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PUBLICNESS UNDER PLATFORMS: AESTHETIC COLONISATION AND THE RESTRUCTURING OF PUBLIC EXPERIENCE

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This article examines how platform infrastructures reshape the experiential and normative foundations of publicness as a principle of collective orientation. It argues that contemporary digital environments organise visibility, attention and affect through an algorithmic organisation of the sensible that aligns perception with data extraction, behavioural prediction and episodic intensification, thereby reconfiguring the conditions under which public experience acquires epistemic and democratic significance. To conceptualise this condition, the article develops the notion of aesthetic colonisation as the process through which platforms reorganise sensibility, temporal rhythm and the experienceability of publics. In dialogue with Dewey's account of aesthetic experience, Benjamin's analysis of shock and the dissolution of Erfahrung, Rosa's theory of social acceleration and Splichal's reconceptualisation of publicness, the article shows how contractual publics stabilise the procedural conditions of participation and how gig publics materialise collectivity through rhythmic peaks of circulation and performative visibility. The final sections outline an aesthetics of formation grounded in aesthetic literacy, democratic infrastructures and public-service communication models oriented to reflective publicity. The renewal of democratic publicness depends on environments capable of sustaining shared attention, temporal depth and the experiential resources required for collective understanding.

KEYWORDS publicness; public sphere theory; aesthetic colonisation; platform infrastructures; datafication; contractual publics; gig publics

Publicness, Platforms and the Reorganisation of the Sensible

Recent debates on the public sphere converge on a shared perception: the digitalisation of communication transforms the institutional organisation of public life and reconfigures its sensory and temporal foundations. The spread of platforms, the datafication of interaction and the automatisation of visibility contribute to what Habermas identifies as a new structural transformation of the public sphere, marked by the displacement of editorially mediated arenas and the expansion of networked environments governed by opaque algorithmic processes (Habermas 2023). This transformation reorganises how the common world is sensed, perceived and temporally inhabited, shaping the experiential conditions of contemporary publicness.

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The present article examines these developments by analysing the reconfiguration of publicness under platform infrastructures. Digital platforms mediate communication while simultaneously restructuring the sensible by organising visibility, attention and affect through computational operations embedded in everyday life. They also reshape the temporal structures of experience, intensifying what Rosa describes as social acceleration: the compression of intervals, the multiplication of stimuli and the emergence of horizons of orientation shaped by rapid sequencing and heightened tempo (Rosa 2013). These dynamics influence the formation of publics and the conditions through which shared meaning becomes possible. By identifying the aesthetic, temporal and institutional mechanisms that organise this environment, the article situates contemporary transformations within a broader genealogy of publicness and experience.

The central thesis is that these dynamics constitute an aesthetic colonisation of publicness. By aesthetic colonisation, I refer to the infrastructural reorganisation of sensibility through which the perceptual, affective, and temporal dimensions of experience are increasingly formatted in advance by platform logics, shaping how public life becomes visible, experienceable, and orientable. Digital infrastructures reorganise the sensible according to logics of speed, visibility, and affective modulation that convert attention and emotion into resources for extraction (Beller 2003; Zuboff 2019; Fuchs 2014). Such organisation introduces sensory and temporal patterns that weaken the experiential foundations of democratic publicity. Communication accordingly acquires a public form shaped by stimuli, performance, and accelerated sequencing. Rosa's account of acceleration helps to clarify how these patterns reshape the rhythms of resonance required for democratic orientation, generating modes of unavailability (*Unverfügbarkeit*) through which the world is increasingly apprehended as an operational field of stimuli, reshaping its availability as a shared horizon of meaning.

From this vantage point, what has so far been described in terms of the organisation of experience can be articulated as publicness (*Öffentlichkeit*), understood as an experiential, aesthetic, and temporal principle. As Splichal observes, the translation of *Öffentlichkeit* into "public sphere" produced a semantic narrowing that eclipsed its dual reference to a principle of publicity and a collective actor (Splichal 2022). This narrowing facilitated the naturalisation of technologically mediated "public spheres" as mere infrastructures, obscuring the experiential, aesthetic, and temporal processes that sustain public life. Under platform conditions, publicness acquires a form increasingly shaped by algorithmic governance and accelerative temporalities that modulate appearance and the circulation of meaning according to computational logics.

The argument unfolds through a progressive reconstruction of the aesthetic and infrastructural conditions of contemporary publicness. It begins by establishing a Deweyan framework in which aesthetic experience and democratic communication provide the experiential foundations of public formation. This framework is then extended through a Benjaminian genealogy of modern media environments, foregrounding shock, distraction, and the fragmentation of experience, and further specified through Rosa's theory of social acceleration as a temporal diagnosis of altered modes of collective orientation. Building on these perspectives, the article develops the concept of aesthetic colonisation to analyse how datafication and algorithmic organisation restructure sensibility and publicness under platform conditions. This analysis is articulated through Splichal's distinction between contractual publics and gig publics, which clarifies the infrastructural and experiential forms through which public life is stabilised and episodically mobilised in digital environments. The conclusion synthesises these strands by outlining an aesthetics of formation as a conceptual horizon for reflective publicity and the renewal of democratic publicness.

Dewey, Aesthetic Experience and the Formation of Publicness

John Dewey's philosophy offers a particularly fertile point of departure for analysing the relation between aesthetics, democracy and publicness, insofar as it presents aesthetics as a general theory of experience with direct implications for collective life. In *Art as Experience* (1934), Dewey describes aesthetic experience as the intensified realisation of processes already embedded in everyday activity. Experience acquires an aesthetic character when its elements interpenetrate to form a unified whole, a pattern in which sensation, emotion and thought join into meaningful continuity (Dewey 1934: 35–36). This unity confers form upon experience and creates the conditions through which situations become intelligible, memorable and open to communication. Aesthetic organisation thus supplies the experiential coherence through which events become publicly meaningful.

This integrative conception provides a productive entry into the question of publicness. Dewey's account aligns closely with the multidimensional meaning of *Öffentlichkeit*, which Splichal (2022) identifies as a principle of publicity, a communicative arena and a collective actor. Publicness gains density when individuals recognise the indirect consequences of actions as shared conditions and orient themselves toward these consequences through collective inquiry. Dewey situates this process within the field of communication, which he describes as "the great instrument of both individualisation and socialisation" (Dewey 1927: 184). Communication reshapes private experience into forms capable of circulating within the common world, generating perceptual and interpretive patterns that sustain public attention and shared orientation.

Within this framework, the aesthetic condition of publicness can be understood as a constitutive process through which experiences become publicly intelligible. For an issue to acquire public significance, it must take on a perceptible and narratable form. Communication accomplishes this organisational task by arranging experience into rhythms, sequences, images and narratives capable of inviting others into a shared horizon. Dewey's description of art as the "most universal and freest form of communication" (1934: 244) indicates that democratic communication attains its fullest expression when it assumes an aesthetic form that integrates perception, affect and meaning. Publicness thus emerges as a quality of experiential organisation, generated by forms that render consequences visible, relatable and situated within a world held in common.

This perspective clarifies the affinity between Dewey's aesthetics and Splichal's concept of reflective publicity. Splichal (2022, 2023) conceptualises publicity as a configuration of visibility, mediation, accountability and reflexivity anchored in material and institutional conditions of publicness. Dewey supplies the experiential grounding of this configuration by explaining how communication discloses indirect consequences of action and renders them available to collective reflection. Aesthetic experience marks the moment at which such disclosure acquires perceptible form, enabling publics to orient themselves toward shared implications. Reflective publicity attains democratic significance when supported by aesthetic modes of experience that sustain continuity across time, resonance across actors and openness to interpretation and inquiry, thereby linking infrastructural conditions of publicness to the lived processes through which publics emerge and recognise themselves as such.

Dewey's analysis also foregrounds the historical sensitivity of these processes. Writing in a period marked by the rise of radio, cinema and advertising, he recognises that technological innovation participates actively in the structuring of experience and reshapes perceptual habits, rhythms of attention and modes of association. Technology acquires

formative force when it organises experience and aligns perception with particular economic and cultural arrangements. Dewey captures this dynamic when he describes technology as becoming a "despotic master" in contexts where it directs experience in ways that restrict reflection and reduce opportunities for shared inquiry (Dewey 1927: 204). This insight positions aesthetics at the centre of democratic analysis by revealing that communication and experience are co-constitutive and historically mediated.

Twentieth-century critical theory extends this perspective by situating transformations of experience within broader regimes of mediation. Rather than treating experience as a subjective given, these approaches examine how media forms configure the perceptual and temporal conditions under which experience becomes publicly articulable. Benjamin's analysis of technical reproducibility foregrounds this shift by tracing how mediated circulation alters relations between perception, memory and reception, thereby reworking the conditions of experiential continuity (Benjamin 2006; Buck-Morss 1989, 1992). Adorno and Horkheimer further conceptualise these processes through the notion of the culture industry, understood as a system that organises sensibility through standardised aesthetic patterns aligned with economic rationalisation (Adorno and Horkheimer 2002; Adorno 2002). Together, these accounts reveal media as formative environments that shape attention, affect and shared horizons of meaning.

From this broader vantage point, contemporary digital environments appear as an intensification of these dynamics. Accelerated communication, ubiquitous stimuli and competitive economies of attention generate dense perceptual ecologies in which temporal rhythms are compressed and attentional engagement becomes intermittent (Rosa 2013; Citton 2014; Davenport and Beck 2002). Experience is increasingly organised through sequences of salience that reconfigure modes of narrative accumulation and reshape the textures through which situations acquire coherence, recognisability, and public relevance. These transformations bear directly on the aesthetic condition of publicness, as perceptual continuity, resonance and interpretive openness become harder to sustain. The question of publicness thus shifts from the availability of communicative spaces to the organisation of experience itself, understood as a mediated and aesthetic process that conditions how publics can emerge, persist and engage in shared inquiry.

Dewey's framework offers a resource for responding to this condition. Aesthetic experience restores coherence by arranging perceptions into structured forms that support recognition, empathy and reflective engagement (Dewey 1934). Communication acquires democratic force when it constitutes experience as an organised field through which publics can orient themselves toward shared issues and their consequences. Public formation grows from these experiential structures, and the vitality of democratic life increases when communicative practices sustain the depth, continuity and interpretive clarity through which publicness unfolds (Dewey 1927; Alexander 2013; Frega 2019). Read in this way, Dewey provides the experiential grammar that prepares the transition toward Benjamin's analysis of shock and fragmentation and toward Splichal's diagnosis of contractual and gig publics, in which the aesthetic and temporal conditions of publicness are reorganised through platform infrastructures.

A Benjaminian Genealogy of Sensibility and the Disruption of Publicness

Walter Benjamin complements Dewey's aesthetic model of democratic integration with a critical genealogy that foregrounds rupture, discontinuity, and the technical reorganisation of perception. Modernity is interpreted as a transformed sensory environment structured by shock (*Chockerfahrung*), generated by the accelerated tempo of the

metropolis, the circulation of crowds, and the proliferation of mechanically reproduced images. In *On Some Motifs in Baudelaire*, Benjamin diagnoses a "change in the structure of experience" that renders traditional forms of transmissible and cumulative experience increasingly fragile (Benjamin 2006, 314). Under these conditions, experience is reorganised through defensive adaptation to overstimulation, reshaping continuity and memory and producing a shift from *Erfahrung*, grounded in temporal sedimentation and collective transmission, toward *Erlebnis*, defined by isolated experience exhausted in immediacy (Benjamin 2006, 318).

The intensification of stimuli compels subjects to adopt protective mechanisms of sensory screening and anticipatory vigilance. As Benjamin notes, the more efficiently consciousness filters shock, "the less these impressions enter long experience [*Erfahrung*] and the more they correspond to the concept of isolated experience [*Erlebnis*]" (Benjamin 2006, 319). Consciousness functions as a shield and as a regulatory mechanism of perception, preserving psychic equilibrium while reducing experiential depth. The prevalence of *Erlebnis* reflects a rationalisation of perception shaped by conditions of shock and overstimulation. This transformation has psychological and social consequences, reshaping the conditions under which shared meaning, collective orientation and public discernment take form. In *Central Park*, Benjamin radicalises this diagnosis by showing how the material culture of memory mirrors the decline of cumulative experience. The souvenir appears as "the complement to 'isolated experience,'" originating in a "defunct experience [*Erfahrung*] which thinks of itself, euphemistically, as living [*Erlebnis*]" (Benjamin 2006, 183). Experience is preserved as residue and as trace, coinciding with processes of self-estrangement and weakened shared orientation.

Benjamin further clarifies the aesthetic and political stakes of this transformation through his analysis of mediated reception and experiential formation. In his discussion of Brecht's *The Flight of the Lindberghs*, the fleeting enthusiasm surrounding Lindbergh's transatlantic flight is described as a "mere sensation" that rapidly exhausts itself, exemplifying the logic of *Erlebnis* characteristic of mass-mediated excitement (Benjamin 2006, 306). Brecht's intervention operates as an "exercise in refraction," transforming singular experience into transmissible *Erfahrung* grounded in effort, practice and formal elaboration. The distinction between *Erfahrung* and *Erlebnis* emerges here through duration, transmissibility and the capacity for experiential accumulation.

The figure of the flâneur encapsulates this ambivalence. Traditionally associated with a mode of attention capable of lingering, discerning and narrating the city, the flâneur embodies a perceptual stance grounded in reflective distance. Benjamin's reading of Baudelaire, however, situates this figure within conditions already marked by fatigue and tension. Baudelaire singles out being "jostled by the crowd" as his decisive experience, describing a condition of disillusion in which the semblance (*Schein*) of a crowd endowed with meaning and movement has faded (Benjamin 2006, 342–343). Under these conditions, the practice of flânerie unfolds within an environment shaped by pressure, circulation and shock, which alters the temporal and perceptual coordinates that sustained contemplative observation.

This configuration becomes more legible in Benjamin's description of the flâneur as structurally analogous to the commodity. "The flâneur is someone abandoned in the crowd. He is thus in the same situation as the commodity," Benjamin writes, adding that this condition operates beneath the level of conscious awareness and permeates the flâneur "like a narcotic" (Benjamin 2006, 31). Immersion in the crowd produces a form of intoxication that compensates for social humiliations while reorganising perception around circulation and exchange. The empathy cultivated in this setting resembles what Benjamin ironises as

a "commodity-soul": a mode of openness oriented toward adaptation to the flux of buyers and signals. Empathy here functions as a sensibility attuned to movement and availability, shaping presence within the crowd without consolidating interpretative distance. Read in this way, the flâneur appears as a threshold figure whose attentiveness unfolds between narrative possibility and sensory saturation. His perceptual openness participates in dynamics that support immediacy, circulation and affective attunement, while simultaneously constraining the accumulation and transmissibility of experience (*Erfahrung*). Benjamin's account thus situates the flâneur at the intersection of aesthetic receptivity and the emerging regimes of shock and exchange that organise modern public life.

Digital infrastructures extend and automate these dynamics. Algorithmic interfaces generate sequences of microshocks, including notifications, metrics, updates, and abrupt shifts in visibility, which reorganise sensibility into reactive patterns. The resulting experiential field resembles an intensified configuration of Benjamin's modernity: perception becomes episodic, orientation fluctuates, and attention disperses across proliferating signals. The endless scroll functions as a form of digital montage, producing juxtaposition without sustained linkage and succession without narrative integration. Such conditions complicate the formation of publics, which depend on shared temporalities, common frames of reference, and experiences capable of accumulating over time. Instead, algorithmic environments favour forms of collective presence assembled through simultaneity, virality, and affective synchronisation, resonating with what Splichal conceptualises as gig publics (Splichal 2025), a concept that will be further analysed and elaborated in the following sections. In digital environments, shock becomes infrastructurally embedded. Algorithmic operations organise the sensible by privileging velocity, novelty, and impact, embedding opaque calibrations into the perceptual field (Beer 2016; Beller 2003). Publicness becomes entangled with these rhythms as visibility acquires an instantaneous and fluctuating character, and shared significance emerges through infrastructural patterns of amplification and alignment. The erosion of *Erfahrung* thus coincides with the weakening of the experiential foundations of public life.

Benjamin also identifies resources for interrupting this logic. He associates such possibilities with dialectical images: configurations that arrest the flow of stimuli and bring fragments into meaningful constellation (Benjamin 1999). These interruptions create intervals of reflective attention through which shared implications can be sensed. Dewey's account of aesthetic experience as a patterned movement of tension, development, and fulfilment resonates with this insight, highlighting the importance of temporal structures that sustain orientation, recognition, and communicability (Dewey 1934). Aesthetic experience gains democratic relevance when it introduces such intervals, recalibrating accelerative tempos and enabling perceptual reorganisation.

From a Rosaian perspective, Benjamin's analysis of shock anticipates later diagnoses of social acceleration. What appears in Benjamin as the fragmentation of *Erfahrung* under metropolitan stimuli re-emerges in Rosa as a generalised erosion of resonance, in which the world is increasingly encountered as unavailable (*Unverfügbarkeit*) (Rosa 2013). Rosa explicitly clarifies that the altered temporal consciousness of late modernity should not be understood as a departure from acceleration, noting that "the observed alteration in the consciousness of time and the time horizon represents a consequence and manifestation, or a new level, of the process of acceleration and cannot be interpreted as its replacement by a new temporal principle" (Rosa 2013: 21).

Digital infrastructures intensify this condition by compressing intervals, accelerating contact without stable relation, and multiplying impressions without generating axes of resonance. The disruption of publicness thus appears as a semiotic, temporal, and affective process rooted in patterns of acceleration that weaken the experiential bases of shared

understanding and collective orientation. If Benjamin and Rosa provide a phenomenological and temporal diagnosis of this transformation, the contemporary digital environment reveals its infrastructural and operational form. The erosion of resonance and the fragmentation of experience are produced and stabilised through technical systems that capture, format, and monetise perception under conditions of speed and overstimulation.

Aesthetic Colonisation and the Datafication of Publicness

From Expression to Extraction: Datafication as Aesthetic Capture

The digital public sphere presents itself as an infrastructural formation that organises participation and perception through processes of registration, inference, and modelling. Splichal frames contemporary conceptual disputes around the public sphere as disputes about "the critical epistemic value of public opinion and the public sphere as the main instantiations of publicness" (Splichal 2023, 673). In his diagnosis, the digital transformation of communication intensifies pressures toward quantification and operationalisation, displacing the critical epistemic value traditionally associated with publicness. He formulates this shift with particular clarity when he observes that the critical epistemic value of the public sphere "has been overshadowed by an exclusive emphasis on its universal normative validity and operational reliability achieved through opinion mining and big data analytics" (Splichal 2023, 686).

Splichal draws an explicit historical parallel between the marginalisation of public opinion following the rise of opinion polling and the present trajectory of public sphere research, noting that today, however, the public sphere concept faces a fate reminiscent of administrative public opinion discourse following the proliferation of opinion polls (Splichal 2023). Under these conditions, the proliferation of adjectival and operational uses of the public sphere concept risks turning it into a "floating or even empty signifier" (Splichal 2023, 686), detached from the material, institutional, and ethical foundations that historically anchored publicness as a critical category.

Contemporary digital environments are shaped by pervasive platforms, powerful corporate and governmental influences, porous boundaries between publicness and privateness, and the spread of misinformation and propaganda. These transformations, Splichal argues, "have raised concerns about the integrity and legitimacy of the 'digital public sphere'" (Splichal 2023, 687), rendering questions about the emancipatory and critical potential of publicness increasingly urgent. Read alongside broader analyses of datafication and platform capitalism (Couldry and Mejias 2019; Srnicek 2017; Zuboff 2019; Fuchs 2014, 2017), this diagnosis situates communicative life within expanding circuits of extraction, prediction, and optimisation.

From an aesthetic perspective, datafication reveals a deeper process. Sensibility itself becomes a locus of extraction and modulation, as attention, affect, gesture, gaze, and temporal rhythm acquire operational significance within infrastructural design. This analytical extension remains consistent with Splichal's insistence that publicness cannot be theorised independently of its material conditions. As he states, "in this critical perspective, the public sphere is conceptualized as a material-institutional infrastructure of discursively generated communicative-ethical superstructure with publics and public opinion" (Splichal 2023, 688). The concept further encompasses "all the material conditions that early-20th century theorists identified as integral components of the societal structure essential for the formation of the public and public opinion as intricate expressions of societal will" (Splichal 2023, 688).

Within such configurations, the sensory domain increasingly assumes the form of an operational environment shaped by circulation, retention, and affective modulation.

The concept of aesthetic colonisation designates this movement, namely the incorporation of perceptual life into logics that organise experience through calibrations of rhythm, sequence, and atmosphere. Read through Splichal's framework, this process undermines the experiential foundations of reflective publicity by reconfiguring the material conditions under which publics form, orient themselves, and sustain communicative reflexivity. Under these conditions, the digital public sphere takes the form of a perceptual industrial assemblage that ingests signals, translates impressions into patterns, and redistributes curated stimuli across segmented environments. Such a configuration marks a transformation of media power alongside a reconfiguration of publicness itself, as material-institutional infrastructures oriented toward reflexive publics give way to environments of operational visibility governed by predictive and contractual arrangements.

These dynamics acquire a concrete infrastructural expression in processes of algorithmic personalisation, where the organisation of experience is stabilised through patterned exposure and anticipatory calibration.

Algorithmic Personalisation and the Organisation of the Sensible

Algorithmic personalisation extends these processes by producing patterned environments that stabilise habits of attention and perception. Kaluža (2022) identifies "habitual filter bubbles" generated through repeated exposures that shape expectation, recognition, and affective attunement. Personalisation operates as a device of habit formation, generating experiential continuities that guide perceptual orientation over time and structure how content is encountered and anticipated.

Analyses of TikTok illustrate this dynamic in concrete terms. Bhandari and Bimo (2022) describe the emergence of the "algorithmized self," shaped by feedback cycles that organise visibility, rhythm, and emotional tonality. Scalvini (2023) interprets TikTok's audiovisual ecology as a form of "algorithmic pluralism," characterised by high surface diversity combined with deep structural regularities in gesture, framing, and sound. Obreja (2024) shows how users develop interpretive narratives that integrate algorithmic selection into their self-understanding. Taken together, these accounts situate algorithms as aesthetic and institutional devices that guide appearance, sequence, and atmosphere within platform environments.

Algorithmic personalisation can thus be understood as a regime of world relation structured through anticipatory attribution. Amoore (2020) conceptualises algorithmic systems as apparatuses that gather and arrange propensities, possibilities, and relations within what she terms a "cloud ethics." Drawing on John Durham Peters, she describes clouds as media that function as "containers of possibility that anchor our existence and make what we are doing possible" (Amoore 2020, 7). Algorithms operate through clusters of attributes, probability weightings, thresholds, and biases that shape how selves relate to others before any decisive output occurs. These attributed qualities stabilise patterns of recognition and valuation, producing relational horizons in which action and meaning are prefigured. Amoore emphasises that algorithms necessarily discriminate in order to act in the world, and in doing so generate themselves as "ethicopolitical beings" whose operations are inseparable from the relations they organise (ibid., 8). This perspective supports an understanding of algorithmic personalisation as a formative condition of experience, in which sensibility is shaped through anticipatory arrangements embedded in decision-making processes.

Bucher's notion of the algorithmic imaginary provides a phenomenological complement to this infrastructural analysis. In her study of Facebook, Bucher (2016) shows that algorithms are encountered through ordinary affects, narratives, and practical orientations that shape how users anticipate visibility and relevance. These imaginaries are productive: they

organise expectations, guide practices, and participate in recursive force relations between users and algorithmic systems. Anticipatory attribution operates at the level of computational design as well as through affective and experiential registers that contribute to the organisation of the sensible in everyday platform use. This perspective is further developed in *If … Then*, where Bucher conceptualises algorithmic power as a relational and productive form of power immanent to fields of action. Drawing on Foucault, she describes algorithmic systems as "an ensemble of strategies, where power is immanent to the field of action and situation in question," producing particular forms of acting and knowing through the orientations they generate (Bucher 2018, 3). Algorithmic power operates through the conditional structuring of possibility, shaping what may appear, circulate, or acquire relevance prior to explicit articulation or judgment.

Read in conjunction with Splichal's analysis of publicness, Bucher's account clarifies how the transformation of the public sphere involves more than processes of datafication. It involves a reorganisation of political experience at the level of conditions of possibility, where the parameters of appearance and relevance are configured outside reflexive public scrutiny. In such environments, publicness loses its critical epistemic force, as the space in which communicative orientation could emerge becomes organised through infrastructural arrangements that precede deliberation.

Bucher further specifies the nature of algorithmic power by distinguishing between algorithmic techniques and algorithms as operational systems. Following Mackenzie, she notes that multiple techniques may be used to "impose a shape on the data," including logistic regression, Naive Bayes classifiers, k-nearest neighbors, support vector machines, random forests, and neural networks (Bucher 2018, 26). These techniques outline methods that require further specification in order to become operative as algorithms. Algorithmic form takes shape through a series of additional decisions concerning parameters and hyperparameters, such as the number of trees in a random forest or the depth of hidden layers in a neural network. Software environments often supply default parameters, embedding prior judgments about relevance, efficiency, and optimisation directly into the operational logic of systems (Bucher 2018, 26). Algorithmic systems thus materialise through layers of specification that remain external to public articulation, while decisively shaping how data are processed and how patterns become legible.

This process foregrounds a key feature of algorithmic governance. Power operates through the configuration of the conditions under which data acquire form and meaning, shaping how decisions and orientations become available to public scrutiny. Algorithmic systems govern by organising the field of possible outcomes in advance, configuring visibility, classification, and relevance through technical choices that stabilise particular orientations. In this sense, algorithmic power aligns with Bucher's broader claim that governance takes place through the structuring of situations and relations as an infrastructural mode of operation.

From a Rosaian perspective, such environments can be described as modes of world-relation characterised by continuity without resonance. Rosa (2013; 2019) conceptualises resonance as a responsive and transformative relation between subjects and the world, grounded in temporal openness, rhythmic synchronization, and mutual affectability. Algorithmic personalisation organises contact through repetition, prediction, and alignment, generating forms of familiarity and responsiveness structured by anticipatory calibration. The world appears personalised and adaptive, while offering limited conditions for reciprocal articulation and transformative response at the level of shared orientation. Rosa's theory of resonance thus provides a relational ontology in which social institutions preform historically specific modes of world-relation by shaping affective, temporal, and bodily sensibilities (Rosa 2019). Under regimes of acceleration, these conditions of resonance are

structurally impeded as social rhythms are disrupted and relations to the world tend to stabilise in "mute" forms. Under platform conditions, these dynamics are further extended and automated, as perceptual and affective relations themselves become organised through technical infrastructures.

Read together, Amoore and Rosa illuminate how algorithmic infrastructures reconfigure sensibility by stabilising non-resonant relations that orient perception, expectation, and self-understanding within patterned environments. Through these operations, platforms cultivate tonalities such as urgency, exhilaration, aspiration, or indignation, shaping climates of interaction in which resonance is selectively mobilised and operationalised. The concept of aesthetic colonisation captures this movement, referring to the incorporation of perceptual life into logics that organise experience through calibrations of rhythm, sequence, and atmosphere embedded in infrastructures of circulation and retention. Experience accordingly acquires a patterned form through algorithmic regularities that shape dispositions, expectations, and interpretive schemas. The social world becomes visible through curated horizons that guide attention and perceptual meaning. Public formation unfolds within these horizons, as individuals orient themselves toward shared relevance through atmospheres constructed inside the infrastructural field, where sensibility, mediation, and institutional design converge.

Contractual and Gig Publics: The Aesthetic Reorganisation of Public Life

The contemporary digital environment reconfigures publicness through infrastructures that organise participation, shape perception, and regulate the rhythms through which shared life becomes experienceable. As argued in the previous section, these transformations operate at the level of the sensible, reorganising attention, affect, and temporal orientation through processes of datafication and aesthetic colonisation. Public formation thus unfolds within environments in which conditions of appearance are increasingly structured prior to reflexive articulation.

Building on this diagnosis, the present section examines how these aesthetic and experiential conditions are stabilised institutionally. Splichal's concepts of contractual publics and gig publics name the forms of publicness that emerge when the organisation of perception, participation, and temporality becomes embedded in juridical, technical, and algorithmic infrastructures. Read alongside Benjamin's genealogy of shock and Rosa's theory of social acceleration, these concepts bring into view the aesthetic structures through which the sensible is reorganised under platform conditions, and through which public life acquires its contemporary forms.

Whereas Benjamin and Rosa provide a critical vocabulary for understanding the perceptual and temporal transformation of experience, Splichal specifies how these transformations crystallise into concrete modes of publicness. Contractual publics designate the infrastructural conditions under which participation, visibility, and relevance are procedurally organised, while gig publics describe the rhythmic and episodic forms of collectivity that arise within these conditions. Together, they clarify how digital infrastructures become constitutive of public life by mediating communication and shaping the conditions under which publics can appear, orient themselves, and act.

Contractual Publics: Infrastructures of Public Orientation

It is important to begin by noting that contractual publics do not designate a particular type of public among others, nor simply another adjectival extension in the expanding vocabulary of public sphere theory. As Splichal argues, they name the historical outcome of

a structural transformation of publicness under conditions of platformisation, communification and attention-based economies (Splichal 2022; 2023; 2024). Contemporary publicness is increasingly constituted through asymmetric contractual relations between platforms, content providers, advertisers and users, relations that define in advance the conditions of access, visibility, participation and circulation of public communication. As Splichal notes, "due to its contractual nature, public opinion faces increasing influence from business owners who dictate the terms of access and use of online content" (Splichal 2024, 15). Within this configuration, contractual arrangements progressively displace deliberation as the organising principle of public life.

Contractual publics thus designate environments in which participation is shaped by binding architectures: terms of service, consent regimes, algorithmic protocols, moderation systems, and ranking procedures that are not themselves objects of public deliberation. These arrangements organise the communicative field by specifying how contributions appear, how relevance is attributed, and how interactions move through technical and administrative layers. Publicness acquires form through these classifications, sequences, and thresholds, which create a patterned horizon within which actors recognise issues, respond to events, and orient themselves as participants in a shared world. While participants may remain strangers to one another, they are increasingly rendered transparent to platforms, which accumulate "ever-increasing amounts of user data" through contractual arrangements that govern participation (Splichal 2024, 16).

Very recently, Splichal has emphasised that, under conditions of communification and AI-driven mediation, contractual relations increasingly shape access in ways that constrain autonomy. User participation in online communication networks "can be restricted or even prevented by corporate control and content management," requiring users to enter what he strikingly describes as "a pact with the digital devil," obliging them to accept the terms imposed by platform owners in exchange for participation (Splichal 2024, 15). Contractual publics are therefore organised environments in which participation is formally voluntary yet substantively conditioned by opaque institutional and technological power.

These contractual architectures also articulate temporal and sensory conditions. Interfaces distribute attention across calibrated intervals; recommendation systems shape the tempo of exposure; and notification architectures introduce rhythmic cues that guide participation. Through these mechanisms, platforms generate perceptual fields attuned to patterned succession, continual renewal, and intensified presence. As shown in the previous section, Benjamin's account of modernity provides a critical vocabulary for understanding this organisation of the sensible. He identifies environments structured by abrupt transitions, condensed stimuli, and montage-like juxtapositions that cultivate perceptual habits oriented toward immediacy and impact. Digital infrastructures intensify this structure by operationalising succession through algorithmic sequencing and embedding the logic of shock into the microtemporal fabric of visibility.

Rosa's theory of social acceleration further specifies the temporal logic of contractual publics. These architectures participate in a broader regime in which intervals contract, rhythms intensify, and experiential availability becomes conditioned by speed (Rosa 2013). Worlds shaped by acceleration favour modes of orientation sustained by rapid uptake, adaptive responsiveness, and fluctuating attention. Under such conditions, resonance becomes increasingly difficult, and experience is patterned by forms of unavailability (*Unverfügbarkeit*) that reflect the procedural and anticipatory character of digitally mediated interaction. Contractual publics take shape within these temporal textures, combining tempo, density, and patterned circulation into environments that privilege responsiveness and affective synchronisation over reflective continuity.

In this sense, contractual publics are aesthetic structures as much as juridical ones. They organise the sensible by shaping rhythms of appearance, gradients of salience, and atmospheres of attention. Crucially, they constitute environments organised in advance of experience, shaping how experience unfolds. As Splichal stresses, contractual publics are defined by "patterns of communicative behaviour shaped by concrete—formal or informal—contracts and codes of conduct," which can "relativise or even negate the social contract between citizens themselves and between citizens and the state" (Splichal 2024, 18). Publicness is thus configured through conditions that precede and constrain reflexive articulation.

As a result, the erosion of publicness has epistemic as well as normative dimensions. Within contractual publics, reflexivity weakens, mediativity as a bridge between positions erodes, and public opinion increasingly fails to function as an expression of the general will. Communication assumes a predominantly utilitarian form, oriented toward maximising individual benefit, visibility, or recognition, while "lacking a fundamental condition for the formation of publics that cannot be realised within the framework of a contractual relationship" (Splichal 2024, 16). Contractual publics therefore articulate the infrastructural plane of aesthetic colonisation: sensibility is formatted through contractual, habitual, and algorithmic arrangements before any reflexive public orientation can take place, giving rise to patterned visibility, instrumental communication, and episodic forms of engagement.

Gig Publics: Rhythmic Intensification and Episodic Collectivity

Another concept is equally important for this analysis: gig publics represent the experiential manifestation of this infrastructural logic. They emerge through concentrated peaks of attention, affective mobilisation, and intensified visibility that give rise to collectivities held together by bursts of circulation and synchronised engagement (Splichal 2024: 15–17). Participation follows rhythms characterised by sudden amplification, trending dynamics, and atmospheres of heightened emotional and perceptual density. Gig publics crystallise when sequences of stimuli align across the perceptual horizons of individuals, generating collective presence through synchronised intensities and patterned convergence.

As discussed earlier in this article, Benjamin's diagnosis of modernity as an environment structured by shock provides a conceptual grammar for understanding this mode of public formation. Shock appears as a structuring principle that guides perception toward patterns of impact, rapid succession, and episodic coherence. Gig publics express this principle at a collective level. They assemble through sequences of intensified visibility that generate attention as a rhythmic force. The temporal shift from *Erfahrung* to *Erlebnis*, which Benjamin associates with the fragmentation of experiential continuity, materialises at the level of public life: collective experience acquires form through impacts that register immediately, circulate rapidly, and dissipate once attention moves elsewhere.

Building on the earlier discussion of the flâneur as a figure of perceptual openness and reflective distance, this transformation can be further specified as a shift in the organisation of exploratory attention. The flâneur embodies an orientation toward lingering, interpretation, and sensory attunement within the unfolding movement of the city, inhabiting urban space through slow observation and contingent encounters. In digital environments, this orientation is reconfigured through infrastructural mediation. Algorithmically curated flows guide exploration along sequences of transitions, atmospheres and cues that structure perception into calibrated trajectories of attention. As Splichal (2025) suggests in his comparison of gig publics to hop-on hop-off tourist buses, participation increasingly unfolds through brief stops at preselected points of interest, enabling movement across

curated routes while discouraging sustained engagement or cumulative interpretation. Digital flânerie thus takes shape within environments that generate pre-patterned pathways of visibility and relevance, where drifting becomes inseparable from recommendation systems, trending markers and rhythmic prompts. The contemplative distance associated with flânerie is rearticulated as circulation within infrastructures whose rhythms and itineraries are produced by computational operations, transforming exploratory wandering into episodic passage through curated perceptual landscapes.

From a Rosaian perspective, previously introduced as a theory of world-relation, these dynamics acquire a distinctive temporal articulation. Acceleration generates environments of heightened contact, compressed intervals, and rhythmic patterns that favour swift orientation and adaptive responsiveness (Rosa 2013; 2019). Gig publics articulate these temporalities at the level of collective experience. They form through bursts of circulation that acquire coherence through speed, density, and affective synchronisation, producing atmospheres in which the world appears through sequences of operationalised stimuli. Engagement is sustained through continuity of activation, with temporal structures that limit openness to resonance. Attention gains force through rapid convergence and patterned alignment, shaping collectivity as a phenomenon that emerges within accelerative atmospheres.

Splichal's analysis of performative publicity further clarifies the structural depth of gig publics (Splichal 2024: 11–14). Participation unfolds within infrastructures that valorise visibility, amplify affective expression and reward gestures calibrated for recognition. The will to visibility becomes a constitutive element of public life, and expressive acts acquire significance through their capacity to generate traction within algorithmic environments. Gig publics thus take shape as forms of publicness oriented toward intensity, volatility and signal amplification. Their formation reflects experiential patterns alongside the economic and predictive logics of platform architectures, which treat participation as a source of data and visibility as a vector of circulation.

Gig publics therefore give experiential density to processes initiated at the infrastructural level. They reveal how temporalities of acceleration, atmospheres of intensity and perceptual sequences shaped by algorithmic curation organise collective life. In their rhythms and formations, gig publics exemplify the aesthetic consequences of platform governance, showing how collective presence becomes patterned through episodic synchronisation, affective convergence, and rapid circulation, with implications for sustained processes of public deliberation.

Aesthetic Colonisation: A Unified Framework for Public Reconfiguration

The concept of aesthetic colonisation brings together the dynamics analysed throughout this article into a unified analytical framework. It designates the incorporation of sensibility, namely attention, affect, rhythm, and atmosphere, into infrastructural operations that organise perception as a domain of governance. Under platform conditions, publicness is increasingly shaped through patterned environments that preconfigure how the world appears, how relevance is distributed, and how collective orientation becomes possible.

Across the preceding sections, this reorganisation of the sensible has been shown to operate on three interrelated levels. At the infrastructural level, contractual arrangements and algorithmic systems determine the conditions of access, visibility, and circulation through which communication acquires public form. These arrangements define the procedural horizon within which publics emerge, long before any reflexive engagement takes place. At the experiential level, these infrastructures translate into sensory rhythms and

affective atmospheres characterised by acceleration, intensification, and episodic synchronisation. Gig publics exemplify this logic, materialising collective presence through bursts of visibility and affect, reconfiguring the temporal and interpretive conditions under which collective orientation and will formation take shape. At the aesthetic level, experience itself acquires patterned coherence through sequences, transitions, and calibrated intensities that organise perception into circulatory forms aligned with platform logics.

Read together, Splichal's analysis of contractual and gig publics, Benjamin's genealogy of shock, and Rosa's diagnosis of acceleration illuminate how publicness is increasingly shaped through modes of world-relation characterised by continuity without resonance. The world appears responsive and available, yet remains structurally resistant to reciprocal articulation at the level of shared orientation. Public formation unfolds within environments that privilege responsiveness, visibility, and affective alignment, while weakening the experiential conditions required for reflexive publicity.

Aesthetic colonisation thus names a transformation in the very conditions under which publicness becomes thinkable and experienceable. It refers to the infrastructural organisation of perception through which aesthetic dimensions become operative in public life. By shaping rhythms of appearance, gradients of salience, and atmospheres of attention, digital platforms participate directly in the constitution of shared worlds. Publicness persists under these conditions, but its critical epistemic value is reconfigured, as reflexivity, mediative distance, and cumulative experience give way to operational visibility and patterned circulation.

Conclusion: Aesthetic Colonisation and the Renewal of Publicness

This article approaches the contemporary transformation of the public sphere as a transformation in the configuration of experience, perception, and publicness. Digital platforms function as infrastructures that reorganise the sensible by shaping visibility, attention, affect, and temporal orientation. Publicness develops through patterned environments in which perception, participation, and relevance are configured in advance of reflexive articulation. The concept of aesthetic colonisation captures this transformation at the level of its experiential and infrastructural conditions.

The argument has brought Dewey, Benjamin, Rosa, and Splichal into a shared analytical frame and has reconstructed a genealogy of publicness attentive to its experiential, temporal, and aesthetic dimensions. Dewey's philosophy provides the foundational insight that democratic life depends on the quality and organisation of experience. Publics take shape when indirect consequences acquire perceptible form and when communication integrates perception, affect, and meaning into configurations that sustain shared orientation and inquiry. Publicness, from this perspective, unfolds through aesthetic processes that render experience intelligible, continuous, and communicable.

Benjamin's genealogy of modernity expands this framework by identifying a transformation in the sensory and temporal organisation of experience that directly affects the conditions of public life. His distinction between *Erfahrung* and *Erlebnis* clarifies how technologically mediated environments privilege episodic, impact-driven experience and weaken transmissibility and cumulative meaning. Attention becomes organised through defensive adaptation, perception fragments into sequences of immediacy, and collective orientation takes shape through rapid succession, reshaping the conditions of sustained integration. Benjamin's vocabulary thus makes visible how the sensory organisation of media environments operates as a constitutive element in the formation of public experience.

Rosa's theory of social acceleration specifies this transformation by situating it within broader temporal regimes that structure contemporary world-relations. Acceleration compresses intervals, intensifies circulation and reshapes the availability of the world, producing forms of relation characterised by continuity without resonance. When applied to digital infrastructures, this perspective clarifies how platforms sustain constant responsiveness while constraining the temporal openness required for reciprocal articulation and shared orientation. Resonance emerges here as a structural condition dependent on temporal organisation, linking perceptual fragmentation to wider patterns of mediated social coordination.

Splichal's contribution anchors these experiential and temporal dynamics in a theory of contemporary publicness. His reconceptualisation of *Öffentlichkeit* foregrounds publicness as a principle, an infrastructural condition and a collective actor, allowing the transformation diagnosed by Benjamin and Rosa to be understood as a structural reconfiguration of public life. Within this framework, contractual publics designate the institutional form through which participation, visibility and relevance are governed by asymmetric contractual relations. Terms of service, algorithmic protocols and moderation regimes organise communicative behaviour in advance of reflexive engagement, producing an erosion of publicness that takes an epistemic form, marked by weakened reflexivity, reduced mediative distance and a diminished capacity for collective will formation. Gig publics articulate the experiential expression of these infrastructural conditions. They emerge through rhythmic intensification, affective mobilisation, and episodic synchronisation, assembling collective presence through bursts of visibility that reconfigure cumulative processes of interpretation. Read through the combined lenses of Benjamin and Rosa, gig publics reveal the convergence of shock, acceleration, and patterned circulation in contemporary public life. Collective presence acquires temporal density through alignment within accelerative atmospheres, as sustained public orientation yields to forms of performative visibility shaped by intensity, volatility, and rapid succession.

The concept of aesthetic colonisation constitutes the central analytical framework developed in this article. It gathers the dynamics analysed so far into a unified account of how sensibility, including attention, affect, rhythm, and atmosphere, is incorporated into infrastructural operations that organise perception as a domain of governance. Under platform conditions, publicness develops through the modulation of perceptual fields that preconfigure how the world appears and how relevance is distributed. Aesthetic colonisation thus concerns the infrastructural organisation of experience and the patterned forms through which shared life becomes perceptible.

Aesthetic colonisation operates across three interrelated planes through which digital infrastructures participate in the constitution of shared worlds. At the infrastructural plane, contractual arrangements and algorithmic systems determine the conditions of appearance, circulation, and participation that precede reflexive engagement. At the experiential plane, these arrangements translate into accelerative rhythms and affective atmospheres that structure attention, engagement, and collective presence. At the aesthetic plane, experience acquires patterned coherence through sequences and intensities aligned with platform logics of circulation and retention. Taken together, these planes describe a reorganisation of the sensible in which public life unfolds within environments structured in advance by technical, temporal, and institutional operations.

A Deweyan lens clarifies the democratic stakes of this transformation by foregrounding the role of experience in public formation. Democracy depends on experiential conditions that sustain continuity, resonance and shared inquiry. When these conditions are

reorganised through accelerative, extractive and predictive infrastructures, publicness develops in a mode oriented toward operational visibility and patterned circulation. The contemporary crisis of the public sphere can thus be located in the aesthetic and temporal organisation of experience through which publics emerge, orient themselves and recognise shared consequences.

By foregrounding the aesthetic condition of publicness, this analysis frames democratic communication as a question concerning the organisation of the sensible. Public life depends on how perception, attention and temporality are structured within mediated environments. Aesthetic colonisation names the contemporary configuration of these structures and clarifies how the conditions of reflective orientation, resonance and collective understanding are shaped at the level of experience itself.

Reclaiming the public sphere therefore becomes a matter of reorganising the sensible. Democratic publics require environments capable of sustaining duration, resonance and narrative thickness, temporal structures through which shared experience accumulates and collective understanding develops over time. Dewey's insight that aesthetic experience cultivates forms of coherence that enrich the present and open shared possibilities for the future gains renewed significance in this context, as it highlights communicative patterns that preserve continuity and openness. Benjamin's reflections complement this orientation by emphasising the generative role of interruption and pause, moments in which accelerated rhythms settle, perceptual fields recompose and the world becomes available for recognition. In this sense, an aesthetics of formation names the experiential horizon through which reflective publicity and the renewal of publicness become conceivable.

Between Dewey's aesthetics of integration and Benjamin's aesthetics of interruption emerges an understanding of reflective publicity as an aesthetic-political practice. Publics take shape within infrastructures that organise perception, rhythm and relational possibility. When these infrastructures cultivate attunement, depth and shared world-disclosure, publicness acquires experiential foundations capable of sustaining democratic life. The organisation of the sensible thus becomes a central democratic responsibility. Algorithmic aesthetics thus names both the stakes of this struggle and the ongoing task of shaping environments in which collective experience can develop with continuity, resonance, and interpretive richness.

DISCLOSURE OF INTEREST

The author reports there are no competing interests to declare.

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