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The Art of (Re)-Assembling: Performing Democracy in and through Space

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Abstract

This chapter takes as its starting point the ascendant status of 'recognition,' 'participation,' and 'visibility' in contemporary artistic and cultural discourses. Foregrounding the pitfalls of visibility via cultural representation, it investigates artistic initiatives that construct material terrains and institutional arrangements where new political identities can be enacted and where new modalities of contingent and non-essential forms of being-in-common, beyond identitarian politics, can be performed. Drawing on relatively underexamined case studies of artistic initiatives that have emerged in Europe over the past decade, this chapter contributes to critical political theories and performance studies that engage with questions of space and institutionality by foregrounding the crucial role of architectural tools and artistic methodologies in the radical democratization of society.

Keywords

Democratization · Antagonism · Contemporary art · Public
space · Performance

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1   Introduction

In a time characterized by the increasing erosion of democratic institutions and the lack of common grounds for deliberation and debate (further exacerbated by social isolation enforced by the COVID-19 pandemic), there is an urgent need to revitalize public spaces and reclaim institutional arrangements that allow the body politic to assemble and engage with new forms of political becoming. In this respect, how does the utilization of architectural tools and artistic methodologies play a role in the re-invention and re-enactment of democratic concepts? Indeed, one can draw parallels between participatory performance, theatre, and the performing arts on the one hand, and the practice of democratic politics and the contentious construction of public space on the other. The strong affinity of performing arts with politics goes beyond the self-evident togetherness in public space and extends to the direct nature of political action. For instance, Arendt (1998, p. 188) asserts that action constitutes the privileged realm of political activity and "theater is the political art par excellence: only there is the political sphere of human life transposed into art." Hence, it comes as no surprise that activists, architects, and artists have long been deploying performative and spatial methodologies as a politicized practice to foreground the limitations of representative democracy and of political and/or cultural institutions.

A number of scholars have explored the politics of performance, the role of dramaturgy in the revitalization of the public sphere, and the deployment of public art, curatorial tactics, and architectural concepts to reimagine public space as a terrain for negotiation, exchange, and confrontation.[1] In addition, a body of literature has been privileging relational, participatory, and audience-based artistic practices, encapsulating a new wave of politicization through aesthetic means. For instance, in his 'relational aesthetics,' Bourriaud (2002) theorizes a model of staged intersubjective encounters where art constructs 'microtopias' of equality and erodes the distinction between artist and spectator, institutional and social space. Kester (2011) takes it a step further, advocating for the abolition of the concept of individual authorship in favour of a socially collaborative art form predicated on an ethics of interpersonal interactions and on a compassionate identification with the 'other.'

However, as critics like Deutsche (1996) and Bishop (2004, p. 67) have eloquently noted, the constructed relations in such participatory models are not intrinsically democratic since they do not only rely upon simplistic oppositions (e.g., active versus passive, author versus spectator, individual versus collective), but more importantly, they "rest too comfortably within an ideal of subjectivity

as whole and of community as immanent togetherness." In this respect, Bishop's critique alludes to Laclau and Mouffe's assertion that the creation of a fully inclusive political community is unfeasible since it will always be based on acts of exclusion and a 'constitutive outside.'

This chapter builds on the latter strand of thought in order to look into artistic practices that take antagonism as the very condition of democratic politics instead of envisaging community as a pre-political and homogenous whole where conflict is eliminated in the name of a consensual model (e.g., Marchart 2019; Mouffe 2013; Landau 2019). In sharp contrast to the prioritization of participation and inclusion (as if these were an end in themselves) and in contrast to a consensual account of the public sphere, the chapter adheres to a more agonistic and conflictual understanding of spatiality. This chapter delves into artistic organizations and infrastructures that treat public space as a stage where power configurations are constituted and performed, not only through their spatial articulations, but also through the overall choreography of bodies and decision-making rituals.[2] The practices discussed are invested in creating not only discursive surfaces where disparate, underrepresented, and marginalized voices can be foregrounded, but also architectural settings where a diverse and conflictual collectivity can coalesce, and democratic processes can be reimagined. In this sense, I argue that these initiatives attempt to reconfigure public space as a "space of appearance," premised on the understanding that spatial settings (e.g., the allocation of bodies, the assemblies' morphology, the seating arrangements, the malleability of space) play a crucial role in determining the social dynamics being developed (Arendt 1998, p. 199). In this way, I show how they take issue not only with the procedural and highly bureaucratized forms of present-day institutionality, but also with the very systemic injustices (along with the colonial, raced, gendered, and classed biases) that are embodied in and through institutions, while attempting to offer alternate and prefigurative models of democracy.[3]

2   The Aesthetics of Politics and the Pitfalls of Visibility

According to an emerging body of thought, the last two decades have been marked by a process of depoliticization. This new configuration has been described by different, albeit complementary, perspectives as the 'retreat of the political' (Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy 1997), the imposition of a consensual order that corrodes the terrain for symbolic conflict (Rancière 1998; Mouffe 2005), and the

gradual replacement of agonistic debate with techno-managerial governance and technocratic procedures (Crouch 2004). For instance, Mouffe argues that the post-political is synonymous with a hegemonic order that has cancelled out the space for agonistic confrontation and where the antagonistic dimension of the 'political' has been repressed.[4] Similarly, for Rancière (2010, p. 42), "consensus is the end of politics" since it reduces politics to "the police order" that pertains to the set of institutions and arrangements that maintain a certain hierarchical configuration or "distribution of the sensible" (ibid.). According to the police division, every part of the society has been accounted for, every group has been assigned a role, and there is a direct matching of functions, places, and modes of being; nothing remains unidentified, uncategorized, or without statistical determination. Although these theorizations derive from divergent philosophical origins and employ different terminology ('consensus democracy,' 'post-democracy,' 'police order,' etc.), they point towards the same phenomenon: a situation where the space of political conflict and disagreement has been colonized by a consensual and techno-managerial model of governance.

However, for Rancière (2010, p. 36), the "essence of politics" consists in "disturbing this arrangement by supplementing it with a part of those without part." In the sporadic disruptions of the police order and in the assertion of the presence of those who have no part, the axiomatic principle of equality is enacted. According to Rancière (2010, p. 38), politics implies a practice of dissensus, which "is the demonstration (manifestation) of a gap in the sensible itself." Along the same lines, for Laclau und Mouffe (1985), 'the political,' meaning the impossibility to represent adequately the fullness of society, goes by the name 'antagonism.' In this respect, the radical democratization of society necessitates acknowledging that hegemony is always incomplete, the people are multiple and intrinsically divided, and that "division cannot be overcome; it can only be institutionalised in different ways, some more egalitarian than others" (Mouffe 2013, p. xiv). In other words, democratization can be understood as the constant redefinition and recount of the members of society, a never-ending contestation about the nature of the community, whose voice is heard, and who is deemed a legitimate partner in the debate.

In fact, for theorists like Rancière and Mouffe, both aesthetics and politics constitute such modalities of interrupting any given dominant order, ways of modifying the division between the visible and the invisible, as well as methods of shifting the aesthetico-political coordinates of the community. Since for both thinkers, aesthetics and politics revolve around the symbolic ordering of social relations and the constitution of specific orders of visibility and sense, they are conceived as inherently intertwined. According to Rancière (2011, pp. 72–73),

the aesthetics of politics lies in the re-configuration of any given distribution of the sensible and the politics of aesthetics lies in artistic practices and modes of visibility that re-configure "the cartography of the perceptible, the thinkable, and the feasible." In a similar vein, in Mouffe's agonistic model, critical artistic practices can be deployed to bring to light alternatives to the current post-political order and to give voice to all those who have been silenced by the existing hegemony. In Mouffe's words (2008, p. 12), "critical art is art that foments dissensus; that makes visible what the dominant consensus tends to obscure and obliterate."

This approach, however, which has been translated into the art field and has been accepted almost uncritically, obscures some of the pitfalls of visibility and representation. Indeed, many contemporary artists have been deploying visual tools seeking to contest stereotypical depictions of oppressed groups and "to place the means of representation in the hands of groups marginalized by cultural institutions" (Deutsche 1996, p. 230). Such a limited understanding of visibility (through representation) has urged many in the contemporary cultural realm to declare that the sole task of art is to 'render the invisible visible.' This has oftentimes resulted not only in the co-optation of aesthetic strategies that centerstage difference, otherness, and the proliferation of subjectivities, but also in their abstraction into commodifiable and/or commodified images and signs. Indeed, when objects, subcultures, and subjectivities are decontextualized, they enter the realm of semiotic production and thus can be reinscribed in the vocabulary of exhibition/sign and exchange value, sustaining the very dominant power configurations they initially set out to transcend.

In addition, art institutions' assertion that they recognize marginalized voices via representation in exhibitions can serve as a shield to protect them from criticism, obscuring their complicity in structures of oppression, toxic sponsorship, and systemic racism, as well as in the perpetuation of an unequal distribution of power, resources, and cultural authority (see Pittas 2023). In this sense, visibility should be perceived as pertaining less to the widespread deployment of themes of 'inclusion,' 'pluralism,' and 'participation' in cultural representation, than to the way bodies fit their places and destinations.[5] In other words, since no act of inclusion, a priori, can ever be enough and since the terms of eligibility for entering any field of visibility are always dictated by the hegemonic institutions, any process of democratization resides in revealing the gaps, voids, or surpluses that remain unaccounted by any given symbolic order.

3   Democratizing the Public Sphere

It is this more capacious understanding of democratization – one that exceeds the strict limitations of the artistic, semiotic, or representational realm and rather alludes to an aesthetico-political phenomenon with very distinct spatial and performative characteristics that takes place in the openness of the public sphere – that this chapter adopts. Indeed, according to Stavrakakis (2011, p. 313), "there can be no politicisation in isolation from the field of spatial representation: antagonism can only surface within space–conflicts between socio-political forces can only be articulated in and through spaces." Space becomes political since it is where a wrong can be addressed and where antagonisms can be staged and choreographed. In sharp contrast to the police order that dictates a partitioned spatial organization where everyone has been assigned a proper place, the process of democratization entails the staging of antagonisms, the disruption of the hierarchical configuration of places, and the transformation of a "space of 'moving-along'" into a "space for the appearance of a subject" (Rancière 2010, p. 37).

This view runs counter to the Habermasian consensus-based account of the public sphere. Habermas (1989, p. 160) describes the depoliticization of the public sphere and its decline into a "pseudo-public or sham-private world of culture consumption." Habermas's vision of a resurrected public sphere, as the grounding of ideal democracy, entails institutions and spaces that can accommodate rational debate, reasoned deliberation, and consensus. The limitations of such a deliberative democratic model, premised on rational consensus, quickly become apparent since it does not consider the fact that every consensus rests upon naturalized exclusions. Consensus assigns one-way correlations between a sensory experience and its possible regimes of meaning; it heralds the reduction of the people to the sum of the parts of the social; it establishes a symbolic structuration of the community that has been deprived from its political potency.

In contrast to Habermas, theorists like Mouffe, Rancière, Deutsche, Swyngedouw, and Marchart, among others, have espoused an agonistic, conflictual, and dissensual account of the public sphere. Acknowledging the constitutive dimension of social division, Deutsche (1996, p. xxiv) argues that "social space is produced and structured by conflicts," hence advocating for public art forms that disrupt and "appropriate" space from capitalist and state power domination. For his part, Marchart (2019, p. 87) asserts that "a public sphere opens whenever the routines, institutions, and identities of our social

world are touched by antagonism."[6] All these approaches coincide in viewing the public sphere not as a pre-existing space that guarantees participation and accessibility, but rather one that comes into being through conflict. Such "performative practices of dissensual spatialization" refer not only to the discursive platforms, symbolic scenes, and linguistic arenas that can allow the exercising of the right to speak, but also to the construction of physical spaces that permit bodies to appear and to be forged together (Swyngedouw 2011, p. 375). Hence, adhering to the basic principle of division and accepting that dissensus and antagonism reside at the heart of democracy allow us not only to re-conceive political community as a contingent and open process, but also to re-imagine the spaces where political disagreements and conflictual negotiations can be performed.

4   Staging the Space of Appearance

Such an understanding of democratization, as being enacted in and through space, is espoused by a series of alter-institutional arrangements that attempt a "deterritorialization within existing art institutions" (Baravalle 2018). Indeed, alluding to what has been termed the 'infrastructural turn,' they set out to perform novel institutional forms that either operate within existing museums and push their models further, or invent new organizational formats that open up the horizon of political possibilities. Such artistic organizations and long-term infrastructures might include Ahmet Öğüt's *The Silent University* (2012-), Jonas Staal's *The New World Summit* (2012-), Tania Bruguera's *The Immigrant Movement International* (2011-), Paul Preciado's *Parliament of Bodies* (2016-), and Judith Wielander and Matteo Lucchetti's *Visible Temporary Parliament* (2011-). For instance, the *Parliament of Bodies,* initially conceived as the public programme of documenta 14, has attempted to turn into a platform of social, political, and aesthetic experimentation by presenting minor traditions and peripheral narratives, while hosting programmes with indigenous and queer artists and activists. In the same vein, the *Visible Project* enacts a temporary parliament, a biennial public event in collaboration with partnered institutions, to shed light on socially engaged art by involving attendees in the decision procedures as "a way of re-imagining democracy from the perspective of artists" (Lucchetti 2019).

Such alter-institutions are characterized by both a relative autonomy to existing political imaginaries and by a space of ambivalence, adaptation, and movement. These infrastructures are not identical to traditional structures or

institutions; they are defined by the collective affects and dynamic networks that determine their usage. In this sense, they allude to "instituent" or "instituting" practices, as evinced by the self-organized parliaments, the decentred networks, the alternative campaigns, and the novel pedagogical methodologies that they introduce, distancing themselves from the neoliberal and post-democratic policies advocated by existing mainstream institutions (Raunig 2009, p. 8). Not only do they reveal policy failures and potential pathways for reform, but most importantly they take issue with the very question of exclusion from the public sphere, prioritizing those who have been rendered socially invisible.

In this sense, they attempt to instantiate a "space of appearance" that, according to Arendt (1998, p. 199), "comes into being wherever men (sic) are together in the manner of speech and action, and therefore predates and precedes all formal constitution of the public realm and the various forms of government." They are also characterized by the utilization of architectural tools and artistic methodologies, assuming that social reality can be constructed and transformed by repetition and reiteration.[7] In this sense, they follow strands of theatre and curatorial studies that foreground not only the performative potential of curating, but also the critical role of dramaturgically reclaiming the public space in movement building and communicating power (see Malzacher 2017).

This dynamic constellation of organizations and 'para-institutional' arrangements often exceed the temporalities of the event-based cultural economies (see also Sternfeld 2017). Their common denominator is that they go beyond what Bishop (2012) has described as the 'social turn' in contemporary art, meaning the growing attention to collaborative practices and participatory engagement. They rather strive to re-invent democratic concepts while enacting them, encapsulating Arendt's own argument (1998, p. 207) that asserts that "Politics is a techne, [it] belongs among the arts," and as such it can be linked to activities such as "the performance of the dancer or play-actor," where "the 'product' is identical with the performing act itself." Accepting that antagonism is the constitutive moment of the social and that contingency (un)grounds every system, these initiatives attempt to devise flexible institutional arrangements and open-ended infrastructures that aim at not only unearthing the underlying antagonisms that structure the public sphere, but also cracking these splits wide open, sustaining the divisions, and organizing the side one is fighting for.

5   Assemblism

Building on a long lineage of artistic interventions in the public space and premised on the understanding that the current post-political order reflects the specific interests of a techno-managerial elite, artist Jonas Staal argues that the most effective tool of propagating democratic politics and new forms of self-governance is the performative assembly. Invoking the social movements that have emerged around the world during the last two decades, and specifically, the Arab Spring, the *Indignados* movement in Spain, the *Occupy* movement and *Black Lives Matter* in the US, the Indignant movement in Greece, and *Nuit debout* in France, among others, Staal (2017) attempts to theorize models of public assembly, which he terms "assemblism." In this sense, enacting performative assemblies allows the articulation of collective demands, radical imaginaries, and a different configuration of power that challenge both authoritarian forms of government and global capitalism's tendency for individuation and atomization.

In this respect, Butler's work constitutes a central reference point in Staal's trajectory. Indeed, these insurgent forms of collectivity witnessed in squares, streets, and other forms of public space, according to Butler (2015, p. 59), are "enacted by the assembly of bodies, plural, persisting, acting, and laying claim to a public sphere by which one has been abandoned." They have also involved processes of self-determination, a discursive invocation of a "we," and an enactment of "the people," which is "performative inasmuch as it brings into being the people whom it names" (Butler 2015, p. 169). In other words, any emerging collectivity is instantiated by its performative right to appear and its vocalized actions that predate a clearly demarcated collective subject. These collectivities-in-the-making involve not only a heterogenous, diverse, and potentially internally split assemblage of bodies brought together by necessity rather than choice, but also a partial and non-all-inclusive totality defined by a discursive demarcation. This echoes Mouffe's own argument (2005, p. 69) that "[p]olitical life concerns collective, public action; it aims at the construction of a 'we' in a context of diversity and conflict."

The self-evident political nature of the assembly is complemented by its aesthetic, architectural, and symbolic dimension. The aesthetic dimension is crystallized in the choreographies of bodies and the morphologies of the newly constituted social forms, reminding us that political acting does not differ from dancing, performing, or theatrical acting that takes place on a public stage. In addition, this performative action of bodies does not occur either in a vacuum

or in a pre-established architectural location; it is rather the in-betweenness of bodies that brings the space of appearance into being. The body might be the cornerstone of the assembly's social architecture, but if we are to believe Butler (2015, p. 76), the appearance of the body must be "supported by a material organization of space." In other words, by opposing an essentialist understanding of space (see Lefebvre 1991; Dikeç 2005; Landau et al. 2021), one is allowed to perceive spatial forms as social structures, meaning that both the organization and the attribution of meaning to spaces are predominantly social processes. This brings us to the last dimension, the symbolic, since the assembly invokes an imaginary collectivity that is premised on a false nomination, like the slogan "we are the 99 percent" that spread during *Occupy*. According to Staal (2017), "Assemblism lays the foundation for a collectivity yet to emerge. A new Us is performed as if it is already a majority, before it manifests materially."

However, distancing from the over-romanticization of the assembly format, Staal seeks to channel the concentrated energy, the temporary organizational structures, and the emancipatory political imaginary that are born out of assemblies (as exemplified during the highly condensed and localized 'eventual' sites of protest) into a new type of long-term institutionality and more sustained infrastructures. In Staal's own words (2017), "once the squares are empty again, this new institutionality needs to be formalized, organized, and enacted under administrative structures of checks and balances that guarantee durable physical and economic security and fidelity to the collectivity that brought it into being in the first place." In this respect, his work seeks to give shape to these emerging emancipatory collectivities by consolidating their imaginary, aesthetic, and spatial manifestations and by converting them to long-term 'common' infrastructures. For this purpose, he has reconfigured and extended the notion of the performative assembly to ongoing projects, like summits, unions, parliaments, academies, embassies, and most recently trainings. By constructing parallel political structures where novel self-governing formats can be enacted, he investigates the many forms that the practice of democracy can take, outside the purview of the national-bounded parliamentarism, taking issue with what Badiou (2012, p. 40) has termed "capitalo-parliamentarianism" or what Rancière (2010) has called 'consensus' democracy. His theatrical stagings serve both as symbolic gestures and as architectural arrangements that can allow the performance of gatherings, intimate politics, and self-representation (since the participants' terms of appearance are not predetermined), as well as the experimentation with novel democratic tools.

6 Summits, Parliaments, Trainings

A case in point is the *New World Summit*, an artistic and political organization developed by the artist's production studio since 2012. Through its different iterations, Staal experiments with notions like 'stateless democracy,' 'fundamental democracy,' and 'limitless democracy' to establish alternative political stages worldwide. Partnering with both parliamentary and non-parliamentary movements, these political fora aim to become the meeting grounds for representatives from stateless or unrecognized states, as well as for political organizations deemed as 'terrorists.' Without fixed geographical locations related to nation states and by taking advantage of the juridically exceptional position of visual art, the summits serve as nomadic parliaments, with every iteration taking place in a different locality (see, for instance, *The People's Parliament of Rojava* in Syria between 2015–2018). The parliaments are also brought inside major European museums, not only to serve as meeting grounds for activist groups, cultural workers, and wider publics, but also to confer visibility and legitimacy on certain struggles.

Assuming an agonistic neo-Gramscian 'war of position,' Staal situates art within an arena of ideological struggle, acknowledging the necessity of deploying propagandist techniques in the service of counter-hegemonic emancipatory political movements. For the artist, it is through varied cultural means and in and through space that radical political imaginaries can be articulated. Echoing Mouffe and Marchart, Staal (2011, p. 276) argues that "public space is the democratic arena par excellence, the place in which public conflict and confrontation have to take place, the place in which political existence takes shape." Since the idea of the nation state already materially manifests and has a performative dimension, a vision of a 'stateless internationalism' or a 'stateless democracy' requires a spatial configuration, too. The performative texture and the visual languages he attempts to construct provide this form of counter-institutionality that can open up the horizon of possibility for a post-national future.

One of Staal's most recent stages has been *Training for the Future*. It constitutes a utopian and performative training camp that sets out "to pre-enact alternative scenarios and reclaim the means of production of the future," proposing a reformulation of the traditional revolutionary Marxist mantra (Staal 2019).[8] Conceived by Staal and curator Florian Malzacher and led by creative activists, progressive hackers, theatre makers, and artists who offer trainings and workshops, *Training for the Future* deviates from other participatory assemblies

where the decision of engagement rests with the audience and aspires to turn everyone into active participants. Dissolving the distinction between trainers and trainees is deemed vital not only to perform modes of being together in the present, but also to experiment with the collective construction of the alternative infrastructures of the future. The aim of the training, according to Staal (2019), is to share tactics and knowledges, as well as to "provoke the collective imagination," while "providing the tools to enact it."

The 2019 iteration was organized in September in Bochum, Germany, as part of the *Ruhr Triennial Arts Festival*, and entailed an intense programme of twelve training sessions. Most training modules centred performativity, choreography, and embodiment as methodologies for the re-appropriation of public space, beyond the ritualized forms of protest. For instance, every morning started with *Choreographies of Togetherness* by Tel Aviv-based performative research group *Public Movement*. By introducing a series of touching techniques and collective movement exercises (touching hands, standing in circles, carrying one another), the group invited trainees to deploy them according to different speculative scenarios (for example, when in conflict, when on the run, for protection, etc.). Provoking questions like "What kind of distances do we maintain between our bodies? When do we chose to be touched? How do we develop evacuation techniques and escape a non-intimate touch?," the group attempted to reveal not only the knowledges, but also the politics that remain dormant in bodies (Public Movement 2019). As the trainers argued, through exercising embodied actions, dance routines, and choreographies used by military, police, and activist groups, a dispersed public can turn into a united force and a collective entity. In this case, performativity can exemplify not only a more collectivized format of protest that can "pre-enact" larger antagonisms in society by allowing "conflict to pass from the latent to the manifest" (Marchart 2019, p. 96), but also a more sustained and embodied "support system" (Jackson 2011).

In contrast to the assembly configuration that serves as a formal stage where the diverse groups that have been excluded from democratic discourse can engage in unscripted interactions and experiment with governing forms, trainings provide a more disciplined, committed, and audience-specific composition that bridges theory and action. In this sense, the training format departs from both the overarching themes of 'participation' and 'social engagement' that have saturated the politicized art world and from the polemical atmospheres that have characterized Staal's assemblies. The composition of the training constitutes a paradigm shift since it already presupposes a common horizon. Whereas the assembly format can provide the discursive terrains for conflict, disagreement, and negotiation, the training configuration already presupposes a strong commit-

ment to egalitarian politics from all attendees, facilitating the creation of a clear demarcation between a 'we' and a 'they,' which is the precondition in every process of collective identification.

This novel endeavour establishes an intimate, albeit often critical and uncomfortable, space that allows the sharing of experiences and the strengthening of group bonds. The additional time is not only dedicated to more open-ended discussions but also to the application of practical methodologies, surpassing the impasses that have occurred during assemblies. The training takes the assembly format a step further, providing a toolbox for direct action and a base camp where the idioms of specific tactics and the intricacies of site-specific struggles can be translated into one another and tested out in practice. It goes beyond the sole mobilization of imagination and attempts to give material form to the symbolic infrastructures that have been desired but have not yet been instituted. This new typology of gatherings, I argue, provides the opportunity to leave the realm of representational politics and experiment with Left institutionality beyond the constraints of Realpolitik. Under the protective veil of the cultural realm and the premise of artistic freedom, it can work towards not only the articulation of a radically democratic imagination, but also the devising of its organizational, infrastructural, and institutional grounding.

7   Epilogue

In conclusion, Staal continuously experiments with different innovative architectural formats and institutional settings that can allow people to be together *otherwise*. His nomadic summits, parliaments, and trainings serve as such spatial articulations of a 'stateless democracy,' namely a vision of democracy that is divorced from the state apparatus. The training format, still a work-in-progress, continues to investigate the many forms that the practice of democracy can take by facilitating the transition from hierarchical participatory models to a reciprocal and cooperative model of exchanging methodologies and tactics, with the potential to bring together a disparate assembly of people who share a commitment to emancipatory politics.

Extrapolating from that, the aforementioned artistic initiatives replicate parliamentary formats in the cultural sphere and establish common spaces and different modes of decision-making processes that abolish top-down hierarchies. They are small-scale institutional arrangements that set out to provide practical alternatives to the impasses of parliamentary democracy. Through the deployment of performativity and pre-enactment as tools to materialize intense social

experiences and temporary communities, they attempt to construct multiple and pluralistic public stages to oppose the homogeneous pseudo-public sphere and its normalized exclusions. They allow us, I argued, to perceive the process of democratization as pertaining to the construction of a scene of appearance of anybody whatsoever, a theatrical stage where equality can be demonstrated, and a material terrain where new modalities of contingent and non-essential forms of being-in-common, beyond identitarian politics, can be performed.

However, the use of performative and curatorial techniques to facilitate social encounters remain artistically framed, artificially constructed, and partly predetermined, and hence differ significantly from the spontaneous assemblies witnessed during insurgent movements and moments of protest. In this respect, perhaps it is useful to invoke Žižek's (1999, p. 264) distinction between "per-formative reconfigurations," meaning mere subversive acts that remain within the confines of the hegemonic field and "ultimately support what they intend to subvert, since the very field of such 'transgressions' is already taken into account," and the more radical practices that redefine and reconfigure the whole symbolic terrain. Indeed, artistic practices that either foreground momentary disruptions, playful resistances, and fleeting micropolitical activities, or aestheticize and fetishize oppressed social groups through the 'mirror of recognition' often serve only as a displacement of political struggles and leave institutional power structures intact.

Hence, shifting the emphasis from the enactment of temporary antagonistic spatialities to the construction of more sustainable infrastructures for the appearance and enunciation of the unaccounted becomes an absolute priority. Such more open-ended formats could allow the conflicts and intrinsic antagonisms of the social to be inscribed in an institutionalized manner (what Mouffe would term as the translation of 'antagonism' into 'agonism'). It remains an open question whether the discussed assemblies, parliaments, and trainings work mostly on the symbolic level, namely laying the groundwork for the moment of antagonism that is yet to come, or if they can be actualized in the form of more durable organizational and institutional arrangements that can sustain collective antagonisms and democratic imaginaries over time.

Notes

1. See (Cvejic and Vujanovic 2015; Bogad 2016; Serafini 2018; Fisher and Katsouraki 2017; Rai and Reinelt 2015; Latour 2005).
2. My conceptualization in this paper follows a philosophical lineage that runs from Arendt, through Butler and Rancière, all the way to Marchart (among

others), which views the body as an indispensable medium for the production of public space and for the process of political subjectivation.
3. The findings presented are part of my wider research project on various modes of engagement with cultural institutions in the attempt to democratize them. The findings result from extensive fieldwork carried out in Europe and the US where I conducted semi-structured interviews with artists, curators, architects, policymakers, and museum directors, and engaged in participant observation during artistic exhibitions, assemblies, and parliaments.
4. For Mouffe (2013), the central task of democratic politics is to provide the institutional terrains that will permit the translation of 'antagonism,' meaning the hatred between enemies, into 'agonism,' which signifies a struggle between adversaries and a civilized battle between societal views (see also Marchart et al. in this volume).
5. Indeed, critics on the Left have received the ascendant status of discourses on recognition and multiculturalism with suspicion, underlying their often divisive, fragmented, and identity-based character in relation to broader egalitarian struggles and the obfuscation of more material and economic concerns. For instance, for Eagleton (2016, p. 35), the zeal for pluralism, difference, and cultural recognition "has served to displace attention from various more material issues" and "has become a way of not talking about capitalism" (ibid.).
6. For Marchart (2019), the main conditions for the emergence of every public sphere are strategy, collectivity, conflictuality, the blockade of circulation, and, most importantly, the human body.
7. Butler's conception of gender as performative constitutes an important conceptual basis for the theories of performativity that have flourished in art, theatre, and curatorial studies.
8. Staal's understanding of pre-enactment coincides with Marchart's own term (2019, p. 177, original emphasis) that alludes to the *artistic anticipation of a political event to come.*

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