Vitriol as an attack on culture: the logic of surplus value and the aestheticizing of the political
Frans-Willem Korsten

I would like to define vitriol first by means of a historical comparison, in comparing current uses of vitriol with their abundant use in the 17th century Dutch Republic. What has remained the same is that the brutal use of vitriol is aimed at closing down the radically open nature of the political domain (Republican in the 17th century sense of the term, democratic in the 21st century sense of the term). What is new is that in our days vitriol is an iconic expression of value under capitalism. It concerns forms of expression that are not so much cultural in that they are forms of self-articulation or self-actualization. Rather they celebrate the victory "of the desire for possession over that of enjoyment" (Marx, 'Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts'). One key characteristic of online vitriol is its speed, its desire and ability 'to go viral', which is both a symptom of and an analogy to, or perhaps a straightforward expression of capitalism's strategy of creating surplus value. Considered in this context online vitriol is not concrete or meaningful, at least not in the sense of what one could call a semantic use value. Its value consists in forms of exchange, and under capitalism this exchange is speeded up, in the process of which surplus value is created. The speed in vitriol is not coincidental, that is. It is needed to create a form of surplus value, that, in this case, materializes as discursive possession. As such it is the opposite of what Agamben defined as 'pure language', the language of a community to come. It is, rather, a form of perverted cultural capital that grants the masses expression, while "on no account granting them rights" (Walter Benjamin, epilogue to 'The Work of Art…', 121). Just as fascism once, surplus vitriol now has as its logical outcome the aestheticizing of political life and this, in consequence, has to lead to war, whether it is discursive in nature, or bodily, military.

Visibility as Vitriol: Exploring User-led Shaming
Daniel Trottier

Digital media enable citizens to persecute fellow citizens as a parallel form of social and criminal justice. While serving as denunciative acts against perceived offences, the way this denunciation is practiced through digital platforms can stigmatise targets through unwanted and unanticipated public exposure. This presentation examines digital vigilantism (DV) as warranting conceptual and empirical scrutiny. DV refers to practices in which citizens are collectively offended by other citizen activity (ranging from mild breaches of social protocol to terrorist acts and participation in riots), and respond through coordinated retaliation on digital media, including mobile devices and social platforms. Digital media enable a weaponised mode of visibility in which users source and publish the targeted individual's personal and relational details, often resulting in harassment, death threats, and other harms.

Drawing on exemplary cases in several national contexts, as well as earlier scholarship on online (self-)policing, this presentation considers cultural factors surrounding DV, in relation to embodied vigilantism. Of particular importance is the role that shaming plays as a mobilising force, notably in underscoring tensions in citizen-state relations: while DV may serve to contest state monopolisation of violence and criminal justice, state branches and the press utilise shaming practices to mobilise populations against targeted individuals, which may contribute to DV campaigns. This presentation concludes by addressing methodological and ethical challenges associated with research about mediated and ephemeral social practices.Daniel Trottier is associate professor of digital media. He considers social media use by police and intelligence services, and policing on social media.

Telefilm *De Punt*'s online discussion forum: participatory space for political discussion, or echo chamber for the polemical few?
Gerlov van Engelenhoven

In 2009 the Dutch public broadcasting service (NPO) released a direct-to-TV film called *De Punt*. The film was a fictionalized account of the 1977 train hijacking in the North East of the Netherlands. The event was the final action in a sequence of radical protests carried out by Dutch-Moluccan youths in the 1960s-1970s. The youths were part of the second generation of Dutch-Moluccans. Their parents had come to the Netherlands in the early 1950s, after having fought for the Royal Dutch-Indies Colonial Army (KNIL) against Indonesian nationalists. Arguably because of mismanagement from the side of the Dutch government at that time, their stay that should have been temporary became an indefinite situation of exile that lasts until today. The 1977 hijacking ended after twenty days, when the military surrounded the train, killing six out of nine hijackers, and two hostages by accidental bullets.

The movie *De Punt* presents a story around a fictional talk show called *Met Andere Ogen* (With Other Eyes), for which several (fictionalized) characters are invited that were involved with the hijacking: an ex-hijacker; the father of the one female hijacker, that was killed; an ex-hostage; an ex-military; and ex-prime minister Van Agt. At the end of the movie, a text appears on-screen, inviting the viewers to go to an online forum especially created for the purpose of discussing this historical event.

In an article about this TV film, media scholar Randi Marselis argues in favor of this digital discussion option, because according to her 'the typical expert-driven discussions in a television studio need to be supplemented with digital forums, where viewers can voice opposing interpretations and express their own memory work' (214). My presentation wants to dispute this argument, by scrutinizing the limits of an online forum especially designed for discussion on a specific topic. To what extent are the discussions taking place on this forum a representation of the main voices concerning this topic that circulate in society at large? To what extent does such a phenomenon risk turning into an echo chamber for the polemical few?

What's New About Online Vitriol?: Pamphlets, Protests, and Letter Writing Campaigns and the Rise of the American Right
Elizabeth Tandy Shermer

Today's Twitter trolls, fake news disseminators, and many online commentators sound very similar to yesteryear's American Far Right, the backbone of the conservative movement that took shape after World War II. The elite men and women at the helm of that movement were often dismissive, skeptical, and outright mocking of the conspiracy theories, wild accusations, and protests that so-called "ultras" spread in self-printed pamphlets, discussed in meetings of groups like the John Birch Society, and shared with politicians and newspaper editors in incendiary letters that often attacked liberal, left-wing, and even conservative politicians. But the conservative movement very much needed these Americans to win elections and gain support for laws that shredded social welfare. At the same time, by the mid-1960s, many Americans wondered if conservatives had in fact created a "Frankenstein's Monster that no longer does their bidding," a fear that resurfaced again in 2016. But though the tone, tenor, and accusations sounded eerily similar, their presence on-line seems to be an important new facet of the longstanding ugly side of American politics. After all, this vitriol can be more easily found, shared, and spread but is far harder to debunk. Yet, at the same time, this online hatred has shed light on the darker side of contemporary politics without giving much insight as to how pervasive it is and who is in fact spreading it.

Memory-making and the Birth of the 'Alt-Right' on Twitter
Sara Polak

The movement that is now widely known as the 'alt-right', consists of a fairly loose network of online communities, often of gamers, or anime of manga fans, and often without a history of idealistic political engagement. Many members of such communities are skeptical, misogynist, disillusioned, or nihilistic, but only in recent years have they become politically active, and associated with the nationalist white/racist right in the United States, partly through a shared aesthetic and professed passion to use their freedom of expression to its fullest extent. Previously interested in trolling movements like Scientology 'for lulz', the alt-right recently seems to have acquired considerable political influence through and since Donald Trump's election to the presidency. Steve Bannon is credited with bringing this digitally fluent and influential 'troll army' into the Republican fold, but Donald Trump has from early on been a key player too.

This paper considers the recent history, growth and aesthetic of the Alt Right through the lens of three hypes they have created or majorly contributed to: the Ebola scare, the birther movement, and Trolls for Trump. I argue that through these campaigns the movement has found it feet in the political landscape and fundamentally transformed the public sphere and the political arena.

"Broadcast Yourself": The Public Hypersphere and the Limits of Free Speech
Tom Clucas

This paper examines 'comment culture' in three online platforms: YouTube, the BBC News site, and Facebook.

It begins by briefly surveying debates about free speech, from John Milton's *Areopagitica* to Timothy Garton Ash's *Free Speech*. There has been a shift from a model of free speech as a collective responsibility to one that presents it as an absolute individual right. Next, the paper contends that comment culture has led to an exponential increase in the public sphere. The public sphere was initially conceptualised was a consensual space focussed on debate and common social values. By contrast, the contemporary public sphere is pluralist and increasingly extends into a new dimension: the individual stream-of-consciousness. This is well-illustrated by YouTube's slogan: 'Broadcast Yourself'. Consequently, this digital space may be termed the 'public hypersphere'. Between them, the absolutist model of free speech and the public hypersphere help give rise to online vitriol.

By analysing a serious of vitriolic exchanges on YouTube, the BBC, and Facebook, the paper draws several preliminary conclusions about the public hypersphere and the limits of free speech. Firstly, social media have developed a unique comment culture focussed on combat, disinhibition, and the contest for popularity. Secondly, online platforms are governed by their own distinctive 'thread logic', which disdains tempered rational argument in favour of passionate display, exaggerated rhetoric, and bathos. Thirdly, the conventional rules of conversation, argumentation, and mutual respect have been disapplied. Between them, these factors make the public hypersphere a revolutionary but vitriolic space, which has far-reaching consequences for language, logic, and the constitution of societies.

"It's Nothing Personal": Misogyny as a Hate Crime
Penelope Kemekenidou

Needless to say, social media platforms have made it a lot easier to participate in a crime or hate speech, without much personal effort. It was within a few minutes that actress Leslie Jones had hundreds of rape threats on her twitter account, after meninist Milo Yiannopoulos called for the trolls. At the same time, "trends" like the sharing of creepshot entertainment is on the rise: video material of girls raped or assaulted while unconscious is spread through social networks, often not even via anonymous accounts.

So-called "meninists" meet in threads like the infamous "Red Pill," which has been created by a Republican lawmaker, discussing ideas of how all women are basically children who want to be raped. It is there where "pick-up-gurus" like Julien Blanc or Roosh V emerged, making statements like that in order to protect women, rape should be made legal on private property, and sharing these ideologies freely on major social networks like Twitter, Facebook or Instagram.

Meanwhile authorities and the social media networks themselves fail to define misogyny efficiently as a hate crime, while politicians focus on one-sided laws to prevent hate speech, missing major points of societal problems. This workshop focuses on the difficulty of framing the rules for our online environment, while keeping in consideration the importance of free speech and online anonymity. A "live-visit" of Red Pill threads and entering a discussion there, could be used as well.

Disrupting and Deceiving: A Phenomenological Approach to Online Political Violence
Bernardo Caycedo

Does political violence also take place online? In this paper, I take a phenomenological approach to address this question. I present two case studies that are highly controversial. First, I summarize the discussion on whether Distributed Denial of Service (DDoS) actions are a form of civil disobedience and to what extent they are analogous to sit-ins. Second, I study the role played by social networks in last year's Colombian Peace Plebiscite. The campaign against the ratification of the peace agreement between the Colombian government and the FARC guerrilla purposely misinformed voters through social networks. While it might seem that these two cases have little in common, it is worth noting that according to their supporters both cases are justified civil resistance. Their opponents, though, claim that these practices should be regarded as harmful, anti-democratic, and violent. The public discussion of these two cases can help us understand how does today's online political engagement look like, under what circumstances it becomes violent, and what are the normative questions opened up by this kind of political action. This discussion would be a significant contribution to the urgent task of rethinking basic political concepts such as violence and civil disobedience in a time of increasing digitalization.

Justification of Cyber-harassment in Terms of Digital Media Literacy
Seda Gökçe Turan

Violence and media are important issues in media theories and research. The interaction between individual, society and phenomenon of violence which can be increased or normalized and this issues discussed not only in the media theories but also in many other disciplines in terms of different variables. Though it is unlikely to be the only factor affecting the phenomenon of violence, media tools and developments in technology have now caused violence to be debated in different dimensions. In this research, the effects of the concepts of digital media literacy, cyber violence and emotional deafness (alexithymia) on the perception of individuals as justification violence are discussed as factors that cause individuals to perceive violence as legitimate through communication tools. In this research conducted with the participation of 400 university students, it was determined that variables of being cyber bullying victim, being a cyberbully, digital media literacy and alexithymia (emotional deafness) were explanatory effects on justification of cyber violence. As a result of present research cyber victimization, digital media literacy and alexithymia have explanatory effects on justification of cyber harassment whereas being a cyberbully has no explanatory effects on justification of cyber harassment. In this context, it has come to the point that the use of digital media literacy and conscious internet using are important in order to prevent justification of cyber harassment.

Offline Vitriol: Reactions to a Social Experiment on Feminism
Stephanie Lotzow

In times where slogans like "Grab 'em by the pussy" lead a candidate to win the presidential election in the United States and where Aranya Johar's wake-up call against the discrimination of women "A Brown Girls' Guide to Gender" goes viral on the internet, women still get mansplained that Feminism is not needed anymore in today's society. As a reaction to this two-faced status quo and to personal situations of mansplaining, a social experiment was initiated at the University of Gießen that aimed at making people reflect on Feminism in order to find out whether it is still needed and why.

Inspired by the social media photo campaign "Who Needs Feminism?" that was originally initiated by students of Duke University in 2012, posters were put up at JLU Gießen, Philosophikum I, inviting people to write down reasons why they need Feminism. The campaign took place in the beginning of the summer semester 2017 and lasted for one month. What happened to the posters was regularly documented with a camera and summarized in a semantic and statistical analysis. The presentation will critically reflect on the reactions to the posters and will mainly focus on the offline vitriol the campaign received: the hateful treatment of the posters, the misogynist comments on them and the abuse of the official campaigns' e-mail address.

Besides proving that trolls are not only operating online, the campaign furthermore demonstrates the relevance and necessity of Feminism by pointing out serious reasons that people shared and discussed on the posters. The presentation will close with a personal reflection on the social experiment and provides the opportunity to discuss why the campaign received so much hatred.

Fighting back against cyber harassment: A case study of rescue services to support female journalists
Monica Williams

Social media platforms allow for the rapid exchange of information and the public's contribution to sharing ideas, news, and insight. Yet, the digitalization of media has made online users more vulnerable to threats and harassment,, which directly affect their safety and ability to carry out their work.

While men are subject to digital harassment, women are more likely to be sexually harassed. A 2014 Pew Research Center survey showed that twenty-five percent of young women have been sexually harassed or stalked online. A 2013 survey by the International Women's Media Foundation and the International News Safety Institute found that nearly two-thirds of women journalists have been threatened or abused in connection to their work. Female journalists and prominent figures are disproportionately represented in online attacks, with the objective being to silence their voices. So what can these women do?

In this study, I will analyze initiatives created specifically to curtail emerging threats to women online. Internet "rescue services" like Troll Busters and HeartMob, provide real-time support against threats or harassment. The anti-street harassment nonprofit Hollaback! developed HeartMob after growing tired of rape and death threats. The service is designed to connect targets of harassment with thousands of volunteers on social media who are poised to act as a force against the harassers through support, cataloguing and reporting.

Troll Busters' online platform, is supported by a team that sends supportive messages and monitors attacks to those targeted. Its first responders help women maintain control over their stories. My close study aims to examine the models and methodology to stamp out online trolls. It also contributes to the educational materials, awareness campaigns, and the dialogue on how to combat digital harassment.

#einearmlänge, taharrush, and "Nafris". The online expressions of whiteness after New Year's Eve 2016 in Cologne
Ewelina Pepiak

The media coverage of sexual assaults during New Year's Eve 2016 in Cologne has received certain criticism (Moser 2016, Zizek 2016). The analyses of news feeds have denounced racist and ethnocentric perspectives adopted by mainstream journals all over Europe (Abdelmonem et al. 2016).

The images of white German women attacked by dark-skinned immigrant men that went viral within days following the assaults, articulated a well-known dichotomy - that of a European victim vs. a subaltern perpetrator. They have resulted in an outburst of racist scapegoating in anti-immigrant posts, misleading online press releases and fake reports on further sexual assaults. Ultimately, researchers report a surge in violent attacks on refugees and intensified racial profiling of "Arab/Muslim-looking" individuals (ENAR, Bayrakli and Hafez 2016).

The inner struggle between criticising sexism and racism in relation to both the event and its coverage has reverberated through thousands of tweets, posts and memes in Germany and all over Europe. In spite of the attempts to denounce the visible outburst of islamophobia and, an ambiguous status of the event is still being discussed. Apart from referring to the stereotypical representations of miscegenation that had proliferated in the colonial visual repertoire, my insights will strive to critically examine the contemporary politics of representing a white European woman sexually assaulted by a dark-skinned man.

In analysing press covers, ideological discourses and racial identifications produced by European (German, French, British and Polish) mainstream press and online community in the wake of the New Year's Eve 2016 in Cologne, I will refer to a wider discussion on the relationship between gender, race and colonialism, with a particular focus on the notion of whiteness.

Trump, Trolls, and the Truth: Digital media in the era of "alternative facts"
Sarah Kendzior

The election of Donald Trump showed how digital media can be used by hostile state and non-state actors not only to influence public opinion through propaganda, but to challenge the very notion of "truth" itself. Propaganda tactics that have long been utilized in former Soviet republics – bombarding users with ceaseless lies and innuendo; surveilling audiences to tailor messages to their disparate political leanings; employing bots and trolls to create the illusion (and eventual reality) of a political mob – were used to great effect throughout 2015 and 2016. A weakened US news media, economically hurting for over a decade, lapped up the propaganda for ratings; a disillusioned US citizenry that was already losing faith in institutions proved malleable to the digital onslaught. Today Americans are trying to discern between fact and fiction under a government that both lies pathologically and lacks transparency. As citizens seek veracity, they also rely on social media for organization and mobilization, struggling in the midst of this propaganda morass to rebuild political trust. This talk will review key events of the election and Trump's rule and contextualize them within broader debates around truth, trust, and digital politics worldwide. The speaker, Sarah Kendzior, is an anthropologist who started out studying digital media in authoritarian Uzbekistan, only to see these same tactics used in her home country. She will also address potential solutions to this problem based on her experiences in democratic and authoritarian states.