The Politics of Becoming

Disidentification as Radical Democratic Practice

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Abstract: Current radical democratic politics is characterized by new participatory spaces for citizens' engagement, which aim at facilitating the democratic ideals of freedom and equality. These spaces are, however, situated in the context of deep societal inequalities. Modes of discrimination are carried over into participatory interaction. The democratic subject is judged by its physically embodied appearance, which replicates external hierarchies and impedes the freedom of self-expression. To tackle this problem, this paper seeks to identify ways to increase the freedom of the subject to explore its multiple self. Understanding the self as inherently fugitive, the paper investigates participatory, deliberative and agonistic concepts of self-transformation. As all of them appear limited, it introduces a transformative perspective in democratic thought. Enriching the transformative perspective with queer and gender theory, the paper generates the concept of a politics of becoming, which, through radical democratic practices of disidentification, advances the freedom of the subject to change.

Keywords: democratic theory, radical democracy, subjectivity, identity, queer theory

Introduction

Over recent decades, a renewed interest in revitalizing and transforming old, entrenched ways of doing democracy has emerged. A plethora of perspectives in democratic theory has been exploring new participatory institutions (Pateman, 1970), deliberative forums (Chambers, 1996), counterpublics (Fraser, 1990) and protest movements (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985) to radicalize democracy.[1] From the current study on democratic innovations, which explores the design of citizens' assemblies and participatory budgets (Smith, 2009), to the recent occupations of public squares through Occupy and others (Maeckelbergh, 2012), all of these new participatory spaces have one thing in common: they aim at realizing freedom and equality as core values of democracy (Mouffe, 2005).

In doing so, they struggle with the deeply entrenched inequalities that characterize their societal context. Hence, the particular designs of democratic spaces attempt to counter domination by creating alternative settings that facilitate temporal relief (Asenbaum, 2019a). Inequality and

unfreedom are, however, not simply left on the doorstep. Rather, the logic of identity inscribes societal inequalities on the human body and its performative expressions so that they carry over into participatory processes (Young, 1990). According to Lupia and Norton (2017: 68):

> 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 […] 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.

This problem has particularly been debated among feminist democratic theorists. A focus on identities, they claim, entails essentializing tendencies. The individual subject tends to be judged upon its appearance rather than upon the content it utters:

> 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)

Several radical democratic approaches, from participatory and deliberative to agonistic, have tried to generate concepts of self-transformation that counter such essentialist identity reifications. These remain limited by their ontological assumptions. The aim of this paper consists of filling this theoretical void. It will seek to identify ways to overcome the confining logic of identity through the politics of becoming. The politics of becoming understands identity as the performative production of the self. In this sense, it does not stand in contrast with, but rather encompasses, concepts such as the politics of presence (Phillips, 1995), the politics of difference (Young, 1990), and identity politics more generally. That said, it opens up the perspective on how we can produce our selves differently and thus explore the freedom of the subject to change. The "subject to change" is understood as a multiple self (Elster, 1986) which pursues the freedom of self-expression and self-exploration. When describing the self as inherently fugitive, continuously escaping hegemonic attempts at identification, I suggest that the freedom of subjects to constitute their own identity in participatory spaces can be advanced by exploring disidentification as radical democratic practice. Disidentification entails the rejection of hegemonic identity interpellations and the creation of improper names (Deseriis, 2015; Muñoz, 1999; Rancière, 1999).

The project of exploring the freedom of self-constitution is not meant to reject or undermine the importance of identity in the political struggle for radical democracy. Identity is a necessary means to contesting societal inequalities. What is problematic, however, is the permanent reification of identities which disallows the subject the fundamental freedom of diverse self-expression. Hence, a radical democratic identity politics needs to allow for counter, cross and

multiple identifications in accordance with the subjects' desires. This focus on the micro level of democratic subjectivity is not to be misread as embracing liberal individualism that atomizes society, but as a micro-revolution (Newman, 2010, 6; see also Young, 1990: 124) that allows the subject to more freely navigate in a network of possible identifications. Freedom in this context is not understood as freedom *from* identity, discourse, and the body, but as relational practice mediated *via* multiple identities, discourses, and bodies through the interaction with others (see Foucault, 1997).

To explore the freedom of the fugitive self, this paper will first investigate participatory, deliberative and agonistic perspectives concerning their conceptualizations of self-transformation. What is common to all of them is that the freedom of the subject to change appears limited; thus, the paper turns to a newly emerging strand in democratic thought, which I will call the transformative perspective. With reference to the work of post-anarchist and autonomist-Marxist thinkers, I will develop the politics of becoming, which, through disidentification, allows the subject greater freedom to change. This freedom, once again, appears limited, as disidentification is conceptualized as a collective process of multitudes, swarms and movements. In the last step, the transformative perspective will be enriched with queer and gender theory, which also employ the term disidentification but conceptualize it as a personal experience on the micro level of democratic subjectivity with a promise to enlarge the free spaces for self-identification.

Shaping Enlightened Subjects: Participatory and Deliberative Perspectives

Participatory democrats pay close attention to self-transformations of the democratic subject in participatory processes. They take their inspiration from the republican tradition, and particularly Rousseau, who argues that: "The passage from the state of nature to the civil state produces a very remarkable change in man […] his 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" (Rousseau 1998 [1762], book 1, chapter 8.). In accordance, participatory democrats understand participatory institutions as fulfilling an educational function, providing the democratic subject with opportunities for self-expression and self-discovery. It is the social contact with others that enables personal growth (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, 2012; Held, 2006 [1987]; Muldoon, 2018), particularly utopian socialism (Taylor, 2016 [1982]). Utopian socialists developed detailed conceptions of future societies whose goals were liberation from oppression and personal self-realization. Although Marx and Engels harshly rejected such utopianism in the name of scientific socialism, it is clearly reflected in their writings: "communist society […] 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" (Marx and Engels 1998 [1845], vol.1). The Marxian argument inspired by utopian socialists challenges the fixity of identities and calls for living inner multiplicity.

Meanwhile, the notion of transforming the subject has also inspired the authoritarian strands of socialist thinking, resulting in conceptions of the "new man" in Soviet ideology. Here, educational institutions are used to shape a specific subject from above. This idea runs counter to the participatory democratic impetus of self-realization through participation. 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. They set out a certain path of self-development: "Strong democracy creates the very citizens it depends upon […] forcing us to think in common and act in common" (Barber 2003 [1984], 153). The compulsion addressed by Barber echoes Rousseau's argument, who claims that: "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). The participatory institutions therefore serve the production of particular subjects. The subject is seen as a product, an object of creation, rather than an autonomous self-explorer.

These confining tendencies in processes of self-constitution in participatory democracy are, in many ways, also reflected in theories of deliberative democracy. Through deliberation, Mark Warren (1992: 8) observes that citizens "become more public-spirited, more tolerant, more knowledgeable, more attentive to the interests of others, and more probing of their own interests." Such self-transformations are possible due to the discursively constructed nature of identities. Simone Chambers (1996: 103) 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." Although Chambers insists that deliberative democracy facilitates autonomy in the constitution of the self, tendencies towards compulsion also run through her text: "Citizens themselves come under a publicity requirement in deliberation such that they must offer reasons for their positions and claims" (190).

The subjects created in deliberative democracy appear to be restricted regarding which sides of their multiple selves they can show in deliberative settings. They are called upon as reasonable, civil deliberators. Such a conception of self-transformation is particularly troubling when knowledge is understood as an objective resource to be acquired (e.g. Newton, 2012). In this vein, Fung (2003: 345) claims: "Deliberative institutions in this mode should offer training and education to create informed participants." Meanwhile, in their empirical study, Andersen and Hansen (2007: 552) point out that participants' "knowledge about the issue, as well as their capabilities to engage in political debates, increased. In this sense, deliberation created 'better' citizens." Recent debates in deliberative democracy have tried to counter the criticism of the deliberative constraints articulated by agonists (Mouffe, 1999) and feminists (Pajnik, 2006) by loosening the requirements of rationality and deliberativeness (e.g. Bächtiger and Parkinson,

2019). Nevertheless, deliberative democracy would not be what it is without the ideals of reasoned, civil debate. Thus, to what extent deliberative requirements are implemented is rather a question of degree.

To conclude, while participatory and deliberative conceptions of democracy provide notions of self-transformation, which aim at strengthening personal autonomy, these attempts are only partly successful. Although Warren and Chambers point to some important gains in autonomy through deliberation, this does not overcome the inherently limiting paths of self-transformation laid out from the deliberative perspective. Deliberative forums are constructed with the purpose of producing "better" (empathetic, public-spirited, knowledgeable) citizens. Thus, democratic subjects are not free to change; rather, they are object to particular transformations designed by others.

Articulating the Tormented Self: The Agonistic Perspective

Firmly rooted in the linguistic turn, agonistic thinkers such as Connolly (1991) or Norval (2007) explain identities as product of discursive contestation. The self from the agonistic perspective is conceptualized in anti-essentialist terms as multiple, contingent and fraught with inner contradiction. Chantal Mouffe, for example, argues for a radical constructivist stance, positioning her discourse theory, developed with Ernesto Laclau (1985), in what Tønder and Thomassen (2005) call the ontology of lack. 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 identity through the articulation of nodal points in a web of discourses are bound to fail due to the intrinsic contingency of discursive meanings (Mouffe, 1995b). This opens up the perspective of deconstruction. The disentanglement of discursive constructs, which constitute identity, according to Mouffe, must always go hand in hand with the constitution of new identities: "This is why the transformation of political identities" consists of "the disarticulation of the framework in which the process of identification is taking place, thereby opening the way for other forms of identification" (Mouffe, 2006: 5). Mouffe discusses this approach with regard to gender identities: "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" (Mouffe, 1995a: 319). The de-identification with sexual constructs needs to be followed by a rearticulation of an identity of radical democratic citizenship.

Mouffe's anti-essentialist conception of democratic subjects provides new fertile ground for the freedom of the subject to change. Instead of an essential core, Mouffe (1995a) understands the subject as defined by inner diversity. Similarly, Honig (1994) explains the self as plural and inherently contradictory and Connolly (1995) proposes an ethos of pluralization in which democratic subjects embrace, explore and further develop their inner multiplicity. Nevertheless, the liberating potential of the multiple self is not fulfilled from 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. 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. The end of conflict would mean the end of democracy. This is the tragedy of agonistic democracy (Tambakaki 2017; Wenman 2013). 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 frustrates any real self-transformation. Honig (1994) explains that the perpetual conflictuality positioning different actors and different discourses in society in constant confrontation with each other is mirrored within the self. The many aspects that constitute the self are in unresolvable conflict. According to Helen McManus, the contradictory self needs participatory processes for releasing the tension of constant inner conflict it endures: "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).

This tragic horizon of agonistic democracy is the consequence of an inherent conservativism that stands in contrast with its emancipatory impetus. As a true alternative to the ruling order can never be achieved, improvements within the liberal order represent the best outcome that agonistic contestation can achieve. Wenman points to the agonistic conservativism within Mouffe's work. The fear of fascist tendencies in the recent surge of right-wing populism leads her, 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. As mentioned above, Mouffe suggests the construction of the democratic subject as a radical democratic citizen. To become a citizen, however, the subject has to submit to the dominant order: "what is required is to accept a specific language of civil intercourse" (Mouffe, 1992b: 77). Citizenship is explained as "a common political identity of persons […] who accept submission to certain authoritative rules of conduct" (Mouffe, 1992a: 30). In this respect, agonistic democracy is quite similar to the participatory and deliberative perspectives. Agonists call for "agonistic respect" to secure the established order (Connolly, 2005).

Lastly, it is the notion of hegemony that limits the freedom of the agonistic subject to change. Understanding identity as the product of collective contestation limits personal freedom, as the subject appears to be constructed from the top down as a subject of leadership. Mouffe's recent work on populism makes clear that the actors who articulate new identities are political parties and their public faces who vie for attention in a competitive corporate media environment (Mouffe, 2018). Processes of identity construction under these conditions are advanced by leaders rather than the grassroots, which is in line with the Gramscian thought that Mouffe builds on and which partly overlaps with Leninist concepts of vanguard leadership. In a similar vein, Kioupkiolis (2017: 42) criticizes Laclau's 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, which disallows fundamental change and the fear of upheaval, theories of identity construction inevitably wind up as tools in the hands of elites who lead the masses.

To conclude, agonistic conceptions of the democratic subject as a contingent construction offer great potential when exploring self-transformation in participatory processes. This potential remains unrealized, however, due to the tragic horizon of agonism, its conservative outlook, and the notion of hegemonic identity construction.

Transforming Systems and Selves: A New Perspective in Democratic Thought

While the different democratic perspectives discussed above provide promising approaches to autonomous self-constitution through deliberation and participation, and the construction of new collective subjectivities through contestation, they all fall short of realizing freedom within these processes. Although the limitations of these perspectives relates to their respective ontologies, they nevertheless all share a common problem. They outline a process of subject constitution, which serves particular aims: to create civil citizens who submit to established rules and engage in reasoned deliberation or agonistic respect. The limited societal change envisioned in these theories is reflected in the limited, bound and channeled 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, then, is a perspective within democratic theory that provides the basis for freedom for the subject to change.

I believe that another perspective in democratic thought, which emerged in the wake of the new millennium, provides fruitful ground for this endeavor. What I call transformative democracy was entangled with agonistic theories, but has developed its own distinctive features in recent years (see Tambakaki, 2017; Wenman, 2013: 89). These debates try to overcome the tragic perspective of agonism (Beasley-Murray, 2011). While agonists focus on protest movements and populist parties within the liberal-capitalist order, post-anarchist and autonomist-Marxist thinkers in the transformative perspective focus on grassroots movements, self-organized collectives and the commons, which promote deep societal transformation (Hardt and Negri, 2017; Newman, 2016).

This transformation is sometimes referred to as revolution, insurrection or rebellion. What is crucial is that democracy not only lies beyond this process but 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. (Wolin, 1994:
18)

It is this democratic moment of transformation, which is at the heart of Hardt and Negri's (2004) *Multitude*. Characterized as "the *living flesh* that rules itself […] [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" (100). In the multitude, the mutual dependency of societal transformation of the system and individual transformation of the self becomes apparent: "The intensification of the common, finally, brings about an anthropological transformation such that out of the struggles come a new humanity" (213).

The project of radical democracy, then, does not necessarily entail inventing new institutional arrangements. Rather, it consists of an inner revolution of democratic subjectivity (Newman, 2010, 6; see also Young, 1990: 124). As democracy exists in the moment as a deep subjective experience of equality and freedom, democratization involves freeing the self. Sheldon Wolin's work on fugitive democracy 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 (Wolin, 1994). Building on Wolin's notion of democracy, I suggest understanding the self as fugitive. Its reification through identification means its death. The fugitive self constantly tries to escape identification. 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. Attempts to capture the self can produce continuous identity performances of the officially identified persona in the public sphere; but this, as I will argue later, is only a form of masquerade (Butler, 1990). The self can never be captured in its multiplicity. Instead, the many aspects of the multiple self could be set free by modes of disidentification.

The Politics of Becoming

To advance the freedom of the subject to change, I will build on William Connolly's concept of the politics of becoming. Connolly argues that LGBTIQ, women's and anti-slavery movements all engage in a politics of becoming, not by reifying their identities through physical presence, but by 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: 255–256). While activists of identity politics often define themselves in essentialist terms, the lack of a natural essence of their identities allows them to engage in a transformative politics.

This perspectival shift offers a complete reinterpretation of identity politics. It allows us to understand identity transformation as an aspect already inherent in the politics of presence. The confinements of identity can partly be tackled by a focus on the contingency of identity

constructions *created through identity politics*. Physical presence is not static; it is a performative act of becoming. Participants in these movements are always becoming; they always strive to be who they are currently perceived not to be. Suffragettes campaigning for the right to vote, for example, did not make a stance as housewives but as future voters and office holders. Even in its physically embodied form, the subject is always a subject to change.

The understanding of a politics of becoming 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", identity is a product created *through* participation. The democratic subject is a "subject-in-process" (see Kristeva, 2008 [1977]). This does not preclude the strategic use of essentialism (Spivak, 1988). Rather, radical democratic politics needs to express diversity through the presence of marginalized bodies. Participatory spaces, at the same time, must function as sites of deconstructing and critiquing strategically employed identity reifications.

I agree that claiming space through the enactment of marginalized identities needs to play a central role in radical democratic politics. Such identity constructions, however, always also entail confining tendencies. Hence, I propose to take the meaning of the politics of becoming beyond identity politics to include various aspects of self-transformation in participatory processes. By overcoming the agonist perspective of tragedy and the constant struggle for hegemony on the part of both Connolly and Lloyd, which signifies the ultimate impossibility of democracy, I will investigate the politics of becoming from the transformative perspective in order to explore the potentials of a democratization of subject constitution. This does not entail overcoming identity politics but reinterpreting and reinventing such strategies to expand the freedom to define one's own identity.

To explore the transformative potential of the politics of becoming, I will draw on Rancière's work on subjectivization and, in particular, the concept of disidentification. To understand the meaning of disidentification, let us start with its opposite: identification. Rancière (1999) explains the established political order as post-democracy, which he calls the police. The police rely on the logic of identification. Moved by an impetus of control and conservation, the police name their subjects and assigns them a place and a part in a strict hierarchical order. This logic of control aims at eradicating democracy by eliminating diversity: "Postdemocracy […] 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" (102). Thus, "little by little the identity of the whole with the all is obtained" (124).

This homogenization through identification is disrupted by 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 that belong to the police logic of reifying, assigning and controlling identity. Subjectivization, Rancière explains, is rather to be understood as *dis*identification. Disidentification is the political act of disrupting the identificatory pursuit of the police by rejecting the names they assign. Instead of creating

an alternative identity, which would, again, comply with the logic of the police, disidentification creates an improper identity, a wrong name. The disidentifying subject is an outcast, a nobody, somebody who does not count and has no say in the societal order. It is in the gap between this location of imperceptibility – this nowhere, where nobody is located – and the precisely localized position governed by the police 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 using various examples. In the early 19th century, those who, in the eyes of the police, merely served the production of offspring, but did not count as individuals in the liberal-capitalist order, were named after their most valuable attribute. While the police hailed them as proletarians (proles, Latin "offspring"), many workers rejected this ascription. Their disidentification consisted of a rejection of the class system altogether by promoting a classless society, in which neither capitalists nor proletarians would exist. Rancière (1992: 61) notes that in this case "a process of subjectivization is a process of disidentification or declassification."

According to Rancière (2007), the position of the outcast earlier occupied by proletarians is now the place of immigrants. Engaging with the immigration debate in Australia, Rancière asks, what it means to be "un-Australian" and *un-* itself. He argues that the appropriation of the racist slur of un-Australians residing in the imaginary place of un-Australia by immigrants does not simply create a positive counteridentity in opposition to a nationalist Australian identity. The positionality of un-Australians between an individual identity produced and administered by the police and the location of the unnamed immigrant as an outcast and a nobody creates an *un*-identity, a purposefully wrong name that neither signifies a "real" identifiable person, nor a nobody: "politics as such", Rancière (2007: 562) notes, "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 reappropriation of a derogatory term as an improper name. When the conservative mainstream opposing the student demonstrations of May 1968 in France 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!". These German Jews neither denoted countable and nameable people, nor were (at least the vast majority of) the protesters actually German or Jewish. These "German Jews" purposely employed a wrong name, creating an improper identification to express their political convictions (Rancière, 1999: 126).

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 individuals together to form agentic assemblages as *condividuals*. In contrast with the individualistic subject of liberal theory, the condividual is based on a shared identity. In coming together and forming a collective subject, individuals reject the names

assigned to them: "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: 4).

Improper names and their subtypes of collective pseudonyms and multi-user names are exemplified by the hacktivist collective Anonymous, which reifies its improper identity through the Guy Fawkes mask, both in physical street demonstrations and digital 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, 2018b). Other examples include Robin Hood, a name that has been used by different people to steal and redistribute property. Similarly, in the late 18th century, the popular folk tale of Ned Ludd breaking a stocking frame in anger was taken up by a political movement protesting the devaluation of special skills in the industry that were outdated by industrial machinery. Declaring the mythical Ned Ludd their leader, the Luddites signed proclamations and letters with his name, thus assuming an improper identity (Deseriis, 2015).

Modes of disidentification through the use of improper names, which disrupt the established order, generate new possibilities of freedom for the democratic subject to explore its multiple self. In contrast with other radical democratic approaches, the transformative perspective allows for a deeper reconfiguration of societal relations that constitute the identities of democratic subjects. However, as the notion of improper names particularly makes clear, these approaches only explain the becoming of *collective* subjectivities. What is problematic is that understanding democratic subjects primarily as condividuals or multitudes presupposes submission to group identity. While the subject is portrayed here in morphological terms, it has to go along with swarms and networked flows. These macro-political theories that concentrate on collective subjects need to be supplemented with a perspective that starts on the micro level and looks at society through the eyes of the individual subject.

Indeed, writers contributing to the transformative perspective alerts us: "the revolution against power and authority must involve a micro-political revolution which takes place at the level of the subject's desire" (Newman, 2010: 6). Yet, guidance on how to achieve such a micro-political revolution is scarce. I suggest that debates in gender and queer theory generate a promising outlook for the question of a micro-revolution. Enriching the politics of becoming with queer theoretical concepts will allow for a focus on the micro 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 association with other humans, objects and concepts. In contrast with notions of subjectivization, condividuals and multitudes, queer theory can help us center 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 personal level be reworked in participatory spaces?

Queering Democratic Subjectivity: Masquerade, Disidentification, and Resignification

Queer and gender studies have hardly been acknowledged by democratic theory (an exception is Lloyd, 2005). In the last section of this paper, I will employ queer and gender theory to explore the transformative potentials of democratic subjectivity as part of a politics of becoming. In doing so, the section pursues two objectives. First, it seeks to enrich democratic theory with the specific expertise of queer and gender theory regarding 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, with a view to exploring revolution at the level of desire that Newman calls for.

Hardt and Negri (2004) acknowledge the potential contribution of queer 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 transformative 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" (200). The authors are right in pointing to the subversive potential of the term queer politics, which goes beyond gay and lesbian liberation. Queering identity denotes an understanding of the self as fugitive, escaping and subverting the heterosexual matrix. However, I disagree with Hardt and Negri's claim that queer politics stands in opposition to identity politics. I rather go along with Butler (1993: 4) who suggests that queer morphology and (feminist) identity politics are compatible:

> 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.

I will argue with Butler that it is not about taking sides with either a politics of presence that affirms identity or a politics of becoming that subverts it, but rather about their mutual enrichment. If a politics of becoming is understood as the contingent performance of future selves (Connolly, 1996), which continuously rearticulates a subject-in-process (Lloyd, 2005) through embodied presence, then there is nothing that makes a politics of presence incompatible with a politics of becoming.

As discussed above, Rancière explains disidentification as the rejection of a name assigned by the police. Queer theorist José Esteban Muñoz (1999) conceptualizes disidentification in similar terms, albeit explaining it at a personal level. He describes various stories of people located at the intersectional societal position of queers of color, struggling to identify

themselves on account of 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 established societal hierarchies.

Muñoz recounts several personal incidents when he was drawn to identity performances of others not associated with his identity group, such as transsexual, gay, and female enactments of identity. Disidentification, thus, not only consists of the rejection of dominant interpellations but also of responding to alternative interpellations: "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" (Muñoz, 1999:12). Muñoz explains this in terms of a democratization of identity construction as subjects gain some degree of freedom in articulating their personae. This identity construction depends, first and foremost, on the deconstruction of hegemonic identity interpellations. Dominant discourses can, however, never be completely broken out of. Rather, democratic subjects have to work with the terms available: "disidentification 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 identity interpellations. Other than Rancière's focus on collective identities, such as the "German Jews" and Muñoz' sole relevance of disidentification to queer people of color, Butler explains how disidentification is relevant for everyone. She points to the potential failure of interpellations of broad categories such as "man". Binary gender categories do not acknowledge the wide variety of internal differences of people associated with these categories, so that even those who clearly identify as either sex might feel unease about the package of preconceptions and expectations accompanying these categories. In other words, even those who express their identities within cisgender categories of the heterosexual matrix might disidentify to a certain extent. With regard to disidentification, Butler (1993: 219) states that "it may be that the affirmation of that slippage, that the failure of identification, is itself the point of departure for a more democratizing affirmation of internal difference". Here, it becomes clear how queer and gender theory can contribute to a democratization of subjectivity at the micro, rather than at the macro level. It advances the freedom of the individual subject to position itself in relation to collective identities by exploring its inner multiplicity and embracing alternative versions of the self:

> 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. (Butler, 1993: 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, which I will return to shortly, can be understood in terms of a politics of becoming. Identity categories can be recoded to express the meaning of future and alternative selves.

While Butler is not a democratic theorist and only occasionally relates to democratic theory, her work on performativity has much to contribute to democratic thought (see Lloyd, 2005; Schippers, 2009). The term *performativity* draws attention to the naturalized effort it takes to produce identity. "Identifications are inscribed upon and incorporated into bodies" (Machin, 2015: 49). It hence depends on corporeal performances in line with established identity patterns. Butler explains all gender identities as parody and drag. By studying the gender crossings of travesty, she points to the citationality of gender performances. Identity is not merely discursive in the sense of linguistic/verbal construction. Rather, it is a corporeal enactment. Hence the body does not limit identity, rather it becomes the site of identity production. In this sense, Butler (1990: 50) employs the term *masquerade* as a mode of recitation of established identity performances: "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 corporeal identity performance as masquerade, what is of interest to radical democratic politics is how the mask is produced and which freedoms exist in this process. As the theory of performativity conceptualizes citationality as a collective process with no original author, freedoms to author identity seem to be fairly limited. However, the recognition that performative structures are the product of human interaction also opens up a perspective for remaking such structures: "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, performative structures of citationality in which subjects navigate provide space for renegotiation: "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).

Conclusion

This paper set out to overcome the confining logic of identity in participatory spaces, which "inappropriately freezes fluid relational identities into a unity, and can recreate oppressive segregation" (Young, 1990: 350). To this end, the paper employed several perspectives within radical democratic thought. Participatory and deliberative perspectives generate promising conceptions of self-transformation, which, however, are confined by a concrete path of self-development towards rational and civil deliberators. Agonistic approaches develop fruitful conceptions of identity articulation, but remain limited by their tragic horizon and the logic of hegemony. The transformative potentials of these theories are restricted by the limited societal

change they imagine. A transformative perspective within democratic theory, which has developed in recent years, provides a new vantage point with a focus on systemic transformation. Enriched with queer and gender theory, the transformative perspective allows for a politics of becoming, which imagines the democratic subject in transformative terms. According to Butler (2004: 4), "to remake the human", there needs to be an "interrogation of the terms by which life is constrained in order to open up the possibility of different modes of living".

Advocating a politics of becoming does not entail opposing 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 identitary categories, need to be rethought from a perspective of performative identity construction. Embodied presence is a performative act of becoming; it always entails a carnivalesque moment. The performativity of simply being there becomes apparent when Butler (2015: 87) asks: "is appearance not necessarily a morphological moment […]?". The body does not limit, but produces identity and allows for various enactments of the self (Machin, 2015). Hence, identity politics and the politics of becoming do not preclude each other. Rather, they interact and partly overlap in radical democratic politics.

But the concept of a politics of becoming, as developed here, needs to be questioned concerning its own limitations in providing the subject with the freedom 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 disidentification, as the interruption of identification, employed here contribute to alleviating this problem. The Rancièrian rupture affords a radical break (Rancière, 1999). Disidentification as the rejection of hegemonic identity interpellation further explains such a rupture at the level of personal identity (Muñoz, 1999). The fugitive self, which always escapes permanent reification through identification and representation, expresses different sides of its inherent multiplicity in moments of disruption. Rather than only stretching and negotiating the meaning of terms, discourses can be interrupted by moments of freedom and equality.

Another open question concerns how such experiences of disidentification can be practically realized. Since this is not the focus of this paper, I can only briefly gesture towards some answers. There are two sets of answers regarding disidentification outside and within participatory spaces.

External experiences of disidentification can contribute to the realization of democratic ideals within participatory spaces. One way of engaging in disidentification is through exercises of deconstruction and critique of identity categories (Mouffe, 1995a; Muñoz, 1999). The awareness of the hegemonic nature of discourse and a continuous interrogation of the everyday identity performances can contribute to personal experiences of freedom. Why do we wear the clothes we wear? Why do we describe ourselves in certain terms? Why do we use our voices in certain ways? What do we express through our body language? These and other questions

can guide us to a continuous de-articulation of everyday identity performances. Such disidentifications might then give way to new identity expressions or to an uncertainty of identity. Modes of disidentification can be acquired in institutions of socialization such as the education system where deconstruction could be learned and practiced. Disidentification can also be realized through psychotherapy. When subjects start to discover their own multiplicity, they will also deconstruct their prejudices toward others. These experiences can then be carried into participatory spaces.

Participatory spaces themselves can also facilitate disidentification internally. Here, practices employing anonymity can contribute to moments of disidentification through the interruption of the surveilling gaze of the police. Anonymity in various radical democratic practices, such as masked protesting, online debates, graffiti and pamphleteering, can contribute to personal expressions of the multiple self (Asenbaum, 2018a). Particularly online engagement provides the means to enact identity differently as a moment of anonymity is built into the communicative infrastructure. The body as digital object becomes a contingent reification of the self as it always needs to be reconstituted online (Asenbaum, 2019b). As de Lagasnerie (2017: 72) aptly notes:

> 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-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.

Another way in which participatory spaces can contribute to living the multiple self is on account of their sheer multiplicity. We experience ourselves differently in different contexts. Trips or long-term stays in other countries might bring out entirely different sides of our selves. In this sense, there also needs to be a variety of participatory spaces: from spaces claimed by social movements to those generated by state actors, from online to offline, from clearly structured to anarchic. The experience alone of taking part in a participatory process and the engagement with the formerly unknown others allows for some freedom to explore and potentially reinvent the self. It also needs the creation of counterpublics as safe spaces where alternative identities can be created and established identities transformed. Thus, a variety of different spaces and the frequent change between spaces can increase personal freedom.

In times of the increasing surveillance both online and offline, the hold of the Rancièrian police appears to become more powerful. This makes the task of finding ways to disidentify and free the fugitive self ever more pressing. Theories and practices of radical democracy have great potential in realizing such personal experiences of the multiple self. To radicalize democracy, we need a diversification of spaces, which allow to live the multiple self and increase the freedom of the subject to change.

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[1] "Radical democracy" is employed here as an umbrella term for various perspectives within democratic theory, which – while generating diverse angles – all promote the dissemination of participatory opportunities and a deepening of the democratic core values of freedom and equality. For such a broad conception of radical democracy see also Norval (2007), Saward (2003), and Warren (1996).