# UNIVERSITY OF
# FORWARD
# THINKING
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# Subject to Change

## Democracy, Disidentification, and the Digital

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the University of Westminster for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

University of Westminster

School of Social Sciences

Centre for the Study of Democracy

September 2019

# Abstract

Radical democratic politics in the digital age is characterized by the widespread emergence of participatory spaces generated by state actors and social movements. These new formats of citizen engagement are situated in the context of social inequalities and discrimination of marginalized identities. To counter this problem, feminist debates in democratic theory associated with the term "difference democracy" advocate a politics of presence through physically embodied representation of marginalized groups, providing visibility in the space of appearance. This strategy, however, entails essentializing tendencies as subjects are judged by their physical appearance rather than the content they utter, a problem described as the "dilemma of difference".

This thesis seeks ways out of the dilemma of difference by advancing both freedom and equality in participatory spaces. It explores the relations of freedom and equality that are described as competing values in the democratic paradox. To make the freedom to explore the multiple self compatible with the equality facilitated through the presence of the marginalized, the thesis engages with a range of radical democratic perspectives. To the established participatory, deliberative, and agonistic approaches it adds feminist and transformative perspectives. On these grounds, it develops the concept of a politics of becoming, which is seen as part of a progressive strategy of systemic transformation. Inspired by queer and gender theory, the politics of becoming reinterprets presence as the performative act of self-constitution. To enlarge the free spaces of the subject to change, the thesis suggests radical democratic practices of disidentification through anonymity that affords the opportunity to reject hegemonic identity interpellations and contributes to a democratization of self-constitution.

Drawing on new materialist thought allows for an interpretation of both spatial configurations and the subject as agentic assemblages. Anonymity and other modes of disidentification enable an interruption of such assemblages and reassemble spaces and the self. Digital means of communication provide new affordances for identity expressions. The emerging cyborgian subjects reassemble identity and reconfigure the space of appearance. This results in a new politics of presence that expresses embodied difference but still provides freedom for the subject to change.

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# Statement of Authorship

I hereby confirm that this thesis is the product of my own work. All sources used are referenced.

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London, September 2019

# Acknowledgements

# 1. Introduction

## The Disorder of Things: Masks, Veils, and Conchita's Beard

### 1.1. Introduction

Pitch black. An entirely black image covered the smart device screens of Instagram users who clicked on a post by Conchita Wurst. While the pop singer and drag artist, known for her public appearance as a bearded lady, usually posted selfies in glamourous dresses, on this occasion she had posted an image of total obscurity. Her only comment under the image was a date in a week's time "08.03.2019". Some of Conchita's Instagram followers were in apparent disarray. "im scared", posted a user under the pseudonym emine16; "What? Plz im scared" echoed nasfala.[1] Tom Neuwirth, the man behind Conchita Wurst, stated in a previous interview in reference to his public persona Conchita: "[Tom] wants to get out, show himself. I have to kill her".[2] The black image in the place of a selfie signalled the end of a life.

Five years earlier, Conchita had won the Eurovision Song Contest, impressing and polarizing with her disruptive gender performance. The creation of Conchita troubled gender – to borrow Judith Butler's (1990) terms – by assembling an image of pure femininity disrupted by a beard. Paradoxically, though it was widely known that the character of Conchita was performed by a biological man, it was still the beard – the only element in line with the biological sex of the performer – that appeared artificial and irritating. The beard as an alien thing troubled the coherent assemblage. Images of both male and female fans with artificial beards went viral on social media. The artificial beard on male fans was now connoted with femininity – the beard crossed gender boundaries and came full circle, from male to female and back. Other men in opposition to Conchita's gender crossings shaved off their facial hair in protest and shared before and after selfies on social media. The beard had been appropriated by queer identity (Pilipets, 2018). Five years later, the black image on Instagram articulated an interruption of Conchita's continuous identity performance. After a week of anticipation, on the sixth day – obviously in reference to the biblical creation of "man" – Neuwirth brought light into the darkness. The new persona created by Neuwirth through digital images on Instagram and videos on YouTube showed him in male clothing with white short hair and a white beard – but with mascara and in high heels. Both

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[1] Pseudonyms have been changed to protect the users' anonymity.
[2] https://www.mirror.co.uk/3am/celebrity-news/eurovisions-conchita-wurst-embraces-new-10406831, accessed 29 March 2019.

Conchita and Neuwirth's new self are disruptive of the spatial assemblage that Butler describes as the heterosexual matrix.

The example of Conchita Wurst/Tom Neuwirth points to the central role that identity and its disruptions and reconfigurations play in contemporary Western societies. With the decline of stable class identities and the increasingly fractured nature of everyday identity expressions our selves seem to be in disarray. A series of seminal publications over the past three decades have discussed these identity ruptures, from Harrison White's *Identity and Control* (1992), to Manuel Castells' *The Power of Identity* (1997), and Francis Fukuyama's *Identity: The Demand for Dignity and the Politics of Resentment* (2018). While articulated from highly diverse perspectives, all three books point to the deep economic, social, and cultural ruptures that destabilize our sense of who we are. This disorder of things that define us causes fear of a loss of control over the self, but at the same time this disorder also creates new opportunities to challenge and break down entrenched structures of domination.

The crucial role of such identity ruptures and reconfigurations becomes particularly evident in the current digital age marked by new modes of participatory engagement. The availability of new communicative channels provides new means to articulate a politics of presence (Phillips, 1995) that serves the articulation of gendered, sexed, raced, and classed identities. The #MeToo movement, for example, illustrates how active identity expressions – what Michael Saward (2010; 2006) terms representative claims – continue to facilitate the disruption of established power asymmetries and can contribute to a more radical democracy. By narrating the self in personal stories of sexual harassment and rape, and by linking these stories to personal social media profiles that reify digital identities as networked selves (Cohen, 2012; Papacharissi, 2011), public identity performance can challenge domination. Social media provide a space of appearance (Arendt, 1958; Butler, 2015) – a stage exposed to the gaze of wide audiences that were unreachable for citizens before the digital era. Yet, these new modes of everyday cyborgization reconfiguring the human subject through technology do not simply harness emancipatory potential, but are themselves, in many respects, tools of control and domination. The multi-billion giant Facebook epitomizes a new culture of personal exposure in a social economy of appreciation (Cambre 2014, 305; van Dijck 2013). The personally curated faces on Facebook profiles compete for attention in the currency of likes, shares, and "friends" producing data streams that serve the commercial benefit of a few.

The commodification of personal data shared on social media that function as a new resource fuelling digital capitalism (Srnicek, 2017; Chandler and Fuchs, 2019) and online

surveillance by governmental actors (de Lagasnerie, 2017) inspire a surge in activism for and through anonymity. While the #MeToo movement is primarily known for its insistent self-revelations that link online and offline identities, it is less known that many victims also report abuse anonymously. Rather than a mere technique to avoid public exposure, anonymity today becomes the core radical democratic practice of many protest movements. Groups such as Anonymous, Pussy Riot, and the Zapatistas all utilize masks as a way to conceal identities and signal collectivity. After the uprisings in parts of the Arab world in 2011, Time Magazine declared the anonymous protester the person of the year, depicting a face with female eyes peeking out from between a winter hat and a cloth covering her mouth and nose. The white, impishly grinning Guy Fawkes masks worn by many in the Occupy movement has become an emblem of political contestation along with the black balaclava of the Black Bloc and the hoods of Black Lives Matter. The series of laws introduced around the world that prohibit publicly concealing one's face are developed in tandem with new means of governmental surveillance on the internet. Both of these trends coalesce with the controversy and legal action around the public wearing of veils by Muslim women who are "using the deliberately assumed invisibility of the burka as a form of protest" (Zakaria, 2017, 59). These contestations result in a complex discursive clash around privacy rights, political freedoms of expression, and gender, cultural, and racial identity. Hence, "the political struggle over anonymity when one acts is among the defining struggles of our time" (Isin & Ruppert, 2015, 67).

The things that facilitate anonymity, such as masks, veils, and digital avatars, interrupt continuous identity performances in the space of appearance. Butler explains the space of appearance as a highly regulated discursive realm that restricts who can appear and who is rendered invisible. For those who are granted access, the spatial arrangement regulates the appreciation and credibility of democratic subjects along their identity markers of gender, sexuality, race, and class. Through the disruptive power of things, however, new spaces that subvert the established rules can be created: "only through an insistent form of appearing precisely when and where we are effaced does the sphere of appearance break and open in new ways" (Butler, 2015, 37).

While spaces of appearance are characterized by internal hierarchies, they are often constructed as participatory spaces for citizens' engagement with the aim of overcoming social inequality. Just as masks, veils, and Conchita's beard serve to disrupt established identities, so participatory spaces fulfil the function of breaking up established modes of governmentality: "participatory approaches explicitly seek to disrupt the order of hierarchical institutions, creating new and different spaces in which different rules of the game offer otherwise

silenced actors a chance to speak and be heard" (Cornwall, 2002, 7). The term "participatory spaces" brings together insights from studies of state-sponsored democratic innovations (Smith, 2009), social movements' participatory assemblies (della Porta, 2009), and representative state institutions (Bächtiger *et al.*, 2005). Shielding their participants from external social inequalities, these participatory spaces strive to facilitate freedom and equality through their structural settings. They interrupt external hierarchy with internal democracy.

Freedom and equality have long been understood as core values that define democracy (Evans, 2001, 342; Jones, 2001, 364). When trying to make sense of how these two values relate to one another in the context of participatory spaces, there are two competing approaches. Chantal Mouffe understands freedom and equality as being in an unresolvable tension. She describes this antagonistic relationship as the democratic paradox (Mouffe, 2005 [2000]). Freedom is conceptualized in liberal terms as a divisible good that – in democratic societies – is regulated by the principle of equality.[3] This tension, seeing equality being compromised by freedom and vice versa, is contested by the anarchist concept of equal liberty, which understands the two values as mutually dependent. Freedom can only be realized through equality and vice versa (Newman, 2016). Whether understanding freedom and equality in liberal terms as in tension or in anarchist terms as mutually dependent, it is the spatial arrangement that affects their constellation. The interruption of the established order through participatory spaces, then, allows for the reconfiguration of the relations between freedom and equality.

In societies dominated by social hierarchies, freedom and equality are affected by the identities inscribed in the subjects' bodies and performed through culturally coded objects and discursive concepts. The politics of presence advanced in feminist democratic theory under the term "difference democracy" advocates the visibility of marginalized identities in the space of appearance to draw attention to inequalities and particular standpoints. This strategy to increase equality, however, also curtails the freedom of the democratic subject to explore the multiple self. It restricts the subject to its embodied identity performance as extensively elaborated by difference democrats who speak of the dilemma of difference (Young, 1989, 268). Here the democratic paradox appears to be at work, whereby equality restricts freedom.

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[3] That Mouffe's work is rooted in liberal thought is often overlooked, although it is clearly stated by Mouffe and Laclau themselves (1985, 176).

This thesis will seek ways out of the dilemma of difference and toward the democratization of subject constitution. It will explore how interruptions can be employed to advance freedom and equality as core values of democratic politics in the digital age. It investigates participatory spaces that facilitate new ways of political engagement for democratic subjects and asks how novel identity configurations through anonymity can offer the freedom to explore the multiple self. The subject itself is perceived as *subject to change*.

This thesis will address the following questions:

*How can various structural settings of participatory spaces that afford different identity performances advance freedom and equality in the digital age?*

*Which strategies lead out of the confining tendencies of the dilemma of difference?*

*How are subjects constituted in participatory spaces and in particular in digital spaces?*

*What role does anonymity play in democracy and how can anonymity be employed as radical democratic practice?*

*How is the politics of presence reconfigured in the digital age? And how can it be employed as part of a progressive democratic strategy of social transformation?*

To answer these questions, this thesis will engage with various sources inside and beyond democratic theory and enrich them with insights from various empirical studies to generate theory with a robust empirical grounding. In doing so, it will develop a concept of participatory spaces as assemblages consisting of affective things. The constellations of these things afford, suggest, and restrict particular identity performances. Their constellations configure the potentials of freedom and equality. Yet, the spaces themselves are also the creation of democratic subjects. Identity and space are thus in a dialectical process of mutual constitution. Understanding democratic subjects and their identities themselves as spatial assemblages consisting of human bodies, cultural objects, and discursive concepts allows for an exploration of how participatory spaces enable the rearranging of identity and how subjects may rearrange participatory spaces. From this perspective, the thesis develops the concept of a politics of becoming, which does not stand in opposition to, but rather augments, the politics of presence. Presence is reconfigured through disidentification and anonymity in both analogue and digital spaces. This does not entail a negation of identity

and the body, but a rearrangement of embodied identity articulations that allow for freedom and equality, while still affording the expression of difference and diversity.

The endeavour of this thesis addresses various blind spots in democratic theory and contributes to innovation and progress in debates on democracy. First, democratic theory has been surprisingly quiet on the topic of anonymity. While anonymity is arguably one of the most prominent features of liberal democracy, as evident in the secret ballot, as well as in various unconventional modes of political participation such as wearing masks in public protest, pamphleteering, political graffiti, and online discussions, to date there is no coherent concept of anonymity in democratic theory. To fill this gap, this thesis will generate a complex understanding of anonymity rooted in democratic theory. Second, in light of the recent spatial turn in the social sciences (e.g. Massey, 2005), democratic theory increasingly employs spatial metaphors to speak of new spaces for political engagement (Dryzek, 2009; Mouffe, 1993, 20). This metaphoric use of space has yet to be substantiated. Explanations as to why such new modes of participation take a spatial form are still missing. This thesis will develop a spatial theory of democracy that explains the workings of participatory spaces. Third, although many democratic theorists are enthusiastic about new means of political engagement through digital communication, they have yet to address new modes of identity creation online. What is overlooked is that digital media not only provide a means for political participation, but also harness democratic potentials for self-expression through an increase in variability and agency in relation to the presentation of the self. By employing theories of assemblage, this thesis will contribute to an understanding of how subjects are constituted in participatory processes online. Fourth, while some recent texts have engaged with the significance of things (Honig, 2017), bodies (Machin, 2015), and assemblages (Bennett, 2005) in democracy, an exploration of how such new materialist perspectives contribute to an understanding of democratic innovation and processes of democratic self-constitution is lacking. Far from developing an entire new materialist reading of democracy, this thesis takes inspiration from debates in new materialism, while holding some reservations. And fifth, the thesis will explore new ways of engaging with democratic theory. Rather than adhering to single models of democracy, as has been recently criticized (Saward, 2003b; Warren, 2017), this thesis will explore multiple perspectives in democratic theory to assemble and compare different ways of making sense of democracy (Parkinson, 2012, 9; Smith, 2019 forthcoming). To broaden the scope of democratic theory, it will also engage with strands in democratic thought that have often been neglected by the textbooks on democratic theory, such as feminist and anarchist approaches. This pluralization of democratic thought will support the core argument of this thesis calling for a

pluralization of various participatory spaces in society that afford different and diverse identity performances.

## 1.2. Participatory Spaces as Interruption

Beginning in the 1960s, democratic theory has shifted its focus from democratic state institutions and conventional forms of participation such as voting and petitioning to new participatory modes of public engagement. Theories of participatory (Pateman, 1970), deliberative (Dryzek, 1990), and agonistic democracy (Mouffe, 1992c), which I subsume under the term "radical democracy", explore how new spaces for citizens' engagement can reinvigorate and transform democracy. Such participatory spaces include both formalized institutions such as participatory budgets and citizens' assemblies and social movements' organizations, occupations, and protest formations (Cornwall, 2004a). The experience of participatory spaces is not confined to Western imaginations but spans the world, thus enriching the Western concept of democracy with innovations from the Global South (e.g. Aiyar, 2010; Roque & Shankland, 2007; Wampler, 2007). While radical democrats tend to agree that "we need to invent new social and political forms that introduce radical dislocation in the present forms of domination" (Wenman, 2013, 17), the reformist agenda of current debates about democratic innovations promoting a reinvigoration of democratic participation to maintain the functionality of the system (e.g. Geissel & Newton, 2012) is looked upon with suspicion by some radical democrats. There is a rift running through radical democratic theory between those arguing for a mere augmentation of existing democracy in a reformist sense on the one side and those arguing for radical transformation through systemic change on the other (Wenman, 2013). With Aletta Norval, I argue in favour of looking beyond this divide and understanding both democratic augmentation and radical transformation as steps in a continuous effort of radical democratization (Norval, 2007, 185; see also Cornwall, 2004b, 85). While it is crucial to always question the power relations in which participatory spaces are embedded and the intentions with which they are created, they all signify a democratic potential (Cornwall and Schattan Coelho, 2007). By bringing people together who would otherwise not meet, by rearranging the constellation of bodies that potentially constitute democratic space, new modes of participation can work to challenge the established order of things. In Butler's (2015, 85) words: "In wresting that power, a new space is created, a new 'between' of bodies, as it were, that lays claim to existing space".

I will argue that the intentional rearrangement of bodies to form democratic space always constitutes an interruption. It temporarily brings the established order of things in disarray

and provides the ground for the emergence of new democratic subjectivities. Participatory spaces, whether in the form of governmental democratic innovations or of social movement formations, always function as an intervention that allows those who are usually unheard a chance to speak. By giving voice to the governed, democratic innovations "can challenge the existing institutional order" (Smith, 2009, 3). Against the neoliberal credo suggesting that there is no alternative, they demonstrate that things can be otherwise.

The term "interruption" is of particular value in comprehending democratic innovation. Interruption features differently in radical democratic thinking. In *Antigone, Interrupted*, Bonnie Honig (2013) discusses interruption as a conversational intervention that can have either democratic or dominant effects: "interruption postulates both equality, as when two people interrupt each other to knit together a conversation in tandem, and inequality, as when one party must yield the floor as it were, to the other" (13). Nancy Fraser, in contrast, focuses exclusively on the negative workings of interruption as it thwarts mutual understanding and hinders justice (Fraser, 1997). Jacques Rancière, on the contrary, conceptualizes interruption as inherently democratic. For him, interruption introduces a moment of deeply experienced freedom and equality that disrupts modes of domination: "Politics occurs because, or when, the natural order of the shepherd kings, the warlords, or property owners is interrupted by a freedom that crops up and makes real the ultimate equality on which any social order rests" (Rancière, 1999, 16). It is the Rancièrian notion of interruption facilitating experiences of freedom and equality that participatory spaces potentially harness.

What makes interruption such a curious concept is that it does not articulate a permanent break. Rather, it establishes a recess – a pause – within continuity. The prefix *inter* – the Latin "between" – indicates that after this interlude, things go back to normal. Just like the two interventions marked by dashes in the previous two sentences, the *inbetweenness* of interruption makes us pause and think. "To conceive rupture as a systemic or total upheaval would be futile. Rather, rupture is a moment where the future breaks through into the present. It is that moment where it becomes possible to do something different in or by saying something different" (Isin & Ruppert, 2015, 57). It is in this sense that I believe a separation between reformists and revolutionaries in progressive debates is often counterproductive. What is needed are interruptions of modes of domination as part of a continuous process of radical democratization. Interruptions open up spaces. By defining the boundaries of a before and an after, interruptions provide openings in which things can be different. Such openings can also be conceived of as think spaces, as realms in which different thinking is possible. Innovation and interruption thus go hand in hand.

The key realization is, however, that while it might appear that after the interruption things simply go back to normal and the disorder of things ends as things return to their naturalized places, this is not the case. After the interruption, things are never entirely as they were before. Ostensibly, after citizens' assemblies and university occupations end, participants go home. Their bodies shift back to their assigned place in society. But the experiences of equality, of speaking freely, of being taken seriously do not go away. While experiences might not be directly carried over into people's daily lives and the hierarchies of capitalist societies might remain unaffected, traces of the democratic experience persist. They change how political issues are perceived, they challenge established attitudes, and induce critical reflection. By affecting perception, participatory spaces alter the order of things.

Participatory spaces do not just constitute an interruption of the established order of things; rather, they themselves consist of a certain arrangement of things. The spaces that facilitate new forms of participation consist of physical things such as walls, pavement, and chairs that both limit and afford human interaction. These physical infrastructures are populated by human bodies that relate to each other in contingent constellations of power structures, sexual attraction, and emotional ties. These social and physical relationalities are intertwined with discursive structures of words, concepts, ideas, themes, and notions that enable and bound verbal expression. The disruption of the dominant order through participatory spaces consists of a rearrangement of things that constitute the respective participatory space.

The established study of new modes of citizens' participation explores how the design of participatory institutions can contribute to democratic goods such as inclusion and equal respect among participants (Barnes *et al.*, 2007; Cornwall & Schattan Coelho, 2007; Fung & Wright, 2001; Saward, 2000; Smith, 2009; 2005). I believe that the insights of this approach can be further advanced by exploring the concepts of spaces, things, and bodies. Hence my aim is to enrich thought on new modes of participation with new materialist inspirations. Although at first glance the two fields of study appear to be rooted in quite distinct ontologies, there are surprising overlaps in their core assumptions and potential for mutual enrichment. In a first attempt of "rethinging" democracy from a new materialist perspective, Honig (2017, 5) claims: "Public things are part of the 'holding environment' of democratic citizenship; they furnish the world of democratic life… They also constitute us, complement us, limit us, thwart us, and interpellate us into democratic citizenship". Here things constitute an affordance structure through their mutual affectivity – a notion relatable to the debates on institutional design in democratic innovations. This thesis will examine the constellations of things that constitute participatory spaces and ask how the

disruption of the dominant order through a rearrangement of things allows democratic subjects to express themselves freely and equally.

## 1.3. Freedom and Equality in Participatory Spaces

Many democratic theorists define democracy as being constituted by its core values of freedom and equality. They conceptualize democracy as an equal division of freedom among subjects within a given space (e.g. Evans, 2001, 342; Jones, 2001, 364; Mouffe, 2005 [2000], 19). Chantal Mouffe famously describes the relationship between freedom and equality as the democratic paradox. Her argument starts from the tension between two distinct traditions, liberalism and democratic thought, that together constitute liberal democracy.

> On the one side we have the liberal tradition constituted by the rule of law, the defence of human rights and the respect of individual liberty; on the other the democratic tradition whose main ideas are those of equality, identity between governing and the governed and popular sovereignty. There is no necessary relation between those two distinct traditions but only a contingent historical articulation. (Mouffe, 2005 [2000], 5)

The traditions to which Mouffe points have also been discussed by other authors. They explain the marriage of capitalism as a market-driven ideology of competition with the republican democratic values of popular participation as an odd construct (Abensour, 2011 [1997]; Meiksins Wood, 1995). The liberal tradition understands freedom in terms of individualism and entrepreneurship, as the freedom from state interference in private matters and the protection of private property. This liberal concept of freedom is then translated into the political realm where individuals are free to exercise democratic rights of voting, standing for office, and expressing opinions. Freedom here is conceptualized as the means to pursue our own interests as rational actors in a competitive market setting (see Downs, 1957; Schumpeter, 1947). The democratic tradition, in contrast, rests on the experiences of the Athenian polis, Rousseau's direct democratic thought (Rousseau 1998 [1762]), and the republican premises of popular sovereignty and widespread participation (Arendt, 2009 [1963]; Habermas, 1992 [1962]). The two traditions are in tension because the logic of capitalism rests on the assumption of meritocratic hierarchy and the accumulation of power, while the democratic tradition insists on equality. The capitalist need for the ever wider expansion of the market to maximize profits calls for an ever wider extension of democratic jurisdictions, which makes representative governments unavoidable. Representative

institutions, however, stand in contrast to popular sovereignty. The curious hybrid of liberal democracy combines the capitalist logic of competition, hierarchy, and self-interest with the democratic logic of popular participation (Meiksins Wood, 1995). Thus, it must be accepted, Mouffe (2005 [2000], 5) argues, "that the tension between equality and liberty cannot be reconciled and that there can only be contingent hegemonic forms of stabilization of their conflict".

What remains unanswered, however, is *why* freedom and equality are in tension. What determines their antagonistic relationship? This question can be answered by understanding that Mouffe's own work is situated in liberal thought, which has long proclaimed freedom and equality as competing values, since "[e]very man has freedom to do all that he wills, provided he infringes not the equal freedom of any other man" (Spencer, 1851, 103). In the tradition of Hobbes' Leviathan, the freedom of one individual will be used to infringe on the freedom of others due to the frightened and aggressive nature of "man" (Hobbes, 1968 [1651]). If we think of the participatory spaces in which this thesis is interested, we can see how the democratic paradox plays out. Within participatory spaces, democratic subjects are limited by the actions of others. Speaking time, for example, is limited. The more one person speaks, the less others are able to express themselves. The louder or more assertively one person speaks, the less others feel like their contributions will be appreciated. As will be discussed in Chapter 2, those suffering from such limitations of expression are often subjects with marginalized identities (Karpowitz and Mendelberg, 2014; Young, 2000). The ideal envisaged by radical democrats in spatial terms, then, is the equal division of freedom to act within a given space.

But things are not so simple. While speaking time might be limited, words do not always limit. Their effects also depend on their content. Words can encourage the marginalized to participate, they can open doors to new thinking, or provide representation for those who are not physically present (Dryzek and Niemeyer, 2008). The freedom of one must not always infringe on the freedom of others. When Habermas speaks of the freedom from domination, curiously the concepts of freedom and equality become synonymous. Freedom from domination denotes that all present within a space have the same potential to express themselves (Habermas, 1984 [1981]). What is more, consider the situation in which the freedom of marginalized groups to participate increases. In this case both freedom and equality are advanced, so they appear not to be in tension. From the perspective of the dominator, freedom to dominate decreases, however. But this can also be seen as an increase in the freedom of the dominator, who is now free from dominating. In other words, it is not only the dominated who is freed from suppression; the dominator too is freed from

committing gruesome acts of suppression. This understanding resonates with Anne Phillips' (2015) words, when she argues: "If those people still have power over us or we over them, we are not yet engaging fully with what it means for us both to be human beings" (1) since being human "is about claiming our equality" (9). So if the dominator is unfree because of her acts of domination, then equality is *the condition for freedom*.

This is the core argument of anarchist conceptions of the relationship between freedom and equality, which define the two values as mutually enriching, even as co-dependent. The unfreedoms of others makes the self unfree. This is expressed in the concept of equal liberty that understands the two values as one and the same. There is no trade-off between freedom and equality; there is only equal liberty (Newman, 2016, 176).

This thesis will explore the relationship between freedom and equality within participatory spaces. It will ask how such spatial configurations can aspire to realize equality while affording freedom for the subject to change. Is an increase in freedom used by subjects to dominate over others, as suggested in the liberal-inspired democratic paradox, or does more freedom lead to equality, as suggested by the anarchist concept of equal liberty? Does freedom call on subjects as wolves or as humanists?

## 1.4. The Democratic Subject as Agentic Assemblage

When asking the question of how freedom and equality can be advanced in participatory spaces, the identity of the democratic subject is paramount. We live in capitalist societies that are characterized by deeply entrenched inequalities along the lines of identity categories. These inequalities concern financial resources just as much as respect, recognition, and political power. In fact, all of them are inherently linked. This is pointed out by a feminist discourse in democratic theory that promotes an understanding of difference as a resource for democratic engagement (Young, 1997b). These debates associated with the term "difference democracy" argue for a politics of presence (Phillips, 1995), giving marginalized groups visibility in the space of appearance. The identified body claims equality through its corporeal performance of the self (Phillips, 2015). Examples of the politics of presence include parliamentary quota regulations (Mansbridge, 2005) and protest formations such as SlutWalks and groups such as Femen that expose the naked female body to advance women's rights (O'Keefe, 2014; Betlemidze, 2015). From a new materialist perspective, here the body is conceived as an agentic thing that affects others. Without the need to speak, it is filled with content that acts (see Mansbridge, 2005, 62).

In respect of the democratic paradox, it becomes apparent that while the politics of presence effectively advances equality, it works to limit the freedom for democratic subjects to explore multiple sides of their selves, to experience that which is marginalized *within* ourselves. To this end, this thesis is interested in how equality can be advanced while simultaneously affording the freedom of the subject to change. This endeavour calls for a different conception of the self, identity, and democratic subjectivity, one that allows for disidentification and resignification (Rancière, 1999; Butler, 2004) as part of a politics of becoming (Connolly, 1996). From this vantage point, the stabilizing of identity constructions is an artificial act of domination through the internalization of discipline. Here I borrow Sheldon Wolin's attribute of fugitivity, which he applies to democracy (Wolin, 1994), and understand the *subject* as being on the run. The fugitive self constantly tries to escape the reification of identity. It behaves like eye floaters – the spots in our eyes we never can get a hold of. As we try to focus on them, they move away. The coherent public persona, then, is an act of masquerade (Butler, 1990, 50).

To generate an understanding of the self as inherently fugitive and transformative, I employ the assemblage theory introduced earlier. Not only spatial arrangements, but identity and the self can be explained as an agentic assemblage of things. Jane Bennett explores how food enters the body, nourishes it, is converted into energy, and leaves it. Similar explorations could address medicine that not only enters but alters our bodies and our perception of them. Such an approach advances "a conception of the self… as itself an impure, human-nonhuman assemblage" (Bennett, 2010, xvii). The body appears as an assemblage of body parts, blood vessels, veins, fat, bones, cartilage, brain cells, eyeballs, guts, skin, hair, and so on. It is not the body alone and in itself that defines who we are. The assemblage of the body interacts with discursive concepts of gender, sexuality, race, class, age, etc. and with political affiliations, personal experiences, motives, and desires. These concepts relate to social practices, such as social protocols and gender or racially coded body language, and culturally coded things such as makeup, clothing, and hairstyles (see Young, 1994). As an agentic assemblage, the democratic subject appears as a network of things that affect and are affected by each other.

This assemblage is well explained by what Jon Elster (1986) refers to as the multiple self. According to this notion, we are constituted by different, competing parts such as desires, emotions, reasons, and passions. The conflict between reason and desire plays a particularly important role. The Freudian theory of the id, ego, and superego is one approach to the multiple self, the notion of a *homo sociologicus* pursuing the common good and a *homo economicus* pursuing self-interest is another, and the successive self, changing over time,

is yet another. People feel and act differently according to their current body chemistry, blood sugar levels, hormones, etc. The multiple self can thus be explained as an assemblage of affective things which together develop a decentred kind of agency akin to swarm intelligence. This is what Bennett (2010, 21) calls "distributive agency".

Understanding the democratic subject as assemblage has far-reaching consequences for the study of participatory spaces. First, spatial arrangements bring out different sides of the multiple self. The constellation of physical, social, and discursive things at a given moment affects some things and not others. Second, who the democratic subject is changes space. As the bodies of subjects present constitute space, alteration in their identities, how they express themselves and are seen by others, alters the entire space.

The role of the democratic subject that this thesis examines clashes with some new materialist views. Many new materialist thinkers insist on collapsing the subject/object division. The "democracy of objects" is constituted by the equality of all things (Bryant, 2011). One of the key normative motivations of new materialist thought is to consider nonhuman things including animals, forests, the climate, and so on as agents within democratic processes. From this perspective, democratic theory's preoccupation with human subjectivity is an outgrowth of modern humanist Enlightenment thought, which develops an anthropocentric conception of the world with humans as explorers who conquer nature and civilize the wild (see Bennett, 2010). While I sympathize with this criticism, I am not convinced that the solution is to overlook human consciousness and intentionality, complex features that I would not attribute to a chair or a tree. I feel that such radical equality between all things including humans also has dangerous political implications, freeing human subjects from conscious political action. I am afraid that the democracy of objects approach (Bryant, 2011) and the promotion of enchantment (Bennett, 2010) might obscure intentions behind things. Many artefacts are created with the intention to affect others in certain ways – online spaces are a prime example (Beyer, 2014a). This intentionality is often overlooked and the democracy of objects approach merely obscures it further.

In this thesis, I see humans as fulfilling a double role. On the one hand, they are indeed things as part of spatial assemblages. As social things, humans affect others through their physical presence – just like other things that constitute space. In this regard, it also makes sense to think about how human bodies should be arranged – along with other things – to facilitate equality and freedom. At the same time, humans fulfil the role of subjects who reflect on their actions and consciously engage in politics. This conscious engagement is, however, to be understood in terms of distributive agency. Humans as subjects do not

simply act rationally; rather, their actions result from a conscious and unconscious negotiation between various sides of the multiple self. They are influenced by different states of bodily chemistry, different experiences, different positions in social structures, and shifting motivations. While the approach proposed here does not see humans and other things as equal – all things have different qualities, human consciousness and intentionality among them – it does indeed open up a more democratic perspective on the relationship between humans and nonhumans. The multiple parts that make up the individual human assemblage are interconnected with other human and nonhuman things outside the individual subject that afford, restrict, and suggest democratic subjectivity.

## 1.5. Anonymity and Disidentification as Radical Democratic Practice

As a child in the early 1990s, I enjoyed watching a Saturday night TV show called "Herzblatt" (German: sweetheart). This show was modelled after the American "The Dating Game" and followed a simple plot. One candidate of one sex had to choose a romantic partner by interviewing three candidates of the opposite sex through a panel wall that prevented the contestants from seeing each other. The premise was that a partner should be picked on the basis of what they said rather than how they looked. Today, new dating show formats are popular. I enjoy watching the show "Naked Attraction", in which a candidate picks one of six entirely naked candidates who do not (or hardly) speak. The show entails an examination of different body parts and discussion of sexual practices including personal experiences and statistical facts. The two shows follow the entire opposite logic: attraction based on content vs. attraction based on looks. It might be easy to understand "Naked Attraction" as part of a trend of objectification and even commodification of the body (see Phillips, 2013) – a trend that is also reflected in current dating apps. Indeed, the choice between several naked people elevated on podiums for bodily inspection does call to mind the image of slave markets. But there is also another side to the coin. "Naked Attraction" fulfils an important role in sex education: it promotes diverse body images including fat and skinny bodies, different skin colours, and relationships of different sexes (and numbers). These qualities of diversity are undermined by the concept of "Herzblatt" which conceals difference.

It could be argued that while the two shows ostensibly seem to follow opposite logics, they actually perform the same function: they interrupt identity. While "Herzblatt" interrupts visibility, "Naked Attraction" interrupts the voice. In the latter show, the body is the affective thing that expresses meaning, while in the former, it is the spoken word. In both cases, candidates maintain a certain degree of anonymity.

The anonymity of silent, naked humans is puzzling and speaks to the complexity of the phenomenon. Anonymity is literally about the "unnamedness" of people or their unknowability more broadly. So how can we know a naked person if we do not know their names, their occupations, and what they think? Such complex thinking about anonymity prompts the question of how to draw the line between anonymous and non-anonymous encounters. What makes Alcoholics Anonymous anonymous insofar as people identified by their first names sit in a circle and have face-to-face conversations about intimate aspects of their lives? How is a person anonymous who wanders about an unknown city filled with people? How does a sexual act – possibly the most intimate thing imaginable – between two people who have met very recently and have no intention of seeing each other again qualify as anonymous sex? Is it the face, body, name, content, occupation, family status, social security number or IP address of a person that needs to be hidden in order to facilitate anonymity?

This thesis will explore anonymity and its application in participatory spaces as the interruption of continuous identity performances as part of a politics of becoming. This temporary interruption relies on things that enter, disrupt, and reconfigure the identity assemblage of the subject. Masks, for example, interrupt everyday identity performances. Walls often work to interrupt identity. Think, for instance, of voting booths for casting a ballot, confession booths to whisper words through a grid, public toilet booths whose walls serve the scribbling of graffiti, public walls that display street art or panel walls through which candidates speak in a game show, a piece of paper filled with words of political instigation or a computer screen filled with racial slurs. Online nicknames, pseudonyms, avatars, and digital images can also serve as things that interrupt identity. They are improper names (Rancière, 1999), artificial things that reek of their recent creation.

Yet, these things do not simply negate and do away with identity. Rather, the things that interrupt identity assemblages are always interfaces; they are the means for new identity constructions. The things that efface the democratic subject at the same time serve as the surface for new, temporary faces. They not only interrupt but simultaneously mediate identity. In the time period of the interruption of the officially identified persona, a new identity is created. The gap is not empty; it is full of newness. The interruption is a moment of innovation of the self. And in the context of participatory spaces, it is potentially a democratic innovation. It is this moment of innovation as democratic self-transformation that this thesis will explore.

In the case of Anonymous it is the Guy Fawkes mask, for Pussy Riot it is the colourful Balaclava, for the Guerrilla Girls it is the gorilla mask, for some Muslim feminists it is the veil, and for the Ku Klux Klan it is the white hood that both interrupts and constitutes identity. While we have undoubtedly witnessed a rise in the use of the mask in social movements, the idea of anonymity is nothing new. The hood that conceals identity in the Black Lives Matter movement to protest racially motivated police brutality is mirrored in the tale of Robin Hood stealing from the rich and giving to the poor. The ubiquitous use of avatars in virtual online role play environments, which plays an increasingly significant role in staging online protest, strangely relates to the tale of the long-nosed Cyrano de Bergerac who employed a handsome human avatar to convey his beautiful words to the lovely Roxane. From the uncertain origin of many texts attributed to William Shakespeare to the revolutionary writings now attributed to Thomas Paine and Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, anonymity has historically played a crucial role in Western societies.

As the diversity of these examples demonstrates, anonymity does not always have positive effects. While this thesis is interested in the employment of anonymity for radical democratic acts of disidentification (Muñoz, 1999; Rancière, 1999), anonymity plays a highly ambiguous role within the sphere of democracy. In her investigation of the history of the hood as an object of political relevance, Allison Kinney (2016, 71) states: "For as long as powerful forces have weaponized hoods… wearing them to conceal their own violence, other people have relied on hoods' anonymity and everyday ubiquity in order to fight back, escape, and protest". I will argue that the things that afford anonymity always have liberating effects. They free the democratic subject to act. This newly acquired freedom, however, might have detrimental effects for equality. Anonymous subjects can use their freedom to exclude, submit, and deceive, thereby exacerbating power asymmetries. These observations confirm the tension between freedom and equality described in the democratic paradox. However, anonymity can also work to include the marginalized, to subvert concentrations of power, and to vent honest sentiments. In these cases, anonymity has equalizing effects. The anarchist equal liberty appears to be at work.

These reconfigurations of the relations between freedom and equality are facilitated by the spatial rearrangement of the assemblage that constitutes democratic subjectivity. The stability of the identity assemblages of body parts, skin pigments, sex organs, discursive identity ascriptions, social expectations, and so on is destabilized as it is interrupted by masks, avatars, ballots, walls, and screens. This interruption rearranges the elements in the assemblage, bringing to the fore elements of the multiple self that were previously hidden: "Anonymity engages a type of practice and a type of subjectification that cast our unconscious

in a critical light; it provides the means to question conventional modalities of political subjectification and expose the effects of power that bear on us through these same channels without our awareness" (de Lagasnerie, 2017, 58). The rearrangement of the assemblage of the self, I will argue, is intertwined with the rearrangement of democratic spatiality. The different constellations of things that constitute participatory spaces afford, restrict, and suggest different identity performances. In turn, it is the anonymous subject as agentic assemblage that arranges democratic spatiality: "Anonymity... redefine[s] the contours of the democratic sphere, that is, the way we conceive it and the relations we are able to establish within it" (de Lagasnerie, 2017, 58).

## 1.6. Behold the Rise of the Cyborg

Through the increasing ubiquity of technologically mediated communication today anonymity shifts to the centre of everyday life. Spanning large distances between interlocutors, digital communication tools both mediate and interrupt identity. To answer the question of who the democratic subject is becoming through the everyday use of smart communication devices, we need to investigate the role of the interfaces that mediate our identities. This thesis contends that the interruption of our identity assemblages through interfaces gives rise to new subjectivities that have new qualities and different self-perceptions. These new subjectivities emerge on the basis of a reconfigured spatiality and at the same time they also reconfigure space. By realigning digital and analogue things, cyborgian space and cyborgian subjects emerge.

Consider the following observations I have made over the past years: I am on a bus in a city I have never visited before. To check where I am, I don't look out of the window. I look on the screen of my smartphone. I am a blue dot moving around on a street map. My blue dot is just passing a church. I look out of the window, yes, there it is. *** I want to know if it is raining and I should take my umbrella with me before I leave the house. Instead of going to the window and checking for rain, I look on my weather app. *** Working on my thesis at 3pm, I feel a bit sleepy. But I slept well, didn't I? I check the sleep app on my smartphone. Last night I slept 7 hours and 42 minutes and my sleeping pattern was quite consistent. So no, I can't be sleepy. *** On the deck of a boat travelling along the Canale Grande in Venice, tourists are lining the ship rail to look at the beautiful architecture of the buildings along the channel. They do not look at the buildings directly, however. Rather, they look at the architecture on the screens of their smartphones and tablets with which they take pictures and film the spectacle to share on social media. Their assembled smart device

screens build a dense wall of digital representation between onlookers and represented, physical space.

Smartphones have become an important feature of everyday life. They wake us up in the morning; their calendars tell us the tasks of the day; during the day they remind us of important meetings; through their social media apps we communicate with our friends and acquaintances; they count our steps and monitor our fitness; on the way home from work they buzz in our pockets when we pass the local supermarket to remind us that we have run out of toilet paper; at a certain time they remind us to go to bed; their sleep apps lull us to sleep; and they monitor our sleep patterns to report it back to us in the morning, when the alarm rings and the cycle begins anew.

The everyday use of smart devices signals a profound shift in who we are. In *Seeing Ourselves Through Technology*, Jill Walker Rettberg (2014) discusses how the quantification of the self through smartphone apps alters how we perceive the self and others. Such reconfigurations of the self are well captured by Donna Haraway's metaphor of the cyborg (Haraway, 1991 [1985]). The science fiction notion of the cyborg as the configuration of physical human body parts and technological prosthesis is currently realized through the increasing use of cardiac pacemakers and robotic limbs. Everyday cyborgization goes much further, however, and has deep implication for politics (Asenbaum, 2018b). Just as robotic limbs extend the physical abilities of humans, so too do hearing aids, eyeglasses, and contact lenses. Smart devices follow the same logic. They can make us hear and see things that are far away (Gergen, 2000, xviii). Moreover, the cyborgian transformation of the self through online engagement involves the design and curation of alternative self-representations and the potential expression of previously hidden elements of the multiple self. The term "cyborgization" then signifies a process of reconfiguring the assemblage of the self. By including smart devices, computer screens, apps, and digital self-representations into the assemblage of physical body parts, discursive identity ascriptions, and social conventions, the definition of the self changes. Today we are constituted amid a web of cloud computing, big data, wireless connectivity and the Internet of Things that connects us to our refrigerators, thermostats, and light bulbs in our homes.

The connection between our bodies and our smart devices is growing ever closer as mouse clicks are replaced by touches, swipes, and taps, which makes the use of smart devices more intuitive, natural, and organic. The haptic engagement with smart devices also further develops an intimate, personal connection with the device. The link between the human subject and the communication tool, which no longer simply constitutes an object of use

but instead becomes a part of the cyborgian assemblage, is further strengthened by fingerprint and face recognition technology. For authentication the early generation of smartphones required personal passwords – pin codes consisting of four-digit numbers. These passwords granted access to whoever knew it so that multiple users could use the same device. The introduction first of fingerprint and then face recognition to access smartphones signals a major shift. The smart device is now exclusively accessible by one individual person via the organic body. This is of particular relevance in respect of governmental surveillance and commercial tracking. While for the early generation GPS could tell where a smart device was located, for the current generation GPS can tell where the actual person is located (Eve, 2016, 59ff).

Cyborgian self-constitution heavily relies on social media as a mirror. Every image of the self shared online functions as a digital thing in the cyborgian assemblage. The audience of such communications is not exclusively and maybe not even primarily the other, but always also the self: "When we share photos of our children or a new home or a night out with friends our target audience is not just our friends, but also ourselves" (Walker Rettberg, 2014, 12). Social media create spaces that give the subject a certain degree of control over the arrangement of digital things that assemble the networked self (Cohen, 2012; Papacharissi, 2011). This creative process is possible through the interruption of identity. Even if users create performances of the self that continue identity expressions from offline to online, the interruption of communication by an interface always calls for the active (re)creation of the self – a representative claim (Saward, 2010), which can never be true to the original (Adorno, 1973 [1966]). This provides the potential for democratic openings of freedom: "No longer the site of an embodied identity with a rich biography, [the body] becomes instead, in this instance, a space of exploration" (Saco, 2002, xxi).

## 1.7. Radical Democracy in Perspective

To understand the implications of the cyborgian subject and modes of disidentification in participatory spaces, this thesis builds on a wide range of radical democratic thought. Rather than devoting the thesis to a single view in democratic theory, I draw on a diversity of perspectives, which in my understanding all contribute to the project of radical democracy. Throughout the thesis, I will take inspiration from participatory, deliberative, agonistic, difference, and transformative approaches in democratic thought that all provide different, enriching insights. I do so in response to an ongoing debate in democratic theory about how to move the field forward. The deductive model approach that designs ideal normative models of democracy and then studies them in the real world has recently been criticized

as it is seen as standing in the way of more innovative thinking in democratic theory (Fung, 2012; Saward, 2019 forthcoming). Mark Warren (2017), for example, argues that "model thinking" leads to dead-ends, as models construct a narrow focus and define democracy along single practices such as deliberation, voting, or protest. To counter this, Warren develops a problem-based approach that prioritizes problems over norms. Similarly, Michael Saward (2003) contends: "We do not need more 'models of democracy'" (161). Instead he proposes a reflexive pragmatism in order to "move beyond a notion of separate… models – or beyond 'modelism'" (168).

I want to add to this debate, both moving forward beyond single models but at the same time making use of the firm normative foundations and the clear outlook that models provide. Warren (2017, 40) aptly observes that the function of models of democracy is to "clarify normative presuppositions, enabling critical debate about better and worse forms of democracy". In the same vein, David Held (2006 [1987], X) claims that a variety of models is needed because "[d]emocracy, as an idea and as a political reality, is fundamentally contested". I follow Parkinson (2012, 9) who argues that "ideal models are useful because they help us ask better questions of political activity. They help us attend to what is present in the real world, and what is not, especially when we use multiple models to highlight different aspects of political action". This argument not only promotes the value of different perspectives in democratic theory, but also suggests their combination to generate a rich understanding of the research subject. Smith (2019 forthcoming) advances a similar approach by arguing: "The theoretical enterprises of deliberative, participatory, agonistic and other approaches to democracy differ in significant ways. It is precisely where these different theoretical lenses offer alternative perspectives on the same object of study that we can gain novel insights". Rather than speaking of models, which implies a building block approach for empirical operationalization, I will speak of perspectives, drawing on Iris Marion Young (2000, 148) who explains: "a perspective is a general orientation on the political issues without determining what one sees, and without dictating particular conclusions".

I think that such an approach is promising because it combines various angles, generates multiple insights, and allows for innovative, normative thinking. In addition, it is particularly well suited to the research interests of this thesis. The metaphor of perspectives is rooted in spatial thinking. It suggests that from a particular position within discursive space, some things can be seen while others are obscured. Looking through multiple perspectives then describes the cognitive task of researchers to create relationality by arranging and mapping discursive things. Understanding thinking itself as a sensory or aesthetic

experience of space (Dikeç, 2015), different perspectives in democratic thought can contribute to a more intensive experience of the meaning of radical democracy.

Lastly, an explanation is needed as to why I identify these various perspectives with the term "radical democracy". There is some confusion about the meaning of radical democracy, which stems from its association and at times its equation with agonistic conceptions of democracy. This conflation is a relatively recent phenomenon. The original use of the term contrasting socialist and anarchist conceptions of council democracy with representative democracy (Muldoon, 2018) was revived in debates on participatory democracy that emerged in the 1960s. In this sense, Carole Pateman (1989, 14) writes about "radical democratic theory, which argues for the active participation of all citizens". In the late 1980s and early '90s, however, the term became closely associated with the work of Chantal Mouffe (1992; 1989). Since then, the term has been used in varied ways. Joshua Cohen and Archon Fung (2004) equate radical democracy with deliberative democracy and Mark Warren (1996) discusses deliberative democracy as a prime example of radical democracy. Paulina Tambakaki (2017), in contrast, reserves the term for a wide range of postmodern democratic thought including agonistic and autonomist Marxist writing. In an attempt to distinguish agonistic democratic thought from the broader discourses described by Tambakaki, Mark Wenman (2013, 5, 89ff) and Ed Wingenbach (2011, xvi) use radical democracy only to describe the autonomist Marxist camp.

In this thesis, I make a case for adhering to the original meaning of radical democracy as used by Pateman and indeed prior to her. If radical democracy is taken to mean what its etymology implies – the roots, original meaning or essence of the rule of the people (Holman *et al.*, 2015) – then neither agonists, participatory nor deliberative democrats can be excluded from this term since all of them focus on participation and equality vis-à-vis the current representative model. Such a broad meaning of radical democracy as the umbrella term for several perspectives in democratic theory is currently being used by a growing number of authors (Dahlberg & Siapera, 2007, 7; Little & Lloyd, 2009, 2; Norval, 2007, 13, 38; Saward, 2003, 150). In this sense, Aletta Norval (2001, 26) writes: "Radical democracy may be characterised as an ethos of radicalisation. This ethos is constitutive of agonistic, antagonistic and discursive, as well as deliberative models of democracy, all of which form part of contemporary radical democratic theory".

## 1.8. Facing Challenges

Before delving into the central debates of this thesis, I will address three points of contention that can be raised against the arguments articulated here.

The first concern is that an argument for anonymity in political participation threatens to make groups in society that suffer from historic marginalization invisible. Recommending masks, avatars, pseudonyms and the like for those who are structurally made invisible, disregarded, and pushed to the margins in public debate has potentially detrimental effects. Phillips (2015, 36) is right to argue: "We should not have to pretend away key aspects of ourselves, ask for forbearance in the face of our particularities, or appeal to people to see who and what we are 'beyond' our gender, skin colour, sexuality, or disability". Some cyberdemocratic discourses discussed in Chapter 6 indeed argue for leaving the body behind when entering cyberspace to experience freedom from identity. Julie Cohen (2012, 40f) adequately responds to these conceptions: "we cannot simply leave bodies and space behind as we enter the networked information age… To understand the emerging networked information society, we must take bodies and embodiment seriously and inquire how networked information technologies reshape our embodied perceptions and experiences".

At times this thesis might be interpreted as coming close to such a position of endorsing disembodiment and masking inequalities. The core argument here, however, is entirely different. I go along with Phillips' notion of the politics of the human constituted by a subject combining universal humanness and particular identity affiliations (Phillips, 2015). I follow the core ideal articulated by Young (1990) and Fraser (1990) of a society that celebrates the differences of equals. The core argument of the thesis is that such a diversity among equals cannot always be achieved through a traditional politics of presence facilitated by the visibility of the physically embodied and officially identified person. Instead, presence needs to be re-interpreted as being constituted by various expressions of the multiple self through diverse media in various participatory spaces. The interruption of continuous modes of identity articulation allows for the experience of new forms of presence – some might even feel truer than the performance of continuous identity. Rather than seeing a politics of presence and a politics of becoming as mutually exclusive alternatives, I see them as complementary and even overlapping. It is the diversity of various participatory spaces allowing for different identity expressions that constitutes radical democracy.

The second point that might concern the reader regards the limited accessibility of digital communication to disadvantaged strata within societies and globally. Indeed, digital

divides and digital inequalities constitute significant barriers to participation on both a global and a national scale (Robinson *et al.*, 2015). Exclusion from online participation along gender, race, class, age, and geographic divides leaves these new possibilities of engagement beyond the reach of many. The factual increase in participatory possibilities thus also widens gaps in political engagement. Here, I go along with Kenneth Gergen, who stated two decades ago: "There is surely a gap between the technological haves and have-nots, but there are good reasons to suspect it is shrinking" (2000, xxi). This suspicion has been confirmed in recent years with digital divides dramatically narrowing globally and even disappearing in some countries such as the US, where women now have more internet access then men. A racial divide remains, but this is also shrinking (Campos-Castillo, 2015). Some studies have even shown how homeless people use the internet in their daily lives (Franklin, 2013, 93ff), which demonstrates how far digitization has currently progressed and hints at how far it might go in the future.

Lastly, and in connection with the two points discussed above, since poststructuralism has acquired prominence, there is an argument made against the focus on identity. From a (historical) materialist perspective, the focus that this thesis takes on gender, racial, sexual, and socioeconomic identities does not do justice to the overarching problem of the unequal distribution of economic resources along the class divide. Following this argument, exploring means of rearticulating identity and exploring the multiple self is oblivious to the fundamental inequalities that determine who has resources for such explorations and deconstructions. To this, I respond with an argument articulated by Nancy Fraser (1997). She criticizes the "increasingly bitter split between 'the social left' and 'the cultural left'", a split between the politics of redistribution along the category of class and the politics of recognition along diverse identity groups: "critical theorists should rebut the claim that we must make an either/or choice between the politics of redistribution and the politics of recognition. We should aim instead to identify the emancipatory dimension of both problematics and to integrate them into a single, comprehensive framework" (4). I go along with Pateman who claims that it is crucial to always keep the bigger picture in mind and account for structural inequalities in which participatory spaces are embedded in (Pateman and Smith, 2019; Pateman, 2012). While this thesis clearly focuses more directly on questions around the politics of recognition, it sees these questions as being closely related to and overlapping with questions of distribution. The marginalization and disrespect of identity groups is deeply intertwined with the unequal distribution of economic resources. To think recognition and redistribution together, this thesis situates itself in a transformative perspective in democratic thought introduced in Chapter 4, which understands the

democratization of self-constitution and the transformation of society toward social equality, a just distribution of resources, and ecological sustainability as inherently linked. Democratic transformations of the self and society go hand in hand.

## 1.9. Chapter Overview

To explore how radical democratic practices of disidentification in participatory spaces can reconfigure the relations of freedom and equality, this thesis will proceed as follows.

Chapter 2 will develop a democratic theory of space. It brings together two strands of the literature on democratic spatiality and thus combines insights from the study of physical sites of democratic engagement (Parkinson, 2012) with studies that use the term space in a metaphorical sense to conceptualize social and discursive interaction (Dikeç, 2015). Drawing on Hannah Arendt (1958) and Judith Butler's (2015) work on the space of appearance and taking inspiration from new materialist thought, I introduce a concept of participatory spaces as agentic assemblages consisting of physical, social, and discursive things. It is the mutual affectivity of these things that bound space and afford, restrict, and suggest possible action. Democratic subjects themselves understood as assemblages are both constituted by such democratic spatiality and constitute participatory spaces through their actions. The things that make up the assemblages of democratic subjects are intertwined with the things that constitute space. Alterations of the self trigger alterations in spatiality and vice versa.

Having developed a concept of democratic spatiality, Chapter 3 asks how equality can be advanced within such participatory spaces. It revisits difference democratic thought as feminist debate in democratic theory that draws attention to modes of devaluation and discrimination along the lines of identity markers of gender, race, class, and sexuality within participatory spaces (Mansbridge, 1999b). Their argument for a politics of presence (Phillips, 1995) giving marginalized subjects visibility within the space of appearance constitutes a conscious intervention in the social composition of participatory spaces. The presence of members of marginalized groups constitutes democratic space differently (descriptive representation), potentially also reconfiguring discursive space (substantive representation). Yet, the politics of presence is overshadowed by the dilemma of difference (Young, 1989, 268). As difference democrats elaborate, equalizing mechanisms such as quotas in participatory spaces afford presence, but also entail essentializing tendencies confining the democratic subject to its identified body. While the politics of presence successfully advances equality, the freedom to explore different sides of the multiple self is compromised.

Chapter 4 seeks a way out of the dilemma of difference and asks how equality in participatory spaces can be accompanied by freedom for the subject to change. It first consults participatory, deliberative, and agonistic perspectives in radical democratic thought in the search for modes of self-transformation. As these three perspectives render limited results, the chapter introduces a recently evolving perspective that so far has received little attention in the mainstream of democratic theory. What I term the transformative perspective calls for a radical transformation of society as a deep experience of freedom and equality that interrupts domination (Hardt & Negri, 2004; Newman, 2016). This perspective harnesses the greatest potential to understand self-transformation. The notion of disidentification suggested by the transformative perspective conceptualizes the rejection of hegemonic identity interpellations as part of a politics of becoming that results in the emergence of new collective subjects with improper names (Rancière, 1999). What remains unexplained, however, is how disidentification can be experienced on an individual rather than a collective level. To answer this question, the chapter infuses radical democratic thought with queer theory. Understanding identity performances as masquerade (Butler, 1990, 50) allows for thinking about how the everyday masks subjects are wearing can be resignified and deconstructed (Butler, 2004; Muñoz, 1999).

Chapter 5 asks how such radical democratic practices of disidentification as part of a politics of becoming can be practically exercised. It explores anonymity in various modes of democratic participation. The chapter generates an original conception of anonymity rooted in democratic theory. It shows how anonymity rearranges space by interrupting the established order of things through interfaces. This spatial rearrangement channels discursive things from private into public spaces. This concept of anonymity allows for a reinterpretation of the politics of presence. Instead of interpreting anonymity as mere absence of identity, anonymity facilitates a different mode of presence. Presence is facilitated through the absence of certain aspects of the coherent assemblage of the physically embodied and legally identified persona. This new mode of presence is made possible through the interruption of continuous identity performances, which allows for hidden aspects of the multiple self to appear. This also entails a reinterpretation of the concept of the space of appearance, which has wrongly been associated with the visibility of the physical body. Anonymity, I contend, allows for new modes of appearing through improper names. The space of appearance is thus better understood as allowing for perceptibility rather than visibility. The concept of anonymity developed here shows that anonymity is always liberating; it privileges freedom over equality. The discussion of anonymity, however, also reveals that freedom and equality are not always in tension. While the anonymous freedoms to exclude,

submit, and deceive undermine equality, the anonymous freedoms of inclusion, subversion, and honesty contribute to equality. Anonymity appears as inherently contradictory, as both constructive and destructive forces are set free in the becoming subject.

As the digital age establishes the interruption of identity through anonymity as a core feature of everyday communication, the sixth and final chapter explores how modes of dis-identification come into play in participatory spaces on the internet. It revisits the poststructuralist-inspired debates on cyberdemocracy of the 1990s that explain the digital self as existing only by the words it utters in a world that is overcoming the restraints and inequalities tied to the identified, physical body (Poster, 1997; Rheingold, 1993; Turkle, 1995). They imagine an increase in personal freedom by "leaving the body behind" and conceptualize cyberspace as a separate realm that follows its own logics. This discourse has been criticized from the perspective of cyberfeminist and critical race studies, which claim that disembodiment masks the subjugation of the marginalized and thus works against a politics of presence (Nakamura, 2002). Current debates, in contrast with the cyberdemocratic conception of cyberspace as separate from analogue space, insist on collapsing the digital and the physical (Isin & Ruppert, 2015). The chapter develops a new theory of digital space beyond these two positions. It explains digital space as an assemblage of physical, social, and discursive things that is characterized by interruption. This theory of digital space allows for rethinking the politics of presence in the digital age. Explaining the subject of the digital age as a cyborgian assemblage of human bodies and technological devices (Haraway, 1991 [1985]), the chapter explores a digital politics of presence. Several studies of empirical examples demonstrate that a digital politics of presence articulates marginalized identities in digital spaces but at the same time renders identity transformative by extending the agency of the subject to reassemble the self both online and offline.

The conclusion asserts that the reformulation of the politics of presence in the digital age developed in this thesis is to be understood as one aspect of a politics of becoming which forms part of a progressive, radical democratic strategy for social transformation. The argument that the thesis makes is not one for particular kinds of identity performances afforded by particular kinds of spaces. Rather than pursuing the development of ideal spaces as democratic theory has attempted in the past, it needs a pluralization of spaces that afford different kinds of identity expressions to fulfil the democratic ideal of diversity.

# 2. A Spatial Theory of Democracy: Exploring the Dimensions of Participatory Architectures

*If democracy were a building,*
*the "under construction" sign*
*would never be removed.*

*Michael Saward, 2003a*

## 2.1. Introduction

In a scene from the 2015 film *Suffragette*, which tells the story of the movement for women's right to vote in the UK in the early 20th century, the laundry worker Maud Watts gives testimony in a parliamentary committee. The committee is to make an important decision regarding women's suffrage. The 24-year-old from a working class background, and no stranger to hard work and poverty, is evidently intimidated by the situation. Seated in one of the richly decorated committee rooms of the Palace of Westminster with high windows and gold decorum on the walls, Maud finds herself surrounded by men in elegant suits densely filling the benches of the committee room. Maud is positioned at the front of the room in a chair facing a panel of committee members. The other onlookers are positioned in rows to Maud's left, right, and back, so that Maud is surrounded by their gazes from all sides. When the committee speaker invites Maud to give her testimony, after a long silence, Maud responds: "I don't know what to say".

This example, although fictive, illustrates the powerful effects of space on participatory processes. It is the physical room itself, its decorum and grandeur that signals social status and causes those who do not dress, speak or behave accordingly to feel inferior. It makes them feel *out of place*. The room puts the people within it *in their place*. By signalling identity it creates class and gender hierarchies. The arrangement of the seats focuses people's attention on only a few people. The room thus assigns clear roles of listeners and speakers. It creates hierarchies of attention. Maud's silence followed by "I don't know what to say" highlights not only the limits imposed by the social protocols, but also the discursive boundaries of the words available in a given spatial arrangement. The bodies assigned to the seating order, exposed to the social protocols, and limited by discursive affordances have a choice in submitting to these structures or rebelling against them. The spatial

structures, however, are in place. They are real and they are powerful, whether consisting of bricks and mortar, social conventions or discursive terms. Thus, freedom and equality are afforded and restricted by assemblages of physical, social, and discursive things that constitute space.

The ample metaphorical language evoking spatiality in everyday communication indicates the central role that such spatial imagination plays in current thinking. Metaphoric space is invoked, for example, when we try to make sense of society, understanding it in terms of different social positions, social strata, or high and low levels of education. Space is also used to explain inequality when we speak of power asymmetries and hierarchies. Spatial metaphors are used to indicate time when we say: "In this debate, I had no space to speak because others took up all the space". Space may also refer to content when we express "positions" in a discussion. Or space can indicate emotions when we say: "I was not in the right place to talk about this".

The relevance of space in a metaphoric sense is at the forefront of the recent spatial turn in social sciences, with influential work such as Henri Lefebvre's *The Production of Space* (1991 [1974]) leading the way. Democratic theory has been eager to employ this metaphoric sense of space to conceptualize new forms of democratic participation. John Dryzek (2009) traces the transmission between *public space* and *empowered space* (governmental institutions) in the deliberative system. Chantal Mouffe (1993, 20) observes: "Our societies are confronted with the proliferation of political spaces which are radically new and different". And Andrea Cornwall and colleagues speak of new *participatory spaces*, differentiating between *closed spaces* such as parliamentary committees, *invited spaces* such as citizens' assemblies, and *claimed spaces* such as social movement meetings (Brock, Cornwall & Gaventa, 2001; Cornwall & Schattan Coelho, 2007; Cornwall, 2017).

Such metaphoric use of the term "space" in democratic theory has been heavily criticized by geographers and urban scholars, who point to the missing connection between "real", physical space and its metaphoric citation. And indeed, the use of "space" in democratic theory remains unsubstantiated for the most part. Authors such as Mouffe and Dryzek still owe an explanation of what space actually means. Rather than explaining what is *spatial* about these new participatory spaces, these authors often limit their definitions to the participatory character of the spaces under discussion. John Gaventa (2006, 25), for example, writes: "In this article… 'spaces' are seen as opportunities, moments and channels where citizens can act to potentially affect policies…". Elsewhere Gaventa and others explain the spatiality of new participatory processes by highlighting social relationality and power

structures. But their work fails to show a direct connection of such metaphoric spatiality to physical spaces (Parkinson, 2012, 6). The "failure to discuss the implications of *material* space on political engagement suggests that 'the geographic imagination' of political theory is underdeveloped and unsubstantiated" (Brown, 1997, 14).

The alternative provided by these critics, however, only partly solves the problem. While through meticulous descriptions of rooms, buildings, and public squares they investigate the effects of physical space on human behaviour, they hardly acknowledge the social and discursive spatialities that are intertwined with physical space. John Parkinson's *Democracy and Public Space* (2012), for example, argues "that democracy depends to a surprising extent on the availability of physical, public space" (1). The book extends "the idea common in political science – that institutions structure political behaviour – and ask[s] whether this is true in a physical, bricks-and-mortar sense as well" (6). In other words, the shape of physical things shapes human interaction. While such an endeavour pays close attention to physical spaces, it understands social and discursive elements of participatory encounters as consequences of physical spatiality and thus as external effects. This envisions a unidimensional causality: physical space affects human behaviour. While these authors convincingly deny deterministic intentions, traces of determinism linger in their account of unidirectional effect.

So the current state of theories of democratic spatiality is characterized by a disjunct resulting in unidimensional conceptions of participatory spaces. The literature on physical spaces, on the one hand, focuses on the effects of physical spatial arrangements on social behaviour but does not consider social and discursive spatiality. The literature on social and discursive spatiality, on the other hand, does not relate to insights on physical spaces and uses the term "space" as unsubstantiated metaphor. What is needed is an integration of the conceptions of physical and socio-discursive spatiality to generate a holistic, multidimensional understanding of participatory spaces.

By reviewing the literature that theorizes the relationship between democracy and space[4], this chapter will develop a concept of participatory spaces as multidimensional constructs interrelating physical, social, and discursive architectures.[5] Rather than just adding these

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[4] This focus ensures the coherence of this thesis and supports its interest in democratic thought. Beyond the texts discussed here, there is a wide array of literature on social and discursive spatiality, from the early writings of Lefebvre (1991 [1974]) and Foucault (1986 [1967]) to Massey's (2005) more recent texts that will only be featured here indirectly.

[5] By choosing to speak of multidimensionality to describe democratic spatiality, I engage in discursive spatialization myself. I could have spoken of different levels, aspects or elements of spatiality, each of which would have implied a different discursive spatial arrangement.

three dimensions of space as if stacking three layers on a pile, I argue that together the three dimensions are more than the sum of their parts. Drawing on new materialist theories of assemblage, the three architectures are understood as consisting of the relationality between affective things that produce and bound space. These various constellations of physical, social, and discursive things are characterized by mutual affectivity diffused in intricate spatial arrangements. Space is not defined as objectively measurable relationality between these things. Rather, it is the subjective movement between things that makes space experienceable. Subjects are not the only ones who are capable of movement. Things themselves are restlessly in motion as they assemble and reassemble space (see Barad, 2008, 139). This can be understood in an objectivist manner: things have a life too – they come into being, exist, and decay. But it can also be understood in a subjective manner: things are always perceived differently. This understanding of space as agentic assemblage provides new insights into what happens in participatory spaces. Rather than thinking in terms of cause and effect, I suggest thinking about the agentic nature of the different spatial dimensions, which through their mutual affectivity – with human subjects as a social part of the spatial arrangement itself rather than an alien exteriority – constitute participatory spaces. The different spatial constellations of affective things that bound space produce different contexts for the interaction of freedom and equality.

These reconfigurations of freedom and equality in the context of different constellations of things do not just affect what democratic subjects can and cannot do; they are also deeply intertwined with how democratic subjects see themselves, others, and the world. Democratic spatiality is woven into and partly inseparable from the constitution of the self. To explore how spaces constitute subjects, I draw on Hannah Arendt's concept of the "space of appearance" as the configuration of social relationality through public speech and action: "without a space of appearance and without trusting in action and speech as a mode of being together, neither the reality of one's self, of one's own identity, nor the reality of the surrounding world can be established beyond doubt" (Arendt, 1958, 208). But space does not simply constitute us in a unidirectional way; rather, spaces are at the same time the product of our making. In her recent work, Judith Butler further develops Arendt's space of appearance by studying the public assemblies that emerged in 2011 across the world, most notably in the Occupy movement (USA, UK), the Indignant movement (Spain, Greece), and the Arab Spring (North Africa, Middle East):

> So though these movements have depended on the prior existence of pavement,
> street, and square, and have often enough gathered in the square such as Tahrir,
> whose political history is potent, it is equally true that the collective actions

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> collect the space itself, gather the pavement, and animate and organize the ar-
> chitecture. As much as we must insist on there being material conditions for
> public assembly, and public speech, we have also to ask how it is that assembly
> and speech reconfigure the materiality of public space and produce, or repro-
> duce, the public character of the material environment. (Butler, 2015, 71)

I will pick up these lines of thought from Arendt and Butler and enrich them with inspirations from new materialist assemblage theory. By conceptualizing the democratic subject itself as comprising multiple affective things, I will further explore the interrelation of space and self understood as agentic, interwoven, and at times inseparable assemblages. These assemblages of space and the self create different affordances for the subject to change.

This chapter will lay the theoretical groundwork and clarify the core concepts of this thesis. It will first engage with the literature on participatory spaces that discusses participation in invited, claimed, and closed spaces. In the next step, this concept will be deepened by drawing on new materialist thought. The next section will introduce a multidimensional theory of democratic spatiality differentiating its physical, social, and discursive dimensions. The last step will then consider the role that such spaces of appearance play in constructing identity and constituting democratic subjectivity.

## 2.2. New Participatory Spaces: Inviting, Claiming, and Closing Democracy

The notion of participatory spaces emerging in feminist development studies describes "new architectures of democratic practice" (Cornwall, 2002b, 1). One of its central achievements is drawing attention to commonalities between three areas of democratic participation that are otherwise studied separately in different academic fields: the study of democratic innovations, social movements, and representative governmental institutions (Brock *et al.*, 2001; Cornwall, 2002a; 2017; Cornwall & Schattan Coelho, 2007; Cornwall & Shankland, 2013; Gaventa, 2006).

What Andrea Cornwall and colleagues call *invited spaces* describes participatory formats that are the domain of the study of democratic innovations (Fung & Wright, 2001; Geissel & Newton, 2012; Grönlund *et al.*, 2014; Smith, 2009; 2005). Invited spaces are created by resource rich actors such as state agencies or NGOs for the participation of citizens. A wide array of studies on invited spaces have analysed different participatory formats around the world such as the Gram Sabha village assemblies in India (Aiyar, 2010), local forums for citizens' engagement in South Africa (McEwan, 2005) and Angola (Roque & Shankland, 2007), participatory budgeting in Brazil (Wampler, 2007), and referenda in Switzerland

(Cheneval & el-Wakil, 2018). Cornwall sees such invited spaces as an important element of a long-term process of democratic transformation (Cornwall, 2004b, 85). She also points to potential dangers, however. Invited spaces are sometimes created to co-opt participants and legitimize decisions already made by governmental institutions (Cornwall, 2002b, 8; see also Font *et al.*, 2017). Although attempts at co-optation can be made and participatory processes can be structured by their creators to favour certain outcomes, what actually happens within such spaces can never be predetermined. Participants can challenge the original purpose of invited spaces and use them in unintended ways. As such, invited spaces always foster the potential to challenge established power arrangements and facilitate innovative thinking and social change (Cornwall & Shankland, 2013, 316).

*Claimed spaces* describe participatory formats emerging in citizens' self-organized participation and are the academic domain of social movement studies (della Porta, 2009; della Porta & Rucht, 2013; Polletta, 2002). The dynamics of invited and claimed spaces are fundamentally different. Whereas invited spaces are created by one set of actors for the use of others, so that creators and participants might have different intentions, claimed spaces are created and used by the same people (Cornwall, 2002b, 17). The process of designing these spaces thus raises a different set of questions for designers. Rather than asking, *how do I want others to participate?*, the key question here is, *how do I want to engage with others?* Spatial formations of participation in social movements and civic initiatives have been subject to a wide range of studies including analyses of the global justice movement that formed around the protests against the WTO meeting of 1999 in Seattle (Shukaitis, 2005), the squatter movement in Athens (Poulimenakos & Dalakoglou, 2017), the Indignant movement against austerity policies in the government debt crisis in Greece in 2011 (Kaika & Karaliotas, 2016), public assemblies of the Arab Spring (Lopes de Souza & Lipietz, 2011), and anti-AIDS activism by the civil society organization ACT UP in Canada (Brown, 1997), to name a few.

Lastly, *closed spaces* are participatory institutions to which access is highly restricted (Cornwall, 2004, 5; Gaventa, 2006, 26). Participation is possible through channels of public legitimization such as election or through party delegation or appointment. These channels of access are highly exclusive and privilege white men with high incomes. This exclusivity, in my view, justifies the term "closed spaces". It is noteworthy, however, that access to such spaces is not entirely closed and that through legitimization processes such as elections or public polling they fulfil an important function in democracy. Taking a different perspective, Dryzek calls the same institutions empowered spaces (2009, 1385). The study of closed spaces is the domain of legislative and parliamentary studies which focus on the

physical architecture of parliamentary buildings (Dovey, 1999; Goodsell, 1988; McCarthy-Cotter *et al.*, 2018; Puwar, 2010) and deliberation in legislative processes (Bächtiger *et al.*, 2005).

The concept of participatory spaces then relies on the question of who creates participatory designs for whom. By focusing on the role of creators and participants, the concept of participatory spaces puts power at its core. It asks about the intentions behind participatory design (Cornwall, 2002b, 8). Apart from the central question of power, closed, invited, and claimed spaces also differ in terms of their durability and degree of institutionalization. While closed spaces are highly formalized institutions following clear protocols and often adhering to traditional procedures over centuries, invited spaces have a more experimental, semi-institutionalized character and are of shorter durability; meanwhile, claimed spaces are often short-lived and exhibit merely emergent traces of institutionalization as activists develop common decision-making rules (Cornwall, 2002b, 17ff).

## 2.3. The Stuff Participatory Spaces are Made of: New Materialist Inspirations

The concept of participatory spaces developed by Cornwall *et al.* provides a broad picture of participatory processes bringing into view different democratic formats. These conceptualizations are sensitive to socio-discursive spatialities, but they neglect the physical dimension of space. As mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, the literature on physical spaces that facilitate democratic participation, in contrast, neglects socio-discursive dimensions of space. Here I will develop a concept of participatory spaces, which recognizes how physical, social, and discursive dimensions of space interrelate in participatory processes. To bridge the divide between the two sets of literature, I draw on new materialist thought. This will not only help to explain how physical, social, and discursive dimensions relate to each other, but it will also show that social and discursive interaction is not a simple effect of physical space. Rather, all three dimensions affect each other in spatial assemblages that afford and bound participation.

To better understand the role that things play in new materialist thinking and what this can contribute to a democratic theory of participatory spaces, I will take a brief look at some of the central ideas in debates on new materialism. In doing so, it is imperative to keep in mind that new materialism is not a coherent theory but a diverse and ongoing debate. Many new materialist thinkers situate themselves in equidistance to positivism and poststructuralism, both criticizing and creatively building on their foundations. From positivism, new materialist thought takes the focus on the body and material objects but rejects its assumption of

an empirically measurable and quantifiable objective reality. From poststructuralism, it takes the notion of the relativity of subjective viewpoints and the mutability and contingency of things, while it rejects its sole focus on language and the notion of all-powerful discourses determining reality. This morphological or transformative aspect of new materialist thought is of particular interest for this thesis' undertaking of finding ways for the subject to change:

> New materialists are interested in exposing the movement, vitality, morphogenesis, and *becoming* of the material world, its dynamic processes, as opposed to discovering immutable truths. New materialism sees a physical and biological world operating not according to fixed laws and blueprints, but rather one teeming with dynamism, flexibility, and novelty. Such a world is not determined; rather it is constantly in the process of its making. (Pitts-Taylor, 2016, 4)

New materialist debates strive to overcome the binaries produced by both positivist and poststructuralist assumptions between language/ideas/reason and matter/body/flesh, between representation and the represented, with a simple concept: the vitality of all things (Dolphijn & van der Tuin, 2012, 107). They declare everything – even thought and abstract concepts – to be things and all things to be alive and carriers of agency. In this way, new materialist thought revokes the core dualism between object and subject. Things are not fixed, opaque, explorable, and definable entities that are acted upon by subjects. Instead things are always active in continuous processes of materialization; they are always becoming (Barad, 2008, 139). New materialism thus describes the world in procedural terms as in constant flux. It observes "objects forming and emerging within relational fields, bodies composing their natural environment in ways that are corporeally meaningful for them, and subjectivities being constituted as open series of capacities or potencies that emerge hazardously and ambiguously within a multitude of organic and social processes" (Coole & Frost, 2010, 10).

In the field of new materialism, theories of assemblage are of particular relevance for this thesis. The agentic nature of things does not just come into play when looking at things individually. Rather, things interact with other things, thus constituting networked affiliations resulting in assemblages of various shapes and sizes and composed of various elements: "Assemblages are ad hoc groupings of diverse elements, of vibrant materials of all sorts. Assemblages are living, throbbing confederations" (Bennett, 2010, 23f). Every thing within an assemblage consists of an assemblage itself. The furniture in a room consists of

chairs, tables, lamps, etc.; the chair consists of wooden parts and cushion, the cushion consists of wool, the wool consists of fibre, fibre consists of particles, and so on. Of course, assemblages do not merely consist of physical parts, but also contain social and discursive elements: the terms that denote them and the social conventions around them. The agency of such assemblages does not simply consist of the added agentic powers of each individual element that makes up the assemblage. Instead the sum is more than its parts as the assemblage develops an agentic force on its own (Bennett, 2010).

Consider what you as a reader are doing right now. Reading means not only comprehending the meaning of individual words, but connecting their meanings to form coherent content. The cognitive process of assembling meaning links words to each other. The words consist of letters, written on pages made of paper assembled in a book or words appear as assemblages of pixels consisting of zeros and ones in code on a computer screen. These letters, words, punctuations, pixels made of bits and bytes are reflected through light into your eyes and transmitted through millions of nerve cells into your brain, where they interact with brain cells, neurons, blood streams in your body, pumped through your throbbing heart. This cognitive interaction with words on paper and screens assembles images in your mind that relate to personal memories. The emerging meanings through this process of assembling things is different for everybody as assemblages of images, memories, hormones, and blood flows are different in every body and at every time.

The democratic potential of new materialist thought insofar as it understands anything as an assemblage of things, then, rests on the realization that the constellation of things can be rearranged. Things can be changed. In this chapter, I will look at participatory spaces as assemblages of affective things. It is the mutual affectivity between such physical, social, and discursive things that set the boundaries of participatory spaces and constitute the power relations within them. These things both affect participants but are also arranged and can always be rearranged through democratic subjectivity.

## 2.4. A Multidimensional Concept of Participatory Spaces: Exploring the Relationality of Physical, Social, and Discursive Things

Here I will pick up the debate on participatory spaces and deepen it through new materialist insights to bridge two sets of literature discussing the physical and socio-discursive dimensions of democratic spatiality, respectively. I will first summarize the key elements of the multidimensional concept of participatory spaces developed here and then elaborate them in more depth in the following sections.

One of the central omissions in the existing conceptualizations of participatory spaces is an apparent shying away from the notion of boundaries. It may be a democratic ethos of inclusion, a constructivist emphasis on contingency or an aversion to the positivist Newtonian notion of space as stable and measurable that leads current debates on participatory spaces to neglect boundaries as a defining category. In contrast, I believe that it is exactly the boundedness that defines participatory spaces, which raises the crucial question of inclusion and exclusion (Gaventa, 2006, 26). What defines participatory space is the relationality between things that separate an inside from an outside. I take inspiration from Laclau and Mouffe's (1985) concept of the constitutive outside, which defines identity and reality. In their radical democratic discourse theory, discursive concepts always rely on the definition of the other – that which is not included (Butler, 2015, 4f). Relations between outside and inside, however, are not defined by pure exclusivity, but rather by permeability: elements of the outside are always reflected in the inside and vice versa. Applying the notion of the constitutive outside to the concept of participatory spaces makes it apparent that such spaces are not only defined by boundaries, but also that the reality outside of bounded space is reflected within it. Cornwall (2004b, 80f), for example, draws attention to the partial continuation of social power asymmetries within participatory spaces against the intention of their design to disrupt external inequality.

Such an understanding of participatory spaces does not reduce space to a stable and measurable category. Rather, participatory spaces are volatile constructs because their physical, social, and discursive boundaries are demarcated by the relations of affective things that are never stable but ever creating and recreating their existence (Connolly, 2013; Coole & Frost, 2010; Dolphijn & van der Tuin, 2012; Pitts-Taylor, 2016). I do not understand non-human things as agentic in the sense of intentionality or consciousness, which I reserve for humans. Instead, I describe things as affective insofar as through their interpretation by humans they create affordances and limitations – they create what Lorenza Mondada (2011) calls "interactional space". It is the mutual affectivity between physical things such as walls and chairs, social things such as human bodies with their identity inscriptions, and discursive things such as concepts, ideas, symbols, and themes that defines participatory spaces.[6] The affectivity and, in new materialist terms, vitality of things – whether organic or not – derives from the relationality of human perception. Participatory spaces are ephemeral and in constant flux since they are continuously reinterpreted and reproduced by democratic subjects. Physical space can never be perceived in the same way through different

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[6] Bennett (2010, x) makes a similar distinction. What I call physical and social things, she refers to as thing-materialities and people-materialities.

perspectives rooted in diverse social positions and from the vantage points of different bodies with individual histories and experiences (Robinson, 1998, 534).

When defining participatory spaces as relational assemblages of affective things, then, what do these boundaries consist of and how does concrete physical space relate to abstract metaphoric space? I propose to imagine participatory spaces as consisting of three interrelated dimensions. The first dimension consists of the physical architectures defined by the relationality of physical things which limit, afford, and suggest movement (Parkinson, 2012). These physical spatialities are intertwined with social relations between organic bodies, human emotions, desires, power relations, and sexual attractions (Hénaff & Strong, 2001). Both physical and social dimensions of space are interwoven with discursive architectures of the written and spoken word affording and limiting what can be said and thought (Dikeç, 2012). These three interrelated spatial dimensions constitute assemblages that afford and bound the potentials for freedom and equality.

The three dimensions described here are not to be understood as sealed off, mutually exclusive categories. Parkinson (2012, 77) is right to ask: "can we separate the influence of physical forms from its social, cultural, and political context?" It is often hard to tell where the social dimension of emotive relationality among human bodies ends and the discursive dimension of linguistic expression begins. What is often overlooked is that the same goes for the physical dimension. Physical things are always perceived through socialized eyes and through the discursive terms assigned to them (Butler, 1990), hence they can never be sensed outside of social and discursive spatiality. So, although the boundaries between the physical, social, and discursive dimensions are indeed liminal and the three dimensions are endlessly interwoven, an analytical distinction still makes sense.

It is, then, the mutual affectivity of physical, social, and discursive boundaries, which both limit and afford agency, that defines participatory spaces. Together these three dimensions put in motion unforeseeable and not easily controllable dynamics, which make them more than the sum of their parts (see Bennett, 2010, 24). Affectivity, here, does not go in one direction and is not explainable as a simple calculation of cause and effect. The question is not only how physical space affects social and discursive potentialities. Rather, social relations, subjective feelings, and discursive constructions co-produce space in a relational web of affectivity. Thus, participatory space is indeed more than a metaphor, but it is also more than physical space affecting human behaviour. The interlinked spatial architectures of physical, social, and discursive things produce and limit potential action and are in turn produced and limited through human agency. Just as the space of the committee room in

Westminster Palace – with its physical setting of walls and chairs, its social relations between human bodies, and its discursive limits – was perceived in a radically different way by Maud Watts than the committee members present, so any participatory space restrains and affords the doable and sayable in complex ways.

To gain a better understanding of participatory spaces, I will now explore more extensively the literature on democratic spatialities along the three dimensions outlined above.

### 2.4.1. The Physical Dimension of Participatory Spaces

Considering the bounded nature of physical space, it is necessary to examine which physical things demarcate space. It is the physical boundaries of nation states consisting of fences, border crossing points, gates, mountains, seas, rivers, and sometimes even walls that demarcate the outside from the inside of state territories (see Wolin, 1994, 13). Parkinson (2012, 72ff) draws attention to how physical boundaries can impose social hierarchies as in the case of the infamous gated communities in South Africa instituting racial segregation or the border wall between Israel and Palestine. Public squares, streets, and bridges can, however, enable human encounter. Physical boundaries do not always hinder but might advance democracy, for example, when they facilitate what is referred to as democratic community by bringing together like-minded people or those with a shared sense of identity (Chapman & Shapiro, 1993). Walls can protect deliberating groups from external interference. Democracy, whether conceived of as a nation state, small community, or instantaneous activist meeting, always needs an outside that defines the inside – a demarcated space.

Alongside the notion of physical spaces for democracy arises the question of institutionalization as the perpetuation of democratic practices. Here building democracy can be taken quite literally. It is thus not surprising that much of the literature on the physical dimension of democratic spatiality focuses on parliamentary buildings. These closed spaces are characterized by the inscription of democratic practices into physical spatial arrangements. Nirmal Puwar (2010, 298) claims that "parliament consists of living scripts" as human bodies within them move through spatial arrangements that prescribe and regulate democratic performances. It is important to note, however, that such physically inscribed protocols do not always prevent and mandate, but often merely suggest (Parkinson, 2012, 77ff):

> A physical environment is created that indirectly influences behaviour within
> parliaments and by governments. While the physical setting does not by any
> means deterministically control the attitudes and behaviour of people, it does
> condition their thoughts and actions in preliminary, subtle and interactive ways.

> Buildings may be seen as a form of non-verbal communication in which messages are encoded by builders and then decoded by occupants, with probabilistic but potentially powerful cueing effects as a result. (Goodsell, 1988, 288)

Ample scholarly work illustrates how social relations and discursive expression within parliamentary closed spaces are influenced by their physical settings. The confrontational culture of the UK Parliament, for example, is inscribed in the walls, furniture, and room layout of Westminster Palace. The chamber of the House of Commons is among the smallest parliamentary assembly halls in the world. It is a quarter of the size of the German Bundestag, which ranks among the biggest. The House of Commons only provides seats for 437 of its 650 members. Debates thus literally become heated as the room temperature rises when the chamber is filled with human bodies. Members of Parliament (MPs) sit shoulder to shoulder due to limited space and the fact that seating consists of benches rather than individual chairs as in the US Senate, for example. Latecomers often sit on the stairs in the aisles between the benches, further contributing to a caged and at times aggressive atmosphere with shouting, jeering, and cheering interrupting speakers (Goodsell, 1988, 298; McCarthy-Cotter *et al.*, 2018, 54). Such audience interruptions are also common in parliamentary debates elsewhere. But while, for example, in the German Bundestag the size of the space places a distance between MPs, and the sole microphone at the speakers' lectern diminishes disruption, the small size and the distribution of microphones throughout the chamber contributes to the adversarial character of the debates in the House (Dovey, 1999, 88; Goodsell, 1988, 298; McCarthy-Cotter *et al.*, 2018, 54, 56).

Positioning MPs shoulder to shoulder not only dials up the heat, but also gives expression to political allegiances and alliances. Here the metaphorical standing shoulder to shoulder as an expression of comradery and unity in confrontation with others becomes physically manifest. The political confrontation is physically arranged by positioning two blocs of seats opposed to each other. Political opposition as a metaphorical term draws on spatial imaginations that materialize in these seating blocs, which were originally conceptualized for a two-party system and still to this day stage the confrontation between the government and the opposition (Dovey, 1999, 87f). When MPs from the government and opposition in the House confront each other, their physical territory is demarcated by a line on the carpet, which they are not supposed to cross during debates. These lines place speakers at a sword's length from each other so that if they were to engage in a physical sword fight, blades could cross but not reach the body (Dovey, 1999, 88).

The fact that MPs in the UK Parliament sit closely together in party blocs including cabinet members does not mean that they are spatially arranged as equals within each bloc. Rather, the seating arrangement inscribes a clear hierarchy between frontbenchers, including cabinet and shadow cabinet members, and backbenchers, who are often at the beginning (or in the twilight) of their careers. This hierarchy has significant consequences when frontbenchers and backbenchers compete for speaking opportunities (McCarthy-Cotter *et al.*, 2018; 56; Puwar, 2010, 309).

To add another point that is not mentioned in the literature, the adversarial culture that prescribes confrontation between clearly demarcated political blocs is further inscribed in the spatialized parliamentary decision-making procedures. When a voice vote by MPs does not render a clear result, a division is called. This performance takes the word "decision" quite literally. The term "decide" comes from the Latin "cut off". Making a decision means to eliminate other options (Asenbaum, 2016, 3). This cut is physically performed when the speaker announces: "clear the lobbies". MPs then separate, walking either into the aye lobby on the right or the no lobby on the left. Opinions are separated by walls. The speaker then announces the result of the division: "the ayes to the right…, the noes to the left…"

The adversarial setting of the UK Parliament differs from most other parliamentary assembly halls in which MPs are seated in a semi-circle or horseshoe shape, which indicates a more consensual orientation. Apart from the UK's adversarial blocs facing each other, the typical semi-circle shape can also be contrasted with the Chinese National People's Congress, which arranges seating in a single bloc facing a stage in a theatre-like setting – indicating quite openly that democracy is just a show. Speakers are elevated and look down on listeners, rather than the other way around as in the European Parliament, for example. In the common semi-circle-shaped parliamentary seating arrangements, the different factions are seated in blocs and separated by aisles. Particularly in the US Congress the expression "working across the aisle" is widely used to address inter-party cooperation. This fan-like seating arrangement emerged in the French Revolution and is the origin of the terminology of left-wing and right-wing politics – yet another spatial metaphor. The parliamentary setting also inscribes the relations of different governmental branches, particularly between the legislative and the executive. While in the UK Parliament members of the cabinet including the Prime Minister sit together with other MPs of their party, in many continental European parliaments the legislative, including the MPs of the parties in power, is seated opposite the cabinet. In the US with its strong division of power between governmental branches, cabinet members are entirely absent from Congressional debates (Goodsell, 1988).

Such practices of physical spatialization are not only observable in closed spaces. Much of the attention of those designing invited spaces is devoted to the effects of the spatial arrangement on the participatory process. As we have seen, the seating arrangement of participants can influence social interaction. If the bifurcated space of the two oppositional blocs in the UK Parliament contributes to confrontation and the semi-circle in many other parliaments contributes to a more consensual orientation (Goodsell, 1988, 299; McCarthy-Cotter *et al.*, 2018, 56), then the full circle in invited spaces further pursues this logic. Citizens' assemblies and open forums often seat participants in full circles to facilitate egalitarian and consensual communication: "The ideal arrangement for interaction or consensus forming and negotiation is a circle. Not only does a circular arrangement permit eye contact among all participants, it also removes any head of the table, so everyone is equal in status" (Creighton, 2005, 174). When there are so many participants that one circle does not suffice, invited spaces are often split into several smaller circles, often around tables, so that everyone has an equal position.

This circular shape is also characteristic of activist meetings which often arrange participants in concentric circles. They thus combine the principle of rows characteristic of parliamentary closed spaces with the circle shape characteristic of invited spaces. The egalitarian intention is combined with the reality of large numbers of participants and the need to share information and make collective decisions that include everyone. An activist reports from a meeting of the Indignados movement with its slogan "toma la plaza!", "take the square!"

> Some of the older or less-able participants were given chairs to sit on while others stood around the outside and the more physically flexible sat on the ground so that the meeting was structured in concentric circles going outwards from those sitting on the ground, to those in chairs, to those standing. This concentric circle formation is also an important political statement… People faced each other, listened to one another and did not privilege the role of facilitator or speaker above the role of participant. (Maeckelbergh, 2012, 220)

What parliamentary buildings are for closed spaces, public squares are for claimed spaces. William Mitchell points out that what the various protest movements of 2011, with their different causes and cultural contexts from the Arab Spring to Occupy and the Indignants, have in common is the squares. While other movements are represented in media discourses by the faces of their leaders, it is the leaderlessness of the movements of 2011 that makes the square their public face: "This is why the iconic moments, the images that promise to

become monuments, of the global revolution of 2011 are not those of *face* but of *space*; not figures, but the negative space or ground against which a figure appears" (Mitchell, 2012, 9). This leads Paolo Gerbaudo (2017) to term the diverse movements of 2011 the "movement of the squares". Public squares are the result of the architectural intent of city planning. Such physical openings in urban landscapes can afford democratic openings of discursive and material change (Mitchell, 2012, 18; see also Lopes de Souza & Lipietz, 2011; Parkinson, 2012, 73).

Yet, squares as architectural openings of the city are not all the same. Their particular structures afford particular types of engagement. Anastasia Kavada and Orsalia Dimitriou's (2017) study of the Greek Indignants describes the occupied Syntagma square as a bifurcated space consisting of the upper square and the lower square. The upper square was characterized by its proximity to the Greek parliament, which allowed for verbal protest addressing politicians through shouting and chanting. The hostile atmosphere of the upper square soon provided a fertile ground for racist and xenophobic sentiments. The lower square, in contrast, was physically separated by stairs leading down from the upper square. The distance from parliament and the hostile protest allowed for quiet and peaceful encounters. In the lower square, political action happened literally on another level. The popular assemblies took place here; it was also the organizing site for the occupants' food supply, medical aid, and temporary accommodation. The political ideals of the activists on the lower square centred on equality and inclusion (see also Kaika & Karaliotas, 2016).

As we have seen, physical space is a precondition of democratic engagement. However, only the interaction of physical things with social and discursive things constitutes participatory spaces as agentic assemblages.

### 2.4.2. The Social Dimension of Participatory Spaces

The discussion above addresses social interaction as effects of physical space. The point I would like to establish here is that social interaction is not well accounted for if understood as effect, implying a unidimensional relation from the physical to the social. Rather, I will argue that social relationality is part of space itself. While in the physical dimension of participatory spaces, participants' bodies appear as objects affected by physical agentic things (Puwar, 2010, 299), in the social dimension this relationship changes. Here human bodies appear as democratic subjects who constitute social space. Social space is generated through human presence and is thus in constant flux. As the composition of human bodies and their relations change, so does social space. Consider the power of one glance across a

room. If two people look at each other, a third person might avoid crossing the room between them. It might feel uncomfortable to intercept their visual communication. Human bodies, their communications and relations, create space.

An insulting remark in a conversation, for instance, immediately alters the social configuration of the given space. A new person entering the room, changing the constellation of people, can lead to different topics being discussed or discussions being shut down altogether. A conflict between two people can result in one of them leaving the room feeling that there is not "enough space" for both of them. Social space is thus rather an event and a process than a static arrangement. Space does not so much *exist* as it *occurs* (see Daskalaki, 2018).

We can begin to grasp how the affectivity of bodies constitutes the social dimension of participatory spaces, considering Butler's work on the movement of the squares:

> assembly enacts a provisional and plural form of coexistence that constitutes a distinct ethical and social alternative to 'responsibilization.' As I hope to suggest, these forms of assembly can be understood as nascent and provisional versions of popular sovereignty. They can also be regarded as indispensable reminders of how legitimation functions in democratic theory and practice. (Butler, 2015, 15f)

Here the coming together of subjects, who by assembling their bodies form another collective body, constitutes space. On the grounds of an empty physical space, a public square deliberately built as an opening between densely positioned buildings, a social space emerges constituted by the social relations of emotive bodies. These social relations bound space as they afford, suggest, and restrict action. The emotivity of these social relations is a central aspect of social space. Butler (2015, 15f, 26) points out the shared anxiety and anger of the assembled bodies. Both this emotive articulation directed at others outside the assembly and the solidarity felt among participants within the assembly produce social space. The emotive outside constitutes the inside and vice versa through the demarcation of boundaries (see Laclau & Mouffe, 1985).

The emotivity of social relations goes along with the power structures that assemble social space. Cornwall (2004a, 1) notes: "Thinking about participation as spatial practice highlights the relations of power… that permeate any site for public engagement". These power structures between agentic bodies constitute the relations of freedom and equality within

participatory spaces. Power that "springs up between men [sic][7] when they act together and vanishes the moment they disperse" (Arendt, 1958, 200) is also the defining element of Arendt's space of appearance, on which Butler (2015) draws. For Arendt, the space of appearance is independent of physical locality. As it consists of the social relations *between* subjects, it is directly linked to their bodies. Human bodies thus function as things, whose relationships constitute and delimit social space. Addressing the Ancient Greek polis as the original and ideal form of democratic spatiality, Arendt (1958, 198) claims: "The polis, properly speaking, is not the city-state in its physical location; it is the organization of the people as it arises out of acting and speaking together, and its true space lies between people living together for this purpose, no matter where they happen to be". Arendt further elaborates the mobility of social space:

> The space of appearance comes into being wherever men [sic][8] are together in the manner of speech and action… Its peculiarity is that, unlike the spaces which are the work of our hands, it does not survive the actuality of the movement which brought it into being, but disappears not only with the dispersal of men… but with the disappearance or arrest of the activities themselves. (199)

Looking at the history of parliamentary democracy in the UK, the dependency of participatory spaces on human presence, rather than physical space, becomes apparent. The closed spaces of the great councils which functioned as royal advisory assemblies as incipient forms of parliamentarianism did not always meet in the same location. They were called upon by the king or queen in different places according to their convenience and only in the mid-13th century started convening more regularly in Westminster Palace (Maddicott, 2010, 163). It was thus the presence of council members, their embodied identities and the roles they performed, rather than the physical location that constituted the participatory space.

In the same vein, Marcel Hénaff and Tracy Strong (2001, 2) contend that public political space does not primarily consist of physical, geographic location, but of the social relations and political interaction of human agents. The authors invert the relationship between physical space and social effects discussed in the previous section and stress that physical sites *are the product* of human creation: "*Public space is a human construct, an artifact,* the

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[7] The use of the English term "men" is misleading here. In Arendt's own German translation of the English original *The Human Condition*, Arendt uses the word "Mensch" (Arendt, 1981 [1960], 194) which translates to the English "human". "Men" often equated with "human" at Arendt's time of writing would today be more accurately translated as "human".
[8] See previous footnote (Arendt, 1981 [1960], 249).

result of the attempt by human beings to shape the place and thus the nature of their inter-action" (5; emphases in original). The authors echo Winston Churchill's famous saying: "We shape our buildings and afterwards our buildings shape us" (Commons debates 28 October 1943, col. 403).

The literature on participatory spaces records several examples of how physical space is repurposed and altered through the presence and action of human subjects. Puwar (2010, 299f) claims that physical space is never fixed, but always contested by human agency: "Inhabitation of space enables bodies to move in planned and co-ordinated ways but also in unpredictable ways. Boundaries etched in architectures of stone and iron grids do not go unchallenged". Such contestation changes the structural configuration of physical space and may produce alterations in the relations of freedom and equality. For instance, the re-built UK Parliament of 1834 for the first time included a women's gallery in the House of Commons chamber from which women – formerly entirely banned from attending parlia-mentary debates – could listen in. The metal grilles were installed to keep women in their place. On several occasions, suffragettes challenged this physical social arrangement. In coordinated actions, they threw leaflets promoting votes for women through the grilles into the chamber, transcending the physical boundary with their message on paper and through their chants. Two activists padlocked their bodies to the grilles, drawing attention to the physical restraint that the grilles posed to their political freedoms and to demonstrate their unmovable political convictions. Suffragettes also used the garrets and shafts of the parlia-mentary building to secretly gain access to the closed spaces of parliament, disrupted de-bates, and inscribed their messages as graffiti on walls. The aim of such contestation and partial alteration of physical space was not just to remove physical restrictions, such as the grilles separating silent women from vocal men, but also to rearrange social relations, which ultimately led to female bodies joining the exclusive male assemblage (Puwar, 2010, 300ff).

These examples of feminist protest in parliament illustrate how the original architectural intent of closed spaces can be contested through the instigation of temporary claimed spaces. Claiming space in itself illustrates the social production of space. This becomes particularly evident when the original purpose of physical space is resignified. Squatting provides a good example of such repurposing. The Athenian squatter collective K*VOX, for instance, occupied a former commercial café. The commercial space was repurposed to host the anarchist collective's regular assemblies, a social clinic, a library, and a meeting space for any political group that wished to use it (Poulimenakos & Dalakoglou, 2017). In both cases, namely the suffragette protest in parliament and the anarchist collective, it is

not primarily the alteration of physical space, but the alteration of its use through the presence and action of human subjects that reconfigures space.

Thus, social relations are an essential part of democratic spatiality. They constitute social space as eventful relationality between subjects. The physical and social dimensions of participatory spaces are deeply intertwined with discursive things that explain them and constitute their own dimension of space.

### 2.4.3. The Discursive Dimension of Participatory Spaces

To explore the discursive dimension of democratic spatiality, the etymology of the word "thing" is instructive. Medieval *things* were public assemblies that emerged in the 9th century within Viking societies. Constituting the common governing bodies throughout Scandinavia and parts of today's territory of the UK, these assemblies can be seen as successors of the Ancient Greek polis and predecessors of current parliaments. Things took place in public spaces and fulfilled their legislative and judicial functions with the participation of all free men. Assembly types were differentiated as *althings*, which discussed various matters compared to *lawthings*, which focused on legislative matters (Sanmark, 2013). This terminology can still be found today in the Danish Parliament, the *Folketing* (the people's thing), the Parliament of Norway, the *Storting* (the great thing), and the Parliament of the Isle of Man, *Tynwald* (thing meadow). Importantly, the meaning of the term "thing" shifted from denoting these public assemblies themselves to the topics that were discussed in them. Assemblies were thus called *to discuss public things*. It was not until the 13th century that the meaning of "thing" shifted once again from discursive subjects of deliberation to physical objects (Kullmann, 2018; Olwig, 2013).

I would like to revive this early meaning of "things" as subjects of debate to explore the discursive dimension of participatory spaces. Discursive spatiality then consists of an assemblage of topics in public debate – a continuously changing arrangement of discursive formations. Referring to these discursive things as *subjects* of debate rather than as objects also draws attention to their affective nature. Discursive things affect the social relations between human bodies and the perception of physical space.

To make this point, I draw on Butler's work on performativity (Butler, 2004; 1993; 1990). Through this perspective, we can understand physical space as the discursive articulation of humans. This evidently applies to the human creation of physical space as an artefact and product of architectural planning. Physical space appears as a human product when it is discursively constructed by relating discursive things in people's minds. It is described

in words, drawn on paper, and then physically constructed. Yet, following Butler, such an understanding of the discursive production of space goes deeper. Butler claims that (gender) identity and reality itself can only be perceived through our socialized perceptions. We can never know an objective reality. The subject is positioned within a citational web of discourses from which it can never escape. Any perception of reality is only a subjective interpretation that is shaped by the words through which it is articulated. Accordingly, the perception of any space – be it human-made artefact or natural environment – is always perceived subjectively and thus the product of human discursivity.

In this sense, Mondada (2011, 290) states: "discourses simultaneously represent and constitute the relations and places they depict and that give rise to them". Her case study analyses an invited space in which governmental actors engage citizens in a participatory city-planning project. In observing participants' interaction, Mondada differentiates between interactional space (which has been discussed as social spatiality in the previous section) and represented space. Represented space, addressing spatial imaginations and their linguistic representations, is what I refer to as discursive space.

This example of the discursive production of spatiality in an invited space illustrates what Mustafa Dikeç (2012) calls "space as mode of political thinking". Understanding "space [as] a sensible manifestation of things", Dikeç (2015, 2) conceptualizes the act of spacing as a cognitive process. Perceiving physical space means establishing relationships between physical things through visual, haptic, and/or olfactory perception. Such a process of physical spatialization can be equated to processes of discursive meaning-making: understanding or articulating spoken or written content means ordering concepts – discursive things – and establishing relations between them that make them intelligible:

> Political thinking brings together a disposition to be moved by and a capacity
> to relate and order what we perceive. Spatial imagination – seeing connections
> that cannot always be deduced rationally from the givens, establishing new re-
> lations and gathering, envisaging new forms and configurations – is thus an
> important part of political thinking. (Dikeç, 2015, 4)

Following this argument, any discursive act entails spatialization. Thinking, speaking, and writing all produce discursive space by generating linguistic structures of orientation. They articulate a path that others can follow. Such spatialization always entails establishing terms of inclusion and exclusion. This entails the delimitation of the discursive boundaries of a topic. Cornwall and colleagues, for example, explain participatory spaces in relation to policy spaces as the discursive constellations of debates on one particular policy issue (Brock

*et al.*, 2001, 7). Yet, discursive boundaries also limit what is sayable and thinkable in a particular context (Cornwall, 2004b, 75). Drawing on Foucault's (1979) symbolic boundaries of discourses, Cornwall alerts us to the fact that the availability of words is the prerequisite for expression (Cornwall, 2002b, 8). Such availability can be limited by the existence of words, the limits of the meaning of words, the knowledge or recollection of words, and, lastly and importantly, the social norms permitting the utterance of words in particular contexts.

Discursive boundaries do not simply have their own independent dynamics. Instead, they are linked to the social and physical dimensions of space. As mentioned earlier, the performative production of space refers not only to the actual creation of physical space, but also to its discursive creation which is directly linked to the perception of physical space. The words that describe physical space bring the latter into being. The physical boundaries of space, then, are never stable, but always contingent products of discursivity. This can be illustrated by the example of the Athenian squatter collective K*VOX mentioned earlier. The authors of the study show how the perception of the occupied space of the former commercial café changed through its discursive production, leading to the expansion and shrinking of this space. Discursively, K*VOX was often articulated as a small group of political activists. In these instances, its participatory space merely existed in the regular activist meetings held in a room of a former commercial café. An incident in which the squatter space was attacked by the Mafia, however, triggered a wave of solidarity in the neighbourhood. As residents perceived their own livelihood at risk through the Mafia attacks, the discursive boundaries of K*VOX expanded to include the entire neighbourhood (Poulimenakos & Dalakoglou, 2017).

This discursive production of space cannot be delimited from social and physical spatialization. Physical things that demarcate space can only be perceived through the discursive things that indicate their meaning, which are in turn produced within a network of social relations between human bodies. Differentiating between the physical, social, and discursive dimensions of democratic spatiality is merely analytical. In the end, however, it is the mutual affectivity and insurmountable interconnectedness of the three dimensions that define participatory spaces.

## 2.5. Spatializing Identity, Identifying Space

The discussion above has shown how the interrelation between physical, social, and discursive spatialities constitute intricate affordance structures of participatory spaces

enabling and limiting freedom and equality. To fully understand how participatory spaces affect democratic subjectivity, the role of the subject and the constitution of its identity needs to be explored in more depth. An understanding of subject and identity will also enable us to grasp what it means for the subject to change. To develop this understanding, I will start with the concept of the space of appearance that explains the democratic subject as visible agent coming into being through speech and action (Arendt, 1958; Butler, 2015; Dikeç, 2015). Here I will show that the boundary drawing practices of space making and identity creation are the same. Assemblages of identity and space are deeply intertwined and converge at times. I will then go on to explore the democratic subject as agentic assemblage whose many parts interact with the things that constitute space. Different spatial things enable the appearance and expression of different identity things. Spatial rearrangement as interruption then potentially affords temporary reconfigurations of the self.

### 2.5.1. The Space of Appearance: Of Visible Bodies and Exclusive Boundaries

Following Arendt (1958), participatory spaces are directly linked to identity because it is the public visibility of the speaking and acting body that constitutes democratic subjectivity: "It is the space of appearance in the widest sense of the word, namely, the space where I appear to others as others appear to me, where men [sic][9] exist not merely like other living or inanimate things but make their appearance explicitly" (198f).

This notion of the space of appearance as constituted by the public visibility of the democratic subject is picked up and further elaborated by other authors on democratic spatiality. Dikeç (2012, 672), for example, notes: "What spatialization does for Arendt is that it provides the stage for disclosure of the self in her distinctiveness". Butler (2015), also building on Arendt's space of appearance, draws attention to current movements such as Black Lives Matter (48) or protests of undocumented immigrants in the US (41), which by assembling publicly gain visibility:

> … when bodies assemble on the street, in the square, or in the other forms of public space (including virtual ones) they are exercising a plural and performative right to appear, one that asserts and instates the body in the midst of the political field, and which, in its expressive and signifying function, delivers a bodily demand for a more livable set of economic, social, and political conditions no longer afflicted by induced forms of precarity. (Butler, 2015, 11)

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[9] See footnote 7.

What is significant in the conception of the space of appearance by these authors is that the appearance of the democratic subject is tied to its visibility. The argument for political participation through visibility is also at the heart of Hénaff and Strong's conception of democratic spaces: "sight involves us most immediately with other human beings. In seeing someone or something, I create a space that is ours" (Hénaff & Strong, 2001, 6). Like Parkinson (2012, 34ff), they conceptualize participatory spaces as stages of democracy on which different actors perform different roles. It is the visibility of the actors and the glance of the audience that constitutes democratic subjectivity. In the same vein, Simon Springer (2011, 537) stresses the theatrical aspect of democracy. He contrasts the coming together of deliberating people in public assemblies with the individualistic practice of voting. Democracy, according to this argument, requires face-to-face communication with subjects physically present and visible to each other.

Butler's focus on the bodies that publicly assemble further emphasizes the aspect of visibility in Arendt's original work: "our bodies must be viewed and their vocalized sounds must be heard: the body must enter the visual and audible field" (Butler, 2015, 86). Butler goes beyond Arendt, however, by discussing the question of inclusion and exclusion in the space of appearance. Arendt's work gives the impression that anyone could cross the boundaries of the private into the public sphere and acquire visibility. Such publicity, according to Butler, is, however, highly regulated and dependent on social hierarchies tied to embodied identity. Discourses and practices of discrimination exclude many from being visible. Most notably in Western societies, women have been confined to the private sphere and barred from appearing publicly through political engagement. Today undocumented migrants remain out of sight (Butler, 2015, 35, 41, 73ff). One could add that currently children are hardly perceived as democratic subjects (Nishiyama, 2018).

When Butler highlights the exclusive and inclusive aspects of the space of appearance, she signals towards the argument of the convergence between space and identity that I would like to establish. Affective things establish not only the bounds of space but also the lines that demarcate identity. Physical boundaries such as walls and national border crossing points, social things such as human bodies which carry various identity markers, and discursive things such as names all simultaneously demarcate space and identity. Butler claims that democracy cannot exist without the demarcation of the demos as subject. In other words, democracy is always based on exclusion through boundary making practices: "there is no possibility of 'the people' without a discursive border drawn somewhere, either traced along the lines of existing nation-states, racial or linguistic communities, or political

affiliation. The discursive move to establish 'the people' in one way or another is a bid to have a certain border recognized" (Butler, 2015, 5).

In my view, demarcations of inclusion and exclusion are simultaneously practices of space making and identity creation. National territories, human bodies, and discursive terms are all constituted through exclusion. Linguistic definition and human cognition depend on exclusion per se (Phillips, 2010, 48f). Hence, we can understand identity and the formation of the subject as a process of including affective things within an agentic assemblage. The subject is constituted by the association of physical, social, and discursive things, by its blood flows, skin, and muscles, its religion, party affiliation, and opinions, its name, social security number, and signature. Rather than being constructed or articulated, identity is assembled. The subject emerges as a spatial configuration navigating through a discursive field of concepts, meanings, and identity interpellations. This discursive identity space is intertwined with physical locations of birth, living, and work, and social relations with other humans. The subject as spatial assemblage is not simply the effect of physical, social, and discursive spaces. It is inseparably intertwined with them, their product, their maker, and at times one and the same thing.

To get a better understanding of how subjects are constituted in participatory processes, we need to explore the workings of physical, social, and discursive things that bound participatory spaces in more depth and see how each of them affords and restricts democratic subjectivity.

### 2.5.2. Democratic Subjectivity as Spatial Configuration

Several authors on democratic spatiality elaborate how space creates different identity affordances. Beyond the claim discussed previously that physical spaces affect human behaviour, they claim that spaces affect who we are. Cornwall (2004b, 80), for example, claims that the configuration of participatory spaces affects what roles participants play and what sides of themselves they express. In the same vein, Parkinson (2012) introduces a performative account of democracy, which "alerts us to the *staging* of democracy: the need for and utility of particular platforms for the performance of particular roles" (10). And Brown (1997, 3) argues that participatory spaces give rise to different articulations of political identity. In short, these authors show that space affects identity. As we have seen above, others highlight that subjects create space. Subjects build and arrange physical spaces, produce discursive constellations, and generate social relations. Taken together, we thus see a bidirectional affectivity between space and identity. Identity and space are the

product of a dialectical process of co-constitution (see Springer, 2011, 537). As we will see, the two directions of this dialectical process even collapse at times and converge. As Doreen Massey (1995, 285) claims: "we make our spaces/spatialities in the process of constructing our various identities". Identity itself is constituted as spatial assemblage as the subject navigates through a web of discursive meanings and culturally coded things. Through affiliation with these things that are products of hegemonic identity interpellations, the subject assembles itself and demarcates identity space.

In what follows, I will develop a concept of democratic subjectivity as product and producer of space. The discussion will show how the physical, social, and discursive dimensions of democratic spatiality are intertwined with agentic identity assemblages that facilitate democratic subjectivity.

***Physical spaces and democratic subjectivity.*** The physical spaces we inhabit are one of the prime factors defining our identities. Being born or living in a country for a long period of time makes us Australians, Brits, or Nigerians; being at universities makes us students, scholars, or academics; on basketball courts we become basketball players, on shopping streets shoppers, on dancefloors dancers, and in our living rooms couch potatoes. The current controversy about gender-neutral toilets to break up the male/female binary and accommodate trans and intersex people is another example of how physical space creates identity boundaries that include and exclude (Gershenson & Penner, 2009). If you have ever lived abroad for a certain time, you might have experienced the feeling of being someone else. Often the feelings of excitement and liberation in different locations give way to frustration upon returning home when the old environment does not acknowledge the changes so deeply experienced abroad and forces the old self to come out again. The new self appears to be left on the other side of national borders.

The way we experience and express ourselves in different physical spaces also plays a crucial role in respect of democratic participation. When examining physical democratic spaces, in particular the buildings that host participatory processes, it makes sense to differentiate between internal and external effects on the production of identity and subjectivity (McCarthy-Cotter *et al.*, 2018, 55). Internal effects can be observed, for example, when examining the architecture of Westminster Palace, which is characterized by a clear division running through the entire building, separating the spaces of the House of Commons from the spaces of the House of Lords. The furniture and decor of the rooms signal a class divide that affects identities expressed within them. Standing in the central lobby of Westminster Palace, the corridor to the right leading to the House of Lords is lined with leather

benches in royal red; the seating of the benches lining the corridor to the left leading to the House of Commons is simple green. The rooms assigned to the Lords convey royalty through their rich golden decorum covering the walls and ceilings. Not just the chamber where debates take place, which is furnished with three royal thrones, golden clocks, and wooden lions, but all of the rooms, chapels, halls, and lobbies assigned to the Lords display grandeur and nobility. The spaces assigned to the Commons, in contrast, are furnished in a simple style with green benches and plain wooden panels covering the walls. The two realms of the Commons and the Lords are architecturally strictly separated, so that people within these spaces never cross paths except when entering the central lobby that connects the two wings (Dovey, 1999, 88; Puwar, 2010, 304).

The external effects of physical spaces on the constitution of the subject can be illustrated by examining the exteriority of parliamentary buildings. National parliaments perform national identity and construct an image of unity and belonging (McCarthy-Cotter *et al.*, 2018, 55). It is not just a national identity that is constructed, but also a democratic identity that entails citizenship and invokes political rights. Parliamentary buildings as diverse as the traditional neogothic palaces in London and Budapest, the neoclassical US Capitol reminiscent of Ancient Greek democracy, and the modern Parliament of Australia in Canberra all express both a national and a democratic collective identity. Parkinson (2012) calls this the symbolic effects of architecture. Buildings, monuments, and gravestones tell stories. These stories integrate personal life experiences into the narrative of a nation. Architectural narratives thus generate identity. Parkinson points to "the way that forms act as symbols, anchor points for memories and identity… [P]hysical anchor points of memory help people to think that people like them are taken seriously by the collective, which in turn matters for political efficacy" (74).

***Social spaces and democratic subjectivity.*** The same claim Parkinson and others make regarding the identity producing function of physical space, Cornwall makes for social space. Different social spaces configured by different constellations of human bodies and the power relations and emotive bonds between them give rise to different identity performances. It is the *betweenness* of human bodies, much in the sense of Arendt's space of appearance, that produces identity (Arendt, 1958, 198). In Massey's (1995, 285) words: "the identities, including the political identities, on which the project of radical democracy focuses are themselves formed in a spatialised interlocking of power-filled social relations". The identity performances through human bodies are afforded and restrained by the social relationality between subjects. The potential for freedom to express the self is thus in a state of constant flux:

> People move between domains of association in everyday life in which the ways they come to be seen by others, and seen themselves, may be strikingly different, with implications for the extent to which they are able to influence and indeed act as agents in particular spaces. Someone who is voluble and assertive in one setting may be silenced in others; someone looked up to with respect in one sphere may find themselves patronized and even derided in another. The mutual impingement of relations of power and difference within and across different arenas conditions possibilities for agency and voice. (Cornwall, 2004b, 80)

For Cornwall, it is not the physical space, as it is in Parkinson's approach, but the social space that constitutes the subject. Different people within a participatory space, different ways of moderating deliberation, and different rules of engagement afford the expression of different selves. Participatory spaces then fulfil a democratic function that is often overlooked. While many scholars ask about the real-world outcomes of democratic innovations, Cornwall and colleagues point to the function of identity constitution of such spaces. Democratic subjects do not enter and leave participatory spaces with predetermined, fixed identities. Rather, they produce, re-create, and alter their identities within the process of participation (Cornwall, 2004a, 6; Cornwall & Shankland, 2013, 315; see also Lloyd, 2005).

Focusing on social spatiality, it is not the qualities of the physical space, but the way physical space is used – the way it is socially acquired – that configures identity. For example, the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU) of the UK suffragette movement, known for its disruptive action including breaking shop windows and bombing public letter boxes, founded a number of commercial shops. The shops sold the weekly newspaper "Votes for Women", postcards, tea, toiletries as well as a series of other suffrage merchandise in the purple, white, and green colour scheme of the movement. These shops both supported the movement financially and provided meeting spaces for political debate and planning. But the shops did more than this. They publicly constructed an identity of suffragettes as respectable, reliable, and commercially successful women, which counteracted the militant image of the movement. Moreover, the products sold in the shop, such as cosmetics and scarfs, connoted with femininity and wealth, constituted an image of domesticity and docility in line with established gender roles: "By couching their outlets in terms of affluent, feminine retailing, branches distanced themselves from the image of hysterical militants, presenting themselves instead in terms of conventional, mainstream femininity. And, notably, this femininity – manifested in the (very) conspicuous consumption of material goods – was a predominantly middle-class one" (Mercer, 2004, 6). It was not the physical space

of the shops itself; it was the way it was used, the fact that it was occupied only by women and created for women, and the culturally coded things for sale that performed identity.

***Discursive spaces and democratic subjectivity.*** In the discursive dimension of democratic spatiality, the democratic subject emerges not out of social relations but rather from the constellation of terms and meanings. The names available and the terms that exist to describe democratic subjects brings them into being. Cornwall (2002b, 8) explains:

> What "participation" is taken to mean makes available particular subject positions for participants to take up within particular spaces, bounding the possibilities for inclusion as well as agency. Being constructed as "beneficiaries", "clients", "users" or "citizens" influences what people are perceived to be able to contribute or entitle to know or decide.

According to this account of the discursive spatialization of identity, subjects are constituted by the boundaries of terms that include and exclude. In the same vein, Butler contends that subjects only exist by the terms available to describe them. Subjects are born into a world of pre-established discourses that shape reality. Trying to orient themselves in such discursive webs of meaning, subjects have no choice but to accept the established terms, norms, rules, and discursive structures to express who they are (Butler, 2015, 40). While this account provides a good understanding of how subjects are constituted through discourses, we need to supplement it with a notion of discursive *spatiality* in order to understand how such processes relate to democratic spaces.

This point can be made by drawing on Dikeç's (2012) concept of space as mode of political thinking discussed earlier. Dikeç sees the space of appearance as the location for the subject to articulate identity: "Space becomes a form of appearance and a mode of actuality, making manifest established orders, generating particular relationships to them, and providing relational domains of experience for the constitution of political identities" (Dikeç, 2015, 2). Recall that Dikeç understands thinking as a mode of spatialization because any cognitive process consists of relating and ordering abstract concepts. Just as subjects perceive physical space as the relationship between physical things, so thinking consists of a process of mapping terms, concepts, and ideas. From this vantage point, we can see how identity constitution comprises the relating of discursive things. Being born into a world of pre-existing discourses – as Butler (2015, 40) claims – spatializing identity means relating points of identification to each other. These points of identification constituting personal identity such as gender, race, profession, class, sexuality, religion, and political affiliation mark different social positions. They mark locations within a web of meaning. Constituting

personal identity, then, means navigating within a web of meaning – an identity space – both actively searching for affiliation and being hailed by others. In this process of the spatial constitution of identity, the subject is not stable as it navigates through the web of possible identifications, nor is identity space stable itself, as the meanings of categories such as "man", "lesbian", "immigrant", "racist", and "Catholic" are constantly rearticulated and reinterpreted.

To conclude, the many identity elements that constitute democratic subjects interact with the many things that constitute democratic spatiality in various ways. The red colour of a leather bench cushion may call upon the sentiments of nobility in MPs while historical monuments may prompt a sense of patriotism in citizens. Experts taking part in a citizens' assembly call upon participants as reasoned deliberators, while the exclusion from participating in parliamentary debates may bring out the terrorist in feminists. And for all these identity constructions we depend on the constellation of words that we use to describe ourselves and that are used to hail us. All of these things matter for how subjects assemble. The different physical, social, and discursive arrangements of space resonate with different sides of the multiple self (Elster, 1986) from the *homo sociologicus* to the *homo economicus*, from the id, to the ego, and superego, from different desires and impulses to reflected reasons. But the relationship works the other way around too. Closed, invited, and claimed spaces are shaped by human agents who actively arrange physical, social, and discursive things. Who we perceive ourselves to be and who others perceive us to be within these spaces configures the space itself. The presence of a freedom fighter affects a space differently from the presence of a terrorist. Thus, space depends on the interpretation of identity. This dialectical process, the mutual affectivity of space and the subject, configures different relations of freedom and equality.

## 2.6. Conclusion

This chapter has sought to lay the theoretical groundwork for this thesis. It has developed a deep understanding of participatory spaces by bringing two sets of literature together, combining conceptions of space as socio-discursive constellations in participatory processes with literature on "actual" physical sites of participation. By integrating these two debates, the concept of participatory spaces developed in this chapter overcomes both the mere metaphorical use of the term "space" and the assumption of unidirectional effects of physical space on human behaviour. This new concept explains participatory spaces as agentic assemblages based on the mutual affectivity between physical, social, and

discursive things that demarcate an inside and an outside. The agentic boundaries of participatory spaces delimit and produce the potentials for freedom and equality.

These participatory spaces function as a space of appearance. Closed, claimed, and invited spaces provide stages for the democratic subject to become visible to others. The subject is constituted through its corporeal public performance and through the gaze of the audience. The various things that constitute such spaces interact with different aspects that constitute the multiple self. Seating arrangements and the size of physical space, the combination of people present and the social protocols, the terms that describe identities and the discursive formations emerging from debate all afford and restrict how subjects see themselves and others. This relationship is not unidirectional, however; rather, it consists of a dialectical process in which physical, social, and discursive things defining space call upon subjects and at the same time subjects rearrange things thus reconfiguring space. The identities that subjects express are, on the one hand, afforded by space, while, on the other, they are constitutive of space. As subjects change, so do spaces. These mutually productive processes are so closely related that space assemblages and identity assemblages converge at times. Understanding any linguistic expression as the production of discursive space through the mapping of discursive things, identity itself becomes a spatial engagement. The self navigates its way through a web of identity interpellations.

When understanding participatory spaces as assemblages of physical, social, and discursive things, the question arises as to how the constellation of these things can be altered to advance freedom and equality and how the subject can gain agency over self-constitution. Here, the question of identity becomes paramount. To what extent democratic subjects can express themselves freely and how they are judged by others within participatory spaces is closely related to their identities. These questions are explored by a feminist discourse in democratic theory identified with the term "difference democracy". The next chapter will engage with difference democrats' politics of presence, which seeks to advance inclusion and equality in participatory spaces. The politics of presence, as will become apparent, shares some core features with the space of appearance. It is through the visibility of embodied identities that subjects articulate political claims.

# 3. The Politics of Presence Revisited: Mapping Feminist Democratic Theory[*]

## 3.1. Introduction

In an early essay entitled "Throwing Like a Girl" Iris Marion Young (2005 [1977]) discusses the gendered nature of space. She observes that the personal space that an individual inhabits is not gender-neutral. Rather, men, overall, tend to use their bodies in a more dynamic and uninhibited way than women. Women tend to make small steps, cross their legs when sitting, and generally try to occupy a smaller space. When throwing a ball, boys tend to use their entire body to achieve maximal momentum while girls tend to stand still, fixed in space, and only use their arms. These gendered behavioural patterns are not rooted in biology, but in the different positions gendered bodies occupy within society. In this gendered matrix, female space appears confined: "a space surrounds us in imagination that we are not free to move beyond; the space available to our movement is a constricted space" (33). This variance in identity space is based on different gendered body perceptions. Men tend to perceive their bodies as natural and hardly pay attention to them. Male bodies facilitate subjectivity and create space through their presence. In contrast, "feminine existence experiences the body as a mere thing – a fragile thing" (39). As objects, female bodies are positioned in space and acted upon by male subjects and masculine power structures. The confinement of female identity space is partly due to defensiveness, as women tend to avoid colliding with the things that threaten them. The "invasion of her body space" (45) always poses a threat to a woman, of which subtle forms of sexual harassment are a common and rape the most extreme form (see also Phillips, 2013, 42ff).

Although Young's study on gendered space must be read in the specific context of the 1970s, it still has a lot of explanatory power today. It shows how the size of identity space and the freedom to move within it varies according to the social status of the identity inscribed in the body. The space of marginalized groups such as women and racial and sexual minorities has markedly increased over the past decades. While Young discusses male sex offenders as intruders, Nirma Puwar's (2004) more recent work turns this observation around and describes those bodies with marginalized identity inscriptions as "space invaders" as they push into the participatory spaces of the public sphere. She draws attention to the maleness of democratic spaces that are commonly perceived as neutral. The

[*] Parts of this chapter have been published in a research article in *Politics & Gender*, see Asenbaum, 2019a.

normalization of male space as default arenas for public interaction rests on boundary drawing practices that exclude those bodies identified as deviant: "Some bodies are deemed as having the right to belong, while others are marked out as trespassers, who are, in accordance with how both spaces and bodies are imagined (politically, historically and conceptually), circumscribed as being 'out of place'. Not being the somatic norm, they are space invaders" (8). Puwar describes an incident in which Diane Abbott as the first black and one of only a few female members of the UK Parliament entered one of the smoking rooms of Westminster Palace. The cigar-puffing white men were struck with bewilderment as a person who could only be a cleaner was present among them as an equal. The entering of a black, female body into white, male space "represents a dissonance; a jarring of framings that confuses and disorientates. It is a menacing presence that disturbs and interrupts a certain white, usually male, sense of public institutional place" (42).

The invasion of participatory spaces by bodies with marginalized identity inscriptions reconfigures the space of appearance where the democratic subject becomes visible. For Arendt plurality is a central precondition for the space of appearance, which facilitates the democratic exchange of diverse ideas. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Arendt's space of appearance is criticized by Butler (2015, 73ff) for its unreflected masculine bias that replicates naturalized exclusion, which renders the marginalized invisible. Arendt, according to Butler, overlooks the crucial role of materiality both concerning the material preconditions of appearing publicly, such as food and shelter, and the centrality of bodies and their identity inscriptions. Arendt's pluralism, in other words, is limited to what Anne Phillips (1996; 1995) calls the politics of ideas. Phillips argues that liberal theories of pluralist democracy foreground the diversity of competing interests and forget about the diversity of identities. To overcome this omission, she proposes a politics of presence, which gives visibility to the marginalized in the space of appearance.

The politics of presence is the central theme of a feminist discourse in democratic theory associated with the term "difference democracy", which promotes the inclusion of the marginalized in participatory spaces. Through quotas in the closed spaces of parliaments, random selection in invited spaces, and identity politics in claimed spaces, the inclusion of marginalized bodies works as a visible claim for equality. The proposed techniques of inclusion can be seen as a structural interference with the order of things that make up spatial assemblages, altering the composition of bodies that constitute them. The politics of presence shifts marginalized bodies from private spaces to spaces of public visibility which challenges entrenched power asymmetries and thus contributes to the core democratic value of equality: "Challenging [power] structures… acknowledge[s] the group-structured nature

of social and political hierarchies, and thereby opens up space for political and policy change" (Phillips, 2019a forthcoming).

This chapter will explore the potential of the politics of presence to alter the space of appearance by including marginalized bodies. As we will see, this has beneficial effects on equality but it also entails essentializing tendencies that limit the freedom of the democratic subject to change. In accordance with the democratic paradox, an increase in equality is accompanied by limitations of freedom. This chapter also seeks to contribute to democratic theory more generally. While there is an abundance of texts on democratic theory that differentiate realist, pluralist, participatory, agonistic, deliberative, environmental, and cosmopolitan perspectives, difference democracy remains absent. Although the impact of difference democratic debates on democratic theory is undisputable, comprehensive attempts at mapping difference democracy are scarce and often brief (Dahlberg, 2005; Marx Ferree *et al.*, 2002, 306ff; Saward, 2003a, 134ff; see also Wingenbach, 2011, 132ff).

Dryzek's (2000) "Difference Democracy: The Consciousness Raising Group Against the Gentlemen's Club" is an exception. Yet, it takes a specific angle. Instead of focusing on the constructive ideas that characterize other models of democracy, it sketches difference democracy as primarily an oppositional discourse that is critical of deliberative democracy (see also Dahlberg, 2005).[10] While this may well be an important aspect, it is – from my perspective – not its defining feature. Deliberative democracy is rooted in a critique of the realist model of democracy, yet it is hardly comprehensible in purely oppositional terms. The understanding of difference democracy primarily as a critique of deliberative democracy appears to have a gendered aspect. Women are often defined via their relationship to men. They are perceived as lovers, daughters, and mothers, but not as agentic subjects.

Rather than defining difference democracy in terms of a feminist critique of "the gentlemen's club", this chapter will focus on its constructive features and explore it as a perspective in democratic theory in its own right. As outlined in the introduction, this thesis is making use of various radical democratic perspectives (Parkinson, 2012, 9; Smith, 2019 forthcoming). To the participatory, deliberative, and agonistic perspectives, which are widely known and will be discussed in the next chapter, this chapter will add a difference democratic perspective to answer the following question: how can freedom and equality be advanced from a difference democratic perspective?

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[10] Since Dryzek frames difference democracy primarily as a critique of deliberative democracy and not as feminist discourse, he includes other authors beyond the ones discussed in this chapter such as William Connolly and Chantal Mouffe.

### 3.2. Feminists Rattling at the Doors of Democratic Theory: A Triple Call to Action

Within a decade, three essays by different feminist democratic theorists appeared with the same title, "Feminism and Democracy". The first was by Carole Pateman, who in 1983 sent out a fervent call to no longer ignore the democratic insights feminism can offer to democratic theory. The aim of the essay reprinted in Pateman's *The Disorder of Women* (1989) was to instigate a debate in democratic theory about the role of women in democracy and about the refusal to admit feminist scholarship into the canon of democratic theory. Pateman's call proved successful as it was followed by Anne Phillips' "Feminism and Democracy" (1991), with Jane Mansbridge's (1998) text with the same title following soon thereafter.

Both Pateman and Phillips point to the significant overlap between feminist and democratic principles: "The two traditions [feminism and democracy] have much in common for both deal in notions of equality and both oppose arbitrary power" (Phillips, 1991, 1). If feminism, in broad terms, is understood as the equality of the sexes and the emancipation of women from the social position of subordination, and democracy is understood as equality and freedom in the political organization of society, their mutuality becomes evident (Pateman, 1989, 212; see also Ferguson 2007, 33; McAfee & Snyder 2007, VI). Mansbridge joins Pateman and Phillips in pointing to the democratic experience of the US women's movement (Mansbridge, 1998, 154; Pateman, 1989, 220; Phillips, 1991, 120ff). Phillips describes the democratic ethos of the participatory practices in feminist claimed spaces:

> For the women's movement, questions of internal democracy returned to the centre of the stage, this time imbued with an almost anarchist critique of authority, an intensely egalitarian approach. In most of the newly formed women's groups, any kind of hierarchy was automatically suspect. Meetings were informal and only loosely structured. (Phillips, 1991, 121)

To arrange participatory spaces in an egalitarian manner, activists invented new modes of engagement. For example, to facilitate equal opportunity to speak, verbal contributions were limited through an equal number of discs that each participant could "spend". Furthermore, tasks and responsibilities were allocated among the activists by lot.

Pateman's engagement with feminist perspectives inspires her to push the boundaries of her democratic vision even further than in her earlier work on democratizing various spaces such as the workplace, schools, public services, etc. (Pateman, 1970). Participatory democracy is not just about claiming the privatized spaces of work and opening the closed spaces

of the state. Instead, "democratic ideals and politics have to be put into practice in the kitchen, the nursery and the bedroom" (Pateman, 1989, 222).

This wide vision of democracy is based on the critique of the invisibility of women in mainstream political theory (see Mansbridge, 1998, 142):

> The power of men over women is excluded from scrutiny and deemed irrelevant to political life and democracy by the patriarchal construction of the categories with which political theorists work… The feminist challenge is particularly pressing in the case of radical democratic theory which argues for the active participation of all citizens, but has barely begun to acknowledge the problem of women's standing in political order in which citizenship has been made in the male image. (Pateman 1989, 14)

This invisibility of women, then, is based on the division of private and public spaces, with the private sphere – the domain of women, reproductive work, and sexuality – left out of sight. While liberal democratic theory, according to Pateman, is based on a contract, in which "men" consent to being governed, women are seen as naturally subordinate to men as their consent is not sought (Pateman, 1988; see also Phillips, 1991, 3). "In sexual relations more generally, a woman's refusal of consent – her utterance of the word 'no' or other clear indication of refusal – is systematically invalidated; her refusal is reinterpreted as 'yes'" (Pateman, 1989, 12f).[11] Pateman then goes on to ask how a person who is sexually humiliated and abused in the private sphere and who carries the double burden of housework, including rearing children and caring for old or sick family members, and professional work, can function in the public sphere as an equal and free citizen (221).

Pateman ends her argument for a feminist democratic theory with an emphatic call to action: "The lesson to be learned from the past is that a 'democratic' theory and practice that is not at the same time feminist merely serves to maintain a fundamental form of domination and so makes a mockery of the ideals and values that democracy is held to embody" (223). And this call, indeed, was heard.

### 3.3. The Problem of Internal Exclusion in Participatory Spaces

The feminist response in democratic scholarship that Pateman had hoped for quickly followed. In the same year as her call to action, Jane Mansbridge's *Beyond Adversary*

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[11] While Pateman's observation was made before marital rape was made illegal across the United States in 1993, it still bears relevance today in light of the series of rape and sexual molestation accusations being raised in the #MeToo debate.

*Democracy* (1983) investigated race, class, and gender inequalities in townhall meetings and workplace democracy. Throughout the ensuing decade, the feminist discussion in democratic theory intensified with central publications by Iris Marion Young (1990; 1989), Nancy Fraser (1990), Jane Mansbridge (1993; 1991), Anne Phillips (1995; 1991), and Carol Gould (1996).

Pateman had argued that feminist insight with its sensibility to identity related discrimination and marginalization could enrich democratic theory. And indeed, the ensuing discourse about the value of difference in democracy focused on modes of inclusion and exclusion along identity categories. Difference democrats discuss boundary making practices that decide who is present, who has the right to appear in participatory spaces. The difference democratic perspective goes further than just registering the physical presence of the corporeal subject. Rather, it provides a vocabulary with which to understand the boundary making practices of inclusion and exclusion *within* participatory spaces. Young differentiates between external and internal exclusion. External exclusion asks who is physically present. The established study of democracy focuses on external exclusion, telling the story of continually expanding political rights, in particular through suffrage. In respect of closed, claimed, and invited spaces, access to political participation is greatly influenced by the unequal distribution of economic, social, and educational resources (Young, 1999). Internal exclusion, on the other hand, determines the social standing of participants *within* participatory spaces. Respect and appreciation appear to be distributed just as unevenly as material resources. Inequality in resources correlates with group identities inscribed in the human body. Internal exclusion, then, draws attention to patterns of devaluation of discursive content uttered by participants whose physical appearance is identified with marginalized social groups (Young, 2000, 52ff). While being physically present in participatory spaces, some still remain outside the boundaries of appearance (Butler, 2015, 73ff).

It is not simply the physical body of the marginalized that triggers discrimination. Rather, their socially acquired cultural forms of expression are encoded with inferiority. Thus, it is the manner of expression that signals status. This observation leads difference democrats to criticize the particular forms of expression – namely reasoned, verbal argumentation – that conceptions of deliberative democracy call for. In "Against Deliberation" Lynn Sanders (1997, 348) argues:

> Taking deliberation as a signal of democratic practice paradoxically works undemocratically, discrediting on seemingly democratic grounds the views of those who are less likely to present their arguments in ways that we recognize

as characteristically deliberative. In our political culture, these citizens are likely to be those who are already underrepresented in formal political institutions and who are systematically materially disadvantaged, namely women; racial minorities, especially Blacks; and poorer people.

And in reference to Habermas' public sphere theory, Fraser (1990, 63) notes: "Discursive interaction within the bourgeois public sphere was governed by protocols of style and decorum that were themselves correlates and markers of status inequality. These functioned informally to marginalize women and members of the plebeian classes and to prevent them from participating as peers".[12]

Deliberative democrats have responded in two ways. A first defence of deliberative democracy holds that diversity has always been at the core of deliberative democracy. Without a variety of opinions, deliberation would not be possible (see Chambers, 1996, 158f). Second, deliberative democrats (Dryzek, 2000; Parkinson & Mansbridge, 2012) and scholars of democratic innovations (Fung, 2003, 344; Smith, 2009, 20ff) have incorporated difference democrats' objections and have developed improved conceptions that are sensitive to the problem of internal exclusion.

While these theoretical debates partly alleviate the problem, internal exclusion persists, as a plethora of empirical studies demonstrates. In her detailed study of a New England town meeting and a participatory workplace, Mansbridge (1983) finds clear patterns of inequality along the lines of social identities. In the invited spaces of the town meeting only 29% of participants who contributed to the debate were women. In qualitative interviews, women reported that they felt intimidated by the setting (106). The town meeting was dominated by the disproportionate participation of large property-owning men (100). In the participatory workplace, women reported less often than men that "people seem to respect my opinion" and more often that "articulate people intimidate me" (192). Elsewhere, Mansbridge (1993, 362f) cites several studies showing that in both private and public settings women speak less compared to men, ask more questions, and state information rather than giving opinions and making arguments. Their verbal contributions are characterized by greater uncertainty, which Mansbridge explains with a long history of exclusion of women from the public sphere. Similarly, Sanders (1997, 363ff) investigates the closed spaces of US

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[12] The criticism of deliberative democracy expressed by difference democrats and other feminist scholars is extensive and is dealt with here only briefly. For further elaborations see Fraser, 1995; Ferguson, 2007; Kohn, 2000; Lupia and Norton, 2017; Mansbridge, 2012; Pajnik, 2006.

juries and cites findings that men tend to speak more. Moreover, while the juries consisted of two-thirds of women, in 90% of the cases men were chosen to head the jury.

The problem of internal exclusion continues to be the subject of ongoing empirical work. A study on deliberative polling creating a transnational invited space for 350 participants of 27 EU countries finds that in the 25 face-to-face discussion groups, women and members of the working class spoke significantly less (Gerber, 2015). Another study on the parliamentary closed spaces of seven European countries shows that women take the floor less than their male colleagues (Bäck & Debus, 2018). The gender gap in traditional forms of political participation, such as voting, indicating external exclusion has closed recently in Western societies (Nancy Burns *et al.*, 2018). Upon closer examination, however, inequality between the sexes persists. A recent study of 18 Western countries finds that while women vote and petition at higher rates than men, they are less likely to participate in civil society initiatives and collective action (Coffé & Bolzendahl, 2010). Another study finds that women are significantly less likely to participate in small group deliberation in Canada (Beauvais, 2019). These patterns of self-selection are also mirrored in a dramatic gender gap in political ambition to engage in politics among youth (Fox & Lawless, 2014).

The extensive work of Christopher Karpowitz and Tali Mendelberg documented in *The Silent Sex* (2014) and several other publications (Karpowitz *et al.*, 2012; Mendelberg *et al.*, 2014; Mendelberg *et al.*, 2014) is of particular interest regarding internal exclusion. It investigates the effects of the gender composition of deliberative groups and the decision rules (consensus vs. majority) in a series of experiments supplemented with data from 87 different school board meetings. The results show that overall women speak significantly less than men; they only speak at equal rates to men if they far outnumber male participants. Moreover, when women are in the minority and decisions are taken by majority rule, there is a substantive gender gap regarding speaking time and subjectively perceived authority. Women are also interrupted more often than men and report loss of confidence. The authors explain this as a spiral of discouragement due to the lower status society attributes to women so that: "the fewer women [are] in the group, the lower their status, the less they may speak, and the lower their influence" (Karpowitz *et al.*, 2012, 534). In comparison, men's participation and influence is unaffected by their share of the group.

The observed male dominance does not come into effect when women are in the majority and decisions are taken with a majority vote. Men also do not dominate when women are in the minority, but decisions are taken by consensus principle, which gives the minority veto power. Women also engage in substantive representation and voice women's

distinctive concerns such as family issues, only if they are in the majority. The authors conclude: "Women are often disadvantaged in speech participation, whereas men are never disadvantaged" (Karpowitz *et al.*, 2012, 544). The work of Karpowitz, Mendelberg *et al.* goes to show that it is the presence of bodies with marginalized identity inscriptions and the decision-making rules that affect the configuration of democratic spatiality.

I made similar observations in my own work on citizens' councils in Austria, comparing two case studies. In the first case with an equal number of men and women participating, men spoke slightly more than women. In the other case with a majority of women among participants (58%), women spoke 60% of the time, per capita, pointing to a dynamic of peer encouragement also observed by Karpowitz and Mendelberg. This demonstrates how power relations within participatory spaces are altered through the constellation of gendered bodies (Asenbaum, 2016).

The same exclusionary patterns are observed in non-Western societies. A recent study shows, for example, that in a Gram Sabha village assembly in India, women only accounted for a third of speaking time and received fewer responses by state officials compared to their male counterparts (Parthasarathy *et al.*, 2019). Internal exclusion is also illustrated by a study on invited spaces in South Africa. Here local authorities set up forums for citizens' discussions, which in the context of a long history of segregation were characterized by deep racial and gendered inequalities. The formalized spatial arrangement instituted by government officials intimidated those in marginalized social positions:

> The public silencing of women such that they are largely passive observers in formal spaces of citizen participation is a spatialized construction of identity since the same women are often very active participants in less formal political spaces, such as street and area committees, savings and housing associations and other community groups. (McEwan, 2005, 982)

Black women, however, reconfigured the spatial ordering to make it more inclusive by starting with African greetings, anti-apartheid dances, and resistance and liberation songs. These performances of cultural and political identity, which actively articulated presence, reconfigured the space of appearance.

## 3.4. The Vision of Difference Democracy: Combining Equality and Diversity

The example of black women articulating their identity in participatory spaces illustrates the core argument difference democrats are making. To respond to the problem of internal exclusion, difference democrats promote diversity as a democratic value. They understand

difference as the essence of democracy. This section will provide a brief introduction to the core ideals of difference democracy, which will be elaborated in more depth in the sections thereafter.

Iris Marion Young (1990) formulates her vision of a diverse democracy in spatial terms. She discusses the city as the physical location of an ideal democratic society. This marks a profound break with participatory democratic thought, which is prominent in other difference democratic texts (e.g. Gould, 1996; Mansbridge, 1983). Participatory democrats focus on small democratic spaces of local communities such as town meetings and neighbourhood organizations that facilitate emotive connections of trust and friendship. Young, in contrast, shifts the focus to the big city. City life is characterized by the being together of strangers that form a polity rather than a community resulting in a diverse spatial assemblage: "Our social life is structured by vast networks of temporal and spatial mediation among persons, so that nearly everyone depends on the activities of seen and unseen strangers who mediate between oneself and one's associates, between oneself and one's objects of desire" (Young, 1990, 237). What makes the city the ideal place for democracy is the heterogeneity it provides. In contrast with the homogenic tendencies of the local community, the city's geographic complexity facilitates multiple encounters and a diversity of content: "A place of many places, the city folds over on itself in so many layers and relationships that it is incomprehensible" (240). Besides the diversity of activities, the eroticism of unexpected encounters, and the accessibility of public space for political engagement, the core feature of the city is the plurality of its inhabitants' identities. City dwellers participate in identity groups that articulate difference as part of what Young calls the heterogeneous public.

The heterogeneous public forms an internally inclusive space that combines difference with equality. Young starts from the observation of new social movements in the USA from the 1960s into the '80s, which affirm and reinterpret their marginalized group identities in positive terms. The Black Power movement reframed the African American identity with slogans such as "black is beautiful" and critically distanced itself from the Civil Rights movement's assimilationist strategy. Soon Red Power followed suit, promoting the self-determination of Native Americans. The gay and lesbian movement fought for sexual liberation and promoted alternative conceptions of life and family. While one arm of the women's movement advocated a reformist path to equal rights (equality feminism), the other criticized this strategy as conformist and refused to adapt to institutions they had no part in shaping (difference feminism) (159ff). From the engagement with these movements, Young derives a vision of democracy that combines equality with difference: "In this vision

the good society does not eliminate or transcend group difference. Rather, there is equality among socially and culturally differentiated groups, who mutually respect one another and affirm one another in their differences" (Young, 1990, 163).

The heterogeneous public is partially realized in social movements' claimed spaces that form rainbow coalitions. Instead of trying to overcome or cover up their differences to appear united, heterogeneous publics affirm their differences. While they jointly promote a certain cause, they may disagree on other issues and thus maintain their particular identities (Young, 1990, 188ff; 1989, 264ff; 1987, 75f). The street demonstrations of such coalitions reflect this diversity with "gaily decorative banners with ironic or funny slogans, guerilla theater or costumes serving to make political points, giant puppets standing for people or ideas towering over the crowd, chants, music, songs, dancing" (Young, 1987, 75). Drawing on these social movements' experiences, Young claims that difference is to be understood as a resource rather than an obstacle for fruitful deliberation. In what Young terms communicative democracy, inclusive institutional design needs to promote difference to include a diversity of perspectives and experiences in the discussion. This diversity in communication represents the core of democracy (Young, 1997b, 398ff; 1996, 127f; 1989, 264).

In contrast with the coalition politics of the heterogeneous public, Nancy Fraser (1990) contends that diversity can best be realized through enclave deliberation. The universality of the Habermasian public sphere is challenged by a long history of counterpublics. Parallel to the bourgeois public clubs, associations, and cafés described by Habermas (1992 [1962]), peasants, women, nationalists, and workers held their own gatherings. Today, subaltern counterpublics, as claimed spaces drawing their boundaries along lines of group identification, serve two functions: First, they provide a safe space for members of marginalized groups to reflect their experiences of oppression and form a community free from domination. Second, this safe space serves to reinterpret marginalized identities in positive terms and develop counter arguments and ideas to challenge hegemonic discourses. Mansbridge (1996b, 58) elaborates on the functions of counterpublics:

> The goals of these counterpublics include understanding themselves better, forging bonds of solidarity, preserving the memories of past injustices, interpreting and reinterpreting the meaning of those injustices, working out alternative conceptions of self, of community, of justice, and of universality, trying to make sense of both the privileges they wield and the oppressions they face, understanding the strategic configurations for and against their desired ends,

deciding what alliances to make both emotionally and strategically, deliberating on ends and means, and deciding how to act, individually and collectively.

Fraser (1990) calls these claimed spaces of identity groups weak publics as they are lacking ultimate decision-making power in contrast with governmental closed spaces which she refers to as strong publics. Fraser suggests that the institutional arrangement of strong publics should be extended to include participatory spaces in the workplace, universities, and health facilities (74ff). Her ultimate vision of democracy consists of a classless society that, through its egalitarian economic and social conditions, provides the ground for cultural diversity and creativity (68). This vision resonates with Young's ideal of a society characterized by both equality and diversity.

In the same vein, Anne Phillips' more recent *The Politics of the Human* (2015) stresses that equality as a claim and commitment is compatible with difference. Equality does not denote homogeneity but the recognition of rights and chances. The equality inherent in being human goes along with the diversity of identities. In her earlier work, Phillips points out that the diversity at the heart of the difference democratic visions is not a new concept but has always been a core principle of liberal, and in particular pluralist, democratic thought. However, pluralism was always applied to ideas and not to social groups and identities. While the liberal perspective aimed at overcoming inequality by declaring individuals equal in rights but indefinitely different – thus perfectly individual – in their identity, it overlooked and obscured structural inequalities. According to Phillips (1995, 5f), pluralism in democratic theory needs to be reinterpreted to include social identities. This new perspective on pluralism is promoted by the identity politics of new social movements, which overcome the binary outlook of the category of class. These movements claim that while class may be a salient category and the workers' movement has brought about progress, it is time to draw attention to a greater diversity in society consisting not only of capital owners and workers, but also of male and female, black, white and brown, gay, lesbian, bi and transsexual people (Phillips, 1993, 144). The diversity that results from paying attention to group differences is the foundation of plural deliberation bringing various perspectives together. Such deliberation will, however, never result in consensus or unity (158f):

> This is not to say that difference *per se* will disappear, or that if we only work hard enough on our mutual understanding we will converge on some single set of shared ideals. What distinguishes a radical perspective on democracy is not its expectation of future homogeneity and consensus, but its commitment to a politics of solidarity and challenge and change. (161)

### 3.5. A Different Perspective in Democratic Thought

The brief introduction above illustrates how difference democratic thought engages in a rearrangement of democratic spatiality through the inclusion of marginalized bodies. Concepts such as the heterogeneous public and subaltern counterpublics modulate the access to participatory spaces to advance the regulative principle of equality. By redrawing the boundaries of participatory spaces to include the marginalized, the composition of human bodies that constitute the social dimension of democratic spatiality changes. The studies discussed earlier, showing that female presence is correlated with women's confidence to speak, for example, demonstrate such a reconfiguration of social space. This social modulation in turn reconfigures discursive space as different topics acquire prominence. For example, the study on female participation in parliamentary closed spaces discussed earlier (Bäck & Debus, 2018) shows that female representatives engage in not only descriptive but also substantive representation (see Pitkin, 1967).

Given that the overall objective of difference democracy is the inclusion of the marginalized in participatory spaces, the following will discuss difference democratic thought along three strategies of inclusion that rearrange democratic space. First, difference democracy promotes a politics of presence that includes different bodies in participatory spaces. Second, difference democracy draws attention to emotions that find expression through a multiplicity of modes of communication. And third, difference democracy calls for the acknowledgement of diverse self-interests that challenge established power asymmetries. The admission of different bodies, emotions, and interests into participatory spaces alters the spatial configuration toward the ideal of diversity and equality.

### 3.5.1. The Politics of Presence: Representing Identity Through the Physical Body

Pateman argues that the universalizing conceptions of established democratic theory makes women invisible as the default citizen is implicitly conceptualized as male: "There is no set of clothes available for a citizen who is a woman, no vision available within political theory of the new democratic woman. Women have always been incorporated into the civil order as 'women,' as subordinate or lesser men, and democratic theorists have not yet formulated an alternative" (1989, 14).

In response, difference democrats call for increasing the visibility of marginalized bodies through their physical presence in participatory spaces. In *The Politics of Presence*, Phillips (1995) argues that in democratic engagement it is not just *what* is said that counts, but also *who* says it. The identified body itself conveys a message. Only by claiming presence in

participatory spaces, only by drawing attention to social inequalities represented by their physical bodies and their culturally specific ways of expression can members of marginalized groups draw attention to their particular experiences, claims, and perspectives. Phillips (1991, 60ff) observes that liberal democracy conceptualizes representation according to geographic locality. Constituencies are represented according to their location of residence which partly affords the representation of class and race due to their reflection in geographic divides, but it entirely neglects the representation of gender. Reflecting more recently on the politics of presence, Phillips upholds her preference for descriptive over substantive representation. The goal of descriptive representation is not necessarily substantive representation, that is, the presence of women need not result in more women-friendly policies. Rather, "descriptive representation matters because of what it symbolizes to us in terms of citizenship and inclusion – what it conveys to us about who does and who does not count as a full member of society" (Phillips, 2012, 517).

Similarly, Mansbridge argues that the attendance of members of marginalized groups in public assemblies is crucial because already by their presence, they remind others of their particular interests. In relation to parliamentary representation, she argues: "Even when the descriptive legislator is silent, his or her mere physical presence reminds the other legislators of the perspectives and interests of the group of which he or she is a descriptive member" (Mansbridge, 2005, 62). It is the visibility of the physical body as an affective thing that articulates a political claim.

In the difference democratic perspective, the value of a diversity of identities goes beyond the mere corporeal articulation of a political claim, however. Rather, only those with marginalized bodies share particular life experiences and can thus authentically represent them. The politics of presence brings not only a diversity of bodies, but also a diversity of qualities to participatory spaces (Phillips, 2019b). Since men and women, heterosexual and homosexual, black and white people are forced into different social positions and are thus socialized in different ways, they also develop different social qualities and character traits. Philips (1991) states that "the sexual differentiation in conditions and experience has produced a specifically woman's point of view" (63). Accordingly, women "have perceived themselves as bringing something new to the political stage. Their much delayed entry will not only add to the dramatis personae, but of necessity alter the play" (3).

The presence of women in participatory spaces is often advocated in difference democracy by pointing to specific womanly qualities stemming from particular forms of socialization. According to this argument, women tend to be more caring and nurturing than men.

Womanly virtues of mothering could contribute to democratic exchange by focusing on the common good rather than self-interest, persuading rather than forcing, listening carefully, asking questions, moderating and integrating rather than competing to win the argument. Mansbridge (1991, 126ff) discusses the work of difference feminists, who speak of women's superior democratic culture. Empathy, sensitivity, and intuition as female characteristics are constitutive of the democratic community as they facilitate social connections of trust, love, and duty (Mansbridge, 1993, 345). While Mansbridge does not fully subscribe to the perspective of difference feminists, she takes it as inspiration for her own work. Difference feminist notions are reflected in Mansbridge's concept of "unitary democracy", which is based on friendship, trust, and agreement within small groups such as the early hunter and gatherer tribes and later the Athenian polis (1983, 10ff).

In the same vein, Carol Gould (1993) argues that women can strengthen deliberative values such as concern for others, reciprocity, and mutual respect. Moreover, their nurturing perspective also shifts the focus to the redistributive functions of the state:

> I also believe that the typical concern for providing for the specific needs of others associated with mothering or parenting or with family relations more generally can usefully be imported into the larger democratic community in terms of a focus on meeting the differentiated needs of individuals and not simply protecting their negative liberties. (405)

According to Gould, the best way of ensuring the presence of marginalized groups is by expanding participatory democratic institutions to the workplace, schools, the social system and, furthermore, by including social movements' claimed spaces in our understanding of democracy. This plurality of face-to-face assemblies multiplies the opportunities for the presence of marginalized bodies (Gould, 1996, 181).

Similarly, both Young (1989, 265f) and Phillips (1998, 238) advocate the expansion of participatory democratic institutions to facilitate presence. Both, however, also argue that representation is indispensable in modern, large-scale democracies (Phillips, 1995, 30; Young, 2000, 124f; 1997a, 352). The politics of presence thus gains another dimension: it includes not only the presence of the physical body, but also the replication of identity across time and space through group identification. Representation gives presence to those not physically present. In Pitkin's (1967, 8f) terms, "representation, talking generally, means the making present in some sense of something which is nevertheless not present literally or in fact". The extensive debate undertaken by difference democrats concerning representation focuses on two concepts: mirror representation (also referred to as

descriptive representation) replicating the quantitative relations of different groups within society (see current debates on mini publics, e.g. Ryan & Smith, 2014) and special representation in the spirit of affirmative action.

Mansbridge (2005; 1999b) and Phillips (1995; 1993; 1991) argue that mirror representation in state institutions is a necessary means to facilitate inclusion in the face of structural inequalities. Only members of specific social groups can bring authentic, lived experience and insight from particular social perspectives to deliberation. As mirror representation is not achieved automatically, they call for quotas along the lines of gender and ethnicity. Quotas are to be applied not only to the closed spaces of parliaments but also to some invited spaces. In "Should Blacks Represent Blacks and Women Represent Women? A Contingent 'Yes'" (1999b), which she later reprises in "Should Workers Represent Workers?" (2015), Mansbridge elaborates the value of mirror representation through random selection. And Phillips (1991, 60ff) points to the successes of gender quota policies in Scandinavian parliaments. These policy recommendations call for a redefinition of the use of power in democracy. Mansbridge (1996b) describes the use of power as coercion as a necessary evil to counter injustice. Gender and ethnic quotas are an example of such coercion. Facilitation through moderators in participatory spaces can be seen as the coercive redistribution of speaking time. Thus, coercive power secures equal presence, while it also infringes on personal freedom (Mansbridge, 1996b, 46ff; Mansbridge *et al.*, 2010, 82).

Young, in contrast, advocates special representation of disadvantaged groups, who suffer from the effects of historical oppression. Exceeding the efforts of mirror representation, disadvantaged groups need to receive economic and social resources to self-organize, such as dedicated airtime on public media to communicate their agenda. The current system of party representation is to be supplemented by a structure of self-organized associations of marginalized groups. According to Young, special representation also needs to come into effect in the participatory spaces of schools, workplaces, and neighbourhood communities. Furthermore, in decisions, which directly affect these communities, they need to wield veto power. These measures need to be accompanied by affirmative action in education and employment and the expansion of bilingual and bicultural education and state services (Young, 2000, 141ff; 1997a, 371f; 1992, 532f; 1990, 184ff; 1989, 261ff).

### 3.5.2. Emotions as Part of Democratic Discourse: Communication Beyond Reasoned Argumentation

A second way to facilitate the inclusion of marginalized bodies in participatory spaces is to re-evaluate the role of emotions, passion, and affect. According to difference democrats, emotions are undermined in deliberation by a focus on dispassionate, impartial rationality: "When deliberation turns into a demonstration of logic, it leaves out many who cannot work their emotionally felt needs into a neat equation" (Mansbridge, 1991, 130). Embracing the role of emotions in participatory processes can contribute to the inclusion of those who have been socialized to express themselves more emotively. Against early deliberative democratic reservations according to which emotions obstruct impartiality, distort truth, and subvert efforts to arrive at a rational consensus, Young (1987, 69) claims: "As long as the dialogue allows all perspectives to speak freely, and be heard and taken into account, the expression of need, motive and feelings will not have merely private significance, and will not bias or distort conclusions because they will interact with other needs, motives and feelings". Emotions can go beyond impartial reasoning as they enrich the experience of perspective-taking.

Mansbridge further elaborates the crucial role of emotions in deliberation: "Solutions often require the emotional capacity to guess what others want, or at least to ask in a genuinely curious and unthreatening way… [E]ngaging the emotions helps create the self-transformations necessary to think 'we' instead of 'I'" (Mansbridge, 1996a; see also Young, 1987, 69). According to Mansbridge (1993, 357), both reason and emotion are essential elements of deliberation. Hence, deliberation should not be reasoned but rather *considered*, a term expressing a combination of reason and emotion (Mansbridge, 1999a, 213, 226).

Cheryl Hall's work investigates the exclusion and undermining of passion in both classical philosophy and current conceptions of democracy (Hall, 2005; 2002). Hall (2007) goes beyond Mansbridge's assessment that both reason and emotion are part of deliberation and elaborates their interdependency. For every emotion – be it grief, anger or happiness – there is a logical reason. Emotions can be reasonably explained. Deliberation as a process of reasoning, on the other hand, is always driven by passion. Deliberation is based on emotional resources to engage in debate. Thus, passion and reason cannot function without the other; they are dialectically interrelated. Emotions are based on reasons and reasoning is motivated by emotions.

To facilitate the expression of emotions in participatory spaces, difference democrats turn to modes of expression beyond the verbalization of arguments. This expansion of

communicative modes may enhance inclusion as it acknowledges the diversity of expressions of marginalized groups who may not articulate their claims in the manner of verbalized arguments (Pajnik, 2006). Young (1987, 75), for example, draws attention to the diverse communication techniques of carnivalesque protest movements: "Liberating public expression means not only lifting formerly privatized issues into the open… but also affirming in the practice of such discussions the proper place of passion and play in public". Today's age of communicative plenty in which different media channels and different modes of expression provide a broad variety of means of participation, may contribute to the inclusion of disadvantaged groups (Ercan *et al.*, 2018).

Young suggests supplementing rational arguments with greeting, rhetoric, and storytelling. Greeting encompasses not only short phrases such as "Good morning!" and "How are you?" but also compliments and bodily gestures such as handshakes, hugs, nods, and smiles. Greeting serves the expression of mutual respect and trust and aims at making participants *feel* appreciated. The example of the African greetings and anti-apartheid dances in the invited spaces in South Africa mentioned earlier are a good example of how greeting has an impact on the configuration of participatory spaces. Greeting can be more than a gesture of sympathy. It can formulate political claims for inclusion and express cultural identity (McEwan, 2005, 978). Rhetoric in speech consisting of word play, jokes, flirtation, and metaphors are often denigrated in democratic theory. Yet, Young argues that rhetoric provides a specific channel to introduce affective, intuitive, and situated knowledge into participatory spaces. Storytelling entails the narrating of certain events without necessarily transmitting an argument. Stories aid mutual understanding as they make specific social perspectives comprehensible through their affective qualities. They afford listeners the time to become immersed in different points of view and different ways of thinking. Stories can give expression to emotions as they are told from a personal point of view without requiring objectivity or impartiality (Young, 2000, 57ff; Young, 1996, 129ff).

Similar to Young's storytelling, Sanders (1997, 372f) notes how testimony can enhance democratic participation: "Instead of aiming for a common discussion, democrats might adopt a more fundamental goal: to try to ensure that those who are usually left out of public discussions learn to speak whether their perspectives are common or not, and those who usually dominate learn to hear the perspectives of others". Rather than engaging in a conversation, one person at a time gets to share his or her perspective. An example of testimony can be found in US-American rap culture, in which young people of marginalized class/race backgrounds find a critical voice. In contrast to a hierarchy of knowledge in a rational discourse, "[t]estimony is also radically egalitarian: the standard for whether a view is worthy

of public attention is simply that everyone should have a voice, a chance to tell her story" (Sanders, 1997, 372). In comparison to common conversational modes, testimony allows speakers to narrate and reflect without interruption and without having to respond to others. They are given a chance to engage in their thought while listeners are given a chance to hear the full story before making a judgement. Some versions of testimony have been realized in invited spaces through particular facilitation techniques whereby moderators focus attention on one participant at a time with others listening (Asenbaum, 2016).

By focusing on the democratic contributions of everyday talk, Mansbridge (1999a) adds another mode of communication that enhances the role of emotions. Rather than focusing on reasoned arguments, democrats should acknowledge the contribution of mundane verbal exchange that is often deemed unpolitical. Everyday talk, however, always entails a political component. Since it emerges in the context of everyday life rather than in the political sphere, it is more intimate and more closely connected to emotions. Mansbridge and colleagues add two other modes of communication. Deliberative negotiation and fair strategic bargaining contribute to democratic exchange, as long as this is done on the grounds of equality, mutual respect, and non-coerciveness (Mansbridge *et al.*, 2012, 798f; Mansbridge *et al.*, 2010, 69ff). While negotiation and bargaining might be seen as more rational than emotional modes of communication, they play a crucial role for emotions when they are understood as part of contestation. As the next section will discuss, difference democrats argue that those with marginalized identities cannot always participate in empathetic deliberation but at times need to engage in passionate contestation to defend their interests.

### 3.5.3. Contestation and the Rightful Self-Interest of the Marginalized

The third strategy of inclusion in difference democracy aims at bringing marginalized interests to the public sphere through contestation. Similar to conceptions of agonistic democracy, difference democrats stress the role of conflict and even competition in democracy. The argument for conflict is partly linked to arguments of emotion. Instead of suppressing anger and dissensus, frustration needs to be vented. Allowing for conflict to emerge in participatory spaces can contribute to equality as anger often emerges in response to oppression:

> Both in a public forum and in everyday talk, there are justifiable places for offensiveness, non-cooperation, and the threat of retaliation – even for raucous, angry, self-centred, bitter talk, aiming at nothing but hurt… These uncivil forms of talk are also often necessary as means to the end of approaching both liberty

and equality in deliberation. Sometimes only intensity in oppositions can break down the barriers of the status quo. No one always listens attentively to everyone else, and members of dominant groups are particularly likely to find they do not need to listen to members of subordinate groups. So subordinates sometimes need the battering ram of rage. (Mansbridge, 1999a, 223)

According to this argument, subordinate groups need to engage in disruptive action to challenge inequality. To develop a notion of justified conflict in discursive terms, Mansbridge draws on Foucault's work on communities of resistance (Mansbridge, 1993, 365), which bears some resemblance to Fraser's counterpublics (Fraser, 1990). Subordinate groups "oscillate between protected enclaves, in which they can explore their ideas in an environment of mutual encouragement, and more hostile but also broader surroundings in which they can test those ideas against the reigning reality" (Mansbridge, 1996b, 57).

Like agonists (e.g. Wenman, 2013, 34, 46), difference democrats not only favour contestation that challenges domination, but also display some affinity for competition. Fraser (1990, 68), for example, speaks of the "contestation among competing publics". Likewise (1997a, 359), Young highlights the value of competition for democracy when she calls for the "contestation of the constituency with itself about the content of a decision-making agenda". And Mansbridge sees elements of adversary democracy, such as voting and party competition, as an essential part of participatory societies. She argues that these competitive modes are necessary to overcome the conformist tendencies of consensus decision-making. Where no consensus can be reached on the grounds of fundamental disagreement, majority rule through voting needs to be employed to break the deadlock (Mansbridge, 1990; 1983; 1981; Mansbridge *et al.*, 2010). In line with agonists (e.g. Mouffe, 1999), Mansbridge contends that consensus can mask conflict. Everyday talk and emotive expression, on the other hand, help to reveal conflict (Mansbridge, 1999a, 226). Karpowitz and Mansbridge (2005) illustrate this in an empirical study comparing a consensus-oriented and an adversary-oriented participatory space. They find that in the consensus-oriented participatory planning process, conflict was supressed and dissenting voices marginalized. In the adversary public hearings, citizens aired their anger and conflicts took centre stage.

Difference democrats, who are sympathetic to deliberative democracy, such as Young, seek to reconcile deliberative norms of reason with notions of contestation.

Especially under circumstances where there are serious conflicts that arise from structural positions of privilege and disadvantage, and/or where a subordinated, less powerful or minority group finds its interests ignored in public debate,

> members of such groups do not violate norms of reasonableness if they engage in serious disruptive actions, or express their claims with angry accusations. Disorderliness is an important tool of critical communication aimed at calling attention to the unreasonableness of others. (Young, 2000, 48f)

Young (2001) engages in a fictive dialogue between an activist and a deliberative democrat. Without coming to a conclusion or aiming to resolve the tension, Young constructs ideal positions of the deliberative democrat, who strives to change the system from within by persuading those in power to take a path of progressive reform, and the activist who calls for disruptive action. In conclusion, Young calls for a critical theory of democracy, encompassing both cooperation and conflict.

By calling for confrontational politics, difference democrats promote the recognition of the self-interest of the marginalized. While in conceptions of deliberative democracy the requirement to focus on the common good restricts members of disadvantaged groups to challenge inequality, in difference democracy the subject is legitimately self-interested: "Women, for example, have often been socialized to put the interests of others ahead of their own in ways that interfere with understanding their own interests. The articulation of self-interest has a legitimate role in democratic deliberation, particularly in discussions of fair distribution" (Mansbridge, 1999a, 226). In the context of the unequal distribution of resources along the lines of sex, race, and class, difference democratic contestation explicitly includes *material* self-interest (Mansbridge, 2012, 797; 1996b, 49, 57; 1991, 126; 1990; Mansbridge e*t al.*, 2010; Young, 1997a, 362f). Phillips (1991, 70) explains: "Because of their materially different position in society, women have objectively different interests from men".

Mansbridge *et al.* (2010) embrace self-interest as a vital element of democracy. Accordingly, subjects in participatory spaces need the freedom to articulate their own particular needs while also taking the common good into account. Acknowledging self-interest contributes to transparency as the aim of the common good often functions as ostensible cover for private interests. The open articulation of self-interest thus promotes more honest political debate. Moreover, identifying a multiplicity of self-interests contributes to democratic pluralism. It "embraces the diversity of human objectives as well as the diversity of human opinions" (73).

As this overview has shown, a difference democratic perspective reconfigures the assemblages of participatory spaces by including marginalized bodies, emotions, and self-interests. This reconfiguration of democratic spatiality advances equality as it includes

disadvantaged groups. At the same time, however, the politics of presence also limits the personal freedom of self-expression, as will be discussed in the next section.

## 3.6. The Dilemma of Difference: Democratic Freedom and the Limitations of the Identified Body

Authors contributing to difference democratic debates have repeatedly pointed to a conundrum that emerges from the politics of presence: The strategy of including the marginalized through physical presence within participatory spaces achieves visibility and thus furthers equality, but at the same time this strategy entails essentialist tendencies. It affirms existing identity constructions along with their limitations, confinements, and stereotypes (Gould, 1996, 182ff; Mansbridge, 2005; 1999b, 637f; 1993, 371; Phillips, 2019a forthcoming; 2010; 2009; 1996, 146; Young, 1997a, 350f; 1997b, 389; 1994, 714; 1990, 172). Young calls this the "dilemma of difference" (Young, 1989, 268).[13] While identity politics through social movements such as the Black Power movement or feminist groups might be successful in reinterpreting their identities in positive terms, in doing so they recreate the limitations inherent to all identities. Labels such as woman, man, gay, lesbian, black, Asian, Jewish and so on always create confinements of self-expression and self-definition, no matter if their image is positive or negative. This is even more problematic considering intersectionality: Identity categories such as "woman", for example, mostly emerge in discourses produced by white, heterosexual, educated, able-bodied women with higher incomes and thus rarely reflect the experience of LGBTIQ, non-white, disabled, and poor women (Fraser, 1996, 200ff; Mansbridge, 2003, 357; Phillips, 2019b; Wojciechowska, 2018).

Mansbridge acknowledges that descriptive representation in parliaments through quotas comes at the expense of essentialism:

> One broad cost derives from focusing citizens' attention on their own and legislators' background characteristics rather than the capacity and desire of those legislators to promote effective public policies… [A]ny proposal to select some characteristic for conscious representation has the potential for encouraging a kind of essentialism in identities… As a specific identity becomes the focus, the identity of citizen may be lost. (Mansbridge, 2015, 261, 267)

Elsewhere Mansbridge explains that such essentialist tendencies in descriptive representation are problematic because they reify and fix identification and thus curtail the freedom

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[13] Young borrowed the term from Martha Minow (1985) who used it in a somewhat different way in the context of bilingual and special education.

of the democratic subject. Instead of increasing diversity through inclusion of multiple identities, the politics of presence might actually *undermine* diversity as it creates rigid identity categories and homogenizes multiple and intersectional identifications:

> Essentialist beliefs reinforce stereotypes, trap the individuals in the group in the images traditionally held of the group, make it hard for those individuals to treat their identities flexibly and performatively, de-emphasize lines of division within groups to the advantage of dominant groups within the group, and harden lines of division between groups. (Mansbridge, 2005, 623)

The problems of essentialism through the politics of presence that Mansbridge observes in closed spaces, Phillips (2010) discusses in relation to claimed spaces: "The irony, as many feminists and critical race theorists acknowledge, is that movements to combat the hierarchical structure that generate and sustain these stereotypes often invoke a collectivity that itself seems to presume a unified, perhaps essentialised, group" (54). In reference to feminist movements, Phillips goes on to argue:

> The "women" brought into existence through this politics may, moreover, obscure many differences between women along axes such as class, sexuality, race, nationality, or religion… A loose categorisation of multiple locations and perspectives then comes to figure almost as a person, capable of acting, willing, challenging, and having a consciousness all of its own. Even if we are suspicious of the notion of individuals having unified identities, the treatment of collectives as quasi-persons endows them with more unity than they can justifiably claim. (55f)

In her early work, Young (1990; 1987) discusses the "logic of identity". While Young uses this concept to draw attention to the workings of domination, in my reading it also aptly explains the confining tendencies of the politics of presence. Young argues that the enlightened subject, conceptualized as rational thinker, stands in contrast to the democratic ideal of pluralism: "The logic of identity also seeks to reduce the plurality of particular subjects, their bodily, perspectival experience, to a unity, by measuring them against the unvarying standard of universal reason" (99). However powerful the unifying move of the logic of identity, according to Young, it is bound to fail. Identity can only be constructed in demarcation to difference (Butler, 1993, 3; Connolly, 1991, 64; Mouffe, 2005 [2000], 21). Ultimate unity is impossible. The failed attempt at unification results in binary identity constructions, which are, however, not perceived as equal in value. Those racial, sexual, and

gendered identities perceived as inferior are expelled from the public and banished to the private sphere (Young, 1990, 99ff; 1987, 62f).

Inferior identities linked to "ugly, fearful, or loathsome bodies" (Young, 1990, 124), however, do not entirely disappear in privacy. Young identifies a paradox: marginalized identities are both made invisible and stereotyped at the same time. They are made invisible as democratic subjects, as agents in the public realm, but concurrently they are constructed as the Other, the embodied deviation from the norm (123). Young describes this kind of stereotyping as confining marginalized subjects to their bodies. Their realm of creative self-realization is confined by narrowly defined stereotypes. The identities of those who dominate, in contrast, remain largely undefined. White, upper class men are immune to stereotyping and perceived as impartial and universal – as the norm (100, 125ff).

While Young herself does not make a link between the logic of identity and the dilemma of difference, the connection is apparent. It is not just the problem of hierarchization between different identity groups, the identities themselves bear problematic tendencies. As Young explains: "The unifying process required by group representation inappropriately freezes fluid relational identities into a unity, and can recreate oppressive segregation" (350). I agree with Young that the confining tendencies of identities come into effect to a different degree for those born into positions of marginalization and those in positions of domination. Maleness, whiteness, able-bodiedness, and heterosexuality are indeed established as the norm and undergo far less scrutiny. The fundamentally confining nature of identity nevertheless comes into effect even for those with privileged identities. Exposed to the gaze of others in the space of appearance, even they are not free to change. The logic of identity curtails freedom for all.

### 3.7. Conclusion

The difference democratic perspective provides valuable answers to the question raised by this thesis. With the concept of internal exclusion, it draws attention to inequality within participatory spaces. Difference democracy suggests reconfiguring the order of things that constitute democratic spatiality by including marginalized bodies, suppressed emotions, and neglected interests. The visible presence of the marginalized changes the dynamics of the assemblages that constitute the space of appearance. The shift from the politics of ideas to the politics of presence advocated by difference democrats answers Butler's call to include the corporeal identity performances of the marginalized. Here, Butler goes along with

difference democrats who explain even the silent democratic subject as expressing content through the body (Mansbridge, 2005, 62):

> it matters that bodies assemble, and that the political meanings enacted by demonstrations are not only those that are enacted by discourse whether written or vocalized. Embodied actions of various kinds signify in ways that are, strictly speaking, neither discursive nor prediscursive. In other words, forms of assembly already signify prior to, and apart from, any particular demands they make. (Butler, 2015, 8)

The body, then, functions as an affective thing in participatory spaces. As difference democrats acknowledge, however, the politics of presence also entails limitations to personal freedom of expression. Equality is achieved through a reification of group identity. The marginalized body as affective thing becomes not only an agentic subject, but also an object of prejudice and stereotyping. One way of dealing with the dilemma of difference is to simply reject the affectivity of the body and focus on the content that subjects utter rather than on their appearance. Saward (2010, 77), for example, counters the claim of the agency of silent bodies: "There is no self-presenting subject whose essential character and desires and interests are… evident enough to be 'read off' their appearance". But in my view, the intent to look beyond difference of identity not only threatens to obscure inequalities, as difference democrats rightfully argue, but also overlooks the nuanced ways in which our corporeal identity performances indeed affect democratic participation.

While identified bodies as things in spatial assemblages give democratic subjects agency through their inherent affectivity, they also limit free expression. In Young's study on gendered spaces discussed in the introduction to this chapter, she claims: "To the extent that a woman lives her body as a thing, she remains rooted in immanence, is inhibited, and retains a distance from her body as transcending movement" (Young, 2005 [1977], 39). I believe that the confinements described by Young do not only concern women but affect everyone to a certain degree, as identities have an inherently limiting effect. These limitations go along with the constitution of spatiality that depends on demarcating an inside and an outside, as discussed in the previous chapter. Hence, everyone moves in a personal identity space bound by discursive identifications, human bodies, and culturally coded objects. Phillips (2010, 48f) raises an important point in explaining how the act of essentializing forms an inherent part of cognition. Any thinking and understanding, any construction of discursive space, rests on judging *what is*. The construction of reality is based on cognitive acts of boundary drawing: "when we decide that the crucial distinction is that between man and

woman, or human and animal, or heterosexual and gay, we settle on definitions and boundaries that then mark our ways of thinking and living" (Phillips, 2015, 20).

The question that arises then is: what other forms of identity expression could afford a greater degree of freedom in exploring and expressing the multiple self – the freedom for the subject to change? The next chapter will seek ways out of the dilemma of difference by exploring democratic theory's conceptions of self-transformation and identity change. It will engage with various approaches in democratic theory and seek to enrich them with queer and gender theory in order to develop concepts of disidentification and a politics of becoming, which is seen not to replace but rather to augment the politics of presence.

# 4. Identity, Interrupted: Disidentification as Radical Democratic Practice

> *Democracy is that which dissolves the power of the identities used to discriminate between us, that differentiate and hierarchise… Democracy is the possibility to build better worlds which will no doubt comprise new identities, but that can overcome the inequalities of today.*
>
> *Clare Woodford, 2018*

## 4.1. Introduction

Recently, my boyfriend and I took a bus from Edinburgh to Glasgow. After the bus ride, a woman who had taken the same bus and sat close to us approached us. She asked in a friendly manner if she was right in her assumption that the two of us were "queenies", which she had deduced from our affectionate interactions. It took me a moment to respond. I identify as a gay man and had not been confronted with the term "queenie" before. I could see that her intentions were benevolent so I hesitantly agreed with her proposition. I allowed the conversation to move along without challenge – she obviously asked for this confirmation to let us know that she had many friends who were "queenies", which was obviously meant as an approval of our relationship and sexual identity. I nevertheless remember a strong feeling of reluctance to respond to this identity interpellation. Being hailed as a queenie did not feel right. It had a feeling of bitter consent that went along with muted disagreement. It was a feeling of disidentification.

The problem reflected in this incident is that of the ability to self-identify, to wield agency in the process of the construction of one's own identity, and to have the freedom to change how we are identified by others. This problem is reflected in the dilemma of difference discussed in the previous chapter, which calls for the public visibility of marginalized identities to further equality but at the same time curtails the freedom for the subject to change.

This is an important point for this thesis where its scope is extended beyond the question of the marginalization of disadvantaged groups in democracy. The question of democratic freedom, which is the topic of this chapter, directly affects all members of society. It is the question of how the perception of our selves limits or expands the scope of self-expression and self-realization. Recall Mansbridge's (2005, 62) claim that through descriptive representation even silent subjects communicate political claims through their identified bodies. Arthur Lupia and Anne Norton cast a critical light on the confining aspects of such embodied communicative acts:

> The silent body speaks, whether it wills that speech or not. It speaks of its place in the social order: of race, sex, age. The black man must speak as a black man, the white woman as a white woman. The old speak from the shell of age. Some speak from the haze of beauty. The text written on the body, read from the body, may amplify or mute what the speaker says, but it cannot be easily silenced… We have spoken before we speak, we have been read before we write. The people who enter a room carry not only the inscribed body, but the many texts they have written on that body. (Lupia & Norton, 2017, 68)

This chapter will seek ways out of the dilemma of difference and will pose the question of personal freedom to express the multiple self in participatory spaces. Exploring this problems in difference, participatory, deliberative, and agonistic democracy reveals that none of these perspectives offers satisfying solutions. They all remain limited by their respective logics. What is more, all of their conceptions of self-transformation appear to be envisaged as a process from above, be it through notions of self-transformation into a particular (enlightened, educated, reasoned) subject or through the concept of hegemonic identity construction.

To generate a democratic theory that facilitates the freedom for the subject to change, this chapter will explore a transformative perspective that allows for rethinking the spatial order that constitutes democratic subjectivity. The disorder that Pateman (1989) attributes to women entering male spaces is also at the core of postanarchist thinking that understands freedom and equality as disruptive forces that disturb the established order (Newman, 2011). This transformative character of identity assemblages rests on an understanding of space as a volatile construct: "space… is neither naturally given nor immutable, but rather a product of interrelations always in the making, and thus both disrupted and a source of disruption (Massey, 1999). This dynamism and the contested nature of space offer transformative possibilities" (Dikeç, 2015, 3). Here Arendt's space of appearance that facilitates

a politics of presence is reconfigured as space of becoming through modes of disidentification. The politics of becoming queers identity through the rejection of hegemonic identity interpellations and through strategies of resignification. Queering democratic subjectivity through modes of interrupting hegemonic identification can be seen as "strategies for more genuinely transformative social action" in the "arenas of transformation" that Cornwall (2004, 75f) describes in her theory of participatory spaces.

The transformative perspective introduces an entirely different understanding of the relationship between freedom and equality as discussed in this thesis so far. Rather than seeing the two core values of democracy as in tension, as described by the democratic paradox, postanarchist conceptions define them as mutually dependent. Freedom is only possible on the grounds of equality and vice versa. This casts an entirely new light on the core questions raised by this thesis.

To explore ways out of the dilemma of difference, this chapter will draw on several perspectives in radical democratic thought. First, it will consult the difference, participatory, deliberative, and agonistic perspectives with regard to their conceptions of self-transformation. As all four approaches only generate limited conceptions of freedom for the subject to change, a fifth perspective in democratic theory that focuses on social transformation will be introduced. Through the lens of the transformative perspective, the difference democratic politics of presence will be re-read as part of a politics of becoming, which focuses on identity disruption through disidentification. Disidentification in transformative democratic theory, however, only explains radical democratic subjectivization on a collective level, so that the democratic subject is caught up in group dynamics. To tackle this problem and explore disidentification on a micro level of democratic subjectivity, the politics of becoming will be further enriched with insights from gender and queer theory, which explain identity via the concepts of performativity and masquerade and develop strategies of resignification as a way forward.

## 4.2. Ways out of the Dilemma of Difference: Democratic Subjectivity in Perspective

The question at hand is how to tackle the confining tendencies in the politics of presence and combine the enhanced equality, which this strategy successfully pursues, with the freedom of self-exploration and self-expression. In accordance with the perspectival approach adopted by this thesis, it will interrogate four perspectives in democratic theory in pursuit of ways out of the dilemma of difference. The obvious first port of call for this undertaking is difference democracy itself. As will be seen, difference democratic strategies to

overcoming the dilemma of difference, while generating promising approaches, remain limited by and in conflict with essentialist tendencies. Hence, three other radical democratic perspectives – namely participatory, deliberative, and agonistic democracy – will be consulted and evaluated with regard to their approaches to self-transformation.

### 4.2.1. Essentializing Constructed Identities: The Difference Democratic Perspective

As discussed in the previous chapter, identity fulfils a positive function in difference democratic strategies for inclusion. Nevertheless, difference democrats also point to the problematic role of identity in democracy, confining the democratic subject. Young describes identity as a confining space that limits physical motion and personal expression. In particular, the freedom of marginalized groups, such as women, is bound by hegemonic spatiality as gendered codes suggest how to act and what to say. While "some women escape or transcend the typical situation and definition of women in various degrees and respects" (Young, 2005 [1977], 33), overall women are like objects that are placed into and confined by a web of social relations. The logic of identity described by Young elsewhere (1990) that reduces plurality to unity and supresses diversity – as I have argued in the previous chapter – limits not just the freedom of those with marginalized identities, but that of everyone. We are all limited by our stable identity constructs and the expectations of identity continuity and integrity. This critical view on the confining function of identity, then, calls for a positive reinterpretation of marginalized identity as in the politics of presence, and at the same time raises the question as to how the fixities and confinements of the spaces that bound identity can be loosened.

To counter the confining tendencies of the politics of presence, difference democrats propose that their strategies of inclusion, most notably quota solutions, are not incompatible with an understanding of the democratic subject as a contingent identity construction. In various texts, difference democrats develop performative accounts of identity that are compatible with a politics of presence. Understanding identity in constructivist and performative terms opens up identity spaces to potential transformations of the self.

Mansbridge (2003, 358), for example, argues that although focusing on identity categories "is dangerous, not only because it exaggerates reality but also because it underlines the very stereotypes that have been used to keep women in their place, the existence of danger does not mean that we should forswear [quota strategies]". In order to counter essentializing effects, the introduction of quotas needs to be justified by a public debate explaining gender identities as relational and a product of historical processes of subordination (Mansbridge,

2005). The category "woman" is not to be understood in essentialist terms but rather in terms of positionality. Women are a product of specific, gender-coded experiences, which are distributed unevenly among men and women (Mansbridge, 1991, 133). This point is also central to Phillips' claim that "those who have experienced marginalisation have concerns, interests and perspectives that those lacking this experience may not even understand, let alone be able to represent" (2019 forthcoming). Acknowledging different social positionalities and particular experiences does not rule out an understanding of identities as fluid constructions. Phillips (1993, 161) calls for a contingent conceptualization of group identities and claims that "an attention to difference does not entail an essentialist understanding of identity" (Phillips, 1996, 142).

Young's work goes the furthest in outlining an approach to thinking identity in contingent terms (Young, 2000, 92ff; 1997b, 389ff; 1990, 43ff; 1989, 260; 1987, 72). She employs the concept of seriality, which Jean-Paul Sartre (2004 [1960]) used to describe class, to understand the category "women". While the term "group" is commonly used to describe people with the same identity markers, it is misleading as it implies direct interaction between its members. In a group, people know each other and gather consciously for a specific reason. In contrast, a series puts individuals in a similar structural position defined by specific physical objects, practices, routines, and cultures. Women, understood as a series rather than a group, are individually unknown to each other. Nevertheless, they identify with one another as they are socialized within the same material milieu marked by a gendered division of labour and heterosexuality. They employ the same physical things such as specific clothing, cosmetic products, toiletries, etc. However powerful the structures confining seriality, they do not ultimately define each individual woman; they only enable and constrain certain actions (Young, 1994). This serial understanding of identity can be understood as spatial assemblage with culturally coded objects, human bodies, and social constructs interwoven in a terrain that constitutes and bounds identity expression. A series marks a spatial order in which one follows the other. This also suggests that one can stop following, step out of the series, and break new ground.

In order to break out of such identity space, Young (1990, 124) calls for "a revolution of subjectivity. Rather than seeking a wholeness of the self, the subjects of this plural and complex society should affirm the otherness within ourselves, acknowledging that as subjects we are heterogeneous and multiple in our affiliations and desires". This revolution of subjectivity is furthered by the identity politics of social movements in two key respects: First, these movements reclaim the definition of their own identity. The newly generated identifications are not stable; rather, they overlap with other identities which are part of a

process of continuous redefinition. Second, these movements do not claim the definition of any identity but their own. Such a participatory and self-organized process of identity production is thus inherently democratic (169ff). The politics of presence, then, consists of a continuous redefinition of contingent identity space.

These approaches of difference democrats to overcome the dilemma of difference are promising. Understanding identity spaces as contingent constructions opens up the potential for transcendence of the self and greater freedom of identity articulation. Difference democratic approaches to contingent identities are, however, hampered by some essentializing tendencies that run through their work. In making the argument for a politics of presence, difference democrats repeatedly fall back into essentialist thinking. Young, for example, describes the liberating effects of reclaiming and affirming ones marginalized identity:

> I am just what they say I am – a Jewboy, a colored girl, a fag, a dyke, or a hag – and proud of it. No longer does one have the impossible project of *trying to become something one is not* under circumstances where the very trying reminds one of *who one is.* (Young, 1990, 166, emphasis added)

In response to constructivist notions of identity, Young states: "it is foolish to deny the reality of groups" (47). Similarly, in reference to the abstract individualism of Enlightenment thought, Phillips (1993, 95) warns of the "distorting consequences of trying to pretend away group differences". And Mansbridge describes the process of socialization in quite essentialist terms: "Because *healthy people want to be who they are*, children usually value being a boy or a girl long before they understand the full social connotations of this identity" (Mansbridge, 1993, 344, emphasis added). This notion of identity does not prove to be fluid or contingent, as claimed elsewhere.

The argument that particular gendered or racial qualities stem not from a biological core but from socialization only provides a partial remedy to this problem. The stabilization of identity constructions in a politics of presence remains. When a person is approached with the expectation of being particularly good at listening, or multi-tasking, or dancing because of her gender or race, this always limits the freedom of that person to express and explore the multiple self, no matter what explanation underlies this assumption. From this point of view, the call of Phillips (1995, 162) and Young (2000, 124ff) for citizens to place special trust in representatives who share the same physical identity features based on similar positions in society is problematic. So too is Mansbridge's (1991) call for introducing womanly qualities into the polity. Here women are called upon to embrace their socialized

nurturing and mothering qualities. However positive the interpretation of these features, they nevertheless limit the possibilities of self-definition. Positive identity affirmation always implies inflexibility of and confinement by identity.

We have seen that while difference democrats extensively problematize the dilemma of difference and elaborate ways to overcome its essentialist tendencies, they are only partially successful. Despite the rich potential of the constructivist notions that call for a revolution of subjectivity and understand gender as seriality, difference democrats forgo the exploration of what this means for changing identity and exploring the multiple self. Instead, they use constructivism to justify the recommendation of continuous identity performances. The question thus remains as to how the freedom of the democratic subject to change can be advanced within participatory spaces.

### 4.2.2. Shaping Enlightened Subjects: The Participatory Perspective

In contrast to liberal conceptions of democracy that locate participation in the institutionalized closed spaces of the state and restrict citizens' engagement to the voting booth (Schumpeter, 1947; Downs, 1957), conceptions of participatory democracy emerging in the 1960s and '70s relocate political activity to new participatory spaces from self-managed workplaces (Dahl, 1986; Gould, 1988), to neighbourhood associations (Barber, 2003 [1984]), participatory parties with democratized structures (Macpherson, 1977), and sites of self-organization of education and public services (Hirst, 1994; see also Smith & Teasdale, 2012). Theories of participatory democracy focus largely on the question of how individuals change through interaction within participatory spaces. They see participation as self-realization and an antidote to alienation from politics (Pateman, 1970, 45ff). The notion of the development of personal potential also explains why the role of education holds such a central place in theories of participatory democracy (Dacombe, 2018, 31ff). Participatory spaces function as schools in which democratic subjects learn about various issues and enhance empathy with others (Pateman, 1970, 42). This educative process in participatory spaces entails deep personal transformation.

Participatory democrats take their inspiration from the republican tradition and particularly from Rousseau (1998 [1762], book 1, chapter 8) who argues that: "The passage from the state of nature to the civil state produces a very remarkable change in man… [H]is faculties are so stimulated and developed, his ideas so extended, his feelings so ennobled, and his whole soul so uplifted" that he is transformed from "a stupid and unimaginative animal" into "an intelligent being and a man". In the same vein, participatory democrats understand

participatory spaces as educational institutions which facilitate personal development. As a means of socialization, they provide the democratic subject with opportunities for self-expression and self-discovery. It is the social contact with others that facilitates personal growth (Macpherson, 1977; Pateman, 1970).

The notion of self-realization in participatory democracy can be traced back not only to the humanist and republican tradition (Dacombe, 2018), but also to socialist thought (Asenbaum, 2013; 2012; Held, 2006 [1987]; Muldoon, 2018), and particularly the utopian socialism of thinkers such as Robert Owen, Charles Fourier, and Henri de Saint-Simon (Taylor, 2016 [1982]). Utopian socialists developed detailed conceptions of future societies with the goal of achieving liberation from oppression, individual freedom, and self-realization. Such ideas often opposed the professional specialization imposed by emerging capitalist societies and advocated instead integrative approaches that allowed the individual to cultivate multiple talents and inclinations and thus explore diverse aspects of the multiple self. Although Marx and Engels harshly rejected such utopianism in the name of scientific socialism, it is nevertheless clearly reflected in their writings:

> For as soon as the distribution of labour comes into being, each man has a particular, exclusive sphere of activity, which is forced upon him and from which he cannot escape. He is a hunter, a fisherman, a herdsman, or a critical critic, and must remain so if he does not want to lose his means of livelihood; while in communist society, where nobody has one exclusive sphere of activity but each can become accomplished in any branch he wishes, society regulates the general production and thus makes it possible for me to do one thing today and another tomorrow, to hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, rear cattle in the evening, criticise after dinner, just as I have a mind, without ever becoming hunter, fisherman, herdsman or critic. (Marx & Engels, 1998 [1845], vol. 1)

The Marxian argument, inspired by early utopian socialists, challenges the fixity of identities and calls for a multiplicity of the self. Such an approach is also reflected in current pedagogics which emphasize practical experiences in art, handicrafts, theatre, and intercultural exchange over the knowledge of facts (e.g. Miller *et al.*, 2014). Yet, the notion of personal development through education has also inspired the authoritarian strands of socialist thinking, resulting in conceptions of the "new man" in Marxist and Soviet texts. Here the original thought of liberation through self-exploration takes an unintended turn: educational institutions in particular and social and political institutions more generally are used to shape a specific subject from above. This idea runs counter to participatory democratic

thinking, where self-development is instituted outside of state influence. Referring to civil society's participatory spaces, Schmitter and Karl (1991, 79f), for example, write: "The diverse units of social identity and interest, by remaining independent of the state, can also contribute to forming better citizens who are more aware of the preferences of others, more self-confident in their actions, and more civic-minded in their willingness to sacrifice for the common good".

However, theories of participatory democracy do not manage to completely rid themselves of the authoritarian legacy. It is not any kind of self-transformation that participatory institutions facilitate. Rather than providing a realm of self-exploration, they set out a certain path of self-development. The experience of the needs of others through participation creates a public-minded and other-regarding democratic subject, as Barber elaborates:

> Strong democracy creates the very citizens it depends upon… because it mandates a permanent confrontation between the me as citizen and the "Other" as citizen, *forcing us to think in common and act in common*. The citizen is by definition a we-thinker, and to think of the we is always to transform how interests are perceived and goods defined. (Barber, 2003 [1984], 153, emphasis added)

The compulsion addressed by Barber echoes Rousseau's argument, to wit: "man, who so far had considered only himself, finds that he is *forced to act* on different principles, and to consult his reason before listening to his inclinations" (Rousseau, 1998 [1762], book 1, chapter 8, emphasis added). The spatial reconfiguration suggested by participatory democrats, thus, serves the production of particular subjects. The outcome of this transformative process is to a certain extent predetermined. In many ways, the subject is seen as a product, an object of creation, rather than an autonomous self-explorer.

### 4.2.3.   Creating Better Citizens: The Deliberative Perspective

In contrast with participatory democrats, thinkers in the deliberative democratic tradition bring a whole new set of expertise to the discussion. Rooted in the linguistic turn with structuralism and later poststructuralism becoming the dominant paradigm in social sciences, deliberative democracy draws on notions of discursive identity construction (e.g. Mansbridge *et al.*, 2010, 79). They take inspiration from Habermas' *Theory of Communicative Action* and its ideal of personal autonomy and freedom from domination: "Corresponding to the ideal communication community is an ego-identity that makes possible self-realization on the basis of autonomous action" (Habermas, 1984, 98). This focus on

autonomy and freedom from domination provides a promising outlook for overcoming the authoritarian tendencies in the participatory democratic concept of subject formation.

Based on a deliberative perspective on discursive identity production, Dryzek (2000, 74ff) responds to the difference democratic politics of presence. He criticizes difference democrats for simply replacing the masculinist view in deliberative democracy with a feminist view. Instead of a politics of presence that focuses on contestation along the lines of group identity, he proposes a contestation of discourses and calls for discursive representation (Dryzek & Niemeyer, 2008). Understanding discourses as producing identities calls for a focus on discourses rather than on identities, the latter being merely the result of the former: "One way of interpreting the whole idea of difference is therefore in terms of discourses rather than identities" (Dryzek, 2000, 75).

The problem here, I think, is clear enough. In principle, Dryzek simply reverses the theoretical move that difference democrats undertake. While Phillips (1995) argues that liberal democratic theory has ignored identities and the inequalities linked to them and only focused on content which calls for a perspectival shift toward identities, Dryzek reverses this with an argument for refocusing on content. In other words, Dryzek supports the difference democratic notions of contestation and diversity, but rejects the notion of presence. This appears problematic as a focus on content might obscure inequalities tied to identities in the same way that the original liberal theory did. However, Dryzek's notion of the discursive production of identities through the contestation of discourses warrants further investigation.

In theories of deliberative democracy, discursive identity creation is conceptualized with the ideal of freedom from domination in mind, which might overcome the authoritarian inclinations in participatory democratic conceptions of self-transformation. Investigating this idea in detail, however, constraints similar to those in participatory democracy become apparent. Simone Chambers (1996, 103), for example, elaborates: "Our inner selves (who we are and what we want) are shaped through the communicative relationships we enter into. Practical discourse rationalizes this process by asking participants to reflect upon and evaluate their needs and interests rationally from the point of view of their generalizability". Chambers insists that the freedom of self-expression lies in these modes of communication: "deliberative democracy, because it asks participants to examine, justify, and deliberate about their preferences and interests, gives the individual the opportunity to shape her preferences and interest autonomously" (189). The element of compulsion identified in both Rousseau's and Barber's writing, however, is also clearly reflected in Chamber's text:

> Citizens themselves *come under a publicity requirement* in deliberation such that *they must offer reasons* for their positions and claims. Reason giving initiates a learning process in which participants acquire discursive skills. Participants are asked to defend their preference in terms that others could find convincing. They are asked to look at their preferences from both the partial and the impartial point of view. (190, emphasis added)

These are exactly the tendencies of compulsion criticized by difference democrats. The requirement of reasoned argumentation produces specific democratic subjects. They are not only recreating a masculinist, Eurocentric subject, as difference democrats argue. More importantly for the question of freedom in self-transformation, the subjects created in deliberative democracy appear to be restricted in the development of their personality. The logic of deliberation dictates that subjects need to be reasoned, open-minded, other-regarding and so on. Such a conception of self-transformation is particularly worrying when objectivist assumptions about knowledge are employed. Some studies in deliberative democracy have been particularly keen to point to knowledge gain through deliberation, implying that knowledge is an objective resource to be acquired. In the same vein as participatory democrats, Fung claims: "Deliberative institutions in this mode should offer training and education to *create informed participants*" (2003, 345, emphasis added). And in an empirical study, the authors observe: "[participants'] knowledge about the issue, as well as their capabilities to engage in political debates, increased. In this sense, deliberation *created 'better' citizens*" (Andersen & Hansen, 2007, 552, emphasis added; see also Newton, 2012).

This position is criticized by Mark Warren (1993; 1992), who investigates the deliberative democratic potential for self-transformation. In accord with the accounts outlined above, he states that through deliberation citizens "would become more public-spirited, more tolerant, more knowledgeable, more attentive to the interests of others, and more probing of their own interests" (Warren, 1992, 8). This transformation of the self in deliberative democracy especially affects political identities: "only democratic processes can transform hardened opposition into other kinds of identities. They do this indirectly, through structural inducements to deliberate, negotiate, and adjust… Democracy holds open the space, as it were, in which to build" (Warren, 1996, 254f).

Warren contends that deliberative means of self-transformation increase freedom and autonomy. This is for two reasons. First, deliberation induces self-reflection and makes subjects more aware of their own interests which is liberating in itself (Warren, 1996, 254f).

And second, conflict is to be understood as limiting freedom because it entails confrontation which constitutes relations of domination. When conflict is diminished through deliberation and mutual understanding, this increases freedom. Like Chambers, Warren understands this as an increase in personal autonomy. Yet, he remains critical of the notion of consensus to which many deliberative democrats adhere. He distances himself from Rousseau's conception of the subordination of all individual wills under the general will (Warren, 1992, 11). In "the process of self-discovery (or self-creation)" (12), conflict cannot always be transformed into mutuality, hence there need to be spaces for conflict and confrontation that do not require identity change (9). Like Dryzek, Warren thus identifies a legitimate role for conflict within deliberative democracy. However, in contrast with Dryzek who proposes to shift the focus toward a contestation of discourses, Warren sides with difference democrats in favour of conflict along the lines of identity.

To conclude, while deliberative conceptions of democracy provide notions of self-transformation that try to strengthen individual autonomy, these attempts are only partly successful and ultimately do not provide adequate conceptions of personal freedom of the democratic subject to change. Although Warren and Chambers point to some important gains in personal autonomy through deliberation, this does not overcome the inherently limiting paths of self-transformation laid out in the deliberative perspective. Participatory spaces for deliberation are constructed with the purpose of producing "better" (empathetic, public-spirited, knowledgeable) citizens. Thus, democratic subjects are not free to change, but instead are subject to particular transformations designed by others.

### 4.2.4. Articulating the Tormented Self: The Agonistic Perspective

Warren's argument linking the reification of identity to confrontation finds support in the agonistic perspective. Agonists conceptualize the formation of alternative collective identities as a precondition to any challenge to the neoliberal hegemony. Firmly rooted in the linguistic turn, agonistic thinkers such as William Connolly (1991, 75) or Aletta Norval (2007) explain identities as the product of discursive contestation with subjects at the margins of society developing aversive identities to challenge domination. The self in the agonistic perspective is conceptualized in anti-essentialist terms as multiple, contingent, and fraught with inner contradiction (Connolly, 1995a; 1995b; Honig, 1994). This opens up new potential for self-transformation. Such potential, however, remains unfulfilled as agonism is limited by its tragic horizon and the notion of hegemonic identity construction.

Mouffe (1995) directly responds to the difference democratic politics of presence. She fervently argues against any kind of essentialism which she detects in the work of Pateman (1989) and Young (1989; 1987). While sympathizing with these feminist approaches, which contest the universal construction of the citizen in the image of men and confine women to the private sphere, Mouffe (1995, 322) criticizes their fixed conceptions of (gender) identity: "I do not believe, however, that the remedy is to replace [the modern category of the individual] by a sexually differentiated, 'bigendered' conception of the individual and to bring women's so-called specific tasks into the very definition of citizenship".

Instead, Mouffe argues for a radical constructivist position. In this view, identities are constituted through discursive articulation. Elsewhere Mouffe (1995b) elaborates such a process of identity construction in more detail. Here she positions her discourse theory developed with Ernesto Laclau (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985) in what Lars Tønder and Lasse Thomassen (2005) call the ontology of lack (see also Marchart, 2005). Based on the work of the psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan who points to the vast field of the unconscious which indicates the decentred nature of human identity, Mouffe argues that the core of human identity, on which subjectivity is based, consists of a lack, nothing, an empty space. Identity which is constructed upon this lack is characterized by instability. Attempts at permanently reifying and fixing identity through the articulation of nodal points in a web of discourses are bound to fail due to the intrinsic contingency of discursive meanings. Identity, then, emerges through a continuous dialectical process of fixity and non-fixity (Mouffe, 1995b). The understanding of lack at the core of the subject opens prospects of *de*construction. The disentanglement of discursive constructs that constitute the democratic subject, according to Mouffe (2006, 5f), always has to go hand in hand with the constitution of new identities: "This is why the transformation of political identities" consists of "practices that will mobilize [the subject's] affects towards the disarticulation of the framework in which the process of identification is taking place, thereby opening the way for other forms of identification".

In terms of Mouffe's (1995a, 319) response to the politics of presence, this means that there is no essential core on which a feminist claim for a female identity can be based: "we no longer have a homogenous entity 'woman' facing another homogenous entity 'man,' but a multiplicity of social relations in which sexual difference is always constructed in very diverse ways". According to Mouffe, sexual difference would not and should not disappear in a pluralist conception of radical democracy, but it would lose its significance in political interaction: "in the domain of politics, and as far as citizenship is concerned, sexual difference should not be a pertinent distinction" (323). The de-identification with sexual

constructs needs to be followed by a rearticulation of an identity as radical democratic citizen, which is open enough to allow for various identifications while still orienting the subject toward freedom and equality.

Mouffe's anti-essentialist conception of democratic subjects who are defined by their lack of a foundational core provides new fertile ground for the exploration of the freedom of the subject to change. Instead of an essential core, Mouffe – like many other agonists – understands the subject as defined by inner diversity (Mouffe, 1989, 44). Honig (1994), for example, describes the self as plural and inherently contradictory. And Connolly (1995a) proposes an ethos of pluralization in which democratic subjects embrace, explore, and further develop their inner plurality. Here Connolly echoes Young's call for a revolution of subjectivity that embraces the otherness within the self mentioned earlier (Young, 1990, 124).

Despite this promising outlook, the liberating potential of the multiple self is not fulfilled in the agonistic perspective for three reasons. First, the tragic horizon of agonism thwarts any substantive self-transformation. Second, the inherent conservativism of the agonistic perspective constructs a subject of submission rather than a subject of emancipation. And third, the notion of a hegemonic struggle suggests a top-down construction of democratic subjectivity.

As agonistic democracy is defined by conflict, there can never be a final resolution to such conflict. The end of conflict would mean the end of democracy. This is the tragedy of agonistic democracy (Tambakaki, 2017, 581; Wenman, 2013, 33ff;). Mouffe (2013a, 84) clarifies that there is no such thing as radical democracy: "the extension and radicalization of democratic struggles will never have a final point of arrival in the achievement of a fully liberated society". This tragic view also stifles any real self-transformation. Honig explains that the perpetual conflictuality that positions different actors and different discourses in society in constant confrontation with each other is mirrored within the self. The many things that constitute the assemblage of the self are in unresolvable conflict (Honig, 1994). Helen McManus explores the agonistic self in political participation. The contradictory self needs participatory spaces as forums in which to release the tension of constant inner conflict that it endures:

> it is precisely in the experience of inner conflict as "torment", as something that needs to be addressed and yet can never be entirely resolved, that individuals find themselves compelled to act… The individual knows that the exhilarating "release" of action will in turn bind her up in another set of torments, another

set of excesses along with the attendant perturbation and relief of acting on those excesses. (McManus, 2008, 525)

The multiple self that is caught up in inner torment is situated in a spatial arrangement that itself can never fundamentally change. The social structures surrounding and constituting the subject can be contested by collective subjectivity, but its hierarchical relations and competitive principles cannot be overcome (Tambakaki, 2017, 581). So the subject is bound to endure agony without any prospects of internal or external change.

This tragic horizon of agonistic democracy is owed to an inherent conservativism that stands in contrast with its emancipatory impetus. Since a true alternative to the ruling order can never be achieved, improvements within the liberal order are the best that agonistic contestation can hope to achieve. Wenman (2013, 180ff; 2003) points to the agonistic conservativism within Mouffe's work. The fear of fascist tendencies in the recent surge of right-wing populism leads Mouffe, according to Wenman (2013, 182), to develop "a model of agonistic democracy built around the need to construct order, unity and authority". This conservativism has far-reaching consequences for freedom in identity construction. Mouffe (2013, 28) suggests that "the moment of 'de-identification' [must] be accompanied by a moment of 're-articulation'" reconstructing the subject in terms of radical democratic citizenship. Elsewhere, this radical democratic citizenship is outlined in conservative terms fulfilling primarily the function of maintaining the liberal order rather than facilitating self-expression. To be accepted into the community of citizens, the subject has to submit to the dominant order:

> To belong to the political community, what is required is to accept a specific language of civil intercourse… Those rules prescribe norms of conduct to be subscribed to in seeking self-chosen satisfaction and in performing self-chosen actions. The identification with those rules of civil intercourse creates a common political identity among persons otherwise engaged in many different enterprises. (Mouffe, 1992, 77)

And elsewhere democratic citizenship is described as "a common political identity of persons… who accept submission to certain authoritative rules of conduct" (Mouffe, 1992a, 30f). Apart from the hegemonic function of radical democratic citizenship that dominates rather than emancipates the subject, Mouffe (1995b, 264) also calls for a "'civic' nationalism". Such civic nationalism is not to be understood as homogenous, but rather as a plural and open category. However, this pluralism does not simply fulfil the democratic value of diversity; it is a tool for diverting potentially destructive energies. Multiple identifications

within the civic national identity do not serve to bolster experience of the multiple self, but merely disperse potentially destructive energies into multiple directions and diffuse outlets. Rather than one antagonistic relationship, Mouffe (1994, 111) advocates many agonistic identifications.

It becomes apparent that Mouffe's theory is driven by a fear of destructive forces that make conserving the status quo more appealing than risking upheaval in the name of substantive change. Wenman is right to point to the parallels between Mouffe's later texts and the contractual theory of Thomas Hobbes (1968 [1851]), who pitted the monstrous Leviathan against the monstrous wolf in all of us. Mouffe's criticism of essentialism in difference democracy ultimately fails to afford any perspectives for self-transformation.

Lastly, it is not only the insurmountable inner conflict of the subject and the conservative conception of a subject of submission to the liberal order that limits the freedom of the agonistic subject to change; so too does the notion of hegemony. Understanding identity as the product of collective contestation, as suggested by Norval (2007), limits personal freedom as the subject appears to be constructed from the top down as a subject to leadership.

Mouffe's recent work on populism makes clear that the actors who articulate new identities are political parties and their charismatic leaders who vie for attention in a competitive corporate media environment (Mouffe & Errejon, 2016; Mouffe, 2018). Although the goal of left populist movements is to increase freedom and equality, processes of identity construction are advanced by leaders rather than the grassroots, which is in line with the Gramscian thought on which Mouffe builds and which partly overlaps with Leninist conceptions of a vanguard leadership. In a similar vein, Kioupkiolis (2017, 42) criticizes Laclau's (2005; 2000; 1996) conception of hegemony, in which "the people are an 'amorphous mass' that need to be educated, moulded, and directed by enlightened leaders". As long as agonistic democracy is limited by its tragic horizon that disallows fundamental change, and the fear of upheaval results in aspirations of social conservation, theories of identity construction inevitably wind up as tools in the hands of elites who lead the masses. Ironically, in a similar way as in theories of participatory and deliberative democracy, identities are shaped by enlightened, intellectual elites and paths of transformation are predetermined.

To conclude, agonistic conceptions of the democratic subject as a contingent identity construction offer great potential to explore self-transformation in participatory spaces. Yet, this potential remains unrealized on account of the tragic horizon of agonism, its conservative outlook that maintains the liberal, capitalist order, and the notion of hegemonic identity construction as a top-down process.

**4.3. Transforming Systems and Selves: A New Perspective in Democratic Thought**

While the different radical democratic perspectives discussed here provide promising approaches to performative identity constitution through embodied presence (difference democracy), self-development through participation (participatory democracy), autonomous self-constitution through deliberation (deliberative democracy), and the construction of new collective subjectivities through contestation (agonistic democracy), they all fall short of realizing freedom within these processes. Although the limitations of each of these perspectives derive from their respective ontologies, they nevertheless all share a common problem. They outline a process of subject constitution that serves particular aims: to create more educated, civil, empathetic citizens who submit to established rules, citizens who engage in reasoned deliberation or agonistic respect. The limited social change advanced in these theories is reflected in the limited, bound, and channelled transformations of the subject. The particular self-transformations outlined here appear to be advanced from the top down, by enlightened academics, intellectual leaders, and populist parties. What is needed, thus, is a perspective in democratic theory that provides the grounds for freedom in identity construction, freedom for the subject to change.

To this end, I believe that another perspective in democratic thought that emerged in the wake of the new millennium offers some fruitful ground. What I call transformative democracy was entangled with the agonistic perspective in the early writings that identified with the term "radical democracy" but it has developed its own distinctive features in recent years. In critical response to and clear demarcation from earlier agonistic approaches, texts on post-hegemony try to overcome the tragic perspective of agonism (Day, 2005; Beasley-Murray, 2011). While agonists such as Mouffe focus on the populist movements and parties with new modes of leadership, writers in the post-hegemonic field focus on grassroots movements, social collectives, and self-organized commons. Although this literature, despite its partial theoretical complexity, is very well received publicly, it has yet to be acknowledged in the texts defining the canon of democratic theory. This chapter provides one of the first attempts at outlining this perspective and relating it to other theories of democracy (other, slightly different approaches to describing this perspective are developed by Tambakaki, 2017, 578ff and Wenman, 2013, 89ff).

Texts in the transformative perspective articulate the same criticism of the politics of presence as put forward by Mouffe and other agonistic thinkers. They challenge the essentializing assumptions and confining constructions of identity politics. Sheldon Wolin (1994, 12), for example, argues: "Postmodern cultural politics follows in the footsteps of

nationalism in insisting upon boundaries that establish differences (as in gender or racial politics) but proclaims identities as well. Here, too, the political becomes associated with purification". Wolin's aversion to the boundaries that fix identity is also constitutive of his conception of fugitive democracy. He claims that democracy can never be captured and institutionalized. Institutionalization eradicates the spirit of democracy, which can only live in the moment of deeply experienced mutuality. Applying Wolin's notion of democracy to the self, I suggest that we speak of a fugitive self, whose reification through identification equates to its death. Attempts to capture the self can produce continuous identity performances of the legally identified persona in the public sphere, but, as I will argue later, this is only a form of masquerade (Butler, 1990). The self can never be captured in its multiplicity. The many aspects of the multiple self might rather be set free by modes of disidentification, which will be explored in the next section. First, however, I will lay the ground for a politics of becoming through disidentification by exploring the transformative perspective in democratic theory.

### 4.3.1.  Towards a Transformative Perspective in Democratic Theory

What most clearly distinguishes the transformative perspective from the other radical democratic perspectives discussed so far is the bold articulation of systemic alternatives. In contrast with the discourse on the revitalization of democracy in the participatory, deliberative, difference, and agonistic perspectives, it puts social transformation at its centre. This is aptly illustrated by its use of the spatial concept of utopia. In the literal translation from Greek, utopia denotes "no-place", it describes a space that is "nowhere" or "elsewhere". Transformative democrats use the notion of utopia not only for the imagination of alternative systemic configurations but also as a way to point to "real utopias" that establish alternatives in the here and now. The founding of collective alternatives, such as cooperative modes of production, occupied buildings, and self-managed spaces, are not just insular phenomena but form part of a transformative movement. The late Erik Olin Wright explains that at times there is only a thin line between reformist and transformative strategies. Yet, what differentiates the two is the fact that the transformative perspective always keeps the systemic alternative in clear sight: "Real utopias, in contrast [with reformism], envision the contours of an alternative social world that embodies emancipatory ideals and then look for social innovations we can create in the world as it is that move us towards that destination" (Wright, 2013, 17).

The notion of utopia is also central in Saul Newman's (2016) postanarchism, which enriches traditional anarchist work of the 19th and 20th centuries with poststructuralist and

postfoundationalist thinking. Here utopia denotes a break, a transformative divergence from the presence of domination as "a utopian moment of rupture and excess which disturbs the limits of politics" (Newman, 2010b, 7). This interruption of domination as part of a transformative strategy consists of a reconfiguration of space. The project of transforming social relations on a macro level is pursued by reconfiguring democratic spatiality in various sites on a micro level. Postanarchism is aimed "at fostering the emergence of new autonomous political spaces, where communal and free relations can develop. This would involve an experimentation with new ways of living, different non-authoritarian political practices and structures, and even alternative economies" (128). To advance an idea of the autonomous constitution of "insurrectional spaces" by democratic subjects, Newman (2011, 355) reinterprets the term of design and describes it as "forms of autonomous self-ordering from below".

Postanarchism, thus, introduces a disorder of things by interrupting established modes of domination and reordering space to foster freedom and equality. Compared to the liberal conceptions of freedom and equality discussed in this thesis so far, the anarchist perspective introduces an entirely different understanding. Liberal thinking, on which Mouffe builds the democratic paradox, positions freedom and equality in an unresolvable tension, so that an increase in the freedom of one subject means the decrease in freedom of another. Equality works as a regulatory function that distributes freedom among individuals (see Spencer, 1851). The opposition between freedom and equality in liberal thinking rests on the conceptions of individualism and competition. If each individual is in direct competition with all others, she needs to increase her resources, power, and freedom at the expense of others. Freedom is perceived as a limited resource. Anarchism, in contrast, argues that the freedom of one individual *depends on the freedom of others*. Freedom is never realizable individually but only collectively. Freedom and equality are not at odds with one another, but rather intimately intertwined. Postanarchism suggests a conception of collective freedom

> … in which liberty can be shared without being diminished; in which the liberty of one is only imaginable in the context of the liberty of all; and in which liberty must come not only with formal equality (of liberty), but with social and economic equality. It is at this point that the difference between liberty and equality becomes indistinct, one term merging into the other. (Newman, 2010b, 22f)

Newman explains that freedom and equality are not two different concepts; rather, they are one, as "for anarchists, democracy must be conditioned by an ethics of equal liberty" (2016, 176). Where there is inequality, there cannot be freedom, because some are confined by

domination while others are confined by dominating. Only when all are equal can all be free. Furthermore, when equality is enforced by the state – in socialist conceptions of redistribution or in feminist conceptions of quota regulations – equality is always achieved through inequality. The use of force rests on an accumulation of power (Newman, 2010b, 3, 20ff).

To develop this postanarchist approach, Newman draws on several thinkers including Jacques Rancière and Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri. While these authors do not define themselves as anarchists, Newman claims that their thought is clearly rooted in and contributes to developing a new anarchist project (Newman, 2010b, 104). Rancière's work explains democracy as the moment of freedom and equality interrupting the dominant order (Rancière, 1999). In Dikeç's re-reading of Rancière's democratic theory in spatial terms, he describes Rancière's police as the attempt by the established order to fix relations of domination. The hierarchical space of the police constitutes a stable, measurable, empty terrain from which dominant forces assign names and places to their subjects. In naming, counting, and ordering subjects, the police fixes social constellations and conserves the established hierarchical order (Dikeç, 2005, 172ff). This process of hierarchical spatialization is, however, periodically intercepted by moments of rupture, when democratic subjects "construct a space, a polemical common space for addressing a wrong and demonstrating the equality of anyone with anyone" (178).

The moment of rupture that is central to the work of Rancière and Newman shares with the agonistic perspective a focus on conflict. Conflict plays an important role in the transformative perspective as the means for transformation. Only through the struggle of social movements can equality and freedom be achieved. Social movements, then, become the site of both striving toward democracy and the lived experience of democracy itself. What clearly differentiates transformative from agonistic democrats is that the transformative perspective does not understand democracy itself as a state of conflict but defines conflict as a mode of democratization – a move toward democracy. This becomes apparent when looking at definitions of politics and the political. While Mouffe defines the political as the potential antagonistic conflictuality inherent in every human relation, Wolin conceptualizes the political in contrary terms as the democratic moment of communality: "I shall take the political to be an expression of the idea that a free society composed of diversities can nonetheless enjoy moments of commonality when, through public deliberations, collective power is used to promote or protect the wellbeing of the collectivity" (Wolin, 1994, 11).

The experience of commonality in the moment is at the same time the actualization of democracy and a transition toward democracy: Democracy is "a rebellious moment" (Wolin, 1994, 23) – a subjective state of mind. In contrast with agonistic tragedy, the transformative perspective opens prospects for systemic change. This change is sometimes referred to as transformation, revolution, insurrection or rebellion. What is crucial is that democracy does not just lie beyond this process; democracy is realized within it:

> Democracy is not about where the political is located but how it is experienced. Revolutions activate the demos and destroy boundaries that bar access to political experience. Individuals from the excluded social strata take on responsibilities, deliberate about goals and choices, and share in decisions that have broad consequences and affect unknown and distant others. Thus revolutionary transgression is the means by which the demos makes itself political. (18)

It is this democratic moment of transformation, which is at the heart of Hardt and Negri's *Multitude* (2004). As the social category of class is becoming increasingly less relevant due to a new globalized world order, the term "multitude" captures a new radical collective subjectivity which preserves the multiplicity of singularities but simultaneously affords the recognition of the common. Hardt and Negri reconceptualize the supposed oppositions of pluralism and equality and define the multitude as a continuous production of commonality and difference: "while remaining different, we discover the commonality that enables us to communicate and act together" (Hardt & Negri, 2004, xiii). This productive reconfiguration affords the transformative power of the multitude: "The intensification of the common, finally, brings about an anthropological transformation such that out of the struggles come a new humanity" (213). Rejecting the binary opposition between reform and revolution, Hardt and Negri (2017, 254) trust in the transformative power of "antagonistic formations within and against the state". Rather than in terms of institutions and decision-making rules, they understand democracy as the intuitive coordination in the production of the common akin to concepts of swarm intelligence (Lewis, 2010).

In contrast with the other radical democratic perspectives discussed so far, which all see the necessity for both representative and direct democratic institutions, the transformative perspective collapses this division and understands democracy in its original sense as self-rule. Hardt and Negri (2017, 247) describe what they call absolute democracy as the "rule of everyone by everyone". This form of self-rule is constituted by *the common*. The notion of the common, which is central in the transformative perspective, bears some resemblance to participatory democrats' notion of democratic community. Wolin (1994, 24), for

example, writes: "Individuals who concert their powers for… common concerns of ordinary lives are experiencing a democratic moment and contributing to the discovery, care, and tending of a commonality of shared concerns". In the transformative perspective, the common, however, goes beyond the participatory democratic spirit of communal organization by addressing the question of property and the social distribution of wealth. Rancière (2014 [2005], 57f) argues that while capitalist forces of privatization aim to constantly expand the commercial sphere, democratic forces expand the common as public sphere including everyone.

Hardt and Negri, like Rancière, use the term "common" in the singular and thus present an expansion of the notion of the original commons (in plural). The commons as originally described by Garrett Hardin (1968) and later Elinor Ostrom (1990) are common-pool resources including land, water, public places, and knowledge. The concept of the commons thus addresses the question of property ownership and develops an understanding of participatory communal control and self-management. Many insist, however, that the commons are never owned, but only preliminarily used so that they function as hosts to their users. Commons then create a community of commoners and it is their social relations and activity which define the commons (Deleixhe, 2018, 63f). Rather than property or any kind of object, the commons are defined by the interactive process of *commoning* – the creation and recreation of the respective resource.

This notion of cooperative production also plays a crucial role in the current freedom of information and the open source movements, which confront the capitalist drive towards the commercialization and privatization of knowledge. In the digital age, the logic of commoning through sharing knowledge online challenges the capitalist logic of property rights enforced through online paywalls that confine digital knowledge space (Beyer, 2014b). Wikipedia is a particularly illustrative example of how common-based knowledge production can work (Konieczny, 2010). And the notion of liquid democracy as practiced by Pirate Parties shows how open source principles and wiki technology can be used to produce collective decisions, texts, and even laws (Blum & Zuber, 2016).

Considering the immateriality of digital objects and the discursive nature of knowledge, Hardt and Negri take the notion of the commons further, and besides arguing for the socialization of traditional commons, such as water, banks, and education (Hardt & Negri, 2012), they define the common (in singular) in discursive terms: the common is the outcome of any social and communicative interaction. If the common is understood as

knowledge production, then any linguistic or performative articulation is part of the process of commoning.

While Hardt and Negri put their conception of a common-based democracy in more concrete terms in *Declaration* (2012), where they speak of a federative structure of assemblies, it remains abstract in most of their writings. The work of Alexandros Kioupkiolis picks up their notion of the common and provides an idea of how it might be applied to democratic decision-making. What he calls common democracy denotes the self-rule of the people which eliminates the distinction between the rulers and the ruled: "the public political governance becomes a *common* affair: a public process accessible to all members of a community on the basis of equality" (Kioupkiolis, 2017, 37f). These principles of transparency and accessibility of common decision-making are illustrated by the movement of the squares, which, in contrast with the practices of political negotiation behind closed doors, assemble in public for everyone to see and join. While common democracy eliminates the separation between rulers and ruled, it does not, according to Kioupkiolis, eliminate some forms of representation and does not require everyone to participate at all times. Instead, through a combination of various mechanisms, such as rotation, limited tenure, and sortition (see Owen & Smith, 2018), and through the variation of participants who feel the strongest about respective issues, an organic kind of representation of the physically absent emerges. These principles of common democracy, Kioupkiolis argues, can be found not only in recent social movement mobilizations, but also in Ancient Greek forms of direct democracy and current digital commons such as Wikipedia. In a similar vein, Wright (2013, 17ff) illustrates the realization of democratic utopias here and now through examples such as Wikipedia, workers' cooperatives, participatory budgeting, unconditional basic income, and "randomocracy" through sortition.

To conclude, the transformative perspective outlined above differs from other radical democratic perspectives in advocating fundamental systemic change. The constitution of participatory spaces, or insurrectional spaces in Newman's (2011) terms, is part of a deep reconfiguration of democratic spatiality through an interruption of domination. The notion of equal liberty in anarchist debates uncovers entirely new perspectives in relation to the objectives of this thesis. If equality and freedom are not at odds, as the democratic paradox suggests, then it appears that they can both be advanced simultaneously within participatory spaces. I will return to this question in the next chapter. The transformative perspective outlined here provides fresh and fertile ground for the self-transformation and self-explorations of the democratic subject. So, how can democratic subjectivity be re-imagined

through a transformative democratic lens, and what possibilities can it provide for democratic self-constitution?

### 4.3.2. From the Politics of Presence to a Politics of Becoming: Disidentification as Radical Democratic Practice

The freedom for the subject to change in the transformative perspective is based on a different conception of democratic spatiality. The difference, participatory, deliberative, and agonistic perspectives discussed so far understand space as stable and only partly changing. The rearrangement of spatial assemblages they recommend is limited by the liberal, capitalist context in which they are produced. The transformative perspective, in contrast, explains space itself as a morphological entity. The transformation of the self goes along with the transformation of space as two intertwined assemblages, as discussed in Chapter 2 (2.5.2). The utopian and insurrectional spaces of postanarchism not only interrupt domination on the level of society as a whole, but also this destabilization of ground interrupts established practices of identification. The self is never fixed but always becoming: "Postanarchism, or if you like, post-foundational anarchism, conceives of a political space which is indeterminate, contingent and heterogeneous – a space whose lines and contours are undecidable. Postanarchist political space is, in other words, a space of *becoming*" (Newman, 2011, 355). In contrast with the Arendtian space of appearance in which the gaze of spectators actualizes and reifies the subject (Arendt, 1958), the space of becoming constitutes morphological subjectivities that are in constant flux. This change is, of course, not an entirely autonomous process. The subject always depends on the interpellation of others. But this interpellation, as will become clear, is interrupted by freedom and equality enlarging the identity spaces through which the subject moves. This freedom of self-creation is based on the morphological nature of space. As spaces produce subjects and subjects produce spaces in a dialectical manner, the freedom of self-exploration becomes a project of extending the spaces that break with the logic of domination. Thus, we can understand "autonomy as an ongoing project of political spatialization" (Newman, 2011, 356). Exploring freedom in democratic self-constitution, this section will augment the politics of presence with a politics of becoming by supplementing modes of continuous identity performance with modes of disidentification.

Many theorists contributing to the transformative perspective challenge the core assumptions of identity politics. Their critique addresses the constraining elements of the politics of presence that imagines the democratic subject as physically embodied and identified, confined to its particularities of one dominant identity that overshadows other intersectional

identifications. Wolin likens identity politics to the logic of the state which, in defining the boundaries of a territory, a nation, and a culture, creates a hegemonic group identity: "Both as container and excluder, boundaries work to foster the impression of a circumscribed space in which likeness dwells, the likeness of natives, of an autochthonous people, or of a nationality… Likeness is prized because it appears as the prime ingredient of unity" (Wolin, 1994, 12). The construction of group identity as an exclusive unity undermines "heterogeneity, diversity, multiple selves" (24). In contrast, democracy needs to be imagined as "a mode of being" (23), as "a project concerned with the political potentialities of ordinary citizens, that is with their possibilities for *becoming political beings* through the self-discovery of common concerns and of modes of action for realizing them" (11, emphasis added).

Newman takes a similarly critical stance toward identity politics and points not only to its confining aspects, but also to its divisive tendencies that impede a common democratic project:

> A politics that is based around the assertion of an identity, or seeks an institutional recognition of a specific difference… [is] confining itself to a certain particularity, thus closing itself off from struggles and identities outside itself. What is foreclosed is an egalitarian, collective, democratic dimension which embodies a necessary openness to the other. (Newman, 2010, 8)

The democratic dimension that overcomes division as indicated by Newman is reflected in Hardt and Negri's multitude, which they describe as "the *living flesh* that rules itself" (2004, 100). Not unlike Laclau and Mouffe's chain of equivalence (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985, 176) and Young's heterogeneous public (Young, 1990, 188ff; 1989, 264ff; 1987, 75f), the multitude emerges as a new democratic subjectivity with a mosaic-like character: "The multitude is an internally different, multiple social subject whose constitution and action is based not on identity or unity (or, much less, indifference) but on what it has in common" (Hardt & Negri, 2004; see also Hardt & Negri, 2017, 231).

It becomes apparent that in contrast with the politics of presence, the subjectivities described here undergo transformation. To best capture such identity reconfigurations, I will build on Connolly's notion of a "politics of becoming". Interestingly, Connolly uses the term to describe exactly the same social phenomena that in the difference democratic perspective are associated with the politics of presence. He argues that the LGBTIQ, the women's, and the anti-slavery movement all engage in a politics of becoming, not by reifying their identities through physical presence, but through pursuing an agenda of identity

change. They aim to *become* citizens with equal rights deserving of equal respect: "The politics of becoming occurs when a culturally marked constituency, suffering under its current social constitution, strives to reconfigure itself by moving the cultural constellation of identity/difference then in place" (Connolly, 1996, 255f). While participants in these claimed spaces often define themselves in essentialist terms, the lack of a natural essence of their identities allows them to engage in a transformative politics (264).

This offers a complete reinterpretation of identity politics. This perspectival shift allows us to understand an aspect of identity transformation that is already inherent in the politics of presence and yet seldom acknowledged in debates on difference democracy. The confinements of the dilemma of difference can partly be tackled by a focus on the contingency of identity constructions *created through identity politics*. Paradoxically, physical presence is a performative act of becoming. Participants in these movements are always becoming; they always strive to be what they are currently perceived not to be. Young (1990, 124, 169ff) hints toward such an understanding when she calls for a revolution of subjectivity and explains the self-definitions of the marginalized as contingent constructions. Even in its physically embodied form, the subject is always a subject to change.

In the perspective I am suggesting, the politics of becoming does not replace the politics of presence. The two concepts are rather in a relation of augmentation. The politics of becoming suggests that presence is not fixed in time and space. Rather, presence itself needs to be understood as a transformative process of becoming. The identity claimed through presence in participatory spaces is a becoming identity, one that claims a future self. Suffragettes, for example, did not take a stance in claimed spaces as housewives but as future voters and politicians. They emerged in the space of appearance as who they aspired to be. In that brief moment of experiencing democracy, they became equal citizens. Thus, the concept of the politics of becoming allows us to rethink the politics of presence.

The understanding of a politics of becoming and its compatibility with a politics of presence can be further explored through the work of Moya Lloyd (2005). According to Lloyd, instead of perceiving identity as pre-political, so that the politics of presence can represent the category "woman" in participatory spaces, identity needs to be understood as a product created *within* participatory spaces. The democratic subject needs to be understood as a subject-in-process. This does not preclude the strategic use of essentialism. Rather, participatory spaces need to express diversity through the presence of the marginalized. However, at the same time, they need to function as the sites of critiquing and deconstructing essentialism. Even when engaging in strategic essentialism, the performative nature of

identities must be kept in mind: "even when an essence becomes hegemonic, it is never simply locked down. It remains performative – producing that which it means as it names it through reiteration and re-citation. For this reason, performative identities are always susceptible to subversion, transgression and even transformation" (Lloyd, 2005, 67).

Understanding the self as inherently fugitive – as that which tries to escape reification through identification and representation – we can see that a politics of presence temporarily stabilizes identity as a communicative act. The self, however, remains fugitive. The subject to change keeps transforming in different spatial contexts. Its identity assemblage is altered as it interacts with different things in other spaces, which are themselves in constant flux. The subject is always becoming.

I propose, however, to take the meaning of the politics of becoming beyond identity politics to include all aspects of self-transformation in participatory spaces. Beyond Connolly's original notion, which focuses on claimed spaces, this also includes identity transformations in invited and even in closed spaces. More importantly, however, by overcoming the agonistic constraints of tragedy and a continuous struggle for hegemony of both Connolly and Lloyd, I will investigate the politics of becoming through the transformative perspective to explore the potentialities of a democratization of subject constitution.

To explore the emancipatory potentialities of the politics of becoming, I will draw on Rancière's work on subjectivization and in particular on the concept of disidentification, which denotes an interruption of identity assemblages. To understand the meaning of disidentification, let us start with its opposite: identification. As mentioned earlier, Rancière explains the established political order as consensus or post-democracy, which he calls the police. The police rests on the logic of identification. Moved by an impetus of control and conservation, it names its subjects and assigns them a place and a part. This logic of control and conservation counteracting freedom and equality aims at eradicating democracy: "Post-democracy… is an identifying mode, among institutional mechanisms and allocation of the society's appropriate parts and shares, for making the subject and democracy's own specific actions disappear" (Rancière, 1999, 102). Thus, "little by little the identity of the whole with the all is obtained" (124).

This process of homogenization through identification advanced by the police is disrupted by processes of subjectivization. Subjectivization consists of the collective creation of new identities that contest the police order. These processes of becoming are, however, not processes of identification which follow the police logic of reifying, assigning, and controlling identity. Subjectivization, Rancière explains, is rather to be understood as *disidentification*.

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Disidentification is the political act of disrupting the identificatory processes of the police by rejecting the names it assigns. Instead of creating another identity, which would, again, comply with the logic of police, disidentification creates an improper identity, a wrong name.

> That "wrong name" identified nothing. Instead it put to work a process of dis-identification. A process of dis-identification is what creates a political subject. A political subject is a being that arrives as supplement to the social distribution, since it cannot be identified as a part of the police order. (Rancière, 2007, 561)

This wrong name articulates the positionality of a gap in which it is created. The disidentifying subject is an outcast, a nobody, somebody who does not count and is not assigned a share in the social order. Between this nowhere, where nobody is located, and the precisely localized position controlled by the police, emerges a new ground through disidentification. It is the gap between identification and nothing where subjectivization through disidentification occurs. Through this "identification with an anybody that has no body" (Rancière, 1992, 62), new collective subjectivities arise which cannot be controlled and administered by the police.

Rancière explains disidentification through various examples. The emergence of the proletariat as political subject is one such case. In the early 19th century, those people who in the eyes of the police merely served the production of wealth, but did not count as individuals in the liberal-capitalist order, were named after their most valuable attribute: their production of offspring that would further produce wealth. While the police order hailed those outcasts as proletarians, many workers rejected this ascription by disputing the identity category assigned to them. Their disidentification consisted of a rejection of the class system altogether by promoting the Marxist notion of the classless society in which neither capitalists nor proletarians would exist. "In this way", Rancière (1992, 61) notes, "a process of subjectivization is a process of disidentification or declassification".

According to Rancière, the position of the outcast earlier occupied by proletarians is now the place of immigrants. In a more recent piece, he engages with the immigration debate in Australia and asks what it means to be "un-Australian". By expanding this question to the meaning of *Un* itself, he argues that the terms "Unaustralians" residing in the imaginary place of "Unaustralia" do not simply create a counter-identity. The re-appropriation of the racist slur by immigrants does not simply create a positive identity in opposition to a nationalist Australian identity. The positionality of Unaustralians between an individual

identity produced and administered by the police and the position of the unnamed immigrant as outcast and nobody creates an *un*-identity, a purposefully wrong name that clearly neither signifies a "real" registered and administered person, nor a nobody: "politics as such", Rancière (2007, 562) claims, "rests on the anarchic power of the… un-identified".

Lastly, Rancière uses the example of the phrase "We are all German Jews" to illustrate the re-appropriation of a derogatory term as an improper name. When, at the students' demonstration of May 1968 in France, conservatives tried to discredit the student leader Daniel Cohn-Bendit by pointing to his German-Jewish roots, protesters engaged in subjectivization by chanting "We are all German Jews!" Again, neither are these German Jews "real" people in the sense that they would be countable and nameable, nor were (at least the vast majority of) the protesters actually German or Jewish. These German Jews purposely employed a wrong name, creating new identifications to express their political convictions (Rancière, 2007, 561; 1999, 126; 1992, 61).

Rancière's notion of improper names is further developed in the work of Marco Deseriis, who explores these novel collective identities as the actualization of Hardt and Negri's multitude. Improper names bring together individuals who form agentic assemblages as a *condividual*. In contrast with the individualistic subject of liberal theory, the condividual is based on a shared identity. The human bodies that form the collective subject interact with the discursive articulations they produce, forming a space of becoming. In doing so, they reject the individual names assigned to them by creating an improper name that interrupts hegemonic identity interpellations: "improper names function as assemblages of enunciation that are common and singular, impersonal yet individuated. Although these aliases retain the formal features of a proper name, their multiple and unpredictable iterations in the public sphere put into crisis the referential function of the proper name" (Deseriis, 2015, 4f).

Improper names can take two forms: multi-user names and collective pseudonyms. The latter are exemplified by the hacktivist collective Anonymous, which reifies its improper identity through the Guy Fawkes mask, both in its physical version in street demonstrations and its digital version in online protest. The improper face of Anonymous belongs to a proper historical figure. Guy Fawkes is known for his role in the failed Gunpowder Plot of 1605 (Asenbaum, 2018; Cambre, 2014; Koch, 2014). Similarly, in the late 18th century the name Ned Ludd was associated with the politically motivated breaking of stocking frames as a form of workers' protest against increasing industrialization. Although Ludd's actual existence is disputed, a popular folk tale tells of him breaking a stock frame in anger.

Whenever a piece of industrial machinery was broken, it was jokingly blamed on Ludd. The political movement protesting the devaluation of special skills in the industry through automation took over this name. Declaring the mythical Ned Ludd their leader, the Luddites signed proclamations and letters with his name, thus assuming an improper identity (Deseriis, 2013). In contrast to collective pseudonyms, multi-user names can be exemplified by Robin Hood, a name that was used by different people to steal and redistribute property (Deseriis, 2015, 2).

The use of improper names is explained by Deseriis as a spatial practice. Improper names disrupt the spatial order of the police: "Because the state apparatus produces the subject as a political, epistemological, and biological unit that is always fundamentally *in place*, those subjectivities that cannot properly be located pose a fundamental threat to state power" (Deseriis, 2015, 24). By breaking down established boundaries and introducing a disorder of things, improper names create new spaces of becoming:

> Because they are open to unforeseen appropriation, improper names imply an opening of closed spaces and a constant subversion of fixed relations… [B]y making themselves available to unforeseen appropriations, they let the outside slip into the inside, and vice versa. This means that improper names do not designate fixed identities. Rather, they are heterogeneous assemblages in which the whole (the ensemble of an improper name's iterations) is unable to unify and totalize the parts, among which, nevertheless, it establishes relationships and paths of communication. (Deseriis, 2015, 6, 18)

Modes of disidentification through improper names that disrupt the established order generate new potentials of freedom for the democratic subject to explore its multiple self. The augmentation of the politics of presence through a politics of becoming and the re-reading of the Arendtian space of appearance as space of becoming opens new prospects for the subject to change. In contrast with other radical democratic approaches, the transformative perspective allows for a deeper reconfiguration of spatial assemblages that constitute the identities of democratic subjects.

However, as the notion of improper names makes especially clear, these approaches only explain the becoming of *collective* subjectivities. One potential problem in understanding the democratic subject primarily as condividual or multitude rather than as individual is that it presupposes submission to group identity. While the democratic subject is thought here in more morphological terms than in other radical democratic theories, the individual subject in participatory spaces has to adjust and go along with swarms and networked flows.

Understanding identity in Hardt and Negri's terms of commoning means that identity – whether proper or improper – is a product of collective production through the multitude, limiting the freedom for the individual subject to self-identify.

The postanarchist conception of democracy cautions against this danger: "the revolution against power and authority must involve a micro-political revolution which takes place at the level of the subject's desire" (Newman, 2010a, 6). Yet guidance on how to achieve such micro-political revolutions is scarce. I suggest that debates in gender and queer theory generate a promising outlook for the question of a micro revolution that addresses personal desires and affords the opportunity for individual change. Enriching the politics of becoming with queer theoretical concepts will allow for a focus on the individual level of democratic subjectivity. Of course, the democratic subject can never simply constitute itself independently. The whole notion of identification rests on networked affiliations through cognitive associations with other humans, objects, and concepts. It denotes the connections and overlaps between various assemblages that constitute a person's individual identity. In contrast with the notions of subjectivization articulated by Rancière and others in the transformative perspective that explain the individual as a part of swarms, collectives, and multitudes, queer theories allow for a focus on the question of what the individual subject can do to disidentify. How can hegemonic identity interpellations be rejected in everyday interaction? And how can those identities that define us on a very personal level be reworked?

### 4.3.3. Queering Democratic Subjectivity: Masquerade and Resignification

Feminist thought has undergone profound changes in the last few decades. This shift is often described as the move from second to third wave feminism. While feminists from the 1960s into the '80s engaged in a fight for sexual liberation through concepts of the female body and female experience as particular (and sometimes superior), from the 1990s onwards feminist debates shifted to postmodern concepts that understood identity as a volatile construction. This transition can also be observed in academic labels turning from "women's studies" to "gender studies", not only including queer and intersectional thought, but also broadening their scope through the lenses of masculinity, critical whiteness, and disability studies. Notions of identity politics through the presence of second wave feminism were contested by third wave notions of performativity, which describe gender as an active process of doing rather than a fixed state of being. The divide between second and third wave feminism is also reflected in the debates of this thesis between the identity politics of the difference democratic perspective and the notion of identity construction in the transformative and agonistic perspectives. In this thesis, the two "camps" will, however,

not be understood as standing in opposition to one another, but rather as different and mutually enriching perspectives.

While second wave feminism has made its way into democratic thought in the debates between difference democrats, third wave feminism and queer and gender studies have hardly been acknowledged by democratic theory (an exception is Lloyd, 2009; 2005). In the last section of this chapter, I will employ queer and gender theory to explore the transformative potential of democratic subjectivity as part of a politics of becoming. In doing so, the section pursues two objectives. First, to enrich democratic theory with the specific expertise of queer and gender theory in relation to identity change. The concept of disidentification will be explored in further depth and, moreover, supplemented with the notions of masquerade and resignification. Second, queer and gender perspectives will be employed to focus on the micro level of democratic subjectivity to explore the revolution on the level of desires that Newman (2010a, 6) calls for.

Hardt and Negri acknowledge the potential contribution of queer and gender theory and particularly the work of Judith Butler to democratic thought. They position the conceptions of gender performativity in opposition to identity politics to illustrate the multitude as a transformative democratic subjectivity: "Queer politics… is not really an affirmation of homosexual identities but a subversion of the logics of identity in general. There are no queer bodies, only queer flesh that resides in the communication and collaboration of social conduct" (Hardt & Negri, 2004, 200). The authors are right in pointing to the subversive potential of the term "queer" that goes beyond gay and lesbian liberation. Queering identity denotes an understanding of identity as fugitive, escaping and subverting the heterosexual matrix. I disagree with Hardt and Negri's contention, however, that queer politics signify the morphology of the collective of the multitude, which implies submission to group dynamics. I rather go along with Butler who does not see second wave feminism and third wave queer politics as mutually exclusive, as Hardt and Negri suggest. Through Butler's work, the politics of presence and the politics of becoming through disidentification can be seen as complementary:

> Although the political discourses that mobilize identity categories tend to cultivate identifications in the service of a political goal, it may be that the persistence of *dis*identification is equally crucial to the rearticulation of democratic contestation. Indeed, it may be precisely through practices which underscore disidentification with those regulatory norms by which sexual difference is materialized that both feminist and queer politics are mobilized. Such collective

disidentifications can facilitate a reconceptualization of which bodies matter, and which bodies are yet to emerge as critical matters of concern. (Butler, 1993, 4)

With Butler, I will argue that it is not about taking sides with either a politics of presence or a politics of becoming, but about their mutual enrichment. If a politics of becoming is understood as the contingent performance of future selves (Connolly, 1996), as continuously rearticulating a subject-in-process through embodied presence (Lloyd, 2005), then there is nothing that makes a politics of presence incompatible with a politics of becoming. Rather, the politics of becoming partly depends on sites of physical presence, on a space of appearance where the democratic subject is co-constituted by the gaze of spectators in a constant process of rearticulation and reinterpretation of the self. At the same time, the politics of presence is constituted by corporeal performativity, by a subject that is always subject to change.

As discussed above, Rancière explains disidentification as the rejection of a name assigned by the police order: "It always involves an impossible identification" (Rancière, 1992, 61). Citing the incident in 1961 when French police killed hundreds of Algerian liberation protesters in the name of "the French people", Rancière observes that this interpellation failed. Many rejected the interpellation as the French people. Queer theorist José Esteban Muñoz conceptualizes disidentification in similar terms, albeit on the level of personal identity. He describes various personal stories of different people located at the intersectional social position of queers of colour struggling to identify as they are being hailed by different identity categories. Disidentification occurs when dominant interpellations fail, which, according to Muñoz, are part of heteronormative, sexist, and racist discourses that stabilize state power and conserve established social relations (Muñoz, 1999, 5).

Muñoz recounts several incidents when he was drawn to the identity performances of others not associated with his identity group. Transsexual, gay, and female identity performances, for example, had an exciting and enticing effect. Disidentification, thus, consists not just of the rejection of dominant interpellations, but also of accepting the interpellation of others: "To disidentify is to read oneself and one's own life narrative in a moment, object, or subject that is not culturally coded to 'connect' with the disidentifying subject. It is not to pick and choose what one takes out of an identification" (12). Rather than freely constructing one's own identity at will, the disidentifactory modes of becoming depend on alternative interpellations. Muñoz explains this in terms of a democratization of identity construction as subjects gain some degree of freedom in articulating their public personae. This identity

construction depends first and foremost on the deconstruction of hegemonic identity inter-pellations. Discourse, however, can never be completely broken out of. Rather, democratic subjects have to work with the terms available and try to stretch, alter, and reconfigure discursive meaning. Hence, disidentification can never be a counter-identification in the sense of constructing alternative counter-identities that oppose hegemonic discourse from outside. Instead, disidentification always navigates within dominant discourse, negotiating new terms and creating free spaces:

> Disidentification is about recycling and rethinking encoded meaning. The pro-cess of disidentification scrambles and reconstructs the encoded message of a cultural text in a fashion that both exposes the encoded message's universaliz-ing and exclusionary machinations and recircuits its workings to account for, include, and empower minority identities and identifications. Thus, disidentifi-cation is a step further than cracking open the code of the majority; it proceeds to use this code as a raw material for representing a disempowered politics or positionality that has been rendered unthinkable by the dominant culture. (31)

Like Muñoz and Rancière, Butler uses the term "disidentification" to describe failed iden-tity interpellations. Other than Rancière's focus on collective identities such as the "French people", Deseriis' improper names such as Ned Ludd, and Muñoz's sole relevance of dis-identification to intersectional groups such as queer people of colour, Butler explains how disidentification is relevant for everyone. She points to the potential failure of interpella-tions of broad categories such as "woman" or "man". Binary gender categories do not acknowledge the wide variety of internal differences of people associated with these cate-gories, so that even those who clearly identify as either of the sexes might feel unease about the package of preconceptions and expectations that accompany these categories. In other words, even those who express their identities within categories of the heterosexual matrix of masculinity, femininity, and attraction to the opposite sex might disidentify to a certain extent. In Mouffe's (1995a) terms, one could argue that closure of identity is never possible because consensus with one's own self about who one is can never be achieved. The bound-aries of personal identity space cannot be closed because the self remains fugitive. With regards to disidentification, Butler (1993, 219) states: "it may be that the affirmation of that slippage, that the failure of identification, is itself the point of departure for a more democ-ratizing affirmation of internal difference". Here it becomes clear how queer and gender theory can contribute to a democratization of subjectivity on the individual, rather than a collective, level. It advances the freedom to rework or decrease the significance of collec-tive identities with their confining tendencies and promotes freedom for the individual

subject. By loosening the confinements of hegemonic identity constructions, disidentifications afford the exploration of alternative identity performances:

> Paradoxically, the failure of such signifiers – "women" is the one that comes to mind – fully to describe the constituency they name is precisely what constitutes these signifiers as sites of phantasmatic investment and discursive rearticulation. It is what opens the signifier to new meanings and new possibilities for political resignification. It is this open-ended and performative function of the signifier that seems to me to be crucial to a radical democratic notion of futurity.
> (191)

According to Butler, it is thus not always necessary to create new terms to signify new identities. Rather, new identities can be expressed through the resignification of established categories. Such practices of resignification, to which I will return shortly, can be understood in the terms of a politics of becoming. Identity categories can be resignified to express the meaning of future and alternative selves.

While Butler is not a democratic theorist and only occasionally refers to other democratic theorists and the term "democracy", her work on performativity has much to contribute to democratic thought (Lloyd, 2009; 2007; 2005; Schippers, 2009). Butler's approach is based on a radical deconstructivist ontology, articulated in her famous claim that there is no difference between biological sex and social gender. Rather, sex is constructed, from the moment of the doctor's exclamation: "It's a boy!" In Butler's terms, the discourses through which identities are performed depend upon citation and re-citation. Subjects can only express themselves in the terms that are already established. Because there is no pre-discursive subject, hegemonic discourse has no origin. Identity, then, is the product of discursive formations, which subjects are born into and constantly reproduce (Butler, 1990).

The term "performativity" draws attention to the naturalized effort it takes to produce identity. Butler explains all gender identities as parody and drag, indicating the artificiality of such human products. By studying the gender crossings of travesty, she points to the citationality of gender performances. To illustrate the imperceptible artificiality of all identity performances, Butler employs the concept of masquerade. Borrowing the original concept from Joan Riviere (1997 [1929]), who uses the term "masquerade" to describe female identity performances as a charade to navigate a world dominated by masculinity, Butler (1990, 50) reinterprets masquerade as a mode of recitation of established identity performances of all genders: "The mask is taken on through the process of incorporation which is a way of

inscribing and then wearing a melancholic identification in and on the body, in effect, it is the signification of the body in the mold of the Other".

When understanding identity performance as masquerade, what is of interest for this thesis, and democratic theory more generally, is how the mask is produced and which freedoms exist or could be expanded in the construction of the mask. As the theory of performativity conceptualizes citationality as a pre-established process with no original author, the freedom to author identity seems to be fairly limited. And indeed, Butler clearly rejects interpretations of her work that suggest one is freely able to choose a gender. However, the recognition that performative structures are the product of human interaction also opens up the perspective to the remaking of such structures, which has great significance for democratic theory: "The terms by which we are recognized as human are socially articulated and changeable… [They] have far-reaching consequences for how we understand the model of the human entitled to rights or included in the participatory sphere of political deliberation" (Butler, 2004, 2). Thus, while the performative structures of citationality in which subjects navigate are limiting, they also provide the space for re-negotiation and re-imagination: "The 'I' that I am finds itself at once constituted by norms and dependent on them but also endeavors to live in ways that maintain a critical transformative relation to them" (3).

Butler further argues that the potential for personal autonomy to decide over one's own identity depends upon the institutional settings that facilitate such identity expression:

> Indeed, individuals rely on institutions of social support in order to exercise self-determination with respect to what body and what gender to have and maintain, so that self-determination becomes a plausible concept only in the context of a social world that supports and enables that exercise of agency… [C]hanging the institutions by which humanly viable choice is established and maintained is a prerequisite for the exercise of self-determination. (7)

Here Butler evidently refers to legal arrangements that afford, for example, the registration of a third sex in official documents and other laws that facilitate the inclusion and self-expression of trans- and intersexual people. When such legal and institutional arrangements – or participatory spaces, for that matter – are understood in terms of performativity themselves, and thereby as discursive articulations and social expressions as suggested in Chapter 2 (2.4.2. and 2.5.2.), then we can see how the theory of citationality can explain identity change and institutional change in the same vein. The perpetuation of political institutions, such as the US presidency or the UK Parliament, can be understood in terms of recitation and their reforms and changes as partial resignifications. While invited and claimed spaces

are more volatile than closed spaces, it is nevertheless apparent how their citational articulation embeds them in performative structures that afford their stabilization and perpetuation.

It follows that a democratization of the performative production of both identities and institutions entails strategies of resignification (Lloyd, 2007). According to Schippers' radical democratic reading of Butler's resignification, what is crucial to its understanding is that discursive terms or performative acts carrying the intended meaning of the subject are always subjected to reinterpretation by interlocutors. The subject can never control how its utterances are perceived. This lack of control signifies the multiplicity and inherent instability of meanings. While there is no perfect control over meaning making, the inherent volatility of discursivity also entails that the meaning of established terms can be changed through conscious effort. And these meanings, according to Butler, make identity, so that, through intentional resignification, the masks that reify identities can be remoulded. This can be exemplified through various cases where derogatory terms intended to demean individuals associated with marginalized group identities have been re-appropriated and connoted positively by members of the respective group. The term "queer" is exemplary of this, which from its original pejorative intention in the late 19th century was redefined in activist and academic discourses over the last few decades. According to Schippers, such resignification fulfils its democratic potential if it is the product of an open and participatory process. If so conducted, "resignification challenges and contests linguistic norms in an everyday setting, opening up a new terrain for transformative struggles and participatory democratic practices" (Schippers, 2009, 84).

In strategies of resignification, the overlaps between difference democratic and the transformative perspective become apparent. The politics of presence stands for the reappropriation and reinterpretation of the terms that denote marginalized identities. What is more, physical presence in the space of appearance goes beyond the reinterpretation of words and reconfigures meaning through the corporeal performance of marginalized identities. The politics of presence is always part of a politics of becoming.

## 4.4. Conclusion

This chapter has set out to tackle the confining implications of the politics of presence in participatory spaces. The dilemma of difference reifies hegemonic identity constructions, impedes self-transformation, and stifles the exploration of different aspects of the multiple self. Discussions in the difference democratic perspective develop promising concepts of

discursive identity production, but they remain entangled in essentialist assumptions. Participatory and deliberative perspectives generate conceptions of self-transformation, which, however, lay out a concrete path of self-development toward particular qualities such as empathy and rationality. Agonistic approaches, rooted in a constructivist ontology, develop fruitful conceptions of identity articulation, but remain limited by their tragic horizon and the logic of hegemony. All of these radical democratic approaches tend to imagine identity change as a process that is advanced by intellectual, academic or party elites. The transformative potential of these theories, moreover, is restricted by the limited social change that they envision. A transformative perspective in democratic theory that has developed in recent years provides a new vantage point with a focus on systemic transformation. Enriched with queer and gender theories, the transformative perspective articulates a politics of becoming that allows for the imagination of the democratic subject in transformative terms. According to Butler (2004, 4), "to remake the human" requires an "interrogation of the terms by which life is constrained in order to open up the possibility of different modes of living; in other words, not to celebrate difference as such but to establish more inclusive conditions for sheltering and maintaining life that resists models of assimilation".

Employing a politics of becoming situated in the transformative perspective does not entail opposing the practical mechanisms proposed by difference democrats to realize the politics of presence. Rather, as Mansbridge (2005) argues, both quotas as the most effective means of a politics of presence and the discursive terms which create identity categories need to be rethought from a perspective of performative identity construction. By understanding the politics of presence as a performative act of becoming, the transformative aspects inherent in a politics of presence become apparent. Both the representation of identity groups through embodied presence as a mode of constructing future and alternative selves and the resignification of pejorative identity conceptions are central strategies of a politics of presence understood through a transformative perspective. The Arendtian space of appearance is reconfigured as spaces of becoming when situated in the context of transformative democracy. This convergence becomes apparent when Butler describes the spaces of appearance that are constituted by demonstrations in Syria: "we can see how the existing public space is seized by those who have no existing right to gather there, who emerge from zones of disappearance to *become* bodies exposed to violence and death in the course of gathering and persisting publicly as they do" (Butler, 2015, 82, emphasis added). And later Butler asks: "is appearance not necessarily a morphological moment…?" (87)

But the theory of a politics of becoming developed here needs to be interrogated about its own limitations to facilitate freedom for the subject to change. These limitations are due to

the poststructuralist ontology that both transformative democrats and queer and gender theorists employ. Situating the subject within a tight corset of discursivity only allows for limited stretching, reinterpreting, and rearticulating. The concepts of interruption and disidentification can help to alleviate this problem. The Rancièrian rupture affords a radical break. Disidentification as the rejection of hegemonic identity interpellation further explains such a rupture on the level of personal identity. The fugitive self that always escapes permanent reification through identification and representation expresses different sides of its inherent multiplicity in moments of disruption.

Situating these concepts in the spatial theory based on new materialist inspirations outlined in Chapter 2 further emphasizes the democratic impetus of the transformative perspective. Understanding spaces and subjects as assemblages of volatile things allows for thinking rupture as a radical democratic intervention in the order of these things. Rather than thinking in the claustrophobic notions of hegemonic discourse that also creates the tragic horizon of agonistic democracy, the politics of becoming advanced here thinks in terms of assembling and reassembling the things that constitute reality. These things are seen not as simply being acted upon as objects, but as agentic products in the making that are themselves continuously becoming (Barad, 2008, 139). Their inherently vital nature constantly reassembles the space of appearance that produces subjects and is produced by subjects in different ways. Instead of navigating through the thicket of discursive structures, we move in spaces made of things that can be shifted, realigned, and reinvented. This does not denote a break with discursive theory by all means; rather, it denotes a different angle that strengthens the agency of the subject.

While the politics of becoming provides a valuable outlook for rethinking democratic subjectivity and the making of identity in contingent and performative terms, there are two decisive questions that remain unanswered. The first is how to engage in such modes of disidentification practically. The theory of disidentification through a politics of becoming remains abstract for the most part, so how can disidentification be engaged with on a practical level? The second question is: if disidentification affords greater freedom for the democratic subject to self-identify, how does this newly won freedom relate to equality? Does freedom through anonymity counteract equality, as the democratic paradox suggests, or do the two core values of democracy work to their mutual amplification, as suggested by the anarchist concept of equal liberty?

Some fruitful answers to the question of the practical realization of disidentification are given in the debates on transformative democracy in terms of critique and deconstruction:

The critical examination of the process of identity production can contribute to its denaturalization. Resignification of the terms that describe identity categories and the performative enactment of alternative versions of the self are means of stretching the discourse and exploring free spaces. While this is a promising approach, Rancière (2007, 569) expresses a convincing criticism of this strategy. He engages with the practical difficulties to disidentify and notes that "[i]t is not so easy to be *un*". After pointing to the many academic tools of discourse analysis available for deconstructing meaning, he asks: "Are we framing a world of idiots where we play the part of the smart guys?" While deconstruction can also be understood as everyday practice rather than as academic exercise, Rancière makes a valid point. Gaining a critical distance and decoding everyday discourse takes a lot of work. So, what practical tools are available that may help to realize radical democratic practices of disidentification? And how can the arrangement of participatory spaces afford such disidentifactory practices?

We find some hints in Rancière's work. Recall that with disidentification Rancière describes how those who do not have a part form a visible collective subjectivity. They take part through the disruption of established modes of identification and the subsequent alteration of their identity. Rancière equates this moment of interrupting identification by the police order with democracy. The subjectivization resulting from such modes of disidentification is defined by not having a proper name: "The name of an injured community that invokes its rights is always the name of the *anonym*" (Rancière, 1992, 60, emphasis added). It is not that this new emergent identity is entirely nameless; rather, disidentification "is a crossing of identities, relying on a crossing of names" (61). Disidentification, however, produces intentionally wrong names, not with the purpose of deception but as evidently artificial constructs, which Rancière refers to as improper names. Building on Rancière, Deseriis (2015, 3) writes: "Contrary to a proper name, whose chief function is to fix a referent as part of the operation of a system of signs, an improper name is explicitly constructed to obfuscate both the identity and number of its referents".

Such improper names, I propose, are based on anonymity that may function to realize practices of disidentification. An improper name, a mask, a pseudonym, an online avatar or even a blank space where a name would be expected function to visualize alternative democratic subjectivities on both an individual and a collective level, which has great significance for democratic theory and practice. Anonymity serves to interrupt established modes of identification and create new improper identities. Such improper identities often afford the expression of otherwise hidden aspects of the self. Anonymity as the disruption of continuous identity performances is often employed to counter surveillance and control by the

established order, particularly in the digital age, as will be examined in Chapter 6. It reconfigures identity assemblages by bringing things into disorder, altering the configuration of the multiple self. While anonymity should not simply be understood as the realization of disidentification, I propose that it can function as a practical strategy of a politics of becoming.

The second question raised here as to whether the freedom of disidentification will lead to new modes of domination relates to the central research interest of this thesis. This thesis seeks to advance the core democratic values of freedom and equality in participatory spaces through alternative modes of identity performance. As outlined in the introduction, liberal theories of democracy have positioned freedom and equality as being in insurmountable tension. In the democratic paradox (Mouffe, 2005 [2000]), the freedom of the subject allows for its domination over others and enforcing equality infringes the freedom of all. Freedom and equality can never be fully realized together. This tension is also reflected in the dilemma of difference elaborated in Chapter 3. This chapter, however, has introduced a radical juncture that challenges this paradigm. The postanarchist conception of equal liberty provides an entirely different explanation of the relations of the two central features of democracy: "the two principles of equality and liberty – which in liberal theory are often separated or seen to be in tension with one another – are, for anarchists, inextricably bound together, animating and giving meaning to one another" (Newman, 2010b, 12). So, there are two competing explanations of the relations of freedom and equality: The democratic paradox sees them in tension, while the transformative perspective sees them as mutually constitutive. The question to explore is thus whether modes of disidentification through anonymity demonstrate the mutual exclusivity or the mutual dependency of freedom and equality.

The next chapter will explore anonymity in various participatory spaces. It will ask whether anonymity can realize modes of disidentification on a practical level and how freedom and equality relate to each other in these processes. While anonymity is commonly associated with the absence of identity, I will discuss anonymity as mode of presence. Anonymity reconfigures presence through absence. This uncovers novel perspectives for a new politics of presence. Rancière (1999, 100f) hints at such an understanding of presence when he writes: "There is democracy if there is a specific sphere where the people appear. There is democracy… if there are groups that displace identities… [T]here is democracy if there is a dispute conducted by a nonidentary subject on the stage where the people emerge".

# 5. Anonymity and Democracy: Absence as Presence in the Public Sphere[*]

*I need to become anonymous. In order to be present.*

*The more I am anonymous, the more I am present.*

*Tiqqun, 2008*

## 5.1. Introduction

In an interview for a film documentary, the former president of Brazil, Dilma Rousseff says: "There is a huge freedom in being anonymous. Immense. Which we had when we were in hiding. That's the thing. The immense feeling of freedom, which I never had again. For a short time".[14] This quote, which refers to Rousseff's activity as a guerrilla during the military dictatorship in Brazil from the 1960s into the '80s, exhibits many prominent features of anonymity. Anonymity's main effect is a deeply felt sensation of liberation, which is, however, temporarily restricted. Anonymity appears as a disidentifactory practice that realizes a democratic moment of freedom – the freedom of the subject to change. In the case of Rousseff, anonymity transformed a faceless, supressed citizen into an empowered freedom fighter. Anonymity can work to make the absent present. This is achieved through an interruption of modes of identification that stabilize the established order of domination – whether this order takes the form of a brutal military dictatorship, a neoliberal surveillance state or the discursive networks of disciplinary identity interpellations we engage with every day. As one strategy of a politics of becoming, not only can anonymity contribute to contesting the political order, but it also challenges the integrity and uniformity of the self, setting free an inner multiplicity. Anonymity can work to liberate the fugitive self:

> In providing the means to belong, simultaneously, to several mental universes, [anonymous action] enables the possibility of playing them out against each other and, in this way, to put to work a prosses of dis-identification and de-

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[14] Interview with Dilma Rousseff, the former president of Brazil, in the film documentary *The Edge of Democracy*, 2019, by Petra Costa, Busca Vida Filmes.

simplification of oneself vis-à-vis institutions: to promote practices that are freer and more selective – more and more emancipated from the psychic hold of external and arbitrary constraints. Thus, we could consider "anonymity" the term for a technique of desubjugation. (de Lagasnerie, 2017, 72)

The subversive forces of anonymity as described here rest on modes of identity negation. Anonymity is commonly understood in terms of concealment – as a negative act of detracting or eradicating identity, as effacing the democratic subject. In the established interpretation, anonymity is framed as the opposite of identity. It negates the legally identified, officially registered, and physically embodied persona. Anonymity, then, appears deeply at odds with the politics of presence as continuous identity articulation in the space of appearance. And indeed, while in some places difference democrats are sympathetic toward anonymity and acknowledge its liberating effects for marginalized groups by protecting them from personal harm (Mansbridge, 1983, 60f; Young, 1990, 238) and by advancing meritocracy (Phillips, 2019b, 5; 2015, 35), overall they appear sceptical of concealing identity: "Women should *not* have to present themselves as disembodied abstractions – from behind a curtain that conceals their bodily peculiarities – in order to claim their equal status in the world. Those with dark skins should *not* have to insist on us all being the same 'under the skin'" (Phillips, 2015, 36). Rather than a distance between communicators through anonymous, disembodied participation in voting or textual deliberation, the difference democratic perspective calls for embodied engagement through the physical appearance of diverse bodies in participatory spaces (Phillips, 1995, 150; 1991, 11, 130, 132).

The sceptical position of difference democrats is also reflected in Butler's discussion of the space of appearance. Butler (2004, 3) acknowledges that concealing identity may have liberating effects for marginalized groups: "There are advantages of remaining less than intelligible… [I]f I have no desire to be recognized within a certain set of norms, then it follows that my sense of survival depends upon escaping the clutch of those norms". This kind of being "under the radar" denotes a state of not appearing in the public sphere and remaining outside the boundaries of the space of appearance. The space of appearance, in contrast to acts of concealment, is characterized by the democratic subject entering the public stage exposed to the gaze of its spectators: "If we consider what it is to appear, it follows that… our bodies must be viewed and their vocalized sounds must be heard: the body must enter the visual and audible field" (Butler, 2015, 86). Butler's space of appearance is thus demarcated by a clear boundary separating a sphere of visibility from a sphere of invisibility. As noted in Chapter 2, this logic of presence in the space of appearance resonates and is further accentuated in Hénaff and Strong's (2001) work on public space,

which maintains that those who are not visibly perceptible on the stages of the public sphere are located in the private sphere (5). Geoffroy de Lagasnerie pushes this interpretation even further. For him, anonymity is diametrically opposed to the space of appearance. Anonymity breaks with the public sphere. It organizes a secession from the public: "Anonymous subjects are not subjects who appear. On the contrary, they dissolve as public subjects and organize their own invisibility… Anonymity, then, enables the field of politics and democracy to be disconnected from the public sphere" (de Lagasnerie, 2017, 62f).

In this chapter, I will oppose this interpretation of anonymity. De Lagasnerie's erroneous interpretation of anonymity rests on a long history of public misconception of the term. This misconception stems from a lack of theorization of anonymity. There are hardly any coherent explanations of anonymity in academic discourses (Gardner, 2011, 939; Ponesse, 2014). This is particularly evident in democratic theory. It is surprising that while anonymity plays a crucial role in the various modes of participation, such as secret voting, campaign funding, textual political debates in newspapers, manifestos, pamphlets, online political engagement, graffiti, and masked protesting, there is to date no coherent explanation of anonymity in democratic theory. In contrast to the absence of anonymity in democratic theory (with Moore, 2017, being a recent exception), there is a plethora of diverse, empirically driven literature discussing anonymity in various forms of political participation. This literature, however, suffers from a lack of theoretical attention to its main subject of research. Eric Barendt's book *Anonymous Speech* (2016), for example, discusses anonymity in various forms of political participation but fails to provide a definition of anonymity. The meagre traces of definitions that are to be found in the literature on anonymity in political participation are lacking in crucial respects. Firstly, they fail to acknowledge the complexity of the phenomenon. Many scholars treat the concept of anonymity as simple and self-explanatory. For example, Jonker and Pieters (2010, 216) state: "anonymity means that it is impossible to determine who sent which message to whom". Secondly, and more importantly, anonymity is often equated with privacy. Akdeniz's (2002, 224) only definition of anonymity, for example, consists of the sentence: "As a concept anonymity is closely related to free speech and privacy". Julie Ponesse (2014) refers to such descriptions of anonymity as privacy as the reductionist approach. These two interrelated shortcomings – the oversimplified definition of anonymity as privacy – result in a lack of theoretical attention to the complexity of anonymity in a democratic context.

De Lagasnerie's understanding of anonymity as secession from the public sphere, thus, rests on an understanding of anonymity in negative terms as identity negation and restriction to the private sphere. This is in line with Butler's understanding of the space of

appearance as defined by the physically embodied subject stepping into a sphere constituted by the gaze of its spectators. In short, if the subject remains invisible, it does not appear. I contend that this is an erroneous conclusion. In contrast, I argue that anonymous subjects *do* appear even when their physical bodies remain invisible. Anonymity reconfigures presence as a mode of becoming in participatory spaces and, in my reading, is compatible with a difference democratic perspective. What is more, this appearance is public. In contrast to privacy, which demarcates a spatiality shielded from public view, anonymity depends on communication and is thus inherently public. Anonymity, then, is not at all equivalent to privacy. It reconfigures the boundaries that divide public and private spatialities and allows elements of private spaces bleed into the public realm. To be clear, I am not arguing that anonymity is not also about (in)visibility. I contend that the visibility of the physically embodied persona is not a condition for appearing in public.

The inherent connection between anonymity and public space is also apparent in Deseriis' work on improper names: "*It is through circulation in the public sphere* that the use of an alias becomes a process of subjectivation whereby those who do not have a voice of their own seek to acquire a symbolic power outside the boundaries of an institutional practice" (Deseriis, 2015, 5, emphasis added). The oversight of anonymity's inherently public character is due to the common interpretation of anonymity that focuses on the negative moment of effacing the subject. As the notion of improper names demonstrates, however, anonymity always entails identity creation. Thus, what is needed is a focus on the constructive moment of anonymity as public articulation. Ponesse (2014) calls for a positive conception of anonymity (see also de Lagasnerie, 2017, 57). This positive moment is emphasized by Mouffe (2006, 5):

> [T]o construct oppositional identities it is not enough to simply foster a process of "de-identification" or "de-individualization". The second move, the moment of "re-identification", of "re-individualization" is decisive. To insist only on the first move is in fact to remain trapped in a problematic which postulates that the negative moment is sufficient, on its own, to bring about something positive…

I will attend to the positive moment of identity construction by employing Rancière's notion of aesthetics. The interpretation of anonymity as identity negation that effaces the subject emerges from an emphasis on public visibility as the prime mode of identification. Public identity performance, however, consists of more than the visibility of the physically embodied persona. For instance, it might also entail the perception of sounds, written or

spoken words, images, avatars, and blank spaces. Rather than focusing solely on the visibility of the body, to properly understand anonymity we need to focus on the "sensible manifestation of things" (Dikeç, 2015, 2). Instead of mere vision, a focus on *experience* is needed to grasp appearance. It is not only through the presence of the visible body but through communication more generally, of which corporeal presence is one mode among many, that subjects appear. Here Rancière's work on aesthetics is helpful. According to Rancière (2004, 8), aesthetics is a spatial practice that divides the political realm of the perceptible:

> aesthetics… is a delimitation of spaces and time, of the visible and the invisible, of speech and noise, that simultaneously determines the place and the stakes of *politics as a form of experience*. Politics revolves around what is seen and what can be said about it, around who has the ability to see and the talent to speak, around the properties of spaces and the possibilities of time.

To understand how anonymity reconfigures the space of appearance, we need an expansion of the senses that account for appearance. It is not visibility per se, but perceptibility that enables the subject to appear. This opens up a perspective for understanding presence as a mode of becoming. Presence is actualized through the articulation of the subject through various means of communication. In this sense, presence is indeed always tied to the body as it is the body that articulates. Yet, it is not tied to the body's visibility, but rather to its perceptibility.

When Rancière says that the delimitation of political space creates boundaries for what can be said and done, we can see how anonymity's interruption of the established order reconfigures participatory spaces in a way that allows for other things to be said and done. The reconfiguration of physical spatiality through physical things, such as masks, hoods, veils, voting booths, and computer screens, that intercept identification serves to reconfigure social spatiality as relations among human bodies are altered, which in turn reconfigures discursive spatiality as new things are said and enter public discourses.

To develop an understanding of anonymity that does justice to its complexity, we need to focus on its inherently contradictory character. Anonymity does not just entail identity negation, as the common perception would have us believe; it also involves identity creation. Through an interruption of identification, modes of subjectivization (Rancière, 1999) and rearticulation (Mouffe, 2006) produce new subjectivities. Anonymity's contradictory character is well explained by Pitkin's concept of representation. As mentioned in Chapter 3, representation, according to Pitkin (1967, 8f), makes present what is physically absent. I

will argue that anonymity as an interruption of the dominant spatial order takes this logic further. Anonymity makes the absent present. As Ponesse notes: "Anonymity and other techniques of nonidentifiability function as the gatekeepers of the boundary between our private selves and the public domain" (2014, 351). Here I go further. Anonymity does not only open the door to privacy while leaving the spatial boundaries separating the private and the public sphere intact. It reconfigures the boundaries between public and private spaces by channelling private sentiments into the public sphere. It affords a performance of the private self in public space.

This can also be explained with Laclau and Mouffe's (1985) concept of the constitutive outside employed in Chapter 2. The definition of the inside by the absence of the outside makes the outside present (see Butler, 2015, 4f). Woman is defined as "not-man" and straight is defined as not queer. In this sense, anonymity makes present what is absent. It affords experiences of sides of the multiple self that are not represented in the official version of the self. It allows for Dryzek and Niemeyer's (2008) discursive representation and Saward's (2010; 2006) representative claims while blocking established modes of authentication. This denotes a liberation of the construction of discursive representation through representative claims. Anonymity potentially enlarges the identity space surrounding the democratic subject, in which she navigates a set of possible identifications. As the free space of the democratic subject to articulate itself expands, the many things that constitute the multiple self are reconfigured into new assemblages.

While it may appear that this assessment adopts an overly optimistic view on anonymity, this chapter will also account for the negative aspects of anonymity in participatory spaces. Owing to the inherently contradictory character of anonymity's core functions of identity negation and identity creation, and its quality of reconfiguring private and public spatiality, anonymity results in deeply contradictory effects for democracy. Exploring the workings of anonymity in various participatory spaces will show that anonymity affords both inclusion and exclusion, subversion and submission, and honesty and deception. While anonymity thus has both positive and negative effects, all of these effects, I will argue, are liberating for the democratic subject. John Suler (2004) describes anonymous online communication as inherently disinhibiting, freeing the subject of social constraints – for better or worse. Even if the subject engages in exclusion, submission, and deception – which limits the freedom of others – the subject itself does so because anonymity loosens its constraints, enacting the famous words of Isaiah Berlin: "the liberty of some must depend on the restraint of others" (1969 [1958], 124). Or, as the Brazilian philosopher Paulo Freire observes, elites in societies marked by class, race, and gender inequality experience the fear

"of losing the 'freedom' to oppress" (Freire, 2005 [1970], 46). In this way, anonymity always enlarges the free space in which the democratic subject can act. I arrive at this understanding by conceptualizing anonymity not in terms of negative liberty, which protects individuals from unwanted intrusions. It is this negative understanding of freedom that goes along with a focus on identity negation, equating anonymity with privacy. Rather, freedom needs to be understood as the positive liberty to act. Hence, freedom enables action (Berlin, 1969 [1958]; Fromm, 1941).

It becomes apparent that interruption is not always good for democracy, at least in the case of anonymity. While anonymity can contribute to the disidentifactory interruptions of the dominant order by equality, as discussed by Rancière (1999), anonymity can also facilitate domination which interrupts equality (see Fraser 1997). Honig's (2013) notion of interruption – contributing either to equality or to domination – appears most apt in this context.

The ambiguous role of interruption through anonymity, and the contradictory role of anonymous freedoms both advancing and undermining equality, sheds new light on the central question of this thesis. This chapter will investigate two competing assessments of the relations of freedom and equality. While the democratic paradox sees them in irresolvable tension, the anarchist concept of equal liberty understands them as co-constitutive. According to the democratic paradox, an increase in freedom through anonymity should undermine equality. Just as Berlin states in the above quotation, the freedom of some is used to dominate others. According to equal liberty, an increase in freedom should amplify equality. I will show that what appear as competing hypotheses are actually compatible. The increased freedom of anonymity undermines equality when subjects use their freedom to exclude, submit, and deceive, which amplifies social hierarchies. Anonymous freedoms advance equality, however, when they lead to inclusion, subversion, and honesty, which flattens hierarchies.

To develop this concept of anonymity and elucidate its affordances, I pursue two strategies. First, I review etymologies and conceptualizations of anonymity and their relation to privacy in various academic disciplines. Both their merits and shortcomings provide inspiration for the new definition of anonymity rooted in democratic theory to be developed here. Second, the chapter turns to empirical studies on anonymity in participatory spaces. It briefly describes anonymity in voting, campaign funding, textual political discussions, and masked collective action. It then identifies anonymity's three sets of contradictory freedoms, offering illustrations from the empirical literature on political participation. Building on these insights, I finally elaborate the theoretical conceptualization of anonymity in

contrast to privacy and the workings of the three sets of contradictory freedoms in more depth. Here anonymity is understood as one form of the everyday masquerade described by Butler (1990). Yet, in contrast with the everyday masquerade, it relies on an interruption of common modes of identification. The form that anonymity takes, I will argue, depends on a spatial reconfiguration of all three dimensions of democratic spatiality elaborated in Chapter 2. In the physical dimension of participatory spaces, anonymity depends on the interruption of identification with the help of physical things, such as masks, hoods, veils, voting booths or computer screens. In the social dimension, it depends on the configuration of power structures between humans. And in the discursive dimension, it depends on the constellation of identity knowledge among participants.

## 5.2. What is Anonymity?

The etymological development of the term "anonymity" is characterized by a continuous expansion of meaning. To trace this development, I bring together three sets of literature, moving from literary studies to computer science – which each describe anonymity in a specific context – and finally to more general elaborations of anonymity in communication studies, sociology, political science, and philosophy. The same expansionary development of meaning can be observed in the use of the term "privacy". The expansions of both "anonymity" and "privacy" coalesce with the development of new communication technologies, resulting in their overlapping and partial convergence. The task undertaken here of developing a definition of anonymity rooted in democratic theory consists of disentangling anonymity and privacy.

The term "anonymous" entered the English language in the late 16$^{th}$ century, referring to publications whose authors remained unknown. While the meaning of the Greek original, which translates to "nameless", is already quite confined, its meaning in English became even more narrow: "Anonymity [was] defined broadly as the absence of reference to the legal name of the writer on the title page" (Griffin, 1999, 882; Kopley, 2016, 2). "Anonymity" thus did not refer to any kind of unidentified communication, but solely to nameless textual publications (Ferry, 2002). The practice of anonymous publishing was common even before this time. It was only then, however, that the blank spaces on pamphlets, poems, and books were replaced by the word "Anonymous". The question arises as to why the blank space was not simply left blank but filled with the name-like "Anonymous". This move appears to be a collective effort to draw attention to the author and his or her conscious decision to remain unidentified. In the linguistic establishment of "anonymity" we thus find the first traces of identity creation rather than solely identity negation. Here

"Anonymous" begins to function as an improper name (Deseriis, 2015) as a nascent form of the identity rearticulation (Mouffe, 2006), which, as I will argue later, is a core element of anonymity.

Current conceptualizations of anonymity in computer science and technology studies illustrate the significant qualitative shift that the term has undergone through the emergence of digital communication. The nameless author now becomes the unidentified communicator. The recipient of a message perceives "all subjects in the anonymity set as equally probable of being the originator of a message" (Diaz *et al.*, 2003, 57). This literature acknowledges the complexities of anonymity as part of a communicative process that goes beyond textual publication. Moreover, it insists on the scalability of anonymity. Anonymity is not a state that is present or not, but a matter of degree to be measured on a scale between two opposing poles: anonymity and identity. To acknowledge the different degrees of anonymity, this literature introduces not only quantitative measures, but different types of anonymity, specifically insisting on its demarcation from "pseudonymity": the use of pseudonyms in contrast with communication without any identifier (Pfitzmann & Hansen, 2010).

This qualitative shift in anonymity's meaning, expressed in quite technical terms in computer science and technology studies, is also recognized in sociology, political science, communications studies, and philosophy. Exceeding definitions of anonymity in literary publications and online communication, authors such as Helen Nissenbaum and Craig Scott generate more complex understandings of anonymity as a social phenomenon both online and offline. Scott (1998, 387) defines anonymity as "the degree to which a communicator perceives the message source is unknown and unspecified", thus drawing attention to subjectivity: Anonymity is not an objective state but defined by the perception of communicators. Similarly, Thorsten Thiel explains: "'anonymity' describes a situation of intersubjective action in which it is not possible either to conclusively attribute a particular action or communication to an individual or subject or to render an individual or subject accessible/responsible" (Thiel, 2017). Beyond the emphasis on (inter)subjectivity, this definition also points to the inherently communicative nature of anonymity, which differentiates it from privacy. Moreover, it views anonymity as an interruption of continuous identity articulation, a disconnection between communicator and content. This disconnection is also at the centre of Ponesse's (2014) definition of anonymity as dissociability divorcing the speaker from the message.

Marx (1999), Wallace (1999), Nissenbaum (1999), and Véliz (2018) all draw attention to the plethora of identity markers that define a person. While for anonymous textual

publishing, the name was the sole identifier, in today's information age and in light of in-creasingly complex understandings of anonymity, factors such as location (address), social security numbers, looks, social categories (race, class, gender), profession, family relations, etc. comprise a set of highly diverse identifiers that constitute a person. Accordingly, ano-nymity is defined as the non-identifiability of one or several of these traits (Marx, 1999), "the noncoordinability of traits" (Wallace, 1999, 24), and the inability to "join the dots" (Véliz, 2018, 2).

Nissenbaum (1999, 143) describes anonymity as unreachability: "Deepening our under-standing of the issue of anonymity in an information age… requires an appreciation of what it takes to be 'unreachable' or 'out of grasp' in a world where technologies of knowledge and information are increasingly efficacious at reaching, grasping, and identifying". In a similar vein, anonymity is defined by Matthews (2010, 351) as "a suite of techniques of nonidentifiability that persons use to manage and protect their privacy. At the core of these techniques is the aim of being untrackable". And Moore (2017) names a lack of traceability as one dimension of anonymity.

But if anonymity means unreachability, untrackability, or untraceability, how, then, is it different from privacy, which can be broadly understood as an individually defined per-sonal sphere protected from external intrusion? In the information age, the meanings of anonymity as one's personal identity being undetectable in a communicative network and privacy as personal information being undetectable in a communicative network become virtually indistinguishable. The term "privacy" has undergone an expansion similar to that of anonymity (see Westin, 1984). Its original meaning in the work of Ancient philosophers such as Aristotle and Plato referred to private property as personal control over objects (Papacharissi, 2010, 27). In its modern sense, the term "privacy" was first used by Warren and Brandeis in 1890 as "the right to be let alone". When newspapers – at the time of the emergence of the printing press in Europe and the US – started publishing details about the lives of public persons, this was perceived as an intrusion into their personal affairs. This notion of privacy, thus, constitutes a sphere that is shielded from outside intervention. Pri-vacy in this version has not lost its original meaning of ownership, as the private sphere is characterized by its control by the individual subject (Reiman, 1976). It relies on a physical demarcation of space, distinguishing between private locations (such as the home) and pub-lic locations (such as cafés, squares, etc.). It is this demarcation of private and public space in the context of patriarchal modes of domination that has been aptly criticized by feminist scholars (Cohen, 1992; Wagner Decew, 2015).

This physical geography is upset by new forms of communication. Zizi Papacharissi (2010) goes so far as to describe the public/private dichotomy as collapsing as new online spaces are both "privately public and publicly private" (142). Public digital communication relies on private websites, with participants located in private homes (132). To grasp this new hybridity, Nissenbaum (2010; 1997) develops the concept of "privacy in public". The individual's control over who has access to personal information is compromised by government surveillance and commercial data mining. This new understanding of privacy still contains original elements of personal control and the demarcation of a sphere to be left alone. It is uprooted, however, by the physical dislocation of this sphere. Privacy becomes mobile.

This brief review explains why and how the terms anonymity and privacy overlap. Their parallel expansion in meaning has peaked following their digitization, resulting in overlapping and blurred understandings. In response to these conceptualizations of anonymity, a new understanding of anonymity has to not only overcome this amalgamation, but also confront several other key challenges.

Current discussions successfully deepen the understanding of anonymity by explaining it as subjective, a matter of degree, depending on various identifiers, and resulting in several types of anonymity. However, these definitions suffer first from their conceptualization of anonymity as mere identity negation, neglecting the possibilities of identity creation. This is observable in the use of terms such as unidentifiability, unknowability, undetectability, unreachability, untrackability, untraceability, and noncoordinability. These terms suggest that anonymity marks the impossibility of communicators being identified by the audience, rather than as an action undertaken by communicators themselves. The sole focus on identity negation is also evident when anonymity is defined as the opposite of identity. This is another reason why anonymity and privacy appear to be so closely related. When anonymity is conceptualized as concealing identity and privacy is seen as restricting access to personal information, they are hardly distinguishable. Second, the terms employed to describe anonymity do not coincidently share the suffix -ity, which indicates that they are conceptualized as a state rather than as a process. And third, the differentiation of types of anonymity is helpful to a certain extent. But terms such as "pseudonymity", "physical anonymity", "discursive anonymity", "offline anonymity", "online anonymity", "self-anonymity", "other-anonymity" (Scott, 1999), "agent anonymity", "recipient anonymity", and "process anonymity" (Wallace, 1999) can lead to confusion and overcomplication. A new definition of anonymity must provide clarity and, at the same time, encompass these various subtypes of anonymity.

I generate this new definition of anonymity by employing the concept of democratic spatiality and by focusing on freedom. First, current understandings of anonymity as closely related to privacy emerge from concerns over the infringement of civil rights. The association of anonymity with privacy results in defensiveness. Anonymity is related to the private spaces that shield one from public intrusion. A focus on the spatialities that form the context of anonymity, however, makes clear that anonymity does not describe a sphere shielded from engagement with others. On the contrary, anonymity is inherently communicative. It is not primarily a matter of hiding in isolated spaces, but rather one of showing, exchanging opinions, and creating identities in common spaces. *Anonymity is a mode of presence.* It articulates the self in the public sphere. Anonymous identity performances cross the boundaries between public and private, channelling private things into the public sphere. The anonymous subject steps into the space of appearance by making itself perceptible through an aesthetic self-formation in vocalized or written words, through physical body language or digitized symbols and images.

Second, the inherently liberating effects of anonymity as unidentifiability have been conceptualized as negative freedoms, freedoms to be protected from external intrusion. Again, the overlap with privacy is all too apparent. However, I suggest that we also need to take into account positive freedoms, freedoms to act: "anonymity functions to increase an individual's agency… Being anonymous widens the sphere of possible action" (Ponesse, 2014, 312). Thus, while privacy is closely related to negative freedoms protecting from intrusion, anonymity also relates to positive freedoms of expression and identity creation.

Since the original conceptualization of negative and positive freedoms by Erich Fromm (1941) and later Isaiah Berlin (1969 [1958]), critics have contended that the two cannot be easily demarcated, since every freedom contains both positive and negative aspects (Blau, 2004; MacCallum, 1967). I agree with and build on this critique by drawing attention to the positive freedoms of anonymity that add to its negative freedoms of concealment. Thus, while anonymity in current debates is conceptualized as the impossibility of interlocutors to identify the subject, I define anonymity as the self-expression of the democratic subject. Anonymity is not the opposite of identity; it is a precondition for creating identity in a freer manner, drawing on both positive and negative freedoms. Anonymity allows the subject to assemble in new ways.

In my view, the definitions discussed above, which primarily focus on identity negation, understanding anonymity in purely negative terms – as a technique to protect privacy (Matthews, 2010, 351) – miss the point. Here Moore's (2017) work is helpful since it

defines anonymity not only in terms of lacking traceability but also in positive terms of durability and connectedness, which points to newly created identities. But I also believe that there is indeed a negative moment in anonymity. This moment of negative dissociation constitutes an interruption of established modes of identification. The interruption that facilitates the negative freedom not to be detected by dominant forces, however, can only be understood in direct relation with the positive freedom of exploring the multiple self. Our understanding of anonymity, as Mouffe (2006) aptly points out with regard to disidentification, should not linger in the moment of disarticulation; rather, it needs to focus on rearticulation. It is the interruption of identification that frees the fugitive self to explore its multiplicity by creating new selves in the public sphere. The gap that this interruption opens up provides an empty space that enables the experience of lack at the core of the subject (Mouffe, 1995b). On the basis of this lack, new identities are articulated in anonymous engagements that afford presence in the space of appearance.

I therefore define anonymity as follows:

> *Anonymity is a context-dependent mode of presence expressing private sentiments in the public sphere by negating some aspects of the legally identified and/or physically embodied persona.*

Unlike previous definitions, the above definition gives priority to the creative and constructive aspects of anonymity, while not neglecting or diminishing its concealing and negating aspects. Moreover, it defines anonymity as a public, communicative process, rather than as a private state, stressing its performative and agentic nature. And finally, it is broad enough to encompass various subtypes, both providing unity and allowing for differentiations, which will be further elaborated in the final section of this chapter. The following sections will investigate the workings of anonymity in various participatory spaces and illustrate how its positive freedoms both advance and undermine equality.

## 5.3. Anonymity in Participatory Spaces

Anonymity plays a key role in different modes of political participation in democracy. In what follows, I briefly outline anonymous (a) voting, (b) campaign funding, (c) textual political discussions, and (d) masked collective action. In comparison with the invited, claimed, and closed spaces discussed earlier, anonymous participatory spaces often have a more decentred character. The interruptive moment of anonymity mediated through interfaces such as computer screens, avatars, sheets of paper, and walls often entails asynchronicity. Anonymous textual discussions via political pamphlets, letters to the editor, graffiti

or online forums connect participants by providing a common forum for content, but without assembling them physically at the same time and in the same space. In other instances, anonymous interaction entails the geographical separation of interacting participants, for example in anonymous voting and synchronous online chats. Whether synchronous or asynchronous, anonymity creates a common discursive space but does not depend on a common physical space. Through anonymous participation, then, decentred kinds of participatory spaces emerge. Just like the invited, claimed, and closed spaces discussed so far, however, they always depend on physical space and a material infrastructure. They also entail social relationalities between participants and the generation of discursive space. Anonymous participatory spaces are more amorphous. This amorphous character contributes to their quality of freeing the fugitive self and functioning as spaces of becoming.

Voting as the central mode of political participation in representative democracies is in its current form strongly linked to the notion of anonymity. However, the correlation between anonymity and voting is a relatively recent phenomenon. Open voting either by voice, raising of hands or on a visually identifiable ballot provided by different parties in different colours was the common practice in the US for more than 100 years from its constitutional founding in 1789. Under these circumstances, political parties heavily influenced citizens' voting behaviour either by threat or patronage. This was the reasoning behind introducing the secret ballot in the US and the UK in the late 19th century (Barendt, 2016, 156ff; Gardner, 2011, 942; Hunter, 2002). The opposite legal trend to voting procedures, from anonymity to public identification, occurred in the case of private campaign contributions. In the late 20th century, the US introduced requirements for the mandatory disclosure of financial contributions to candidates and political parties that exceeded a certain threshold (Gardner, 2011, 944). Nevertheless, anonymity is still in place in most countries for donations below a certain amount.

Anonymity in textual political discussions has been addressed empirically in at least three forms: the publication of political texts, graffiti, and online communication. First, anonymity played a crucial role in circulating political pamphlets and articles as exemplified by the political controversy between Federalists and Anti-Federalists in the debate over the US Constitution in 1787. The use of pseudonyms was essential in this debate and built on a long European tradition of anonymous publication (Smith Ekstrand & Imfeld Jeyaram, 2011). Second, anonymity is a core feature of graffiti in public bathrooms, as demonstrated by studies of one American and one Australian university campus (Butler, 2006; Rodriguez & Clair, 1999). Far from just scribbling slogans or jokes, graffiti appear as extensive dialogues between students who negotiate their gender, sexuality, race, and political views.

Third, the medium of bathroom walls is surprisingly comparable to online forums. Participants post messages and check back at a later date to see if someone has responded. With the advent of the internet, textually anonymous discussions have become more prevalent, with increasing publication speed and reach, as well as reduced costs (Akdeniz, 2002; Gardner, 2011; Leitner, 2015; Woo, 2006). While asynchronous posts in online forums are reminiscent of anonymous political writings from the 18th century and bathroom wall graffiti, real-time chats make political writing more akin to live discussions.

Another strand of literature investigates masked collective action used by both progressive and reactionary social movements. Progressive movements use masking to turn demonstrations into street parties with clownesque performances, street theatre, and carnivalesque tactics of disguise (Bruner, 2005; Morris, 2012; Ruiz, 2013; Spiegel, 2015). An example of such a carnivalesque guerrilla performance can be seen in the Russian feminist collective Pussy Riot who performed their "Punk Prayer" at Moscow's Cathedral of Christ the Saviour in 2012. Three of the five women, who used colourful balaclavas to mask their faces, were arrested and jailed. A global movement in solidarity with Pussy Riot re-enacted the mockery of authority, taking on the colourful balaclavas as their symbol. This form of political participation builds on carnival traditions that date back to Ancient Rome. Medieval carnival was more political than its commercialized reprisals today. The tradition of people taking to the streets in disguise was used to challenge authorities through mockery and to enact a reversal of social hierarchies (Bruner, 2005). Similar practices of masking are used in online protest by hacktivist groups such as Anonymous. The latter group uses anonymous online communication to attack Scientology, global corporations, and national governments around the world and promotes freedom of speech and social justice (Asenbaum, 2018; Coleman, 2014). The Black Lives Matter movement uses the guise of hoods to enact solidarity with victims of hate crimes and police brutality who are criminalized because of wearing hoodies. The "Million Hoodie March" can be read as a proud reclaiming of a marginalized race/class identity (Kinney, 2016; Nguyen, 2015). On the other side of the political spectrum, the Ku Klux Klan uses anonymity to enact white racial homogeneity through uniform white hoods and racist acts of intimidation and murder. Emerging in 1865 in the US South, the KKK fast became the largest and most influential white supremacist movement (Blee & McDowell, 2013). This example also illustrates that anonymous hate crimes predate the internet. The connectivity and reach of the KKK is, however, amplified today by the use of online communication (Schmitz, 2016).

While anonymous voting, campaign funding, textual political discussions, and masked collective action appear as quite distinct forms of political participation, the discussion of the

freedoms afforded by anonymity in the following section reveals some surprising similarities. Despite their diversity, all of these modes of political engagement form participatory spaces. In these various participatory spaces, different dimensions of democratic spatiality take prominence. In anonymous pamphleteering and graffiti, the discursive dimension comes to the fore, while in masked protest, social spatiality with the horizontal power relations among protesters and the vertical relations between protesters and riot police are most apparent. Nevertheless, in all of these participatory spaces, physical, social, and discursive spatiality are at work and interrelate in affective assemblages.

## 5.4. Anonymity's Contradictory Freedoms

The starting point for developing a more complex understanding of anonymity, one that goes beyond merely equating it with privacy, is the observation that anonymity not only facilitates identity negation, but also affords identity creation. Sociologists such as Erving Goffman (1956) pointed out decades ago that new identities are constructed on the foundation of the identity hidden through anonymity. Goffman explains these identity performances in spatial terms. Subjects act on front stages and back stages. Through this terminology, we can observe how anonymity channels private selves from the backstage to the public front stage. The mask – be it physical or virtual – serves both the negation and creation of identity.

In the literature on anonymous political participation, identity negation is framed in terms of freedom of speech. Concealing identity appears necessary in the face of various repressive forces in society. Anonymity appears as negative freedom – as a means of becoming invisible and avoiding detection. Regarding online communication, Akdeniz (2002, 233) notes: "anonymity enables users to prevent surveillance and monitoring of their activities on the Internet from commercial companies and from the government". Yet, identity negation protects not only from interference by state and economic actors, but also from peer pressure by family, friends, and colleagues. According to Barendt (2016, 156ff), the secret ballot was introduced in the late 19th century in the US and the UK not just to protect workers from their employers; the voting booth also proved especially important to women gaining suffrage in the early and mid-20th century as it shielded them from the influence of husbands and fathers. This negative moment inherent to anonymity interrupts identification. It protects the subject from external interference through a reconfiguration of space by employing physical things such as voting booths, masks, and computer screens, or discursive things such as pseudonyms, improper names, and blank spaces.

The moment of identity negation in participatory spaces is followed by a creative moment in which new imaginaries and alternative personae emerge. Ruiz (2013, 2275) claims: "the mask does not negate identity; instead it signifies the possibility of a multiplicity of identities… It suggests a way of thinking about blankness as a means not only of erasing difference but also as a means of articulating difference". Employing anonymity bestows democratic subjects with the ability to reinvent their appearance and thus to influence their perception by others, be it through wearing a mask, designing an avatar, creating a pseudonym or narrating the self through text. The literature on masked collective action in claimed spaces points to the liberating effects of such playful experimentation with a diversity of identities. The democratic subject is temporarily relieved from the constraints of the one and only identity in the public sphere, which is subject to governance surveillance and commercial targeting. Mikhail Bakhtin, a prominent scholar on the carnivalesque, wrote: "The mask is connected with the joy of change and reincarnation, with gay relativity and merry negation of uniformity and similarity; it *rejects conformity to oneself*" (Bakhtin, 1968, 39, emphasis added).

Based on this core contradiction of identity negation and creation as anonymity's founding elements, three sets of contradictory freedoms emerge, each consisting of one element advancing and the other undermining equality. Anonymity in participatory spaces serves (a) inclusion and exclusion, (b) subversion and submission, and (c) honesty and deception.

### 5.4.1. Inclusion and Exclusion

Nowhere is the contradictory character of anonymity so clear as in the discussion of inclusion and exclusion. On the one hand, anonymity reconfigures democratic spatiality by levelling the playing field. It strips away identity markers, thus flattening hierarchies and generating more inclusive participatory spaces. On the other hand, anonymous interaction often exhibits attacks on marginalized social groups in an attempt to exclude those deemed as inferior. This exacerbates internal hierarchies and bolsters the boundaries of participatory spaces.

*Inclusion.* The common argument for the equalizing effect of anonymity claims that social hierarchies are suspended – or at least that their effects are mitigated – by concealing visible markers of gender, race, class, sexuality, disability, age, and so on, thus contributing to inclusion. In terms of anonymous online communication, Leitner (2015, 167) claims: "cyberspace represents a sphere of existence free from (or at least freer from) socio-economic inequalities and social constraints. Without the ex-ante requirement of self-identification,

individuals can equally share in the personal freedom to choose how to express themselves, including whether and how to self-identify".

While unequal power relations are not simply eradicated on the internet, anonymity appears at times to contribute to more equal relations. Similarly, among those who participate in bathroom graffiti, anonymity structurally impedes discrimination along visual identity markers. While identity clues might persist in writing, physically embodied signifiers of social status are suspended: "graffiti level the playing field by getting past all of the factors – such as social status, hierarchical position, education, access, familiarity with rules, expertise, communication competence – that advantageously privilege and benefit certain members against others" (Rodriguez & Clair, 1999, 2). The same argument is made by activists in the Pussy Riot movement. Following their arrests, the media revealed personal details about band members and stylized them as celebrities. In contrast, anonymous Pussy Riot members claim: "We are anonymous because we act against any personality cult, against hierarchies implied by appearance, age and other visible social attributes. We cover our heads because we oppose the very idea of using female faces as a trademark for promoting any sort of goods or services" (cited in Groeneveld, 2015, 10).

These equalizing effects of anonymity result in meritocracy. While in non-anonymous settings, identity markers indicating the status of the speaker influence the perception of what is said, anonymous communication can only be judged by the value of its content. Anonymity also blinds the Greek goddess Justicia so she cannot discriminate between subjects and all are equal in front of the law. A student participating in bathroom graffiti explains: "I like toilet walls because there's no identity. Because if you knew who wrote it, you could think 'oh, I don't like that person, I'm not going to respond well to what they said', but if you don't know who wrote it, you're going to respond with whatever you think is the best response" (cited in Butler, 2006, 23). This argument is curiously echoed in the US constitutional debate. Melancton Smith, writing under the pseudonym Plebeian, claimed that arguments should be judged "on their own merits. If it be good, it stands not in need of great men's names to support it. If it be bad, their names ought not to sanction it" (cited in Smith Ekstrand and Imfeld Jeyaram, 2011, 46).

The principle of meritocracy is also at the centre of both the ideology and practices of Anonymous. The hacktivist collective originated on the image board 4chan and its subboard /b/, where mostly young North Americans share and discuss digital images with complete anonymity. "With no method of individual identity verification, /b/ becomes a community made up of non-persistent individual identities. When you post on /b/, nobody can

prejudge you based on your looks, age, wealth, status, or style. They only have your words" (Wesch, 2012, 92f). The ephemerality of the site, with every post expiring as new posts appear, can be interpreted in terms of a critique of digital archiving and monitoring. McDonald (2015, 979) sees 4chan and Anonymous as antitheses to the Facebook culture of naming, liking, and tagging, which connects value to the persona and not the content, and creates an archive easily abused for surveillance (see Cambre, 2014, 305). This leads Halpin (2012, 19) to interpret Anonymous as an anti-capitalist project: "Anonymous… is an ontological shift on the terrain of identity at the very moment that identity has become the highest form of selection and exploitation in cognitive capitalism, the first glimpse of life without identity on the Internet".

The notion of anonymity as destabilizing capitalist hierarchies by countering the idea of personality cults also resonates in the literature on masked protest (Morris, 2012; Ruiz, 2013). Social movements' claimed spaces are framed in opposition to capitalist inequality as places of horizontality, reciprocity, and solidarity. The movement itself appears as a democratic utopia, as in the transformative perspective outlined in the previous chapter. This inclusive agenda is expressed in frames like the slogans of the Occupy movement "We are the 99%", Anonymous "We are Anonymous We are legion", the Pussy Riot movement "We are all Pussy Riot", the Black Lives Matter movement "We are all Trayvon Martin", and the Zapatistas "We are you". All these slogans begin with self-definitions rather than political claims. They rearticulate a common identity based on the de-articulation of individual identity (Mouffe, 2006) and engage in modes of subjectivization through improper names (Deseriis, 2015; Rancière, 1999). The identification "We are" is then followed by a broad, inclusive term. The "We" is constructed as an inclusive space for (almost) everyone. Thus, not only the negation of hierarchizing identity markers, but also the creation of new collective identities in insurrectional spaces (Newman, 2011) can lead to inclusion. Ruiz (2013, 274) elaborates: "the mask creates a space that can be occupied by those who perceive themselves to be excluded".

*Exclusion.* The freedom to dominate, oppress, and exclude is facilitated by anonymity when identity negation is used to avoid accountability and discriminate against those whose positions are marginalized within society resulting in both internal and external exclusion (Young, 2000). Internal exclusion within participatory spaces through a devaluation of participants with marginalized identities results from disinhibited misogynist, racist, homophobic or other discriminatory utterances. Although all are unknown to each other within anonymous participatory spaces, insults automatically find their addressees as social hierarchies existing outside the discursive setting are replicated.

The phenomena of hate speech and "flaming", which are largely discussed today in the context of online anonymity, were also well known to participants in the US constitutional debate. Addressing insults to each other's pseudonyms, Federalists and Anti-Federalists used terms such as "ignorant loggerhead" and "ungrateful monster" to degrade their opponent: "An onslaught of sparring and often libellous remarks appeared in newspapers and pamphlets… The absence of an author's true identity, however, did not spare anonymous authors from attack and may have indeed made such attacks easier" (Smith Ekstrand & Imfeld Jeyaram, 2011, 39, 43).

This is also the central observation in Rodriguez and Clair's analysis of toilet graffiti. While they acknowledge graffiti as an important outlet for suppressed anger, they also observe that it is used by those on the top of hierarchies to affirm their position: "dominant groups – especially white heterosexual men – use the open nature of graffiti to intimidate and 'discipline' minority groups… [G]raffiti allow for open discourse (sexist, racist, and homophobic speech) that organizations cannot sanction, but which may also act to establish or reinforce the privileging aspects of patriarchal practice, thus, supporting the hegemonic order" (Rodriguez & Clair, 1999, 3).

The Ku Klux Klan represents a telling example of external exclusion through anonymity. Here, anonymity is used in an attempt to cast those with marginalized identities out of participatory spaces in order to construct a homogenous cultural and racial space. The most appalling use of anonymity can be observed in racist hate crimes and the murder of African Americans in the 1920s (Blee & McDowell, 2013). In these cases, masking was used in public lynchings to avoid detection. While today the KKK does not engage in public executions, their ideology of white supremacy that is disseminated via social media shows how the Klan upholds its original ideas of racial purity (Schmitz, 2016). The goal of such actions is to expel particular ethnic groups who are perceived as a threat to their own culturally cognate community.

The example of the KKK illustrates not only how identity negation can be used for exclusion, but also identity creation. On the one hand, the ghost-like figures are meant to intimidate their victims. On the other, this attire also establishes internal hierarchies. While collective actors such as Occupy, Pussy Riot, and Anonymous use the mask to enact internal equality, the KKK employs a system of attire that expresses difference in social status between Klan members (Blee & McDowell, 2013, 252). The equalizing effects of the hood are countered by different coloured robes, stripes, and decorations enacting hierarchy. Moreover, Schmitz's study of hierarchies in the ideology of the KKK, as expressed on its

various webpages, shows that racism towards non-members is not the only line of discrimination. Rather, websites also contain misogynistic and heterosexist content. Most pages exclusively display Klans*men,* often in military attire and combat, while women are underrepresented and depicted as housewives. Thus, while women are formally equal members within the KKK, they are informally ranked in a subordinate position in relation to their male counterparts (Schmitz, 2016, 208ff).

The freedom to exclude facilitated by anonymity does not always take the form of discrimination of marginalized groups. It can also be observed wherever those in privileged social positions, such as economic elites or state actors, employ anonymity to amplify power imbalances. In many countries, riot police concerned with maintaining public order at demonstrations and protests increasingly appear masked. While these black masks, either in the form of balaclavas or gas masks, serve physical protection, they also fulfil the dual function of anonymity: negating and creating identity. First, by concealing identity police evade personal identification and avoid public scrutiny. This is accompanied by trends of police refusing to wear their badge numbers and restricting civilians from filming their actions, which is most frequently observed in the context of police brutality against ethnic minorities (Spiegel, 2015, 791f). Second, anonymity also allows police to construct menacing personae. Riot police uniforms are akin to soldiers' military gear, evoking the image of an army at war. While the camouflage of military uniforms is meant to allow soldiers to disappear, the black police uniforms signal presence, threat, and unity.

The power imbalance between anonymous police and demonstrators in claimed spaces is amplified by bans on face coverings in public gatherings. The Canadian federal ban on masks of 2012, for example, punishes mask wearing with up to ten years' imprisonment. This inverts the logic of liberal democracies making state actors identifiable to be held accountable by the public and simultaneously upholding citizens' right to privacy. According to Spiegel (2015, 791f), these tendencies need to be interpreted in a wider context:

> In the United States, cases of individuals arrested and charged for filming police officers multiply, while high-profile cases such as those of Chelsea Manning and Edward Snowden, both charged with breaching national security for exposing to the American people state documents concerning American government activity, further anchor the asymmetrical logic of coding and surveilling individuals while *obscuring* the actions of public forces that, in principle, serve and answer to these same individuals.

These tendencies can also be observed in online communication. The internet amplifies the

possibilities of surveillance: "users' identities have become increasingly exposed, while the subject of surveillance and their activities have become less identifiable. Therefore, the major impetus for the power imbalance between the subject and the object of surveillance in the network is their differences in identifiability" (Woo, 2006, 961).

This imbalance of invisible power holders and the identified citizens can also be seen when economic actors influence the legislative process, both directly through lobbying and corruption and indirectly through campaign and party funding. Where there are no transparency laws in place requiring the identification of donors, anonymous financial contributions establish secret connections between the donor and the candidate or party. Although the donors are known to the beneficiary, they remain unknown to the public. While in clear cases of corruption the donation is tied to explicit political demands, in less explicit cases the beneficiary might act in the donor's interest in the expectation of further donations. Such concerns were raised in 1997 when the British Labour government proposed to exempt motor racing from a ban on tobacco advertising shortly after the Labour Party received a £1 million donation from business magnate and Formula One chief executive, Bernie Ecclestone (Barendt, 2016, 163ff). Thus, anonymous party financing can distort democratic legislative processes, which translates economic inequality into political domination.

### 5.4.2. Subversion and Submission

By allowing dissidents and marginalized groups to avoid detection (identity negation) and to form new collective identities through improper names (identity creation), anonymity facilitates the contestation of hegemonic power structures. Simultaneously, however, anonymity evokes conformist tendencies when anonymous participants give up individual beliefs and critical thinking in exchange for a feeling of belonging to a community. Anonymity, thus, facilitates both subversion and submission.

***Subversion.*** Some of the most influential texts contesting political power relations that are today clearly attributed to certain authors were originally published anonymously, such as Thomas Paine's *Common Sense* attacking the English government published in 1776 by "an Englishman". *The Communist Manifesto* by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, calling for a proletarian revolution, was first published anonymously in 1848 and only attributed to its authors more than two decades later.

The importance of anonymity for subversion has remained ever since. Morris argues that neoliberal developments of commodification and surveillance create a political context in which anonymity becomes an empowering tool:

> Anonymity is not only a politically-motivated response to the encroachments of data-gathering devices and the bioinformatics that underwrite the impersonal efficiency of contemporary biopolitical control societies. It is also an aesthetic revolt against the era of navel-gazing narcissism that has hypnotized the subject of these regimes… A form of resistance to the State, then, is to eliminate its access to its economic subjects by scrambling the informatics networks it uses to delineate, organize and manage them, effectively de-activating oneself as a political subject. (Morris, 2012, 110)

Whistleblowing, for example, is a subversive practice in which individuals "leak" information about illegal or immoral actions from an insider perspective (Barendt, 2016, 75). This contests the capitalist logics of privatization and commodification of knowledge. WikiLeaks, one of the most prominent examples, provides a website for the anonymous publication of information on US governmental wrongdoings. In 2010, Bradley/Chelsea Manning, a soldier in gender transition, leaked the largest amount of classified military and diplomatic material to the public in US history via WikiLeaks and other channels, exposing human rights violations such as the purposeful killing of civilians by the US military in Iraq and Afghanistan (de Lagasnerie, 2017). The story of WikiLeaks appears at the centre of a global cultural rupture of identity reconfigurations. The anonymity of its whistleblowing practices contrasts dramatically with the celebrity status of Julian Assange, its public face overshadowing the drama of Manning, a young person searching for a new identity between army barracks and prison walls.

WikiLeaks is part of a broader "freedom of information movement" (Beyer, 2014b; Coleman, 2019; McCarthy, 2015), evolving from the hacker counter culture that upholds the principle of free speech and open source. Political groups such as the Pirate Party derive their name from the notion of online piracy, consisting of stealing and publicly sharing digital private property. Anonymous is another actor in the freedom of information movement that engages in the practices of hacking and leaking. It is most notorious for its Distributed Denial of Service Attacks (DDoS), making their opponents' websites inaccessible by flooding it with access requests. This tactic is often equated with analogue forms of claiming space such as sit-ins or occupations. Anonymous illustrates how employing anonymity enables some "computer nerds" to inflict serious harm on powerful institutions such as the Church of Scientology, Visa and MasterCard, and governments around the world (Asenbaum, 2018b).

The mask becomes a common focal point of diverse movements contesting practices of identification and surveillance. What the Guy Fawkes mask is for Anonymous, the colourful balaclava is for the Pussy Riot movement. In contrast to the white-faced, bearded man who is associated with the digital culture of disembodiment and Western reason, the hand-knit balaclavas in different colours enact physical embodiment, femininity, cultural diversity, and passion much in the spirit of difference democracy. This contrast between Pussy Riot and Anonymous shows how Pussy Riot's performative interventions are deeply rooted in a feminist contestation of patriarchy. Pussy Riot's "Punk Prayer" directly attacked Vladimir Putin's government and the Russian Orthodox Church – the two centres of patriarchal rule in Russia. This act of anonymous subversion opens up new spaces by claiming and re-appropriating old spaces of power:

> The spectacle of brightly colored balaclavas on the five women standing on the altar of a sacred but also fraught religious space not only occupies space but offers an example of the new kinds of bodies and sensations that can take place in a public space. They open up room to consider the cathedral otherwise. (Bruce, 2015, 52)

The global movement in support of Pussy Riot reinterprets their political objectives and resituates them in a Western context, not as protest against dictatorship but as protest against state surveillance and police brutality. While the Western and Eastern perspectives differ in certain respects, they both focus on the balaclava as a subversive object that thwarts identification. The balaclava circulates as a physical thing in street protest and as a digital thing in online discourses. Interpreting an image of a policeman pulling the balaclava off a female protester's face at a US solidarity demonstration with Pussy Riot, Bruce (2015, 54) states: "In this image the balaclava circulates as vehicle for drawing parallels between US and Russian state repression".

It was no coincidence that Pussy Riot staged their "Punk Prayer" protest in February – the carnival season. Medieval carnival provided a temporary chance to enact the inversion of social hierarchies as "the lower classes had an opportunity to dress up as the ruling classes and mock their power" (Spiegel, 2015, 808). Political dissidents and disenfranchised groups "used carnival festivities to critique government officials and state institutions and demand significant political reform" (Bruner, 2005, 139). Bruner reports one such example: In 1580 Romans-sur-Isére, a small town in France, the gap between the rich and the poor widened as the ruling elite exempted themselves from paying taxes. In response, the carnival festivities organized by the common people ran under the theme "eat the rich". The

crowd in disguise held mock armed military parades, marched with rakes and brooms to sweep away the rich, and enacted selling the meat of the rich at a market. This fictive performance had real consequences as the mock rebel leaders were prosecuted, tortured, and hanged (Bruner, 2005, 142).

The parallels with Pussy Riot's "Punk Prayer" are apparent: "Medieval carnival is known to have included mockery of church authorities, even swearing and indecent behaviour from pulpits and altars" (Steinholt, 2013, 123). While both Pussy Riot and medieval carnival encompass elements of humour, they combine these with serious threat. The threat "eat the rich" is echoed by the chorus of the Punk Prayer "Virgin Mary, chase Putin away". The Punk Prayer consists of aggressive rock music and swear words. The balaclava itself, however colourful, contains aspects of threat: "the circulatory power of the balaclava means that such endless reproduction can become monstrous and terrifying" (Bruce, 2015, 49). This can also be observed in the techniques of the black bloc in anti-capitalist demonstrations. Hiding their faces behind black balaclavas, scarves, and hoods, the creation of a menacing persona is not an unintentional side effect, as one anti-globalization protester explains: "part of the effectiveness of our mass mobilizations rest on this threat of implied violence" (cited in Ruiz, 2013, 269).

Hiding faces in hoods is also an essential practice in the Black Lives Matter movement. The hood affords a performance of defiance through its association with youth riots, gang wars, and anti-capitalist insurgency. In the "Million Hoodie March" hundreds took to the streets of New York City in hoods to protest the killing of Trayvon Martin, a 17-year-old African American, whose killer, white neighbourhood watchman George Zimmerman, walked free. As the anonymity of Martin's hood was blamed for creating a threat which justified Zimmerman's actions, Black Lives Matter activists wear hoodies to perform solidarity with the victim and claim their race/class identity (Kinney, 2016; Nguyen, 2015). Kinney (2016, 71) elaborates: "But even when, and sometimes because, authorities brand the hood as criminal or illegitimate, people keep wearing their hoods for resistance, revolution, and transformation. For self-expression, defiance, and play".

Lastly, the subversive freedom of anonymity can be illustrated by the controversy surrounding the veiling of Muslim women. In her book, *Veil*, Rafia Zakaria (2017) contends that in the context of the enforcement of burka bans and Islamophobic media discourses, the practice of publicly wearing the veil becomes an act of political participation. The veil functions as a tool for subversion confronting Islamophobia and claiming diversity in the public sphere. The state, or, in Rancière's terms, the police, demands access to the individual

person's face as prime identifier. The veil interrupts identification just as the hood does. The forced unveiling of Muslim women in schools and courts by the state and the politically motivated hate act of other citizens pulling a headscarf off a woman's head is echoed in media threats addressed to black youth to unhood, not to become the next shooting target. The disciplinary power that confronts anonymous subversion takes the form of a physical threat to life and freedom of the defiant subject.

***Submission.*** From the 1930s on, studies in social psychology have tried to find explanations for the strong group dynamics of crowds, particularly regarding the emerging fascist movements in Europe. They found that individuals appeared to give up or lose their individuality in groups and tend to follow group dynamics and leadership. An explanation for this deindividuation was the anonymity of the crowd. Perceiving themselves as unidentifiable, individuals not only felt less accountable for their actions, but were also swayed by emotive group dynamics (e.g. Le Bon, 2009 [1896]). Current models of deindividuation clarify that it is not just that negative behaviour is emulated, or that crowds are always deindividuating; indeed, they can have the opposite effect. Stephen Reicher (1987; 1984) argues that whether individuals conform to group dynamics under the condition of anonymity depends on the salience of certain features of identity that are shared between both the individual and the group. In other words, anonymity leads individuals to submit to a group, if that group is defined by a strong group identity that individuals share with the group. The salient collective identity amplifies those aspects that the individual shares with the group. The identity of the assemblage gains control over individual action. The individual subject is free from making decisions, free to submit to the group, and free from the constraints of accountability: "The mob has all the power of its aggregate of members, who, embedded as they are in the group, are virtually invisible as individuals; they feel liberated from responsibility, and thus the chain of personal accountability is all but destroyed" (Boyd & Field, 2016, 340).

The most horrendous consequences that submission to the collective through anonymity can have in the political sphere can be illustrated by the racially motivated lynchings that occurred in the US in the 19th and 20th centuries. Lynching as a political hate crime against black people was used by groups such as the KKK, as discussed above. In these hate crimes, individuals' submission to a group identity of terror played an important role. The affectivity of hate that spreads through groups is partly facilitated by the anonymity of its participants who negate their individual identity through the group identity of the crowd. In contrast with the KKK who actively seeks anonymity through the physical object of the hood, lynch mobs did not need guises; they simply depended on the multiplicity of their members

to hide individual identity: "One form of anonymity has been substituted for another: unmasked, the lynch men can both claim public credit for their reign of terror and dodge legal responsibility" (Boyd & Field, 2016, 341).

The freedom to submit to collectivity does not always come in such drastic and appalling forms. More subtle forms can be observed in current political collectivities such as Anonymous, who, as illustrated above, create inclusive collective identities. Individuals included in the collective not only occupy equal positions in the social hierarchy, but also submit to a commonly constructed persona. They tend to adjust their modes of expression to collectively perform and reinforce this improper identity. Gabriela Coleman (2012, 86), for example, claims that: "donning the Guy Fawkes mask associated with Anonymous… entails trading individualism for collectivism". The absence of individual identifiers on discussion boards such as 4chan and its forum /b/, where Anonymous participants engage with each other, results in mutual mimicry. A sort of group think emerges. As Halpin (2012, 22) observes: "After a certain amount of time, one loses one's individuality and enters the 'hivemind' of '/b/'". The use of the Guy Fawkes mask can be understood both as facilitating inclusion as well as a performance of deindividuation. Cambre (2014, 316) witnesses a conscious effort on the part of Anonymous activists to overcome individuality: "an Anonymous twitter user claimed: '*Today I took off my face.*' Whereas many activist movements have used carnivalistic components as part of a strategy of resistance and embraced masking, others have emphasized the removal or erasure of the human face, the defacement of the subject". In her analysis of images generated and circulated by Anonymous activists, Cambre shows a picture with a man taking off the Guy Fawkes mask with no face behind it. Another image bears the caption: "It is time to leave behind your names. It is once again time to become Anonymous" (Cambre, 2014, 316f). In Mouffe's (2006) terms, it appears that there are tendencies in Anonymous where a de-articulation of identity through a process of de-individualization is not followed by a re-individualization. Here de-individualization appears as a final dissolution of the individual subject into the collective.

This inclination towards homogeneity can be witnessed elsewhere too:

> a trend shared in twenty-first century protest from Tahrir Square to Occupy is the refusal to have a "representative *face* come forward as the avatar of the revolution" – a move which is both tactical and ideological. In order to discipline and control, the police need to be able to identify individuals and

personalize their crimes as the wrongdoing of delinquents. Anonymous protest, however, not only skirts disciplinary tactics but also asserts the protesting body as *collective* and *depersonalized* (Spiegel, 2015, 795, emphasis added).

What appears to be happening here is that participants in these movements more or less consciously give up their individuality to a certain degree so as to form an unassailable unit, while, with the same move, adhering to the ideology of equality. In addition to these strategic and ideological motives, this unity of equals also satisfies a psychological function: the yearning for belonging. Building a community that accommodates a feeling of belonging, mutual appreciation, and acceptance is an important aspect of inclusion. If belonging and acceptance is the participants' main motive, their political beliefs might prove flexible. This is particularly relevant in the context of the increasing openness – and at times emptiness – of the content of current social movements engaging via social media, in which anonymity plays a central role. Concepts such as networked social movements (Castells, 2012), connective action (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012), and cyborg activism (Asenbaum, 2018b) point to an increasing eclecticism and even nihilism in the content of these movements. When political causes and content become less important and increasingly vague, deindividuation through anonymity can contribute to submitting to group dynamics and anonymous leadership.

Moreover, there is a practical reason for tendencies of conformity in anonymous collective action. Improper names exemplified by the Guy Fawkes mask, the Pussy Riot balaclava, and the pseudonyms in the US constitutional debate entail that different people can take on the same anonymous persona (Deseriis, 2015). To the many arrests of hacktivists, Anonymous responds: "You can't arrest an idea". This implies that participants within movements or civil society organizations need to adhere to a common ideology or set of ideas even if these diverge from their individual political beliefs. While in non-anonymous movements, individual participants can be authorized to speak for the group and held accountable, in collectives such as Anonymous this is hardly possible due to the unidentifiability of participants. This leads to intense controversies within Anonymous with sub-groups accusing one another of being inauthentic or individual participants being "doxed" – expelled and publicly shamed by finding and publishing their legal identities (Dobusch & Schoeneborn, 2015). In the case of sharing a pseudonym, such as Publius used by Alexander Hamilton, James Madison, and John Jay, the pressure to stick to a consistent line of thought might be even stronger as participants try to "pass" as the same person.

### 5.4.3. Honesty and Deception

Lastly, accounts of anonymity in participatory spaces describe how anonymous subjects are more willing to reveal their true beliefs. Identity negation helps to avoid peer pressure which in turn leads to more sincerity in public discourse. Others, however, point to anonymity's affordance of lying as it allows for the construction of fake identities and deceit through a lack of accountability. Anonymity, thus, contributes to both more honesty and more deception in democracy.

***Honesty.*** Oscar Wilde famously wrote: "Man is least himself when he talks in his own person. Give him a mask and he will tell you the truth" (Wilde, 2007 [1861]). These words were based on 19th century practices of masked balls allowing for sexually frivolous behaviour and anonymously published novels that often contained strong political undertones (Barendt, 2016, 14). The same can be observed today in all modes of anonymous political participation discussed here: escaping domination through anonymity – be it from state institutions, economic actors or peers – contributes to a diversity of opinions in the public sphere:

> There are certain unpopular positions which some people might want to explore, but not if they know they will be exposed to ridicule and perhaps even physical harm if they are tied to such views in public. To completely forbid anonymity would therefore result in no unorthodox views ever reaching the public sphere of debate. (Hunter, 2002)

Through the secret ballot in elections and referendums, voters can uninhibitedly express their interests. Similarly, anonymity is used in polling to detect the electorate's true preferences on various political issues (Kuran, 1993, 41f). Anonymity's freedom to speak the truth also plays into the freedom of subversion as dissidents such as Pussy Riot and Anonymous reveal their true beliefs when shielded by anonymity. Anonymous media channels are established as truth-promoting institutions such as WikiLeaks' whistleblowing website or Anonymous' independent media platform anonews.co that challenges the mainstream media narratives (McDonald, 2015). However, honesty does not just contribute to subversion; it can also aid exclusion and submission. Aggressive and derogatory speech directed at marginalized groups is an expression of true sentiment. Thus, Gardner's (2011, 929) two sides of anonymity might actually be seen as one and the same: "anonymity has been both praised for freeing citizens to vote and speak their true beliefs, and condemned for providing convenient cover to harmful or democratically undesirable behavior".

Both Butler (2006) and Rodriguez and Clair (1999) report in their respective accounts on bathroom graffiti on university campuses how, in these anonymous dialogues, students verbalize political opinions that are deemed inappropriate in classroom discussions and student newspapers. Thus, the more formally regulated public sphere has exclusive effects: "Graffiti allow the key benefit of anonymity, that is, protection against any form of retribution. All can say whatever, however, and whenever, to whomever" (Rodriguez & Clair, 1999, 2). Rodriguez and Clair claim that the bathroom stall functions as a kind of confession booth where social identities and political views are expressed and negotiated. One might add the comparison to a voting booth, also serving the expression of true beliefs. The study of bathroom graffiti at a US university with predominantly African American students in the late 1990s illustrates how, under conditions of anonymity, taboo topics such as homosexuality could be addressed. As the following dialogue shows, both sides of the argument – those defending and those opposing homosexuality – expressed their opinions in a candid and unrestricted manner:

> (D) I really don't understand how a woman could be attracted to another woman and I agree with the sister girl to the left of me. Homosexuality is very unnatural and since God says its wrong in the bible I don't [think] he would create a human being that way. It's a learned behavior.

> (E) You have to learn to interpret the bible. King James was a racist woman hater. Reading is Fundamental. You also think God is a HE. Question everything that contradicts your Freedom and liberty.

> (A) African American women. Look! Don't judge people. You don't understand homosexuality at all! If it was a choice I wouldn't choose it because of all the abuse. Why can't I just be myself in this world? (cited in Rodriguez & Clair, 1999, 6ff)

This dialogue is indicative for a few reasons. Not only can the construction of sexual identity be observed, but we can also witness a genuine dialogue that most likely would not have taken place without an anonymous medium. The question (A) poses at the end is especially telling: "Why can't I just be myself in this world?" implies that she can only express her real self publicly under conditions of anonymity. Both freedoms of subversion of hegemonic identity constructions and internal exclusion within a peer group resulting from frankly speaking one's mind can be observed in the dialogue.

The case of bathroom graffiti illustrates that anonymity is especially important to marginalized social groups in allowing them to publicly express their identities. The internet

provides another outlet to articulate queer identities. Leitner (2015, 2010) elaborates the situation of LGBTIQs in South Korea who often face stigmatism and social ostracism: "many persons identifying with a homosexual (or other non-heterosexual) identity find an anonymous Internet to be the only recourse for open expression… A lack of expressive opportunity deprives homosexual persons of reasonable opportunities to develop their identities". In countries with more accepting cultures toward queer sexualities, anonymity nevertheless plays an important role. Annual Gay Pride parades are characterized by masquerade and carnivalesque identity performances enacting gender changes and fusions through masks, makeup, and disguise (Baxter, 2015).

***Deception.*** Paradoxically, while enabling a more honest discourse by concealing identity is an undisputed feature of anonymity, facilitating deceit appears just as plausible. In stark contrast to Oscar Wilde's assessment of the mask as facilitator of truth, Leonardo da Vinci wrote the following in his notebooks from the late 15th and early 16th century: "the mask [represents] lying and falsehood which conceal truth" (da Vinci, 2005, 684).

While today hiding one's identity when casting the ballot in elections is perceived as a core political right, the role of the secret ballot was far more contested in 19th century Britain: "secret voting was contrary to the English cultural traditions of honesty and openness; it would lead to habits of falsehood and deception" (Barendt, 2016, 157). While one was supposed to vote in accordance with the common good, the secret ballot gave the opportunity for selfish voting, either concealing or even lying about one's decision. Voting based on the common good was particularly important in the face of exclusion of certain social groups from the franchise – most prominently women. Thus, John Stuart Mill argued that men had to reveal their voting behaviour not only to a wider public, but specifically to their wives and daughters whose interests they were supposed to include in their considerations.

In contrast to single voting acts, the internet provides multiple and continuous opportunities for deception. The case of *A Gay Girl in Damascus* is a telling example. In the wake of the uprisings in many Arab countries in 2011, the blog *A Gay Girl in Damascus* told the personal story of the Syrian LGBTIQ activist Amina, resisting the ultra-conservative Syrian regime from within. Amina's blog posts were promoted by *Lez Get Real*, a US-based LGBTIQ news website run by Paula Brooks. After the blog rapidly rose in popularity in just a few months, news spread that Amina was abducted, causing her loyal community to spring into action under the hashtag #FreeAmina. However, it soon turned out that Amina was really Tom MacMaster, a 40-year-old, white, heterosexual, American man. Paula Brooks, who had promoted Amina's blog through *Lez Get Real* and engaged in private and

allegedly romantic contact with Amina, later turned out to be Bill Graber, a 57-year-old, heterosexual American. Both men claimed to have invented fictive personae to more credibly rally for a social group that they were not part of. Cardell and Maguire's (2015) pointed analysis uncovers the relevance of the power structures in which this case is situated:

> The hoax is dangerous because it cloaks the dominant narrative under the disguise of a subversive narrator who corroborates rather than disrupts the dominant narrative… It places a US readership in the privileged position of card-carrying listener to the voice of a subordinate object whose "true" story confirms the rightness of Western democracy and Orientalist discourses about Middle Eastern Otherness, evident, for example, in the cultural stereotype of the Arab woman as being in need of rescuing. (Cardell & Maguire, 2015, 215f)

Conscious deceit is also used to troll or infiltrate political opponents and to spread fake news. Anonymous, for example, employed deception facilitated by anonymity to attack the white supremacist Hal Turner. Turner propagated racist views via his radio show and website. Anonymous activists flooded the radio show with anonymous prank phone calls and the website with prank comments (Coleman, 2014, 19f). This is not an isolated case. Groups such as Expose attempt to document the illegal activities of extreme right-wing groups online and report them to the police. While this is not the official policy of the group, some members create fake accounts on social media – so-called "sock puppets" – to post racist comments, add right-wing individuals as friends, and "like" right-wing groups in order to gain the trust of the online community. When they are ultimately invited to secret chat rooms where strategy and future actions are planned, they gain access to valuable information (Bartlett, 2015, 62ff).

More sophisticated forms of deception are employed when anonymous programmers design social bots to present themselves as human social media users. On Twitter, bots posing as political supporters or activist groups tweet and retweet political content, heavily influencing which political messages are read online and potentially having an impact on the results of elections and referendums. Donald Trump's presidential campaign in 2016 and the campaign for Brexit in the UK's 2016 referendum were both heavily supported by artificial agents whose puppeteers remained in the dark (Bastos & Mercea, 2017; Bessi & Ferrara, 2016).

## 5.5. Conclusion

When considering the antithetical character of anonymity as identity negation *and* creation,

and the resulting three sets of contradictory freedoms, the stark contrast between privacy and anonymity becomes evident. Neither inclusion, exclusion, subversion, submission, honesty, nor deception have much, if anything, in common with privacy. This is because they all relate to a crucial aspect of anonymity besides concealment. They all hint at the inherently *communicative* character of anonymity. This is also illustrated by the four modes of anonymous political participation discussed above: voting, campaign funding, political writing, and masked collective action are all modes of communication in the public sphere. Thus, anonymity does not entail being let alone. On the contrary, anonymity gives the democratic subject presence in the space of appearance. The public sphere – the opposite of privacy – is the precondition for anonymity (see Barendt, 2016, 13).

That said, this does not mean that privacy and anonymity do not share any features in common. They clearly overlap in their functions of shielding the democratic subject from interference by others – be they state actors, economic actors, or peers. However, while privacy withdraws content from public scrutiny and the identity of the subject remains known, anonymity shields identity *while communicating content* in the public sphere. Anonymity, thus, conveys one crucial feature of privacy, the concealment of identity, into the public sphere (see Moore, 2017, 13; Ponesse, 2014, 316). It reconfigures the boundaries between private and public space and facilitates a *private* form of engagement in the *public* discursive arena. In her elaboration of the defiant act of public veil wearing by Muslim women, Zakaria (2017, 71f) claims: "Veils thus are… an extension of the private space of the harem where [the women] are protected, into the public realm". By negating some aspects of the legally identified and physically embodied persona, anonymity transcends publicity and privacy, transforming private sentiments into political claims and transmitting them into the public sphere, thereby facilitating *absence as presence*.

As such, we need a new understanding of presence – one in which visibility of the physically embodied persona does not function as the only criterion. When common modes of identity performance are interrupted through anonymity, subjects appear differently. Anonymous presence is expressed through voice, sound, written words, images that represent the body, improper names, and blank spaces. Presence is perceptible through many ways that partly include and partly go beyond the visibility of the body. It takes multiple forms and in doing so it reconfigures the identity assemblage of the self. It brings often hidden aspects of the self to the fore when anonymous subjects are free to express themselves honestly or when they playfully engage with the many things that constitute their identities. The multiple self is reconfigured through the decentralizing effects of anonymity. What we usually engage in when we present ourselves publicly is an effort of integration that keeps

our identity assemblage coherent. In performing our established persona, we enforce and harden the boundaries of identity space that confine the fugitive self. Anonymity's inherently liberating effects make these boundaries more porous:

> An adequate concept of anonymity, therefore, will need to take account of the ways in which anonymization dissociates or disintegrates what is naturally integrated. Because anonymity is a way of segregating an otherwise integrated self – of packaging selves piecemeal for the world – anonymity involves a loss of visible integrity, and as such creates ambiguous identities. (Ponesse, 2014, 316)

Rather than speaking of natural coherence, as suggested by Ponesse, I think that integration is an artificial act, a forceful act resulting from the disciplinary power that Rancière (1999) describes as the police. In postanarchist terms, it is an act of self-domination or voluntary servitude (Newman, 2010c). The act of forcing the multiple self into a unity is described by Butler (1990) as masquerade, as discussed in the previous chapter. The everyday performance of the self consists of an effort of picking up and constantly reproducing a mask that is handed to us through citation and recitation. Interestingly, the etymology of the term "person" leads to the Latin *personare* "to sound through", which is derived from the use of wooden masks in dramatic performances in the Roman Empire (Napier, 1986). The original persona as mask or "false face" inverts our current understanding of the identifiable person as real while the mask is understood as fake. However, when applying the original meaning of the word "person" to its current use, the identifiable person appears not as the true self, but as public performance, as masquerade. Anonymity is not masquerade, but the interception of masquerade. This is achieved through the disidentifactory practices of rejecting the mask, rejecting the hail of dominant discourses (Muñoz, 1999) thus interrupting the identification through the police (Rancière, 1999).

Such a rejection can never be entirely successful, since the subject can never break out of discourses. But the interruption of continuous identification through practices of anonymity opens up new spaces for exploring and reassembling the multiple self, for playing with the many things that constitute us. Anonymity does not end identification; it merely interrupts it. It creates a space, a gap between periods of continuous identification. After the interruption, identification takes hold and puts the subject back into its place in the normalized order of things.

These reconfigurations through anonymity in participatory spaces have important implications for freedom and equality as core values of democracy. Anonymity's inherently

liberating character always widens the free space of democratic subjects. Anonymity's negative freedoms of escaping surveillance are accompanied by often overlooked positive freedoms to act. In accordance with the democratic paradox that sees freedom and equality in tension, anonymity's freedoms often undermine equality. This reconfigures space, creating new hierarchies or reinforcing established modes of domination. Anonymous subjects can use their positive freedoms for external exclusion, expelling others from participatory spaces or for internal exclusion to exert their superiority over others. Within anonymous crowds, they can submit to group dynamics and leadership, which establishes a hierarchy of leaders and followers. And they can employ anonymity to deceive others, creating a hierarchy of knowledge. In these cases, the democratic paradox is in place. Freedom undermines equality. But at other times, the postanarchist concept of equal liberty understanding freedom and equality as mutually amplifying each other is at work. Anonymous spaces are reconfigured as realms of equality when anonymity contributes to inclusion and meritocracy; when subjects engage in subversion to challenge domination; and when they express honest sentiments, thus flattening knowledge hierarchies. In conclusion, both the democratic paradox and equal liberty explain anonymous interaction in participatory spaces.

The question, then, is how the democratic paradox and equal liberty relate to each other. Are there some participatory spaces in which one of them is at work and in other spaces another? I believe that a clear-cut separation of the two does not explain reality. Rather, the two always go together, in varying constellations and intensities. This becomes clear when we observe both freedoms undermining and freedoms advancing equality in the same case. In the anonymous discourses scribbled as graffiti on bathroom walls, for example, subjects challenge power asymmetries by venting honest sentiments, but at the same time they engage in exclusion by disciplining marginalized groups. Anonymous prank phone calls to troll white supremacists and the social media sock puppet accounts of Expose entail both deception and subversion. In all of these cases, both the democratic paradox and equal liberty are at work. Anonymity's freedoms always both undermine and advance equality and, thus, remain contradictory.

Often even the two opposing freedoms of one binary (e.g. inclusion and exclusion) are at work simultaneously. Anonymous, for example, engages in subversion confronting social inequality, while at the same time exhibiting internal tendencies of submission. The inclusive, levelled playing field in the debate about the US Constitution is characterized by a highly exclusive language of personal insult. The same can be observed regarding honesty and deception. The German democratic theorist, Hubertus Buchstein (1997), argues in an

essay on online deliberation: "the network presents an *unreal world* which allows all of us to create one or even more virtual identities… In most cases people pretend to have those positive characteristics they feel they lack" (Buchstein 1997, 258f, emphasis added). The literature on masked collective action offers a different explanation. It interprets identity creation as revealing aspects of the multifaceted self: "The mask is related to transition, metamorphoses, the violation of natural boundaries, to mockery and familiar nicknames. It contains the playful element of life" (Bakhtin, 1968, 40). While this chapter has compared cases of deception with cases of honesty for the purpose of analytical clarity, in practice all cases contain both aspects as the boundaries between reality and fiction are blurred. Referring to the Guy Fawkes mask (V-mask) employed by Anonymous, Cambre (2014, 318) states: "The generative trait of the V-mask, as Deleuzian multiplicity, like the quality of undecideability, ensures resistance to representation because it provides a riddle rather than a clear relationship, it is a non-identity acting as-if an identity, but instead of choosing one or the other it oscillates between them. It rejects dominant 'either/or' alternatives". Rather than viewing the contradictory freedoms as mutually exclusive, I suggest that we understand them as interacting dialectically.

The dialectic of anonymity's contradictory freedoms is further complicated by a normative aspect. While the division in the dichotomies of freedoms advancing and undermining equality might be a helpful heuristic, it is also necessary to think about the positive and negative effects within each freedom. Suzanne Dovi (2009), for example, argues that exclusion contributes to democracy, as the access of privileged groups needs to be restricted in public decision-making. In the same vein, we can observe that submission to commonly established rules and deception as an expression of the multifaceted subject are all positive aspects that contribute to democratic life, while inclusion can further privilege the more powerful, subversion can compromise security, and honesty might lead to hurt.

One further step is necessary to fully understand anonymity in participatory spaces. As discussed above, the academic debate on anonymity provides several suggestions as to how to differentiate particular types of anonymity. Authors speak of pseudonymity, physical anonymity, discursive anonymity, offline anonymity, online anonymity, self-anonymity, other-anonymity (Scott, 1999), agent anonymity, recipient anonymity, and process anonymity (Wallace, 1999). The definition developed here, in contrast, is broad enough to encompass all of them, but in turn loses the sharp distinctions offered by these terms. Instead of developing complicated terminologies of subtypes, I believe that the spatial theory developed in this thesis can help to sharpen our view of different forms of anonymity, while not losing the macro view afforded by the definition of anonymity advanced here. The

spatial theory (Chapter 2) differentiates between physical, social, and discursive spatialities. Each of these dimensions, as I will briefly show here, can explain particular contextual conditions that determine the different forms that anonymity takes.

The physical dimension of space draws attention to the physical things that constitute anonymity; in other words, it depends on the materiality of the medium. These things include pens and paper, marker pens and bathroom walls, keyboards and computer screens, typewriters, masks, hoods, veils, voting booths, and even human bodies (when they are so numerous that they become indifferentiable). All these things constitute new interfaces between communicators. What is curious about these interfaces is that they both mediate communication and interrupt identification. This interruptive communication allows for the constitution of new self-reifications through which the subject exerts presence. The specific materiality of the things that interrupt identification plays an essential role. The perceived reality of the identity, for example, differs depending on whether physical masks or digital pseudonyms are used. The socio-cultural identity of the speaker is constructed differently if a political message is written on a bathroom wall or in a newspaper as a letter to the editor. This is well illustrated by the hood that came to represent the murder of Trayvon Martin. Nguyen (2015, 792) writes: "Because clothing is both contiguous and not contiguous with what it covers – skin, flesh – it is a mutable boundary that asserts itself within a field of matter, forcing us to confront the intimacy between bodies and things, and the interface between their amalgam and the environment". The raced and classed object of the hood articulates a representative claim (Saward, 2010) making the absent Martin present. A special case among the things that interrupt identity are large assemblages of human bodies. Here it is the quantity of bodies that impedes individual identification and thus interrupts the continuous identity performance of the subject. The visible bodies themselves create an interface that articulates a new collective identity.

Turning to the social dimension of democratic spatiality, we can see how the constellation of human bodies, their emotive connections and power relations affect which form anonymity takes. These relations between anonymous participants do not simply emerge out of nothing in a participatory space. Rather, they partly mirror and partly suspend and reconfigure external relations. Their respective social locations afford different power resources to protesters and riot police, affluent and poor party funders, and heterosexual and homosexual graffiti scribblers. These pre-established hierarchies can be disrupted or amplified by anonymity. Alison Kinney (2016) explains how the material object of the hood reverses its meaning when it is employed by activists to protest against racism in comparison to its use in executions. While the anonymity afforded by the hood enhances the

position of protesters, it dehumanizes and degrades the condemned criminal. Similarly, the veil can amplify patriarchal structures disciplining its wearer, while also empowering its wearer to confront state repression (Zakaria, 2017). To understand specific cases of anonymous political engagement, the pre-existing and the newly emerging power structures defining social space, thus, need to be taken into account.

Finally, discursive space and in particular the configuration of identity knowledge form another crucial contextual condition of anonymous political participation. First, it matters which identity knowledge is conveyed by the identifiers used (pseudonyms, social security numbers, initials, etc.) and which identity markers (gender, age, ethnicity, etc.) of the legally identified and physically embodied persona are revealed. Second, it matters who is anonymous within a participatory space and who is not. The confrontation between unmasked protesters who are legally prohibited from covering their faces and masked riot police is an obvious example. A more subtle level can be illustrated by the question of whether the identities behind online pseudonyms anonymizing users-to-user interaction are known to operators of websites and accessible to hackers and government agents. Third, it matters whether or not anonymous participants have previous knowledge of each other and have pre-established social relations. In workplace participation via anonymous online feedback tools, for example, participants might be formally unidentified but as the anonymity set is small, their identity might be easily deduced via social cues such as recognizable wording or content (Hayne *et al.*, 2003). In short, the form anonymity takes is affected by the constellation of discursive space and the question of who knows what about whom. Together, the contextual constellations of physical things that interrupt identification and mediate communication, social power relations, and discursive identity knowledge explain which form anonymity takes.

This chapter has shown how anonymity can function as a practice of disidentification and can contribute to a politics of becoming by reconfiguring presence in the space of appearance. As illustrated in the discussion of the history of anonymity, this phenomenon has grown in importance throughout history from anonymous publishing to anonymous online communication. The emerging digital age has rapidly accelerated this process. While a hundred years ago anonymity was mostly the privilege of those with access to publishing, already the invention of the telephone made anonymity more accessible. With the advent of the internet, however, anonymity has become an inherent aspect of everyday communication. Online tools both mediate communication and simultaneously interrupt identification. A decentring of identity assemblages through anonymity becomes an integral part of our selves. The next and final chapter will explore which new democratic subjectivities

emerge through anonymous online communication, what this means for freedom and equality in participatory spaces, and what potential it harbours for the subject to change.

# 6. Becoming Cyborg: Toward a Digital Politics of Presence[*]

> *The radio is one-sided when it should be two-. It is purely an apparatus for distribution, for mere sharing out. So here is a positive suggestion: change this apparatus over from distribution to communication. The radio would be the finest possible communication apparatus in public life, a vast network of pipes. That is to say, it would be if it knew how to receive as well as to transmit, how to let the listener speak as well as hear, how to bring him into a relationship instead of isolating him.*
>
> *Bertolt Brecht, 1932*

## 6.1. Introduction

Technological progress has always inspired imaginations of democratic futures. Bertolt Brecht's vision of a decentralized multi-user network of communication via radio frequencies developed in the 1930s bears some striking resemblances to today's digital communication network known as the internet. Brecht's radio democracy was followed by conceptions of teledemocracy that imagined telephone and later teletext voting following televised political debates (Arterton, 1987). New electronic communication tools are also central to discussions about participatory democracy (Chapter 3), for example in Barber's strong democracy employing electronic townhall meetings and televoting (Barber, 2003 [1984]; 1998; 1997). With the spread of popular access to the internet in the 1990s, such imaginings found new inspiration. The poststructuralist-inspired discussions about cyberdemocracy envisioned a new digital public sphere (Vedel, 2006). Anonymity was at the heart of these debates, which assumed that the interruption of established identity performances would enable the exploration of alternative selves.

Cyberdemocracy viewed the democratic subject as being reconfigured in the context of new spatialities captured under the term "cyberspace", which was seen as a sphere separate

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[*] Parts of this chapter have been published in a research article in *Communication Theory*, see Asenbaum, 2019b. Other parts have been published in a research article in *Politics & Gender*, see Asenbaum, 2019a.

from "real life". Here the democratic subject would dwell as a disembodied self, perceptible only by virtue of the words it uttered. While the disembodiment thesis has been rigorously criticized from feminist, postcolonialist, and materialist perspectives and is commonly acknowledged as outdated in current debates (Beyer, 2012; Kennedy, 2006; Robinson, 2007), the notion of cyberspace as a realm of equality and freedom overcoming corporeal constraints is still a matter of debate. In the recent *Politicizing Digital Space* Trevor Smith (2017) outlines the digital as a realm of disembodied universal reason:

> The simple act of going online and entering into a pseudonymous space automatically strips away identities, as your body and social background are invisible to the other commenters as a source of prejudice… Online interactions within a website dedicated to political discussion are the ultimate form of Cartesian subjectivity, as what we think and share with others is what defines us to the others, not the sight of our bodies. (47)

Smith employs Arendt's concept of the space of appearance to argue that in digital space all that counts is the content of speech and action, while bodies and their inscribed identities are left behind. According to Smith, digital space entails "separating political participation from presence" (54). This separation of the embodied subject from its political articulation is necessary because "[b]ecoming a political subject means elevating oneself out of the particulars of identity and into the realm of universal concern" (43).

In this final chapter, I will contest the disembodiment thesis as articulated by Smith and many cyberdemocrats before him. I will make the argument that a politics of becoming through disidentification employing online anonymity does not preclude embodied presence. Rather than overcoming a politics of presence by leaving the body behind when entering cyberspace, the chapter will show how digital modes of communication reconfigure a politics of presence. Performing the self through the technological tools that both mediate and interrupt identity illustrates how presence is always a mode of becoming. Rather than understanding the democratic subject in digital space as defined as universal being stripped of all particularities and existing merely through reasoned verbal articulation, the chapter will explore the materialities both of digital space and of the subjectivities emerging on its grounds.

In the previous chapter, I argued that the space of appearance does not rely on the visibility of the body. This, however, does not entail leaving the body behind and understanding the space of appearance as a realm of universal reason. Rather, bodies and identities always matter in participatory spaces. Here, once again, Butler's work is insightful. Looking at the

role of smartphones and social media in street protest, Butler challenges the disembodiment thesis. Rather than seeing physical corporeality and the materiality of spaces as sperate from a digital world, Butler observes how the digital and the analogue blend into new subjectivities and new spatial configurations:

> And if this conjuncture of street and media constitutes a very contemporary version of the public sphere, then bodies on the line have to be thought of as both there and here, now and then, transported and stationary, with very different political consequences following from those two modalities of space and time. (Butler, 2015, 94)

Elizabeth Grosz points to the transformative potential of such reconfigurations of digital and physical materiality. They disrupt conventional perceptions and open up spaces of becoming for new subjectivities to emerge:

> The virtuality of the space of computing, and of inscription more generally, is transforming at least in part how we understand what it is to be in space… it threatens to disrupt or reconfigure the very nature of information, communication, and the types of social interaction and movement they require. (Grosz, 2001, 87)

These reconfigurations of space uncover potential for "transformations, the usage of spaces outside their conventional functions, the possibility of being otherwise – that is, of becoming" (90).

From the beginnings of the popular use of the internet to this day, the imagination of online communication was dominated by metaphors of space and movement through space as reflected in Butler's and Grosz's statements. When subjects *go* online, they *surf* through a network of web*sites* and *home*pages employing browsers such as *Safari. As space cowboys* and *cybernauts* they push the *electronic frontier* further. They travel on the *information superhighway* to *visit* various *chatrooms* and *forums*. Their navigations are limited by *firewalls* and *paywalls*. On their *search* for information they *follow* others, become trapped in *echo chambers* or *leak* information from secret spaces to the public sphere. And, of course, all this happens in *cyberspace*.

But what the "space" in cyberspace stands for – and thus what constitutes the spatiality of cyberspace – has changed over time. Today, a radical counter thesis has developed that opposes the notion of cyberspace as a separate realm following its own unique logics. As reflected in the quotations from Butler and Grosz, analogue and physical space appear to

merge. Current theories argue that through the Internet of Things, which positions the human subject amid a network of various smart devices and common things such as clothing, refrigerators, cars, and thermostats equipped with sensors, chips, and smart technology, new spaces emerge. These spaces overcome the distinction between analogue and digital space, so that the two collapse into one. While I find a lot of value in this position, it also leaves us with a problem. If digital space and analogue space are conflated, we lack an adequate conceptual framework in which to talk about two things that, intuitively, appear to be very different. Does it not make a difference whether I start up a conversation with a stranger in the supermarket or on Facebook? Rather than collapsing the digital and the physical, we need to understand how the two relate to each other and interact.

In this chapter, I will generate a theory of digital space that neither understands the digital and the physical as separate spheres nor seeks to entirely collapse the distinction between the two. Rather, I will explain them as spatial assemblages of physical, social, discursive, and digital things. Assemblage theory provides a productive way to understand how the digital and the physical relate to each other, while maintaining distinct concepts to describe them. This theory will provide new answers to the question of what it means to appear and what role the body plays in digital spaces. Drawing on current debates in corporeal cyberfeminism, critical race studies, and digital new materialism, I will re-read difference democratic thought and generate an understanding of a digital politics of presence. Employing the concepts generated throughout this thesis, I will argue that it is the disruption of established identity performances mediated via interfaces that generates a moment of disidentification through anonymity as part of the expression of diverse and embodied identities in a digital politics of presence.

To this end, I will first revisit the poststructuralist cyberdemocracy discourse of the 1990s, which imagined the self as disembodied. I will then consider the criticism articulated against the disembodiment thesis in critical race studies, which condemns the invisibility of difference. To find conceptions that overcome the disembodiment thesis, I will engage with early cyberfeminist and current corporeal cyberfeminist debates, which offer notions of the digital subject as both embodied and transformative. The next section will draw on the concepts of the cyborg (Haraway, 1991 [1985]) and evocative objects (Turkle, 1984) that will help to explain how the digital and the physical relate to each other. This will enable the generation of a new theory of digital space explained as assemblage of physical, social, and discursive things. I will then demonstrate how the politics of presence is reconfigured through these new digital spatial assemblages by exploring several examples of digital online engagement.

## 6.2. Revisiting E-topia: Of Disembodied Subjects in Cyberspace

> *[Being online] means existing in pure language… in cyberspace, one dwells in language. and through language.*
>
> *Internet user cited in Markham, 1998, 204*

In the 1990s, the discourse about cyberdemocracy came to prominence, which theorized new means of digital communication from a poststructuralist perspective. This discourse can be understood in the context of two preconditions. First, the debate on cyberdemocracy was spurred by the development of the world wide web in 1989 and the spread of internet access in the Global North. Second, this socio-technological development was paralleled by increasing academic interest in poststructuralist thought. With Judith Butler's theory of performativity adding to and updating the thought of scholars such as Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida and popularizing these continental European discussions in the US, poststructuralism acquired an almost hegemonic position in social theory. Theories of the construction of reality through language appeared to be realized in the early popular use of the internet that was dominated by textuality and the absence of visual elements. What appeared as new worlds of online interaction became so important, so mesmerizing, that scholars paid little attention to its material infrastructure. Virtual reality in cyberdemocratic writing is often compared to hallucinating from drug use or travelling to another universe.

In cyberdemocracy, disembodied democratic subjects, perceptible only by textual expression, move in cyberspace as a parallel world separated from analogue reality. The disembodied subject appealed not only to deliberative democrats as cyberspace promised to realize a public sphere free from domination (Bohman, 2004; Ward, 1997), but also to postmodern theorists (Poster, 1997), unwittingly replicating the modern dichotomies of online and offline, body and mind, reality and illusion. Waskul and Douglass (1997, 388), for example, write:

> When on-line, one does not occupy a fixed physical form. That is, in cyberspace there is no such thing as a body, at least not in the sense that we inhabit a body. All that exists are fleeting electronic images loosely associated with a self-selected screen name (another fleeting electronic image). In this sense,

cyberselves are literally disembodied. The self is freed from any physical form and thus challenges the traditionally perceived relationship between body and self.

In what follows, I will first explore the spatial metaphor of cyberspace that is so central in cyberdemocratic debates. Then, I will investigate the role of anonymity in the emergence of digital subjectivities.

### 6.2.1. Cyberspace: Pushing the Electronic Frontier

The core concept of the cyberdemocracy discourse is cyberspace, a realm imagined as a sphere of pure discursive interaction. The promise of cyberspace fosters a sphere of freedom and equality by breaking with the logics of the analogue world around it. Cyberspace is perceived as discontinuing – as interrupting – "real life". Cyberspace is:

> … another life-world, a parallel universe, offering the intoxicating prospect of actually fulfilling – with a technology very nearly achieved – a dream thousands of years old: the dream of transcending the physical world, fully alive, at will, to dwell in some Beyond – to be empowered or enlightened there, along or with others, and to return. (Benedikt, 1991, 131)

As spatial interruption, cyberspace is understood as dispensing with the limitations of the analogue sphere and generating a utopian space, a separate realm perceived as a mystical dream world: "Cyberspace is a habitat of the imagination, a habitat for the imagination. Cyberspace is the place where conscious dreaming meets subconscious dreaming, a landscape of rational magic, of mystical reason" (Novak, 1991, 266).

Cyberspace appears to work according to entirely different rules. It undermines all logics of common space and throws reality into disorder (Lipton, 1996, 336). In an (auto)ethnographic study, Annette Markham (1998, 23) recalls her experience of going online, which felt "like entering a strange new world where the very metaphysics defied my comprehension of how worlds should work". This transcendental spatiality of electronic networks is founded on one core element: While in analogue space distance stands in relation to movement and in particular speed of movement, in cyberspace all distance is overcome. The world appears to shrink in the palm of the user's hand. Interlocutors are perceived as immanently present, while they are physically located far away, which results in a reconfiguration of social relations. As an early internet user (cited in Turkle, 1995, 198) explains:

It was a lot easier to talk to people [about my problems]… because they're not there. I mean, they are there but they're not there. I mean, you could sit there and you could tell them about your problems and you don't have to worry about running into them on the street the next day.

Collapsing distance and eradicating travel time signals "the end of space through cyberspace" (Nunes, 1997, 172). A new kind of spatiality emerges that is perceived as "a 'nonspace', a hyperdimensional realm that we enter through technology" (Barnes, 1996, 195).

Apart from the collapse of distance, what characterizes cyberspace as a "nonspace" is its perceived lack of materiality. A space entirely constructed of zeros and ones, of digits and bytes, of digital simulation, cyberspace is detached from physicality (Markham, 1998, 86). This point is also crucial for understanding the cyberdemocratic notion of subjectivity. As the digital replaces the physical, cyberdemocracy is defined by the invisible subject. Anonymity strips subjects of their bodies tainted with identities that are subject to discrimination. Cyberspace promises to liberate the human spirit from its fleshy cage. The notion of disembodiment in cyberspace originates in the very text that coined the term "cyberspace". In the cyberpunk novel *Neuromancer* William Gibson (2016 [1984], 6) writes about "the bodiless exaltation of cyberspace", "contempt for the flesh", and how the hero of the story was denied access to cyberspace and "fell into the prison of his own flesh". The notion of disembodiment created in this dystopian science fiction novel resonated with the personal experiences of many early "cybernauts": "When I spend a lot of time in disembodied spaces, I forget my body. Often, I don't remember it until the physical pain is extreme, and then I resent my body's intrusion on my life online" (Markham, 1998, 59). They often felt like stripping off the body and leaving it behind in the world of flesh when entering the world of text: "By logging onto my computer, I… exist separately from my body in 'places' formed by the exchange of messages" (Markham, 1998, 17). Cyberspace, thus, reconfigured not just space, but also the identities expressed in this "nonspace" as online "where I am and who I am are up for grabs" (Lipton, 1996, 342). This kind of identity play "offers the possibility of forgetting about the real body" (344).

### 6.2.2. Exploring the Multiple Self Through Online Anonymity

These notions of disembodiment and anonymity feature prominently in the central works that define the cyberdemocratic discourse. *The Network Nation* by Starr Roxanne Hiltz and Murray Turoff published as early as 1978 – almost two decades before Castells' *The Rise of the Network Society* (1996) – constitutes one of the founding texts of cyberdemocracy.

The book provides detailed empirical work on computer conferencing, comparable to current synchronous online chats. As in these early forms of digital communication interlocutors were unidentified by default, this study provides one of the earliest cases of online anonymity. Hiltz and Turoff's analysis resonates with the concept of anonymity developed in the previous chapter. Online anonymity does not simply entail the negation of established identity; rather, the authors observe acts of identity creation via pseudonyms: "A pen name is like a mask or a costume; it helps people to play a role in a conference" (95f). The study examines how anonymity enables participants to "feel more free to express disagreement" (27) (subversion). Different, ephemeral pen names can be used for deliberate deception (89). But anonymity also facilitates the venting of true sentiments, as users "suggest potentially unpopular ideas" (27) (honesty). Moreover, anonymity can fuel the expression of aggression toward others (exclusion) (29, 91). Most importantly, however, anonymity contributes to inclusion:

> General appearance, such as height, weight, and other culturally determined aspects of "attractiveness" and the clothes, makeup, jewelry, and other props used by persons to present themselves to others, provide an important filtering context for face-to-face communication. So do the visibly apparent cues that are provided by sex, age, and race and by visually apparent physical handicaps. In general, those aspects of self that are devalued by a culture – such as being black, female, old, "ugly", or disabled – have the effect of acting as a general stigma… [Through online anonymity, however,] it is the content of the communication that can be focused on, without any irrelevant status cues distorting the reception of the information… (Hiltz & Turoff, 1978, 78, 91)

The observations of Hiltz and Turoff as cyberdemocratic pioneers of the 1970s strongly resonate with the "e-topias" of the 1990s.[15] Howard Rheingold's work is usually cited as the most influential and characteristic of the '90s discourse. Already in 1991 in the essay "The Great Equalizer" Rheingold describes the internet as promoting a shift in the power balance from governments to citizens' grassroots movements employing new means of communication to feed their ideas into political discourse. In *The Virtual Community* (1993) he is more cautious and elaborates the dangers of government surveillance and commodification of the cyberdemocratic public sphere (276ff). The focus of the book, however, is Rheingold's personal experiences of the WELL (Whole Earth 'Lectronic Link), one of

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[15] I borrow this term from William Mitchell (1999), who is himself not a cyberdemocrat but a more cyborgian-inspired theorist, see 6.4.

the oldest virtual communities with discussion forums on different topics. Anonymity is a core feature of this kind of textual interaction: "Mask and self-disclosures are part of the grammar of cyberspace, the way quick cuts and intense images are part of the grammar of television. The grammar of CMC [Computer-Mediated Communication] media involves a syntax of identity play: new identities, false identities, multiple identities, exploratory identities, are available in different manifestations of the medium" (147).

While Rheingold welcomes the fluidity of identity boundaries, he conceptualizes digital identity performances that diverge from analogue identity as deception. Biological men taking on women's personae online are perceived as imposters (164ff). To illustrate this, Rheingold tells a story that is cited repeatedly in many cyberdemocratic texts. An online character called Joan in some accounts (Poster, 1997, 222f; Rheingold, 1993, 164f; Turkle, 1995, 228f) and Julie Graham in others (Stone, 1991, 82ff; Wajcman, 2004, 68), claiming to be a psychologist based in New York who had been paralyzed and muted in a car accident, had won the trust of several women in online communities, who shared intimate details. When it later turned out that Joan/Julie was really Alex (Lewin in Wajcman, 2004), a psychiatrist who was curious about women's private lives, many users felt exploited and betrayed.

In *Life on the Screen* Sherry Turkle (1995) tells the same story. While she also frames the story of Joan/Alex as deception (228f), she goes into greater depth as to why such deception takes place and observes how internet users "use the anonymity of cyberspace to project alternate personae" (209). These online personae are not perceived as fake as such, but rather as a form of living out a true aspect of the self, which is hidden in common public interaction. Thus, "donning a mask, adopting a persona, is a step toward reaching a deeper truth about the real" (219). Through digital communication the lines between analogue reality and digital reality blur. What is real is a matter of subjective perception. It is not defined by whether or not communication is technologically mediated (see Markham, 1998, 120). In an interview, a teenage girl complains about her friends disappearing behind computer screens: "Now they just want to talk online. It used to be that things weren't so artificial. We phoned each other every afternoon" (237). While the interviewee perceives telephone conversations as real – as they are conveyed through an old, naturalized medium – online communication appears as fake and isolating. According to Turkle, these shifts in the perception of reality do not indicate that the virtual is just as real as analogue reality. Rather, online subjectivity is situated in a liminal space between the real and the artificial: "In the real-time communities of cyberspace, we are dwellers on the threshold between the real and the virtual, unsure of our footing, inventing ourselves as we go along" (10).

Turkle provides an extensive ethnographic investigation of MUDs (Multi-User Dungeons/Domains) – online spaces for synchronous textual role play, where users collectively create an interactive story. In common and one-on-one chat conversations, they construct online personae and objects and navigate through textual sceneries. As in analogue role play or improvisational theatre, participants can investigate and experiment with sides of their personality which are usually excluded from the continuous identity performances in everyday interaction. Some users even claim that their online identities feel more real than their analogue identities: "I feel very different online. I am a lot more outgoing, less inhibited. I would say I feel more like myself. But that's a contradiction. I feel more like who I wish I was" (179). And another user explains: "I am not one thing, I am many things. Each part gets to be more fully expressed in MUDs than in the real world. So even though I play more than one self on MUDs, I feel more like 'myself' when I'm MUDding" (185). Other studies have observed this sense of experiencing a more authentic self online (Bargh *et al.*, 2002; Markham, 1998, 202). Turkle investigates online role play as a therapeutic activity, in which hidden and underdeveloped qualities can be practiced and eventually carried over into analogue interaction (189ff). This is why Turkle calls MUDs a "transitional space" for "reaching greater freedom" (263).

In MUDs identities are multiple and ephemeral so that users do not have to commit to one of them. This also includes the common practice of gender change, as users define the sex of their characters as female, male or neuter. As Turkle tries to perform male characters online, she reports feeling freer, more confident, and relieved of certain social pressures (210ff). Another female interviewee reports that when communicating through male characters she felt that her firm and strict attitude was appreciated and not perceived as "bitchy" (221). A male user, on the other hand, reports feeling relieved of the demands of competitiveness and that he could engage in more cooperative interaction without being perceived as too soft or effeminate (216ff). Thus, online gender swapping can relieve users from gender stereotypes which can be perceived as liberating by users of all sexes (see Bruckman, 1996).

Turkle's notion of the decentred, multiple self is deeply rooted in postmodern thought. The rhizomatic structure of the internet itself embodies the fragmentation of the online self. Turkle illustrates this by the curious digital object called a "window":

> Windows provide a way for a computer to place you in several contexts at the
> same time… [W]indows have become a powerful metaphor for thinking about
> the self as a multiple, distributed system… The life practice of windows is that

of a decentred self that exists in many worlds and plays many roles at the same time. (Turkle, 1995, 13f)

The notion of the internet as an inherently postmodern medium is also reflected in the hypertext structure of the world wide web, through which users navigate. This replaces the modern linear logic of teleological thinking with a rhizomatic logic of infinitely multiple directionalities. Hypertext increases the reader's freedom and breaks up established hierarchies: "Electronic readers… can genuflect before the text or spit on its altar, add to a text or subtract from it, rearrange it, revise it, suffuse it with commentary. The boundary between creator and critic (another current vexation) simply vanishes" (Lanham, 1993, 6). George Landow (1992) elaborates the political implications of these novel configurations of subjectivity. While modern writing practices created a stark asymmetry between the writer with sole power over the text and the reader as its passive consumer, hypertext flattens these hierarchies. Not only can the reader alter the text, the main liberating force of hypertext consists in allowing the reader to decide the order in which text passages are read. Thus, readers freely navigate through the text according to their preferences. This fundamentally changes the approach to understanding text. While textual interpretation methods such as hermeneutics assume that by careful interpretation the correct, essential meaning can be detected, in hypertext no one reads the same version of a text as the orders of text passages are nearly endless – as are its subjective interpretations (Landow, 1992, 90ff, 281ff).

The rhizomatic nature of hypertext also plays a central role in what is arguably the most elaborate attempt at developing a poststructuralist theory of new communication technologies presented in the work of media theorist Mark Poster (2001; 1999; 1995; 1990). He argues that the deep transformations of communication cause profound reconfigurations of the subject. These reconfigurations carry within them democratic potential:

> the mode of information enacts a radical reconfiguration of language, one which constitutes subjects outside the pattern of the rational, autonomous individual. This familiar modern subject is displaced by the mode of information in favour of one that is multiplied, disseminated and decentred, continuously interpellated as an unstable identity. At the level of culture, this instability poses both dangers and challenges which, if they become part of a political movement, or are connected with the politics of feminism, ethnic/racial minorities, gay and lesbian positions, may lead to a fundamental challenge to modern social institutions and structures. (Poster, 1995, 57)

Poster elucidates how the modern subject of the Enlightenment period is constituted by a stable relationship between senders and receivers of communication, who are fixed entities positioned in time and space through words that function as a clear representation of intelligible reality. Senders call upon readers as subjects through their sole authority – thus author – via the word. This configuration is drastically changed through digital communication: while the spatial distance between senders and receivers remains, the temporal difference is eliminated. The rhizomatic structure of hypertext alters the representational character of the word. Text takes on a performative character, continuously re-situating both senders and receivers in a process of mutual interpellation. Thus, "the subject can only be understood as partially stable, as repeatedly reconfiguring at different points of time and space, as non-self-identical and therefore as always partly Other" (Poster, 1995, 59).

Like Rheingold, Poster (1997, 222) explains anonymity as a key feature of cyberspace:

> On the Internet individuals construct their identities, doing so in relation to ongoing dialogue, not as an act of pure consciousness… [This] does connote a "democratization" of subject constitution because the acts of course are not limited to one-way address and not constrained by the gender and ethnic traces inscribed in face-to-face communications.

The mere fact that gender and other identity categories have to be actively chosen and can be completely rejected by creating neuter characters provides space for resistance to analogue identity hierarchies:

> Internet communities function as places of difference from and resistance to modern society. In a sense, they serve the function of a Habermasian public sphere, however reconfigured, without intentionally or even actually being one. They are places not of the presence of validity-claims or the actuality of critical reason, but of the inscription of new assemblages of self-constitution. (Poster, 1997, 224)

The postmodern discussions of democratic subjectivity in digital communication undertaken by Rheingold, Turkle, Poster, and many others (Benedikt, 1991a; Holmes, 1997; Markham, 1998; Waskul & Douglass, 1997) generate invaluable insights for democratic thought. While these debates are often perceived as naïve in hindsight, it is important to understand that the early internet was indeed a more democratic place: not in terms of access, but in terms of its participatory characteristics (Walker Rettberg, 2014, 12f). Most importantly, cyberdemocrats highlight how anonymity facilitates the exploration of the multiple self. It expands the freedom of the democratic subject to change and opens the

perspective on digital communication as part of a politics of becoming. The creation of alternative online personae can be seen as a rejection of hegemonic identity interpellations, a temporary interruption of identification. Yet, their understanding of cyberspace as a sealed-off realm that is separate from analogue space, one that can serve to leave the body behind, is problematic. For example, Turkle (1995, 9) claims that by employing digital communications "[w]e are able to step through the looking glass". Employing the metaphor of wonderland characterizes virtual reality as unreal, as a dream from which one can awake. Elaborating her thesis of the multiple self, Turkle cites an interviewee: "Why grant such superior status to the self that has the body when the selves that don't have bodies are able to have different kinds of experiences?" (14) So, is cyberspace really disembodied? Does the space of appearance described by cyberdemocrats only allow content to appear, as contended by Smith (2017)? To suggest otherwise, I will explore the work of the critics of cyberdemocracy and their alternative conceptions.

## 6.3. Diversity Reconfigured: Gender and Race in Cyberspace

From the second half of the 1990s to the early 2000s, cyberdemocratic thought was critically expanded. The critical response to the postmodern disembodied self draws attention to racialized and gendered bodies both online and offline. What is interesting about these discussions is that while on the one hand they promote diversity online by creating spaces to perform marginalized identities, very much in line with the difference democratic notion of a politics of presence, on the other hand they champion self-transformations through anonymity. The two do not appear antithetical, but as complimentary elements of an emancipatory political strategy.

### 6.3.1. From Default Whiteness to Claiming Spaces for Racial Diversity

While much of the classical cyberdemocratic work discussed above addresses gender as an example of the fluidity of online identities, scholars in critical race studies shift the focus to *Race in Cyberspace* (Kolko *et al.*, 2000; see also Bailey, 1996). In the textual online communication of the 1990s, race had become entirely invisible, much more so than gender. Whereas in MUDs gender is a required category in a user's character description and is also evident in most pseudonyms in online chats, race is absent. Moreover, many users in anonymous online spaces ask their interlocutors for their "asl": age, sex, and location. The requested basic information excludes race, which might be perceived as an inappropriate or otherwise uncomfortable question. Any expression of race is often perceived as aggressive, controversial, and attention seeking (Kolko, 2000, 213ff). The mere textuality of

early online communication provided users with the opportunity to finally forget about a topic commonly perceived as controversial and divisive. This results in "default whiteness" (Nakamura, 2002, 46ff). Users whose physical skin colour is not white are under pressure to negate their racial identity and try to "pass" as white. The ideal of equality through disembodiment appears to have homogenizing and conformist effects. According to Nakamura, while whites express themselves freely, people with other skin colours are limited in their self-expression (35). To understand the role of race in online communication, according to Kolko, it is also crucial to bear in mind that the internet is not a neutral medium. It is designed predominantly by a specific group of people, namely white, middle-class men from the Global North. Default whiteness is a design choice (Kolko, 2000, 213ff).

If Nakamura and colleagues criticize online anonymity for the practice of identity negation that erases non-white identity from computer screens, then the other core element of anonymity, identity creation through the construction of racially heterogeneous selves, could contribute to enhancing the diversity that these authors advocate. Alas, what Nakamura terms "identity tourism" – changing the sex, race or other identity attributes of online identities – only serves to reproduce existing stereotypes:

> Chat-space participants who take on identities as samurai and geisha constitute the darker side of postmodern identity, since the "fluid selves" they create (and often so lauded by postmodern theorists) are done so in the most regressive and stereotyped of ways. These kinds of racial identity play stand as critique of the notion of the digital citizen as an ideal cogito whose subjectivity is liberated by cyberspace. On the contrary, only too often does one person's "liberation" constitute another's recontainment within the realm of racialized discourse. (Nakamura, 2002, XV)

Users constructing alternative racial identities rely on their limited knowledge and stereotyped conceptions of other cultures. Moreover, these constructions need to conform to the simplistic and reduced modes of online expression. Racial hierarchies are intertwined with gender hierarchies when white men perform heroic samurai while white women perform sexualized, docile geishas. According to Nakamura, identity tourism does not represent a shift in situatedness as experience of oppression, but rather a recreational endeavour experiencing the self as an exoticized, oriental Other. The resulting racial, stereotyped, online personae deter participation of racial minorities and their expression of authentic racial identity (Nakamura, 2002; see also Fizek & Wasilewska, 2011; González, 2000; Robinson, 2007).

To counter the problem of default whiteness and stereotyping, critical race scholars advocate an active online presence of racially marginalized groups. They call for claiming spaces as a way of expressing difference through the digital embodiment of race. The figure of the decentred, fluid, and ephemeral self in cyberdemocratic discussions is opposed by a need for stability and clear representation in order to build resilient communities akin to difference democratic counterpublics (Kolko & Reid, 1998). Unlike whites, who wish to explore their multiplicity, many people with other skin colours living in white majority contexts already experience their identities as unpleasantly fragmented and disoriented and are longing for consistent identification (Nakamura, 2002, XVI).

While these debates in critical race studies aptly criticize conceptions of cyberdemocratic post-racial selves, they also partly support the core ideals of cyberdemocracy. Nakamura (2002, 49) claims: "A diversification of the roles that are permitted and played can enable a thought-provoking detachment of race from the body and questioning of the essentialness of race as a category. Performing alternative versions of the self and race jams the ideology-machine". Nevertheless, these authors point to a crucial problem with the cyberdemocratic notion of disembodiment. The negation of established identities can obscure marginalization and reinforce the hegemonic identity constructions in our heads. At this point, we are back to the dilemma of difference, as the mere continuation of analogue identities online limits the freedom of the subject to explore its multiple self. What is needed is a concept of a space of appearance, where embodied identities are perceptible yet free to change.

### 6.3.2. Cyberfeminism: The Subversive Alliance of Women and Robots

Debates around the term "cyberfeminism" might provide some answers to our predicament here. Early cyberfeminist thought takes a similarly critical position toward the cyberdemocratic disembodiment thesis as that proposed by the critical race theories discussed above. They develop alternatives that envision the subject as physically embodied, gendered, and racially diverse. At the same time, however, they advance notions of identity transformation. Their main contributions can be seen in drawing attention to women in relation to new technologies and to the materiality of both physical and digital bodies.

Cyberfeminism as a movement extends beyond academia and brings together discussions from three sources: feminist Science and Technology Studies (STS), digital artistic spaces such as the Old Boys Network (www.obn.org) and SubRosa (cyberfeminism.net), and digital spaces for women's empowerment such as peer-to-peer groups conveying technological knowledge and skills. The term "cyberfeminism" was simultaneously coined by the

British cultural theorist Sadie Plant and the Australian art collective VNS Matrix (Volkart, 2004, 97). In their Cyberfeminist Manifesto, VNS Matrix (1991) write:

<blockquote>
we are the virus of the new world disorder

rupturing the symbolic from within

saboteurs of big daddy mainframe

the clitoris is a direct line to the matrix

VNS MATRIX
</blockquote>

In these few lines, many characteristics of cyberfeminism can be identified. The artistic style is used in a postmodern move to break up established logics and make way for novel subjectivities, which are connoted with femininity and the female body.

These themes are also reflected in Sadie Plant's *Zeros + Ones* (1997), one of the founding texts of cyberfeminism. Plant observes a disorder of binary identity codes rooted in Western thinking. This identity disruption is amplified by new possibilities of anonymous communication and identity play online. Plant illustrates this reconfiguration of gender identities along the computational logic of zeros and ones. While in traditional Western thought, the phallic 1 is associated with presence, power, and masculinity, women are associated with the 0 as absence, passivity, powerlessness, a nothing, a gap, a hole. In this metaphor, men are everything and women nothing, an image corroborated by the division of global wealth and political power. The computer disrupts this binary logic, however, and turns the established binary upside down. In original computer punch cards, the 0 constitutes the something and the 1 the nothing, so that the world is "[n]o longer a world of ones and not-ones, or something and nothing, thing and gap, but rather not-holes and holes, not-nothing and nothing, gap and not-gap" (57).

Plant invokes a post-gender vision. The book starts with the lines: "Those were the days when we were all at sea. It seems like yesterday to me. Species, sex, race, class: in those days none of this meant anything at all" (3). This image of boundless beings in the primordial soup is mirrored in Plant's observation of new identity formations in current societies. With female emancipation and the increasing acceptance of queer sexualities in Western societies, work relations and family models change. Gender identity, even in analogue embodied interaction, is characterized by ephemerality: "No one is or has one sex at a time, but teems with sexes and sexualities too fluid, volatile, and numerous to count" (212). This trend toward new sexual subject formations is amplified by online communication and its possibilities for anonymous interaction and identity play (46, 112f).

Plant's narrative of the history of computing relocates the focus to the forgotten contributions of women, such as Ada Lovelace whose work in the 1840s foresaw the potentials of computing beyond mere calculation (see also Evans, 2018). Primarily, though, women undertook repetitive work to fulfil the plans developed by men. When weaving was automated through punch cards as an early form of computational automation, women moved to the industrial assembly lines and functioned as gearwheels along with industrial machines. Today it is women in the Global South, mainly in Asia, who assemble computers for their use in the West:

> When computers were vast systems of transistors and valves which needed to be coaxed into action, it was women who turned them on. They have not made some trifling contribution to an otherwise man-made tale: when computers became the miniaturized circuits of silicon chips, it was women who assembled them… [W]hen computers were virtually real machines, women wrote the software on which they ran. And when *computer* was a term applied to flesh and blood workers, the bodies which composed them were female. (37)

Plant describes an intimate relationship between women and machines, both abused as tools of men. She invokes the many popular fictional narratives of robots, often designed as women and thus connoted with the idea of sexual objectification, who rebel against their human, male creators. The alliance between women and robots in a social revolution, upsetting gender binaries and global work relations, is, however, imagined by Plant in less violent, rather evolutionary terms. With the change from industrial to information societies, muscular strength loses its relevance. Contemporary precarious work relations rather demand flexibility, multi-tasking, emotional intelligence, and cooperative teamwork. According to Plant, women are much better equipped for current work relations through their historical positioning as weavers and will soon outplay inflexible, stubborn, and competitive men.

Plant's work is reflected in many other cyberfeminist texts. Danet (1998) and Sick (2004), for example, describe online avatars as masquerade resulting in the performance of new gender hybridities and post-gender identities. And Blair (1998) describes anonymity's effect of levelling power relations between men and women. Plant's book undoubtedly contributes a lot to cyberdemocratic thought, drawing attention to women's subordinate role in both the Global North and South, their forgotten contributions to the development of technology, and the possibilities of new gender constellations online. Nevertheless, the book has been rightfully criticized for its techno-determinism and essentialism (Wajcman, 2004,

73). Similar to some debates in difference democracy, it affirms established stereotypes in positive terms.

### 6.3.3. A Corporeal Cyberfeminism: Of Biological and Digital Bodies

Another strand of cyberfeminism positions itself more critically toward utopian writing such as Plant's and turns toward materiality:

> The utopian promise so often associated with the new technologies demand our sharpest critical attention, for it is foolish to believe that major social, economic, and political issues can be addressed by throwing technology at them. As radical net critics have repeatedly pointed out, cyberspace is not an arena inherently free of the old feminist struggle against a patriarchal capitalist system. The new media are embedded in a framework of pan-capitalist social relations and economic, political, and cultural environments that are still deeply sexist and racist. (Fernandez & Wilding, 2002, 23f)

This strand of literature, which I term "corporeal cyberfeminism"[16], contributes to a new emerging materialism (Strowick, 2004, 303). Writers such as N. Katherine Hayles (1999), Allucquére Rosanne Stone (1991), Mark Dery (1996), Diane Gromala (1996), and Anne Balsamo (1996) criticize both the liberal Cartesian subject as rational thinker whose mind is superior to the body, and the postmodern disembodied subject, which navigates through cyberspace "as body-free environment, a place of escape from the corporeal embodiment of gender and race" (Balsamo, 1996, 123).

Corporeal cyberfeminists provide two core arguments to counter the disembodiment thesis. First, they advocate privileging physical matter as the source and foundation of the digital. Stone (1991, 111), for example, contends: "No matter how virtual the subject may become, there is always a body attached. It may be off somewhere else – and that 'somewhere else' may be a privileged point of view – but consciousness remains firmly rooted in the physical". And for Hayles (1999, 5) now is the time to "put back into the picture the flesh that continues to be erased in contemporary discussions about cybernetic subjects". Second, beyond the acknowledgement of the physical, the digital body itself needs to be understood as matter. Reichle (2004, 253) claims that upon entering cyberspace, the body is divided into a biological body and a digital body. Turkle (1996, 121) explains digital bodies as "objects-to-think-with". The digital body acquires materiality as a tool for self-exploration.

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[16] Jessica Brophy (2010) uses the term "corporeal cyberfeminism" for the particular theory she develops rather than the broader discourse to which I am referring here.

Corporeal cyberfeminism as sketched above provides a fruitful perspective for the questions addressed by this thesis. It acknowledges physical and digital embodiment allowing for the expression of difference and yet it is nevertheless open to self-transformation: "If we think of the body not as a product, but rather as a process – and embodiment as effect – we can begin to ask questions about how the body is staged differently in different realities" (Balsamo, 1996, 131). However, the bifurcation of the democratic subject into a physical and a digital configuration appears only as a partly satisfactory solution. To further develop corporeal cyberfeminist thought, I think three aspects are in need of exploration. First, the splitting of the subject into a digital and a biological unit appears to replicate the crude binarism of the body/mind split so extensively criticized. Subjects in the digital age are more complex and diverse configurations. Second, what is needed is an explanation of how these physical and digital aspects of the self relate to one another. And third, to situate such digitally embodied subjectivities, the outdated theory of cyberspace as divorced from physical space needs to be revised.

In the remainder of this chapter, I will employ theories of assemblage to explain the democratic subject as a complex spatial configuration of physical, digital, and discursive things. To this end, I will first go back to the roots of corporeal cyberfeminism and examine the notions of the cyborg (Haraway, 1991 [1985]) and evocative objects (Turkle, 1984). Building on these concepts, I will then draw on the spatial theory of democracy developed in Chapter 2 to advance a new understanding of digital space. This will, finally, put me in the position to ask what a politics of presence that allows for embodied subjects to appear and transform in participatory spaces looks like in the digital age.

## 6.4.    A Theory of Digital Space

"How did the trope of immateriality colonize our imagination to the point where we came to believe computing exists beyond the material world?" (Casemajor, 2015, 4). This question is at the centre of current debates on digital democracy. Most theorists position themselves at a critical distance from the cyberdemocracy discourse and the concept of cyberspace as a disembodied realm separate from the physical world. Engin Isin and Evelyn Ruppert (2015, 41), for example, emphatically argue that digital space and physical space are not separate: "there are no two different spaces". They cite several authors such as Paolo Gerbaudo (2012) and Christian Fuchs (2014) who make the same point. However, they all fail to provide an alternative. They all fail to explain what it means that there is no separation between the digital and the physical, that the two are the same thing. Isin and Ruppert announce their best intentions to overcome the separation, but foresee that they will also

fail as many others before them. In my view, the reason for this failure is that the separation actually makes sense, at least to a certain degree. It is as unproductive to speak of cyberspace as an entirely separate realm that follows completely different logics to physical space as it is to deny any distinction between digital and physical space, which intuitively makes a lot of sense. Rather than completely conflating or completely divorcing digital and physical space, we need to think about how they relate to each other, how they connect, and, as I will argue, how they assemble.

### 6.4.1.  Behold the Rise of the Cyborg

To develop a theory of digital space, we need a clear understanding of how the physical and the digital relate to each other, an understanding that sees the two neither as the same thing nor as entirely separate. To generate such an understanding, I will draw on early conceptions that predate the cyberdemocracy discourse, namely the notions of the cyborg (Haraway, 1991 [1985]) and evocative objects (Turkle, 1984) and relate these to current theories of assemblage.

Donna Haraway's trope of the cyborg provides a point of departure for understanding how the physical relates to the digital in novel configurations of space and the self (Haraway, 1991 [1985]). In contrast with the disembodied beings in cyberdemocracy that exist merely through the words they utter, the cyborg emerges as a configuration of human-machine, organism-technology, mind-software. Its human body of flesh and blood is augmented through computer technology. This agentic amalgam of biological and technological parts appears as a liberating subject in a world confined by hierarchical identity formations, in which "[g]ender, race, or class consciousness is an achievement forced on us by the terrible historical experience of the contradictory social realities of patriarchy, colonialism, and capitalism" (155). Like Young (1990, 99ff; 1987, 62f), Haraway explains identity categories as binary constructions that define one element as superior and the other as inferior, such as civilized/primitive, mind/body, and male/female (177).

The cyborg as monstrous agent breaks out of this dichotomous thinking by overcoming the boundaries between animal/human, human/machine, and physical/non-physical. It does not, however, reconfigure those binaries into a new unity, a higher synthesis as in Hegelian-Marxist theory, but rather leaves the riddle unresolved. The irony of the cyborg is constituted by plurality, dissolving unity into permanent contradiction. Haraway encourages us to give up the struggle for simple dichotomous thinking and instead to indulge in the pleasures of the cyborg – the pleasures of unresolved riddles, friction, and disorientation. This

disorientation has important implications for cyborgian space. As cyborgs experience "pleasure in the confusion of boundaries", existing configurations of space and the self are disrupted. Indulging in spatial disorientation, cyborgs leave behind binary gender codes and traditional models of sexuality and family. This also affects the constitution of politics and of participatory spaces. The cyborgian reconfiguration of the boundaries of private and public in many respects echoes Pateman's *Disorder of Women* (1989) calling for a democratization of the private sphere: "No longer structured by the polarity of the public and the private, the cyborg defines a technological polis based partly on a revolution of social relations in oikos, the household" (Haraway, 1991 [1985], 151). This disorder results in "partial, contradictory, permanently unclosed constructions of personal and collective selves" (157).

The cyborg itself can be read as a spatial configuration. Its existence depends on the transgression of established boundaries between binary sets of identification. The cyborg as emancipatory subjectivity then rests on an augmentation of space. As the boundaries within identity spaces, in which subjects navigate to create a coherent persona, are eroded, the freedom to identify – or refuse identification – increases. Rather than being restricted by the identity boundaries that define us as men and women, black and white, queer and straight, the subject is free to identify and disidentify. The cyborg that disrupts the established order by introducing disorder into established identity arrangements can be seen as a central agent of a politics of becoming.

The figure of the cyborg itself is mainly left in the dark in Haraway's text. When cyborgs are part human part machine, however, looking at how humans relate to computers can make this figure more comprehensible. While today computers disappear as smartphones in our pockets or as smartwatches on our wrists and thus often escape our attention, the early generation of household computers prompted curiosity. At the time when Haraway developed her cyborg theory, Sherry Turkle wrote about computers as "evocative objects". Whereas in overviews of cyberdemocratic thought, Turkle's *Life on the Screen* (1995) discussed earlier is frequently cited, her book from 11 years earlier, *The Second Self* (1984), goes largely unnoticed – even less attention is given to its cyborgian conceptions. Turkle does not use the term "cyborg" in her 1984 book. In her later reprise of her work on evocative objects, however, she explicitly describes the relationship between humans and computers as cyborgian configurations (Turkle, 2007, 325f).

Through psychological ethnography, Turkle studies the use of computers by children and young adults. Computers appear both as tools, as objects, and at the same time as agentic

subjects, which call upon users in different ways. In their double role as evocative objects, computers influence their users' identities. They enter into processes of becoming: "We search for a link between who we are and what we have made, between who we are and what we might create, between who we are and what, through our intimacy with our own creations, we might become" (Turkle, 1984, 2). Users can employ computers as tools to create their own individual worlds. As soon as they enter these worlds, they are affected by them. Humans become the object of the computer's creation as "computers enter into the development of personality, of identity, and even of sexuality" (6). Not only do users humanize computers as "friends" that "are stupid" at times or need to "rest for a while", but humans also start to perceive themselves in technological terms as they might not "function well" or something forgotten is perceived as being "erased from the hard drive" (7).

Turkle's point is not to mystify computers and understand them as alive. Rather, she develops a deep understanding of how we *perceive* computers as vital objects. Through careful observations of how children engage with computers, she provides an account of their conception of vitality. At a very young age, children follow a simple classificatory scheme of motion: what moves is alive – a bird, a cloud, a rolling stone. Later they understand that not all things that move are alive; they move because outside forces set them in motion. In the eyes of children, however, computers upset this system. They move by themselves. They appear as autonomous actors that are intelligent. They can talk, ask questions, and they have answers. They think! Depending on their age, children are often not sure whether computers are alive. At a certain point, they develop a new classification scheme to determine vitality: Do they have emotions? Their classification develops from motion to emotion (33ff, 51). As adults, while we rationally know that computers are not alive, there is still a certain part of us – the child in us, if you will – that believes in the vitality of computers. We humanize them because we have an emotional connection with them. In this way, computers "upset the distinction between things and people… The computer too seems to have a psychology – it is a thing that is not quite a thing" (33ff, 54).

The double function as inanimate object and vital subject gives computers a special role in the constitution of the self. They function as mirrors for the self. According to Turkle, the story of Narcissus can explain the use of computers, although it has been misinterpreted in the past. Narcissus did not fall in love with himself out of vanity, but seeing his reflection in the water he perceived himself as someone else, thus falling in love with the self as other. Computers function as mirrors to see the self as reconfigured other. It objectifies the self, resulting in a representational object – a digital thing – vis-à-vis the self (156f). Yet, the purpose of this objectified other/self is not vain self-love. It rather serves the anxious search

for the self, as reassurance of our own existence, of our stability and unity (319). Unlike regular mirrors, which are inanimate objects, Turkle sees computers as agentic. As evocative objects they do not create objective representations of their subjects. Rather, they call upon and co-construct the human subject in certain ways. As agentic force, computers bring established processes of self-constitution into disorder, resulting in cyborgian configurations:

> Because they stand on the line between mind and not-mind, between life and not-life, computers excite reflection about the nature of mind and the nature of life. They provoke us to think about who we are… The effect is subversive. It calls into question our ways of thinking about ourselves: most dramatically if mind is machine, who is the actor? Where is responsibility, spirit, soul? *There is a new disorder*… Where we once were rational animals, now we are feeling computers, emotional machines. But we have no way to really put these terms together. The hard-to-live-with, self-contradictory notion of the emotional machine captures the fact that what we live now is a new and deeply felt tension. (Turkle, 1984, 320f, 326, emphasis added)

In 1.3 and 2.5.2 I outlined a theory of the democratic subject as assemblage and further expanded this concept in 2.5.2. At this point, the notions of the cyborg and evocative objects enable us to further deepen this concept. If the subject is thought of as an assemblage of its physical body parts, skin pigments, sexual organs, and body chemistry interacting with culturally-coded things, such as clothing, makeup, and jewellery, and with discursive concepts that describe gender, race, religion, political affiliation, etc., then processes of cyborgization can be understood as evocative objects and digital self-representations entering these assemblages. Christian Fuchs and David Chandler (2019, 4) write: "Technologies have always impacted human capacities. We cannot, therefore, easily separate technological objects from human subjects". In a similar vein, Jennifer González (2000, 27f) describes the subject as a conglomerate of electronic and biological appendages: "the appended subject describes an object constituted by electronic elements serving as a psychic bodily appendage, an artificial subjectivity that is attached to a supposed original or unitary being, an online persona understood as somehow appended to a real person who resides elsewhere, in front of a keyboard". Hayles (1999, 3) describes the posthuman subject as an "amalgam, a collection of heterogeneous components, a material-informational entity whose boundaries undergo continuous construction and reconstruction". Lastly, Haraway (1991 [1985], 162) herself hints at a possible understanding of the cyborg as assemblage when she writes:

"Any objects or persons can be reasonably thought of in terms of disassembly and reassembly; no 'natural' architectures constrain system design".

I thus propose to understand the democratic subject in the digital age as constituted as an assemblage of human body parts, physical artefacts, discursive concepts, and digital objects. While all these things are connected through their mutual affectivity, smart devices fulfil a special role as evocative objects. As illustrated by Turkle (1984), they are, in the human perception, more lively than other things. They actively call upon us and thus co-construct our identities.

The figure of the cyborg as assemblage can be thought of in spatial terms through the work of William Mitchell. According to him, the many things in identity assemblages interact with the things that constitute space: "Increasingly, we are living at the points where electronic information flows, mobile bodies, and physical places intersect… These points are becoming the occasions for a characteristic new architecture of the twenty-first century" (Mitchell, 2003, 4). Mitchell describes the newly emerging subjectivities as constituted by boundaries and connections. The boundaries of the skin that limit the human core interact with the carpets, curtains, and windows that bound the room and the walls that bound the building (7ff). If the cyborgian assemblage that defines democratic subjectivity in the digital age is perceived in these spatial terms, then we need a new understanding of digital space that overcomes the shortcomings of the conception of cyberspace.

### 6.4.2. How Digital Spaces Assemble

The concepts of the cyborg and evocative objects provide a new vocabulary with which we can think about how reality, space, and identities configure in the digital age. They lead the way to a new theory of digital space that explains the relationship between the physical and the digital. Cyborgs and evocative objects neither entirely collapse the physical and the digital nor do they explain them as entirely separate realms. Today, cyborgs are not science fiction. Rather, cyborgs are very real in the here and now. They exist through the relationality of physical and digital things that form agentic assemblages. Interhuman relations are mediated through the smartphones in our pockets, the smartwatches on our wrists, headsets, earpieces, tablets, laptops, and touch screens. These many things that provide connectivity do so through wireless networks and cloud computing, which define a new cyborgian space in which we constantly move, even when not using digital devices. The Internet of Things further extends the connectivity of evocative objects that constantly hail us from different angles. We are connected with the thermostats, light bulbs, and refrigerators in our smart

homes. The sensors in our shoes connect to the internet, as do the sensors applied to our pets and babies. We should not, however, understand such assemblages as entirely breaking down the boundaries between human and machine; rather, we should see them as relations of human subjects with their evocative objects. Humans shape and are shaped by these machines. So, what does a theory of digital space look like that does not conflate the physical and the digital but at the same time overcomes their stark separation?

To answer this question, I will employ the spatial theory of democracy developed in Chapter 2 explaining democratic space as an assemblage containing a physical, a social, and a discursive dimension. What these dimensions look like as part of digital space will be discussed with the help of current literature on online engagement.

Both the main strength and the weakness of the poststructuralist-inspired notion of cyberspace is its focus on discursivity. With its elaborate analyses of textual engagement on the internet, writers such as Rheingold, Poster, and Turkle provide excellent accounts of discursive spatiality online. However, cyberdemocratic texts, with few exceptions (e.g. Nunes, 1997), have been rightfully criticized for their blindness to the physical aspects of cyberspace. Current literature, in contrast, is eager to point to the material aspects of digital communication. Online interaction is explained as mediated through a physical topography of a global network of satellites and fibre-optic cables that links servers, data centres, routers, modems, and computers (Cohen, 2012, 41ff; Saco, 2002, 75ff). Furthermore, current media theorists describe the digital not as being primarily defined by its discursivity as in the cyberdemocracy debate, but rather as constituting a new social sphere as users connect via social media to communicate with family and friends or to engage in politics (Isin & Ruppert, 2015, 35; Saco, 2002). Thus, the current debate allows us to still understand the digital in terms of discursivity, but in addition pay attention to its physical and social aspects.

So, if digital space consists of the same three dimensions as analogue space, if it assembles physical, social, and discursive things, how is it different? Why do we need a theory of digital space at all? In other words, are digital and analogue space the same thing, as the current debate would seem to suggest (Isin & Ruppert, 2015)? I will argue that in digital space, physical, social, and discursive things assemble in profoundly different constellations compared to analogue space. The main feature that distinguishes digital space is the interruption between physical and social space, a gap between the physical location of the subject and the space where it appears. Analogue participatory spaces are characterized by a physical space in which participants meet face-to-face. It is in this common physical space

that social relations between participants form. Physical, social, and discursive spatiality directly build on each other and are deeply intertwined. These spaces of appearance are constituted by the co-presence of physical bodies. Digital spaces, in contrast, interrupt the connection between physical spatiality on the one hand, and social and discursive spatiality on the other. Bodies are present, but they are not co-present. They are located in different physical sites. I believe this is the key to understanding digital space. The digital does rest on physical space, but it is not primarily the technological infrastructure of the hardware which current media theorists are so eager to point to. Instead, scholars of democracy need to attend to the physical spaces in which participants are located. Digital space, then, is constituted as a decentred kind of physical space, much like how anonymous participatory spaces were described in the previous chapter (5.3). Participants do assemble. They assemble in the social space constituted on the screens; they assemble in discursive space through the words they exchange, but they remain physically remote.

This particular constitution of digital space is enabled by the things that both mediate and interrupt interaction. The physical screens of electronic devices intercept analogue spatiality. As illustrated in the previous chapter, anonymity always depends on the interruption of spatial assemblages by various things such as masks, bathroom walls, voting booths, and computer screens. These things interrupt identity while at the same time providing an interface for the creation of new personae. Digital communication always entails a moment of anonymity and is hence characterized by the same modes of mediation and interruption. Digital communication devices always negate some aspects of identity and call for their reconstruction. This interruption changes things. It entails a potential for disidentification that reconfigures, to a certain extent, how we see ourselves. But this does not entail the constitution of an entire new reality – new identities, new spaces – as proposed by cyberdemocrats. Rather than a new world of pure discursivity and disembodiment, digital space is comprised of many continuities, continuities of inequalities, discrimination, and social hierarchy. Yet these continuities are always partially reconfigured through moments of interruption. They can never be perfectly translated.

The interruption between the physical, the social, and the discursive that constitutes the central element of digital space goes along with several shifts and reconfigurations on all three levels of spatiality. In the following, I will briefly look at each of these levels in turn.

***The physical dimension of digital space.*** The central thesis of Diana Saco's *Cybering Democracy* (2002) is that digital space is constituted as social spatiality that rests on a physical infrastructure, which is overlooked in cyberdemocratic writing. Beyond the topography of

satellites, cables, routers, servers, monitors, and keyboards, the materiality of digital space consists of the electronic light pulses and microwaves that travel through this wired landscape. Often the information age is thought of as immaterial because what is displayed on a screen appears as just an illusion. Yet, in reality, bits and bytes are electronic light pulses mediated through cables, transmitted to computers, where they interact with phosphors on screens or activate circuits on sound cards (Saco, 2002, 26, 75ff). This vast geography of technology providing for connectivity is what Julie Cohen refers to as networked space (Cohen, 2012, 41ff). One should add that the internet does not just rely on a physical network; its use also causes very real, material effects as the vast amount of physical data storage needed generates $CO_2$ emissions (Gabrys, 2014).

Conceptualizing digital space in this way, we can begin to understand communication online as a physical network of electronic pulses generated by our fingertips typing on keyboards and touching screens. Each tap sends an electronic signal that makes its way through a wide network and ends up on someone else's screen. While democratic subjects in digital participatory spaces might be located in their homes, at work or in public parks, they connect these physical spaces through electronic pulses. As discussed in Chapter 2, the arrangement of physical things that constitutes the physical dimension of participatory spaces affects participants' interaction. It affects the social and discursive dimensions of democratic spatiality. Decentring physical space, then, means that each participant in digital spaces is affected by different physical surroundings that are unknown to other participants. These individual physical locations need to be understood as constituting a new kind of fragmented, decentred, yet connected spatiality.

Another aspect of the physical spatiality of cyberspace that I have hinted at earlier is that it becomes increasingly cyborgian. What we perceive as "regular" physical space becomes progressively more permeated by electronic hardware. In this sense, Kavada and Dimitriou (2017, 86) describe space "as made up of both physical and mediated components". Apart from Haraway (1991 [1985], 151) as cited above, several authors elaborate how the boundaries between private and public are reconfigured through the infusion of physical space with digital technology. Mitchell notes how public spaces are increasingly subject to video surveillance from private spaces, generating a private-to-public channel. The information flow goes the other way through video conferencing enabling private spaces to be broadcast to the public (Mitchell, 2003, 28). Social movements, for example, can enlarge their claimed spaces through live streaming (Kavada & Treré, 2019). I recall a recent academic conference I attended, where the keynote lecture was given via Skype (a video conferencing application). The keynote speaker located in her private bedroom was visible on a large

screen in the conference hall. I perceived an odd friction between public and private spaces. This "ability of electronic media to remove, or at least rearrange, boundaries between public and private space" (Papacharissi, 2010, 68) has significant consequences for the perception of the physical spaces in which democratic subjects are located during digital engagement. As noted in the previous chapter (5.2.), Papacharissi (2010, 132) argues that because citizens now engage in politics online, their private homes are reconfigured as public spaces: "This relocation suggests that we re-examine the spatiality of citizenship. Within this private sphere, the citizen is alone, but not lonely or isolated". The reconfiguration of public and private physical spatiality is partly due to the elements of anonymity inherent to digital space. As online communication is facilitated by things that mediate and interrupt communication, the subject can more easily express private things in the public sphere, as suggested in the previous chapter.

***The social dimension of digital space.*** While the cyberdemocracy discourse in many ways simply assumed that cyberspace was indeed a space, without further questioning its spatiality, today's discourse on digital democracy is more aware of the need to provide a convincing explanation. Many scholars agree that the spatiality of digital space is founded on social networking. Digital space is primarily a social space. In reference to the cyberdemocratic conception of cyberspace, Cohen (2012, 33) contends: "networked information technologies do not call into being a new, virtual space that is separate from real space. Instead they have catalyzed the emergence of a new kind of social space".

What digital space as a social space means becomes apparent when recalling that social space, as elaborated in Chapter 2, is constituted by human relations, by their actions and performances. It comes into existence where humans interact and vanishes with them (Arendt, 1958). While in online communication, subjects do not come together physically, digital space is nevertheless constituted by their interaction. Isin and Ruppert (2015, 39) describe digital space as "a relational space of digital acts". This space comes into being through clicking, liking, following, sharing, poking, tweeting, messaging, searching, filtering, hacking, tracking, camming, and, of course, social networking. If we imagine all these digital acts as electronic light pulses making their way from our fingertips through the vast cable and satellite networks of the internet, we can begin to imagine how the physical and the social dimension of digital space are interrelated. This is why Saco (2002, 27) calls digital space "a unique kind of social space". She explains that our perception of space is based on movement. Digital space is a social space constituted by the networking activities of its users. Of course, social interaction differs in several respects from analogue interaction: the main difference being that it comprises a "sociality without a face" in Saco's terms

(29). Saco wrote these words two years prior to the rapid rise of Facebook. But, as argued previously, as online communication is realized through interfaces that mediate and interrupt, the social dimension of digital space is always defined by a moment of anonymity and a potential for disidentification.

***The discursive dimension of digital space.*** The current literature on digital democracy is surprisingly silent with regard to the discursive aspects of digital space. It might be that the discourse on cyberdemocracy of the 1990s has already said everything there is to say or that the current literature might be overly eager to position itself in opposition to earlier techno-optimism. Despite the increased presence of visuality on social media such as Instagram, Flickr or Snapchat, in digital spaces textuality remains the dominant form of communication. When comparing the discursive spatialities emerging in analogue participatory spaces with digital engagement, what stands out is obviously the textual reification of content in the latter. While in analogue engagement, the spoken word is a discursive thing perceptible by sound in one particular moment in time and is thus highly ephemeral, these discursive things become reified in text or in voice recordings online. Online, words can be read or listened to repeatedly; they can be copied. Discursive space online entails a certain durability as text and recordings remain saved on digital interfaces and servers. Discursive content online is searchable by keywords and accessible to greater and sometimes unintended publics. Understanding discursive space as a cognitive structure of meaning through which the subject navigates as elaborated in Chapter 2 (2.4.3), the hypertextual structure of the world wide web appears as an accurate realization of this image. In this regard, many texts of the cyberdemocracy debate are insightful given that many of their observations still hold true to this day (Landow, 1992; Lanham, 1993; Poster, 1995). This networked nature of discursive space is characteristic of so-called hashtag activism today, in which political campaigns form around hashtags on social media, such as the #MeToo campaign confronting sexual harassment and rape (Mendes *et al.*, 2018).

In summary, we need to understand digital space neither as a separate realm disconnected from physical space, nor as entirely of a piece with physical space, but rather as an intricate assemblage in which physical, social, and discursive spatiality interact. While digital space is intimately intertwined with analogue space, they nevertheless differ in many respects. Digital spaces are characterized by an interruption and decentralization of physical space, by the networked nature of social space, and by the textuality of discursive space. This makes digital space a particular kind of assemblage.

**6.5. Difference Democracy in Digital Spaces: Reconfiguring the Politics of Presence**

The theory of digital space and the subject as cyborgian assemblage provides new insight into the dilemma of difference. As discussed in Chapter 3, the politics of presence advanced in debates about difference democracy suggests a strategy of physically embodied identity performances of marginalized groups in participatory spaces as a way of promoting inclusion. While this successfully advances equality as it draws attention to marginalization and gives a voice to particular standpoints, it also limits the freedom of the subject to define, transform, and explore their own identity. It limits the freedom of the subject to change. In Chapters 4 and 5, I proposed re-reading the politics of presence as a politics of becoming and suggested that anonymity might be a practical means to realize moments of disidentification. The rich accounts of identity change through online anonymity in debates about cyberdemocracy lend support to the thesis of a politics of becoming through anonymity. While cyberdemocracy appears compatible with a politics of becoming, it stands in opposition to a politics of presence. Its notion of disembodiment, which renders difference imperceptible, threatens to cover up inequalities. These arguments are still prevalent in current debates, for example in Smith's account of digital space, wherein he suggests "untying political speech from bodies". He goes on to argue:

> What really matters for the political realm in terms of appearing and visibility is the ability to make one's opinions heard and for collective actions to have a lasting impact. *The presence of the body is not necessary for any of this*, as what distinguishes us from others politically is not our bodies or faces, but our words and deeds. (Smith, 2017, 28, emphasis added)

I find Smith's conception of digital space as a realm of disembodied, universal reason problematic. It rests on an erroneous assumption about anonymity understanding anonymity as the mere negation of identity. Understood thus, spaces of appearance online only make content visible, but negate bodies and identities. As I have argued in the previous chapter, however, anonymity entails as much identity creation as identity negation. Digital images, text, pseudonyms, selfies, emoticons, and avatars reconfigure bodies and identities. Smith's position is not just problematic politically insofar as it further undermines the status of those who are already disadvantaged by encouraging images of default whiteness and default masculinity; it also overlooks the fact that the body is always there. Disembodiment means ignoring the body rather than actually leaving it behind. We are thus in need of a formulation of a digital politics of presence that allows for the embodied articulation of diverse identities and still harbours the potential for the subject to change.

To generate such a renewal of the politics of presence in the digital age, a novel understanding of presence is needed. In the previous chapter, I argued that anonymity reconfigures presence by channelling the absent located in private spaces into the public sphere. This reconfiguration of presence through moments of disidentification, then, becomes an inherent part of everyday communication in the digital age. Presence emerges as the reconfiguration of identity assemblages of the subject bringing different things to the fore at different times resulting in constant reconfigurations of the self. Presence itself can be understood as a performative act, a process of becoming.

The concept of presence is invoked repeatedly both in the older debate on cyberdemocracy, speaking of "a fantastic presence" (Nunes, 1997, 170), and in the current literature on digital democracy, speaking of "telepresence" (Senft, 2018, 55ff), for example. The theory of digital space as assemblage of physical, social, and discursive things can help to make sense of online presence. It is not only the embodied human subject, but various things in cyborgian assemblages that experience presence. Regarding the physical dimension of space, Turkle (1984, 3) observes the presence of computers themselves: "People sense the presence of something new and exciting. But they fear the machine as powerful and threatening". On the social level, Markham (1998, 24) describes how users "*create* embodied presence". She observes how "people who connect to this network often feel a *sense of presence* when they are online" (Markham, 1998, 17). And in relation to discursive spatiality, Nunes (1997, 168) states that textuality in online exchange is "a means of calling forth presence, of making the subject 'here' without being here".

The three strategies of inclusion promoted by difference democracy outlined in Chapter 3 – presence, emotion, and contestation – are reflected in many critical and especially feminist accounts of digital democracy today. Digital democracy is characterized by the emergence of digital counterpublics of marginalized groups who contest domination (Dahlberg, 2007; Downey & Fenton, 2003; Travers, 2003). Accounts of digital democracy also focus on emotions (Asenbaum, 2018b; Castells, 2012; Dahlgren, 2009) and shed light on affective publics online (Papacharissi, 2015). In what follows, however, I will focus on a new politics of presence and examine how marginalized groups articulate their identities in digital spaces of appearance.

### 6.5.1. Digital Spaces of Appearance: Classed, Raced, and Queered Identities Online

The recent corporeal cyberfeminist debates discussed above in many ways echo the difference democratic concept of a politics of presence (Phillips, 1995). They draw attention to

digitized bodies and corporeal difference in digital engagement. What is crucial in understanding this new politics of presence is the fact that presence does not necessarily entail physical co-presence. This is corroborated by the original debate of difference democracy, in which presence was always thought of as a mode of *representation* of identity (Phillips, 1995, 30; Young, 2000, 124f; 1997a, 352). The representative of an identity group in difference democracy is mirrored by the classed, racialized, and queered bodies of digital avatars and online images that stand for marginalization and make the absent present. In both the original and the digital politics of presence, the representation of the marginalized body functions as an affective thing that reconfigures spaces toward equality.

Here, I will provide several examples that illustrate how bodies appear online. I start with three examples of how classed, raced, and queered bodies claim digital space. The discussion thereafter will draw on further examples to illustrate how cyborgian identity reconfigurations facilitate a digital politics of presence.

***Example 1: The classed bodies of the 99 percent.*** In August 2011, just a few weeks before the first major protest erupted in New York's Zuccotti Park, an Occupy activist named Chris created a Tumblr blog titled "We are the 99 percent". On this blog, he invited people to tell their personal stories of hardship caused by austerity politics through selfies: "Let us know who you are. Take a picture of yourself holding a sign that describes your situation… Below that, pwrite 'I am the 99 percent'" (We are the 99 percent blog, 2011). Within weeks, the blog was flooded with around 100 selfies per day of people telling their stories. These images walk a thin line between self-exposure and anonymity. Individual self-portraits of people holding up handwritten signs that cover their faces either completely, in part, or not at all both reveal and cover physical embodiment. Some are signed with first names or pseudonyms, but most carry no name at all (McDonald, 2015, 976).

An obese man, probably in his 30s, with his naked shoulders, arms, and chest exposed, holds up a sign close to his face that reads, "I play World of Warcraft naked 40 hours a week. I eat mostly McDonald's. I am probably unemployable. I am the 99%" (We are the 99 percent blog, 2011). Another naked man with a noticeable scar on his chest holds up a sign telling his story of cancer, precarious work, and difficulties in getting health insurance. Another picture shows a pregnant belly with only the lower part of a female face. Her sign reads, "At 21 years old I am… about to become mother to a baby whose illness has gotten us booted off gov't health insurance… at 9 months pregnant… Scared for our future. I am the 99%" (We are the 99 percent blog 2011).

***Example 2: The raced bodies of anti-racist raiders.*** Habbo Hotel is a social media site providing a virtual hotel setting in which users create human avatars for social interaction and role play. In 2006, users of Habbo Hotel repeatedly faced difficulties navigating in the virtual outdoor hotel areas. The entrance to the pool was blocked by African-American avatars with big afros in black suits, who shouted, "Pool's closed due to AIDS". The repeated raids of Habbo Hotel were the work of an online swarm that had formed in response to alleged discrimination against black avatars by moderators and the overrepresentation of white avatars. As moderators started to block black avatars and automatically impede their registration to regain control, the online protesters charged them with racism (Asenbaum, 2018b). These "online-sit ins", mimicking peaceful protest tactics of the US civil rights movement of the 1960s, were repeated on Habbo Hotel and other sites. Manuals were circulated online that instructed protesters on how to design the uniform black avatar and avoid deletion by moderators. In a follow-up action on World of Warcraft, black avatars were marched to a virtual marketplace to be sold as slaves (McDonald, 2015). Memes inspired by the raids, such as the slogan "Pool's closed", spread via social media. The memetic protest action even materialized in analogue space as white people dressed in black suits with afro wigs formed a swastika out of their bodies in front of the headquarters of Habbo Hotel's mother company, Sulake, in Finland.

***Example 3: The queered bodies of social media users.*** On the 13th of June 2016, Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram were flooded with rainbow flags. Social media users changed their profile pictures to the rainbow flags of the LGBTIQ movement or shared the flag in their newsfeeds. It was one day after the mass shooting inside a gay nightclub in Orlando, USA, in which 49 were killed and 58 wounded by a terrorist claiming to be affiliated with the Islamic State. By altering their digitally embodied appearance, social media users performed support for the victims of the attack, made a political statement against homophobia, and advocated values of a pluralist and open society (see Jenkins *et al.*, 2019). The practice of replacing one's profile picture, which usually depicts one's own face, with the rainbow flag served to negate the user's identity and replace it with an improper name – a collective call for freedom and diversity.

The use of the rainbow flag on social media is not restricted to this individual case. Every year in the early summer months, many social media users apply a transparent rainbow filter to their regular profile pictures. Faces appear behind a transparent rainbow colour scheme (see Gerbaudo, 2015). Annual Pride demonstrations and celebrations recall the Stonewall riots in New York in 1969, in which queer people publicly and sometimes violently claimed their equal rights. Today, many who define themselves as heterosexual use

the rainbow filter. By queering their image, they do not proclaim a homosexual identity, but they claim the possibility of living queer desires in a diverse society. They perform a politically progressive identity that rejects heteronormativity.

In summary, pictures of pregnant bodies concealing the face, the use of black avatars by white activists, and the alteration of profile pictures through rainbow filters all illustrate that anonymity and moments of disidentification in online communication that disrupt established identity performances do not entail leaving the body behind. Rather, they facilitate the expression of diversity through embodied presence. Yet, the mediation and interruption provided by computer interfaces do entail a reconstruction of embodiment, a rearticulation of identity that generates some leeway for the discontinuity of identity and the enabling of self-exploration. While the selected examples focus on cases with a high degree of anonymity, other examples that explicitly focus on continuing analogue identity performances online also lend support to this argument. The #MeToo campaign, for example, consists of victims of sexual harassment and rape disclosing their identities through social media (Mendes *et al.*, 2018). In another case of hashtag activism, sex workers shared pictures of themselves in their everyday lives to counter the prejudice directed toward them under #FacesOfProstitution (Middleweek, 2019). In both of these cases, anonymity is not an evident element. Yet, the interruption of established modes of identity performances through interfaces necessitated a reconstruction of identity. At the beginning of this process, the screen is always blank. Hence the subject has some freedom to reconceptualize the self, to select specific pictures or to relay certain stories. Regarding social media profile pictures Jill Walker Rettberg (2014, 42) notes: "we represent different versions of ourselves in each profile picture we choose".

### 6.5.2. Transforming Physical Bodies Through the Digital: From Thinspirations to Self-Quantifications

The continuity of identity addressed in the examples of hashtag activism cited above is the central focus of current debates about identity in digital democracy and in particular debates in corporeal cyberfeminism. They observe the extension of analogue to online identity performances. Yet, these extensions always entail a moment of interruption and re-constitution of the self – a morphological moment is built into online communication. These debates add an important observation to the understanding of digital self-transformation discussed so far. Digitally enabled self-transformation does not only happen on the screen – as cyberdemocratic discourses suggest; they also bleed into analogue space. This happens in two ways. First, as discussed above, physical space today is reconfigured as cyborgian space.

The corporeal cyberfeminist literature shows that online body images change how we *perceive* analogue bodies; they alter how we see ourselves and others offline. Second, online body images are used as a tool for the physical transformation of analogue bodies. The following examples are less explicitly cases of political participation, although they do illustrate a new participatory culture. They nevertheless have important political implications. The transformation of bodies affects the abilities and self-perceptions of democratic subjects.

The literature illustrates these transformations of analogue bodies through the digital with several examples. On pro-anorexia websites mostly young girls suffering from anorexia exchange diet and self-starving tips and share pictures of skinny bodies as "thinspiration" (Daniels, 2009, 112ff; Gies, 2008, 321). Other websites serve communities of obese men to positively affirm their body image and reinterpret mainstream beauty ideals (Monaghan, 2005). And websites of transgender communities give advice on physical body transformations, from makeup tips to hormone therapy and surgery. In relation to pro-anorexia and trans websites, Daniels (2009, 117) argues: "Instead of seeing cyberspace as a place in which to experience the absence of the body… these girls and self-identified women use digital technologies in ways that simultaneously bring the body 'online' (through digital photos uploaded to the web) and take the digital 'offline' (through information gleaned online to transform their embodied selves)". Anorexic girls and trans people strive to transform their *physical* bodies *through the digital* and the reinterpretation of fat men's physical bodies is digitally mediated. The digital reconfigures perceptions of analogue reality and the body (Cohen, 2012; Daniels, 2009). Reminiscent of Turkle's (1984) computers as evocative objects, both Cohen (2012, 46) and Brophy (2010, 938) describe technological apparatuses as calling upon the democratic subject in certain ways by affording and restricting possibilities for performing the self. Like everyday expressions of the self through physical bodies, clothes, body language, makeup, etc., digital identity performances rely on materiality. Through Butler (1993) and Grosz (1994), Brophy explains the body as a material process constituted by performance. The digital body is generated through the performative act of going online and extending the established performance of the self through a different medium (Brophy, 2010; see also Gies, 2008, 314).

This attempt at authentic self-representation that always contains elements of self-transformation can be explained via Butler's concept of citationality discussed in Chapter 4 (4.3.3). Even if the subject tries to replicate its body as authentic self on the electronic interface, it is bound to fail as citational representations always differ (Butler, 2004). This is also evident in the recent emergence of the so-called quantified self movement. Here the idea of

the transformation of the physical body and even of personalities with the help of digital tools is taken to the next level. Participants in the quantified self movement use various websites and smartphone applications to quantify their activities with the goal of achieving personal change. Through smartphones and various other wearable devices such as wrist bands, clothing clips, necklaces, rings, and even sensors in disposable patches, self-quantifiers measure their calorie intake, physical activity, blood chemistry, blood pressure, body temperature, heart rate, and sleeping patterns. Via GPS they track their running routes or the location of their pets and babies (Swan, 2012; Walker Rettberg, 2014, 61ff).

> The long-term vision of QS [quantified self] activity is that of a systemic monitoring approach where an individual's continuous personal information climate provides real-time performance optimization suggestions… The individual body becomes a more knowable, calculable, and administrable object through QS activity, and individuals have an increasingly intimate relationship with data as it mediates the experience of reality. (Swan, 2013, 85)

Around the practice of self-quantification, a movement formed that promotes these practices. In regular meetings self-quantifiers share experiences and encourage each other in their respective projects of self-improvement (Lee, 2014). Because of these participatory aspects of the movement and the personal control over one's own data, some see self-quantification as democratic practice: "One important outcome of big data QS is the empowerment of the individual through an intuitive understanding and ongoing interaction with their data. Data is democratized from scientific practices and made universal and meaningful for use by all individuals" (Swan, 2013, 95). Jennifer Whitson (2013), in contrast, warns of self-quantification as a neoliberal strategy in which discipline is internalized and appears as pleasurable. An important aspect of self-quantification is the gamification of every aspect of life. Self-quantification apps provide points, ratings, and peer acknowledgement. These are the same mechanisms that make social media attractive for many who enjoy the attention and competitive elements of quantified likes, friends, and followers. Increasing these numbers becomes a game that profoundly affects relationships and identities.

These activities of self-quantification result in assemblages of data that represent specific aspects of the self and, in combination with other data from social media and smartphone apps, produce a "data double" – a digital replica or (failing) citation of the self (Walker Rettberg, 2014, 68). This "self is one that is spatially expanded, with a broad suite of exosenses" (Swan, 2013, 95). In many ways, this data double resembles the reflection in computers as mirrors described by Turkle (1984, 156f). Her anxious Narcissus, who looks at

his own reflection not out of vanity but rather out of insecurity about the coherence of the self, corresponds to today's trends of self-quantification: "Apps which allow us to see our own data allow us to see ourselves. We look at our data doubles as we gaze into a mirror as teenagers wondering who we are and who we might be" (Walker Rettberg, 2014, 87).

### 6.5.3. Can Anonymity Enable Diversity? Claiming Digital Space

The observations of self-quantification and continuous identity performances on social media point to a diminishing role of anonymity online when compared to the default textuality of the 1990s. Beyond my contention that all of these continuous identity performances entail elements of anonymity through the disruptive power of interfaces, there are still multiple examples of digital spaces in which anonymity plays a central role today (Asenbaum, 2017). For example, the findings in Tom Boellstorff's (2008) study on identity performance through visual avatars in the online game Second Life bear some remarkable similarities to those of Turkle (1995) published 23 years earlier. Although the medium of online role play had changed profoundly from text-only to communication through digitally embodied avatars, the observations are consistent overall.

Boellstorff witnesses how individual participants create multiple avatars of various sexes, races, and species. Users experiment with aspects of their selves not usually experienced offline. These performances are often perceived as revealing true aspects of the self. This can be illustrated by the story of the digital avatar Pavia who explains:

> I'm a man in real life, but about three weeks ago I learned that I'm transsexual… Here in Second Life I created something new in myself that I never realized was there before. At first it was just role playing, but then I grew to love Pavia. I kept infusing myself into her, but then something unexpected started to happen: Pavia started coming out in the real world. I became her, she became me. (cited in Boellstorff, 2008, 138)

These forms of identity play are used in both social and political contexts. Social media and online games such as Second Life are often re-appropriated as claimed spaces when they are used against their original commercial intentions for political action. The annual 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence, for instance, has recently spread to Second Life. Here feminist activists set up virtual discussion events, meetings, and exhibitions around the topic of gendered violence. Participants design female avatars with black eyes, bruises, and bleeding wounds as a way of raising awareness (Motter, 2011). In another example, a queer community established itself in the virtual role play fantasy game World

of Warcraft. The fact that the 5,000 users of the community created 15,000 characters, including the practice of gender swapping, is indicative of playful identity exploration. Due to its global scope, this community also included participants from countries where homosexual practices are banned. Apart from political discussions on LGBTIQ issues, the community organized virtual Pride parades (McKenna *et al.*, 2011).

Besides claiming commercial space on social media, online activists also create their own spaces as alternative media. The New York art collective Guerrilla Girls, for example, extends its analogue interventions in the disguise of gorilla masks through digital images and videos of gorilla performances online. In particular, the breakaway group Guerrilla Girls Broadband have created a subversive online presence. On their website, users can join by virtually dressing up as gorillas. Core members of Guerrilla Girls Broadband themselves take on the identities of female artists who have not gained the recognition they deserve in the male-dominated art business. A "cartography of choice" maps abortion clinics and emails can be sent to "bad bosses" anonymously to address sexual harassment, unequal pay or other work-related grievances (Stein, 2011). Precarious work relations were also central to the digital claimed spaces of the Euro Mayday Netparades in 2004 and 2005. The annual Euro Mayday Parade draws attention to the current precariousness of work, which especially affects women. On the website of the Mayday Netparade, users could create their individual protest avatars as part of a diverse collective. According to a study by Mattoni and Doerr (2007), women, who are often underrepresented in the imagery of traditional Labour Day parades, took centre stage online as "the parade's visual icons of protests positively underlined diversity and differences as an asset of the collective struggle" (132).

Identity exploration in claimed spaces on the internet does not require an entire virtual world with fully animated avatars like in the cases cited so far. Rather, social media provide tools for the everyday practice of identity play as part of political engagement. Gerbaudo (2015) analyses how users change their social media profile pictures for flags, logos or portraits of others. In the Arab Spring, for example, thousands of social media users changed their profile picture for the image of Khaled Said, a 28-year-old blogger killed by police in Alexandria. These profile pictures then become part of the personal assemblage that defines the self. For social media users, employing profile pictures that depict someone else or stand for a political cause is "a move that simultaneously anonymises them a little and shows how profile pictures can function as metonyms: this is a part of me" (Walker Rettberg, 2014, 41).

### 6.6. Conclusion

This chapter has raised the question of how the space of appearance is reconfigured in the digital age. How can subjects appear when they are not physically present? The poststructuralist-inspired cyberdemocracy debate of the 1990s conceptualizes cyberspace as a separate realm from analogue space that follows its own logics. Here subjects appear only through their words as disembodied beings – a notion that is still advocated today (Smith, 2017). Along with several critics I have argued, however, that this position overlooks the central role that bodies and materiality play in these digital spaces. The subject, even if anonymous, is always embodied and performs identity in multiple ways. To develop a new understanding of the space of appearance in the digital age in which not only content but also bodies and identities appear, this chapter has put forward a new theory of digital space. In contrast with the cyberdemocracy debate, which explains cyberspace as divorced from physical space, the current literature conflates the two. The distinction between the digital and the physical collapses. I find neither of these positions productive. Overcoming the distinction between digital and physical space is throwing out the baby with the bathwater, since it leaves us without sufficient concepts to differentiate between them. Rather than collapsing physical and digital space, we need an understanding of how they relate to each other. This will also explain how subjects appear in digital spaces.

To this end, the chapter employed theories of assemblage to explain digital space as a relational construct in which physical, social, and discursive things interact. The physical spaces in which participants are located and connected through a network of cables and satellites interact with the social relations and discursive expressions on social media sites. Yet, digital space is special insofar as the interfaces that mediate communication always also interrupt identity. The transfer from offline to online entails an interruption, an opening that facilitates innovation, exploration, and play. The digital representation of the subject fails to perfectly copy the offline self. It has been found, for example, that even Members of Parliament, who strive to maintain continuous online self-representations, present themselves differently on different websites (Koop & Marland, 2012).

This interruption that compels the subject to reconstruct its identity, I contend, contains a moment of anonymity. The potential for disidentification, even if we are mostly unaware of it, is inherent to the act of going online. It resides in the selection of profile pictures on social media that represent a certain version of the self rather than another. Potentials for disidentification also lie in choosing the skin colour of emoticons in text messages, and in the creation of pseudonyms on a news commenting website.

All these digital self-representations – selfies, avatars, emoticons, profile pictures, ribbons, colour filters, and pseudonyms – enter into the identity assemblages that define us. The interaction of these digital self-representations with our physical bodies, clothing, and hairstyle mediated through the technological devices in our pockets, on our wrists, necks, feet, and ears, recreate the subject as cyborg. The questions we need to ask are not about the separateness or convergence of the digital and physical, but rather about how all of these things that constitute the self assemble. In cyborgian assemblages, technological devices are never neutral, but have political and social implications. They are created with a purpose. And as evocative objects they call on us in certain ways. More than other things, they actively enter processes of subject constitution.

The notion of digital space as assemblage of physical, social, and discursive things, and the concept of the cyborg as assemblage of the human body, digital things, and evocative objects that mediate and interrupt identity, explain how the space of appearance functions in the digital age. The body is not absent from digital engagement. On the contrary, the physical body is always there; without it, the perception of the digital would not be possible (Butler, 2015, 94; Cohen, 2012). The physical body interacts with digital body images created online. It is replicated in selfies of the 99 percent who digitize their bodies in protest against austerity. New bodies are created as stereotypical black avatars to protest racism. Bodies are altered through colour filter rainbow flags to promote open societies. Female bodies are shown as bruised to protest sexual violence. Images of human ribs covered only by skin are shared through digital networks to inspire self-starvation. Fat bodies are shown to counter established beauty standards. Transgendered bodies are digitized to encourage those who wish to transition.

These examples lead the way to a new digital politics of presence by providing novel answers to the dilemma of difference. Digital spaces often serve the representation of bodies with marginalized identities as advocated by the politics of presence. Cyberfeminist counterpublics as claimed spaces online provide the context for peer support, reaffirming and expressing identity in public discourses. Digital spaces can also be employed for radical re-embodiment as in the case of the Habbo Hotel raid. The performance of black digital bodies by majority white users can be seen as part of a politics of presence as it articulates diversity and challenges domination. Whether identities online are performed in a continuous or a discontinuous manner, it is crucial that the reconfiguration of identity online always entails a moment of anonymity and a potential for disidentification. The interruption of identity results in new identities, even if they come in the shape of old ones. The recreation of the self online always entails a choice – of images, of avatars, of pseudonyms. This enhances

our agency over the performance of the self and can be part of a more conscious politics of presence, in which identity articulation becomes an intentional performance of marginalization.

# 7. Conclusion

This thesis set out to explore new ways to advance freedom and equality as core values of democracy in the context of social power asymmetries and modes of discrimination of marginalized identities. It focused on the potential contribution of participatory spaces as innovative modes of democratic engagement to interrupt such inequalities and raised the question of how the structural settings of these spaces can afford different identity performances to advance freedom and equality. In particular, the thesis engaged with the strategy of a politics of presence that advocates physically embodied identity performances of those with marginalized identities in the space of appearance to draw attention to modes of discrimination and particular standpoints. This successfully advances equality but impedes the freedom for the subject to change and explore various sides of the multiple self. The thesis sought ways out of this dilemma. To this end, it engaged with a variety of theoretical debates and accounts of empirical work within the scholarship of democracy and beyond. In doing so, it generated several insights and theoretical innovations. In this Conclusion, I will first recap the answers offered to the central questions raised and then briefly discuss the contributions that the thesis makes to democratic theory. Lastly, I will sketch challenges and possible agendas for future research in the field.

To find ways out of the dilemma of difference, which enhances equality through the physically embodied presence of those with marginalized identities but at the same time limits the freedom for the subject to change (Young, 1989, 268), the thesis advanced a reformulation of the politics of presence (Phillips, 1995). In this reformulation, the politics of presence is understood as part of a broader strategy of a politics of becoming that combines the embodied expression of diversity with the freedom of self-transformation. The politics of becoming rests on practices of disidentification that entail the rejection of hegemonic identity interpellations and interrupt established modes of identification (Muñoz, 1999; Rancière, 1999). This interruption of the coherent performance of an officially identified persona reconfigures the space of appearance by enlarging the subject's freedom to explore different sides of the multiple self. This kind of disidentification always goes along with subjectivization. It entails not only the rejection of identity interpellations but also the creation of new identities (Mouffe, 2013, 28) through improper names (Deseriis, 2015), thus allowing for temporary self-transformation.

The literature on disidentification suggests that such interruption of identity can be achieved through a critical engagement with hegemonic discourses that produce hierarchical identities. It proposes modes of deconstruction as a means of critically interrogating

discourses and thus loosening the grip of identity categories (Mouffe, 1995a; Muñoz, 1999). It also suggests the resignification of the concepts that describe identity so as to recast their meanings in positive terms (Butler, 2004; Lloyd, 2007) – a strategy also advocated by difference democrats (Young, 1990). This thesis went beyond such intellectual endeavours and explored more practical means of disidentification. It suggested that disidentification can be practically achieved by employing anonymity as radical democratic practice. Anonymity and disidentification are by no means the same. Rather, anonymity harbours the potential for experiencing disidentification. It can function as a tool that interrupts hegemonic identity interpellations by negating some aspects of the physically embodied and legally identified persona. But anonymity consists of more than mere concealment, as is commonly supposed. Anonymity entails articulating new identities and exploring sides of the multiple self that are otherwise hidden. It affords the articulation of private sentiments in the public sphere. Anonymity makes the absent present.

To make sense of such identity reconfigurations through anonymity, this thesis suggested understanding identity as a spatial assemblage of things. Things such as blood flows, skin pigments, sexual organs, clothing, accessories, hairstyles, makeup, and discursive constructions of race, gender, sexuality, class, age, occupation, and religion circulate in agentic assemblages that define the self. This new materialist inspired perspective suggests that rather than constructing identities as suggested in poststructuralist debates, subjects *assemble* (Bennett, 2010). Anonymity interrupts these assemblages through things such as masks, veils, voting booths, pen and paper, public walls and spray cans, computer screens, pseudonyms, avatars, and blank spaces. This interruption allows subjects to reassemble. It facilitates a temporary reconfiguration of the identity assemblage in which the subject can experience different sides of the multiple self. After the anonymizing things are ejected from the assemblage – after the masks are taken off and the voting booths are left – bodies return to their positions assigned by the established order. Normalcy persists, but the experience of the interruption lasts.

In the digital age, the subject is reconfigured as cyborg (Haraway, 1991 [1985]) as smartphones, electronic wrist bands, clothing clips, necklaces, rings, and sensors in disposable patches are applied to the physical body and thus enter the assemblage of the self. These physical objects applied to the human body carry a moment of anonymity that is built into them as they both mediate and interrupt identity. Through this interruption, subjects are compelled to reassemble their identities online. They can perform their selves in a more continuous manner on social media such as Facebook where they circulate visual self-representations. In participatory spaces generated through hashtag activism such as the

#MeToo campaign, they reify their digital identities, mirroring analogue identities. However, these digital objects that enter into identity assemblages are not mere replications of the offline identity. Rather, they involve acts of curation and expand the sphere of personal agency over self-representations. Other digital spaces call for more discontinuous identity performances and invite users to construct different avatars or pseudonyms, to employ emoticons, colour filters, flags, political symbols, images of others such as partners, relatives, or political figures, or to construct the self through mere textuality.

In both digital and analogue spaces, which in the digital age are reconfigured as cyborgian spaces, it is the particular spatial configurations that invite such varied identity performances. The architecture of particular website interfaces, for example, affects the identity configurations assembled on them (Beyer, 2014a; Kavada, 2012), as does the physical architecture of parliaments and public squares (Parkinson, 2012). These spaces themselves, however, are constructed by humans and through human agency. Space and identity, then, are part of a dialectical process of mutual constitution. Assemblages of identity and space are in constant flux; through their mutual affectivity, they continuously assemble and reassemble each other.

Assembling identity through the modes of disidentification afforded by anonymity explains the politics of presence in new terms. Such disidentifactory articulations of the self are neither disembodied, private, nor necessarily invisible. They are public identity performances that re-embody the subject through digital, textual or physical identity reifications that are perceptible in multiple ways through images, sounds, and words. This rearticulation of identity, making the absent present, generates new prospects for the politics of presence. When subjects reify their bodies as stereotypical black avatars to block an online space in protest against racism, when they assemble as bruised, digital bodies to protest against sexual abuse, when they depict their naked, obese or ill bodies in selfies to protest against austerity, they take part in the politics of presence. When the activists of Pussy Riot employ colourful balaclavas to articulate femininity, strength, and diversity, when Guerrilla Girls wear gorilla masks to challenge the entrenched patriarchal structures of the art world, when queer teenagers negotiate their identities through the use of graffiti on bathroom walls, and when people wear hoods to perform their marginalized race/class identity in protest against racially motivated police brutality, they take part in the politics of presence.

For sure, not all examples discussed in this thesis can be seen as part of a politics of presence. While the white, grinning Guy Fawkes mask of Anonymous and the pseudonyms employed by Hamilton and Madison in the debate about the American Constitution do

facilitate an exploration of the multiple self and generate freedom for the subject to change, they do not take part in the reification of marginalized identities. For this reason, I developed a broader concept of a politics of becoming of which the politics of presence is one strategy. All practices within the politics of becoming employ moments of disidentification to rearrange identity assemblages and explore the multiple self. The politics of presence, in particular, focuses on identity reifications that articulate diversity and embody the marginalized in the public sphere. This even includes the intentionally continuous performances of the #MeToo campaign or the self-representations of Members of Parliament on various websites and social media (Asenbaum, 2019a). These continuous identity expressions always articulate a subject-in-process (Lloyd, 2005) and perform future selves (Connolly, 1996). Each citation of the self slightly diverges from the previous (Butler, 2004). This is because the coherent performance of the self is always an act of masquerade, an effort to hold together what drifts apart. The self, however, remains forever fugitive.

A politics of becoming, then, does not promote one particular type of space that facilitates one particular kind of identity performance. Rather, the key conclusion of this thesis is that a politics of becoming, as part of a progressive strategy for deep social transformation, needs to provide a wide variety of participatory spaces: spaces that allow for discontinuous identity performances by constructing alternative selves and spaces that rearticulate established identities. Digital spaces of marginalized groups that form counterpublics for peer support and the development of strategies to challenge inequality are as central to the politics of becoming as spaces that facilitate discontinuous digital embodiments that allow for identity play. Some spaces might employ mere textuality, while others make use of avatars, and others still invite people to meet in the flesh. It is the plurality of such diverse spatial configurations that characterizes the politics of becoming.

Since it was the goal of this thesis to find ways of advancing freedom and equality in participatory spaces, we need to ask how a politics of becoming through disidentification can contribute to this end. To make sense of the relation between freedom and equality within spatial assemblages, I employed two competing concepts: the agonistic democratic paradox that understands the two values as in tension (Mouffe, 2005b [2000]), and the anarchist equal liberty that understands them as co-constitutive and mutually dependent (Newman, 2016). The discussion of several empirical examples of anonymity in participatory spaces demonstrated that neither the democratic paradox nor equal liberty explains all cases. Rather, they both come into play, often within the same participatory space. Practices of disidentification through anonymity always have liberating effects. Anonymity frees the subject to act; it loosens the grip of hegemonic identity interpellations and allows for freer

expressions of the multiple self. Yet, this newly won freedom at times undermines equality, while at other times it enhances equality. The democratic paradox comes into effect when the anonymous subject uses its freedom to exclude others through acts of domination, submit to the group dynamics of crowds or deceive others. Equal liberty emerges when anonymity affords inclusion and meritocracy, the contestation of domination or reducing information hierarchies through honesty. The key point is that the agonistic and the anarchist conceptions of freedom and equality are not necessarily mutually exclusive. As humans, we are complex beings living in a complex world in which freedom and equality can go together or contradict each other. Their various constellations depend on the spatial assemblage in which they are situated. It is the mutual affectivity of many things that influence their relations. Anonymity can function as radical democratic practice, but it can also be employed for domination. Hence, how the effects of anonymity play out depends on the intentions of humans and the spaces they create.

This thesis advocates the use of anonymity as part of a progressive strategy of social transformation. Such a strategy, however, needs to go beyond questions of identity performance and to ask profound questions about the distribution of wealth worldwide and about climate justice for future generations. As Pateman (2006) points out, a deep understanding of radical democracy includes a just distribution of economic resources that facilitate political participation. The key contribution of this thesis to such a transformative perspective is to draw attention to the role that participatory spaces and the identities assembled within them can play and how they can advance freedom and equality. Rather than searching for one ideal spatial constellation, as many have attempted in the past, I champion a plurality of varied spaces that allow for different identity expressions. The acknowledgement of the variety of human existence and the understanding of identity assemblages as constantly reconfiguring call for a multiplicity of different spatial arrangements that allow for the articulation of the multiple self. We need spaces that challenge inequality while allowing the democratic subject to change.

To develop this answer to the questions posed herein, I engaged with various theoretical sources and generated several innovative contributions to democratic theory that I will briefly summarize below.

***Anonymity in democratic theory.*** This thesis provides the first in-depth theorization of the concept of anonymity rooted in democratic theory. Although anonymity is a central feature in various modes of participation in liberal democracies, it has not received attention in democratic and political theory. While anonymity is commonly defined in terms of identity

negation and privacy, I described it as an act of identity creation in the public sphere. The anonymity of subjects does not situate them outside the space of appearance. Rather, anonymity reconfigures spaces. The anonymous subject is neither private nor invisible; it is perceptible in the public sphere. By interrupting coherent identity, anonymity decentres identity assemblages and affords the exploration of the multiple self. This increased freedom has contradictory effects. It allows for inclusion and exclusion, subversion and submission, and honesty and deception. The workings of anonymity depend on the specific spatial configurations in which it is situated, being affected by the physical tools employed, the power relations between participants, and the constellation of discursive identity knowledge.

*A spatial theory of democracy.* This thesis also generated an in-depth theorization and systematic explanation of participatory spaces. Democratic theory is rich in the metaphoric use of the term "space" to denote new modes of participation (Dryzek, 2009; Mouffe, 1993, 20). Others have focused on the effects of the concrete, physical spaces on participation (Parkinson, 2012). This thesis developed the first coherent concept of democratic spatiality that goes beyond mere metaphoric use and brings together insights about physical and socio-discursive aspects of space. It drew on inspirations in debates on new materialism to describe participatory spaces as agentic assemblages of physical, social, and discursive things that affect each other. In relating these various things, participatory spaces demarcate boundaries that separate an inside and an outside. Through their mutual affectivity, these things are more than the sum of their parts. Rather than imagining such spaces in terms of cause and effect, they are best understood as a network of mutually affective things generating movement in various directions and being affected by the various things within them. Among these things, humans fulfil a special role as they are characterized by consciousness and intentionality. This does not make them autonomous rational subjects. Rather, they are themselves assemblages of affective things and thus only have partial conscious control over their actions. As assemblages, human subjects are intertwined with and partially indistinguishable from the assemblages that define space. The assemblages of humans and spaces mutually co-produce each other in a dialectical manner.

*A theory of digital space.* The debate on digital space is characterized by a discord between, on the one hand, conceptions of the 1990s that conceptualize cyberspace as a realm of disembodiment that is separate from analogue space (Benedikt, 1991b) and, on the other, current debates that conflate digital space and analogue space (Isin & Ruppert, 2015). In contrast, this thesis draws on the theory of space discussed above in order to overcome this divide. Digital space is neither separate from nor the same as analogue space. Rather, it

consists of the relations between physical, social, and discursive things. In this way, it is constituted by the same things as analogue space. What sets digital space apart is the interruption between the physical spaces in which subjects are located and the social and discursive spaces in which they appear. A moment of disidentification is thus built into the architecture of digital space as it compels subjects to reassemble their identities online. Through this interruption, computer devices enter identity assemblages. While this, to a certain degree, enhances personal agency over the presentation of the self, it also means that evocative objects enter into the very process of identity constitution and call upon the subject in particular ways that are mostly motivated by commercial interests.

***Developing the plurality of radical democracy.*** This thesis contributes to a pluralization of democratic theory and in particular radical democratic thought. It insists on the value of a plurality of different approaches that provide different lenses through which to view reality and further develop the larger radical democratic project. To this end, I proposed to engage with several perspectives in democratic theory and assess the same subject of research from various vantage points (Parkinson, 2012, 9; Smith, 2019 forthcoming). Beyond applying the established participatory, deliberative, and agonistic perspectives, the thesis sought to expand the radical democratic horizon by focusing on two perspectives that are often neglected and have yet to find their rightful place in the central texts on democratic theory. First, I engaged with feminist discussions identified with the term "difference democracy" (Mansbridge, 1998; Phillips, 1991; Young, 2000) and proposed a coherent difference democratic perspective articulated along the axes of embodied presence, expressing emotions through various means of communication, and the contestation of domination. Second, I sketched an emerging perspective in democratic theory that proposes deep social transformation (Hardt & Negri, 2012; 2017; Newman, 2016; Rancière, 1999). The transformative perspective describes utopias and spaces of becoming that facilitate the experience of democracy in the moment. Democracy is conceptualized as overcoming modes of representation through self-rule and the commons.

After this brief summary of the main contributions of this thesis to democratic theory, I will end by turning to the future of the field. I believe that the pluralism discussed above is one of the strengths of democratic theory and the study of radical democracy in particular (Dean et al., 2019). Some current debates in democratic theory advance a pragmatic approach and argue for leaving behind the model thinking that has been characteristic of democratic theory since the period of the East-West conflict (Fung, 2012; Saward, 2019 forthcoming; 2003; Warren, 2017). They might be right in thinking that the current historical context characterized by complexity and rapid change will give rise to other debates in democratic

theory that do not discuss democracy in terms of clear-cut models. Notwithstanding these changes, I believe that democratic theory needs clear normative grounding and, to this end, it needs to engage in contestation and deliberation about the meaning of democracy (see Held, 2006 [1987], X). This pluralism that has been characteristic of democratic thought over recent decades might take new forms. Rather than engaging in model building or exploring perspectives as in this thesis, novel ways might be found to express such pluralism. Beyond exploring multiple perspectives in democratic theory, this thesis also contributes to new engagements in the field by taking inspiration from sources located outside of democratic theory, such as new materialism and queer theory. A vast field of theoretical debates have yet to be engaged with from the vantage point of democratic theory. Critical whiteness studies and masculinity studies, for instance, shift the analytical gaze from the marginalized to those in positions of power, which generates a new and promising angle for democratic thought.

It will be up to such future scholarly work to assess how democratic subjectivity is altered in the digital age and beyond. The question of who we are becoming is an open-ended one that needs to be repeatedly raised anew. The process of becoming is in rapid flux. Consider that until the 16th century ordinary people did not have mirrors (Zakaria, 2017, 8). Knowledge of their own image was confined to reflections in water. If mirrors entering identity assemblages change their dynamics, then the introduction and widespread use of the "black mirror" – as the popular TV show refers to smart device screens – must revolutionize them. In this sense, Butler (2015, 20) claims: "media has entered into the very definition of the people. It does not simply assist that definition, or make it possible; it is the stuff of self-constitution, the site of the hegemonic struggle over who 'we' are". This triggers profound transformations of the self as computer devices take over certain human cognitive functions. They alter how we remember and how we perceive things. When Phillips (2010, 48f) notes that cognition is an essentializing process that simplifies reality, we can observe how digital devices take over such filtering functions through algorithmic computing (Walker Rettberg, 2014, 20ff). Once again, this draws attention to the role of computers not as neutral tools, but as evocative objects calling upon us in certain ways. We have to decide how to respond to these calls. A part of assessing this question rests in analysing why these evocative objects call on us in the ways that they do and in whose interests they were built. This demands a better understanding of the economic and political forces that shape artificial intelligence and the smart devices in our pockets. Rather than engaging in self-transformation, the subject, in many cases, is shaped by powerful actors. This gives a sense of the growing urgency of the need to increase our agency over processes of self-

constitution and to enlarge the free spaces for the subject to change.

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