Introduction

The dialogical principle of the democratic public sphere has been facing challenges in recent years that stem from a variety of changing conditions for the political process. To start with, the development of new media technologies is transforming the conditions for social interaction both in everyday life and in the relationship between citizens and professional politicians. Another prominent transformation of the political process springs from globalisation: a multiplicity of economic, technological, and politico-administrative relations today transgress the boundaries of the nation-state; the associated decision processes are thus taking place beyond the classical, nationally defined public sphere, and a transnational public sphere able to match these developments has not yet evolved (Fraser 2014; Volkmer 2014). Parallel to this, the nation-state's traditional, relatively homogenous cultural frames of reference are being challenged by the comprehensive supply of transnational media contents, increasing migration, and the resulting cultural complexity.

In addition, as a basic principle of the democratic public sphere, political decisions must be able to legitimise themselves in relation to the dialogical opinion formation among free, autonomous citizens. Not only does this principle hold a central position in modern political philosophy, it has furthermore been implemented as the normative foundation of the institutions of democratic nation-

states. Today, however, even in well-established democratic societies, the legitimacy of the political system appears to be at risk. Political processes in which wide-reaching decisions are presented as being 'without alternative,' and in which public political communication has been conquered by spin and strategic positioning, seem to discourage citizen participation. In some cases, this disengagement and the accompanying erosion of institutional legitimacy results in antidemocratic, populist currents gaining ground.

So far, research on the democratic public sphere has identified a variety of problems that represent major challenges to the basic dialogical principle of legitimacy: unequal opportunities of participation on the basis of gender, class, and minority status; non-democratic political movements; tendencies towards technocratisation of state policy-making and the increased importance of non-public forums of decision-making (governance networks, expert systems); the professionalisation of party politics with increased focus on strategy and spin at the expense of open debate; widespread apathy among citizens; the simultaneous fragmentation and conglomeratisation emerging from the increased commercialisation of the media public and tendencies towards addressing the public as self-centred consumers rather than universally committed citizens. Under these conditions, civic engagement is put under pressure.

Reflecting these circumstances, the articles in this volume address the following question from a variety of perspectives: *How can civic engagement in the public opinion formation of contemporary democratic societies be enhanced?*

The social science traditions on deliberative democracy (Dewey 1927; Habermas 1992; Fishkin 1995; Dryzek 2010) and civil society and social movements (Cohen and Arato 1992; Young 2000) have delivered valuable analyses in the field. Building on these achievements, this book supplements them with theories and research perspectives from the humanities (e.g. media theory, cultural theory, aesthetic

theory). The conceptual framing is expanded beyond the agenda of the political system, integrating an understanding of political processes 'from below,' as emanating from the everyday experiences and practices of citizens. If we apply more open standards regarding what counts as proper democratic activity, it could be argued that the political participation of citizens seems to have shifted to other modes of engagement and new arenas than those of formal democracy (Rosanvallon 2008).

In accordance with this approach, it is a basic thesis of the arguments that follow that plausible answers to the sketched challenges will need to build on and combine sources of experience and knowledge stemming from a variety of existing, more or less fragmented practices in public space:

1. Experimental experiences of new, concrete arenas for democratic conversation and participation, e.g. *deliberative citizens' forums* as an institutional innovation of the democratic process. A range of practical experiences of this kind have been produced in local, national, and transnational contexts (Mansbridge and Parkinson 2012). Crucial questions concern the generalisability of these experiences, their delicate interplay of conflict and consensus, and the possible role of the mass media in disseminating them in constructive ways.

2. Experiences of public intercourse in written and electronic media as well as on the *Internet* and especially on *social media* (Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram, Flickr, etc.), which are increasingly establishing themselves as significant forums of public interaction in addition to mass media (Couldry 2012; Fuchs 2010; Coleman and Blumler 2009). The nature and role of online communication between politicians and citizens, as well as among citizens themselves, calls for analysis in order to estimate its strengths and weaknesses with respect to facilitating genuine deliberation and its potential contribution to developing a general, democratic

public sphere. At the same time, the legacy media continue to play a crucial role as conditioning platforms of democratic debate, especially in relation to institutional politics.

3. Experiences of public communicative action of contemporary *social movements*. Social movements have historically been crucial agents in bringing about democracy and the democratic public sphere within the classical nation-states. Today, social movements are to a large extent operating transnationally, thus contributing to an embryonic transnational public sphere. The analytical question is concerned with which elements of institutional innovation—with regard to the democratic public sphere in general—can be derived from the practices of contemporary social movements (Della Porta and Rucht 2013). Can social movements thus be considered laboratories for the development of new types of public, democratic participation, transgressing the frame of the nation-state?

4. Experiences of *artistic* interventions in the public sphere (as opposed to power-oriented interventions) by artists and activists using aesthetic expressions in their public communication as dynamic resources for provoking dialogue and challenging the reflective identity work of citizens. Are artistic interventions likely to constitute institutional innovations on their own terms? Or should they primarily be analysed in their capacity to create public awareness and non-directed critical reflection (e.g. the interventions of Michael Moore or The Yes Men). In other words, should artistic interventions be regarded as possible contributions to qualifying the deliberative process by opening new, 'estranged' ways of perceiving and reflecting on the issues at hand (Duncombe 2007; Thompson 2012; Nielsen 2014)?

These fields of experience all represent existing societal resources and approaches to democratic politics that emanate from the perspective of the citizens, thus supplementing or transcending the systemic view of party politics.

The articles in this volume are roughly organised according to these four fields of experience. *Part I* presents articles that reflect on the democratic public sphere, civic engagement, and deliberation in the perspective of political theory and institutional processes.

In "Can We Make Public Spheres More Democratic Through Institutional Innovation?" Mark E. Warren starts out by defining democracy as a political system in which the people collectively self-rule. The people can rule only to the extent that their interests and perspectives are formed into public opinion that prioritises agendas for collective action. Democracies need robust public spheres. Yet even in the highest functioning democracies, public spheres are not as democratic as they should be. Public spheres are *democratic* if they accomplish three broad functions. They should empower inclusions, so that people have voice. They should be deliberative, in the sense that voice should take the form of informed public opinion. And they should produce actionable agendas that can be taken up by decision-making institutions. But voice too often reflects organisation, wealth, and media access. Public discourse is often destructively polarised, angry, and misinformed. And the agendas that emerge from public discourse are too often a poor fit with decision-making institutions. Warren asks whether we can design institutions that would speak to public sphere deficits by altering the ways voice is enabled and structured. And his answer is that—although they cannot solve every problem—deliberative minipublics count as one kind of institutional innovation that can address and nudge public spheres in more democratic directions.

Jørn Loftager's article "Deliberative Democracy and Political Ideology: Social Liberalism vs. Neoliberalism" takes its point of departure in the observation that while neoliberalism has expanded at the expense of social liberalism, democratic theory has simultaneously undergone a profound deliberative turn. The article explores links between these developments and presents a double argument: it argues how political ideology should be part of the research agenda on deliberative democracy, and points out a critical opposition be-

tween the two versions of liberalism vis-à-vis deliberative democracy. Whereas a social liberal notion of citizenship based on equal rights is conducive to deliberative democracy, the neoliberalism of recent years tends to define citizenship in terms of labour market participation rather than public political participation. On the other hand, a potential congruence is indicated between a notion of deliberative democratic governance that is sceptical of direct political steering and ideas of spontaneous social processes found in neoliberal ontology (Hayek), as well as in Durkheim's social liberal thinking. Danish politics serves as an illustrative, least likely case in point.

Simon Laumann Jørgensen's article "Frontline Democracy?" argues that due to performance management reforms within the public sector, the room for practical reasoning and relative autonomy among the frontline professions in the welfare state has been narrowed. Though this trend can be judged as advantageous to democracy in light of concerns with representative legitimacy and worries about administrators' arbitrary discretionary powers, it seems reasonable to consider whether they might also weaken democracy. The article applies political theory to consider what democratic functions might be lost in the process. In particular, it asks to what extent the analytical tools developed by Jürgen Habermas in the terrain of deliberative democracy could serve the purpose of diagnosing the democratic functions and dysfunctions of the so-called frontline spheres of contemporary welfare states.

"Dingpolitik and the Expansion of the Democratic Public Sphere? From 'Democracy-as-Talk' to 'Conversing with Things'" by Jan Løhmann Stephensen deals with the fact that theories that challenge the anthropocentric view of democracy and political participation in broader terms have in recent years attracted much attention. This has been the case, for instance, with Bruno Latour's so-called 'politics of things' (or *Dingpolitik*); and in direct extension of this, Noortje Marres' notion of 'material participation' as well as Jane Bennett's theories on 'vibrant matter.' Picking up from the critiques that have been raised against deliberative democracy for being a mostly west-

ern, white, male, bourgeois, and much too discourse-based construct that on closer scrutiny turns out to be anything but democratic, this cluster of new theories, which often goes under the name of 'new materialism,' seems to radicalize such critique in order to include non-human agency in the realms of politics and democracy. But rather than subscribing to this metaphor of a rupture within political theory, the article instead discusses if and how we might meaningfully align these theories—the anthropocentric, discourse-centred notion of deliberative democracy on the one hand, and the post-anthropocentric, materialist ideas on the other—so that we can harvest the best from both in the service of a meaningful expansion of the democratic public sphere, both conceptually and in praxis.

Birgit Eriksson's article "Taking Part, Sharing Power, or Heading for the Exit? Youth Participation in Cultural, Social, and Political Life" argues that the participatory agenda is on the rise in cultural, social, and political domains. While the democratic system is losing legitimacy, new participatory repertoires and publics are evolving. Participation, however, is not only required *by* citizens but also demanded *of* citizens in order to make institutions and society work. Participation can thus present both interesting new forms of co-creation, civic engagement, and empowerment, *and* post-welfare demands and post-political legitimisations. The article approaches this double-edged character by examining how 70 young Danish students experience and react to the participatory agenda. Based on texts and interviews produced by the students, Eriksson establishes how they conceive of participation and relates this to questions of identity, community, and democracy. Introducing specific cases from cultural, social, and political life, she argues that their understanding of participation is closely linked to the participatory repertoires offered by cultural institutions and expected by political authorities. She further shows how their understanding of participation was directly affected by a specific event—the European refugee crisis in the autumn of 2015—and the "organized publics" (Kelty) that followed on from this. She concludes by pointing at some of the

potentials of youth participation, and what must be avoided if we are to realise them.

The articles in *Part II* are concerned with the potentials and limitations of online communication, social media, and mass media as resources for the democratic public sphere.

Nick Couldry's article "The Expanding Domain of Political Contention: A Triple Problem" considers the multiple problems confronting analysis of the expansion in the nature and sites of political contention. It identifies three distinct problems. First, an *ideological* problem, which requires looking past the various ideological framings of 'where' politics is now, and which 'social' entity is represented in such politics (drawing on the author's previous arguments about 'The Myth of Us'): the self-serving rhetoric of social media platforms in particular should be resisted, and instead, it is argued, we need an account of politics on social media that is based on a deeper reading of social contexts. Second, an *ontological* problem, which overlaps with the ideological problem, but goes deeper: this stems from the fact that today's 'space of appearances' (Arendt) is constructed in advance through processes of data collection and data processing. This poses challenges for understanding what sort of 'social' is appearing to us, and is discussed with reference to recent literatures on data and categorisation. Third, a *topological* problem: for reasons that have nothing to do with social media platforms, but more to do with the changing nature of political risk and political power, the 'topology' of public deliberation has shifted irrevocably from a mainly national setting to a more complex configuration that is, in part, distributed across borders, although the nation-state remains very important. This challenge is discussed in relation to the recent debates on the public sphere, particularly Nancy Fraser's discussion on 'transnationalizing the public sphere.'

In Mads P. Sørensen's "Members of Parliament on Facebook: Towards an Understanding of the Pros and Cons of Online Political Conversations," it is argued that the ongoing conversation among

citizens, and between citizens and politicians, has always been key to the idea of a well-functioning democratic public sphere (Koch, Mansbridge, Habermas, Sunstein, etc.). Conversations between politicians and citizens in the Danish political system have traditionally taken place at political party meetings and at public meetings and hearings. However, the rise of new social media like Facebook provides new, interesting platforms for this conversation—and many opinion makers and scholars have high expectations for the democratic potential of these platforms. This chapter examines what happens when traditional democratic conversations between citizens and politicians are transferred from the old face-to-face meetings to Facebook. Using interviews with Danish Members of Parliament (MPs), the paper examines the advantages and disadvantages of online democratic conversations on Facebook.

Camilla Møhring Reestorff and Carsten Stage's article "Media Ecologies of Crowds and Participatory Trolling: 'Muhammad Movie Trailer' (2012) and 'Happy British Muslims' (2014)" aims—through two case studies—to develop a framework for understanding how contemporary crowds can be conceptualised as a specific kind of 'media ecology.' Methodologically the article argues that user-generated online knowledge can be utilised to provide access to interesting, but also challenging empirical material in the study of these complex and global crowd events. It furthermore seeks to understand the ways in which the media ecology of crowds can be understood as an ambivalent reconfiguration of the public sphere where affective and excessive crowd behaviours are cued by a particular 'participatory politics of trolling' based on the creation of suggestive spectacles. It is argued, however, that the 'participatory politics of trolling' does not, in these cases, motivate a democratic reconfiguration, because the media ecologies end up repeating highly recognisable affects, rhythms, and antagonistic political reactions inherited from a variety of past events.

In the article "A Blind Spot? News Sources, Democracy and Gender in News Media" Christina Fiig engages in a discussion of the

democratic consequences of TV news programmes in terms of a lack of diversity in news sources. In line with Jürgen Habermas' normative perspectives on democracy and the public sphere, Fiig considers the consequences this lack has for a democratic public sphere and for women's participation, representation, and voice in the media. The analysis draws on existing empirical data and on work by Justin Lewis and Peter Dahlgren. Lewis links citizenship, a well-informed citizenry, and news media in a discussion of the 'democratic promise of news.' With Dahlgren's analysis of television as a space for civic identity and agency, the article reflects on the contributions and limitations of television news framed by a gender bias and by some dimensions of civic cultures (knowledge, values, trust, practices, and identities).

"Civic Engagement by Invitation? Citizen Negotiations about Public Media Framings of Everyday Life Responsibilities for Societal Problems" by Bente Halkier deals with public communication campaigns, in which citizens are often encouraged and invited to take part in solving societal problems by way of reflecting upon and changing their everyday routines. In this way, everyday habits potentially become normatively contested, and citizens potentially engage in micro-publics of reflection and action on public issues in their daily lives. However, it is argued that, seen from a practice theoretical perspective, such potential everyday public engagement will likely blend into other everyday activities, and the degree of 'public connection' in this kind of engagement is likely to vary considerably. The article presents an analysis of negotiations in focus groups among Danish citizens about a number of public issue campaigns across policy areas, and their constructions of their responsibilities for, engagement in, and connection with the public issues in question.

Part III focuses on social movements in their capacity as potentially democratising agents, and as key players in the development of civic engagement and a participatory public sphere.

In "Learning Democracy: Global Protest for (Democratic) Education in the Social Forums and Beyond" Donatella della Porta and

Nicole Doerr argue that besides their external, policy-oriented aims, social movements are spaces for learning and experimenting with democratic practices. This emerges as crucial when global democracy is addressed, as issues of pluralism, tolerance, and the building of cosmopolitan identities are all the more important. The chapter explores the connections between democracy, creative knowledge production, and education in the transnational context of the Social Forums and other spaces for mutual learning that have been inspiring and nourishing worldwide protests for democratic education in the global justice movement and beyond it. The article first shows that education has been central for social movements in both their external struggles for democratic rights and their internal practices of intellectual knowledge creation and diffusion. From the labour movement to the global justice movement, the chapter then traces a criticism of top-down educational practices, of homogenisation of contexts as well as of specialised (or ideological) knowledge developed. The article discusses the framing of education as a global human right, and the encounter with and networking of diverse forms of knowledge among these transnational activists. Last but not least, it is argued that the recognition of diversity as a positive value for mutual learning in movement implies a particular attention to multilingualism, as well as to the importance of listening.

Thomas Olesen's article "The Injustice Symbols of Political Islam: Rethinking the Global Public Sphere" proposes that the global public sphere is ideationally and emotionally organised by shared injustice symbols. The focus of the chapter is on injustice symbols related to political Islam or, more precisely, to what the chapter calls a *global Islamic grievance community*. At least three potential contributions, it is argued, may emerge from such an approach. First, and this is a general point, the existing literature on the global public sphere has not given sufficient attention to the symbolically structured character of global public space, but has been interested mainly in its informational and communicative networks and in the actors driving such networks. Second, the existing literature on the global public

sphere is predominantly concerned with the role of progressive and/
or liberal-democratic actors and institutions in constituting such a
space. However, the political space of the global public sphere is, and
perhaps increasingly so, more complex and contentious than this
account leads us to believe. Third, security and political analyses of
the threat from Islamic terrorism and radicalisation, currently high
on the agenda across the world, need to factor in the global meaning
structure in which such processes are inextricably anchored. While
such analysis is not absent, there is a lack of a theoretical framework
in which to contextualise and organise it. The chapter aims to con-
tribute on all of these fronts, and thus to rethink the concept of the
global public sphere.

Under the headline "What's gone wrong with democracy?", in
March 2014 *The Economist* noticed "a troubling pattern [that] has
repeated itself in capital after capital. The people mass in the main
square." Mikkel Thorup's article "Street Thinking: The Radical Left
on the Place Protests" addresses another form of thinking about
the square occupations and demonstrations in recent years, namely
that of the radical left, including Slavoj Žižek, Jodi Dean, Alain Ba-
diou, The Invisible Committee, Toni Negri, and others. The chapter
explores and discusses their philosophical, political, and strategic
reflections on how people massing in the main squares actualised a
profound distrust in the classical institutions of representative de-
mocracy, the public sphere, party politics, and individual subjectivity.
These mass movement activities have been interpreted and translated
into a 'street thinking' that rediscovers the street, the square, the
mass, and the physical encounter as democratic media in an era that
is supposed to be all about the neoliberal individual surfing the web
and engaging in virtual behaviour and immaterial economics.

The chapter "When the Police Hijacked #Blockupy Frankfurt"
by Christina Neumayer, Luca Rossi, and Björn Karlsson aims to en-
hance our understanding of activists' social media tactics and how
these tactics materialise in contested corporate social media. Taking
its point of departure in Jürgen Habermas' critical public sphere

theory, this research moves away from an activist-centred perspective and explores how authorities such as police interfere in activist communication on social media. This inquiry is pursued through a case study of social media communication by activists involved in the Blockupy action against the opening of the new European Central Bank headquarters in Frankfurt am Main, Germany. It combines an ethnographic inquiry into activists' social media tactics with a social network analysis of Twitter hashtags, showing an increasing police presence in the hashtags over the course of the day of action, hindering activists' attempts to communicate their alternative perspectives through corporate social media. The chapter concludes by arguing that we need a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between activists and police. We also need to extend our perspective on the colonisation of the public sphere on social media beyond control and surveillance by including discursive and other subtler forms of colonisation.

Part IV explores the potentials of aesthetic interventions in the public sphere with respect to creating new patterns of experiencing and reflecting on politics and civic participation.

In the chapter "Affect and Effect: Artful Protest and Political Impact," Stephen Duncombe argues that every era engenders the form of protest appropriate to its hegemonic power. Neoliberalism is dependent upon worldwide flows of people, products, and, critically, information and images. From the square occupations of 2011 to the street protests of the present, global activists have become increasingly adept at creating and disseminating images of dissent, revelations of injustice, and performances of alternatives, utilising aesthetic approaches once thought to be the province of the artist. Duncombe explores the dynamics of such artful activism, pointing out how aspects of contemporary protest that can seem unproductive when considered substantially make sense when considered symbolically: tactics designed to generate emotional *affect* as well as material *effect*. Yet, a protest is not just an art-piece: its function is to

challenge and transform power and, in this respect, the spectacular protests of the past decade have a mixed record. The article discusses whether this is the result of a constitutive flaw, a mismatch between the form of contemporary political protest and necessities of political organisation and sustained mobilisation—or whether these protests are aiming at something larger: the organisational realisation of the aesthetic form prefigured within spectacular protests and, thus, the catching up of reality with the imaginary.

Henrik Kaare Nielsen's article "Artistic Interventions in the Political Public Sphere: Democratic Potentials and Limitations" develops a conceptual framework integrating aesthetic theory, political theory, and theory of the public sphere. It is a basic thesis that political agency always has a more or less pronounced aesthetic dimension and that this dimension may have crucial implications for the effects of political actions in terms of attracting public attention, creating engagement, nourishing participation, shaping sympathy or antipathy, and so on. The article suggests a distinction between a multiplicity of forms of aesthetic intervention with qualitatively different perspectives for the democratic public debate and meaning formation. Thereafter, it concentrates on a specific form of aesthetic intervention, the artistic intervention in the political public sphere, describing this form on a conceptual level and presenting empirical examples.

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