BOOK SYMPOSIUM

The Politics of Becoming

Introduction to the Symposium

Taina Meriluoto

Hans Asenbaum's open-access book *The Politics of Becoming: Anonymity and Democracy in the Digital Age* takes on some of the biggest questions in feminist and radical democratic theory. It asks, how we should understand who we are, and what implications our answer to that question has for democracy.

Asenbaum's book departs with the classical problem of identity-based political action. While recognizing the democratic merits of arranging democratic participation in ways that incorporate marginalized identities into arenas of decision-making, feminist scholarship has equally recognized how such identity-based practices tend to reify existing identity categories, and risk reducing people to mere representatives of those categories. Asenbaum's book asks how we could solve this "dilemma of difference." One way forward, says Asenbaum, is exploring the radical democratic potential of anonymity and disidentification. Building on feminist and queer theory, Asenbaum conceptualizes the self as a constantly shifting assemblage, and sketches the prospect of a "politics of becoming" that combines the potential for expressing marginalized identity with the freedom for the subject to change.

Such identity reconfigurations are a distinct feature, and a unique affordance of our current digital age. New communicative channels, says Asenbaum, provide novel means to articulate who we are. A key vehicle for this in Asebaum's thinking is disidentification, which allows us to distance ourselves from the identity performances of our everyday interactions and explore our inner multiplicity. For truly democratic spaces and futures, Asenbaum argues, we must make sure that our democratic practices recognize the multiplicity and the changing character of the self, and allow this multiplicity to be performed. It is only through such performances of the self, Asenbaum claims, that the democratic subject can truly be free and equal.

In this symposium, three democracy scholars with expertise in digital communication, international development, and community engagement reflect on the book's arguments. Anastasia Kavada starts us off by taking up Asenbaum's individual-focused proposition and expands it to democratic

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collectives. Kavada asks how collective identities can be conceptualized as becoming and investigates the processes and conditions that permit identity experimentation on both the individual and the collective level. Andrea Cornwall cautions us against the potential undemocratic perils of anonymity. Through the Durkheimian concepts of accountability and anomie, she asks whether anonymity might erode the bonds of democratic communities. Finally, Oliver Escobar explores how the understanding of the self put forward in *The Politics of Becoming* may be redefined as nested-I that is embedded in multiple social relations. This perspective, Escobar suggests, opens the view on self-transformation as enabled through social connectivity.

In his response, Hans Asenbaum argues that the politics of becoming overcomes the juxtaposition of individual and collective identity through the concept of overlapping and ever evolving assemblages. Identity assemblages are embedded in spatial assemblages and societal assemblages. The politics of becoming is not an individual undertaking but requires the connection of personal and societal transformations toward democratic futures.

Conceptualizing the Collective in the Politics of Becoming

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In *The Politics of Becoming: Anonymity and Democracy in the Digital Age,* Hans Asenbaum provides a compelling vision of a transformational kind of democracy that allows individuals the space to experiment with their identities. Asenbaum brings Judith Butler's notions of performativity and masquerade in dialogue with democratic theory and discusses how anonymity and pseudonymity, often facilitated by digital media, help individuals perform alternative identities that are not constrained by conventional identity markers. These markers place individuals within hegemonic "identity boxes" that restrict the potential to experiment with identities and thus reinforce existing inequalities.

Asenbaum's conceptualization puts forward "an ideal of democracy as the condition for self-transformation. It is not an ideal of overcoming identity, but one that sets free the multiplicity and personal variability of identification" (83). His vision goes beyond that of "difference" democratic theorists like Iris Marion Young, aligning more with the "transformative" perspective in democratic theory as defined in the work of theorists such as Sheldon Wolin.

However, while most of this literature "only explains radical democratic subjectivization on a collective level" (83), Asenbaum's account

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focuses resolutely on the individual. Indeed, Asenbaum seems weary of theories where the democratic subject is thought "primarily as condividual or multitude rather than as individual" (109), as this "presupposes submission to group identity," which limits the freedom for the individual subject to self-identify. Yet, the purpose of any democratic system is to offer a space of encounter where agreements and compromises can be reached, however provisional. Focusing mainly on the individual as the subject of identity experimentation may thus constrain the conceptual power of the politics of becoming.

In this essay, I reflect on how the collective and its identity can be conceptualized in line with Asenbaum's understanding of identity on the individual level. How can both individuals and collectives engage in the politics of becoming? How can collectives convene, see themselves and reflect on their identity not only in ways that leave space for individuals to transform their identity but also where this reconfiguration of individual identities is transformative on the collective level?

Conceptualizing the Multiple and Ever-changing Collective

I would like to start with a remark on the constructed nature of the "individual" and the "collective" and particularly of their sharp distinction. The flat ontology, on which Asenbaum's account of assemblage is based, differentiates "between entities in terms of degree rather than kind in order to avoid hierarchical or binary modes of thought" (Ash 2020: 345). This problematizes any conceptualization of individual and the collective as separate from each other. Instead, the individual and the collective should be viewed as points of entry into the phenomenon, as angles and perspectives through which we can observe and analyze reality.

Addressing these questions also demands a conceptualization of the collective and its common identity that is in line with the open-ended nature of the politics of becoming. However, the modes of collective subjectivization discussed by Asenbaum tend to disregard processes of commoning, where, for instance, individuals may come to consensual decisions about what the collective is about. Instead, Asenbaum focuses on modes of collective subjectivization where individuals have the freedom to align themselves with broad proclamations of collective identity and where "the 'We' is constructed as an inclusive space for (almost) everyone" (142). Examples include the Occupy movement and Anonymous. The collective is here defined with a "logic of aggregation" (Juris 2012), where an expansive affirmation of identity allows individuals to aggregate, like a swarm, under the same umbrella slogan or term.

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But what happens once individuals aggregate? Research on movements like Occupy (Kavada 2015) has shown that after participants gather in the same space, they start to engage in a painstaking process of defining what the collective is about. Such definitions may include statements and manifestos but also common guidelines around how to do things. This process of collective subjectivization does not necessarily close down experimentation but may allow a movement to remain internally diverse in its self-definition.

Thus, what is needed is a conceptualization of the collective and its "commoning processes" as sites of becoming not only for the individuals taking part in democratic politics but also for the demos as a collective subject. The work of social movement scholar Alberto Melucci can be instructive here. Much of Melucci's work focuses on how collectives, and social movements in particular, develop a collective identity. Melucci is rather unique among social movement scholars for his insistence on collective identity as a process rather than an outcome (Kavada 2009). He defines collective identity as

> an interactive and shared definition produced by a number of individuals—concerning the orientations of their action and the field of opportunities and constraints in which such action is to take place. By "interactive and shared" I mean that these elements are constructed and negotiated through a recurrent process of activation of the relations that bind actors together. (Melucci 1996: 70)

"Interactive" and "negotiated" in Melucci's definition point to collective identity as a continuous process through which the collective constructs and reconfigures itself. For Melucci, a movement's identity is internally diverse and ever-changing. This is why he advocated for using "identization" (1996: 77) to capture the dynamic nature of collective identity construction.

In my work (Kavada 2009, 2015), I have employed Melucci's conceptualization of collective identity to study how social movements use digital media to create heterogeneous and continuously changing collective identities. This research has discussed, for instance, how Occupy Wall Street participants engaged in a laborious effort of "commoning," to use Asenbaum's terminology, by putting together a shared statement about the movement's grievances. The statement was uploaded on the movement's website as a "living document," with activists using the internet's capacity for continuous updating to present the statement as something in flux and always under negotiation (Kavada 2015).

Social media can also prompt individuals to don the mask of the collective, introducing heterogeneity in the collective's self-definition.

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Francois Cooren (2012) proposes the notion of ventriloquism to explain how individuals bring the collective to life by speaking as the collective, while concealing the fact that it is an individual who animates that voice. As the case study of Occupy Wall Street showed, the social media editorial teams soon developed some common rules around how the collective should sound like to ensure a cohesive performance of the movement's voice, like "avoiding 'I' statements" (Tweeting for @OccupyWallStNYC) (Kavada 2015).

Although Melucci did not link his conceptualization of collective identity to democratic theory, the concept allows us to consider the demos' collective subjectivization as an open-ended process. It also helps us outline how the demos can offer the institutional conditions for individuals to be free in experimenting with their identity.

This points to a demos as an assemblage that oscillates between states of fixity and flux. Democratic decision-making requires some fixity: decisions need to be made and recorded, roles and responsibilities assigned, so that the demos can establish some kind of self-understanding of its purpose and boundaries. But this does not preclude the demos from also engaging in a process of self-reflection, in a critical assessment of its democratic model, of its rules and boundaries. In other words, processes of collective decision-making should focus not only on the wide range of issues that the demos must decide on but also on the constitution of the demos itself and on its democratic practices. This can open up a space of experimentation for both the collective and the individual, where the reconfiguration of identity on the individual level can animate the transformation of the collective subject and vice versa.

Understanding the demos as an assemblage can expand Asenbaum's rich conceptualization of the politics of becoming, allowing us to think of the individual and the collective as overlapping assemblages that are connected by continuous feedback loops, where the freedom to experiment with identities becomes a feature of the whole model and one that makes democracy more democratic.

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Anonymity, Accountability, and Anomie

Reflections on Anonymous Participation in "Invited Spaces"

Andrea Cornwall, King's College London

This essay explores two challenges to the democratic potential of anonymity outlined by Hans Asenbaum in *The Politics of Becoming: Anonymity and Democracy in a Digital Age*: the ramifications of disidentification in a time of growing political anomie, and the wider implications of this for accountability.

At the turn of the twenty-first century, when my article "Making Spaces, Changing Places: Situating Participation in Development" (Cornwall 2002)—on which Asenbaum draws to theorize democratic spaces—was originally written, there was much cause for optimism about the state of democracy internationally. To speak, as "Making Spaces" did, of an *efflorescence* of "new democratic spaces," focused attention on departures from democracy's "business as usual"—formal political arenas saturated with patriarchal elites who had made them their own. "Making Spaces" counterposed the rule-bound, restrictive realm of formal politics to the democratic potential of the new intermediary spaces that were opening up to "invited participation" (Cornwall 2002; Cornwall and Coelho 2006; Cornwall and Gaventa 2006). These "invited spaces," we suggested, were sites for contestation and transformation of power relations, in which a different set of rules of inclusion and representation gave social movements and civil society organizations the possibility to influence policies that affect their lives.

I suggest that anonymous participation complicates our understanding of representation, inclusion, and accountability in these kinds of arenas. Drawing attention to some of the downsides of anonymity, to which the book gives less attention than perhaps is warranted, I reflect on the implications of abandoning one key attribute that characterized the

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invited spaces that colleagues and I studied: face-to-face encounters between people who might otherwise never have met and who, through the process of deliberation, develop new relationships and understandings.

Anonymity and Anomie

Anonymity is a key practice in *The Politics of Becoming,* which envisions a democratic subject not based on fixed identity categories but as an unfinished process, free to explore its inner multiplicity. Asenbaum's argument that with anonymity the subject can explore a plurality of possible positionalities is attractive in a time of polarized public debate where people may hesitate to share what they actually think. When people's performances of self can come without preconceptions based on appearance, participating anonymously would seem to hold the potential of creating the Habermassian (1984) "ideal speech situation" so elusive in real life.

There is much to like about this idea. Anonymity can serve as a cloak to protect those who speak out or who challenge vested interests and entrenched social norms. Where visibility meets violent repression—for example, for LGBTQIA+ people in Yoweri Museveni's Uganda—it can offer safety for those seeking to create community. In situations where anomie has fractured social ties, it can make it possible for opinions and perspectives to be shared that might otherwise never be voiced let alone heard. Yet in such a context of anomie, anonymity—and these multiple, dissociated, expressions to which it can give rise—is a double-edged sword.

Who speaks, and *how* and whether they are *heard,* remains as inflected with societal inequities as in real life. There's no reason to believe that the "communicative strategies of elites" (Kohn 2000: 424) would not continue to be privileged within anonymized deliberative democratic spaces. Those socialized to expect to be heard may mask themselves with an avatar and alias. But the codes, tone, and other dimensions of speech into which they have been enculturated—which are inflected with gender, race, class, and other social inequities (Pauwels 2003; Tannen 1990)—are surely always already present when speakers interject from behind their mask of anonymity.

Anonymity opens up the possibility not simply of *non*-identification but of *dis*identification (Becker and Tausch 2013). This can manifest as a detaching of the self from a coherent, integrated identity that would include ethical concern about others, taking the humanity out of encounters between strangers. This can lead to a distancing of the self from the persona represented by the avatar, extending to detachment from any

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sense of responsibility over views that are expressed. John Suler (2004) calls this "the online disinhibition effect." Suler's account of disinhibition resonates with Asenbaum's account of subjects in the process of becoming; the self comes to be regarded not as singular but as an "intrapsychic constellation that may be, in varying degrees, dissociated from [the] in-person constellation(s) … that surface in and interact with different types of online environments" (2004: 325).

Fake news, threats, hate speech and conspiracy theories circulating in digital media may be driven by what Suler calls "toxic disinhibition" (2004: 321), the result of intrapsychic constellations dissociated from any sense of responsibility to others. As a result, Suler notes, the online self becomes "a compartmentalized self" that doesn't have to "own their behavior by acknowledging it within the full context of an integrated online/offline identity" (322). This raises the question of how being freed of the accountability that comes with representing a particular group or being a named individual affects participation in "invited spaces."

Anonymity and Accountability

Accountability in politics is often associated with transparency: seeing what is going on, being able to view who said or did what, and having the capacity to hold individuals and institutions to account. All of this disappears once anonymity permits people to hide their identities. What's to stop someone donning a persona and claiming to speak for a marginalized group? Or inventing stories or injuries and make accusations for which no accountability can be exacted, because the speaker can literally disappear?

There is an illusion of inclusion if many voices speak, but does this really disrupt in the radical ways Asenbaum suggests? Whether anonymous participation can "interrupt external hierarchy with internal democracy," as Asenbaum argues, comes to depend not only on whether people are able to speak their truths without fear of reprisal. One wonders, would there be the prospect of similar dynamics emerging in anonymous participatory spaces as in social media spaces—trolling, doxing, and all? Pseudonymity, the consistent use of an alternative name with which people can't be identified, offers a solution. Yet it also fixes identity, leaving less scope for exploring a multiplicity of possible versions of the self that is one of the most interesting ideas in Asembaum's book.

The lack of accountability consequent to anonymity might expose participants to sharper and more toxic forms of discrimination and abuse rather than "shielding their participants from external social inequalities,"

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as Asenbaum contends (2023: 2). The phenomena of multiple aliases—"sock-puppetry"—to manipulate and deceive in online spaces uses the cover of anonymity to marshal support or for pile-ons. The deployment of bot-generated tweets to inflame and incite on Twitter is a case in point (see, e.g., Fridman 2023). What anonymity gives license to may, in itself, be antidemocratic: attempts to silence the expression and exchange of alternative views, including ad hominem attacks on those who hold particular positions by what amount to masked assailants. This can give rise, in turn, to a politics of crude intimidation, rather than of inclusion.

Even without these kinds of dynamics, the very anonymity of anonymous participation mitigates against the kind of social bonds, friendships, kindred-spirit-ness that bonds people in participatory spaces and that accounts for the kind of respectful exchange of views among people who can see a fellow human being in front of them that "participation with a human face" makes possible. After all, the face has been described as the "organ of emotion," revealing truths about ourselves we may wish to conceal. Being among humans can demystify authority, build relationships across power differentials, humanize the practices of governance, and act as an antidote to the idea of those involved in public administration being "faceless bureaucrats."

Is there, I wonder, a risk that anonymity might *prevent* deliberation because it places people at a remove from each other, unable to perceive their effects on each other or build empathy or extend the benefit of the doubt because they remain behind a mask? Might, then, anonymous participation threaten the very possibility of open, participatory democracy, creating increasingly captured, closed spaces? It is with this, in an era of authoritarian populism and intensified political polarization, that we now need to contend.

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In/visibility, Public-Making and the Politics of Becoming

Oliver Escobar, University of Edinburgh

Coming from a family that struggled through four decades of dictatorship after the Spanish Civil War, I have never doubted the importance of anonymity in political life[1]. Hans Asenbaum's new book, *The Politics of Becoming: Anonymity and Democracy in the Digital Age,* takes the question of anonymity beyond the usual tropes. In this essay, I reflect on how foregrounding a politics of becoming generates actionable insights to advance participatory politics and democratic life.

In Asenbaum's account, anonymity emerges as a fundamental dimension of participatory politics not just for what it hides or protects but also for what it shows and enables. The book demonstrates that anonymity is not just absence, but a different kind of presence with its own political thrust.

In/visibility frames the scope of our change-making imagination. It throws into relief, or renders invisible, our shared imaginaries of what is possible, thinkable, and desirable. In doing so, it underpins the future-making power of new utopianism, understood as the "education of a desire for being and living otherwise" (Miguel Abensour quoted in Thaler 2022: 3). Although the politics of in/visibility is as old as human collectives, its structuring power is amplified in our era of "communicative plenty" with the unprecedented expansion of opportunities for communication (Ercan et al. 2019: 20).

Paraphrasing Anaïs Nin (1975), we don't see the world as it is, we see the world as we are. And whatever we are is constantly changing, in a

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state of becoming. This is good news for anyone longing for a substantial reassembling of our shared worlds. And this is a key aspect of the theory of change developed in Asenbaum's book: "democratic transformations of the self and society go hand in hand" (2023: 18). A politics of becoming, as a radical democratic project, thus unfolds in the shape-shifting spectrum of the politics of in/visibility. Here, the individual comes to the fore not as a unitary entity but as a relational milieu. This underpins Asenbaum's quest for a more capacious public sphere that can accommodate a democratic pluriverse of identity-building practices with transformative potential.

The premise of the book (i.e., as humans, we are constantly becoming) would seem obvious were it not for the stronghold of thinking orthodoxies prevalent in the last half century. Entire disciplines, and their practices, have been built on the notion that we are individually prepackaged bundles of relatively fixed preferences (e.g., the democratic subject must be representable and thus categorized; the market subject must be exploitable and thus segmented; the bureaucratic subject must be knowable and thus standardized). These world-making rationalities have become so prevalent that they often go unquestioned in mainstream political discourse (but see Brown 2015; Scott 1998; Stone 1997). Before the Schumpeterian turn in democratic thinking—and the groundwork it laid for the democratic elitism of the neoliberal project—thinkers like William James (2004) warned against reification and "the dangers of thinking that groups have fixed identities" because "identities change, develop, and mutate" (Bernstein 2010: 69)—a position that was subsequently emphasized by agonistic thinkers (e.g., Connolly 2005).

In the interstices of Asenbaum's suggestive prose, participatory democrats will find possible antidotes to the persuasive master narratives built around the pre-political identity of *Homo economicus* (cf. Sen 2009). As such, I read Asenbaum as challenging essentialist and foundationalist accounts in political science. For me, the corollary of this work is that the fundamental unit of political analysis is not the individual but its relationships—what some call "the nested-I," drawing on Ubuntu relationality as a counternarrative to Cartesian rationality (Bollier and Helfrich 2019: 89).

Thinking with Asenbaum about the "multiple-self" helps reclaim the collective dimension of the individualized self. Identities are always in a state of becoming because they are relational: we discover who we are at a given time through our dialogic engagement with the world as it manifests itself in others and through us (see Bakhtin 1984: 293). Identity appears thus inextricable from the collective—or as Ubuntu philosophy puts it, I am because we are (Murove 2012). Identity is the name we give

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to that emerging domain where the individual and the collective constitute each other. Moreover, identity is where our sense of individuality emerges as a dimension of the collective, which in turn renders visible the urgency of a politics of interdependence driven by care-full solidarities (e.g., Care Collective 2020).

The book would benefit from a stronger foregrounding of this relationality (the nested-I) as the non-essentialist core of democratic agency. Otherwise, at times, the book may be misread as pointing to an individualized notion of the political self, which may be misconstrued as shoring up imaginaries of radical individualism. As Aurora Levins Morales (2019: 55–88) argues, much historical storytelling has been anchored on individuality—leaders, martyrs, revolutionaries, despots—whereas the history of communities, collectives, crowds, movements, publics, and counter-publics is often harder to tell (but see Graeber and Wengrow 2021). A politics of becoming must arguably be a politics not just of the multiple-self but of the nested-I.

Future work toward a politics of becoming must also grapple with the challenge of understanding how multiple selves engage in the constitution of multiple publics. A politics of becoming must recognize that participatory processes do not capture a public that is "out there." Rather, they generate publics through a range of public-making assemblages. Part of the challenge is recognizing the tension between public-making processes that assume fixed identities and those that make space for emerging identities. This interplay may generate new forms of collectivity and solidarity as a tangible manifestation of a politics of becoming.

Asenbaum's book opens lines of inquiry that, as shown in these reflections, can be taken into various domains. But it also leaves a healthy dose of unfinished business: for example, the spatial metaphor that dominates the field of public participation too often directs our gaze to the visible frontstages of participatory processes, whereas many of the most consequential dynamics unfold in *backstages* that are usually rendered invisible in theoretical and empirical accounts (Escobar 2015). That is one of the crucibles where the politics of in/visibility meets the politics of becoming through public-making work. For instance, the invisible work done backstage by organizers of participatory processes summons particular types of publics with potential to either reproduce or transform the status quo.

Another area for further development relates to Asenbaum's exaltation of the multiple-self. I wonder whether there is a risk that extolling the virtues of the multiplication of selves may erode the sense of a coherent narrative of self, capable of sustaining political agency. Is fragmentation and thus potential disconnection the price for decentering the

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self? Or does decentering speak to the networked self, the nested-I, thus multiplying its connections and agency?

Asenbaum's book is infused with much needed critical optimism: the politics of becoming is a politics of possibility, but it is not naive about the constraints and affordances of a present often trapped by the past. It remains to be seen what contribution a politics of becoming can make to the urgent democratic transformations needed for tackling the key challenge of our time: mobilizing collective capabilities not for "mastering Planet Earth" (Thaler 2022: 165) but toward its shared stewardship.

NOTE

1. For a longer version of this essay please see: https://www.research.ed.ac.uk/en/publications/invisibility-public-making-and-the-politics-of-becoming

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Embedding the Multiple Self in Democratic Transformations

A Response to my Critics

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I would like to express my deep gratitude to Taina Meriluoto for her thoughtful curation of this symposium. I am honored and humbled by Anastasia Kavada, Andrea Cornwall, and Oliver Escobar's deep engagement with my work. There is a surprisingly clear convergence among their points of critique. Kavada is concerned that my account of the politics of becoming focuses too much on the individual level and neglects collective processes of subjectivization; Cornwall worries that online anonymity may lead to anomie by eroding the social fabric of face-to-face encounters in invited spaces; and Escobar points to the nested nature of identity whose becomings are possible only through relational engagements with others. I cherish this critique and hope that my response, however short, may ease some of these concerns.

Democratic theories' accounts of identity are rich. From early feminist debates on identity politics and representation (Mansbridge 1999; Phillips 1995) to agonistic conceptions of identity articulations through social movement–led struggle for hegemony (Laclau and Mouffe 1985), these accounts share one feature: they focus on group identities. Accounts as diverse as William Connolly's (1991) *Identity/Difference* and Amy Gutman's (2003) *Identity in Democracy* situate their debate primarily on the collective level of identity articulation. This focus on collectivity is valuable and important. Kavada is right to argue that democracy is always a collective endeavor. Cornwall's accountability and Escobar's relational nestedness are key features of democracy.

What remains underdeveloped through the established focus on collective identity in democratic theory, however, is the democratic freedom of expressing and crafting one's own identity. Michaele Ferguson aptly points to the problem of democratic theory's overemphasis on commonality, which undermines personal freedom: "The allure of commonality is that … it promises that we can know with whom we can share democracy, that we can therefor trust them and accept letting them make some of the decisions. Yet to orient ourselves to political freedom is

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to acknowledge that the outcome of democratic action cannot be controlled, that they are and always will be uncertain" (2012: 8). In contrast to the controlled settings of prestructured democratic innovations that fix participants' identities, we need democratic serendipity (Asenbaum and Hanusch 2021) to enable spontaneous eruptions of democratic agency that allow for new identities to emerge (Asenbaum 2021, 2022).

The freedom of constructing our own identities is never experienced or generated in isolation. Identification—just like democracy itself—is always a collective endeavor. It rests on the recognition and construction of similarity and difference (Connolly 1991). The aim of the politics of becoming is not cutting the ties of the individual with society but to gain personal agency over how one perceives oneself and how one is perceived by others. This is why I situate self-transformations in democratic spaces (chap. 2), which are constituted as assemblages of material objects, human and nonhuman bodies, and performative expressions. Identity can never be freely chosen, but is constructed within this, indeed, nested web of relations. We are often unaware of how much agency over producing our selves we actually have. The politics of becoming is a reminder and maybe even a wake-up call to explore our inner multiplicity and actively craft our identities.

Kavada argues that the demos constitutes itself as an assemblage of many individuals. I agree but also push beyond this thinking by arguing that not only the demos but member of the demos is made up of assemblages. Once we understand what is called "the individual" as an assemblage of blood flows, bacteria, medicines, clothing, discursive concepts, opinions, and social protocols, then we can start thinking about how to reassemble our selves (chaps. 1–2). The crucial point I want to establish here is that the assemblage thinking I employ overcomes the idea of individual versus collective altogether. Rather than thinking about individual freedom from society, I think of personal agency as one component of a heterogenous assemblage of the self that is internally diverse and externally connected to the various components of democratic spaces and society at large.

Making sense of the self and society as interconnected assemblages opens the view for structural transformations. Building on Wolin, Ranciére, Hardt, and Negri and other radical democratic thinkers, I propose the politics of becoming as part of a progressive movement toward democratic futures (chap. 4). When each of us explores their inner multiplicity and musters the courage to be otherwise, just for a moment, we can seed a democratic microverse. By coming together and claiming democratic spaces, a democratic microverse prefigures alternative futures (chap. 7). Marquis Bey beautifully articulates the mutual interdependency

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of our self-transformations: "We might become anything at all, something wildly other than what we are, and in order to give in to that we need to be encountered by a world that really, actually truly holds and loves us by never, ever presuming to know what shape we will take, what we will want, before we show up" (2022: 6). Here we return to Ferguson's argument for letting go of control and giving in to the unforeseen, which opens spaces for democratic transformations.

The Politics of Becoming, then, does not articulate an argument for individual identity construction that is somehow isolated from society. Much rather, my argument erodes the boundaries between individual and society by conceptualizing them as interconnected and interdependent assemblages which are always in the process of becoming. What our times of deep crises call for is the recognition of this transformability. Both society and self are the product of our making, of our situational engagements. We need to seize this moment, to remake our selves and societies if we want to sustain human and nonhuman life on this planet.

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