Editorial Introduction

Democratic Self-transformations

Identity, Performance, and the Politics of Becoming

Hans Asenbaum and Taina Meriluoto

Our selves are characterized by inner multiplicity (Elster 1986). Our raced, classed, gendered, and sexed identities are intersectional (Crenshaw 1991; Wojciechowska 2019). Depending on the context and our state of mind, we are parents, employees, dancers, slackers, victims, perpetrators, players, hosts, explorers, altruists, or egoists. We are all these things at once and consecutively. We change and grow. Our identities are never permanent but always in motion, being transformed through our performative engagements (Lloyd 2005). We are constantly becoming.

The contributions to this special issue ask how the understanding of the self as multiple and becoming challenges and expands the scope of existing democratic theory. Acknowledging freedom and self-determination as core ideals of democracy, we ask how participants in democratic politics can actively engage in crafting their own identities. Considering equality as another core ideal of democracy, we reflect on how a multiple and transformative self may augment the "politics of presence," which advocates for the corporeal engagement of marginalized groups, bringing their lived experiences into democratic spaces (Phillips 1995). Recent contributions that argue for a more contingent and performative understanding of identities in terms of claim-making (Saward 2010) or discursive representation (Dryzek and Niemeyer 2008) threaten to obscure identity altogether. These approaches overlook the importance of identity as a source of empowerment for democratic agency (Machin 2022). Rather than overcoming identity, the contributions to this special issue seek to preserve the empowering function of identity while at the same time allowing for the exploration of inner multiplicity and self-transformation.

So, how can the politics of presence be further developed through the lens of performativity? How can radical democratic engagement do justice to our intersectional identities and multiple selves? In answering

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these questions, we seek to open perspectives toward a politics of becoming—a radical democratic strategy that allows for living our inner multiplicity while simultaneously advancing equality and inclusion of marginalized identities (Asenbaum 2023; Connolly 1996).

The digital age affords new means of self-expression and self-creation. Articulating and exploring identities via social media allows for more freedom in curating and constructing the self. Identities emerge as digital assemblages of images, selfies, avatars, hashtags, pseudonyms, GIFs, and emojis (Meriluoto 2023; Papacharissi 2011; Walker Rettberg 2014). Anonymity plays a crucial role in these modes of self-expression as the act of going online always necessitates a rearticulation of the self on screen. Digital communication harbors the potential for disidentification—for distancing our selves from our everyday identities and temporarily being otherwise (Rancière 1999). Our online and offline selves, however, are not separate. Rather, they form hybrid assemblages (Asenbaum 2021). Online expression extends our performative repertoire. Hence, this special issue explores democratic opportunities, challenges, and hazards of self-expression in the digital age online, offline, and in hybrid modes of communication.

First, in "Becoming through Detachment: Displacement, Unframing, and Disidentification in the Brazilian June Journeys," Ricardo Fabrino Mendonça and Ângela Cristina Salgueiro Marques focus on identity deconstruction by drawing Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, Jacques Rancière, and Judith Butler into conversation. With illustrations from the 2013 protests in Brazil, the authors argue that challenging established identifications through detachment constitutes a central dimension of becoming.

In "Becoming Visible: Corporeal Politics, Spaces of Appearance, and the Miss America Protest," Moya Lloyd picks up the Rancièrian concept of disidentification. In contrast to its established interpretation as abstract and discursive, she argues for *embodied* disidentification and shows how hitherto invisible populations achieve visibility. Amanda Machin's "Performances of Death: Hunger Strikes, Discipline and Democracy" deepens the exploration of embodied self-transformation. She claims that through hunger strikes, bodies become political subjects. In "Justice and the Politics of Identity: Becoming and Structure in Iris Young," Michaele Ferguson revisits the work of Iris Marion Young. Ferguson advocates a structure-oriented account of a politics of becoming that goes beyond individual identity transformation and envisions a deep reconfiguration of society.

The next two articles take us to the digital realm. In "Who Is the Digital Sovereign?" Rahel Süβ challenges liberal readings of sovereignty in digital democratic experiments. By drawing on radical democratic theory she conceptualizes the digital sovereign as subject to self-transformation.

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In "'This Forum Is Not a Democracy': The Role of Norms and Moderation in Cultivating (Anti-)democratic Incel Identities," Jennifer Forestal traces incel identities from their surprisingly democratic and inclusive origins to current anti-democratic and misogynistic iterations and argues that these changes are due to not online affordances but to group norms and moderation practices.

In its final section, the special issue takes us from the politics of presence to the politics of becoming. First, Anne Phillips revisits her original concept of the politics of presence in light of current political developments. In conversation with Hans Asenbaum, she reflects on essentialism, anonymity, and the multiple self. Finally, a symposium with contributions from Anastasia Kavada, Andrea Cornwall and Oliver Escobar critically engages with Asenbaum's new book *The Politics of Becoming: Anonymity and Democracy in the Digital Age*.

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