

“THIS WAS TERRORISM.” - MULTIMODAL REPRESENTATION OF THE CAPITOL HILL INVASION ON JANUARY 6TH, 2021, IN TUMBLR POSTS.

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<p>Tiivistelmä</p> <p>Donald Trumpin kannattajien tunkeutuminen Yhdysvaltain kongressitaloon tammikuun kuudentena päivänä 2021 herätti runsaasti huomiota niin perinteisessä kuin sosiaalisessa mediassakin. Yksi sosiaalisen median sovelluksista, joilla tapahtumaa kommentoitiin, oli mikrobloggaussovellus Tumblr. Tämän tutkimuksen tarkoituksena oli selvittää multimodaalisen kriittisen diskurssianalyysin keinoin, kuinka kongressihyökkäystä representoitiin 42:ssa Tumblr-julkaisussa. Lisäksi tutkin, kuinka kongressihyökkäyksestä tuotettiin multimodaalisia representaatioita yhdistelemällä kirjoitettua kieltä kahden visuaalisen kommunikaation moodin, kuvien ja animoitujen GIF:ien kanssa. Tähän sisältyi moodien roolien tutkimista sekä yhdessä että erikseen.</p> <p>Tutkimuksessa selvisi, että 98 % julkaisuista esitti kongressihyökkäyksen negatiivisessa valossa. Trumpin väitteet vaalivilpistä koettiin aineistossa perättömiksi ja demokratian vastaisiksi. Hänen kannattajiaan kutsuttiin terroristeiksi ja uusnatseiksi. Tapaus rinnastettiin aineistossa myös voimakkaasti Black Lives Matter -liikkeeseen, ja sekä Capitol-kukkulan poliiseja että Trumpin kannattajia syytettiin rasismista.</p> <p>Mitä tulee aineistossa käytettyjen kommunikaation moodien rooleihin, kirjoitetun kielen osalta merkittävintä oli verkkoaktivismi, jota esiintyi 90 %:ssa julkaisuista. Visuaalisten moodien yleisin käyttötarkoitus oli verkkoalustojen välisten intertekstuaalisten viittausten välittäminen, jota esiintyi 43 %:ssa aineistosta. Kirjoitetun kielen ja visuaalisten moodien välisestä suhteesta paljastui, että vaikka kuvat ja GIF:it olivat yleensä julkaisujen katseenvangitsijoita, niiden sisältämät viittaukset kongressihyökkäykseen ja muihin aiheisiin olivat epämääräisempiä kuin kirjoitetun kielen kautta välitetyt. Kiinnostava ero kirjoitetun kielen ja visuaalisten moodien välillä oli, että yhteydet kongressihyökkäyksen ja BLM-liikkeen välillä välittyivät pääosin kirjoitetun kielen kautta.</p> <p>Verkkoaktivismin ja tyypillisesti Yhdysvaltain poliittisen vasemmiston ajamien teemojen yleisyys aineistossa korreloi positiivisesti aiempien Tumblria koskevien tutkimusten kanssa. Tämän tutkimuksen jatkoksi olisi hyvä saada vertailevia tutkimuksia muista sosiaalisista medioista, kuten X:stä tai TikTokista. Näissä tutkimuksissa analyysin multimodaalisuutta voitaisiin myös lisätä ottamalla mukaan myös videoaineistoja.</p>	
<p>Asiasanat</p> <p>kriittinen diskurssianalyysi, multimodaalinen kriittinen diskurssianalyysi, Donald Trump, Yhdysvaltain politiikka, Yhdysvaltain kongressihyökkäys, multimodaalisuus, kirjoitettu kieli, kuvat, GIF:it</p>	
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<p>Abstract</p> <p>The attack on the US Capitol building by Donald Trump's supporters on January 6, 2021, attracted plenty of attention on both traditional and social media. One of the social media platforms hosting discourse on the event was the microblogging service Tumblr. The purpose of this study was to find out how the Capitol Breach was represented in 42 Tumblr posts via a Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis. Moreover, I studied how written language was combined with two visual modes of communication, still images and animated GIFs, to create multimodal representations of the event. This entailed studying the roles of the modes both together and separately.</p> <p>The study yielded the following results: In 98 % of the posts, the Capitol breach was represented in a negative light. In the data, Trump's claims of election fraud were deemed as unfounded and anti-democratic, and his supporters were called terrorists and neo-Nazis. The event was also strongly juxtaposed with the Black Lives Matter movement, and both the Capitol Hill Police and Trump's supporters were accused of racism.</p> <p>Regarding the roles of the modes of communication present in the data, for written language, the most prominent was Web Activism, which could be found in 90 % of the posts. For the visual modes, the most common purpose was conveying intertextual references between different online platforms, which had a 43 % presence in the data. The relationship between written language and the two visual modes turned out to be such that while the still images and the GIFs were typically the most salient elements in the posts, they did not contain as explicit references to the Capitol breach and other issues as written language. An interesting difference between the written language and the visual modes was that the references to the BLM movement were made mainly via written language.</p> <p>The significant presences of Web Activism and themes typically promoted by the American political left in the data correlate positively with earlier research on Tumblr. Further research on other social media platforms, such as X or TikTok, would be needed to complement the findings of this study. In further studies, the multimodal scope of the analyses could also be expanded to include video data.</p>	
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1 INTRODUCTION

On the 6th of January 2021, a mob of the supporters of the previous President of the United States, Donald Trump, broke into the US Congress building, trying to prevent the Senate from confirming Joe Biden's win over Trump in the US 2020 Presidential Election. (STT-Yle 2021.) The police did not provide much resistance to the attackers, and five people died in the riot. (Matikainen 2021; STT-Yle 2021.) Since Trump had previously refused to admit his loss in the election, and called his supporters to storm Capitol Hill, many saw that he had encouraged them to commit a coup (Matikainen 2021). Starting from the day of the event, it attracted plenty of international attention on both traditional and social media. One of the platforms for exchanging views of the event was Tumblr, where connections were quickly drawn to the rise of fascism and white supremacy in the USA. Given that notable events related to the societal and political issues in the USA, such as the Occupy Wall Street movement (see Milner 2018), The March For Our Lives (see McCracken 2020: 230–231) or sexual violence (see Mendez, Keller, and Ringrose 2019) have gained significant attention on Tumblr, it is hardly surprising that the invasion on Capitol Hill provoked plentiful discussion on the platform.

In this study, I will focus on the discourse the Capitol breach provoked on the platform Tumblr through an analysis of 42 posts in which the event is commented on. The study has two purposes: First, I aim to find out how the event was represented in these posts. How did the creators of these posts interpret the actions of Trump and his supporters? What kind of meanings did they attribute to the event? Second, I want to contribute to the field of multimodal research of contemporary social media content, more specifically Tumblr posts, by exploring the roles and relationship between written language, and two modes of visual communication, still image, and GIFs (stands for Graphic Interchange Format, "a type of computer file that contains a still or moving image" (Cambridge Dictionary 2023). Given that the Capitol breach was such an exceptional political and historical event, Critical Discourse Analysis was selected as

the more specific field of research this study is situated in. Furthermore, since the scope of traditional CDA (Kress and van Leeuwen 2005: 14) is somewhat lacking in terms of methods suitable for studying other than linguistic data, its sub-branch, Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis, turned out to be more fitting for the purposes of my research.

This Master's Thesis will begin with a more detailed description of the Capitol breach as an event, and Tumblr as a social media platform in Chapter 2, after which I will proceed in introducing the aims, data, and methods of analysis used in the present study in Chapter 3. In Chapter 4, the theoretical framework my analysis methods are based on, which is a combination of James Paul Gee's (2010, 2011) theory of Discourse Analysis, and the Visual Grammar by Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen (2005), will be laid out in more detail. Chapter 5 will include the analysis and discussion of my data, and the thesis will end with Conclusions in Chapter 6.

2 THE CAPITOL BREACH AND TUMBLR

In order to understand the data of this study, one needs to have at least a basic understanding of the Capitol Breach as an event, and Tumblr as a social media platform. In this chapter, I will give an overview of both of these topics. The Chapter begins with Section 2.1, which covers the Capitol Breach, and is followed by Section 2.2, which focuses on Tumblr.

2.1 The Capitol Breach

On Wednesday, January 6, 2021, hundreds of supporters of the former president Donald Trump stormed the Capitol Hill and broke into the US Capitol building with the goal of preventing the Senate from ratifying Joe Biden's victory over Trump in the 2020 US Presidential Election through a ceremonial counting of the electoral votes (Barrett, Raju and Nickeas 2021). Some of them brought weapons with them, such as firearms and even two pipe bombs (Aaro 2021). Since the Trump administration had earlier concluded that civilian law enforcement would be enough to protect federal facilities on January 6, the Capitol police was not prepared for the breach, and ended up in a melee with the rioters for several hours, during which pepper spray was employed by both parties, and five people ended up dead (Chavez 2021; Barrett, Raju and Nickeas 2021; Cohen, Wild and Cohen, 2021; Aaro 2021). While inside the building, the rioters broke windows, and vandalized the contemporary House Speaker Nancy Pelosi's office, as well as both congressional chambers (Barrabi 2021). The contemporary Vice President Mike Pence and other lawmakers were evacuated from the building, but the rest of the members of Congress, officials, and journalists who had

gathered there for the ceremony had to either take cover or flee (Barry and Frenkel 2021; Haberman 2021). The National guard was sent to aid the Capitol Police, and by the evening, the Capitol was free of the rioters, and the Senate could resume the count. Biden's victory was certified in the early hours of the following day (Barrett, Raju and Nickeas 2021).

In the first Congressional hearing on the riots, the former Capitol police chief, Steven Sund stated that the people who broke into the Capitol came prepared. He was backed up by the former sergeant-at-the-arms, Michael Stenger, according to whom the attack was coordinated, and could have resulted in more than five casualties. (Pilkington and Greve 2021.) Among the mob that breached the Capitol were members of extremist groups, such as The Proud Boys, and QAnon conspiracy supporters (Barry and Frenkel 2021), as well as well-known individuals, such as the neo-Nazi conspiracy theorist Tim Gionet aka. "Baked Alaska", and the QAnon conspiracy theorist Jake Angeli (Barry and Frenkel, 2021). In the aftermath of the event, criminal charges were brought against several members of far-right extremist groups who were suspected of having been planning the attack for weeks or even months (Cohen, Wild and Cohen 2021). This planning was largely done via social media sites, such as Facebook, Parlor, and Gab, where right-wing activists started amassing people for pro-Trump protests ever since his election loss (Barry and Frenkel 2021).

The incident attracted worldwide media attention, and President Donald Trump was widely perceived as responsible for it (Frater et al. 2021). Even Fox news, which had been known for supporting Trump during his presidency, did not defend him, and labelled his claims of election fraud as unfounded (Barrabi 2021; McKay 2021). Democratic leaders around the world, including the political allies of the U.S., expressed horror over the events, and demanded Trump to respect the election results. While many international agents reminded the U.S. of its role as a "model democracy" in the world, some political opponents of the country, namely Russia and Iran, framed the events as a proof of the fragility of American and Western democracy. (Frater et al. 2021). The Black Lives Matter Global Network considered the police response to the riots as a sign of the double standards regarding white and black people prevalent in the US law enforcement (Chavez 2021).

Trump's responsibility for the breach was supported by his actions ever since he lost the election: For weeks before the day of the breach, Trump and his supporters had been insisting that the election was stolen and filing lawsuits in order to overturn Biden's victory (McKay 2021). He had also been unsuccessfully trying to pressure Pence into blocking the certification from happening. On Twitter, Trump had been

encouraging his supporters to protest in the capital of the U.S. on January 6 through several tweets over the weeks before the day. (Barry and Frenkel, 2021). What is more, on the day of the riots, he gave a speech to his followers at a rally on the Ellipse, near the White House. In the speech, he framed the certifying of the election results as illegal and even treasonous, bashed Pence, and urged his supporters to go to the Capitol to protest (Haberma 2021; Barry and Frenkel 2021).

Trump's behaviour during and after the riots also came under scrutiny: While he did tell the protesters to stay peaceful through tweets during the riot (Singman 2021), he did not condemn them in his early tweets but expressed sympathy towards them, and even praised them for their fighting against the "stolen" election (Barrett, Raju and Nickeas 2021). Trump was also reluctant to dispatch the National Guard to subdue the riot, and only did that after the intervention of several officials (Haberma 2021). Trump's actions were afterwards condemned by not just Democrats, but also many Republican leaders, and he was impeached on a charge of inciting the insurrection – the impeachment being already the second during his term of office (Haberma 2021; Barrabi 2021; Pilkington and Greve 2021; Levine and Gambino 2021). The attorney general nominated by Joe Biden, Merrick Garland, labelled the riots as domestic terrorism, and connected it to white supremacy (Pilkington and Greve 2021). However, Trump was acquitted by the Senate in the impeachment trial (Pilkington and Greve 2021).

At the time of writing, in November 2023, nearly three years have passed since the Capitol breach. More than 1,000 people have been arrested and charged with crimes related to it, and Trump himself has been charged with inciting an insurrection. (Hall et al. 2023.) The criminal case related to his efforts to overturn the results of the US 2020 presidential election is still waiting for a conclusion (Griffiths 2023).

2.2 Tumblr

In this section, I will offer a description of Tumblr as a platform. I will begin with a brief introduction to the platform, and the key functions of it. Next, I will move on to describing some characteristics of Tumblr: multimodality, distinctive tagging practices, and the intertextuality and polyvocality that is prevalent in its contents. The section will end with an overview of political activism on Tumblr, which is yet another feature that is characteristic of the platform (McCracken et al. 2020: 225).

Tumblr is a microblogging platform founded by David Karp in 2007 (Neill Hoch 2018; Tumblr 2021). A microblogging platform is a social media platform that enables its users to create relatively short, multimedia posts about topics of their choice, and circulate them either in social networks formed by connected users or by public broadcast. In addition to Tumblr, other popular microblogging platforms are, for example, Twitter (nowadays known as X) and Sina Weibo. (Xu et al. 2014: 13.) The headquarters of Tumblr are located in San Francisco, USA. On March 30, 2021, there were 520.9 million blogs on Tumblr. (Tumblr 2021.) On the *Community Guidelines* page of the platform (Tumblr 2021a), Tumblr is described as “a global platform for creativity and self-expression”. In terms of age, the users of Tumblr tend to be quite young, and the contents of the platform are typically centered around their interests and hobbies (Xu et al. 2014: 21).

When signing in Tumblr, a new user must come up with a username that is then connected to a blog created automatically by the platform. In addition to this primary blog, Tumblr users can also create secondary blogs that can be, for example, focused on a specific interest, such as cooking, or operated in a different language than the primary blog. (Tumblr 2021b.) Tumblr users are encouraged to customize their blogs via features, such as background colours and header images, create new content, and connect with one another (Tumblr 2021; Tumblr 2021b). This connection happens through various actions, such as following other blogs, i.e. subscribing to see their content on one’s dashboard, which is a feed of content not unlike Facebook or Twitter’s basic view. Other central actions are reblogging other users’ posts, liking them, and replying to them. In reblogging, one chooses to feature an already existing post in their own blog (Tumblr 2021b), while posts that are liked are only saved into the “Liked” -folder of one’s blog, from which other users can view them, unless the user chooses to hide them. Replying is the equivalent of leaving a comment on a post. The likes, reblogs, and replies received by a single post are called its “Notes”, and the total number of them is shown at the lower right-hand corner of the post. Active users are rewarded by Tumblr with increased visibility in its search results and tag pages, which are pages that collect content centred around given topics (Tumblr 2021b).

While both count as microblogging platforms, Tumblr posts have more diversity in content than Twitter. One reason for this is that unlike Twitter posts, Tumblr posts have no character limits. Another reason is that Tumblr supports a larger number of different modes of communication. (Neill Hoch 2018.) Tumblr (2021) encourages its users to express themselves multimodally. The mechanics of the platform enable users to create posts with text, photos, animated GIFs, sound files, videos, and even links to

external websites – and combine them with each other within posts (Tumblr 2021b). For example, a single post can include a photo, written text, and a GIF. Multimodality is also a central feature in memes, popular artefacts that are remixed and circulated by countless users on the Internet, including Tumblr (Milner 2013: 3257, 3259).

Multimodality in Tumblr posts has been studied by, for example, Aarnio (2015), Christiansen and Høyer (2015), and Milner (2013). Aarnio (2015: 137–140) found out that while the functions of different modes overlapped and were often so intertwined that it was not possible to separate them clearly, there were some differences between the typical uses of text and image: while text was often used to provide information, images, such as photos and GIFs were important in attracting attention, evoking emotions, and expressing reactions. In a study of multimodal image posts that also contained text, Christiansen and Høyer (2015: 71, 73, 75) observed that images can be used to increase the believability of argumentation by showing the faces of the people behind the written claims. Aarnio also (2015: 139) found that different modes could either support each other or conflict with each other, highlighting some contrast that the makers of the posts wanted to bring up.

Another distinctive feature of Tumblr is the use of tags on the platform. For a long time, Tumblr did not have any kind of formal community architecture, such as community pages or accounts (Neill Hoch 2018). During that time, some of the functions of communities were taken up by tags, metadata labels that can be used in the manner of keywords in organizing vast amounts of information (Neill Hoch 2018; Bourlai 2018: 47). An example of this is the use of a specific tag known only by a certain fan community, for the purpose of limiting the audience of sexual or romantic content (Neill Hoch 2018). Tags can be added at the bottom of every post, and they are visible for other users in the dashboard. The Tumblr Help Center emphasizes the importance of tagging one's posts appropriately, so that other users will find them. (Tumblr 2021b.) The reason for this is that the Tumblr search system is algorithmic, and while it has been updated to also operate on phrases, tags used to be the only proper search terms, and remain as excellent tools for retrieving information centred around different topics (Tumblr 2021b; Xu et al. 2014: 15).

The tagging system of Tumblr is characterised by its tolerance of spaces and special characters (Tumblr 2021b; Bourlai 2018: 54–55). As a result of this feature, the tags on Tumblr posts can be quite long, even full sentences. According to Bourlai (2018: 47, 54–55), Tumblr tags can be divided in two categories based on function: keyword tags and comment tags. Keyword tags are the classical kind of labels and search terms described above, such as *cats* or *studying*. (For clarity, all tags referred to in this thesis

will be italicised.) They are unlikely to carry much sentiment, and when they do, they are usually concerned with general issues, such as *anxiety* or *blacklivesmatter*. Comment tags are written additions to the content of the post, and typically even three times longer than keyword tags. Tumblr users prefer to add their comments on tags, for it enables them to add their input into posts while keeping them short and easily rebloggable by other users.

Intertextuality is a concept that refers to the allusions, quotes, or other kinds of references to other texts that can be found within a text (Gee 2010/1999: 29–30). Another concept related to intertextuality is entextualization, which is a process where discourse is removed from its original context and interpreted in a different one. This new interpretation may or may not be similar to how the original creator of the text or the audience in the original context interpreted it (Blommaert 2005). Intertextuality and entextualization are examples of polyvocality, the presence of multiple voices within a text (Milner 2013). All these three phenomena are present and prevalent on Tumblr.

According to Xu et al. (2014: 21), original posts make up less than 10 % of the overall content circulating on the platform, while the vast majority of it consists of reblogged material. Tumblr (2020a; Tumblr 2021b) encourages its users to reblog content made by other users, as well as to make their own additions to them in the form of captions, comments, images, GIFs etc. This results in collaborative posts that can feature contributions from multiple users, or sometimes even dialogue between the original user and others. This kind of collaborative posts have been observed by, for example, Aarnio (2015: 140), who observed that additions made by other users could include, for example, new information or sarcasm, and Milner (2013: 3275–3276), whose data included opinions and reactions to political discourses.

What increases the amounts of intertextuality and polyvocality present in Tumblr posts even further is the fact that the platform (Tumblr 2021b) also allows its users to insert links to other platforms, such as Tiktok, embed content from them straight into posts, and even to link one's Tumblr account to their Twitter account for simultaneous publication on both platforms. According to Jones and Hafner (2012: 42, 38), hyperlinking enables users to draw connections between different things, and create implicit suggestions about the relationships between them. The purposes between hyperlinking can be anything from humour to provoking critical conversation. Tumblr posts containing material from various social media platforms can give multifaceted representations of different topics and feature conflicting opinions of the same issue (Aarnio 2015: 134–135).

Discourse is never apolitical (Gee 2010/1999: 7), and neither are the contents of Tumblr. The platform fosters progressive and liberal activism and promotes the political engagement of its users (McCracken et al. 2020: 225; McCracken 2020: 232 - 233). Studies on political activism on Tumblr include, among others, the following examples: Milner (2013: 3257, 3287) studied memes related to the Occupy Wall Street movement of 2011 on Tumblr and various other social media platforms, and observed that the platforms fostered polyvocal political discourses where both the supporters and opposers of the movement could exchange views, spread their messages, and even mobilise support. Gerbaudo (2012: 104, 118-119), who also focused on the Occupy Wall Street movement, found out that a Tumblr page called "We are the 99%" became a space where Americans with quite diverse backgrounds set aside their cultural and political differences, and subscribed to a collective identity that helped to sustain the movement. Aarnio (2015) analysed the representation of the 2014 shooting of a young Black man, Michael Brown, in 50 Tumblr posts. She discovered that Tumblr was used to distribute information about the event, and express opinions and reactions to it, as well as the different accounts of it that were circulating in different traditional and social media. In her data, the event was connected to broader societal issues, such as police brutality and racism in the USA. Christiansen and Høyer (2015) looked into anti-feminist discourses in a Tumblr group called "Women Against Feminism" and found multimodal argumentation where statements about feminism were expressed both directly and indirectly. Kohnen (2018: 357, 359) focuses on activism in fan communities, and states that many fans on Tumblr are vocal about social justice issues, such as the misrepresentation of racial minorities in movies.

3 3. THE PRESENT STUDY

In this chapter, I will present the setup of this study. I will begin with the aims of my study in Section 3.1, after which I will focus on the data selection and collection in Section 3.2. The methods of analysis used in this study will be laid out in Section 3.3, and in Section 3.4, I will discuss the ethical issues related to my research.

3.1 Aims

In this study, I aim to answer the following questions:

1. How is the attack on the US Congress on January 6th, 2021, multimodally represented on Tumblr?

For the purposes of this study, “Tumblr posts” will be defined as the parts of the posts that are visible on the dashboard. Thus, I will not be studying the replies received by each post, as they must be viewed separately (Tumblr 2021b). Given that 71% (N=30) of my data is multimodal in the sense that it features more than one semiotic mode (Machin and Mayr 2012: 6): written language and either still images or GIFs, it would not be possible to extract the full meanings of the posts in my data without taking into account the different modes featured in them.

To answer this research question, I will employ one of the “Six Theoretical Tools” from Gee’s theory of Discourse Analysis (cf. Gee 2010/1999: 165–175; see Section 4.2.1 below) called the “Figured Worlds Tool”. This is due to the nature of Figured Worlds as (simplified) interpretations of the world where specific agents perform certain meaningful actions for particular reasons. The “Seven Building Tasks” of Gee’s theory

(cf. Gee 2011; see Section 4.2.2 below) will also be vital in finding out how the Congress attack was represented in these Tumblr posts: The analysis will involve figuring out what “Activities” were performed by whom (“Identities”), were they justified or not (“Politics”), and what were the “Relationships” between various parties related to the event. Furthermore, I must also explore what sources of information were regarded as trustworthy (“Sign Systems and Knowledge”), and what other issues the Capitol Breach was seen as “Connected” to. Through a search for recurring themes in these Building Tasks, a Figured World or even several different Figured Worlds for the Capitol Breach will emerge from the data.

2. What are the roles of written language and images/GIFs in these posts, and how do they work together in them?

Given that different modes of communication have different affordances (see, for example, Kress and van Leeuwen 2005, Machin and Mayr 2012), it is reasonable to expect that there can be differences in the roles written language and images play in these posts. The other aim of this study is to find out whether there are differences between the purposes the modes that are used in the 42 posts. In addition to exploring the purposes of written language and the two visual modes separately, I will also focus on how they have been combined in the data.

Essentially, answering this second research question will also involve looking into how the Six Theoretical Tools of Gee’s theory have been used to convey the Seven Building Tasks (Gee 2011; see Section 4.2 below). However, given the nature of this question, the Theoretical Tools that will prove the most useful for the analysis, will be somewhat different than with research question number one. When it comes to written language, the Social Languages Tool will give insight to the Identities and purposes of the creators of the posts (cf. Gee 2011: 156–159; see Subsection 4.2.1 below). With the images and GIFs, there is no single Theoretical Tool that rises above the others. This is not surprising, since visual communication is typically more open to interpretation than language (Machin and Mayr 2012: 31).

3.2 Data selection and collection

A separate Tumblr account was created for the purposes of data collection and management for this study. In order to minimise the effect of the Tumblr algorithms on the searches made during the data collection, I avoided specifying any interests for my user persona. The name of the blog is “A CDA-research blog” and the account

connected to it is called “cdabuffontheloose”. To make the purpose of the blog transparent to other users, the biography of the blog states: “The sole purpose of this blog is data collection for a MA Thesis project”.

The first set of data was collected on January 22nd, 2021. After some initial experiments with the Tumblr search bar, as well as having followed the discourse on the events of January 6th, 2021, in my personal blog for the past two weeks, I came to the tentative conclusion that using the tag *capitolhill* would provide me with an ample collection of posts related to the Congress attack. Since different lexical choices carry with them sets of associations that link them to particular Discourses (Machin and Mayr 2012: 32), I decided not to use tags, such as *capitol riots* or *capitol protests* as search terms. The use of lexical items, such as “riot” or “protest” carry moral connotations that would have skewed my data in ways that do not fit the purposes of this study.

In addition to the choice of tag, the following choices were made in terms of search filters: First, since it had already been about two weeks since the event itself, and I wanted to also discover posts that had been made earlier, I chose the filter “Most Popular” instead of the other option, “Recent”. The filter also ensured that the posts featured in my search results would be those that had received the most notes from other users. Second, given that this study has a multimodal approach, I chose the filter “All Posts” (as opposed to, for example, “Text”) from the post type menu.

From the posts that appeared on search results with these terms, I initially selected the first 200 that seemed related to the Congress attack, saving them into my research blog by liking them. Even though I tried to avoid posts unrelated to the 6th of January Congress attack in my first round, a more careful revision of the saved posts later led me into discarding 14 of them as irrelevant to the present study, for they were concerned with other topics and events related to Capitol Hill, such as the *Capitol Hill Autonomous Zone* protest of summer 2020. After this, the total number of posts in my data was 186.

The remaining 186 posts were later screenshot and copy-and-pasted into a separate document to both facilitate the analysis and classification of the data and to ensure that they would not be lost in case something happened to the blog they were originally saved to.

Due to practical reasons, the size of the data sample had to be reduced drastically later on in the research process. In order to prune the dataset into a size that would be manageable in terms of time and effort yet large enough to enable a satisfactory degree of generalizability, a new criterion was added to the data selection: the posts chosen for analysis had to have at least 300 notes (see page 6 above for a definition). This

pruning round yielded 51 posts, which had 301–9, 495 notes each. Two of them were later discarded due to not being related to the Capitol riots, which resulted in 49 remaining posts.

Regretfully, the posts containing videos were also discarded later due to practical concerns. However, the posts that contained GIFs were kept in the data due to their brevity. While GIFs can consist of only one frame, all the GIFs featured in my data are animated (Cambridge Dictionary 2023).

The final number of posts in my data is 42. 29% of the posts in my data (N = 12) are written language -only posts, while 71% (N = 30) include both written language and either still images or GIFs.

3.3 Methods of Analysis

In this section, I will describe the methods of analysis used for the present study. I will begin by locating my study in the field of Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis, after which I will proceed into a more detailed description of my analytical framework.

The method I have chosen for this study is Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis. The paradigm fits the purposes of my research for several reasons. Given that the Capitol attack was a topical event that received a lot of media coverage, it is a typical topic for Discourse Analysis, which has previously been used to study, for example, political speeches, school textbooks, news texts, and advertisements (Machin & Mayr 2012: 5). The choice of topic in this study was inspired by my personal observations on Tumblr content, which is also in line with the traditions of Discourse Studies. (Pietikäinen and Mäntynen 2019: 219, 221–222). One of my reasons for choosing CDA instead of Analytic Discourse Analysis was the political nature of the topic. The potential CDA holds for exposing the ways in which seemingly neutral language can serve specific ideological purposes by, for example, representing a phenomenon or a group of people in a certain kind of light, is likely to be an asset in finding out how the Capitol attack is represented (Machin and Mayr 2012: 5). And since my data is multimodal, that must be reflected in the analysis.

My methods of analysis are derived from the theoretical frameworks by Gee (2010, 2011; see Section 4.2 below), and Kress and van Leeuwen (2005; see Section 4.3 below). These frameworks are suited for CDA due to the ideological nature of both language and images (Kress and van Leeuwen 2005: 14; Gee 2010/1999: 9–10). For the purposes of this study, the functions of the two frameworks are divided as follows:

Gee's theory, which is applicable to studying both linguistic and non-linguistic data (Gee 2011: xii), will serve as the base for the analysis, and guide the interpretation of all the analysis results, while the Grammar of Visual Design will be applied to the visual aspects of my data. Gee (2010: 194) states that when using his theory to study an image, the analysis must be based on details of the image, just as with language. Furthermore, he agrees with Kress and van Leeuwen (2005) on the notion that images have a grammar, which further justifies the combination of these two frameworks.

Essentially, applying Gee's theory for CDA (cf. Gee 2011, 2014; see Section 4.2 below) involves using the Six Theoretical tools (Situated Meanings, Social Languages, Figured Worlds, Intertextuality, Discourses and Conversations) to find out how each of the seven building tasks (Significance, Activities, Identities, Relationships, Politics, Connections, and Sign Systems and Knowledge) have been realized through language (or some other mode). The more specific sub-questions, such as the grammar-focused tools (Gee 2011; see Section 4.2 below), will only be utilized when they are helpful to answering these broader questions. Furthermore, the analyst is not expected to ask all these questions related to the Theoretical tools and Building Tasks of every piece of data. While it would be the "ideal" discourse analysis, in most cases, it is either too impractical or even impossible. (Gee 2005: 121-122.) Instead, I will focus on Building Tasks that are relevant in terms of the aims of the analysis and look for repetitive "themes or motifs" (see Gee 2010/1999: 165-168), which will then be used as a basis for hypotheses on Theoretical Tools that would be helpful with answering my research questions. Once these hypotheses have been formed, they will be tested in terms of how far and wide they function in the data. The validity of the analysis will be based on how much evidence of linguistic and visual details can be found to support my findings, and to what extent the findings converge (see Gee 2010/1999: 123-124).

While the analysis of the written language featured in my data will be guided by the study of linguistic features with the help of the more grammar-focused concepts of Gee's theory (cf. Gee 2011; see Section 4.2 below), the observations related to the images and GIFs included in the 42 posts will be made on the basis of the Visual Grammar (Kress and van Leeuwen 2005; see Section 4.3 below). In practice, this means that the findings made from the visual components of the data will be based on the Representational (Narrative and Conceptual Patterns), Interactional (Viewer's position and Modality), and Compositional Structures (Information value, Salience, and Framing) present in the posts. In regard to posts that contain written language as a part of an

image, the written language will be analysed as both elements in language and elements of the image (see Gee 2010/1999: 196).

3.4 Ethical considerations

In this section, I will contemplate the ethical aspects of this study. I will begin by laying out some general principles of the ethics of online research, after which I will move on to the context of this study.

According to the Association of Internet Researchers (Ess and the AoIR ethics working committee 2002: 8), hereby referred to with the acronym “AoIR”, the primary ethical concern in research is to “do no harm”. Online research should be conducted in such a way that no psychological, economical, or physical harm comes to the participants of the study (Markham and Buchanan 2012: 7). The ethics of online research are especially important to consider when referring to the data in published research, for it is characteristic of social media data that it can be traced back to the original source via a simple online search (Laaksonen 2018). Given that there can be such variance between the specific circumstances of different studies, the AoIR (Ess and the AoIR ethics working committee 2002: 4) recommends that decisions concerning research ethics should be made to accommodate the contexts of each study.

Regarding the present study, the most pressing ethical concerns are related to the use and quoting of the Tumblr posts in my data. According to the AoIR (Ess and the AoIR ethics working committee 2002: 4–5, 7), two important questions to ask when trying to determine whether it is ethical to use online data for research are what are the ethical expectations established by the venue, and whether the participants in this environment [are] best understood as ‘subjects’ (in the senses common in human subjects research in medicine and the social sciences) – or as authors whose texts/artifacts are intended as public?” The ethical expectations of an online environment can be manifested in practice, for example, in the form of a site policy, or as technological features that enable the users to mark some interactions as “private”. The difference between subjects and authors is that while subjects assume that their communication in the online environment is private, authors do not.

The answer to these two questions can be found in the Tumblr Help Center. According to the microblogging site (Tumblr 2023), it is possible to adjust the settings of one’s Tumblr blog so that it is removed from Tumblr searches, and search engines are discouraged from indexing it. Moreover, a Tumblr user can also set individual posts

on their blog as “private”. As the posts in my data were findable via the Tumblr search function, it can be deduced that they have been intended as public.

However, as Laaksonen (2018) points out, the public availability of data alone does not make the research ethical. Even when people are using a public online platform, they might still have strong expectations of privacy (Markham and Buchanan 2012: 6). Indeed, some Tumblr users do share personal information in their blogs, such as their age, gender, or sexual orientation. What is more, the topic of the present study is politically charged. For these reasons, I have taken the following measures to mitigate the risk of the contents of these posts being traced back to their original creators: First, the posts in the data have been anonymised via coding them with numbers 1–42, and they will be referred to with these numbers in the analysis. Second, I have chosen to limit the screenshots of posts I have chosen to feature as examples in the analysis to only those parts of the posts that are necessary to illustrate the points being made. The usernames of the creators of the posts will not be visible in any of the figures. However, there are two examples (Figures 2 and 4), which contain tweets made by American public figures, a former reality-TV star and a journalist (Carter 2023; Scripps Local Media 2023). Given that these people can be expected to be aware of the risks of participating in public debates online under their real names, I have decided to not blur their names and profile pictures.

4 THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

In this chapter, I will provide a more detailed account of the theoretical framework my methods of analysis are based on. The chapter begins with Section 4.1, where I describe the field of Critical Discourse Analysis, and its sub-branch, Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis, which is the field of research the present study is situated into. After Section 4.1, I will elaborate on the two theories I have used in the analysis, James Paul Gee's (2011) theory of Discourse Analysis, and the Grammar of Visual Design by Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen (2005). Gee's theory and its key concepts will be introduced in Section 4.2, while Kress and van Leeuwen's theory will be covered in Section 4.3.

4.1 Critical Discourse Analysis

Critical Discourse Analysis is a sub-field of Discourse Analysis (Suoninen 2021). In this subchapter, I will give a brief overview of it, and the central concepts related to it. I will begin by situating Critical Discourse analysis within the broader field of Discourse Analysis and describing its history and defining principles. Afterwards, I will introduce the difference between the concepts of "discourse" and "Discourses", the notion that language has power, and the concept of context.

Discourse Analysis is a cross-disciplinary paradigm that is characterised by a socially constructivist view of language, in which language is seen as simultaneously shaping and being shaped by the surrounding reality (Pietikäinen and Mäntynen 2019: 229; Machin and Mayr 2012: 4). In other words, in Discourse Analysis, language use

is seen as intertwined with social practices. As a result of this, it does not just focus on language, but also on societal phenomena (Pietikäinen and Mäntynen 2019: 25–26, 221). In terms of concepts and methodological tools, Discourse Analysis has been influenced by many other paradigms, such as Conversation Analysis, sociolinguistics, rhetoric, ethnomethodology, and the works of Michel Foucault and Ludwig Wittgenstein (Suoninen 2021).

The field of Discourse Analysis is made up of multiple approaches that are connected by shared theory rather than shared methods (Pietikäinen and Mäntynen 2019: 240–241). However, they can be roughly divided into analytical and critical approaches based on their foci: Analytical Discourse Analysis studies the ways in which everyday language is used to achieve different goals. It has borrowed plenty of methods and concepts from Conversation Analysis, and tends to use videoed interactions as data. (Suoninen 2021.)

Critical Discourse Analysis (hereby referred to as “CDA”) has its roots in an approach called Critical Linguistics, which was developed by Gunther Kress, Tony Trew, Roger Fowler and Robert Hodge at the University of East Anglia, UK, in the 1970s. The aim of Critical Linguistics was to look into the ways in which language and grammar can be instrumentalized in the purpose of supporting or opposing different ideologies. (Machin and Mayr 2012: 1–2). CDA itself originates in the 1980s and 1990s, where its first practitioners, such as Norman Fairclough, studied how certain ways of constructing meanings about the surrounding world reached hegemony (Pietikäinen and Mäntynen 2019: 34). What makes CDA different from Analytical Discourse Analysis, as well as much of traditional linguistics, is that political objectivity is not one of its goals. In fact, many practitioners of CDA, are openly committed to work against societal injustices, such as racism. (Machin and Mayr 2012: 4.)

In CDA, language is viewed as resources language users make choices from in order to achieve their goals. In practice, these resources can be, for example, different languages, accents, dialects, genres or discourses. Not all of these resources are equally strong or applicable in all situations. The totality of linguistic and other semiotic resources possessed by an individual is called their linguistic repertoire. (Pietikäinen and Mäntynen 2012: 22).

CDA, as well as all Discourse Analysis, typically makes a distinction between the terms “discourse” and “Discourses” (Pietikäinen and Mäntynen 2019: 27–28, 30). According to Blommaert (2005: 3), the term “discourse” refers to “...all forms of meaningful semiotic human activity seen in connection with social, cultural and historical patterns and developments of use.” Two statements can be made based on this

definition: First, discourse is not only limited to spoken and written language, but also other modes of communication, such as sound, layout, image, texture and smell. Second, discourse is not “just words”, but affects the world around it, and is affected by it. It is used to attach meanings and value judgements to the different things and entities of our environments, and affects how different social goods, such as wealth, power or acceptance, are distributed within a society (Blommaert 2005: 4; Gee 2010/1999: 7). The meanings that can be constructed through discourse are also constrained by linguistic and sociocultural conditions, such as the prevalent definitions of concepts, such as “gender” or “prestige” (Blommaert 2005: 4). In conclusion, discourse is always both social and political (Blommaert 2005: 4; Gee 2010/1999: 7).

Included in discourse, yet a different concept, Discourses, with a capital “D” are conventionalized ways of semiotisation that name a phenomenon, express a specific view on it, and systematically affect it in the real world. Similar to discourse in general, discourses construct meanings about different things in our environment, but their scope is limited to specific topics, such as parenthood, politics, wolves, or sports. They are recognizable, and can be given names, such as “environmentalist discourse” or “pro-military discourse”. Different discourses around the same topic tend to conflict with each other, each aiming to become the dominant one, i.e. reaching the status of an unquestionable truth. (Pietikäinen and Mäntynen 2019: 40–41.)

One of the most central notions in CDA is that language has power. It is through language that we can create, legitimise, question and change values, knowledge, and notions of the surrounding reality. (Pietikäinen and Mäntynen 2019: 43) This can be illustrated through the concept of naturalisation, which is defined by Machin and Mayr (2012: 4–5) as the act of making something, such as a particular worldview or ideology, appear as “natural and commonsensical”. This is often achieved through very subtle details of language, such as grammatical features. For example, whether an event is coded as a verb, such as “kill”, or a noun “death” can cause drastic changes in the way it is interpreted (Kress and van Leeuwen 2005: 2). Consequently, the aim of CDA is to denaturalise the language of a text in order to reveal the assumptions, ideas and absences within it. (Machin and Mayr 2012: 5.) For these reasons, power, politics and ideologies have been central points of focus in CDA since the beginning (Pietikäinen and Mäntynen 2019: 33). Typical research topics for CDA have been, for example, political speeches, school textbooks, news texts, and advertisements (Machin and Mayr 2012: 5).

Context is another important concept in CDA. According to Pietikäinen and Mäntynen (2019: 40), the term refers to "all the factors that affect the construction of a

meaning and restrict its use and interpretation". Context is layered, and there are always countless layers present in any interaction. Some examples of different layers of context are situational context, such as a breakfast table conversation; historical context, such as the 1950s; political context, such as the Finnish political system; genre context, such as Italo-Western films; and the contexts of the researcher and those being researched. (Pietikäinen and Mäntynen 2019: 40–41, 49–52, 221).

4.1.1 Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis

While CDA started off as an approach that focused only on language (Kress and van Leeuwen 2005: 14), in the 2000s, it was influenced by visual studies, and a new sub-branch of CDA was born (Pietikäinen and Mäntynen 2019: 34). According to Machin and Mayr (2012: 9–10), Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis (hereby "MMCDA"), has a lot in common with CDA: It shares the view of language both being shaped by and shaping the surrounding reality, as well as the goal of denaturalizing language to reveal the communicative choices behind it. However, it also extends these notions to other semiotic modes, such as image, sound, touch, smell, and layout. As with CDA, there are also many different possible approaches to MMCDA (Machin and Mayr 2012: 10).

While multimodal CDA stresses that language is not the only semiotic mode through which meanings are conveyed (Machin and Mayr 2012: 6), one of its central principles is that different modes have different affordances and restrictions (Jones and Hafner 2012: 3). This means that not all meanings can be conveyed through different modes. Even when the same meaning can be conveyed through two different modes, such as image and text, they will be realised differently. For example, what in visual communication is expressed through choices in composition or colour, might be realised in language through different clause structures and world classes. (Kress and van Leeuwen 2005: 2). For this reason, it is useful to combine the observations made from different modes when analysing a multimodal text (Machin and Mayr 2012: 9).

According to them, the analysis of visual design should be part of Critical Discourse Analysis alongside textual analysis (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2005: 14). Like language, photos, diaphragms, graphics and other images also involve choices made by the author of the text. Consequently, an analysis of the details of an image can also reveal ideological stances and other kinds of "hidden meanings". (Machin and Mayr 2012: 8–9.)

4.2 Gee's Theory of Discourse Analysis

In this section, I will present James Paul Gee's (2010/1999, 2011) approach to Discourse Analysis, which will be the main theoretical framework of my analysis. I will begin by a brief introduction of the "27 tools of inquiry" (Gee 2011: x), and those of them that do not fall into the categories of "Six Theoretical Tools" or "Seven Building Tools". The aforementioned subcategories will be introduced in more detail in subsections 4.2.1, and 4.2.2.

In Gee's (2011: ix) approach, Discourse Analysis is defined as "the study of language-in-use". The approach is one that sees "discourse analysis as tied closely to the details of language structure (grammar), but that deals with meaning in social, cultural and political terms" (Gee 2011: ix). Since other semiotic modes also have their own "grammars", with the help of theory that is suitable for those modes, Gee's theory can also be adapted for the analysis of texts that include non-linguistic content, such as images or web pages. (ibid. xii.) Essentially, the approach is made up of 27 "tools" that are specific questions that help the analyst focus on the details of language from various different perspectives in order to find out how language is used to do things in the world. (For a full list, and descriptions of these tools, see Gee 2011.) While there is no mandatory order for applying the tools for data (ibid. x), some of them are more closely related to each other, or even intended to be used simultaneously.

The following tools of inquiry, the Making Strange Tool, the Context Is Reflective Tool, and the Frame Problem Tool can be seen as general principles that one should keep in mind while doing the analysis. The Making Strange Tool refers to the importance of trying to denaturalize language and other data to uncover the taken-for-granted aspects of interaction that is central in all Discourse Analysis. According to Gee, this is especially important to keep in mind when studying a piece of data within a culture that is familiar to the researcher. The Context Is Reflective Tool, and the Frame Problem Tool are supposed to help the researcher explore the contextual aspects of interaction both during and after doing the initial analysis. (Gee 2011: 9, 19, 84-85, 185.)

While the next three tools: The Fill In Tool, The Actions Tool and The Why This Way and Not That Way Tool are introduced separately in Gee's (2011: 12-14) theory, he stresses that they are supposed to be used together. The Fill In Tool helps the analyst to understand what the speaker means in terms of the goals and purposes of the communication. In practice, this entails making informed "guesses" on the basis of the

piece of data at hand. In the case of ideological differences, Gee argues that it is crucial to try to understand the speaker even if the data features viewpoints that the researcher disagrees with, for it will lead into a better and fairer critique.

The Doing and Not Just Saying Tool focuses on what action or actions are being performed in the data. Is the text ordering to do something, asking for help or, perhaps, mocking something or someone? With regards to putting The Doing and Not Just Saying Tool into practice, Gee makes a distinction between “local goals” that are smaller-scale actions performed through individual utterances, and “global goals”, which are accomplished through larger blocks of text. (Gee 2011: 42–44, 47.)

The Why This Way and Not That Way Tool reminds the researcher that grammatical choices are by no means neutral. In order to achieve the goals language users have for each interaction, they must make design choices, such as whether to use a noun phrase (e.g. “kittens’ growth) or a verb (e.g. “grow”). These grammatical design choices affect the meanings that are being conveyed, which makes them a fruitful object of study in discourse analysis. The findings one gets by using The Why This Way and Not That Way Tool should converge with the observations made by the two related tools. (Gee 2011: 54–55.)

Given that Gee’s theory is so focused on details of language, it includes up to nine different tools that are intended for more elaborate study of linguistic details. Each of them helps the researcher focus on a different aspect of language. The Deixis Tool deals with deictics, such as personal pronouns or words referring to place, while The Vocabulary Tool focuses on the distribution of Germanic and Latinate words in a piece of data (Gee 2011: 8–10, 52–53). The Subject Tool, the Topics and Themes Tool, The Intonation Tool, and the Integration Tool operate on the level of sentences (ibid. 18, 24, 28, 58, 65–67). The last three tools, The Stanza Tool, The Cohesion Tool, and The Topic Chaining Tools are useful for studying longer stretches of language (ibid. 74–75, 128–143). (For detailed descriptions of each of these tools, see ibid.: 8–146.)

4.2.1 The Six Theoretical Tools

The following six tools are called The Six Theoretical Tools in Gee’s (2011: 150; 2014/2011: 189–191) approach: The Big ‘D’ Discourse Tool, The Big ‘C’ Conversations Tool, The Situated Meanings Tool, The Social Languages Tool, The Figured Worlds Tool, and the Intertextuality Tool. These tools are supposed to direct the analyst’s attention to different kinds of relationships language has with the world and culture.

The Big ‘D’ Discourse Tool reflects Gee’s (2011: 151, 178) definition of Discourses as “...ways of enacting and recognizing different socially situated and significant

identities through the use of language integrated with characteristic ways of acting, interacting, believing, valuing, and using various sorts of objects (including our bodies), tools, and technologies in concert with other people." According to Gee, the essence of Discourses is being certain "kinds" of people, such as "a tough guy", "an African American", "a patriot" or "a Belieber" (a devoted fan of the pop star Justin Bieber).

Related to Big 'D' Discourses Tool, Gee also introduces the Big 'C' Conversations Tool. Conversations are public debates among different Discourses that are centred around societal issues (or the central issues of a smaller societal sub-groups, such as specific academic fields), e.g. abortion, feminism, or multilingualism. Conversations consist of countless interactional events, and are situated within specific historical, geographical and institutional contexts. A typical characteristic of especially Conversations related to large-scale societal issues is that everyone knows what kind of "sides" are involved within the Conversation, what kind of arguments there are for and against these sides, how they are talked about, and what kind of people tend to be on the different sides. Conversations can be so widespread that everything individuals or institutions, such as social media influencers or newspapers, can say or write about these issues (or even the interpretations they can make about statements made about them) must be made against them. (Gee 2014/2011: 189-190.)

The Situated Meaning Tool focuses on what Gee (2011: 151-154) calls "situated meanings". As opposed to "general meaning", which refers to the range of typical meanings each word, utterance or grammatical structure has, situated meanings are specific meanings that linguistic elements take in specific contexts. For instance, while the word cat generally refers to a feline, in certain contexts it also refers to a skilled jazz player. Because meaning-making is an active process where listeners must guess the correct situated meanings to make sense of the communication, language-users shape their utterances according to what kind of previous experiences and knowledge the other participants of the interaction have.

The Social Languages Tool guides the analysts' attention to social languages, which are styles or varieties of a language (or a mixture of languages) that enact and/or are associated with a particular social identity. Examples of social languages are, for example dialects, such as African American Vernacular English, language varieties associated with a specific social class, such as upper-class English, or the languages of various interest groups, such as K-pop fans. While social languages do not necessarily have official names, they all have by what Gee calls "a second grammar", a set of "rules" for combining grammatical units to form patterns that are

characteristic of that specific social language. When studying a piece of discourse with the help of the Social Languages Tool, it is important to keep in mind that a single text can include more than one social language. (Gee 2011: 156–159.)

The Figured Worlds Tool is based on the concept of “figured worlds” that Gee has adapted from the work of Dorothy Holland (Holland et al. 1998: 52) who defines it as

“A socially and culturally constructed realm of interpretation in which particular actors are recognized, significance is assigned to certain acts, and particular outcomes are valued over others. Each is a simplified world populated by a set of agents who engage in a limited range of meaningful acts or changes of state as moved by a specific set of forces.”

Other concepts that are close to figured words are, for example, “schemes”, or Goffman’s “frames”. Because the purpose of figured worlds is to facilitate cognition, they are often taken for granted, and the ways they oversimplify the world around us can only be discovered through conscious reflection. What is important to note, though, is that figured worlds are not restricted to people’s minds but also exist in the surrounding world in various forms, such as media texts, and the talk and actions of people we interact with, such as neighbours or local politicians. The Figured Worlds Tool is especially useful for Critical Discourse Analysis due to the fact that figured worlds deal with notions of what is “typical”, “normal” or “appropriate” within a given context. As a result, they can become a means of discriminating against or judging people who are taken as “atypical” or “abnormal”. (Gee 2011: 169–171, 173.)

As suggested by its name, The Intertextuality Tool encourages the analyst to look for different forms of intertextuality in the data, such as direct and indirect quotations or allusions. This tool is connected to the Social Languages Tool: Gee (2011: 166) argues that intertextuality can also take place at the level of social languages. This happens, for instance, when a text mimics another social language in the level of grammatical features but not on the lexical level.

4.2.2 The Building Tools

Language is used - alongside with other non- linguistic tools, such as actions, symbol systems, objects, technologies and belief systems - as a tool for building things in the world. According to Gee, these things can be categorised into seven areas of “reality”: significance, activities, identities, relationships, politics, connections, and sign systems and knowledge. In Gee’s theory these things are called the “seven building tasks” of language. Whenever one uses language, one engages in one or more of these building

tasks. (Gee 2011: 88). In the following paragraphs, I will introduce the seven tools connected to each of these building tasks.

As suggested by its name, The Significance Building Tools deals with how language is used to build up and lessen the significance of different things. In practice, this entails looking into what things are foregrounded or downplayed through, for example, placing them into a main clause vs. a subordinate clause. (Gee 2011: 92.)

The Activities Building Tool is concerned with what are called activities in Gee's theory. As opposed to an "action", an "activity" is an action or a sequence of actions that carries out "a socially recognizable and institutionally or culturally normed endeavour", such as "gaming" or "lecturing" or "protesting". Because activities are so culture- and institution- specific, if an activity deviates significantly from the norms of such activities, it can be a sign of some innovation or disturbance. (Gee 2011: 96-98.)

The Identities Building Tool is concerned with how people use language to enact and get others to recognize different kinds of identities, such as "everyday person", "an avid football fan", "a lawyer", "an upper-middle class career woman" or "an Ostrombothnian". These identities are connected to different ways of using language and acting, such as vernacular or formal varieties of language. Due to the fact that language is also used to portray other people and their identities in specific ways, usually in contrast to our own identities, the Identities Building Tool also helps to shed light on what kind of attitudes and beliefs about other people and groups of people are expressed in the data. (Gee 2011: 107, 109.)

Yet another thing people do with language is building, maintaining, and even destroying relationships, which is what The Relationships Building Tool focuses on. Whether we are engaging in, for example, a professional or an intimate relationship, has effects on what kind of language we use. The Relationships Building Task is closely related to the Identities Building tasks, since our identities are often defined at least partially in relation to our relationships with other people, social groups, and institutions. However, they are still separate tools. After all, a person can relate to people (or even to the same person) in many different ways while maintaining the same identity. (Gee 2011: 114-15.)

Unlike in everyday language, the term "politics" in The Politics Building Tool does not refer to political parties or government but to "any situation where the distribution of social goods is at stake". "Social goods" here refers to "anything a social group or a society or a social group takes as a good worth having". Social goods can be, for example, money, the right to carry firearms or marriage. When using language, people build what counts as "social goods", distribute them to or withhold them from

others, and build viewpoints on how social goods are or should be distributed in a society. Because these views often differ between people and groups of people, they are a common source of conflict in a society. (Gee 2011: 18, 20.)

The Connection Building Tool (Gee 2011: 126) studies how people use language to draw connections between different things, such as current events and larger societal issues. Sometimes these connections are not made explicitly but left for the listener to fill in. In some cases, speakers might even try to manipulate what kind of connections listeners make in their minds and what they will think of them.

While the Sign Systems and Knowledge Building Tool is closely related to the Politics Building Tool (after all, sign systems and forms of knowledge are also social goods), it still counts as a separate tool due to sign systems and knowledge being so distinctive to human beings and important to people. With this tool, the researcher can find out how people use language to construe certain sign systems (such as different languages, dialects, images or graphs), and certain forms of knowledge or belief as better or worse, as privileged or not in a given context. Different sign systems are connected to different knowledge and belief systems, such as religions or scientific fields. (Gee 2011: 136–138.)

4.3 The Grammar of Visual Design

In this section I will lay out Kress and van Leeuwen's (2005) theoretical framework for studying visual communication, which is likely the most well-known approach used for MMCDA. The purpose of the theory is to explain the logic behind the ways visual elements are combined into meaningful wholes. The grammar of visual design describes how the elements depicted in images, such as people or places are used to make visual statements, just as the linguistic grammar is used to make meanings through language. An important notion behind this Visual Grammar is that semiotic modes are not just shaped by the potential and characteristics of the medium but also by the surrounding societies and their cultures (their histories, values etc.) Thus, image is no more "neutral" mode of communication than any other. While we may think visual communication only reflects reality, it is always coded, and can be used for the purposes of different ideologies and institutions. The impression of transparency only comes from the fact that we can read the visual code of our culture. A proof of this is that it is nearly impossible to interpret art from other cultures without studying. (Kress and van Leeuwen 2005: 1, 32–35, 47.)

The Grammar of Visual Design is situated within the theoretical framework of social semiotics, and Kress and van Leeuwen have based it on the three metafunctions of semiotic modes adapted from M. A. K. Halliday. The first of them, the ideational metafunction, is about representing the world, whereas the second, the interpersonal metafunction, deals with creating relationships between the creator of the text, the receiver and those being represented. The third metafunction, the textual metafunction, is concerned with forming a coherent text. While the three metafunctions can be applied to any semiotic mode, Kress and van Leeuwen's theory is focused on still and moving images. (Kress and van Leeuwen 2005: 6, 20, 41–44.)

Kress and van Leeuwen's theory consists of five main categories: narrative patterns, conceptual patterns, viewer's position, modality and composition. Their relationships to Halliday's three metafunctions are as follows: Narrative and conceptual patterns are representational structures, which serve the ideational metafunction. Viewer's position and modality are interactional structures and serve the interpersonal metafunction. Compositional patterns are textual structures that serve the textual metafunction. (Kress and van Leeuwen 2005: 15.) In the following subsections I will describe the five categories in more detail. Subsection 4.3.1 will cover representational structures, 4.3.2 interactional structures, and 4.3.3 compositional structures.

4.3.1 Representational Structures

Before delving deeper into the categories of visual representational structures, it is important to define what exactly is being represented in visual communication. Kress and van Leeuwen call the elements and creatures featured in images "(represented) participants" as opposed to "interactive participants", i.e. the creators and viewers of images. Represented participants can be identified by either them standing out against the background via some way, such as size, positioning or colour saturation, or by them having distinctive functions. Due to practical reasons, the concept of "represented participant" will hereby be referred to with the abbreviation "RP". (Kress and van Leeuwen 2005: 47–50, 59.)

Representational structures are divided into narrative and conceptual patterns depending on whether they represent their participants in terms of their essence or actions. It is important to note that there are typically several different representational processes embedded within any still or moving image. (Kress and van Leeuwen 2005: 59, 107.) In this section, I will first describe narrative patterns and their subcategories: Actions, Reactions, and Conversions, after which I will move on to conceptual patterns, and their subcategories: Classificatory, Analytical, and Symbolical patterns.

According to Kress and van Leeuwen (2005: 59, 258), narrative processes represent "actions, events, processes of change" and "transitory spatial arrangements". In short, a narrative process is any process where participants are represented as doing something to each other. Narrative processes are characterized by the presence of "vectors", which are lines formed by the depicted elements. A vector can be, for example, a pointing limb, a road running across the image, or an abstract graphic element. In moving images, actions are represented by real movements instead of vectors. Narrative processes can further be divided into three subclasses: Actions, Reactions, and Conversions (for further details, see Kress and van Leeuwen 2005: 50–68).

Conceptual Patterns are representational structures that represent the participants not in terms of their actions but of essence (either in terms of meaning, structure or class). Their subclasses are Classificatory, Analytical and Symbolical patterns. (Kress and van Leeuwen 2005: 59, 79.) The first subclass of conceptual patterns, Classificational processes, represent participants through some kind of a taxonomy: a 'kind of' relation or a hierarchy. In a classificational process there is at least one participant with the role Superordinate, and at least two participants who play the role of 'Subordinates' in relation to it (ibid. 2005: 79–80).

The second subclass of conceptual patterns, Analytical processes, represent participants through a part-whole structure. While there are many different types of analytical processes (for an extensive overview of different kinds of analytical processes, see Kress and van Leeuwen 2005: 91–103), they always include a participant called Carrier (the whole) who has Possessive Attributes (the parts; there can be any number of them).

The third subclass of conceptual patterns, Symbolic Processes, represent the participants in terms of their symbolic, arbitrary meanings. A common example of a Symbolic Process is how the heart symbol is used to represent "love". Symbolic Processes can be further divided into Symbolic Attributive and Symbolic Suggestive processes. (Kress and van Leeuwen 2005: 105–106.)

4.3.2 Interactional Structures

Interactional Structures are concerned with the interpersonal metafunction of semiotic modes. They are used to represent relationships between the represented and interactive participants of images. According to Kress and van Leeuwen, there can be three kinds of relations between these participants: relations between represented participants, relations between interactive and represented participants (i.e. what kind of attitudes do the former have towards the latter), and relations between interactive

participants (what do they do to/for each other via images). (Kress and van Leeuwen 2005: 114, 116.) In this subsection, I will introduce the two kinds of interactional structures: Viewer's Position and Modality.

In the Grammar of Visual Design, the viewer's position in relation to the RPs is expressed through three dimensions: the gaze, size of frame, and perspective. The concept of the gaze refers to whether the RPs of an image are looking at the viewer or not. A situation where a RP looks directly at the viewer is called a "demand". Demands establish an imaginary contact between the represented participants and the viewer. The participants "demand that the viewer enter into some kind of imaginary relation with" them. Details, such as expressions and gestures specify the nature of this relation. The represented participants in a demand can also be non-humanoid, such as animals or objects, as long as they can be interpreted as looking at the viewer. A case where a RP doesn't look at the viewer is called an "offer". In offers, the image addresses the viewer indirectly. The represented participants are "offered" to the viewer as objects of scrutiny and contemplation, like "specimens in a display case". The choice between a demand and an offer is interesting for a discourse analyst because it can reveal what kind of attitudes the creator of the image has towards the RPs. Are they, for example, depicted as equal to the viewer or more powerful than them? (Kress and van Leeuwen 2005: 117-121, 264.)

According to Kress and van Leeuwen (2005: 124-128), size of frame is used to convey social distance in visual communication. These differently sized frames are based on everyday interactions, and represent different degrees of social distance, ranging from close personal distance, i.e. the distance at which people can grasp or hold each other to public social distance, that is the distance between strangers who do not interact with each other. In addition to creatures, the concept of social distance also applies to objects, buildings, and landscapes.

Perspective operates in subjective images, i.e. images that have a built-in point of view. It must be applied both in relation to the horizontal and the vertical angle (Kress and van Leeuwen 2005: 130-131). According to Kress and van Leeuwen (2005: 134-136, 140), the horizontal angle signals involvement, while the vertical angle represents power relations.

The concept of modality refers to the estimated truth value of a "proposition" (i.e. a statement given in any mode). It is important to note that in social semiotic theory, this does not refer to the actual verity of the proposition, but whether it is represented as true/false in the context of a particular social group. Thus, modality serves the interpersonal metafunction instead of the ideational metafunction. The criteria of

“truth” are always based on the values and beliefs of a particular social group. What might seem “natural” and “realistic” for one group, might seem “unnatural” and “unrealistic” for another. In addition to assessing the truth value of texts produced within one’s own group, modality is, indeed, also used for passing judgements on the “truths” of other groups. (Kress and van Leeuwen 2005: 154–155.)

What determines the modality of an image? According to Kress and van Leeuwen, the modality of an image is always motivated to match the coding orientation of the intended addressees. They define coding orientations as “sets of abstract principles which inform the way in which texts are coded by specific social groups, or within specific institutional contexts”. For example, “naturalistic coding orientation”, is the everyday, commonsense coding orientation people use to make sense of images, views “realism” as the highest correspondence to what can be seen with the naked eye as possible. To use colour as an example, in naturalistic images bright, fully modulated colours convey high modality. However, another coding orientation would have different criteria for “realism”. For instance, “technological coding orientation” puts a lot of emphasis on effective visual representation. Unlike in naturalistic images, in technological images, bright, fully modulated colours would convey low modality. (Kress and van Leeuwen 2005: 165–166, 172–173.)

4.3.3 Compositional structures

Composition is a phenomenon that serves the textual metafunction of semiotic modes. According to Kress and van Leeuwen (2005: 177), the logic of the integration of a multimodal text is realized through one or both of these following codes: the mode of rhythm (temporal composition) or the mode of spatial composition. Rhythm dictates texts that unfold over time, such as music, dance and speech, whereas spatial composition dictates texts in which all the elements are present at the same time, such as photos and magazine pages. Certain texts, such as movies, are, of course, subject to both rhythm and composition.

Kress and van Leeuwen (2005: 176–178, 264–265) state that changes in composition can change the overall meaning of a text even when the interpersonal and representational meanings of it remain the same. This can happen, for example, when the reading path of the text changes drastically. Composition consists of three interrelated systems: information value, framing, and salience.

The information value of visual elements is affected by its placement in the text. The distinctions between left and right, top and bottom, and center and margin all

have effects on the information value of an element (see Kress and van Leeuwen 2005: 179–201 for further details.)

The concept of framing refers to whether the elements of a text are connected to or disconnected from each other. The stronger an element/a group of elements of a composition is framed, the more it is being presented as a separate unit of information (Kress and van Leeuwen 2005: 203–204).

Salience refers to the (visual) “weight” of the elements in a text. It creates a hierarchy between the elements of the text, in which the most salient element is the most important one, and often the central message of the text. While salience cannot be measured objectively, in visual compositions, it is realized through a complex combination of the following factors: contrasts (tonal or colour contrasts); size (the bigger, the more salient); sharpness of focus; perspective (objects at the front are more salient than those on the background); placement in the visual field (the more towards top and left an element is placed, the more salient it is); overlap; and cultural factors (such as cultural symbols or human figures). (Kress and van Leeuwen 2005: 201–203.)

5 ANALYSIS

In this chapter, I will present the findings of my study. Section 5.1 will focus on research question number 1: How is the attack on the US Congress on January 6th, 2021, multimodally represented on Tumblr?”, while the next three sections are concerned with research question number 2: “What are the roles of written language and images/GIFs in these posts, and how do they work together in them?” Sections 5.2, and 5.3, respectively, will explore the roles of written language, and still images and GIFs in the 42 posts. The chapter will end with Section 5.4, in which I will explore the relationship between written language and the two visual modes in my data.

5.1 Representation of the Capitol attack in the data

The dataset consists of 42 Tumblr posts that were collected by using the tag *capitolhill*. The tag was chosen for the search since it does not carry morally charged connotations (cf. Machin and Mayr 2012; see Section 3.2 above), unlike, for example, *capitol riots*. 29% of the posts in my data (N = 12) only feature written language, while 71% (N = 30) feature both written language and still images or GIFs.

In order to answer the first research question, we need to piece together what kind of Figured World (Gee 2011: 169–171) for the Capitol attack is constructed in the posts of my data. To find this out, we will look at the building tasks of language that are the most relevant in determining this: Activities, Politics, Identities, Relationships, Connections, and Significance (cf. Gee 2011; see Subsection 4.2.2 above). In the following subsections, I will go through the “what's”, “who's”, and “why's” of the Capitol

Attack, after which I will present the Figured World that emerges on the basis of my findings.

It should be noted that all direct quotes from the data that are featured in the analysis, have been rendered as loyal to the original source texts as possible, including possible typos, grammatical errors, etc.

5.1.1 The “what’s” of the Capitol Attack

I will begin this section by looking into what kind of Activities (Gee 2011; see Subsection 4.2.2 above) the Capitol breach is represented as in my data. Given that different kinds of Activities carry different connotations, some more positive than others, Politics is also a central building task in this section. The most frequently constructed Activities are listed below in Table 1 along with the percentages of posts they were found in. It should be noted that many posts represented the Capitol breach as more than one different Activity by, for example, using keyword tags that labelled the event differently.

Table 1 The Capitol Breach as Activities.

Activity	Percentage of all posts	N
Riot	29	12
(Domestic) terror attack	29	12
Violence	19	8
(Attempted) coup	17	7
Vandalism/looting	12	5
Protest	12	5
Insurrection	5	2
Treason	5	2
(Significant) historic event	5	2
Others	21	9

The two most common Activities (see Table 1) the Capitol attack was constructed as in my data are “riot” (29%, N = 12) and “(domestic) terror attack” (29%, N = 12). The next most common Activities were “violence” (19%, N = 8), “(attempted) coup” (17%, N = 7), “vandalism/looting” (12%, N = 5), “protest” (12%, N=5), “insurrection” (5%, N = 2), “treason” (5%, N = 2), and “(significant) historic event” (5%, N = 2). 21% of the posts (N=9) feature some other Activities. As can be seen, most of these Activities have rather negative connotations, which strongly suggests that the creators of the

posts have not seen the Capitol attack as something moral and justified. The only exception to this is the Activity “protest”. However, even in post number 6, which is the only post in my data that expresses pro-Trump views, stating that “the government is suppressing people who don’t agree with them”, storming the building is represented as something a person can be found “guilty” of.

While the Trump supporters evidently saw storming the Capitol as a patriotic act, the posts in my data largely presented it as anti-American and anti-democratic. Democracy was the most common social good (see Table 2) constructed in the data (26% of the posts, N = 11), and nationalism the second most common (21%, N = 9). Trump and his supporters were largely denied these social goods, as can be seen from the following example from post number 4:

“If you can excuse this then you do not love America. You love tyranny, hate, and power. This was weak. This was anti-American. This was terrorism.”

Table 2 The social goods most frequently constructed in the data.

Social good	Percentage of all posts	N
Democracy	26	11
Nationalism	21	9

5.1.2 The “who’s” of the Capitol Attack

If the Capitol attacks were “riots” and “terrorism”, and other quite heinous actions in my data, who were the attackers, then? What about Trump, or the other members of his party? How about the other side of the American political field? In this subsection I will answer these questions by shedding light into the Identities, Relationships, and Connections that were constructed in my data. As with the previous subsection, Politics is also intertwined with the contents of this one.

In line with the frequency of the Activity “(domestic) terrorism” in my data, the most common Identity ascribed to the Capitol attackers (see Table 3) was that of “(domestic) terrorists (29% of the posts, N = 12). The second and third most common Identities were “racists/white supremacists” (24%, N = 10), and “(neo)nazis/fascists” (10%, N=4). Sometimes these Identities appeared together, such as in the case of post number 13, where the Capitol attackers are called “nazi terrorists”. The most represented individual attacker was the QAnon “shaman” Jake Angeli, who was featured in 7% (N = 3) of the posts. In addition to the more serious condemnations, the attackers were also called stupid in 7% (N = 3) of the posts.

Table 3 The most common Identities ascribed to the Capitol attackers.

Identity	Percentage of all posts	N
(Domestic) terrorists	29	12
Racists/white supremacists	24	10
(Neo)nazis/fascists	10	4
Stupid	7	3

Regarding Trump, he receives a plenitude of criticism in the posts, and is widely blamed for inciting the Capitol breach, creating a strong Relationship between him and the attackers. The most common Identities constructed for him in the data (see Table 4) are “(neo-)Nazi/fascist” (10%, N = 4), “traitor” (7%, N = 3), and “criminal” (5%, N = 2). 71% of the posts (N = 30) include other kinds of criticism towards him that are voiced in a serious tone. 5% (N=2) of the posts make fun of Trump through, for example, calling him “President Agent Orange”, or comparing him to King Kong, as in a caricature from post number 30 featured in Figure 1.

Table 4 The most frequent types of criticism towards Donald Trump in the data.

Theme	Percentage of all posts	N
Trump as a neo-Nazi/ fascist	10	4
Trump as a traitor	7	3
Trump as a criminal	5	2
Other kinds of criticism voiced in a serious tone	71	30
Making fun of Trump	5	2



Figure 1 A caricature from post number 30; Donald Trump as King Kong.

The American political right also receives its fair share of criticism in my data (29%, N = 12; see Table 5). Most of the criticism is targeted towards those members of the Republican party, who had supported Donald Trump during his presidency, or even backed up his claims of election fraud (14% of the posts, N = 6). In these posts, a clear Connection is created between the actions of those politicians, and the Capitol attack. For instance, in post number 5, which features screenshots of *The Late-Night Show with Stephen Colbert*, the Republican politicians who are perceived as responsible for the Capitol Breach, are called “Cynical cowards who believe the voters should not get to choose who governs this country.” In another post (number 16), a Republican senator, and far-right ally of Trump, Lauren Boebert, is exposed for having shared details of the whereabouts of Nancy Pelosi during the Capitol attack, even though the White House Sergeant of Arms had directly forbidden the senators from disclosing their locations to anyone.

Table 5 Representation of the American Political Right in the data.

Theme		
Overall criticism towards the American political right	29	12
Criticism towards the Republicans who supported Trump	14	6

Criticism towards Republicans in general	10	4
Neutral/positive representations of Republicans	10	4

While Republicans in general receive criticism in 10 % (N = 4) of the posts, such as in the case of post number 23 that features the tag *fuck republicans*, just as big a part of the posts (10%, N = 4) assigns them neutral, or even positive Identities. In these posts, Republican members of the Senate are not Connected to the Capitol breach but are instead regarded as equal members of the democratic system Trump and his supporters are painted as wanting to destroy. This can be seen in, for example, post number 19, which features a Twitter thread by a White House employee, who states that “They attempted to scare our Members and our staff out of completing our Constitutional duty to certify the results of a fair and free election...”

The Identities assigned to the American political left (mostly Democrats but also other leftist groups) in my data (see Table 6) are mostly positive. They are referred to in 36% (N = 15) of the posts, and all except one of them (2%, N = 1) paint them in a positive light. The most mentioned individual Democrat politician in my data is the new President Joe Biden (19%, N = 8), who is regarded as the legitimate winner of the 2020 US Presidential Election. He is seconded by the House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (10%, N = 4), who is presented in the posts as a special target of the attackers. In addition to members of the Democratic party, the American Antifa, which is a politically left-wing anti-racist and anti-fascist movement (Wikipedia 2023), is also mentioned in 10% (N = 4) of the posts. While it is stated in some posts (N = 2) that the supporters of Donald Trump have tried to blame the Capitol attack on Antifa, the claim is regarded as ridiculous in my data.

Table 6 Representation of the American Political Left in the data.

Theme	Percentage of all posts	N
Overall mentions of the American political left	36	15
Positive representations of the American political left	33	14
Negative representations of the American political left	2	1
Joe Biden mentioned	19	8
Nancy Pelosi mentioned	10	4
The American Antifa mentioned	10	4

5.1.3 The “why’s” of the Capitol Attack

What other themes and societal issues have been constructed as being connected to the Capitol Breach? What are its meanings to the USA and the rest of the world? In this subsection, I will present the themes that have been Connected to the Capitol attack and foregrounded as Significant in relation to it. In an order from most to least frequent (see Table 7), these themes are the BLM movement and racial issues (60% of the posts, N = 25), the COVID-19 pandemic (24%, N = 10), criticism towards the USA (21%, N = 9), US history references (14%, N = 6), and social media (14%, N = 6).

Table 7 The themes most frequently Connected to the Capitol Breach in the data in the order they appear in the analysis in this Section.

Theme	Percentage of all posts	N
The BLM movement and racial issues	60	25
The US police institution as racist	31	13
White privilege mentioned	12	5
White supremacy mentioned	14	6
The COVID-19 pandemic	24	10
Criticism towards the USA	21	9
Criticism towards the US' history of foreign policy	7	3
Social media	14	6
Accountability of social media companies	5	2
Social media and mental health	5	2
US history references	14	6
US Civil War references	7	3

The theme by far most Connected to the Capitol attack in my data is the Black Lives Matter movement, and other racial issues (60% of the posts, N = 25). Especially much Significance is placed on the differences in the police responses to the BLM protests of 2020, and the Capitol attack, and this difference is perceived as a result of racism that is deeply rooted in the US police institution (31%, N = 13). For example, in a screenshot of a tweet by Julia Carter, a physician, philanthropist, and former reality TV star (Carter 2023), that is included in post number 38 (see Figure 2 below), an image of a black BLM protester being restrained by at least four police officers in riot gear has been placed next to an image of two white Trump-supporters carrying *Trump 2020* and *Confederate* flags in the White House with no police in sight. The comparison has been framed with the statement “There are two Americas”, which foregrounds a difference between the lived realities of BIPOC and White Americans. The Connection to racism is further cemented by the tag “#racism” which appears among the tags of the post. In 12 % (N = 5) of the posts, the Capitol attackers are stated to have enjoyed white privilege.



Figure 2 A tweet featured in post number 38.

In addition to building a Connection between the US police and racism, the Capitol attackers are also tied to white supremacy in 14% of the data (N = 6). Except for the people inside the Capitol building at the time of the attack, BIPOC Americans are being portrayed as the people who are most threatened by the Capitol attack. For instance, in post number 2, where the creator of the post informs people about the curfew placed in the Capitol Hill area on the day of the attack, the addressees of the post are told to “get inside” as soon as they can, for “We can assume that cops will be no kinder to you than these insurrectionists”. In another post (number 32), the creator shares links to a Twitter thread where black people seek donations.

Given that the Capitol attack took place during the COVID-19 pandemic, it is hardly surprising that 24% of the posts in my data (N = 10) contain some kind of references to it. It should be noted here that even the face masks featured in photos have been counted as references to the COVID-19 pandemic, for they were not widely used in the USA before it. While most of the references seem to serve as details that tie the Capitol attack to its historical context, in two of them (37 and 41) they are used to pass

judgement on the Capitol attackers, such as in the following statement from post number 41: “The poetic justice of Trump supporters’ objection to masks making them easier to identify and arrest is indescribably sublime.”

While the main responsibility of the Capitol attack is largely attributed to Trump and his supporters, 21% of the posts (N = 9) also criticise the USA and its government. The biggest theme among this criticism is the country’s history of foreign policy (7% of the posts, N = 3). In these posts, the Capitol attack is viewed as a sign of the hypocrisy of the US government, which has a history of using “defending democracy” as an excuse to meddle in the affairs of foreign countries that have somehow threatened its geopolitical interests. An example of other kinds of criticism targeted at the USA is, for instance, post number 14 that features a tweet stating: “one hundred trillion dollars on defence every year and you can just walk into the literal capitol lmao”. In another post (number 3), the US legal system is blamed for islamophobia by contrasting Jake Angeli being served only organic food while in federal custody with a news article that reports on Muslim ICE detainees having repeatedly been fed pork.

References to US history (14% of the posts, N = 6) are also used to build Significance to certain aspects of the Capitol attack. The most prominent theme among these references is the US Civil War (7%, N = 3). For example, in a screenshot of a tweet from post number 41 that is depicted in Figure 3 below, the fact that some of the Capitol attackers carried *Confederate* flags, is constructed as a travesty towards the result of the war.

During the four years of the Civil War, the confederates never got closer to Washington than Fort Stevens. Until today, when insurrectionist supporters of [@realDonaldTrump](#) paraded through the U.S. Capitol Building carrying the Confederate battle flag.



Figure 3 A screenshot of a tweet from post number 41; A Trump-supporter carrying the Confederate flag through the Capitol Building.

Social media also gets its share of Connections in my data (14% of the posts, N=6). The two clear themes $\frac{2}{3}$ of these references can be categorised to are the accountability of social media companies (5%, N=2), and social media and mental health (5%, N=2). In the posts belonging to the former category, Facebook and Twitter are called out for bearing the responsibility of providing platforms for Trump and his supporters to circulate the claims of election fraud and plan the Capitol attack. “Whoops you broke America”, states the creator of the cartoon show Gravity Falls in post number 24. In the posts of the latter category, the Capitol breach is presented as such a shocking event that some people might either want to not engage with content related to it on social media, or to avoid it altogether

5.1.4 Summary

So, how is the Capitol Attack represented in my data? When combining the findings related to the different Building Tools, the Figured World (see Gee 2011) for the Capitol breach emerging from my data looks something like this:

Joe Biden won the 2020 US Presidential Election in a fair and democratic election. However, Donald Trump refused to accept his failure, and incited a terror attack on January 6th, 2021. In the attack, the supporters of Trump, who were white supremacists, and most likely also (neo)Nazis (see Subsection 5.1.2, stormed the Capitol building, and tried to prevent democracy from happening, but failed. Since the Capitol police officers were also racists, they let the white attackers do whatever they wanted. What made the actions of the attackers even worse, was that they broke the current COVID-19 restrictions by gathering in one place.

Compared to how the US police had reacted to the Black Lives Matter protests of the previous summer, the actions of the Capitol Hill police spoke volumes of the racial bias of the police institution in the USA. Thus, the ones who suffered the most from the Capitol attack, save those who were inside the Capitol building during it, were the BIPOC of America.

In addition to Trump and the attackers themselves, part of the responsibility for the Capitol breach also belongs to Trump's supporters in the Republican party. The owners of social media platforms, especially Facebook and Twitter, are also to be blamed for the attack.

5.2 The role of written language in the data

To better understand the role written language has in my data, we will take a closer look at the Social Languages (Gee 2011, 2014; see Subsection 4.2.1 above) featured in the 42 posts. According to Gee (2011: 50–55), social languages play an important role in communication: While an utterance may have a plethora of possible meanings that would be grammatically correct, our knowledge of social languages - alongside with figured worlds - helps us determine the meanings that are relevant in each context. Social languages are always tied to recognizable social identities, such as “a college professor” or “a gluten-free baking enthusiast” (Gee 2014/2011: 163). It is important to note that the labels used to refer to a particular social language are not important, for many of them do not even have conventionalized names (ibid). Thus, the labels

featured in this section are by no means the only possible ones one could use to describe these categories.

In the analysis, I found that while the 42 posts featured many kinds of social languages ranging from Nursery Rhymes to the social language of Pacifism, one social language had an overwhelming presence of 90% of the posts (N = 38; see Table 8). This social language was that of Web Activism. According to Dartnell (2006: 4, 6), Web Activism is “a form of global conflict made possible by the World Wide Web”, which “centers on producing, providing, and spreading information outside of government control or regulation.” It is a means for non-state actors to participate in politics, where “values, interests, and needs that underlie personal and group identities as well as states are being re-articulated and re-negotiated.” The creators of the posts used written language to engage in activist practices, such as connecting the Capitol breach to larger societal issues or urging people to action. For example, post number 20 asserts:

“These people are literal domestic terrorists and now is the worst time for silence. [...] Never forget how police treated this literal white supremacist coup-attempt versus peaceful protestors begging for a bit of peace in their lives.”

The imperative “never forget” makes it clear that the creator of the post wants to leave an impact on how the viewer interprets the meaning of the Capitol police’s actions, while the stark contrast between “literal white supremacist coup-attempt” and “peaceful protestors begging for a bit of piece in their lives” specifies their views on the Capitol breach and the Black Lives Matter protests.

Table 8 The Social Languages featured the most in the data.

Social Language	Percentage of all posts	N
Web Activism	90	38
Antiracist Activism	52	22
American Political Left-Wing Activism	36	15
American Patriotism	14	6
Journalism	21	9
Being an Everyday Person	21	9
Obscene Language	21	9
Variations of “fuck Trump”	10	4

The social language of Activism present in my data can be further divided into subcategories that are advocating different socio-political matters. Given the

frequency of Connections between the Capitol breach and the Black Lives matter, and other racial issues (see Subsection 5.1.3), it is hardly surprising that most examples of the social language of Web Activism in the posts represent Antiracist Activism (52% of all posts, N=22). This manifests itself, for example, in the form of statements, such as “Just think of the carnage had they not been white.” from post number 33, or the use of tags, such as *blm*, and *no justice no peace* from post number 3.

The second and third biggest subcategories of the social language of Web Activism in the data are American Political Left-Wing Activism (36%, N = 15) and American Patriotism (14%, N = 6). The social language of American Political Left-Wing Activism is present in many ways, ranging from the use of quite obvious tags, such as *leftist* or *leftblr* (i.e. a politically leftist Tumblr blog) from post number 12 to criticism targeted towards the American political right. An example of the latter can be seen in the following quote from post number 4, where the Capitol breach is presented as an example of the moral corruption of the political opponents:

“Because the Conservatives have always been like this, and today was just the perfect indication that they are hypocrites. They don’t care about democracy or police or law and order or any of the other things they proclaim they hold dear.”

In addition to the Capitol breach causing outrage amongst the politically left-leaning Tumblr users in my data, the event also managed to spark more generally patriotic sentiments. For example, post number 19 features a Twitter thread by a White House employee, who recounts his experience of the Capitol breach, and states: “We will continue to do the work of the people. I have never felt a sense of duty so strongly. America will persist.” In another post (number 21), OP labels Trump’s actions related to the Capitol breach as “treason”, and attempts to provoke patriotic anger in American viewers by addressing them in the following way:

“His supporters have turned against the most important buildings in *your* capital, his supporters are turning on *your* countrymen and they have attacked the heart of *your* homeland.”

The threefold repetition of the italicized possessive pronoun “*your*”, followed by the patriotic lexical items “*capital*”, “*countrymen*”, and “*homeland*” emphasizes the feeling of outrage the viewer is expected to share over the actions of Trump and his supporters.

After Activism, the three most frequent social languages in my data are Journalism, Obscene Language, and Being an Everyday Person (cf. Gee 2014/2011: 162). Each of these three social languages appear in 21% (N = 9) of the posts.

The Social Language of Journalism is featured in the data mostly as screenshots of articles or broadcasts made by representatives of traditional mass media, or tweets by journalists employed by them, which are then commented on by the OPs. For instance, post number 22 (see Figure 4 below) features a screenshot of a tweet made by Melissa Blasius, a journalist working for the media house ABC15 Arizona (Scripps Local Media 2023), providing an update on the QAnon “shaman” Jake Angeli (see Section 2.1 above). Below the screenshot, the text body of the post mocks Angeli on the basis of Blasius’ tweet. However, posts number 35 and 42 are exceptions to this rule, for in them the social language of Journalism has been typed as parts of the text body of the post.



Figure 4 A screenshot of a journalist’s tweet and a comment by OP from post number 22.

Even though a majority of the creators of these posts clearly do their best to exhibit their knowledge on various societal issues related to the Capitol breach, and to make a difference, in 21% (N = 9) of the posts, the social language of Being an

Everyday Person provides the viewer with glimpses of the ordinary people behind the screens. Instead of trying to make general statements, in these stretches of written language, the OPs express personal thoughts, feelings, and reactions on either something related to the Capitol breach or the creative process behind the post itself. Posts number 22 and 30 (see Figures 1 and 4) are both good illustrations of this: in the former, the OP shares how seeing the caricature of Donald Trump in an evening newspaper made them choke on their tea, and in the latter, the OP finds Jake Angeli's predicament "hilarious".

Some of the people in these posts are not content with expressing their sentiments related to the Capitol breach through printable language but resort to Obscene Language. Even though it could be argued that the use of obscene language also counts as expressing one's personal feelings and reactions, due to the social stigma around it, it is treated here as a social language that is separate from the social language of Being an Everyday Person. While the word "fuck" is not the only obscene term found in these posts, all of the posts in this category include at least one expression containing it. The most typical example of this are variations of the insult "fuck X", which are present in six out of nine posts. Given the amount of criticism targeted at him in my data (see subsection 5.1.2), it is hardly surprising that the person most often insulted in this manner is Donald Trump (10%, N=4).

Summa summarum, the nature and frequencies of social languages present in the 42 posts suggests that the most common purpose of written language in my data is Web Activism (90% of the posts, N=38), where the Capitol breach is viewed through the lens of some socio-political agenda, generally either Anti-Racism (52% of all posts, N=22), American Political Left-Wing Activism (36%, N=15), or American Patriotism (14%, N =6). Activism aside, written language is also used to either quote or mimic traditional mass media (21%, N=9); convey the OPs more personal reactions and sentiments (21%, N=9) or highlight some users' indignation over the events of Capitol Hill through obscene language (21%, N=9).

5.3 The role of images and GIFs in the data

In this section, we will explore the role of images and GIFs in the data through the Building Tasks (Gee 2011: 88; see Subsection 4.2.2 above). While it is possible to find almost all of the seven building tasks of language from any image (Gee and Hayes 2011: 112), certain recurring themes emerged from the images of my data in terms of

each building task (see Table 9). Given that all the parts of a multimodal text work together to create meaning (Kress and van Leeuwen 2005: 177), the images contained within the same posts were not treated separately but as a whole. Thus, even in cases where an image post contains multiple images, it has still been counted only once.

Table 9 The most significant recurring themes featured in the images and GIFs of the data.

Theme	Percentage of all posts	N
Trump-supporters doing something amoral	21	9
Making a visual comparison	12	5
Using pop culture references to pass judgement on various parties	21	9
American patriotism	31	13
Donald Trump's presidential campaign(s)	29	12
The COVID-19 pandemic	17	7
Trump-supporters engaging with the viewer	14	6
Trump-supporters threatening the people of the Capitol building	12	5
Trump-supporters	31	13
Jake Angeli	7	3
The "Podium Guy"	7	3
Republican politicians	12	5
Featuring a real person's face	38	16
Photographic evidence as a prestigious source of information	31	13
Twitter as a prestigious source of information	31	13
Screenshots of content originating from various online platforms	43	18
Memes	17	7

As mentioned above in subsection 5.1.1, the building tasks Activities and Politics (Gee 2011; see Chapter 3 above) are quite intertwined in the posts featured in my data. This is no less true when it comes to the images. As noted by Kress and van Leeuwen (2005: 32–34, 47, 114–115), images do not just neutrally represent reality, but contain values and attitudes towards some aspects of social life. In the context of the images included in these posts, one recurring theme of representing Activities that also carry moral statements is Trump-supporters doing something amoral. It is featured in 21% (N = 9) of all posts. In these images, the RP's (Kress and van Leeuwen 2005; see Subsection 4.3.1 above), who are people that either broke into the Capitol building itself

or at least participated in the demonstration outside it, can be seen engaging in condemnable actions, such as urinating against the outer wall of the Capitol building in post number 41. What is crucial for an image to have been counted in this category is that the Activity conveyed via the image could be understood as amoral without reading the text body of the post.

Another, less frequent way of constructing Activities and Politics in the image posts is Making a visual comparison (12% of all posts, N = 5). In these posts, two or three images have been placed next to each other either horizontally or vertically, contrasting them with each other. A typical example in this category is a contrast between “good” and “bad” images, where an image of the Capitol breach is compared to images of, for example, a Black Trans Lives Matter demonstration in post number 40. While in the image of the BTLM protest, the RPs are shown kneeling on the ground, either holding signs or raising their hands as a sign of surrender, in the image of the Capitol breach, the Trump-supporters can be seen standing up, and even giving the middle finger to the Capitol police officers.

The fact that multiple building tasks tend to be realised through a single image becomes especially apparent in the case of the theme Using pop culture references to pass judgement on various parties, which is present in 21% of the 42 posts (N = 9). In these images, evaluative statements about people, parties, or even the USA as a country, are conveyed through intertextual references to movies, cartoons, and other TV shows. The images of this category displayed a fascinating overlap between Activities, Politics, Connections, and Significance. A good example of this is post number 30, where the RP in the image (see Figure 1) can be recognized as Donald Trump, while the visual comparison to King Kong renders his claim of having won the election as just as void as the movie monster’s claim over the skyscraper. In addition to establishing Trump’s Activity as unjustified (building Politics), the image also draws a Connection between the scene in the movie, and Trump’s actions. Furthermore, the choice of the movie reference as the premise for the caricature foregrounds this Connection, thus building its Significance.

In addition to Connections to popular culture, the images in the data also featured three other prominent themes: Connections to American patriotism (31%, N = 13), to Donald Trump’s presidential campaign(s) (29%, N = 12), and to the COVID-19 pandemic (17%, N = 7). The Connections in these three categories were conveyed through symbolic processes (Kress and van Leeuwen 2005: 105–106; see Subsection 4.3.1 above), such as the American flag both carried by and painted on the face of Jake

Angeli in post number 22 featured in Figure 4, or the red *MAGA* cap and black face mask that can be seen on the RP in the background of the same image.

The Connections to Trump’s presidential campaign(s) made in the images also indicate a Relationship between him and his supporters. However, the Trump-supporters featured in the posts also tried to engage with the viewer in 14% of all posts (N = 6). In these images, the RPs’ gazes constitute demands (Kress and van Leeuwen 2005: 117–121; see Subsection 4.3.2 above). The most typical example in this category is the individual who became known as the “Podium Guy” (BBC 2022), who can be seen smiling and waving to the viewer from the same image featured in posts number 8, 39, and 42, while holding the House Speaker’s podium he has stolen.

Yet another kind of a Relationship that emerged from 12% (N = 5) of the images of my data was a Relationship where the Trump-supporters pose a threat to the politicians, police officers, and staff of the Capitol building. This Relationship is illustrated well by Figure 5, originally by Reuters, which is featured in three different posts (9,35, and 41): In the image, the Capitol building is swarming with RPs, who are climbing the stairs of the building, crowding its terraces, and holding *TRUMP 2020* flags triumphantly. The smoke surrounding the Capitol building adds to the ominous atmosphere of the image, and the bluish hues of the sky bring out the orange light shining from inside the building. Overall, the image gives the impression that the Trump-supporters are threatening the building and everyone inside it.



Figure 5 An image of the Capitol building featured in posts number 9, 35, and 41.

When it comes to Identities, it is hardly surprising that the most common category of Identities constructed in the images of the data is that of Trump-supporters (31% of the posts, N = 13). It is notable that Jake Angeli and The Podium Guy were the most frequently appearing individual Trump-supporters in these images, with 7% (N = 3) presences each. Another, less frequent Identities category emerging from the images was Republican Politicians (12%, N = 5). The building task, Identities, also intersected with that of Significance in the data, for the most common theme in things given Significance in the images was Featuring a real person's (as opposed to fictional characters) face, which could be found in 38% (N = 16) of the posts.

Regarding Sign Systems and Knowledge, two equally prominent categories with 31% (N = 13) presences in the data each, emerge from the image posts. One is Photographic evidence as a prestigious source of information, and the other is Twitter. In the former, different kinds of statements concerning the Capitol attack are accompanied by photographic evidence. For example, in post number 36, the text of the post states that a video on TikTok featuring a woman claiming that she got maced for stepping one foot into Capitol Hill contains disinformation, for the woman was not maced but can be seen holding half an onion in her towel, and rubbing it on her face to increase the believability of her claim. The text is then accompanied by screenshots from the video, where the half an onion in question can be seen. Modality is an important factor in what makes these images believable: all have high modality in terms of the naturalistic coding orientation (Kress and van Leeuwen 2005: 154–155, 165–166; see Subsection 4.3.2 above). Even the blurrier images match the current expectations of photorealism within the constraints of, for example, a screenshot of a TV news broadcast.

While 43% (N = 18) of all posts feature screenshots of content originating from various online platforms, ranging from Reddit to the website of New Oxford American Dictionary, the online platform with the most prominent presence (31% of all posts, N = 13) in the data is Twitter (nowadays known as X). In these posts, Tumblr users have found a take on the Capitol breach made by a Twitter user relevant enough that they have wanted to share it in their blog. The screenshots of Twitter posts are either accompanied by tags only or also a text by OP that somehow comments on or adds to it, such as in post number 22 (see Figure 4).

To summarize, the images in the data are used to build many kinds of meanings, but based on the themes presented in this section, the role of images is as follows: In the 42 posts, the images are used to present Trump-supporters performing less-than-honourable Activities but also to make visual comparisons, and pass judgement on

various parties related to the Capitol breach via popular culture references. What is more, the images build Connections to American patriotism, the COVID-19 pandemic, and Trump's presidential campaign(s), marking the RPs in them through symbolic processes. The Relationships built in the images create the impression that the Trump-supporters posed a threat to the people of Capitol Hill, and some of them wanted the world to witness them storm the building and even loot it. Their Identities were highlighted as Significant through the images, as well as those of some Republican politicians. On the basis of the images, the two sources of information that were most often considered as prestigious regarding the Capitol breach were photographic evidence and Twitter.

5.4 The relationship between written language and the visual modes in the data

In this section, I explore the relationship between written language and the two visual modes in my data, and how they work together to create the meanings Section 5.1 provided an overview of. The section begins with some more general findings related to the relationship between the modes, after which we will take a closer look at memes as a special case of image content.

While the written language and images or GIFs featured in the data have purposes that are more often carried out through one mode than the others, such as engaging in activist practices or providing photographic evidence, the relationship between the different modes of communication is as follows: The images, GIFs, and screenshots were typically the most salient (Kress and van Leeuwen 2005: 201–203; see Subsection 4.3.3 above) elements of the multimodal posts (93% of the multimodal posts, $N = 28$). However, while 80% of the multimodal posts included some kind of contextualisation through visual elements, such as visual comparisons or the faces of real people (see Section 5.3 above), in all the multimodal posts, written language provided more specific contextual information than images, connecting the posts to the Capitol breach, the BLM movement, and other issues in a more direct manner.

This finding is easily demonstrated through one of the Six Theoretical Tools, Situated Meanings (Gee 2011: 151–154; see Subsection 4.2.1 above). When working with the Situated Meanings Tool, one must figure out what specific meanings listeners/viewers have to attribute to the words or images in that context to understand the intended meaning of the message correctly. This also entails finding out what kind of

knowledge and experiences the speaker - or in case of this study, the creator of a post - has assumed the recipients to have. (See Gee 2011: 153-154.)

For example, post number 38 featured in Figure 2 includes a visual comparison within a tweet that is prefaced by written language in the tweet itself and followed by tags. In addition to the comparison created through Composition (Kress and van Leeuwen 2005; see Subsection 4.3.3 above), the fact that in one of the images, the Black RP is being swarmed by a group of officers in riot gear, while in the other, the White RPs are carrying Trump and Confederate flags in the Capitol Building with no police in sight, already creates such a stark contrast between the images that a viewer with enough knowledge about the racial issues and the events of the early 2020s in the USA could probably figure out the intended message of the post. However, the text "There are two Americas." contextualises the tweet more clearly as concerning the US, and the tags build even more obvious Connections to *racism, us politics* (as in politics of the USA), and *trump*, so that those viewers who are less aware of these matters could understand the Situated Meanings of it.

Even though the observations presented above also apply in case of the posts in my data that feature memes (17% of the posts, n=7), memes are somewhat more complex than the other images when it comes to Situated Meanings. As defined by Shifman (2014: 41), Internet memes are

"[...] a group of digital items sharing common characteristics of content, form, and/or stance, which [...] were created with awareness of each other, and [...] were circulated, imitated, and/or transformed via the Internet by many users."

In the memes featured in my data, the Connections to the Capitol breach are made through written language in the images instead of visual elements, save for post number 14, in which a police cap and a KKK hood are used to represent the Capitol police and the Trump-supporters in one meme. Despite this, it should also be noted that the visual (and linguistic) aspects of the memes provided plenty of other kinds of contextual information.

Given that reproductions of memes always imitate the original version of the meme to at least some extent (Shifman 2014: 39-54), meme templates carry conventionalized meanings, such as given communicative functions or specific relationships between the RPs, that are then applied to the context of the issue at hand. What is more, these meanings are not necessarily obvious to all viewers but understanding them might require detailed knowledge about popular culture references or digital meme subcultures (Shifman 2014: 99-100).

To illustrate these conventionalized meanings carried by memes, and how they were situated in the context of the Capitol attack in my data, we will take a look at a meme from post number 41 featured in Figure 6. While the text:

“So, you tried to have yerselves a little coup and you stormed the capitol building. And then you took pictures of yerselves doing it and posted ‘em online. I don’t even really have to say it, do I?”

clearly connects the meme to the Capitol attack by addressing the attackers, and calling them out for their actions, it does not explicitly state the quote from the 1998 movie *The Big Lebowski* by Ethan and Joel Cohen that is conventionally used with this meme template: “Then you’re a special kind of stupid” (Philipp n.d.). Instead, the viewer is expected to recognize the meme based on the image and know this quote to fully understand the message of it in the post.

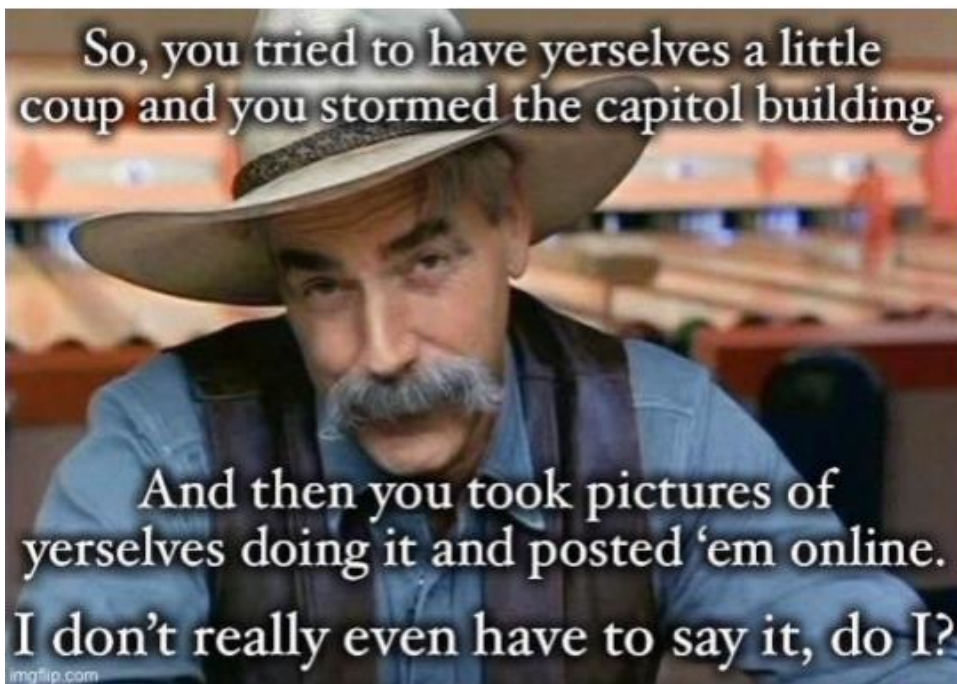


Figure 6 A meme from post number 41; “Then you’re a special kind of stupid.”

To reprise, the relationship between written language and images in the 42 posts is such that even though the images, GIFs and screenshots featured in the data tended to be the most salient features of the multimodal posts, the contextualising elements in the images were vaguer than those conveyed through written language. This observation is in line with the notion by Machin and Mayr (2012: 31) that visual communication is typically more open to interpretation than language. However, in the case

of the memes featured in the data, the conventionalized meanings associated with the meme templates added an extra layer of Situated Meanings into the posts they were included in.

6 CONCLUSIONS

In this chapter, I will reflect on this study. I will begin by a brief recap of the set-up and research questions of the study, after which I will summarise my findings, and reflect on them in the light of previous research. The chapter will end with some suggestions for further research.

The purpose of this study was to find out how the attack on the US Congress on January 6, 2021, was represented on Tumblr posts related to it via a Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis. The dataset included 42 posts which were collected on January 22nd, 2021, by using the tag *capitolhill* as a search term on the platform. The posts contained three modes of communication: written language, still images, and GIFs.

The aims of the study were to answer two research questions:

1. How is the attack on the US Congress on January 6th, 2021, multimodally represented on Tumblr?
2. What are the roles of written language and images/GIFs in these posts, and how do they work together in them?

The methods of analysis for the study were derived from a combination of theoretical frameworks by Gee (2010, 2011; see Section 4.2 above), and Kress and van Leeuwen (2005; see Section 4.3 above), and the analysis yielded the following results to the two research questions:

With regard to the first research question, I found that in 98% of all posts, (n = 41), the Capitol breach was represented as a negative event: either a riot or even a domestic terror attack instigated by Donald Trump in order to unjustifiably prevent the US Congress from ratifying Joe Biden's victory in the US 2020 Presidential Election. In these posts, the Capitol breach was portrayed as an attack on American democracy,

and in addition to Trump and the attackers themselves, part of the responsibility for it was attributed to Trump-supporting Republican politicians, and social media platforms, especially Facebook and Twitter. Furthermore, in my data, the Capitol breach was strongly connected to the racism perceived to be rooted deeply into the US Police institution. The attackers were called white supremacists and (neo)Nazis, and the Capitol Police was criticized for treating them significantly more leniently than the Black Lives Matter protesters of summer 2020.

The representation of the Capitol breach in my data is quite clearly anti-Trump and includes references to themes that are typically associated with the supporters of the Democratic (or other left-leaning parties) in the USA, most obvious of which are the Connections to the BLM movement and other racial issues. Given that Tumblr as a platform encourages social activism, and progressiveness, and has collaborated with liberally-minded agents, such as Planned Parenthood or advocacy groups focused on LGBTIA+ rights (McCracken 2020: 227–228, 235), this is hardly an unexpected finding. The prevalent presence of concerns related to social justice issues, such as racism and mental health, that were raised in these posts is also in line with previous research concerning Tumblr posts (see, for example, Kohnen 2018; Mendez, Keller, and Ringrose 2019; or Milner 2013). As other social media platforms have not necessarily courted and aligned themselves with marginalized communities to the same extent as Tumblr (Willard 2020: 241), a comparative study on the representation of the Capitol breach on some of them, such as Reddit or TikTok, could give insight into the potential differences between their users' views on the event as opposed to those expressed in my data. X (formerly Twitter) could be an especially interesting platform to perform this kind of a comparative study on, given that 31% (N = 13) of the posts in my data featured tweets.

Concerning the second research question, my findings were as follows: First, regarding the written language featured in the 42 posts, a purpose that emerged from 90% (N = 38) of the posts was engaging in Web Activism, where the users, for example, drew Connections between the Capitol Breach and wider societal issues or encouraged their recipients to take action to help the perceived victims of it. The three most common types of Web Activism found in the data were Antiracist Activism (52%, N = 22), American Political Left-Wing Activism (36%, N = 15), and American Patriotism (14%, N = 6). The substantial presence of activism in my data correlates with previous studies on Tumblr (see, for example, Gerbaudo 2012, Milner 2013, or Kohnen 2018). Other emergent roles for written language in these posts were quoting or imitation of traditional mass media, expressing the users' personal feelings and reactions on the

Capitol attack, and using obscene language to express outrage over it, which each had 21% (N = 9) presences in the data.

As for the still images and GIFs of my data, the most common purpose of the visual modes was conveying intertextual references originating from various online platforms (43% of all posts, N = 18). The overwhelming majority of these references were from Twitter (31%, N = 13). Aside from these screenshots, the two next biggest emergent themes were Representing Trump-supporters (31%, N = 13), and using Photographic evidence as a prestigious source of knowledge (31%, N = 13), where photos of the Capitol attack are used to increase the credibility of the statements made through written language. To compare, in their study on the discourse practices of an anti-feminist Tumblr group, Christiansen and Høyer (2015: 75) also found that creators of the Tumblr posts featured in their data used images to increase the authenticity of their content. Furthermore, 38% (N = 16) of the posts in my data showed the faces of real people, many of whom could be recognized as having taken part in the Capitol Breach, and who could, perhaps, even face legal consequences due to it.

What is fascinating in the 31% (N = 13) of images which show the supporters of Donald Trump when compared to the written language featured in the data, is that while they were presented visually as engaging in immoral actions in 21% (N = 9), of the data, in the images Trump-supporters were mainly depicted as just Trump-supporters (29%, N = 12) rather than, for example, nazis or white supremacists. This difference between written language and images signals a major difference in the Identities taken up by the Trump-supporters in the images themselves, and those ascribed to them by the creators of these Tumblr posts. Another interesting detail in the images included in my data are the 12% (N = 5) of images, where the Trump-supporters are presented as posing a threat to the people of Capitol Hill. In some of these images, the Capitol Police can be seen as defending the building and the Congresspeople from the attackers, which is also a more positive role than what they are given in the written language.

Yet another, slightly less frequent theme (21%, N = 9) in the images included in my data was the use of pop culture references to pass judgement on various parties related to the Capitol Breach, such as Donald Trump or Republican politicians. This function of images in my data resonates with Milner's (2018: 2359) finding that satirical humour for public commentary was also common in posts concerning the Occupy Wall Street movement.

Regarding the relationship between the different modes of communication included in the 42 posts, my findings were that while the still images and GIFs were

typically the most salient elements of the multimodal posts, there was a clear difference in the levels of specificness conveyed via written language and the visual modes: the former contained more obvious Connections (Gee 2011: 126; see Subsection 4.2.2 above) to the Capitol attack, and other issues, such as police brutality, than the latter. A curious detail related to this is that the Connections to the BLM movement and other issues featured in these posts were made mainly through written language rather than still images or GIFs. The considerably smaller presence of BLM Connections might be explained by the fact that the Capitol breach as an event was not a direct conflict between supporters of the BLM and Trump, but between the latter group, and the people of Capitol Hill. However, on Tumblr, the supporters of the BLM movement have reacted to the event, which likely explains the higher frequency of references to it in the written language.

While the memes of the data (featured in 17% of all posts, $N = 7$), followed the same rule related to the specificness of contextual information conveyed via written language and visual modes, they also contained another level of contextual information related to the conventionalized meanings carried by the different reproductions of the same meme. The presence of memes in my data correlates with Milner's (2018: 2359) observation that the use of image memes in public discussion on the Occupy Wall Street movement was especially common on social media sites, such as Reddit and Tumblr.

However much information one can find out in a single study, there is always more to research. The tags of the posts featured in my data could make up even the majority of the written language in a post, and it would have been interesting to devote more attention to the more specific purposes they might have. For example, Bourlai (2018: 47, 54–55) has studied the Tumblr tagging practices, and divides Tumblr tags in two categories based on function: keyword tags and comment tags. Furthermore, Bourlai (2018: 46, 48–49, 52) argues that comment tags can have discourse functions and divides them into three sub-categories: "opinions", "reactions" and "asides". A more in-depth analysis of the tags using Bourlai's theory could have given valuable insight into the functions on them as opposed to the written language featured in the text body of the posts.

Another line of inquiry that I unfortunately had to leave out of the present study due to the practical limitations of this MA Thesis project were posts concerning the Capitol Breach that contained videos. The posts that had to be omitted from the dataset included some truly fascinating contributions on the discussion regarding the Capitol breach in video format, ranging from clips from TV news to a furious self-

proclaimed American Liberal individual reading the riot act to former schoolmates of his who had apparently participated in storming the Capitol. An analysis of these posts via Gee's theory of Discourse Analysis could without doubt have given an even more well-rounded understanding of the multimodal representation of the Capitol breach on Tumblr.

While the Capitol Breach took place more than two and a half years ago, the need for Critical Discourse Analytic studies on discussions on topics related to US politics has hardly lessened. The next US Presidential Election is coming up in about a year's time (November 2024), and despite having received four different charges during 2023, he is still campaigning for the Republican presidential nomination (Reunamäki 2023; Hall et al. 2023). Depending on the results of this upcoming election, and other events related to it, similar studies on reactions to them as this could be needed not just on Tumblr but on other social media platforms, too, such as TikTok, Instagram, Facebook, Reddit, or X.

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