

Concept Paper Title: Experiments in Interfaces

Keywords: democracy, drawing, art, politics, public protest, public realm, public space, voting

Abstract

Purpose:

Exploring the need for 'neutral' public space located between the private act of voting and formal deliberative democracy, this paper examines two interfaces between everyday life and democratic politics and considers ways this territory can be a site for generative artistic practises.

Approach:

Many artists and architects work in the space between the individual and formal collective political processes. Speculating outward from two artworks by the author and drawing on the thought of Hannah Arendt, Rosalyn Deutsche, Chantal Mouffe, Bruno Latour and others, this paper maps theory to the territory and proposes a new framework for reconsidering the work of such practitioners.

Findings:

Three potentially fruitful avenues for exploration as artistic practice related to democratic interfaces are identified and discussed through examples.

Originality and value:

This exploration is part of a broader practice-led research project into models of public collaborative thinking within the context of artistic practice. Many argue that the public realm has been co-opted by neo-liberal political and economic forces, resulting in a sense of hopelessness that limits our ability to imagine anything else. This research reflects on artistic tactics that counter this sense of hopelessness. These practices often suggest alternative social structures, foster ephemeral (local) public spheres or propose spatial configurations that support these. This paper offers a useful framework for reflecting on the work of politically-engaged artists and architects as well as structuring new projects.

Introduction

Viewed from a position within everyday life, the formal apparatus of democracy can appear to be on the other side of an unbridgeable canyon or a tempered one-way mirror. In 2015, partly driven by an interest in what could be between there and here, the author made a drawing by tracing the marks she drew on a California election ballot.¹ In the same year, she made a large round table inscribed with a map incorporating six sites of extended protest.² These works distinguish two interfaces between ordinary life and the political systems within which it takes place.

The years since 2015 have brought striking changes in political landscapes in the US, the UK and Europe; that appear to indicate a growing disenchantment with democracy. Is it possible

¹ *Drawing for the Count*, 2015, pencil on A3 tracing paper

² *Table 18*, 2015, plywood, metal fasteners, 3.860 m diameter, seats 18 people.

that democracy requires more of its citizens than we are willing to do, are able to do and/or understand how to do?

This paper speculates from these two interfaces between everyday life and democratic politics – voting and public protest – and considers how the territory in which they operate might function as a site for generative artistic practises of public collaborative thinking.

Drawing for the count: Private voting

Marks on paper often have significant consequences. Lines drawn by colonial cartographers have resulted in huge loss of life, the oppression of whole peoples and migration on the global scale. Sykes and Picot's cartographers' lines on the map of the Middle East and the Radcliffe Line across the Indian subcontinent continue today to irritate intractably unstable situations that steadily undermine peace where it exists. Design drawings make other kinds of things happen. By specifying how something should be made, they set in motion actions that result in bringing new assemblages of things and environments into existence. Marks on roads, playing fields and sidewalks define lawscapes and rulescapes that control the movements of drivers and players. Within the context of everyday life in California in the early 21st century however, marking a ballot may be the average person's only act of drawing that has any kind of public consequences.

The form of ballot used in California requires the voter to link a name to a role or a proposition to a YES or a NO, by drawing a connecting mark between a solid bar and an arrow head. These slight lines combine into an enormous assemblage of marks on paper that is read as data in what sometimes seems a high stakes gamble. In tracing the marks made on a ballot paper for *Drawing for the count*, the artist separated them from their original purpose, but the new lines remain purposeful as a reminder that drawing has consequences. The traced lines reflect a way of looking at the world and document a desire that certain things happen.

In his book *Lines*, Tim Ingold notes the social, spatial and conceptual consequences of two kinds of lines which, after Paul Klee, he calls the *walk* and the *assembly of fragments*. The former, Klee's 'line on a walk' (Klee, 1972, p. 17) is dynamic and freely moving. The latter, 'a series of appointments' (Ingold, 2016, p. 75), is an assembly of lines connecting a series of points where each segment follows the shortest distance between points. Ingold relates these two types of lines to two ways of being in the world. He associates the *walk* with 'wayfaring' and its corollaries: story telling and the hand-drawn map based on personal experience. He relates the *assembly*, on the other hand, to 'destination-oriented transport', 'pre-composed plots' and printed route-plans (2016, p. 77). In our digital world, the lines we usually see are made up of pixels. Together these can appear to be any kind of line, but as assemblies of fragments like the drawing on a ballot, they are very much representative of Ingold's second worldview.

The verb *to vote* is derived from the Latin for making a vow or wish. *Poll* once referred to the head, as in the 'counting of heads', and a *ballot*, from the Italian *ballota*, was a small coloured ball to be placed into a container to register a vote. The words have meandered away from these original meanings such that today in California, citizens go to *polling* stations to vote by making marks on a piece of paper called a *ballot*. We do not vote with

heads, bodies, voices or balls. Nor do we assemble with our fellow citizens in any one place, as ancient Athenians may have done, to make our vows publically. Nevertheless, voting is a point of direct engagement with electoral politics and the ballot paper is the one interface with democracy that a citizen touches and manipulates. Strangely, although like all forms of government, democracy is both public and profoundly social, voting, our one guaranteed way of participating, is carried out in isolated privacy.

The aggregation of votes produces a social outcome. Yet the connection between the private act of voting and its social consequences is difficult to apprehend. Voting is disconnected from the things that usually bring meaning to human action: our relations with other people; the places we inhabit and the things (animate and inanimate) we value in those relations and places. Although this three-fold disconnection may be necessary to protect the process of voting from tampering, is it also possible that the distance it enforces between what is meaningful and the formal processes of politics chips away at our faith in democracy as a system of government? Can we cultivate and nurture more meaningful and rewarding kinds of engagement?

Table 18: Public protest

Occasionally, something happens and public spaces fill with purposeful social activity – celebration, protest, violence etcetera. Many of us nurture a notion that there is a connection between public space and democracy. But, what is that connection? In the ancient act of appearing in public to be counted, voting and the public display of position and opinion were one and the same. Today, although it is an official part of a public political process, the voting act is performed in private. Public protest however, sits at the opposite end of the spectrum. Although carried out public, its impact on political outcomes is indirect. Struggles between disparate groups with both each other and their governments are continuously disclosed and enacted in urban public spaces throughout the world. In many cities, certain spaces have become associated with struggles for freedom and democracy, even though in practice, they have also been sites of public violence and unforgivable abuses of state power. The names of some have become household words – Tahrir Square, Tiananmen Square, etcetera – they seem to have meaning even when exactly what happened there is forgotten.

Table 18 (2015) is inscribed with an imaginary city plan which includes six urban spaces that were settings of prolonged urban protests in the US, UK, Spain, Turkey, Ukraine and Egypt during 2011-15. The table is round so that each person sitting around it sees things placed on it from a different perspective. This work was partly inspired by the ideas of Hannah Arendt who sees the common world as made up of all the things that humans have made together. Our relation to this world, she writes, is like a 'table located between those who sit around it[. ... T]he world, like every in-between, relates and separates men at the same time' (Arendt, 1998, p. 52). But for Arendt, our common world only appears when 'things can be seen by many in a variety of aspects without changing their identity, so that those who are gathered around them know they see sameness in utter diversity' (1998, p. 57). *Table 18* was made to allow the possibility of symbolically occupying Arendt's metaphor – of practising, in an embodied way, the appearance of 'worldly reality' and thereby setting a stage for political life to emerge (Mancke, 2016).

Democracy and public space

The making and doing of the material world, as Marx and others have argued, is a fundamental feature of human existence. Everything humans do and make is accomplished through interaction, negotiation and cooperation. Being social activities, they must take place in some kind of shared space. Production and exchange are thus fully entangled in social and spatial practices (Paglen 2009). Democracy, as something we produce together, is also both social and spatial.

The construction of our world, including democracy and its interfaces, is conditional and never finished. It always retains the potential to change and be changed and this lack of fixity inspires hope *and* fear. In her essay 'Agoraphobia', Rosalyn Deutsche argues that public space is created by democracy (1996, p. 324). The foundations of social life are undermined when there is no monarchy or oligarchy to anchor a class system, thus rendering social relations contingent (1996, p. 272). State power, no longer derived from an external force, is now situated inside the social. But, because it is indeterminable, the social cannot hold a structure of meaning to which democratic power can appeal for authority. Deutsche argues that this is when democratic public space appears. A need for a space for conflict, negotiation and deliberation to occur arises precisely when the fixed social basis for authority disappears and the foundation of society turns into a purely conditional and contestable social entity (1996, p. 324).

In Democracy and Public Space, John R Parkinson asks whether physical public space is actually required for democracy to function. He investigated relations between democratic processes and public space in thirteen cities around the world. His findings point to politics as a *performed* physical activity. In contrast to the digital age notion that physical space is no longer important for democracy, Parkinson argues that today more than ever, *physical stages* are necessary for a democracy to function well, or even at all (Parkinson, 2012, p. viii). Public spaces are needed to allow citizens to carry out the roles that democracy demands of them. Parkinson lists four: 1) 'articulating interests, opinions, and experiences'; 2) 'making public claims'; 3) 'deciding what [...] or what not] to do, to address public claims' and 4) 'scrutinizing and giving account for public action and inaction' (Parkinson, 2012, p. 36). The first role takes place before any formal decision-making can occur, often informally wherever people meet whether physically or virtually (2012, p. 39). Capturing the whole variety of positions (2012, p. 31), which in Parkinson's view is essential to functioning democracy, however, does not always happen organically but needs to be helped along and physical public spaces are needed to do this.

For example, culturally based taboos that govern what we can talk about where, can have important consequences. Drawing on the research of Cas Sunstein on group polarization,³ Parkinson notes that a common taboo against talking about politics in many settings in English speaking countries combined with the dominant cultural emphasis on the individual and family means that political topics tend to be discussed only among family or friends who share similar opinions. In other words, fully free informal debate happens only when we are with 'the like-minded [...] in isolated "deliberative enclaves"' (2012, p. 40). Parkinson points out that whilst this can help marginalized groups, research has shown that it tends to push

³ Sunstein, C. (2002). The law of group polarization. In Journal of Political Philosophy 10 (2):175–95.

views in each enclave to become more extreme because of the lack of the 'moderating influence' of alternative perspectives (2012, p. 40).⁴

Applying Parkinson's findings indicates the need for spaces and techniques for bringing 'deliberative enclaves' together to enable the performance of the first role of deliberative democracy. But is it even possible to create public settings where narrations from all parts of a society can be elicited and heard? Can public space ever be sufficiently 'neutral' for this to happen? What about the conflicts that are bound to happen? And, as Deutsche asks, should democratic public space settle or sustain conflict?

Deutsche argues that our relationship with public space is laced with fear and she locates the roots of our fear in the fact that in democracy, 'the place from which power derives is what [Claude] Lefort calls "the image of an empty place"' (1996, p. 273). We maintain democracy by never allowing a potential tyrant to fill the centre of power, but we are at the same time frightened by the deeply unsettling empty centre. We are also afraid of the difference and disorder we might encounter in public space. Powerful public and private forces behind the development and maintenance of the physical public realm are mobilised to make public space more universally acceptable, more inclusive, safer and more secure. They exploit our fear to steer us away from conflict and toward a flattening consensus that, whilst comfortable, could also undermine democracy by suppressing the articulation of opinions and experiences in public – the performance of Parkinson's vital first role of the democratic citizen.

Some of us may hope that the resolution of difference and social change can happen peacefully with expressive protest being one of a number of ways that issues can be brought into public awareness. But at the same time, we want these activities to remain safe – to allow us to keep working, attending school and generally doing our thing. Our desires are contradictory: we want both complete freedom to use our public spaces for whatever we want, *and* we want them to be 'appropriately' controlled.

This desire for public space to be 'controlled' contributes to disagreements about the relationship between public space and the demands of capitalism. At the intersection of public space as sites of protest and commercial activity, are situations like one noted in the Guardian Newspaper in March 2014. The article reports that the mayor of Madrid began to call the city's Puerta del Sol square, the site of the *indignado* and other protests,⁵ an area where commercial activity is protected. In her view, '[p]rotests should be held in places where they don't hurt economic activity.' How can the plaza be called a protected area, as the union leader responded, 'when it's a public space that belongs to Madrid and its citizens?' (Kassam, 2014). Surely, the right to use a public space for different kinds of public expression should be protected against encroaching commercial activity, should it not?

Deutsche might see this as evidence that although most people believe that their support of 'publicness' supports democratic culture (1996, p. 269), their different understandings of the terms 'public' and 'democratic culture' bring diverse meanings into what seems to be an agreed equivalence. For some, 'democratic culture' might mean a consensual, largely

⁴ Consequences of this are painfully apparent in the political situations in the US, UK and other European countries in the late 2010s.

⁵ In 2013 alone, 391 public protest activities were held in the Puerta del Sol.

passive citizenry, whereas for others it might mean the existence of political activism. In the United States, the right to assemble has been upheld by the Supreme Court, but with conditions. Assembly is legal only as long as 'general comfort and convenience ... peace and good order' are maintained (Mitchell & Staeheli, 2005, p. 800). In this context then, democratic culture includes the right to use public space for political communication through assembly and protest, but only as long as it does not transgress an authority's view of what constitutes 'peace and good order.'

Jacques Rancière's distinction between two aspects of politics provides a useful tool for considering this dichotomy. In his formulation, the administrative and managerial side of politics, which he calls *The Police*, handles the everyday workings of local and state authority. *Politics*, on the other hand, comes into play with the emergence of situations and issues for which there are no protocols in place. *Politics* starts when *The Police's* rules are inadequate and new procedures are needed (Cvejic, et al., 2012, p. 75). Bruno Latour argues that everything that already has 'known consequences', 'habits of thought' or rules and/or protocols, is 'private' (Cvejic, et al., 2012, p. 73). Something becomes public and political when no one knows what to do and they must interact to figure it out. In this situation, any system for dealing with the matter will be 'performative' in the presence of a body of people, i.e., a public. In other words, any issue for which there is an administrative protocol in place can be handled without the engagement of a public and is therefore private. In this way of thinking, the public sphere does not emerge from a pre-existing private sphere, but rather is a series of small spheres that gather around specific issues. The public sphere(s) must be constantly reinstated as new matters of concern appear (Cvejic, et al., 2012, pp. 75, 79).

In Latour's view, matters of concern therefore are what bring political processes into being. As they arise and gather publics, they provoke *Politics* to deal with them. Latour notes that because this process is both difficult to understand and do, governing bodies tend to avoid it and instead try to improve management or governance. In other words, the state tends to fiddle with the workings of *The Police* exactly when we most need to be doing *Politics* (Cvejic, et al., 2012, p. 77).

Erick Swyngedouw points out that urban design, planning and architecture are among the core tools of the managerial side of politics. As procedures deployed to allocate 'people, things, and functions to designated places [... they] colonize and evacuate the proper spaces of the political[...].' In the attempt to produce 'cohesive' cities through their deployment, governments mobilize 'signifiers of inclusiveness (social cohesion, inclusion, emancipation, self-reliance), while reproducing in practice [...] clichés of urban doom (exclusion, danger, crisis, fear)'.⁶ By doing this, Swyngedouw argues, the State uses *The Police* to pre-empt potential conflict in public space (Swyngedouw, 2011: 2).

The business-as-usual model is disrupted when people take to the streets. Public protest is emblematic of citizens' efforts to change the political structures that underpin their lives. Protests offer opportunities for protesters to practise equality, organise and manage themselves and/or 're-configure public space in ways that suggest the possibility of a "new socio-spatial order."' *Politics* can thus sometimes be mobilized to reframe the logic of *The*

⁶ Trump's use of the word 'carnage' in his inaugural speech may be an example of this.

Police by hearing or registering as voice, what has in the past only been heard as noise (Syngedouw, 2011: 1-2), in other words, through the performance of Parkinson's first role of democratic citizenship.

In Chantal Mouffe's framing, the *political* is linked to the 'friend/enemy relation' found in all kinds of social relations (2010, pp. 248-9). The *political* is 'the ever present possibility of antagonism' (2010, p. 250). In her view, the aim of *politics* is to 'organise human coexistence under conditions that are marked by "the political" and thus always conflictual' (2010, p. 249). She argues that because collective identities are formed through public action and because a 'we' can only be constituted by distinguishing a 'they', public life cannot avoid antagonism (2010, p. 249). Furthermore, she argues that in order to thrive within the constant possibility of conflict, we pragmatically allow our social practices to be naturalised in a way that conceals their contingent character. But these 'hegemonic articulations' can be dismantled through a public process, which she calls 'agonistic struggle'.⁷ Mouffe understands that 'things could always have been different and every order is established through the exclusion of other possibilities.' Her 'public sphere' therefore, is a battleground where 'hegemonic projects confront one another, with no possibility whatsoever of a final reconciliation' (2010, p. 250).

Deutsche reaches the conclusion that the task of democracy and its corollary, public space, is to 'sustain' rather than to 'settle' conflict (1996, p. 270). '[P]ower stems from the people but belongs to nobody' (1996, p. 273) and public space is the place where rights can be declared and the way power is exercised questioned. Deutsche and Mouffe agree both that because these rights are multiple and not subject to consensus, public space exists as a site of irresolvable conflict. In their view, democracy moves towards authoritarianism precisely when this role for public space is denied (Deutsche, 1996, p. 275). A battleground is a situation where the fears and hopes of enemies coexist. Public space is therefore exactly the place where one person's hopes arouse another's fears, back and forth, endlessly.

Experiments in interfaces

Starting from two artworks that registered interfaces between everyday life and democratic politics and moved through the ideas of a diverse group of thinkers, this speculation proposes the in-between territory/battleground as a site for art practices that might be called experiments in interfaces. This paper is part of a broader practice-as-research project into modes of public collaborative thinking within the context of artistic practice. It might be useful here to touch on connections between an art practice of public collaborative thinking and the mechanisms of deliberative democracy.

In her essay 'Activist challenges to deliberative democracy', Marion Young usefully juxtaposes the positions of the activist and of the advocate of deliberative democracy. The latter believes that the 'best and most appropriate way to conduct political action, to influence and make public decisions, is through public deliberation [... and that d]eliberative democracy differs from [...] other attitudes and practices in democratic politics in that it exhorts participants to be concerned not only with their own interests but to listen to and

⁷ Mouffe distinguishes antagonism, the struggle between enemies, and agonism, the struggle between adversaries.

take account of the interests of others [...]’ (2001, p. 672). The activist, on the other hand, argues that the system that supports deliberative democratic processes is structurally unjust and inherently exclusionary. Because it is not possible to address fundamental injustices from inside a skewed system, a ‘good citizen should be protesting outside [...]’ (2001, pp. 673, 675, 677).

When viewed from the activist position, the mechanisms of deliberative democracy happen on the other side of the canyon/one-way mirror. An art practice of public collaborative thinking, however, might well experiment with bringing forms of deliberative democracy into art contexts. In the same way that *Drawing for the count* draws on its relationship to voting whilst existing in a completely different register from the actual electoral process, a gathering around *Table 18* might re-cast public protest and/or forms of deliberation within equally distinct contexts. The meaning of these activities resides not in how they resemble political processes, but rather in the possibilities they suggest for enacting, symbolising or rehearsing other ways of living, together.

Turning to the work of others for concrete examples of experiments in interfaces, three potentially useful categories of practice emerge: *practising*, *disclosing* and *re-grounding*. *Practising* involves embodying or trying out alternative forms of democratic political processes such as assembly, narration, self-management, debate, argument, negotiation and conflict etcetera. Another way of defining this might be: *practising* methods for shifting ‘we’ / ‘they’ (us and them) relations. *Disclosing* includes practices that create representations of matters of concern to particular communities/situations in ways that support the gathering of publics around them. *Re-grounding* encompasses practices that attempt to unsettle existing interfaces through some kind of de-normalising process. *Practising*, *disclosing* and *re-grounding*, are each simultaneously material, spatial and social. They are not discrete separate routes to pre-determined destinations, but rather interlaced meandering tendencies that combine materiality, spatiality and sociality in different ways and proportions.

Practising

A number of thinkers have noted how the durational protest of 2011-2015 offered unprecedented opportunities for trying out alternative processes of collaborative administration and politics (Haiven, 2014) (Thompson, 2015) (Stravrides, 2016) (Swyngedouw, 2011). The assembly of large numbers of protestors in public spaces within the context of potentially explosive situations and in some cases extreme weather forced demonstrators to organise structures for their own day-to-day survival. In such a situation as Syngedouw notes, politics appears as a public ‘practice of re-organizing space’ that ‘transgress[es] the symbolic order and mark[s] a shift to a new situation that can no longer be thought of in terms of old symbolic framings’ (2011: 3). This appears to describe something resembling Mouffe’s ‘hegemonic shift’ in action within the context of the protest space itself. At the very least, alternative forms of democratic processes were put into practise resulting in demands on the spaces and those gathered within them that were outside the terms of reference of *the Police*. This in turn generated a need for restructuring the terms to allow those demands to be symbolised, understood and, in a few cases, met (Syngedouw, 2011: 3). Although many of the demonstrations may not have achieved the

kind of change that protestors had hoped for, it may be too early to judge the longer-term effects of these experiments on the places and the social contexts in which they took place.

Through his *New World Summits*, Jonas Staal has orchestrated ambitious public forums where representatives of unrepresented or stateless populations and political organisations practise international politics together. The temporary physical structures he creates for the summits present a memorable aesthetic that lends the assemblies presence and gravitas commensurate with state-sanctioned forums. The forums provide a public stage where the groups can articulate their individual claims and *practise* alternative forms of world building together with other groups (Staal, n.d.).

Other artists work within formal urban planning processes to imagine and develop alternative procedures and systems. Imani Jacqueline Brown and her collaborators attempt to co-produce and practise alternative planning processes for housing development in New Orleans in order to eliminate structural injustices force poorer people of colour out of their homes. Their collective, *Blights Out*, 'seek[s] to demystify and democratize the system of housing development and expose the policies that lead to gentrification.' By forming a coalition of policy makers and artists and including people of all ages, races, economic situations, backgrounds and professions; the collective functions across interest groups. Rather than 'reinventing the wheel', the collective sees itself as *being the wheel*. (BlightsOut, 2015). *Practising* may be exactly this: becoming the wheel turning in a different, and hopefully as in the case of *Blights Out*, a more just way.

Disclosing

As long as it remains accessible, public space has the potential to function as infrastructure needed to support the gathering of publics around matters of concern. How this capacity might be mobilised through artistic practice is of primary interest here. Bruno Latour argues that the fundamental reason people assemble in a democracy is to address divisions over *concrete things* (Latour 2005a, p 14) as opposed to abstractions. In his view, political discussion stops when debate is confronted with 'matters of fact' (Forensic Architecture, 2012). In his view, any system becomes open to abuse as soon as the focus of debate moves away from concrete things. Latour presents Colin Powell's use of the 'fact' of WMDs as a reason for war to underline the kinds of abuses discourse that eschews *things* in favour of *facts* or *evidence* allows. By maintaining a focus on *things* within their *concrete* contexts, Latour argues, *dingpolitik* is incapable of supporting generalising rhetoric (Latour 2005b, p 998) and thus disallows ideologically driven debate.

Latour's discussion of *dingpolitik* appeared in the catalogue for an exhibition that aimed to 'rethink problems of representation in "both" scientific and political spheres' and to take advantage of art's ability to capture interest and provoke thought (Fox, et al 2010, p 199). For Latour and his *dingpolitik*, art is something that represents and draws attention to a matter of concern and consequently has an important role to play in mechanisms that assemble appropriate (legitimate) groups of interested individuals (representatives) around particular issues. For Latour, art contributes to the 'reformatting' required to do *Politics*, that is, to find appropriate protocols for dealing with situations where there are none already in place (Cvejic, et al., 2012, p. 77). This challenges artists and their images, objects, performances and other practices to actively participate in political processes.

The work of *Forensic Architecture* might be emblematic of a practice of *disclosing* with an important caveat that deserves further scrutiny. Whilst interrogating the situations they study in rigorous detail and communicating their findings with exacting clarity and exquisite imagery, *Forensic Architecture* goes beyond simply making issues visible. They use all means possible in an attempt to discover and present 'truth'. Their choice of the name 'forensic' with its association to judicial processes of collecting evidence and uncovering facts, intentionally reminds us that justice systems are deeply political. Participating in an early seminar hosted by *Forensic Architecture*, Latour challenged the gathering to consider what type of assembly could protect against the closing down of discussion which is 'obtained by the political epistemology of the matters of fact' (*Forensic Architecture*, 2012).

Another example of *disclosing* might be Krzysztof Wodiczko's, *Arc de Triomphe: World Institute for the Abolition of War*. The project proposes to encase the Arc de Triomphe in a scaffold-like structure that would reposition the memorial to 'the bellicose past' to become 'a gigantic object of research'. The Institute would 'offer an open-access invitation to all who wish to be historical witnesses, critical interlocutors and potential intellectual and activist forces toward a war-free world' (Galerie Gabrielle Maubrie, 2011). If realized, the on-going research represented and activated by the structure has the potential to become a site of continuous *disclosing*.

Taryn Simon's *The Will of Capital* may be an example of a different form of *disclosing*. Simon carefully examined how the signing of international trade agreements has been documented in photographs. By reconstructing and re-presenting the 'impossible' flower bouquets that adorned the tables of each signing, she draws attention to how the global economy that the agreements that support it distort our understanding of the real places in which we each live and thus *discloses* matters that should be of concern to all living things on earth.

Re-grounding

Mouffe writes of the difference between 'enemies' (people who are actively opposed or hostile) and 'adversaries' (opponents in a contest, conflict or dispute). Beyond the dictionary definitions, there is a sense that one can live with and even enjoy having many adversaries, but having enemies could get you killed. If, as Mouffe argues, humans constantly re-defined themselves in relation to 'others' as part of an *us vs them* binary, then it is important to also see that each issue cuts a different we/they fissure across gathered publics. For Mouffe, 'the crucial question of democratic politics is [...] to manage to establish the we/they discrimination in a manner compatible with pluralism' (Mouffe, 2010, p. 249).

Thinking through Mouffe suggests that to be meaningful, interfaces with democracy must engage with the ever-present potential for conflict. *Table 18* was informed by Hannah Arendt's use of the table as a metaphor for the world we build and share. The table is a device that joins, separates and offers a surface to display things seen together from different perspectives. A round table gives each person seated around it a different view. But sitting around such a table also constructs a unity that implies an 'us' that may obscure divisions that exist within any group. *Re-grounding* this practice might involve finding ways for co-participants to shift between antagonism, agonism and fellowship – in other words between being enemies, adversaries and fellow wayfarers.

An example of this kind of practice might be that of California-based artist Melissa Wyman. Wyman draws on her martial arts training to engage participants in combative collaborative drawing sessions. After providing a simple martial arts tutorial, she invites the gathered collaborator/fighters to publicly engage in an adversarial struggle for space within a 'shared' drawing (Wyman, n.d.). Re-situated into the context of physical conflict, the act of drawing something together turns from a visual/intellectual activity into one that is fully embodied. The insights the activity can provoke are also manifested in the body and as such might contribute to a recalibration of the participant's embodied understanding of human mutuality.

Possibilities for critique

The presentation of these three categories of practice so far suggests that their methods are value-free, yet the projects presented as examples have all been, to greater or lesser degrees, those that seek more open, more inclusive, more egalitarian or 'more democratic' structures. In fact, any of the methods can be employed by anyone toward any worldview or vision for the future and all three types of practice can be employed to generate unsafe or violent situations. Artur Zmijewski's *Them* (2007), which deserves much more scrutiny than is possible in this paper, may be a case in point. The work is presented as a film documenting a series of workshops to which Zmijewski invited representatives of four ideologically opposed groups. In the first workshop, each group was asked to create a mural representing their beliefs and values. Zmijewski had these printed onto t-shirts which group members wore in subsequent meetings. In the second gathering Zmijewski proposed a 'game' in which anyone could 'correct' anything in the room that they felt was problematic.

Over the course of the remaining workshops, the groups gradually defaced each other's murals and t-shirts, finally burning the former. The film is difficult to watch even though the participants maintain a surprising veneer of politeness throughout. The progression to more and more extreme behaviour appears hopelessly inevitable. But it is important to remember that the set-up, as a 'game,' gave participants permission to disrespect the images made by others, thereby inviting and encouraging retaliation and driving each group to be more extreme. Taking place inside the 'art world' as a series of 'workshops' may also have removed social barriers and/or the fear of physical violence that, in a real world situation, might have constrained participants' behaviour.

Does the conceptual frame provided by the three categories of practice outlined here, offer a tool for thinking about Zmijewski's project? *Them* sets up and documents a process in which opposing groups retrench into their ideological stereotypes right before our eyes. At the same time, there are no incidences documented in the film where participants actually *practise* the values they profess, nor is there any component of the game that suggests a potential for recalibration through *regrounding*. If we take the film at face value, however, it could be argued that it illustrates and exposes one way in which social division is normalized and could therefore be seen as an example of *disclosing* with a critical focus on identity and ideology (Lamont, 2012). It could also be argued, however, that in allowing and encouraging participants to alter emblems of belief made by other groups, the game appears to have been deliberately constructed to stoke anger and resentment between the groups. Another kind of game where participants are invited to make new emblems that combined the

beliefs of two groups or encouraged to propose changes by creating new versions of other groups' murals without defacing the originals, for example, may lead to very different outcomes. What is actually exposed in *Them* may be simply be that opposing groups have equal propensity to engage in or become victims of violence when invited to represent and proclaim their beliefs in a shared space.

Conclusion

In *Seeing Power Art and Activism in the 21st Century* Nato Thompson writes that '[b]uilding new worlds requires patience, compromise, and conviviality. It is a process of working in the world and with people. [...] If art is a dream, then it is a dreaming best done in – and with – the public' (2015, p. 164). Many of the projects noted in this paper are what might be called 'world building' practices. Not content to simply reflect back what they see, disrupt the status quo or imagine other possibilities, these practitioners actively engage political processes with an aim to construct new realities.

Many argue that the public realm has been co-opted by neo-liberal political and economic forces, resulting in a sense of hopelessness that limits our ability to imagine anything else. This research reflects on artistic tactics that counter this sense of hopelessness by suggesting alternative social structures, fostering ephemeral (local) public spheres or proposing spatial configurations that might support these. This paper identifies three possible categories of practise in this arena. Further work is needed to establish whether these provide a useful framework for critically reflecting on artistic experiments with interfaces between everyday life and democratic processes within the broader research context.

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