YouTubers as satirists

Humour and remix in online video

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Abstract: This article aims to discuss the role humour plays in politics, particularly in a media environment overflowing with user-generated video. We start with a genealogy of political satire, from classical to Internet times, followed by a general description of "the Downfall meme," a series of videos on YouTube featuring footage from the film Der Untergang and nonsensical subtitles. Amid video-games, celebrities, and the Internet itself, politicians and politics are the target of such twenty-first century caricatures. By analysing these videos we hope to elucidate how the manipulation of images is embedded in everyday practices and may be of political consequence, namely by deflating politicians' constructed media image. The realm of image, at the centre of the Internet's technological culture, is connected with decisive aspects of today's social structure of knowledge and play. It is timely to understand which part of "playing" is in fact an expressive practice with political significance.

Keywords: YouTube, online video, satire, participation, culture jamming, resistance, meme, viral, caricature, popular culture, political discussion, remix, parody, media

This article discusses the role humour plays in politics, particularly in a media environment overflowing with user-generated video. In online remix, popular culture allows creative production beyond consumption, entailing a process of selection, transformation and redistribution. These online everyday practices hence gain a political dimension, whose importance as grassroots participation is directly tied to their interference in the mediascape. As citizens seem to drift apart from forms of political participation once predominant making many fear the failure of democracy, other forms – referred to as non-conventional – appear to have been gaining visibility and relevance. Pippa Norris (2007) acknowledges a rise of alternative organizational forms of activism related to the growth of cause-oriented politics, as opposed to citizen-oriented politics, linked to elections and parties. The process of globalization as well as privatization, marketization and deregulation have reinforced *"the need for alternative repertoires for political expression and mobilization"* (Norris, 2007, p. 641). Looking at approaches that rethink the public sphere as a theoretical construct and as a reality, one may find a positive perspective on the segmentation of the public sphere – of which the Internet is

strongly blamed – regarding it as a strength and not a sign of demise. Nancy Fraser's (1990) conceptualisation of "counterpublics," in which distinct publics instil the democratic debate with vitality as opposed to a monolithic and exclusivist public sphere, offers a theoretical framework which provides heuristic possibilities to the study of online citizen participation.

In YouTube, amateur videos constitute "*a new form of vernacular speech – speech through the production of original and appropriated images and words*" (Strangelove, 2010, p. 156). Talking online means to manipulate images, meme-making and sharing these video creations. "*Citizenship is, in part, a question of learning by doing*" (Dahlgren, 2006, p. 273), including the experiences in seemingly non-political contexts, and talking is a significant practice in the political experience of citizens, beyond political discussion carried out in formal settings. Exposing dominant political discourse through critical comment is one of the political activities of online amateurs, and humour plays a part in leading that process to the next step: playfulness contributes to mobilisation and to grabbing the attention of the media (Flichy, 2010, pp. 58–9). Developing what Edwards and Tryon (2009) call "critical digital intertextuality," YouTubers do not restrict their actions to decoding or opposing content that is presented to them; rather, they enhance their media literacy by contesting the transparency of such texts.

Remixing or appropriation, characteristic of culture jamming and other forms of intervention in media culture, is the focus of our analysis. A key element of situationism, subversion was considered "*an all-embracing re-entry into play*" (Vaneigem, 1974, p. 150). The realm of image is perhaps at the centre of the Internet's technological culture and is connected with decisive aspects of today's social structure of knowledge and play. It is timely to understand which part of "playing" is in fact an expressive practice with political significance.

In this article, a brief genealogy of political satire, from classical to Internet times, is followed by a general description of the Downfall meme, a series of videos on YouTube featuring footage from the film *Der Untergang* and altered subtitles. Amid video-games, celebrities, and the Internet itself, politicians and politics are also the target of such twenty-first century caricatures. The analysis of these videos enabled us to identify the relation between politics and the media as a strong subject of parody and to understand how the character of Hitler was chosen to deflate politicians' constructed media image. This is but one example of how the manipulation of images is now embedded in everyday practices and may be of political consequence.

1. A genealogy of an ambiguous relation: humour and politics

In the history of humour, different perspectives are brought together as the dominant discourse has itself undergone changes through times. Researchers dedicated to the study of humour recognize an affinity with social sciences. Humour and laughter have been deemed "*essential to human existence and social life*," both otherwise unbearable (Zijderveld, 1983, p. iv). For Le Goff (1989), laughter is considered a cultural phenomenon and "*a social conduct with its own codes, rituals, agents and theatrical character*" (Goff, 1989, p.2). Moreover, humour is an instrument for deconstructing society, often looking upon areas that are

otherwise sealed off. Some topics, it seems, we can only discuss while laughing. Humour's historical presence in critique has been strongly associated with satire, leading to a special focus on political satire for the purpose of this study.

1.1. Satire's literary roots

When searching for "satire" in the latest issues of scientific journals, alongside comments on authors such as Pope or Swift, we are likely to find references to The Simpsons, and, more recently, to The Daily Show as well as blogging. One may attribute this to satire's "*unparalleled facility at cuckoo nesting in different media and genres old and new*" (Quintero, 2007, p. 9). Since its own definition poses a challenge to the day, the specific genealogy of satire is difficult to determine. Its possible origins, the Greek satyr plays, the Roman Saturnalia festival and satura, formal verse satire, had a rather different political character: the Greek comic theatre, a public event, engaged the participants in self-analysis through laughter, while affording a diverse group a sense of belonging to a community; Roman satire was written for a social elite of readers, and enjoyed as a private experience (Keane, 2007, p. 41). Greek comedy, like tragedy, was marked by a heritage privileging didacticism over aesthetics – even if the latter gained more importance due to the influence of sophistic critique – as is exemplified by aristophanic plays, (Silva, 1987, p. 58). In medieval times, even if outside the literary world, it is necessary to evoke the role of the jester in medieval courts, delivering his criticism sanctioned by the king. However, it should be noted that this was a controlled setting: the king's laughter discriminated and distinguished, and through this laughter society was structured (Goff, 1989).

In the Renaissance, a time for questioning both society and art, and for discovering new worlds, satire was assumed to have a social function, one of exposure and revelation, following the didactic tradition of Classic comedy. Two centuries apart, Gil Vicente in Portugal and Molière in France made their audiences laugh out loud at their own society. Erasmus' Praise of Folly is also brought to mind, a work whose simplicity in style contrasts with its message, making comic and serious difficult to distinguish (Blanchard, 2007, p. 123).

The eighteenth century is regarded as the most prolific historical period in satire, marked by diversity and creativity, and inhabited by some of the most influential authors. If its pervasiveness in most genres is very important, so is the broadening in scope from human weaknesses to the cruelty of human kind, now also focusing on social problems, religious conflict, and politics. Montesquieu and later Voltaire both tell their story as if describing a voyage. And similarly to Cervantes, studies on Montesquieu also note a self-reflection on satire inscribed in his text (Goulbourne, 2007, p. 154). Travelling is equally present in Jonathan Swift's work, a master of satire: to "*call the work of a contemporary artist Swiftian, we signal surpassing criticism*" (Boyle, 2007, p. 211).

After this blooming period in Europe, satire was propelled by the social, political and religious context of the New World, gaining momentum throughout the 1800s. Twain's late works are considered the culmination of this maturation. The British, the Puritans and new-born democratic institutions were easy targets, while abolition and woman's suffrage presented themselves as hot topics, begging to be addressed by satirists (Morris, 2007). As

we approach contemporary times, inspired by classical satire – both in format and in focus – 1900s' satirists voice a dystopian view of their reality and perceived future, deconstructing modern utopias as well as favouring technology and the mechanical as satiric objects. Huxley and Orwell embodied the satirist as a cautionary prophet, realizing the shortcomings of utopian dreams of progress before their intellectual peers.

Humour in general, by playing with meanings, challenges our beliefs as well as what we hold for granted and stable. In this, one can catch sight of the close ties between humour – including satire – and a genre such as fantasy. Similarly to satire's social function of shattering deception and illusion, fantasy is characterized as "subversive literature," given that "*structurally and semantically, the fantastic aims at dissolution of an order experienced as oppressive and insufficient*" (Jackson, 1981, p. 180). By violating dominant assumptions, subverting rules and convention considered normative, fantasy can be included in Fiske's description of the process carried out by popular culture of "*struggle over the meanings of social experience, of one's personhood and its relations to the social order and of the texts and commodities of that order*" (Fiske, 1989, p. 28). Satire is in a way the child of humour and fantasy, and acquires political strength from the dissident seeds existing in both.

1.2. Satirising through images: caricature, television and online video

Despite the strong literary character of satire, satirists have also resorted to image for their criticizing purposes. Besides prior influences from medieval art, Dutch drawings and Reformation prints, a defining moment was the invention of caricature by the Baroque masters. In a reaction to the idealization present in portraiture, caricature tried to cut man's hubris down to size, reminding him of his Lilliputian stature. In the 1700s, English artists started caricaturing politicians, turning the reaction to the constraint of formal portrait into "*political satires, or graphic commentaries on political events*" (Paulson, 2007, p. 312). After the French Revolution, caricature became a weapon, and those who wielded it started to suffer the same fate as the artists of words: prison. This potential was soon understood in the nineteenth century press, joining the satirical drawing to the critical spirit of the text, in an attack with varying degrees of subtlety (Santos, 1982, p. 11). While discussing his own Art, in the early twentieth-century, Leal da Câmara (1982 [1912]), caricaturist, painter, politically committed man, asserts "*caricature is to the art of painting what the pamphlet is to literature*" (p. 22). With advances in printing technology, caricatures and cartoons started having a stronger presence in the pages of newspapers (Tunç, 2002, p. 48).

Underlying this account is a perspective that images are not restricted to the domain of propaganda. Peter Burke (2008) reminds us "*caricatures and cartoons made a fundamental contribution to political debate, demystifying power and encouraging the involvement of ordinary people with affairs of state*" (p. 79). And if in democratic states political cartoonists have contributed to expose injustice, lack of freedom or political corruption, their importance in despotic contexts may be even greater and with harsher consequences (Tunç, 2002).

During the twentieth century satire moved to yet another medium. From satirical puppet shows like Spitting Image in the UK (Meinhof & Smith, 2000) or Les Guignols de l'info in France (Collovald & Neveu, 1999), animated series like The Simpsons (Gray,

2006), or South Park and Family Guy (Hughey & Muradi, 2009), the already-mentioned The Daily Show and The Colbert Report (Colletta, 2009), to satirical programs in which the politicians participate in person (Coleman, Kuik, & Van Zoonen, 2009), there is a growing body of literature on television satirical programmes and their influence over political opinion and engagement. In programs like The Daily Show or The Colbert Report, the targets of humorous deconstruction are not only social and political issues, but also the medium itself and its professionals. Considering *"parody aims to provoke reflection and re-evaluation of how the targeted texts or genre works"* (Gray, Jones, & Thompson, 2009, p. 18), these televisions shows are hence examples of satirical parodies that indicate *"skepticism about the news proper and the authority it channels and supports"* (Druick, 2009, p. 306).

Although suspicion has been raised concerning the end of the common shared experience of television viewing and its implications for the public sphere (Wolton, 1999; Bennett & Entman, 2001), the authors of Satire TV praise *"the shift from network broadcasting, to cable narrowcasting,"* viewing it as the *"enabling mechanism for these popular critiques of politics"* (Gray, Jones, & Thompson, 2009, p. 19). These authors note 1950's and 1960's network executives mainly stayed away from satire, for fear it might be "too esoteric" for "mass audiences," while cable channels could choose to alienate part of the audience, and, consequently, of the advertisers. This liberated them from the shackles of the need to provide "mass entertainment," allowing less consensual forms of humour.

A similar consideration can be made for the Internet. Yet, computer-mediated communication was not always considered a medium hospitable to humour, and there was little research on the subject: attention was eventually turned to humour due to its possible contribution to understanding group identity and solidarity, as well as individual identity (Baym, 1995). Computer jokes, for instance, are said to induce a sense of community into computer users, since *"comic texts transform the dilemmas of each agonizing user into a shared inter-subjective experience"* (Shifman & Blondheim, 2010, p. 1363). In countries like Russia, flash animation, shareable through email and hyperlinking, has embodied two long-standing traditions – the anekdot and graphic critique – to comment on social, political or moral life (Strukov, 2007). In recent studies, online satire is presented as a way of bypassing state control of freedom of expression, together with other forms of coded speech drawn on by Chinese bloggers (Esarey & Qiang, 2008), refining a national heritage of satirical comment and similarly to the protest songs of the twentieth century (c.f. Raposo, 2007).

The launching of YouTube – an online video distribution website – in 2005 can be seen as a decisive moment: it not only made watching video online considerably easier, its main contribution was to unprecedentedly lower the barriers to uploading and distributing video, inviting each of us to "Broadcast Yourself." In 2012, it remained by far the most popular video website on the Internet.[1] Many subsequent video websites mimic YouTube's features to some extent. As we gain access to creating our own channels, whether political satire is unable to please a large audience, too demanding, or too

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[1] According to Alexa, a company that compiles traffic metrics, YouTube was third on the list of the top 500 sites on the web (following Google and Facebook), in January 2012.

offending, becomes even less important. Political cartoons have seen their lives and their reach extended, technologically trapping politicians who become unable to smother 24-hour criticism (Terblanche, 2011). Already enjoying a long existence in political and social life, political satire has been renewed by the new media environment, as illustrated by the case of the Downfall meme, which we will now discuss.

2. Studying the *Downfall* meme: definitions and methodology

When something becomes highly popular and spreads quickly online, it is described as "viral,"[2] and when something does so by being adapted or remixed several times it is called a "meme," in tribute to Dawkins' concept of the cultural counterpart of the gene, the biological replicator.[3] Several events and references have hence become the topic of status updates, tweets, blog posts, photoshopped images and videos. Their fame increases through the online version of word-of-mouth, namely email, forums, blogs, social networks, or trend analysers – and amplifiers – such as Boing Boing, Wired, Mashable, as well as newspapers and television programs.

In the world of the Internet, and especially of online video, memes frequently offer a humorous take on the subject, and the Hitler meme corresponds to this profile. Shifman and Thelwall (2009) argue that *"[the] Internet, more than any previous medium, is suitable for large-scale distribution:"* the online meme has higher "copy-fidelity," increased "fecundity," and potentially enhanced "longevity" – all properties introduced by Dawkins in The Selfish Gene (pp. 2568-9). Shifman (2011) calls YouTube the "paradise for meme researchers," since *"[not] only did this website evolve as a central hub for meme diffusion, it also made the spread, variation and popularity of memes highly* transparent" (original emphasis, p. 4).

In the Downfall meme (also known as "Hitler reacts," "Hitler's rant," "Hitler finds out..."), a scene from the 2004 film *Der Untergang* (*Downfall* in English) sees its original subtitles replaced by new, distinct, ones. This is different from vidding or fansubbing practices because it does not stem from the fan community: most users had little previous knowledge about the film.[4] Despite following the tone and the main lines of action in the scene, the subtitles have little connection with the actual ones. *Der Untergang* recounts Hitler's final days, locked in the Berlin bunker. With a highly praised interpretation by

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[2] This term commonly describes *"videos which are viewed by a large number of people, generally as a result of knowledge about the video being spread rapidly through the internet population via word-of-mouth"* (Burgess, 2008, p. 101).

[3] Shifman (2011) distinguishes memes from viral videos on the basis of a different structure of participation: *"the* memetic video [...] lures extensive creative user engagement *in the form of parody, pastiche, mash-ups or other derivative work"* (original emphasis, p.4). Burgess (2008) states that "viral" and "meme" are *"very loosely applied biological metaphors […] appropriated from the various attempts to develop a science of cultural transmission based on evolutionary theory that have been unfolding for decades"* (p. 101).

[4] "Vidding" consists of setting television or movie clips to music. Its origin can be traced to the creativity of dedicated *Star Trek* fans (Coppa, 2008). "Fansubbing" is the translation and inclusion of subtitles by fans, and it has been linked to the expansion of Japanese animated cinema outside this country (González, 2007).

Bruno Ganz and acclaimed by the critics, winner and nominated for several awards (including an Oscar for Best Foreign Language Film), this film reached a reasonable audience. It was nevertheless accused of offering too sympathetic an image of the dictator, humanizing him, a condemnation which in contrast is considered by others the work's strength.

To discuss this series of YouTube videos, we defined as the unit of analysis the video itself and its respective title. We also considered the description provided by the creator (when available), and, in certain cases, other contextual elements.[5] In order to form a sample, YouTube's search box was used by typing in "Untergang" and "parody." Following theoretical reflections on parody, it could be argued YouTube videos are closer to the definition of "parodic satires," since the methods typical of parody are employed, yet, the target is extramural (as distinguished by Hutcheon, 2000). The film above all provides the material, even if the contrast between the dramatic tension of the original and the light-heartedness of most videos is arguably fundamental for this meme's popularity. The reason for preferring the term "parody" (instead of the theorisation "parodic satire," or just simply, "satire" or "humour") was twofold: first, YouTubers self-identify more with that term as opposed to satire; second, "parody" has a strong presence in the reflection on online videos and politics (Hess, 2009; Jenkins, 2009; Tryon, 2008). After that, we followed the links directing to "related videos" (in 2012, "suggested videos") mocking the scene where Hitler is informed of the Russian military progress, provoking the realization of his impending defeat. Other videos were found through blogs or newspapers discussing the meme. Since the scene just described became the most famous excerpt from the film (despite others being also used), we restricted our search to this clip in particular.

The videos were chosen for analysis on the basis of diversity, in an attempt to form a thematic overview of the parodies. When enough videos illustrated the treatment of one particular topic, as each new instance repeated common traits, and when no new topics were found, collection stopped. We therefore determined the size of the sample (50 videos) by analysing variations, and consequently concluding that we had achieved data saturation (Saumure & Given, 2008).

Table 1: List of instances of the Downfall meme analysed. Data collected in April 2010.

Upload	Title	Subject
2006-08-10	Sim Heil: Der untersim	Videogames
2007-06-07	Hitler gets banned from Xbox Live	Videogames
2008-03-05	Hitler gets scammed on eBay	Internet
2008-04-20	Hitler finds out his art sucks	Non-sense

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[5] In this study, we follow YouTube researchers' approach of combining the video with its contextual elements, "*[m]eanings are communicated through video titles, descriptions, visual and audio content, and written commentary*" (Strangelove, 2010, p. 156).

Upload	Title	Subject
2008-05-16	Hillary's Downfall	National politics
2008-06-06	The downfall of HD DVD	Technology
2008-06-07	Hitler Gets Banned From Yahoo Answers	Internet
2008-06-22	Ronaldo Leaves Utd	Sports
2008-08-15	Hitler's COD4 problem	Videogames
2008-08-21	Hitler finds out the Ending of Harry Potter and the Half Blood Prince	Pop culture
2008-09-17	La chute – Sarkozy	National politics
2008-09-17	Hitler Loses His Girlfriend	Non-sense
2008-09-29	The Republican Downfall	National politics
2008-10-14	Hitler gets his Star Wars Convention ruined.	Pop culture
2008-11-03	Real Estate Downfall	National politics
2008-11-25	Hitler se entera que Farkas es candidato presidencial gracias a Facebook	National politics
2008-11-25	Hitler Finds Out hes got Herpes	Non-sense
2008-11-26	Hitler Hates YouTube	YouTube
2008-11-27	Hitler cant complete super mario bros...	Videogames
2008-11-28	Hitler gets betrayed in a game of Risk	Games
2008-12-11	Hitler Hates "Hitler Gets Banned" Parody Videos	Meta-video
2008-12-23	Hitler the I.T. manager has a vista problem on his hands..	Technology
2008-12-24	Hitler finds out there is no Santa	Ridicule
2008-12-27	Hitler hates fred	YouTube
2008-12-28	Hitler finds out that they cancelled Hannah Montana	Pop culture
2009-01-08	Hitler Loses his Teddy	Non-sense
2009-01-28	Lock-out au Journal de Montréal	Local issues
2009-02-04	Downfall of Grammar	Internet
2009-02-18	Hitler cherche une place de parking	Local issues
2009-02-23	The Downfall (Der Untergang) - Parody - The Ice Cream Truck	Non-sense
2009-04-26	La Caida del grupo de MSN de Hitler - Gabito Grupos	Internet
2009-04-26	Hitler Se Entera De Su Resultado De La PSU (V. Renovada By LillosKing).	Local issues
2009-05-04	Gordon Brown is informed that he should resign	National politics
2009-06-26	Hitler Finds Out Megan Fox rejected him	Celebrities

Upload	Title	Subject
2009-06-27	Downfall Hitler Gran Turismo 5	Videogames
2009-07-04	Hitler Finds Out Sarah Palin Resigns	National politics
2009-07-13	Hitler's Reaction To The Death Of Michael Jackson	Celebrities
2009-07-14	Hitler finds out Tony Romo dumped Jessica Simpson - The Downfall of Tony Romo	Celebrities
2009-07-14	Hitler Loses His Ipod Touch	Technology
2009-07-29	Hitler finds out that President Obama is not a US Citizen	National politics
2009-08-12	Hitler se fait arnaquer par les 3 Suisse mp4	Technology
2009-08-16	Usain Bolt Breaks 100m World Record and Hitler Reacts	Sports
2009-08-24	Adolf Hitler et la météo du Québec	Local issues
2009-09-05	BunkerTVI	National politics
2009-09-06	O caso Manuela Moura Guedes	National politics
2009-09-09	la fine di berlusconi?	National politics
2009-09-14	Hitler Reacts to the Kanye West Incident at the MTV VMAs 2009	Celebrities
2009-09-15	Parodie de La Chute avec Brice Hortefeux en Hitler	National politics
2009-11-04	The White House Bunker: Election Night 2009	National politics
2010-04-20	Hitler reacts to the Hitler parodies being removed from YouTube	Meta-video

The analysis of videos addressing other subjects notwithstanding, we privileged videos mocking politicians, and political controversies (thus, these are over-represented). Despite a predominance of English subtitles, there are several instances in other languages. To exemplify this, we selected videos with Portuguese, Spanish, Italian, French and Hebrew subtitles (translated to French). There are even more languages available (such as Croatian or Romanian), but we were restricted by our own limitation to understand their subtitles.

In all videos watched, the scene's action was followed thoroughly, namely the alternation on who is speaking and the defining moments (delivering the news, departure from the room, Hitler's outburst, the woman crying outside, Hitler's dismay). We venture the presumption that the dissonance created by the mixing together of a scene of such dramatic intensity with jocular subtitles is very effective in capturing the attention of video watchers and creators, regardless of their knowledge, interest or opinion as to the original work. The clashing of genres, tones, intentions and expectations is a common characteristic of remixes, especially when irony and a satirising disposition are present.
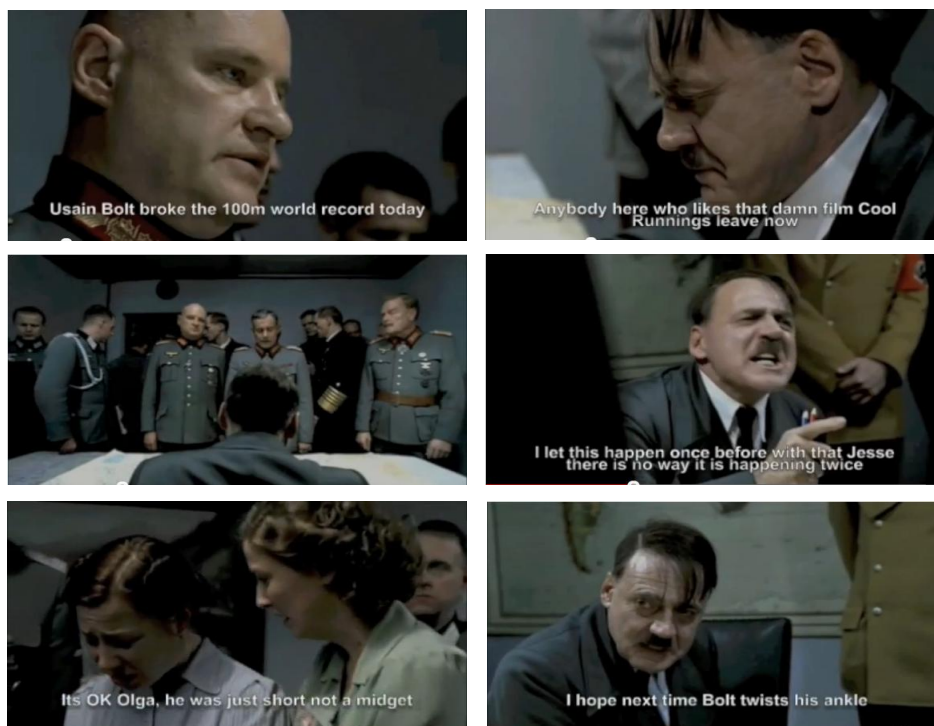
Figure 1: Video "Usain Bolt Breaks 100m World Record and Hitler Reacts," sequence of events in the Hitler meme: delivering the news, departure from the room (request and exit), Hitler's outburst, the woman crying outside, Hitler's dismay (sequence left to right, top to bottom). Screenshots taken on September 15, 2011.

Due to Constantin Film's request for YouTube to block content on copyright grounds, many videos became unavailable while the database was being built (April 2010).[6] However, some information could still be retrieved: title, views, duration and creator were accessible in the "related videos" list; and we had already preserved some data through Zotero in an exploratory search.[7] This blocking had happened before, which may indicate that even if the oldest video we found is from August 2006,[8] there could have been earlier examples. This is corroborated by a discussion in the comment section regarding a previous version no longer available, precisely due to a copyright infringement claim. The videos reviewed in this article were uploaded between that date and the building of the database (however, there was only one instance from 2006 and one from 2007). As far as we can ascertain, most of videos which were made inaccessible in April 2010 have since been restored to YouTube, with added advertising – Constantin

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[6] YouTube complies with such requests by resorting to their Content ID system, which was created for "*copyright holders to easily identify and manage their content on YouTube. The tool creates ID files which are then run against user uploads and, if a match occurs, the copyright holders policy preferences are then applied to that video. Rights owners can choose to block, track or monetize their content*" (YouTube, 2011).

[7] Zotero is a bibliographical tool which allows the capture of screenshots as well as the retrieval and organization of information about a particular page.

[8] This video – "Sim Heil: Der untersim" – is also listed by the website "Know Your Meme" as the earliest example of the meme (Rocketboom, 2009). "Know Your Meme," according to its own description, "*is a site that researches and documents Internet memes and viral phenomena*" (Cheezburger Inc, n.d.).

Film changed their strategy from blocking to monetising and tracking. The fact that the removal was partly reconsidered (Constantin Films still has 33 take-downs listed on YouTomb) did not, however, fully quell YouTuber's feelings of betrayal towards the video company.[9]

3. The *Downfall* meme: mocking, non-sensical and protest instances of meme-making

Hitler has been a regular target of satirical depictions: still during World War II, from the powerful art works in photomontage by John Heartfield (1930s) and Chaplin's performance in The Great Dictator (1940), to cartoons such as Disney's Der Fuehrer's Face (1943) or the Soviet Kino-Circus (1942); and ever since, in all media and art forms. Traceable as far as 2006, it was Der Untergang's turn to provide material for a fast growing meme, polemical, and with international versions, covering close to everything. After six years, it is still possible to find new instances of the Downfall meme, particularly in connection with current events, which makes it one of the most lasting and prolific memes to date.

3.1. Mocking video-games, celebrities, popular culture and the Internet

The earliest example found, "Sim Heil: Der untersim" survived different waves of take-down notices, perhaps by eluding software detection through Content ID. It ended up being removed in April 2010, even if it was not among the first ones targeted. Two reasons for its endurance may be the fact that this video includes a title sequence and starts earlier in the scene, not fully respecting copy fidelity. The first meme instance featured English subtitles, whereas this version was made with Spanish subtitles. Its creator tried to re-upload the English one, but it was removed once again in December 2009 (according to YouTomb).

Mentioned in all descriptions of the Hitler meme, the most famous video is "Hitler gets banned from Xbox Live," counting over four million views before being taken down, due to a threat from Constantin Film, which in turn had received a complaint from Microsoft (Clay, 2011). Videogames are in fact a recurrent topic, which is not surprising given their strong presence on YouTube in general. Super Mario Bros (Nintendo), Gran Turismo 5 (Playstation 3) and Call of Duty 4 (cross-platform), all have their own Untergang parodies. In these three cases, Hitler is clearly himself, even if treated anachronistically as being alive and a fan of video games. Unlike the first example described here, one can find historical references, such as to D Day or Eva Braun. The character is addressed directly as Hitler, and even mocked in his physical aspects: in "Hitler cant complete super mario bros…" the Hitler character digresses in a lament about his ears.

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[9] YouTomb (http://youtomb.mit.edu/) is a research project developed by the MIT chapter of Free Culture, a student organization whose goal is to promote the public interest in intellectual property and information and communications technology policy. This project tracks videos that have been taken down from YouTube due to alleged copyright violation.

Celebrities have not escaped satirisation, especially when they are protagonists of events that were heavily covered by the media. Here we find a more general pattern in YouTube videos, in which such events are quite video-worthy, and form a two-way relation between "old" and "new" media. In some cases, celebrities are not themselves satirised, but employed as weapons against the Hitler character, as in "Hitler Finds Out Megan Fox rejected him," or "Usain Bolt Breaks 100m World Record and Hitler Reacts." In the latter, a parallel is established with the Berlin 1936 Olympics and Jesse Owens' victory, other current black personalities are named, and there is an allusion to Obama. Most of these videos were removed for copyright infringement. Larger than life franchises (such as Star Wars) were also fertile ground for mocking their respective fandom, more than themselves. In the computer world, the giants Apple and Microsoft – the trendy products of the one and the criticized operating system of the other – were an expectable source of inspiration for witty subtitles.

The Internet was also caught by parodying keyboards, in connection with the sharing of experiences within a community, as we have seen regarding computer jokes. Common anguishes lived by Internet users are portrayed: Hitler is again banned, this time from the web service Yahoo Answers, he gets scammed on eBay, and has to deal with the closing of MSN Groups. Regarding the latter ("La Caida del grupo de MSN de Hitler - Gabito Grupos"), his maker's critical purpose is openly declared, in an explicit analogy, "*[the] impotence and despair of 'Great Adolfiyo' is a satire of what many people suffer for what happened in MSN*."[10] It is the only video which calls itself a satire (with the description available at the time of our analysis), while five others claimed to be a parody, either in its title or description, or both.

3.2. Mocking YouTube: from inside jokes to digital protest

YouTube equally became an object of ridicule. These videos target so-called YouTube celebrities, the partnership program, as well as the social media features such as subscribing, friending, or rating: Hitler is portrayed as a distraught user who is unable to achieve partner status, or a jealous vlogger looking for recognition. Filled with references to famous YouTube videos and YouTubers, they are made for "insiders." Someone who is not aware of how YouTube works, and does not recognize these people and videos, will have a hard time finding them laughable. Self-reference even goes a little bit further, since the parodic satires themselves have received identical treatment, generating meta-memes, to invoke Shifman's (2011) terms. In the video "Hitler Hates 'Hitler Gets Banned' Parody Videos," for example, the Hitler character downplays their importance, using common remarks made about them, such as "*the subtitles don't make sense.*"

The take-down order from Constantin Film was immediately turned into a conjugation of the Hitler meme, generating perhaps one of the most political instances. Posted defiantly on YouTube, "Hitler reacts to the Hitler parodies being removed from YouTube" places heavy criticism on the film studio, on YouTube's acceptance of the

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[10] In the original, "[l]a impotencia y desesperación del 'Gran Adolfiyo,' es una sátira de lo que muchas personas sufren por lo sucedido en MSN."

copyright claim, and on the subsequent automatic take-down. The creator of this video argues that the parodies have helped Der Untergang gain more exposure, to a level it might have not reached otherwise. Moreover, in his view, the removal is non-compliant with the fair use doctrine of copyright law, which states "*that, under some circumstances (broadly, when social benefit is larger than individual owner's loss), people can quote copyrighted work without permission or payment*" (Aufderheide & Jaszi, 2011, p.3). The option of moving to another website is debunked since "*YouTube is the de facto standard:*" the YouTuber notes this website's prominence in online video, claiming its competitors are ignored both by copyright owners and Internet users, and therefore do not constitute a valid alternative. Constantin Film's decision to review its policy towards the Downfall meme, from blocking to monetisation, also would affect this video, much to the dismay of its creator (noted in an annotation that was added at a later time).

Constituting another battle of the war between copyright owners and YouTubers, and given the popularity of this particular meme, across borders and interests, the take-down and this video in particular captured the attention of online activists and commentators.[11] Nevertheless, the uploader, despite anticipating the uproar of protest this situation would generate, was not very confident that it would cause a long-lasting effect on the balance between the protection of copyright and the right to satirise and remix: "*Everyone's gonna get upset about how corporations can illegally take down parodies/ But tomorrow, they'll forget all about it and watch cat videos,*" enunciating the prevailing derisive stereotype used to portray YouTube – and the Internet – as meaningless entertainment.
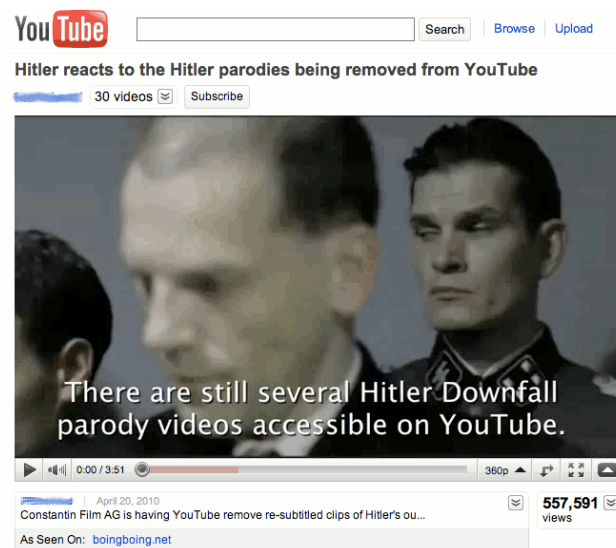

Figure 2: The video "Hitler reacts to the Hitler parodies being removed from YouTube." Screenshot taken on July 10, 2010.

Although social commentary humour may be elusive on YouTube memes (Shifman 2011,[10]), "Hitler reacts to the Hitler parodies being removed from YouTube" discusses a

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[11] It merited comments from the activist group Open Video Alliance (josh, 2010), high-traffic websites like Mashable (Axon, 2010), and even online coverage from broadcast media (Cooper, 2010). Notice, in Figure 2, the indication of "As seen on boingboing.net," an influential digital culture website. This feature is determined by the amount of traffic directed to the video from that address.

topic that ranks high in online political discussion (namely copyright), criticises YouTube and Google's relation with companies, while also questioning the real worth of online political debate. Despite the YouTuber's low expectations as to the impact of his creation, less than three months after being uploaded, this video had already broken the five hundred thousand barrier. The European Parliament only achieved a similar number in the combination of the three "viral videos" launched for the 2009 elections, also promoted on television.[12] Two years later, the view count of this instance of the meme was just under one million. This duplication in views may indicate that, although it was slower than other "viral videos" to achieve such figure, it continued to circulate online, steadily reaching a wider audience.

Should we consider these videos satirical works? Is a "serious fun" approach being followed, as mentioned in the discussion on online parodies (Jenkins, 2006)? Or are YouTube memes that deal with political issues doomed to be "*unfunny and, and inevitably treat a complex issue simplistically*" (Clay, 2011, p. 228)?

Most of them do not tackle "serious issues," resembling child play, filled with silliness and invoking an upside-down world as described by Bakhtin (1984 [1965]), one whose cultural phenomena can be understood as "carnivalisation." This literary category is connected with "*the festive aspect of the whole world in all its elements, the second revelation of the world in play and laughter*" (Bakhtin, 1984 [1965], p. 84), and is a celebration of laughter and the comic. Carnivalisation conjugates a plurality of voices, which characterises it as a polyphonic manifestation. For Test (1991), satire is the blending of four elements, attack and humour, but also judgement and play, in infinite variations. Humour grounded in play seems to be very present in the examples of the Downfall meme.

Gamers and Internet users seem to be laughing at themselves, engaging in a form of self-deprecating humour which may indicate a sense of common identity. They understand each other, the allusions, the slang. Bordering on the disrespectful and anarchic, forms of comic excess weave multiple cross-references, in a use that is defiant and reminiscent of culture jamming practices (Dery, 2002). Sociological analysis of culture jamming establishes a parallel with the "hacker ethos" (Carducci, 2006). "*[H]acking opens up technology to innovation and revision. For many hackers 'work', if done on a computer, means play,*" Cox (2010) remarks, further adding "*[t]his spirit of experimentation and play is at the very core of the culture jammer aesthetic*" (p. 24).

Mainly concerned with the shortest-term, these videos address episodes or situations of the most ephemeral nature, and focused on everyday life, which has always supplied us with plenty of humorous material, as well as insights that merit sociological analysis. As Bergson (1924) points out about comedy in his study on laughter, "*there are scenes in real life so closely bordering on high-class comedy that the stage might adopt them without changing a single word*" (p. 61). In addition, making, remixing, uploading and sharing online videos as ways of using technology in everyday life can be regarded as part of "an array of creative activities constituting the reproduction of the social actor with her relationships, knowledge and emotional well-being" (Bakardjieva, 2005, p. 25). If "*[a]t times [popular*

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[12] Namely, the "At the polling station" series, in which a scared woman, bank robbers and professional road racing cyclists all go to a polling station, despite their "pressing situations."

culture] may be largely non-political, other times more proto-political, while in certain cases it may take on explicit political relevance for some of its audiences" (Dahlgren, 2006, p. 276), the same can be argued concerning online remixes, as we pay more attention to the topics addressed in some of the memes and the resulting discussion. It is videos such as "Hitler reacts to the Hitler parodies being removed from YouTube" that give some credit to the assumption that YouTube videos contribute to the constitution of counterpublics – together with the comments generated on YouTube, but also with the continuation of debate in external blogs and website – especially in response to the actions of powerful actors, like the content industries.

4. Talking politics in the *Downfall* meme

Speaking of the religious professions, Pollard (1970) states "*affectation and hypocrisy are ready topics for [the satirist] at any time*," and become even more appealing when those who fail have additional obligations in terms of behaviour (p. 12). Politicians may well fit this profile and be more prone to attack and judgement through humour and play.

In many videos "Hitler" personifies one of two distinct characters. On the one hand, an unnamed leader, who could be Hitler, or any authoritative figure perceived to have similar characteristics. On the other, the Führer himself, addressed directly as such, and at times with additional historical references framing the context. He is mocked as himself, alluding to his lack of skill in art, regretting his ears, or admitting his large ego. In some cases, the creator follows the original clip so closely that all name references – Steiner, Stalin and the German officers – are the same as in the film. However, a third case can also be found: Hitler as a stand-in for a specific person from our current time.

4.1. The portrayal of politicians in the *Downfall* meme

The caricature of Hitler is carried out, first, by the interpretation of Bruno Ganz, and then intensified by his placement in the realm of the absurd. When it becomes a caricature of a politician it turns into a grotesque deformation, in which we recognize the abuses of power, the political puppeteering or greediness for power and money, enabling the political life to cause laughter.

During the primaries for the 2008 US presidential elections, "Hillary's Downfall" illustrated this symbolic replacement, in which the Hitler character stood in for Hillary Clinton, generating controversy and contempt. In the same sense that Hillary Clinton had gained Big Brotheresque qualities in the "Vote Different" video,[13] when she is represented as Hitler, a connection is established that leaves marks, and the same applies to all "victims" of the meme. Later on, Hitler became Obama in "The White House Bunker: Election Night 2009," despite this only being implied and never directly said. Instead, he is referred to as "Mr. President" and declares winning the Nobel Peace Prize. Hitler filled unspecific Republican shoes, finding out about Sarah Palin quitting as governor of Alaska. Depicting his pending resignation, Hitler became Gordon Brown, surrounded by officers

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13 "Vote Different" is a remix of footage from a speech delivered by Hillary Clinton and from the "1984" Apple commercial, which in turn was inspired by Orwell's homonymous satirical work.

who made him aware of his unpopularity. In a sort of family portrait, Hitler embodied Sarkozy, while the other officers substituted French politicians with ties to the President, and the crying woman is identified as Carla Bruni.
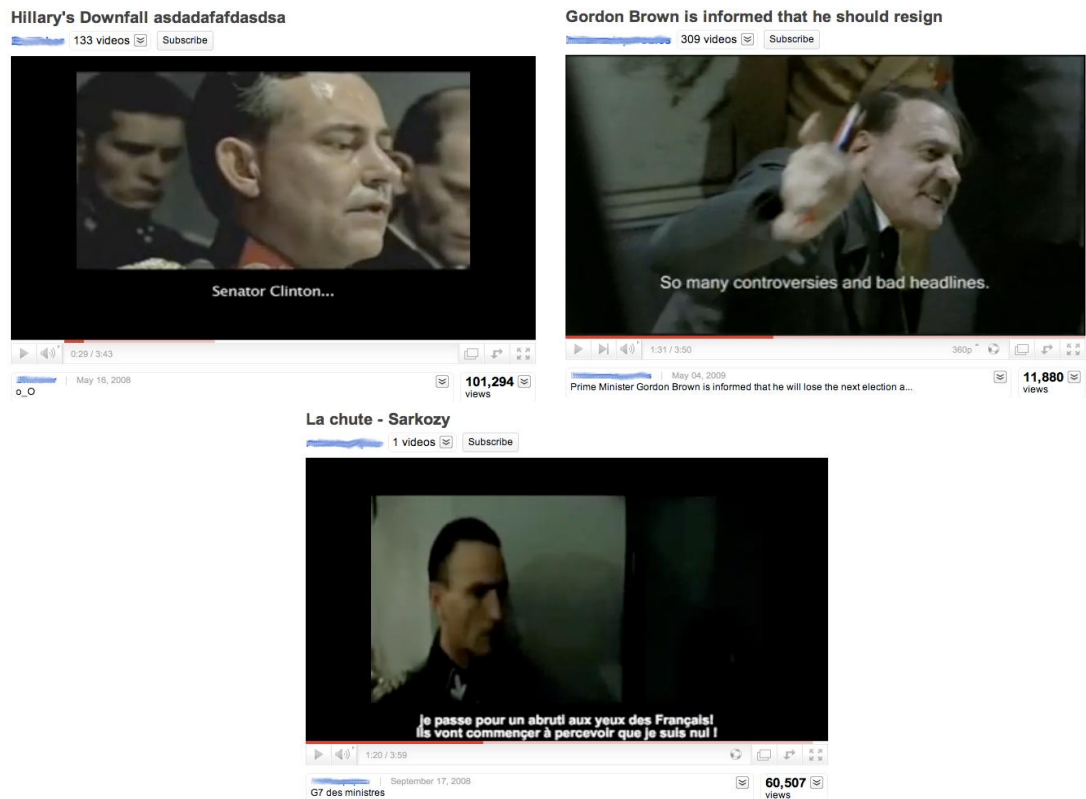

Figure 3: Videos "Hillary's Downfall," "Gordon Brown is informed that he should resign," "La chute – Sarkozy" (from left to right, top to bottom). Screenshots taken on September 11, 2010.

At times, instead of politicians, other figures accused of despotic behaviour are targeted. In "Lock-out au Journal de Montréal," the Hitler character represents Pierre Péladeau, a Canadian media owner, and founder of that newspaper. The officers and the crying woman act as doubles of other people linked to the confrontation between Péladeau and the worker's union. The video is part of the union's political action, directing people to their website. Besides opposing the founder's policies towards labour, it also criticizes current practices of using readers as a source of free content, as well as information control carried out by news media.

Politics is a hot topic in *Der Untergang* parodies, as in satire's history. The protagonists may vary, but one aspect is recurrent: the political influence of the media, and the concern of politicians regarding what is said about them. In "The Republican Downfall," the Hitler character's response to bad media coverage is to "*burn the newspapers*," to which his officers reply that "*the news is all over the Internet*," therefore beyond their control. Hitler, a member of the Republican party, ends up admitting "*Palin is not ready to debate Biden/ we need time to tutor her about the party/ unless you want us to look like fools*." Heavily filled with references to the Italian media landscape and politics, "la fine di berlusconi?" portrays Hitler – affiliated with the Associazione Nazionale Circolo della Libertà, an Italian political movement – trying to find ways of creating distractions from news against Berlusconi. It is filled with references to the Italian media landscape and politics, and once

more ridicule is used. Accusations of censorship of a news program by the Portuguese Prime-minister, and the implication of such suspicions for media conglomerates operating in Portugal are discussed in "Bunker TVI" (TVI is a Portuguese private television channel). In this video, Hitler is himself, with anachronistic references and as if he lived in this country.

Variations in international media coverage cause differences in reach of national political affairs. Although both are the target of parodies, it is more probable that a non-French person understands the mocking of Sarkozy, than for someone outside Portugal to know the details of the affair involving the former Prime-minister Sócrates and a news anchor. This is evocative of Frye's (2000) assertion, "*writer and audience must agree on its undesirability, which means that the content of a great deal of satire founded on national hatreds, snobbery, prejudice, and personal pique goes out of date very quickly*" (p. 224). Furthermore, it places demands of awareness, mental participation, and knowledge on its audience, reflecting the fact that "*[s]atire is rarely a form of discourse with clear-cut or easily digestible meanings*" (Gray, Jones & Thompson, 2009, p. 15).

Several examples described here are so knit with references that they are difficult to follow. Outsiders may find them amusing as another instance of the meme, but the potential for laughing or criticism can only be fully grasped by those who know and understand the context. A local will better understand why Hitler is complaining about the weather in Québec. However, some experiences are shared by people from distinct countries: one may not know the Chilean Prueba de Selección Universitária, but national exams to apply for university are common worldwide. When anyone from a large city in Europe watches Hitler despair about paying for parking, the ordeal is recognisable and understood.

Figure 4: Video"Hitler cherche une place de parking." Screenshot taken on July 12, 2010.

This last description concerns probably one of the most polemical videos linked to the Hitler meme: "Hitler is looking for a parking spot." This video was no longer available at the time of the data collection, but we found a reposting of the Hebrew version, "Hitler cherche une place de parking," with a second set of subtitles, in French. The latter was added through YouTube's caption system, and not added previously to the upload, as it is customary. According to an Israeli newspaper, YouTube was contacted by the Centre of

Organizations of Holocaust Survivors, requesting the video to be removed "*due to its sensitivity*" (Zilber, 2009) – the video was eventually taken-down on a copyright claim by Constantin Films. In the "Talk Back" section of this article, however, there is not grave outrage about it: a few people are disturbed by the parody, but several others consider they have "*bigger problems to solve*" or that it is only a joke. Regardless of nationality, there have been many voices against the humorous use of the Hitler character in such videos: The New York Times news blog, The Lede, links this video with the instance targeting Hillary Clinton (Mackey, 2009).

Hitler is placed repeatedly in the twenty-first century, upset by the same things as the common man or in a struggle against his own image. Quality may vary, with a strong critical conscience or just for fun, more or less disturbing or polemic, these videos place Hitler in the role of Renaissance's discrediting representative – the satirized unwillingly performing their own criticism – exposing himself, what or who he stands in for, in all their weaknesses. The parodies are not made to cause disgust, at least intentionally, but they may invoke pity on the pathetic figure.

Oliver Hirschbiegel has confessed being flattered by these derivative videos. The director of Der Untergang seems to find them akin to his original intentions, despite the contrary tone, and is quoted saying: "*[t]he point of the film was to kick these terrible people off the throne that made them demons, making them real and their actions into reality*" (Hirschbiegel cit. in Rosenblum, 2010). Video-makers may hence be said to follow the path defined by caricature, whose "*focus is mainly on people in power, whom the caricaturist often tears from the pedestal they have been put on by others and by themselves*" (Zijderveld, 1983, p. 19).

4.2. Discussing the democratic value of satirical memes

Does featuring the image of Hitler go too far? Is there a limit to satire – is there anything beyond its reach? Perhaps not: "*[s]atire flourishes especially in the run-up to and in the aftermath of the great dictators. Twentieth-century fiction has been strongly on Juvenal's side*" (Cunningham, 2007, p. 400). Historically, randomly applying the label of "fascist" or "nazi" became a tool for delegitimizing certain political sectors or figures. The abuse of these accusations made them lose meaning and validity, turning them against the accusers for twisting the fundamental characteristics of these regimes. The Nazi comparison was frequent online from early on (Godwin, 1994), and this particular manipulation of Hitler triggered strong debate in a mailing list of Internet researchers (discussed in Leavitt, 2010). The other side of the political spectrum has equally been targeted online in its own territory, specifically in the Chinese video website Tudou (and later on YouTube). Mao's Red Army Choir has been remixed into singing a variety of hits from the western music industry, from Michael Jackson to Lady Gaga, as well as theme songs from television shows (the example below). "Egao" or "messing with" media content is one of the forms of online political satire produced by the Chinese, and it is "practiced on works that are popular or well-known, so as to make the act of cultural 'vandalism' humorous to a broader audience" (Esarey & Qiang, 2008, p. 764).

Figure 5: Example of a "Red Army Choir sings..." video, on Tudou, featuring the television theme song for the animated series of "Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles." Screenshot taken on November 22, 2010.

The ridicule and absolute trivialization of the iconic presence of Hitler in these videos may be what upsets critics, since being the target of satire is not new. Hitler himself seemed to deal with satire by facing it directly, supporting the compilation of his not so flattering depictions in the press – *Hitler in der Karikatur der Welt* [Hitler in the World's Cartoons] and its follow-up *Tat gegen Tinte* [Facts versus Ink] – a task entrusted to Ernst Hanfstaengl, the then foreign press chief (Conradi, 2006). Alongside the cartoons, it included comments and statistics, in an attempt to debunk the criticism made in the humorous images. Notwithstanding the commercial success of these compilations, it is not clear if they achieved its ends, given that the cartoons and caricatures left a much stronger mark than Hanfstaengl's refutation efforts. As in this case, in which mockery trumps official discourse, even when politicians try to adopt a nonchalant attitude, on YouTube, gotcha moments and parodies are sought and watched, while speeches and public appearances are disregarded, unless they can become the butt of a joke.

The apparent tolerance towards political humour by the Nazi propaganda machine might be explained by "*the awareness that humour is able to sublimate latent conflicts and thereby render them harmless*" (Zijderveld, 1983, p. 57), much like laughter is said to release the "excess steam" of the nervous system according to the "Relief Theory" described by Morreall (2009, pp. 15-22). This tolerance also reflects the strength of the oppressor, and can only be sustained as long as that power is maintained. Ambiguity is at the core of humour, producing rebellions and maintaining the status quo at the same time (Zijderveld, 1983, p. 38). Even if this particular author does not fully subscribe to the conservative view, he does not believe in a true revolutionary power of humour either.

We should note that humourists, in particular cartoonists, play a game of tug-of-war with those in power, a very imbalanced game at times, with serious consequences. In the conclusion of their comparative study about the media in democratic and nondemocratic regimes, Gunther and Mughan (2000) state that "*the contemporary political media [...] helped to sound the death knell of authoritarian or posttotalitarian regimes by fostering political pluralism, thereby helping to spread democracy*" (p. 444). Describing a series of examples as a backdrop to the Turkish case, Asli Tunç (2002) makes a similar claim in regard to satirical

material, "*the widespread use of editorial cartoons as a tool of resistance with major political and ideological implications plays a vital role in the democratization process*" (p. 50).

Despite this recognition of a positive contribution made by the media in nondemocratic contexts, paradoxically – more so given technological development and rise in education levels – the same cannot be said for established democracies. In democracies, the tendency promoted by political elites led towards commercialization and "the *dumbing down of the broadcast media*" (Gunther & Mughan, 2000, p. 445). Regarding online communication, Habermas (2009) noted that "*although the Internet has a subversive effect on public spheres under authoritative regimes, at the same time the horizontal and informal networking of communications diminishes the achievements of traditional public spheres*" (p. 53). From this perspective, the democratic claims of computer-based communication seem to be restricted to specific contexts.

Having this in mind, what kind of role can YouTube parodic satires have? The political mobilization of popular culture is often seen with contempt, as the said "dumbing down." It is probable some YouTubers had little political motivation while making these videos, they were just participating in a funny meme, playing frivolously.

Nonetheless, visual popular culture has a long history in becoming raw material for social and political critique, criticising itself in the process. The goal is to provide an alternative view, to reinterpret media messages, to reappropriate popular culture and corporate iconography: a resistance tactic in reaction to dominant strategies, to invoke de Certeau's (1984) conceptualisation. We have seen how Hitler's image has been widely used in popular culture, in particular for satirical purposes, and how the Führer himself felt obliged to publish a rebuttal to criticism made in a medium like editorial cartoons. In our analysis of videos featuring politicians, one of the issues we highlighted was the relation between media and politics.

These short parodies point to the flaws of democratic societies, in particular the sometimes nebulous ties between politicians and journalists, reproaching them through laughter. In Bergson's (1924) words, that should be its function "*[a]lways rather humiliating for the one against whom it is directed, laughter is, really and truly, a kind of social 'ragging'*" (p. 60). While "Gordon Brown" complains about unfavourable headlines and his involvement in controversies, in "Bunker TVI" the alleged control of media by the government is discussed. In "la fine di berlusconi?" mocking is focused on the attempts to deflect damaging news for the Italian Prime Minister. This unflattering portrayal of politicians depicts them as mainly self-centred, with more concerns about their image – especially in the media – than about their constituency. In addition, although meme-making may seldom be instigated by political motivations, the denial of the possibility to partake in it is regarded as a political act that hinders YouTuber's cultural production and resistance capabilities. Take-down notices like the one issued by Constantin Films together with the consequent Content ID verification are regarded by YouTubers as indicators of YouTube's loss of its former community-driven ethos and a clear sign of co-optation.

5. Satire in the age of YouTube: humour, image, and remixing

Humour is part of humanity's History, and satire in particular seems to thrive when it is demanded as a form of expression by both society and individuals. In the twenty-first century, this need seems to be present, as newspapers, television, films and the Internet display more and more instances of pictorial satire. One can hardly deny *"satiric media texts have become a part of (and a preoccupation of) mainstream political coverage,"* but has this made *"satirists legitimate players in serious political dialogue"* as Amber Day (2011, p. 1) claims?

A closer examination of the sample of Untergang remixes here discussed shows us YouTubers employ remixing and humour as methods of exposing the weaknesses of politicians and the political system, following the long-standing tradition of satirists, countering messages created in the context of institutional political communication. Remixing implies that not only the strategies of political actors are exposed, but also the inner workings of the media and the relation between the two. Through image manipulation, politicians and media actors are turned into their own discrediting representatives, participating in their own mockery. Humour therefore plays a role in twenty-first century political discussion, rather than merely diverting the attention of citizens from such matters. In this sense, satirical remixing may be regarded as a new form of participation, especially as cause-oriented political action, and contribute to the formation of counterpublics, bringing new vitality to democratic debate. Yes, these videos can hardly be compared to the work of masters of literature like Swift or Orwell, whose social critique remains thought-provoking to the day. However, websites like YouTube allow vernacular instances of satire to be registered and easily accessible beyond their iteration – both in geographical and temporal terms. They may not be as enduring or remarkable, but they are part of what is to talk online, including talking politics.

Regarding online satirical remixes' value in the promotion of online political discussion, we note that emotions weigh in political engagement. They may play an important role in both grabbing the attention of viewers and thus contribute to raising awareness on specific issues, and galvanising them to take part in political discussion. Moreover, satirical remixing appeals not only to the emotional side of citizens, but also to the intellect. By breaking down official messages, satirical remixing becomes a lesson in media literacy and rhetoric: it exposes how political images – in the broad sense of the word – are produced, are arranged and can be manipulated. Moreover, the intertextual character of both satire and remix imposes high demands on video watchers, as to fully understand the references that are invoked.

Notwithstanding its role in denouncing the flaws in the media, politicians, political institutions and political systems or triggering political discussion, there are limitations to satirical remix as a tactic for affecting the balance of power. Hess (2009) notes in this regard the production of two illusions: firstly, a perception that there is freedom of speech on this medium, while inducing a belief that this form of participation replaces forms of political expression such as petitioning or protests; secondly, a feeling of satisfaction for being able to speak one's mind through online video, even if there is no audience. For Hess, YouTube may allow the dissemination of messages, but is not successful in creating an organized community. Participation in political debate may be restricted to finger-

pointing instead of looking for consensus building or offering proposals of the citizens' own making. Political satirical remix's contribution to discussion is hence grounded on a negative stance, in which an agreement may be reached on what is undesirable, but it seldom offers alternatives and may even heighten divergence.

Highly derisive or nonsensical videos perform above all a safety-valve function, and have reduced transformative consequences. Their focus of attention is only held until a new target of mockery comes along, making parody seem trivial and a generator of white noise. Satirical remixes that appeal to knowledge of affairs, or even contribute to extending it, aim for a more permanent impact that causes change in some way, even if only in terms of awareness. Like culture jamming in general, in order to be subversive political remixes must have a goal beyond the appropriation of images, which itself constricts criticism: images may be able to carry over some of the dominant meanings embedded in them. The circulation of satirical remixes enables them be reframed and co-opted and, on YouTube, they can turn from critique to generating profit, sometimes even for the benefit of the object of commentary. Uploading to YouTube leaves remixers and all participants in the resulting online discussion subject to the company's policies, with the lack of control this implies.

At a time of revival of Read/Write creativity (Lessig, 2008), inherently intertextual, a product of juxtaposition and bricolage, satire seems to have found fertile ground to flourish. Faced with a world of politics detached from their own world – "politics as usual" – parody became a rhetorical practice at the disposal of citizens to express their views, and engage in dialogue with others. Offering an alternative language for discussing political issues, the parodic satires are in stark contrast with the "politically correct" forms of debates previously privileged. Uploaded to a worldwide repository, the videos are accessible to (almost) anyone with an Internet connection. These images hence become part of communication, not in the sense of broadcasting, or even narrowcasting, but of the creation of an imagetic commons, allowing them to be reused, remixed, reinterpreted. Even so, co-opting and astroturfing – false grassroots movements – are also taking place, and slacktivism is only the pushing of a button away, as Morozov (2011) cautions. The answer to the long standing question of the role humour plays in politics continues open, and as this article is being written, the horizon of citizen empowerment remains cloudy. Nevertheless, if in Juvenal's time it may have been difficult not to write satire, in today's world, it is also hard not to sing, paint, film or *remix* it.

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