals for personal gain with the film material of the villain Xerxes and his inner circle

---

[145] Haberman, "Soros going to bat for Clinton." *Politico*. George Soros donated over a million dollars to the election campaign of Clinton.
[146] "300: Plot Summary." *IMDb*.
[147] Aryan Wisdom, "300 Make America Great Again," 00:01:04-00:01:19.
[148] Ibid., 00:01:04-00:01:10.
[149] Ibid., 00:01:06-00:01:19.

enjoying excessive wealth, the Aryan Wisdom account justifies Donald Trump's fight against the establishment.

One of the most iconic scenes from the *300* film depicts a conversation between King Leonidas and a Persian messenger who asks for Spartan submission to Xerxes. King Leonidas refuses and uses the messenger to send a message of his own: he kicks the messenger into a pit while yelling "this is Sparta!," and the messenger falls to his death.[150] In the fanvideo it is Donald Trump who kicks Barack Obama into the pit, reiterating his own catchphrase, "we are going to make America great again."[151] Again, the juxtaposition of Spartan and American nationalism serves to promote Donald Trump's political ideology.

By giving Donald Trump the role of the leader of a small rebel force, the editor promotes Trump's identity as a champion of the people, fighting against an invading empire that seeks to destroy the nation for personal gain. Simultaneously, the editor promotes an ideology of racial supremacy in both the choice of the *300* film and the selection of the sound bites. Therefore, Aryan Wisdom has created a fanvideo in which the existing mythology of Donald Trump is emphasized, while concurrently promoting an ideology of what Bessner and Sparke argue is a politics of "race-supremacist hyper-nationalism."[152]

4.3. Darth Trump

In the fanvideo "Darth Trump," Donald Trump is given the exact opposite role: instead of leading the rebel alliance, Trump is depicted as Darth Vader, a leader and subject of a fascist empire that seeks control over the entire galaxy.[153] This YouTube video, produced by the Auralnauts as a humorous mix of popular *Star Wars* scenes and "100% all natural Trump sound bites,"[154] does not follow a narrative structure and rather uses some of Donald Trump's more unconventional public speeches for comedic effect, such as attacks on political opponents, commercials, business interviews, and sound bites from Donald Trump's reality TV series *The Apprentice*. Not only through the choice of sound bites but moreover through

---

[150] Dubs, "This Is Sparta," *KnowYourMeme*, n.p. The scene has turned into a popular meme on the Internet, in which the catchphrase "this is Sparta!" is central.
[151] 00:04:29-00:05:03.
[152] "Nazism, Neoliberalism, and the Trumpist Challenge," 5.
[153] Auralnauts, "Darth Trump."
[154] Auralnauts, "Description."

Donald Trump's speech itself, this results in a satirical and often silly adaptation of one of the most recognizable franchises of all time.

4.3.1. Text structure

The Auralnauts have selected sound bites from Donald Trump's speeches which are littered with digressions. In the "Darth Trump" video, the Auralnauts present Donald Trump's speech style as unstructured and unplanned, by emphasizing temporary shifts of subject that do not end in a conclusion nor transit back to the original subject:

> "I'd just release my financials and people were amazed at how good they are, they're great! And I did something I'm proud of – I employ thousands of people, I employ, you know, I don't know if you saw but the Nevada polls just came out and it was fantastic."[155]

Here, Donald Trump begins talking about "financials," trails off to his employees, and finally ends in a discussion of poll numbers. There is no logical or structural conclusion to the sentence or the digression, thus giving the impression that his style of speech is "broken." This "broken" style occurs throughout the sound bites used by the Auralnauts for the video:

> "The last polls just came out and we are leading. I think it's all about confidence, it's about leadership, I really am competent. I am going to find a general so good, who is so mean and so smart, I don't just want mean, I want mean and smart, you know, I know a lot of tough guys, but they're stupid. One of the magazines recently wrote something nice, that I'm a world-class business man. It's true, I built a great company. I get along with everybody. We gonna build a wall, it's going to be so big–"[156]

Similarly, here Donald Trump starts by discussing poll numbers and his competency in leadership, digressing to finding a general, again digressing to praising his business, and finally digressing to his promise to build a border wall. In this example, the temporary shifts of subject don't return back to the original subject, nor is there a concluding reason given for the digressions. The Auralnauts, in emphasizing this "broken" style of speech in their satirical video, imply that Donald Trump is chaotic, unprepared, and unable to uphold the conventions of political speech.

---

[155] Auralnauts, "Darth Trump," 00:00:52-00:01:30.
[156] Auralnatus, "Darth Trump," 00:05:29-00:06:05.

4.3.2. Personal deixis

Opposed to the campaign videos' use of personal deixis to cement Donald Trump as part of middle-class working America, the Auralnauts use sound bites that focus on Donald Trump as a singular entity, the rich salesperson, rather than a leader of the people. In the sound bites, for example, Donald Trump says "I" a total of 45 times, while only referring to himself as part of a "we" nine times. The use of "I" in the selected material often occurs as a means to celebrate personal accomplishments:

> "I deal with foreign countries, I made a lot of a money dealing against China, I made a lot of money dealing against other countries."[157]

Trump stresses that he, as the "I," deals with foreign countries, such as China, instead of persons or companies located within these countries. By doing so, the rhetoric suggests that Donald Trump, alone, negotiates with foreign governments and, most importantly, wins: in the last two clauses of the sentence, Trump replaces "dealing with," which suggests collaboration, with "dealing against," which suggests competition. Thus, Donald Trump establishes himself as a businessman making deals for his personal benefit, instead of collaborating with the nation's best interest at heart.

Furthermore, in these clips selected by the editor, even when Donald Trump uses "we," it is used as an exclusive pronoun, establishing him as a spokesperson for a group of people (here, as discussed below, the use of "we" establishes Trump as spokesperson of "the United States" or "the US military"), while not being part of this group.[158] This thus continues the emphasis of Donald Trump as a singular entity:

> "You don't have to be a total genius to figure this out, even though I am a genius, okay? I'm more militaristic than anybody in this room, just so you understand. I'm really good at war. I love war, in a certain way. But only when we win. By the way when was the last time we won a war?"[159]

The use of "I" in the quoted sentences is used to promote Donald Trump in opposition to others: there is no need to be a genius, but Donald Trump is, and Trump is more militaristic than the others. Moreover, Trump uses "I" again to promote his own capabilities in saying "I'm really good at war;" however, when the practicalities of such wars come into play,

---

[157] Auralnatus, "Darth Trump," 00:01-37-00:02:10.
[158] Zupnik, *A Pragmatic Analysis*, 340.
[159] Auralnauts, "Darth Trump," 00:02:42-00:03:12.

Trump uses an exclusive "we" to talk about the fact that the United States have not won a war in a long time. Trump, although attending a military boarding school, never served in the military.[160] The use of "we" here, then implies the United States as a whole military power. The phrase, "I love war . . . [but] only when we win," demonstrates how Trump uses "I" to promote his militaristic persona, while using "we" to deflect responsibility for the results of such war.

Due to the lack of a clear narrative and the scattered origins of the used sound bites, there is not enough context to use pronouns to establish clearly who Trump's audience is and how he relates to them. However, since this artificially dramatized digression is a conscious choice of the Auralnauts, the video is likely aimed at an audience that appreciates the satirical tone of the video.

4.3.3. Lexical Choice

Similar to the campaign videos, the used sound bites for this video are characterized by the use of simple, often monosyllabic words. Through both the deliberate selection of the audio clips and Donald Trump's colloquial speech style, the Auralnauts emphasize Trump's outsider-status of the political establishment and its conventions:

> "I love Mexican people. I have a tremendous relationship. I also respect Mexico, but what they're doing to us in trade… First of all, they're killing us at the border, they're taking our jobs, they're taking our manufacturing and they're taking our money."[161]

The straightforward phrases "they're killing us at the border," "they're taking our jobs," and "they're taking our money" don't offer any insight in the complicated politics of the US-Mexican border, but they do represent, as Daniel Bessner and Matthew Sparke argue, "a style that appeals symbolically . . . to the "common man" who despises cosmopolitan political correctness and the corporate multiculturalism of multinationals."[162] The simple phrasing and use of powerful keywords such as "killing," 'jobs" and "money" characterize

[160] Gass, "Trump,"*Politico*, n.p.
[161] Auralnauts, "Darth Trump," 00:03:12-00:03:44.
[162] Bessner and Sparke, "Nazism, Neoliberalism, and the Trumpist Challenge," 5.

Donald Trump, as Bessner and Sparke argue, as "an angry embodiment" of reactionary rage against globalism.[163]

The selected sound bites emphasize Trump's reactionary politics, here exemplified by his disdain of trade liberalization and global market rule. In selecting these, the Auralnauts juxtapose what Bessner and Sparke have called Trump's "manipulation of working class hopelessness in the context of widespread economic distress" and "self-aggrandizement as an embodiment of the people's will," with Darth Vader, who, as the embodiment of *Star Wars'* evil Empire, aesthetically and thematically echoes Nazi Germany.[164]

4.3.4. Context

On occasion, the sound bites used by the Auralnauts make no sense without contextual information. In the scene where Darth Trump is first introduced, for example, Trump is quoted paraphrasing Ben Carson[165]:

> "How dare the press not believe me that I went after my mother with a hammer. He said, he went after his mother with a hammer, he wanted to hit her on the head."[166]

Without the contextual information that Donald Trump is indeed paraphrasing a passage from Ben Carson's book, the remarks become humorous and even with knowledge of the context, such remarks do not seem to fit the politically correct rhetoric of a presidential candidate.[167] In two other examples, the Auralnauts used sound bites from Trump's "Trump steaks" commercials and a promotional talk about his clothing and accessories line at Macy's[168]:

> "If you like your steak, you'll absolutely love Trump steaks. Trump steaks are the world's greatest steaks and I mean that in every sense of the word. Trump steaks are by far the best tasting, most flavourable beef you've ever had."[169]

---

[163] Bessner and Sparke, "Nazism, Neoliberalism, and the Trumpist Challenge," 1-5. As Bessner and Sparke argue, Trumpism rose in the "21st century global environment of discontent with market-led globalization," which gave way to Trump's reactionary politics "against neoliberal globalization; against elite advocates of trade liberalization, financial liberalization, and global market rule; and against associated forms of neoliberal governance in transnational forums ranging from United Nations agencies to the European Union to the World Economic Forum."

[164] Ibid., 1.

[165] "New Day,"*CNN*, n.p.

[166] Auralnauts, "Darth Trump," 00:00:25-00:00:52.

[167] "New Day," *CNN*, n.p.

[168] Auralnauts, "Darth Trump," 00:03:44-00:04:21; Ibid., 00:05:00e-00:05:29.

[169] Ibid., 00:03:44-00:04:21.

> "So here's the good news, so Macy's they sell some shirts and ties but not a big business or anything, cute. And fragrance and cufflinks and stuff. Some people think it's Harry Winston or Tiffany's, but it's actually Macy's. And they're good, Trump cufflinks. And like I'm going to tell you about Macy's but you go to Macy's and you know a lot of stores they don't use Christmas, they say happy holidays, happy–"[170]

These sound bites, although stressing Trump's career as a businessman, seem out-of-place in a political context, which makes the character of Darth Trump sound disheveled. The inclusion of these "out-of-context" sound bites thus emphasize the theme of digression further.

The selection of these humorous "out-of-context" sound bites stand in stark contrast with Trump's aforementioned angry reactionary politics and the juxtaposition of Trump with the Darth Vader character. This mix between comedic sound bites and the satirical representation of Trump's policies is a prime example of how YouTube videos can engage politically based on affective or humorous communication, or, as Stenner and Lunt theorize, as an emotional public sphere that parallels the political and societal engagement of the rational-critical public sphere.[171]

4.3.5. The performance

This contrast between light-hearted comedy and political satire is furthermore visible in the visual material of the fan video. The opening shot of Auralnauts' "Darth Trump" features a spaceship flying into battle against a much smaller rebel spaceship. There is a sign on top of the large spaceship, reading "Darth Trump: Make The Galaxy Great Again."[172] The Death Star as well bears a "Make The Galaxy Great Again" sign on top of it.[173] These visual clues work similarly to the use of pronouns in the selected sound bites, emphasizing Trump's business persona and his tendency to put his name on the properties he owns.

However, the most telling visual clue is, as discussed before, the portrayal of Donald Trump as Darth Vader. Darth Vader is an iconic antagonist that fulfils a leading role in the Galactic Empire, which seeks control over the entire galaxy. The militaristic Empire, under

---

[170]Auralnauts, "Darth Trump," 00:05:00-00:05:29.
[171] Stenner and Lunt, *The Jerry Springer Show,* 63.
[172] Auralnauts, "Darth Trump," 00:00:20.
[173] Ibid., 00:01:35.

control of Emperor Palpatine, controls Darth Vader, where Donald Trump prides himself on not being part of the political establishment and being his own brand, as evidenced by the campaign videos. By portraying Donald Trump as the "bad guy," as someone who is controlled by elite forces and an "insider" rather than an "outsider," the Darth Vader character is not at all in compliance with the myth created in Donald Trump's campaign videos.

Moreover, the Auralnauts' alignment of Donald Trump with Darth Vader illustrates a denunciation of Trump as the "angry-embodiment" of reactionary rage against globalism.[174] Aside from being one of the most iconic bad guys in the history of popular culture, Darth Vader and the Galactic Empire aesthetically and thematically echo Nazi Germany. Darth Vader's costume, for example, was in part influenced by Nazi helmets.[175] Taking into account both this comparison and the satirical use of sound bites to make Donald Trump come across as disheveled, the Auralnauts critique Trump's ideology and political ambitions.

4.4. Discussion

Both fan videos used Donald Trump's image and recorded speech in order to establish their own interpretations of his political identity and ideology. The language of the campaign videos create a myth about Donald Trump and his campaign: the political imaginary created in the ads focuses on the notion of "Trump's America" and his anti-establishment, business-savvy persona. The "300: Make America Great Again" video reinforces the created myth by emphasizing the same qualities that Trump's campaign videos highlight: Aryan Wisdom depicts Donald Trump as a champion of the people, fighting against an invading globalist empire that seeks to take control over the nation for personal (financial) gain. In contrast, the Auralnauts depict Donald Trump as the exact opposite: Darth Trump's character comes across as disheveled and is a pawn in another's game to take over the galaxy, while moreover ridiculing Trump's reactionary rage against globalism.

However, where the racial rhetoric in "300: Make America Great Again" and "Darth Trump" is relatively overt, the campaign videos only make coded remarks towards this rage against globalism. In "300: Make America Great Again" the message of racial supremacy is fairly clear: the Aryan Wisdom account chose to use the *300* film for their fan video, a film

---

[174] Bessner and Sparke, "Nazism, Neoliberalism, and the Trumpist Challenge," 5.
[175] De Lange, "From Concept to Screen," *StarWars*.

with a clear distinction between the good, white, chiseled Spartans and the evil, dark-skinned, and oftentimes disfigured (or imperfect) Persians. Furthermore, by using sound bites in which Trump denounces "the false song of globalism," terminology used by the far right in their reactionary rage against the status quo, this lexical choice links Trump to the politics of far right movements.

Similarly, in "Darth Trump" the editors portray Donald Trump as Darth Vader, the embodiment of *Star Wars'* evil empire, who aesthetically and thematically echoes Nazi Germany. The Auralnauts, similar to the Aryan Wisdom account, but from a satirical viewpoint, emphasize Trump's reactionary politics by featuring sound bites in which Trump denounces trade liberalization and global market rule.

The campaign videos, however, only make coded remarks to these far right politics. The campaign videos' message of getting jobs back, renegotiating bad trade deals, stopping foreign nations from "cheating," putting "the American worker first," and stopping "special interests" and "Washington insiders" might nod to themes and policies similar to those of far right movements, but these connections are never made explicit in the campaign videos.[176] By appropriating Trump's voice and appearance, however, both fan videos, albeit for different purposes, connected Trump's policies to those of far right movements, and thus critiquing or exaggerating the myth of Donald Trump.

In using Donald Trump's image and voice, these fan videos thus challenge, reinforce or take the political myth of Donald Trump to new extremes. These fan videos are used to comment on the ideological myth of politicians, and therefore function to a certain extent as a public sphere.[177] According to Dahlgren, the Internet, as part of an evolving public sphere, facilitates a digital space which affords public debate, engagement with political and cultural matters, and the tools with which to express and broadcast public statements.[178] The fan videos are part of a public debate and engage with political and cultural matters, and the platform on which they are shared, YouTube, facilitates the space and the tools with which to express and broadcast these statements. The comments-section, other social media platforms and discussion threads on the channels itself encourage further debate and participation from anyone who has access to the Internet.

---

[176] Team Trump, "Change." Team Trump, "Consumer Benefit." Team Trump, "Deals." Team Trump, "Two Americas: Economy."
[177] Stenner and Lunt, "*The Jerry Springer Show*," 63.
[178] Dahlgren, "The Internet, Public Spheres, and Political Communication," 160.

Due to the mixing of popular culture and politics through fandom, the threshold to engage with the political debate lowers: instead of a strict focus on the rational-critical debate outlined by Habermas,[179] these videos count on humorous, affective and ironic modes of communication in order to participate in contemporary democracy.[180] As Jenkins argues, fans "[refuse] to simply accept what they are given, but rather [insist] on the right to become full participants."[181] This rings true for both fans of iconic popular culture franchises such as *Star Wars* and *300*, and for political engagement through means of fandom.[182]

However, this critical engagement with politics through fandom is not without interference. Here, the central paradox of convergence culture presents itself[183]: where fans seek to reinforce, critique or challenge political ideology through fan videos, they do so from a position of relative powerlessness.[184] Both the functioning of YouTube as a public sphere and the hegemonic structure of the dominant culture undermine the authority of the fan videos.

Firstly, while YouTube affords the sphere on which the public can engage in debate, the social media network simultaneously shapes the public. Through algorithms, copyright claims, blocking content for certain countries and other regulations, YouTube controls to a certain extent what its users can see.[185] Indeed, the corporate control of cyber spaces, such as YouTube, illustrates this tension between the individual's ability to shape and use the tools of digital media to engage in public date, and the digital media's ability to shape individual (digital) identities in return.

Secondly, these fan videos use the resources provided by the dominant culture to create expressions of subordinate culture. John Fiske called this process "excorporation," in which "at least some of the power inherent in the commodification process" is transferred to the subordinate culture.[186] The videos rely both on popular film franchises and the image and

---

[179] Habermas, *Structural Transformation*, 36-37.
[180] Dahlgren, "The Internet, Public Spheres, and Political Communication," 157.
[181] Jenkins, *Convergence Culture*, 131.
[182] Ibid. As Jenkins argues, fans, as the most active segment of the media audience, "grew up dressing as Darth Vader for Halloween, sleeping on Princess Leia sheets, battling with plastic light sabers, and playing with Boba Fett action figures. *Star Wars* has become their 'legend,' and now they are determined to remake it on their own terms."
[183] Ibid.„ 204. As Jenkins argues, the traditional gatekeepers of media corporations and political campaigns "seek to hold onto their control of cultural content," while fans seek to gain control over the same texts.
[184] Ibid., 167.
[185] Pariser, *The Filter Bubble*, 184-188.
[186] Fiske, *Understanding Popular Culture*, 13. As Fiske illustrates, "[excorporation] is the process by which the subordinate make their own culture out of the resources and commodities provided by the dominant system, and

sound bites from Donald Trump. The source material with which the Auralnauts and Aryan Wisdom critique Donald Trump is therefore thus, as Fiske would argue, always already "part of power relations; it always bears traces of the constant struggle between domination and subordination."[187]

5. Conclusion

The fan videos "Darth Trump" and "300: Make America Great Again" challenge the political myth of Donald Trump by excorporating the resources provided by the dominant system into their own subordinate culture.[188] In doing so, these videos function as a public sphere, affording debate based on the fusion of popular culture with politics, and therefore bridging the gap between Habermas' rational-critical public sphere and the emotional public sphere as described by Stenner and Lunt.[189]

      Both videos acknowledged, to a certain extent, the myth of Donald Trump as constructed by his audiovisual campaign messages, but used this myth in order to, in the case of "Darth Trump," ridicule the hyper-nationalism of Trump's politics, and in the case of "300: Make America Great Again," to emphasize an ideology of racial supremacy. Neither video follows the exact contours of Donald Trump's myth as the campaign videos do; instead, the editors of these videos chose not to focus on the "omnipresent, insidious practices of the dominant ideology," but, to borrow from Fiske, these videos are a prime example of how to "understand the everyday resistances and evasions that make [the dominant ideology] work so hard and insistently to maintain itself and its values."[190]

      Through the use of fan practices, such as these videos, but also, for example, the memes of Internet culture and the writing of fan fiction, a fan's position of relative powerlessness in comparison with the legal and ideological authority of corporations, authors or politicians can be in part negated by their appropriation and consequent subordination of dominant culture. Therefore, as Jenkins argues, as fans increasingly "move from the invisible

---

this is central to popular culture, for in an industrial society the only resources from which the subordinate can make their own subcultures are those provided by the system that subordinates them."
[187] Fiske, *Understanding Popular Culture*, 17.
[188] Ibid., 13.
[189] Stenner and Lunt, "*The Jerry Springer Show*, 69.
[190] Fiske, *Understanding Popular Culture*, 18.

margins of popular culture and into the center of current thinking about media production and consumption," the influence of fans on politics and the governance of contemporary media platforms should be subject to further research.[191]

By investigating fandom as civic participation and vice versa, both media and politics scholars will be able to obtain new insights on the contemporary constituencies that no longer seem to be definable by age, gender, race or locale. Furthermore, since the Internet often affords the space and means by which fans participate in political or socio-cultural debate, it is increasingly important to research how the promise of democratic expression central to the myth of "social" media is negated by the neoliberal governance of the Internet.

This research project is a small step in the process of understanding modern fandom and political activism as increasingly intertwined, but was also inherently prone to limitations presented by the restricted scope of the corpus. Other fan practices, and specifically memes in the context of the 2016 presidential elections, allow for similar participation in an evolving public sphere and should therefore be studied as such. The incorporation of fan studies in contemporary discourse on politics can open up new discussions on the constant struggle between dominant ideologies and the subordinate grassroots activism of political fans.

---

[191] Jenkins, *Convergence Culture*, 12.

Bibliography

"300: Plot Summary." *IMDb*. Accessed 19 Apr. 2017.

Aryan Wisdom. "300: Making America Great Again [Donald Trump Parody]." *YouTube*. 3
    May 2016. Accessed 21 Apr. 2017.

Aryan Wisdom. "About This Site." *AryanWisdom.com*, 2015. Accessed 21 Apr. 2017.

Auralnauts. "Darth Trump - Auralnauts." *YouTube*. 7 Dec. 2015. Accessed 21 Apr. 2017.

Barthes, Roland. *Myth Today*. Trans. Lavers, Annette. New York: Hill and Wang, 1984.

Bessner, Daniel and Matthew Sparke. Nazism, Neoliberalism, and the Trumpist Challenge to
    Democracy." *Environment and Planning A* 0 (2017): 1–10.

Dahlberg, Lincoln. "Computer-Mediated Communication and The Public Sphere: A Critical
    Analysis." *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 7.1 (2001): 1-41.

Dahlgren "The Internet, Public Spheres, and Political Communication: Dispersion and
    Deliberation." *Political Communication* 22 (2005): 147-162.

Davis, C.H. "Audience Value and Transmedia Products." Storsul, T., and A. Krumsvik.
    Media Innovations. Göteborg: Nordicom, 2013: 175-190.

De Lange, Sander. "From Concept to Screen: Bringing Darth Vader to Life." *StarWars.com*,
    22 June 2015. Accessed 21 Apr. 2017.

Dubs, Jamie. "This Is Sparta!" *KnowYourMeme*. 2009. Accessed 19 Apr. 2017.

"Extreme Donald Trump Fans." *CBS News*. Accessed 19 Apr. 2017.

Fairclough, Norman. *New Labour, New Language?* London: Routledge, 2000.

Fiske, John. *Understanding Popular Culture*. New York: Routledge, 2010.

Fiske, John. "The Cultural Economy of Fandom." In *The Adorning Audience*, edited by
    Lewis, Lisa A. London: Routledge, 1992.

Fraser, Nancy. "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually
    Existing Democracy." *Social Text* 25/26 (1990): 56-80.

Fraser, Suzanne. "Poetic World-Making: Queer as Folk, Counterpublic Speech and the
    'Reader.'" *Sexualities* 9.2 (2006): 152-170.

Garrison, Arthur H. "Defining Terrorism: Philosophy of the Bomb, Propaganda by Deed and
    Change Through Fear and Violence." *Criminal Justice Studies* 17.3 (2004): 259-279.

Gass, Nick. "Trump: 'I Always Felt That I Was in the Military.'" *Politico*. 9 Aug. 2015.

Accessed 19 Apr. 2017.

Gee, James Paul. "Discourse Analysis: What Makes it Critical?" In *An Introduction to Critical Discourse Analysis in Education*, edited by Rogers, Rebecca. New York: Routledge, 2011: 23-45.

Haberman, Maggie. "Soros going to bat for Clinton." *Politico*. 24 Oct. 2013. Accessed 19 April 2017.

Habermas, Jürgen. *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1989.

Hall, Stuart. "Encoding/decoding." In *Culture, Media, Language: Working Papers in Cultural Studies 1972-79*, edited by Hall, Stuart, Dorothy Hobson, Andrew Lowe and Paul Willis. London: Hutchinson, 1980: 128-138.

Hamblin, Abby. "Everything Donald Drumpf tweeted about Mexico since 2015." *San Diego Union Tribune*, 31 Aug. 2016. Accessed March 3, 2017.

Jenkins, Henry. *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*. New York City: New York UP, 2008.

Milner, Ryan M. "Pop Polyvocality: Internet Memes, Public Participation, and the Occupy Wall Street Movement." *International Journal of Communication* 7 (2013): 2357-2930.

Morrissey, Katherine E. "Fan/dom: People, Practices, and Networks." *Transformative Works and Cultures* 14 (2013): 0.1-4.0.

"New Day." *CNN Transcripts*. 13 Nov. 2015. Accessed 7 Apr. 2017.

"Oxford Dictionaries' Word of the Year 2016 Is…" *Oxford Dictionaries*. 11 Dec. 2016. Accessed 21 Apr. 2017.

Pariser, Eli. *The Filter Bubble: What the Internet is Hiding from You*. Ebook Version. London: Penguin Books Ltd., 2011. Web. 22 May 2016.

Qiu, Linda. "Donald Trump's Top 10 Campaign Promises." *PolitiFact*, 15 July, 2016.

Schill, Dan. "A 'Hill Speak' Primer: Explaining the Legislative Jargon of Congress." *Political Science and Politics* 43.4 (2010): 831-833.

Scott, Suzanne. "The Trouble with Transmediation: Fandom's Negotiation of Transmedia Storystelling Systems." *Spectactor* 30.1 (2010): 30-34.

Stenner, Paul, and Peter Lunt. "*The Jerry Springer Show* as an Emotional Public Sphere." *Media, Culture & Society* 27.1 (2005): 59-81.

Stewart, Scott. "Examining the Terrorist Threat from America's Southern Border." *Stratfor*, July 24, 2014. Accessed March 3, 2017.

Taibbi, Matt. *Insane Clown President*. London: WH Allen, 2017.

Team Trump. "Change." *YouTube*. 12 Oct. 2016. Accessed 21 Apr. 2017.

Team Trump. "Consumer Benefit." *YouTube*. 6 Oct. 2016. Accessed 21 Apr. 2017.

Team Trump. "Deals." *YouTube*. 14 Oct. 2016. Accessed 21 Apr. 2017.

Team Trump. "Two Americas: Economy." *YouTube*. 29 Aug. 2016. Accessed 21 Apr. 2017.

Towner, Terri, and Caroline Lego Munoz. "Boomers versus Millennials: Online Media Influence on Media Performance and Candidate Evaluations." *Soc. Sci.* 5.4 (2016).

Tung, Douglas S., and Teresa K. Tung. *36 Stratagems Plus: Illustrated by International Cases*. Victoria, BC.: Trafford, 2010.

Van Dijk, Teun A. "Discourse Analysis as Ideology Analysis." In *Language and Peace,* edited by Schäffner, C. and A. Wenden. Aldershot, UK: Darthmouth, 1995: 17-33.

Van Zoonen, Liesbet. "Imagining Fan Democracy." *European Journal of Communication* 19.1 (2004): 39-52.

Warner, Michael. "Publics and Counterpublics (Abbreviated Version)." *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 88.4 (2002): 413-425.

Wimsatt, W.K. and M.C.Beardsley. "The Intentional Fallacy." *The Sewanee Review* 54.3 (1946): 468-488.

Williams, Raymond. "Base and Superstructure in Marxist Cultural Theory." *Culture and Materialism: Selected Essays*. London: Verso, 2005: 31-49.

Zupnik, Yael-Janette. "A Pragmatic Analysis of the Use of Person Deixis in Political Discourse." *Journal of Pragmatics* 21.4 (1994): 339-383.