The Art of Making Democratic Trouble
Four Art Events and Radical Democratic Theory
Elín Hafsteinsdóttir
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To Esja
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The Art of Making Democratic Trouble
1. Introduction

In these times of alleged post-politics, where the political discussions in our democratic institutions are said to be more about numbers and details than ideas and political transformations, we every now and then observe emotions running high and political dissensus emerging in the wake of an art project. A seemingly ordinary art event spreads beyond the exhibition walls and engages a large number of people instead of the more usual group of gallery or museum visitors and art professionals.

We have long known how the arts can be political in the sense of highlighting certain issues or giving voice to those silenced in the mainstream debate. By problematizing sedimented norms and practices, art can make trouble in the dominant order, and a good example of this is feminist art with its close ties to feminist political activism. Today’s art events, however, spread with such a speed and in such a multiplicity of media channels that public discussion and interaction occurs in an unprecedented way. The new information technology has made the discussion more international and more direct.

The amount of attention is often assumed to be planned by the artist, with provocation as a potential intention. The artists are in other words anticipated as wanting to make trouble. Even if that would be case, as philosopher Jacques

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1 A key argument made by theorists describing a post-political or post-democratic order is that an overly strong normative emphasis on achieving political consensus has led to a narrowing of the field for political visions and of what is considered politically possible. Furthermore, they describe a lack of radical alternatives to the hegemonic liberal order as well as the risk of decreasing levels of democratic and political engagement by regular citizens. See e.g. Chantal Mouffe, *On the Political* (London: Routledge, 2005); *Agonistics* (London: Verso, 2013); Yannis Stavrakakis, “Challenges of Re-Politicisation: Mouffé’s Agonism and Artistic Practices”, *Third Text* 26, no. 5 (2012); Wendy Brown, *Politics Out of History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001); Jodi Dean, *Democracy and Other Neoliberal Fantasies: Communicative Capitalism & Left Politics* (Durham: London: Duke University Press, 2009); Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (London: Verso, 2006).

2 Feminist art has worked both as a way of including experiences that earlier had been excluded but also been in close relationship with activist feminist politics, targeting both the male dominance of art institutions and political issues such as rape, heteronormativity and racism. One contemporary example is Zanele Muholi, a South-African artist who through her photographs is producing an archive of black lesbian women who otherwise would risk being made invisible and excluded from history writing. See Zanele Muholi, *Only Half the Picture* (Cape Town: Michael Stevenson and STE, 2006). There is a large body of research on feminist art, see e.g. Griselda Pollock *Vision and Difference: Femininity, Feminism, and Histories of Art* (London: Routledge, 1988); Linda Nochlin *Women, Art, and Power and Other Essays* (London: Thames and Hudson Ltd, 1989).
Rancière claims, a political intention does not always lead to the result wished for by the artist:

Film, video art, photography, installation and all forms of art can rework the frame of our perceptions and the dynamism of our affects. As such, they can open new passages towards new forms of political subjectivation. But none of them can avoid the aesthetic cut that separates outcomes from intentions and precludes any direct path towards an ‘other side’ of words and images.³

Expressed in a different way, there is nothing predestined to happen through the exposure of an artwork. This becomes even more evident in art events where some participants may not even have seen the actual artwork themselves. The artworks can evidently activate articulations far beyond any original intention of the artist.

I argue that in order to interpret the debates following some artworks we need to read the events through a democratic theoretical framework. The democratic and political meaning of these art events needs to be interrogated, as well as how the strong emotions (passions) articulated in them are linked to political issues: political in the sense of moving from the simply particular demand to the universal. This aspiration, to better understand the trouble happening in these reoccurring art events, is the starting point of this thesis.

There are clear differences between public discussions spurred by an art object and other more conventionally presented political issues. The art events seem characterized by an unpredictability in the matter of which art objects spur a debate at all, how that debate turns out to be, who will engage in it and what they will talk about. The debates surrounding art events often erupt with a strong force, dominating the headlines of the day and some stay in the spotlight longer than others. Besides unpredictability, they are characterized by temporariness, ranging from fleeting alliances to unclear end points. This is in contrast to the more traditional venues where the debate is dominated by organized interests, such as political parties and non-governmental organizations, and by clear goals of change in terms of, for example, law or policy. The art debates also differ through being generally non-organized, in the sense that they are not framed by, for example, a deliberative aim to engage citizens in political processes. Clearly, our regular modes of analysing the conditions of democracy, such as legitimacy, representation, participation or institutions, will not suffice here.

I argue that post-structuralist radical democratic theory provides the means by which we can analyse the formation of democratic subjectivities and interaction in non-traditional political venues. The domain of arts is no stranger to radical democracy; on the contrary, it can be argued that its engagement with imaginary horizons, articulations of political demands and the constitution of

political and democratic subjects makes it especially apt for an analysis of these forms of art events. Democratic theorist Chantal Mouffe sees “critical artistic practices […] as crucial dimensions of the radical democratic project”. Yet, I argue that within radical democratic theory there has not hitherto been placed sufficient attention on the subjectivities and interactions following these kinds of art events. Art objects are mostly dealt with as examples, isolated from their context and their reception. In short, this thesis starts with a curiosity not only regarding the empirical events but also concerning how they can further our understanding of radical democracy.

Art, dissensus and democracy

When studying the conditions of democracy, we need to pay attention to the everyday happenings within democracy. It is not enough to focus on the big events such as elections, key parliamentary debates or popular uprisings. Everyday practices engage us as citizens in sharing a democracy and having to deal with conflict and disagreement on political issues. By analysing how citizens interact in a democracy we can more fully analyse the core issues of democratic subjectivity; how it is constructed, upheld and challenged. Political theorist Aletta Norval gives an account of democratic subjectivity by focusing on “what it demands in terms of our relations to others and, hence, of democratic community” and further looks to Stanley Cavell when stating that:

[…] in speaking we take up positions vis-à-vis others, and these positions encompass obligations and expectations. Individuals thus bear responsibility for their responses and judgements within a shared form of life.

This shared form of life that Norval speaks of, the life among others and of sometimes sharing a democracy, relates to political theorist Bonnie Honig’s assertion that democracy is “always about living with strangers” and “about being mobilized into action periodically with and on behalf of people who are surely opaque to us and often unknown to us”. How we relate to these

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6 Bonnie Honig, Democracy and the Foreigner (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), p. 38. It is worth mentioning that critique has been put forward of what is considered the left’s preoccupation of democracy. Jodi Dean, for example, claims that “leftists proceed as if democracy were the solution to contemporary political problems rather than symptomatic of them, rather than the name of the impasse in which we find ourselves”, in Democracy and Other Neoliberal Fantasies, p. 76. See also Wendy Brown, States of Injury: Power and Freedom in Late Modernity (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), p. 14.
strangers that we are sharing democracy with in an everyday context becomes in this perspective not a marginal issue but an ongoing and essential question.

We are, in other words, engaging with the crucial question of a democratic community, how different subjects identify and engage with each other and with a particular democratic and political order – and with the contingency and exclusions of that order. Or as Rancière writes on the question of community: “[h]uman beings are tied together by a certain sensory fabric, a certain distribution of the sensible, which defines their way of being together; and politics is about the transformation of the sensory fabric of ‘being together’.”

This introductory chapter will firstly present the aim of the study and frame it within a post-structuralist radical democratic framework. Thereafter, four selected art events that comprise the empirical objects will be introduced as well as a discussion of what an art event is. As the study has an interdisciplinary character, this will be discussed. The research questions will thereafter be presented and framed within a methodological context. Some core methodological decisions, such as selection of events and empirical material, will be presented, and lastly an outline of the study as a whole with an outlook towards the following chapters will be offered.

**Aim of the study**

The overarching aim is to analyse the conditions of democratic exchange and political speech. The study thus moves beyond a focus on the potential political dimension of art and instead emphasizes the exchange that can happen in the wake of an art project. Analysing the interaction that takes place in an art event makes it possible to engage with the conditions and boundaries of speaking politically and the construction of legitimate political and democratic subjects.

The aim is, thereby, to track how a space of conflict, a space of political and democratic articulations and subjectivities, opens up, develops and eventually fades away. This will be attempted by bringing four selected art events into dialogue with post-structuralist radical democratic theory. Key names within this field include political scientists Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe with their influential work *Hegemony and Socialist strategy*, after which Mouffe has further developed the theoretical framework of radical democracy, or what she calls in her terms, agonistic democracy. Besides Laclau and Mouffe, Jacques Rancière, Judith Butler and Aletta Norval will also be in focus.

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7 Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator*, p. 56.
The choice to focus on the democratic and political dimensions, I will argue, is in line with some of the theoretical needs within post-structuralist democratic theory indicated Norval when she emphasizes the “need to develop a deconstructive account of the relation between agreement and disagreement at an ontic level” as well as stating that “greater consideration has to be given to the forms of subjectivity appropriate to democracy, both with respect to the latter’s institution and its maintenance”. The study contributes to this theoretical field from the point of the four art events, as the analysis of the interaction in the art events discloses the very contestations and articulations that construct the relation between disagreement and agreement. By interrogating, for example, how having a political voice is negotiated and contested, we gain insight into the more general ways political subjects become constituted. Similarly, I argue that by studying the different responses in an art event we can better understand the conditions of a democratic exchange in, for example, opening up or closing down an interaction.

The constitution of political and democratic subjectivities needs to be considered in non-typical democratic sites as well as the more established ones. Analysing the conditions of speaking politically or democratically therefore includes looking for boundaries and limits, and as Judith Butler states: “[t]he limits are to be found where the reproducibility of the conditions is not secure, the site where conditions are contingent, transformable”. The unconventional form of art opens up exactly such a potential space where we can distinguish the processes of sense-making, ordering of meaning and trouble-making.

To summarize so far, the overarching question for the study is as follows: What is the democratic and political work that the art events do? More specifically, the study aims to answer: What do the art events say about the conditions of speaking politically? What do they say about the conditions of a democratic exchange, claims and responses, and the identification with a current democratic order/community? How can we interpret the often strong emotions in these events?

Four events have been selected for the analysis, two from the Netherlands and two from Sweden. The events all occur within a relatively short time peri-

12 Norval, Aversive Democracy, pp. 54-55. Exploring these appropriate forms connects to the wider issue of normative issues within post-structuralist theory, where an argument has been made that there is a normative deficit within the field, see e.g. Simon Critchley, “Is there a Normative Deficit in the Theory of Hegemony?” in Laclau: A Critical Reader, eds. Simon Critchley and Oliver Marchart (London: Routledge, 2004), 113-122.
13 Butler, Undoing Gender, p. 27.
od: 2006, 2008 and 2009, 2012, respectively. The choice to include events from two different national contexts allows for reading the specific characteristics of each event while at the same time reading the events with and against each other.

The analysis is performed through a set of research questions posed to each art event. While the four selected events have strong similarities they nonetheless develop differently. These contrasts will be taken into account through a slightly varied theoretical emphasis in the analysis of each event, focusing on key concepts such as making trouble, voice, representation, intelligibility, hegemony and legitimacy. The chosen order of the empirical chapters covering the art events correspondingly reflects a certain theoretical movement. By choosing this strategy, the aim is to keep the perspective of each event as a unique study with its own particularities, although all are analysed through a common framework. The empirical particularities become the means for focusing on the theoretical conceptualizations most relevant to the specific event, as well as for a more extensive discussion of those conceptualizations.

The design of the study is inspired by Sara Ahmed’s work *The Promise of Happiness* where she chooses to “track” where the term happiness goes. By using the word track rather than, for example, trace, Ahmed points to a different direction than the expected backwards motion. This has bearing on my study where I try to track the political and democratic possibilities and boundaries of a certain space that arises. Through tracking the development of these art events I will be including empirical material from traditional media such as newspapers, television and radio and also from social media and, for example, comments made on newspapers’ websites. The tracking is a way of following the exchange and the space of conflict as well as for guiding the analysis when it comes to contextualization. Contextual factors are selected and included in the analysis based on the tracking of each event.

*What is an art event?*

Generally, cultural objects are mainly studied within art history, or more recently within cultural studies, but as I am looking at them as political and potentially democratic events my approach is in many ways different. I am therefore much less interested in the object per se, but more in what the object catalyses. This means that I do not limit the art event to the initial art object but also include in the event the responses and, in turn, counter-responses from the artists. In other words, my objects of study include both the object and the responses.

A core requirement in the selection of events is the existence of a public engagement, that is to say objects that have not been exhibited or discussed are not of interest here. Derrida draws attention to this exclusion of “whatever

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14 The research questions are presented on pp. 25–26.
does not have the visible outline, the theatrical form or the official title of what people call *events*: that which could be, or must have been talked about*. As the aim of the study is to analyse the interaction and the subjectivities within it, this exclusion seems to be necessary to make. Nonetheless, I have chosen to keep some of the inevitable tension regarding what becomes an event and what is a non-event by choosing one event that comes close to becoming a non-event. As will become clear, another common denominator between the different chosen events is an attachment to some form of democratic institution. The question of art and its autonomy has been highlighted in relation to an increased “corporization and marketization of the artistic field”. All four art objects in this study have been commissioned by public organizations or institutions.

The art objects themselves are to be engaged with primarily through the actual public debate. Analytically, a distinction is made between the parts of the artwork that the artists themselves have control over and the parts where other parties are involved and the artists have less control. It can be argued that the reception is part of the artwork but as it is not under the control of the artist I choose to separate them analytically. This is also in line with Ahmed’s way of using the term ‘track’ as it allows me to track the spaces that arise in the wake of the art object. The object can be controlled by the artist but the space of conflict cannot.

*The four selected art events*

Here I will briefly present the four different art events that will be analysed. As each art event will be given a separate chapter, the detailed descriptions of both the artworks and public debates will be developed there.

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19 For a discussion on the complexity of dealing with intentions when it comes to studying art see Mieke Bal who also makes a distinction between intentionally not trying to master or control a part of the art object and when something happens later that the artist could not know would happen at all - and therefore could not be willfully left outside an intention, see Mieke Bal, *A Mieke Bal Reader* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), pp. 245-248.
Petra Bauer and Annette Krauss: Read the Masks – Tradition Is Not Given

The analysis of the first event will revolve around how art events can make trouble out of hegemonic silences. This is a common argument made in favour of art as a potentially important and progressive dimension within democracy – the possibility to bring forth unheard or unrecognized voices and claims. The art project Read the Masks – Tradition Is Not Given by Petra Bauer and Annette Krauss was in 2008 a part of the exhibition Be(coming) Dutch at the Van Abbe-museum, in Eindhoven, the Netherlands. Bauer’s and Krauss’ project critically explored the popular Dutch December tradition of Sinterklaas (resembling Santa Clause) and more specifically of his helper “zwarte piet”, a figure most easily described as coming from the black-face tradition. As a part of the artwork Bauer and Krauss had planned to arrange a protest march, in collaboration with two Dutch anti-racist organizations, Doorbraak and Untold. Due to massive protests and threats the museum decided to cancel the march. In light of the decision to stop the protest march a debate was planned in cooperation between the museum, the city of Eindhoven and the artists to discuss the project and the reactions to it. This debate prompted parliamentary member Geert Wilders, leader of the far-right populist Party For freedom, PVV, to pose a critical question in the Dutch parliament to the minister of Culture and Education. Besides the installation at the exhibition, the protest march that did not take place, and the public debate the artists made a film that explores what happened during the first phases of the project. This film was also a part of a later exhibition also at the Van Abbemuseum. Special attention in the analysis is given to the artists’ responses to the critique and how we can analyse the exchange taking place in terms of democratic subjectivities and trouble making.

Anna Odell: Unknown, woman 2009-349701

In the second event we move from democratic trouble in more general terms to specifically exploring the Rancièrian notion of speech being recognized as speech rather than noise. The event took place in Sweden and the initial art object was a video installation exhibited in May 2009 by Swedish artist and art college student Anna Odell under the title Unknown, woman 2009-349701. It was the making of one of the videos that provoked fierce reactions, namely when Odell in a late January evening in 2009 simulated a psychosis on a bridge in Stockholm with the purpose of being taken into an acute psychiatric ward for compulsory care which did actually happen. People passing her on the bridge stopped and called the police, who after their arrival, forced her into a police car headed for the acute psychiatric ward. The morning after, Odell revealed that she was an art student and that she was there because of an art project. The media got hold of the story and a big debate emerged where members of the psychiatric ward’s staff were very critical of her art project.
A police complaint was filed against Odell who in August the same year was found guilty of dishonest conduct and violent resistance. Odell herself continued with the artwork, incorporating aspects from the legal proceedings and continuing to argue the project’s aim, which was to raise questions concerning the closed nature of mental health institutions as well as how patients’ accounts and credibility are contested. The staging on the bridge was a re-enactment of a previous experience, and Odell connected the issue of credibility to this previous experience when she was not deemed credible due to mental illness. Analytically, the event highlights issues of exercising a political voice and who is allowed to act in a democracy and in what way.

**Makode Linde: A cake performance on World Art Day**

From the issue of voice, speech and noise we move on to representation, or more specifically, to when in 2012 artist Makode Linde exhibited a cake at the Modern Museum (Moderna Museet) in Stockholm. The occasion was the 75-year anniversary celebration of the Swedish artists’ national organization, KRO (Konstnärernas Riksorganisation). It was the minister of culture, Lena Adelsohn Liljeroth, who had the honour of cutting the first slice of the cake. The cake was in the shape of a naked African woman bearing clear similarities to the prehistorical artwork, Woman of Willendorf. Sticking out from underneath the table was Linde’s own head painted as a racist caricature, and every time someone cut into the cake Linde screamed loudly. The screaming Linde with the minister of culture cutting into the cake was captured on both video and photos. These images spread quickly and both the artist and the minister were accused of articulating and taking part in racist imaging. The way the minister seemed to cut into the portrayed woman’s genital area and the choice to feed Linde with a piece of the cake was mentioned in many of the critical statements. The debate spread far beyond the Swedish context and was featured on, for example, BBC and Al Jazeera. Linde had later that same year a retrospective exhibition, which gathered similar work created under the heading Afromantics.

The event is analysed through the notion of representation and the question of who is considered as speaking from the subject position of an insider in relation to a political claim. Also, the emotions displayed in the event will be given extra attention as they illustrate how investments into a particular discourse affect how different representational claims are received.

**Jikke van Loon: Monument in honour of Anton de Kom**

In the fourth event we engage with memory and how articulations of past and present wrongs become a contested part of a shared community. In 2006 a monument, created by artist Jikke van Loon, in honour of Anton de Kom in Amsterdam, stirred a debate with demands to remove the statue. Anton de Kom was the author of the anti-colonialist book We Slaves of Suriname and fought for the independence of Suriname from the Netherlands. He also took
part in the Dutch resistance during WWII, and died in a German concentration
camp in 1945. To honour the memory of Anton de Kom it was decided that a
statue of him should be placed at a square also bearing his name, in a neigh-
bourhood in Southeast Amsterdam where a large Surinamese minority lives.
Van Loon, whose art proposal won the public competition, made a bronze
statue of a naked Anton de Kom, almost appearing to rise from stone. This
was, according to the artist, supposed to signal pride and strength. During the
unveiling of the monument it became clear that the statue was controversial,
with a group of people protesting against it and claiming that it evoked a racist
and colonial history. What seemed to evoke the fiercest protests was the fact
that De Kom was depicted naked and the protesters said that he should have
been portrayed in more dignified manner. On the placards held by the protec-
tors it was written: “We are not slaves anymore”.

This event is analysed within a context of its coming close to being a non-
event, as it did not spur as much debate as the other three. Memory, history and
silence are in the fore, pointing to the importance of temporality when analys-
ing political articulations. Moreover, sharing a democratic society means com-
mitting to a shared future, and this event highlights the need to problematize
popular notions of the arts as being in some way ahead of the people.

Starting points for the analysis

In this section I will briefly introduce some key features of the study’s theoreti-
cal framework. Post-structuralist conceptualizations of radical democracy do
not consist of one distinct theory and the names associated with the term
vary. As a key theorist within the field, Chantal Mouffe’s take on radical de-
ocracy will be the main framework for my analysis. Mouffe’s democratic
model, agonist democracy, states that the political cannot be done away with
through a strategy of achieving consensus; instead we need to take into account
the conflictual nature of the political. The challenge is not to do away with the
political but to channel antagonist relations into democratic, agonistic ones.
Norval’s account of democratic subjectivity as a call for response and a call for
responsiveness will be an important part of the analytical framework for the
democratic dimensions.

Mouffe argues that critical art can have a positive function within democracy
and her writings are typical for the theoretical field in the sense that by choos-

20 A more extensive account of the theory will be presented in Chapter 2.
21 Adrian Little and Moya Lloyd describe this in their overview of the field where they also argue
that some theorists not commonly associated with radical democracy can be included as well,
such as Jacques Rancière and Judith Butler, see Adrian Little and Moya Lloyd, eds., The Politics of
22 Mouffe, The Democratic Paradox; On the Political.
23 For an in-depth account of how the concept of responsiveness relates to democratic identity
see, Norval, Aversive Democracy, pp. 168-176.
ing the framework of a post-structuralist understanding of radical democracy I am choosing a theoretical perspective that already takes into account the possible political meaning and importance of cultural expressions.\textsuperscript{24} Other examples of this are Norval’s engagement with a democratic imagination in relation to the articulation of political claims\textsuperscript{25} and Zerilli’s feminist work on imagination and resistance.\textsuperscript{26}

The question of voice is an important part of analysing the interaction that happens, and the different subject positions and subjectivities that can be detected. Philosopher Jacques Rancière, who has written extensively on aesthetics and the political as well as on dissensus, equality and democracy, will be discussed particularly in relation to having a political voice, of being a speaking being – and thereby demonstrating the equality that is the foundation for us being able to talk and be heard at all.\textsuperscript{27} Moreover, political and feminist theorist Wendy Brown’s work on ressentiment will be drawn upon regarding how the category of the victimhood plays out in the political.\textsuperscript{28} Taking Brown into the analysis is an example of how feminist, queer and postcolonial\textsuperscript{29} theory’s emphasis on how certain relations become normalized, depoliticized, excluded, silenced, etc., is an important dimension in reading the selected art events. Therefore these theories work on a level close to the empirical material as they follow the tracking of the particular events.

Also, within this theoretical field we find inspiration for analysing the strong emotions that have followed the art events, mainly Ahmed’s work on how emotions are a part of how interactions and social meanings are constituted.\textsuperscript{30}

When analysing the space that opens up in the art events we need to take into account its public character. The interactions and claims are not exclusively directed to a particular receiver but made within a public context, a space filled with spectators and potential responders. As art historian Rosalyn Deutsche

\textsuperscript{24} Mouffe, “Art and Democracy”.
\textsuperscript{25} Norval, \textit{Aversive Democracy}.
\textsuperscript{26} Linda M. G. Zerilli, \textit{Feminism and the Abyss of Freedom} (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).
\textsuperscript{27} Jacques Rancière, \textit{Dis-Agreement; The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible} (London: Continuum, 2004); \textit{Hatred of Democracy; The Emanicipated Spectator; Dissensus}.
\textsuperscript{28} Brown, \textit{States of Injury}.
\textsuperscript{29} For a discussion of some of the problems with using the term postcolonial, see e.g. Sofie Tornhill \textit{Capital Visions: The Politics of Transnational Production in Nicaragua}, Diss. Stockholm Studies in Politics vol. 135 (Stockholm: Stockholm University, 2010). In accordance with that discussion I would like to stress that the prefix of post does not mean here that this condition is a mere historical fact that is now in the past but rather indicates transformations and need for contextualization.
puts it: “Who is to define, manipulate, and profit from ‘the public’ today? […] Who is the subject of public space?” Similarly, political scientist Charlotte Fridolfsson analyses three events of political protests and focuses on precisely the political space within which these protests occur. Fridolfsson consciously moves away from a one-way analysis of the social movements themselves to “the boundaries of available space for social movement action, something that also envisages the ideological organization of politics and its margins”.

In my study it is not only about trying to analytically demarcate the space that opens, but also to track how it expands, shrinks and fades away. Moreover, this space is always a matter of spaces – just as there is never one public, but always publics. When we examine “the space from which they speak” account needs to be taken to how this space can be read and felt very differently by different subjects.

Considering that my aim is not exclusively to analyse the hegemonic order per se but to interpret the space that arises and bring back those readings to radical democratic theory, I will be employing a form of dialogical reading. Political theorist William Connolly discusses how neither Derridean deconstruction nor Foucauldian genealogy, although both necessary in their own way are capable of “pursu[ing] the trail of affirmative possibility very far”, or in Howarth’s words: escaping a “negative dialectic”. Connolly attempts to extract what he calls “positive ontopolitical interpretation”, which he sees as “a strategy of attachment”, both implicated in and dissonating with the two strategies of detachment (deconstruction and genealogy). Moreover, he argues this interpretation means that

[…], you project ontopolitical presumptions explicitly into detailed interpretations of actuality, acknowledging that your implicit projections surely exceed your explicit formulation of them and that your formulations exceed your capacity to demonstrate their truth. You challenge closure in the matrix by affirming the contestable character of your own projections, by offering readings of contemporary life that compete with alternative accounts, and by moving back and forth between these two levels.

Connolly’s emphasis is valuable for the approach applied in this study, in the sense that it proposes a way of not only critically analysing the material, with

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31 Rosalyn Deutsche, “Art and Public Space: Questions of Democracy”, Social Text, no. 33 (1992), p. 44. In the quote Deutche is drawing from Craig Owen.
33 Mouffe, “Art and Democracy”, p. 10.
34 Deutsche, Art and Public Space, p. 50.
37 Connolly, The Ethos of Pluralization, p. 36.
Connolly using a detached strategy, but also a way of taking an affirmative move back to the level of radical democratic theory. This relates how Mieke Bal describes the process in which

[...] the objects we analyse enrich both interpretation and theory. This is how theory can change from a rigid master discourse into a live cultural object in its own right. This is how we can learn from the objects that constitute our area of study. And this is why we can as well consider them subjects.\textsuperscript{38}

Starting off from radical democracy’s emphasis on the contingency of any dominant order, and art’s potential of making way for unheard voices and of showing precisely that contingency, I track the democratic and political work that takes place within an arisen space in a democratic community. Furthermore, it is through this forward motion of tracking, and through an open dialogical perspective between the theoretical and the empirical, that the research questions posed to the material are formulated.

\textbf{Research questions}

In this study the research questions posed to each event are partially derived from the empirical material itself and partially from theory. The theoretical incentive comes from an aim to contribute to the problematization within radical democratic theory of how a political voice can be claimed and how a democratic undertaking works outside of the traditional venues within an existing hegemonic order. That is also the reason why there is a distinction made in the research questions between a political and democratic dimension. The two are analysed separately in order to be able to reach both processes of political subjectivities and democratic meanings and potentials. The empirical input to the questions stems from the fact that all of the selected events have stirred political dissensus and have attached themselves to some form of democratic institution. The events are also examples of the claims to speaking politically and have the possibility of a democratic exchange through the existence of a wide general discussion.

The following research questions will be posed to each event and thereby comprise a framework that binds the four events together:

1. The first set of questions is of a descriptive character in order to map out the space of conflict in each art event. \textit{What is the provocation or conflict in the different events? What are the main agents, arguments and emotions?}

2. The second set of questions explores the political dimensions of the event and in particular the conditions of saying something political within a hegemonic order; the possibility of exercising a political voice. \textit{How do processes of politiciza-}

tion and depoliticization play out in the events, in both the art objects and the reception? How are some voices being recognized as political and others not? What are the different political ‘we’ being constructed and referred to? What are the different representational claims and how do they conflict? What are the political subject positions available and claimed within the debate?

3. The third set of questions investigates the possibility of a democratic exchange and in particular the conditions of speaking democratically and obtaining a democratic response. What, if any, is the democratic exchange in the different events? How are democratic claims, subjects and subjectivities being constructed? What are the different forms of responses? In what way is the notion of democracy with a certain set of institutions, structures and symbols being drawn upon, made use of and produced?

Interdisciplinary research field

When turning to the methodological choices and reflections I will start with a brief account of the how the choice of art events as the objects of my study places me in an interdisciplinary field, both theoretically and methodologically. Borrowing from cultural theorist Mieke Bal’s methodological approach of “travelling concepts” 39, much of the research conducted within this interdisciplinary field can be seen as a sort of travelling between disciplines, theories and methodologies. An advantage of the post-structuralist approach is that it has lent itself to a range of different academic disciplines. Although the overall framework is radical democratic theory, this study connects to this interdisciplinary character when, for example, drawing upon feminist and post-colonial theory in order to make sense of the articulations and practices of gender, sexuality and race taking place in the events. Feminist and gender research has together with cultural studies produced a high number of studies that highlight not only dominant constructions of race, gender, sexuality and class through cultural expressions but also how resistance can be read in cultural practices and objects.40

39 Mieke Bal, “Working with Concepts”.
Within mainstream political science and political theory the question of cultural and artistic phenomena has not been at the fore. Cultural policy has been studied empirically on a mainly national level, most often focusing primarily on the policy development itself or examining it as an ideology. More general studies of the relation between politics and the arts have been conducted, especially concerning the ways political argumentation and ideology are constructed through cultural and artistic means. These studies have been mainly within political theory, which is not surprising considering Brown’s description of political theory as the “main portal for the humanities into political science”. One example of this is political theorist Honig’s comparison of modes of literature with genres of political theory, and thus how theoretical knowledge, similarly to art, is not only being produced and conveyed through the arguments themselves but also by the choice of narrative and writing style. How narratives relate to political theory has been studied by Maureen Whitebrook who takes novels as a reference point for studying political identity and ideas. All in all, there are some shared questions between studies of cultural and political theory, although more visible among approaches problematizing the common notion of the political. We now turn to how that problematizing gaze provides methodological framing.

Methodological backdrop
Besides travelling between theories from different academic fields, my topic also encourages a methodological travelling. Jodi Dean discusses the interface between political theory and cultural studies and how the two academic tradi-

tions can meet as they both deal with the question of the political and how some things become political. Despite their different histories and way of engaging with their topics Dean sees a potential in bringing them together.

Four ways or methods of framing the political are promoted by Dean in this interface, and can be read as a pedagogical approach that summarizes a possible way for the two traditions to meet. The first method, *problematization*, is inspired by Foucault and is “a form of critical reading” that emphasizes the making and contingency of the political and the political ‘we’. It does not attempt to find the one true solution (as no such one can be found) and does not claim to be able to provide an all-explaining politics. An example of this kind of research within political science is Katharina Tollin’s genealogical study of gender equality in the Swedish parliament where she problematizes the dominant narrative of a progressive linear development. Tollin describes her take on genealogical analysis as “reading: re-reading, strategic reading and thorough context oriented reading” and continues by stating the importance of “reading as an analytical strategy” within the post-structuralist context. Being open to revisions of the analytical focus rather than starting from a fixed set of theoretical assumptions is furthermore emphasized by Tollin. With Tollin I share both the method of close reading and the problematization of what is taken for granted in the dominant order, for example the preconception of the arts as a sphere separate from the political.

The second method proposed by Dean is *pluralization*, which “multiplies the sites and categories that ‘count’ as political” and “looks for new paths and makes new links in the interests of opening up the terms and terrain of the political”. One example of this is political scientist Cecilia Åse’s feminist study on body and femininity within the Swedish police force, where among a range of other empirical material, Åse includes police uniforms as a way studying how the female body is drawn upon in maintaining subordination. By choosing material such as uniforms, a pluralization is created where we can study and look for the political. In my study it is not only the choice of empirical material but also the art sphere itself that contributes to the pluralization.

Lastly, there are the two methods, *contextualization* and *specification*. Through contextualization the notion of a neutral universal point from which one can study the political is rejected. Instead, context is given a high priority with the underlying view that our analytical efforts and concepts in some ways will always fail to fully grasp the political. Also, Dean points to how contextualization makes it possible to analyse processes of depoliticization. Specification is stated

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49 Dean, “Introduction”, p. 3.

50 Cecilia Åse, *Makten att se: Om kropp och kvinnlighet i lagens namn* (Malmö: Liber, 2000).
as a necessary complement to contextualization as it “helps contextualization avoid the flattening effects that result from the assumption that all elements in a context are equally available for deployment or utilization in a given cultural formation”.

A good example of a methodological approach of both contextualization and specification is Sofie Tornhill’s analysis of visualizations concerning transnational capital and production in Nicaragua. By paying close attention to the historical, political and structural background, Tornhill can in detail analyse the different meanings ascribed to global economic interaction. At the same time, Tornhill identifies different levels in the analysis and makes a thorough specification through interrogating relations of class, gender and race. These different studies share a post-structuralist methodological approach, as either focusing on deconstruction, genealogy, narratives or discourses. One recurring theme is a problematizing focus, often phrased as analysing the ‘conditions of possibility’ – a focus shared by this study.

Although not conventional discourse analysis, this study has much in common with discourse theoretical studies. Within the field an analysis is often made of a certain hegemonic order or dislocation in that hegemony, namely moments where the hegemonic order shows itself as contingent, temporary and therefore contestable. The four art events in this study can be read as dislocations and as such they have a productive role in so far as they can lead to political and democratic articulations, a change in the political grammar. These art events are in other words not only a matter of exercising civil liberties; but they also have a potentially wider democratic meaning and point to the space that can arise in the wake of an art object becoming public.

The commonalities with discourse analytical studies means that there are important methodological reflections to be sought from discourse theory as developed within the so-called Essex school. One important dimension concerns scepticism towards the possibility of finding a clear-cut, unified, logical and post-structuralist method that would be independent of the object of study or the material. Howarth describes discourse theory as “‘problem-driven’ rather than ‘method-‘or ‘theory-driven’ research” and states:

51 Dean, “Introduction”, p. 4.
52 Tornhill, Capital Visions.
53 Tornhill, Capital Visions, p. 24; Fridolfsson, Deconstructing Political Protest, p. 34.
54 See e.g. Fridolfsson, Deconstructing Political Protest, p. 63.
55 Norval, Aversive Democracy, p. 123.
56 There are different strands of discourse analysis, and whenever I will talk of discourse analysis or discourse theory it is the post-structuralist understanding of it that I am referring to. See e.g. Laclau and Mouffe, Hegemony and Socialist Strategy; David Howarth, Discourse (Buckingham: Open University Press, 2000); Jason Glynos and David Howarth, Logics of Critical Explanation in Social and Political Theory, (London: Routledge, 2007); Jacob Torfing, “Discourse Theory: Achievements, Arguments, and Challenges”, in Discourse Theory in European Politics: Identity, Policy and Governance, eds. David Howarth and Jacob Torfing (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 1-32.
57 David Howarth, “Applying Discourse Theory”, p. 318. The problem-driven approach that I am applying here is also connected to the fact that I am not studying conventional political dis-
In line with my methodological principles, there are very few general answers to these questions, as they can only be addressed in the light of the specific problem investigated. […] More openended research, which is characteristic of much discourse theory, raises questions about defining the appropriate context of study, as well as the criteria for selecting documents. […] Instead, the researcher is compelled to make decisions about the appropriate level and degree of contextualization and must establish the limits of any particular project. The key principles underpinning these decisions are that they must be explicit, consistent, and justified. 58

In order to make these decisions explicit I will now turn to describing some methodological decisions, for example the selection of events and empirical material.

**Contextualization and selection of events**

Although I focus on four different events this should not be regarded as a traditional comparison. 59 Rather, I choose to examine them as four unique events where an art conflict has brought about political dissensus. This is also why the term event is more appropriate than case for my study. Fridolfsson similarly uses the term event when she analyses the objects of her study, three events of political protests and dislocations, which she also partly reads in relation to the others. 60

The four art events will be analysed separately but will in the concluding chapter be discussed together and in relation to each other and the radical democratic framework. An important distinction is that I am not reading Swedish events against Dutch events, but all four with and in contrast to each other. It is the particularities of each event that will be discussed and, to a lesser degree, the national contexts or descriptions in themselves. 61 Similarly, political scientist Linda Ekström describes how she chooses not to compare her three cases; rather, she claims that the analysis gains variety, amplitude and increased

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59 That does not mean that comparisons cannot be fruitfully made within the discourse theoretical framework, but that it is not within the scope of this study.
60 Fridolfsson, Deconstructing Political Protest, p. 34.
61 The art world is a travelling world so the national contexts are often not so easy to demarcate. For example, in the event of Petra Bauer and Annette Krauss the initial art object was exhibited in the Netherlands but the artists are Swedish and German, respectively, and only Krauss lived in the Netherlands at the time. Also, other parts of the project have been exhibited, for example, in Norway. This demonstrates the often international character that art projects attain.
nuance by including more than one case. Thus, even though it is not a conventional comparison there is still much to gain by including events from different contexts.

Irrespective of comparisons, the selection concerning which events to include is of high importance. I began with a large number of art events that have now been crystallized to four and the process of selecting the art events became a part of the study’s attempt to continuously move between the empirical events and radical democratic theory. All events have in common a single public dissensus that is neither given nor easily explained, thus there is a certain puzzle in the responses and claims made. What particularly interested me concerning these four events was their political and democratic potential, which made them especially interesting from a radical democratic perspective. The political articulations on gender, race and sexuality that occur within the four events stimulate a reading that allows the four events to inform one another and highlight contrasts. Moreover, what becomes clear in all four events is how the interaction becomes attached in a different way to democratic institutions and symbols as well as catalysing certain preconceptions of what constitutes a democratic debate. My focus on reading these events as bearing a democratic potential also made it appropriate to study two national contexts that are considered as having full democratic rights. In other words, I chose not to select events where the state is prosecuting the artists because of the art itself. The fact that the four events take place within established liberal democracies makes them well suited to be read through radical democratic theorists like Mouffe who specifically address Western liberal democracy.

63 For an illustrative example of how such a moving between the empirical and theory can be conducted, see Maria Jansson, Maria Wendt and Cecilia Åse, “Memory Work Reconsidered”, NORA-Nordic Journal of Feminist and Gender Research 16, no. 4 (2008), p. 237.
64 The four events stirred various degrees of dissensus. The monument by van Loon generated the least debate of the four but was included especially to highlight also how some discussions get silenced and thereby illustrate the tension between event and a non-event that is always present, see Derrida, Events? what Events?, p. 334.
65 This is also why it has not been suitable to include some of the most famous art conflicts in the last decade (including Lars Vilks and the Danish caricatures in Jyllandsposten) which share a central religious theme in the reactions, see e.g. Göran Larsson and Lasse Lindekilde, “Muslim Claims-Making in Context”, Ethnities 9, no. 3 (09, 2009), 361-382; Lene Hansen, “Performing Practices: A Poststructuralist Analysis of the Muhammad Cartoon Crisis”, in International Practices, eds. Emanuel Adler and Vincent Pouliot (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 280-309. To choose some of these was not optimal for my study as there would be a risk of the religious factor overshadowing the political and democratic subjectivities and foreclosing other possible interpretations and positions.
66 The first art event to be definitely selected was the Odell event where after having visited the exhibition it became clear to me how it spoke to the theoretical question of making oneself heard. However, as an example of how some of the key theoretical concepts used in the analysis
Having also examined other art events has been beneficial as they form a background from which I have been able to see with greater clarity the particularities of the four selected events. Nonetheless, I would argue that the research design chosen here is not exclusive to these four events but could be applied when analysing other events as well.

By choosing events from different language contexts I will be analysing empirical material in Swedish and Dutch, two languages that I know.\(^{67}\) There is possible asymmetry in the interpretation stemming from my own background as a long-time resident of Sweden, also when both Swedish events occurred. During my research I have lived in the Netherlands for almost two years (although not during the time of the two Dutch events), which hopefully counteracts some potential bias. In addition, I have sought help from native Dutch speakers whenever I have been in doubt concerning how to interpret certain word choices. This happens more with informal language in online comments than in the newspaper articles.

In every process of translation there are choices to be made. Political scientist Karl Gustafsson chooses in his translations of Japanese and Chinese museum writings to stay as close to text as possible even if the translations sound strange.\(^{68}\) I have also chosen to stay very close to the text but when there is a balance between translating literally and capturing the meaning, I have chosen the latter. All translated quotations are included in the original language in footnotes. Quotes originally in English are quoted verbatim and spelling errors are not corrected. In traditionally published texts such as newspaper articles I have marked with sic where there are errors. When quoting statements from com-

\(^{67}\) In the events that have received considerable media attention outside their national contexts there is material available in more languages. I will mainly be analyzing the material produced in English, when it is relevant.

ments on newspaper articles, blogs or social media I have not marked the errors as quite often they are numerous and these texts are not edited in the same way as those from traditional media channels.

When it comes to the question of contextualization, a number of different contexts can be described. I will focus mainly on two levels of context: Firstly, on the very detailed context of the specific texts, namely what the framework of production is for the text, for example in what kind of media, if it is a response to an earlier text, etc; secondly, on a very general level describing Swedish and Dutch contexts where necessary for the analysis. Besides both being Western liberal democracies, Sweden and the Netherlands are often compared when it comes to their welfare regimes, although the Netherlands is increasingly being considered a hybrid and different in important respects in relation to the typical social-democratic type found in the Scandinavian states.\textsuperscript{69} When it comes to the two Dutch events the colonial history of the Netherlands becomes important, with the decolonization of Indonesia and the Netherlands Antilles commencing after World War II and the full independence of Suriname occurring in 1975.\textsuperscript{70} Cultural historian Peter Aronsson categorizes in his comparison of national museums Sweden and the Netherlands in different groups due to the difference in colonial history. Aronsson includes the Netherlands in the group of “Empires and conglomerate states” identifying a multicultural feature as well as being “ambitious enough to view themselves as representing universal Homo Sapiens”.\textsuperscript{71} Sweden, on the other hand, is categorized by Aronsson as a “smaller state with a long nation-state history” where the imperial ambition is long declined.\textsuperscript{72}

The context given in each analysis is specific for that event and results from the tracking performed. I will track the exchange and include contextual information where it is important for answering the research questions. For example, the murder of film director Theo van Gogh in 2004 becomes relevant in the art event of Annette Krauss and Petra Bauer since it had a significant impact on the debate concerning cultural expression and multicultural society in the Netherlands.\textsuperscript{73} Besides these kinds of immediate event-specific contextual


\textsuperscript{72} Aronsson, “Explaining National Museums”, p. 47.

\textsuperscript{73} See e.g. Ian Buruma, \textit{Murder in Amsterdam: The Death of Theo Van Gogh and the Limits of Tolerance} (New York: The Penguin Press, 2006).
factors, I will not go into detail regarding the context. For example, I will not discuss other art events that have been controversial and often are brought into the debate as comparisons in either a negative or positive way.

**Empirical material analysed in the events**

The empirical material used in the study includes different media sources, such as television, radio, newspapers, magazines, social media and blogs. By choosing to include a broad number and various sorts of empirical material, the ambition is to keep a certain distance from what becomes dominant in mainstream media, so as to not merely reproduce the dominant media’s judgment of what are important and valuable contributions to the debate. This relates to the fact that I am not primarily concerned with mapping the dominant or hegemonic discourse; rather my concerns are in tracking the interaction in order to explore the radical democratic potential of the selected art events.

The amount of material varies greatly between the different events, with the greatest quantity being in the event of Anna Odell, which for a long time generated a large number of articles and features in TV and radio. Odell was mostly known on a national level, which also is true for van Loon as well as Bauer and Krauss. The event of Linde’s cake was the one that spurred the most international attention. The quantity of texts is in itself interesting from the perspective of politicization and depoliticization and the recognition of different voices. The event with the monument by Jikke van Loon was the one that spurred the least empirical material.

I have tried to include as much material as possible, for example, both national and regional newspapers. Texts in the printed media constitute a large part of the material and include columns, opinion pieces, feature articles as well as the typical news article. When it comes to the events with the most data I have focused on the main television and radio channels while in the Van Loon event also included smaller local radio broadcasts.

When it comes to gathering online material one problem has been that it changes rapidly and is not always archived. Newspaper articles, for instance, are easily available but not necessarily the comments made online in connection to them. Another complicating factor is that even though the studied events take place within a short time frame there is a big difference between 2006 and 2012 with respect to social media usage. During this time period the online debate has gained in importance with an increasing quantity of blogs. In selecting which blogs to analyse I have included both those linked by other sites that I have come across as well as those appearing in the search results when using the broad online search engines.

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74 The search for newspaper and magazine articles has been done through the Swedish press databases *Mediearkivet* and *Artikelsök* which include both the main Stockholm based media and also a number of regional newspapers. The Dutch equivalent is *LexisNexis Academic.*
The most notable texts are the online comments on newspaper articles and blogs. These comments often involve harsher language, and although they are not a good representation of the debate as a whole they can be assumed to show some of the boundaries otherwise not articulated. This due to the fact that it is non-edited, and for people taking the step to write a comment it can be assumed it requires a distinct opinion on the matter. The immediacy of the comment writing may also contribute to the somewhat emotional character of some of these texts.

The radio and television material differs from the written material in the sense that the debates are not edited in the same way as written texts thus one hears more of the reasoning behind an argument through, for example, follow-up questions from journalists.

In the transcribing of television and radio material I have aimed at making it as accurate as possible, and where there are distinct emotional reactions such as laughing or sighing I have also included this in the texts. Longer pauses, as well as longer hesitant bridges such as hmmm or aaah, have also been included. When it comes to the television material, I have returned to some key programmes in order to gain a better perception of the tone of voice and body language that the different participants portray. This body language is not included in the transcribing process but in the interpretation process.

For the sake of transparency and reliability I will refer not only to the source, such as the newspaper, but also include the author of all the texts. The reader can then more easily navigate the ‘when’ and ‘who’ of the empirical analysis of the event. This is unproblematic as long as it concerns public persons that consciously express themselves in a national arena, for instance on the national television news. It becomes more complicated with the online data where there are numerous comments made by people without any public function, for example in the different social media groups. As you can only post a comment if you are logged in to Facebook all posts are signed with a name. The question then arises whether quotes taken from these comments should be presented with the full name given. I cannot be sure that online commentators are using their true names, and the situation might arise that somebody is using a fake name, but a name that happens to be someone else’s real name. Although this is a complex issue I will for the sake of transparency and validity nonetheless

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75 In Sweden the selection includes three TV channels, the non-commercial public service company channels SVT1 and SVT2 and commercial channel TV 4. The Swedish radio material consists of the public service radio channels P1, P3 and P4. Radio and TV has been accessed through the National Library of Sweden’s collections of audiovisual media. In the Netherlands I have included all material found at the Netherlands Institute for Sound and Vision.

76 This process of going back to key programmes is inspired by Anna Adeniji’s description of how she used to listen to the interviews she made again and again until she almost knew them by heart, see Anna Adeniji, *Inte den typ som gifter sig? Feministiska samtal om äktenskapsmotstånd* (Stockholm: Makadam förlag, 2008), pp. 65-67.
include all usernames in full – emphasizing that they are online signatures that we most often cannot link to a specific person.  

Reading strategy

In this section I would like to introduce some basic preparations and necessary decisions for reading the events before going into the more specific analytical concepts and tools in Chapter 2. One important decision, considering the vast amount of text in two of the events (Odell and Linde), has been how to make sense of and prioritize the material. The solution was to both look for more general patterns and to go into more depth and detail regarding some selected texts. The idea of tracking has guided my reading, especially when reading the online material, such as blogs and comments on social media. Where I have gone into more detail is where there are instances of more direct interaction and addresses in order to track how certain claims and upheld subject positions are being received and responded to, and in some cases how this leads to new responses. I have also chosen to go into more detail when there are specific references to a notion of democracy, when articulations connect to certain dominant notions of democratic action and symbols. Furthermore, having the overview of the material as a whole gives me the opportunity to do close readings on texts that stick out through, for example, a political positioning, even though it is met with silence.

When structuring the material for reading I have chosen to do it according to genre and then to identify the main interactions that occur. Another possible way would have been to order it all chronologically, but as the different genres have a style and interaction of their own I decided to structure them by genre, while keeping track of where the different texts are situated in the time frame of the event.

When looking for patterns and themes I have focused on the following: words of emotions; descriptions of assumed intentions; articulated subject positions and responses to articulated subjects positions by others; and articulations that relate to the democratic, the shared, a community, etc. This includes articu-

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77 However, I have chosen a careful approach when it comes to sensitive information with quotes by people using their seemingly real names. Examples of this are mainly in the Odell event where people sometimes refer to own experiences of mental illness and where I have chosen to cite anonymous commentators in order to illustrate these subject positions taken. Because of the large amount of data this has not been a problem. It could be argued that some of the threatening statements should be anonymized but as they are expressed on public sites and often directed to a person in the public spotlight I have chosen to include their username also when it appears to be their real name.

78 These interactions often occur over a longer period time, so a certain claim often does not receive a response until weeks later, and within the time period a number of other people have joined in on the debate. However, it seems that there is a smaller group of people that consider themselves, and are considered by others, to be key figures in the debate, and therefore many claims by other people do not seem to influence these interactions to any significant degree.
lations such as “We the taxpayers”, “We the Dutch” as well as “I as an ex-patient” “I as an AfroSwede”, etc. For every pile of genre-structured material I have registered the general themes for the different research questions and marked which ones are recurrent and dominant and which ones seem marginal. This provides me with a comprehensive overview of the material.

When performing a more close reading of the interactions I have besides the research question tried to specifically read how responses are made. This includes tone of voice, unconventional metaphors or wordings, but also silences. In a similar manner Ekström looks at recurrent values and colourful expressions. 79

An important dimension here is to read when a call for a democratic response is answered by either opening up or by shutting down. These responses may include articulations that are supportive, non-supportive, authoritarian, paternalistic, ridiculing, respectful, applauding, etc. This reading can be characterized as analytically open-ended as I attempt to give room for the material to contradict the patterns found while maintaining its complexity in relation to the theoretic framework.

In the empirical chapters the aim is to be both transparent and specific regarding how I interpret the empirical material, and therefore there will be relatively frequent quotes and examples included from the material.

Outline

Here I will briefly describe the structure of the thesis and the chapters that will follow. In the introduction the research aim and questions have been introduced along with some key methodological and theoretical framings.

After this introductory chapter an account of post-structuralist radical democratic theory and how art events can be read through such a framework will follow in chapter 2. An attempt will be made to provide an overview of the theory and how the arts become relevant. Furthermore, special emphasis will be placed on discussing key concepts, such as political voice, democratic subjectivity, dissensus and hegemony. How these concepts can be used as analytical tools in reading the empirical material is further emphasized.

The events will be analysed separately in an order that reflects a certain movement in emphasis throughout the thesis. The movement is from a general take on how art can make democratic trouble, to the processes of recognizing something as an expression of a voice in a political or democratic sense, to the question of political and democratic representation - of speaking for someone more than your self. Finally, a dimension of democracy that concerns memory as a part of what we share as a democratic ‘we’, and how this memory always points forward in time, will be addressed.

79 Ekström, Jämställdhet - för männens, arbetarklassens och effektivitets skull?, p. 68.
The structure of each empirical chapter is in accordance with the research questions, starting from a description of the event and contextual setting. In each chapter the empirical material relating to the event will be presented. I then turn to the second set of questions with the political dimensions in the centre and thereafter, address the possibility of a democratic exchange in the third set of questions. Furthermore, through these sets of questions the events are put in a broader contextual perspective regarding power relations and intelligibility.

Chapter 3, the first empirical chapter, *The foreign trouble of Petra Bauer and Annette Krauss*, analyses the art event with the initial art project *Read the masks – Tradition is not given* and the reactions that followed. The event illuminates art as a democratic process through an analysis of how the artists’ work to incorporate the public debate into the art projects and art’s potential of making trouble out of hegemonic silences. Besides drawing on Aletta Norval’s notion of democratic subjectivity and Chantal Mouffe’s concept of agonistic democracy I will also be making use of Sara Ahmed’s conception of trouble making.

Chapter 4, *The noise of Anna Odell*, concerns the Swedish artist Anna Odell’s artwork *Unknown, woman 2009-349701* and the debate that followed. Focus will be on how we can read her work and on the debate using the concept of noise as understood by Jacques Rancière and through the feminist conception of victimhood as presented by Wendy Brown.

In *The memory work of Jikke van Loon*, chapter 5, the debate following the inauguration of a monument in honour of Anton de Kom by Jikke van Loon is analysed. The chapter’s emphasis is on the complex relation between memory and silence when an art object becomes part of a political articulation of past and present wrongs. Post-colonial theory will be drawn on in order to analyse how history and memory can be conceptualized in the event and in relation to the futural aspect within radical democratic theory.

Chapter 6, *The representations of Makode Linde*, contains the analysis of Makode Linde’s cake performance and the following debate. An important dimension within the event is the notion of representation, both political and democratic, and its relation to possible subject positions within an existing hegemony. Moreover, the analysis highlights the importance of taking into account the different contextual framings within which the interpretation of the art object occurs.

In the concluding chapter 7, the results from the four empirical chapters will be discussed and drawn upon when framing the events not only theoretically but also concerning how the art events came to be at all. Special emphasis will be placed on how the specific character of art plays out in the events, with particular emphasis on intelligibility and imaginary. Drawing on the specific cultural and political contexts of the events we revisit the questions of the democratic and political work taking place in the events and the conditions of political and democratic subjectivities.
2. Reading Art Events through Radical Democratic Theory

As the title of this chapter suggests, the term ‘reading’ will be in the fore as I will be offering both a reading of post-structuralist democratic theory as well as pointing to how this theoretical framework also serves as a framework for analysing the art events. The chapter, which gives an account of the theoretical framing, is divided into three main parts. In the first an introduction to radical democratic theory is offered with its particularities in relation to other democratic theories, as well as the main critique that has been posed against it. We start by asking: What is radical democracy and how come it is now the common denominator for many left-wing thinkers, especially those working within post-structuralism?

Second, the specific place of the arts within radical democracy will be outlined, with focus on intelligibility and imaginary horizons. In the third part we move to how this theoretical framework can be adapted to analysing the spaces of conflict that arise in the art events. In this section the political and democratic dimensions that are central for my reading of the events will be described.

What is radical democracy?

As a point of departure for describing the development of radical democracy I choose the influential work by Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics* first published in 1985. The context that the book was written in was one of a deadlock within the political left and within Marxist theory where the deterministic and class reductionist models were unable to sufficiently include the new social movements that were developing at that time. Social-democratic parties were not considered as having the capability of formulating alternatives to include these movements and were also increasingly seen as not giving citizens enough possibility for participation and influence. Furthermore, the Marxist-Leninist model is described by Laclau and Mouffe as failing to deal with how the left can work strategically in a new political landscape. This especially in light of how right-wing ideology gained strength in early 1980’s with, for example, Thatcherism in

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80 Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy.*
Britain. The devastating failures in building communist societies in Soviet and Eastern Europe of course add to this context.  

What Laclau and Mouffe do in this book is move away from earlier class reductionist theories, and through a new reading of the Gramscian conceptualization of hegemony, approach political and social identities as contingent and non-essentialist categories. Their open-ended vision of a “radical and plural democracy” allowed for close engagements with both other social movements (that were not primarily based on class) as well as other theoretical strands, such as feminist, cultural and post-colonial theory. Laclau and Mouffe’s book also became a starting point for what is alternately termed discourse theory, the Essex school or political discourse analysis. This research focuses on how we can analyse political discourses and the logics that construct those discourses in, for example, strategic negotiation between different political demands and finding a common object to oppose. Discourse theory has become a field in its own right, including not only political theory but also empirical studies on political discourses. In short, Laclau and Mouffe’s intervention has proved highly productive and its post-structuralist emphasis made it possible to engage with other theoretical projects and have an impact outside of the walls of political theory or Marxist theory.

Whereas Laclau’s research interest later came to focus on questions of populism, Mouffe for her part has continued to develop the notion of a radical and plural democracy – an agonistic model of democracy. For the framework of the analysis of the art events we will follow Mouffe, although other thinkers will be included that do not always position themselves within the field as contributors. Besides Mouffe, I engage with philosopher Jacques Rancière who has written extensively on politics and aesthetics, feminist and queer theoretician Judith Butler, and political theorist Aletta Norval. This inclusion is also the reason I will continue to speak of radical democracy and not only the agonistic model of democracy as Mouffe calls it. However, Mouffe’s agonism is where we will start.

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Mouffe’s agonism

As mentioned earlier Laclau and Mouffe’s intervention took issue with the teleological perspective where a certain development was bound to happen from a Marxist point of view. Instead of emphasizing explanations based on economic determinism, Laclau and Mouffe give privilege to the “moment of political articulation” or as summarized by Anna Marie Smith: “[i]n the spirit of Gramsci’s centaur metaphor, Laclau and Mouffe argue that every form of communication, including persuasion, negotiation, and dialogue, is necessarily intertwined with power relations, and that this would remain true in any possible society.”

Laclau and Mouffe furthermore argue that to be able to grasp the political analytically you need to have the term hegemony in the fore. The Gramscian notion of hegemony as conceptualized by Laclau and Mouffe can be understood as the contingent result of a power struggle and is always constituted through an exclusion of other alternatives, of other meanings. That is why a condition of hegemony is never everlasting or non-contestable and always entails possible resistance.

The social is here a “discursive space” and in every social order there are hegemonic practices that create and uphold this order. In line with this we can think of hegemony as a continuous struggle to ascribe meaning to terms such as democracy, equality and art. For example, the notion of what is possible or normal is not a given but the result of a temporary hegemony. Mouffe as an example mentions how feminist art practices have been successful in both criticizing unequal power relations and in showing alternatives to the political order at hand, the hegemonic order.

Drawing on the primacy of the political, and on hegemony, Mouffe has continued to develop her agonistic model of democracy where the name highlights a crucial distinction that she makes between an antagonism between enemies and agonism between adversaries where the latter is the appropriate one for democracy. The aim is to sublimate hostile antagonism to agonism where conflicts can be politically channelled through a democratic system – although this does not mean that the antagonism can ever be eliminated. Pluralism without antagonism is not possible according to Mouffe, and therefore the issue is to transform confrontations between enemies to confrontations between friendly enemies. As Mouffe has made clear, there is no agonism without an-

86 Laclau and Mouffe, Hegemony and Socialist Strategy, p. x.
87 Mouffe, The Democratic Paradox, pp. 98-105.
88 Mouffe, “Art and Democracy”.
89 Mouffe, Agonistics; On the Political; The Democratic Paradox; The Return of the Political.
90 Mouffe, The Democratic Paradox.
agonism. These antagonisms are what Mouffe terms as *the political* and as being “inherent in human relations”. In that sense, you cannot have politics, democracy, or society without them. These antagonisms can “take many forms and emerge in different types of social relations”. The different forms that Mouffe here mentions point to the variations in the political – this in opposition to Carl Schmitt whose basic opposition between friend and enemy Mouffe draws upon. Thereby, Mouffe advocates neither “the liberal relationship between economic competitors or rational interlocutors nor the Schmittean war between irreconcilable enemies, but a relation of political adversaries”. The continuing possibility of antagonism is linked to the basic assumption of a non-essentialist conception of identity where any identity or society is always relational, bearing a ‘we’/’they’ categorization. Therefore “the very condition of possibility of the formation of political identities is at the same time the condition of impossibility of a society from which antagonism can be eliminated”. The political is in other words not the same as *politics*, which Mouffe defines as “the ensemble of practices, discourses and institutions which seek to establish a certain order and organize human coexistence in conditions that are always potentially conflictual because they are affected by the dimension of ‘the political’”.

The post-structuralist perspective on radical democracy is often compared and read in relation to deliberative theory with which it shares some core questions. Mouffe has on several occasions herself highlighted the differences in the agonistic model in relation to, in particular, the Habermasian version of deliberative theory. These differences have helped flesh out the particularities of the post-structuralist version of radical democracy and are therefore worthy of description here.

What the two theoretical strands have in common is an emphasis on the political, on participation, on inequalities as obstacles to formal rights, on how interests and identities are being articulated rather than how interests are converted into representation and on equality and liberty as core values for the development of democracy. Nevertheless, there are also important differences. One concerns the critique from radical democratic theory on how delib-
erative theory upholds rational consensus as possible and worth aiming for.\textsuperscript{101} Mouffe warns that a search for universal consensus solutions, and an omission to give possibilities to democratic confrontations between different political adversaries, can lead to other forms of confrontations that are more difficult to solve in a democratic manner.\textsuperscript{102} The second main difference is whether it is possible and desirable to, by means of postulated democratic communication forms, reach agreements defined by reason rather than the result of power relations. According to post-structuralist radical democratic theory, democracy cannot be cleansed of power relations, and any order is always a temporary result of a power struggle and therefore possible to contest.\textsuperscript{103} In short, Mouffe’s main criticism against the deliberative approach is its focus on rationalism and individualism, which can take into account neither the formation of collective identities – that is political identities – nor the importance of what Mouffe calls passions.\textsuperscript{104} These passions are connected to the collective identities as they designate why, for example, nationalism gains strength, a phenomenon underestimated as it has not fitted well in the models created within liberal theory.\textsuperscript{105} The challenge is to channel these passions democratically so that they do not evolve into friend/enemy relations but rather into relations of adversaries. That is also why Mouffe states that there needs to be proper political alternatives as otherwise there will not be any democratic channels for these possible antagonisms – which in turn risks threatening democracy.\textsuperscript{106}

A critique that has been posed against Mouffe’s agonistic model is that it is too vague on normative issues and in particular on the issue of how the actual democratic institutions should look in order to promote a radical democratic framework for an agonistic pluralism.\textsuperscript{107} One answer to this has been to point to the radical negativity inherent in the theory of Laclau and Mouffe, which means there will always be exclusions and every society is always the result of a certain hegemonic order and power relations. Therefore, there is no “blueprint for an ideal society [that] could fully grasp all of the exclusions built into con-

\textsuperscript{101} Mouffe, \textit{The Democratic Paradox}, pp.7-8; Norval, \textit{Aversive Democracy}, pp. 38-39; Lloyd and Little, “Introduction”, p. 3.

\textsuperscript{102} Mouffe, \textit{The Democratic Paradox}, pp. 104-134.

\textsuperscript{103} Mouffe, \textit{The Democratic Paradox}, pp. 80-105; Lloyd and Little, “Introduction”, p. 3; Norval, \textit{Aversive Democracy}, pp. 37-38.

\textsuperscript{104} According to Mouffe, this main criticism applies to mainstream liberal theory as well, which she also criticizes for not paying attention to “[i]deas of public-mindedness, civic activity and political participation in a community of equals”, in Chantal Mouffe, “Democratic Citizenship and the Political Community”, in \textit{Dimensions of Radical Democracy: Pluralism, Citizenship, Community}, ed. Chantal Mouffe (London: Verso, 1992a), p. 227. Although illustrative of some of the key features within the poststructuralist approach to radical democracy I will not go further into the debate between the two approaches as it goes beyond the scope of this study.

\textsuperscript{105} Mouffe, \textit{On the Political}, p. 24; \textit{The Democratic Paradox}, p. 103.

\textsuperscript{106} Mouffe, \textit{On the Political}, p.120.

\textsuperscript{107} See e.g. Norval, \textit{Aversive Democracy}, p. 12; Critchley, “Is there a Normative Deficit?”; Smith, \textit{Laclau and Mouffe}, p. 199.
temporary institutions and anticipate the unintentional anti-democratic effects of apparently democratic struggles”. What we do know is that Mouffe starts from the perspective of Western liberal democracy and asserts equality and liberty as key concepts for the expansion and strengthening of any pluralist democracy. What Mouffe further argues is that the meaning of these values is a contested one and subject to struggle, and this struggle needs democratic institutions. Mouffe argues against the idea that critical art cannot take place within the existing art institutions and points instead to the possibility of resistance within any given institution due to its contingency and openness for contestation.

The fact that Mouffe operates from within the framework of liberal democracy has been criticized. Jodi Dean who does not share the conviction of putting democracy in the fore is highly critical of the left’s reliance on democracy as something that both “eschews responsibility not only for current failures […] but also for envisioning another politics in the future”. Given that the question of democratic institutions and their attachment to liberalism is not the focus of my analysis regarding the four art events, I will not go further into this critique but rather pay more attention to another point of critique, namely, that Mouffe is unclear on how democratic subjectivities come to be.

**Democracy and subjects to come**

In order to clarify how we can understand the constitution of democratic and political subjectivities we first need to look deeper into the inherent contingency and contestation of democracy, as well as some normative issues within radical democratic theory.

When approaching the normative aspects within radical democratic theory we need to attend to the “impossibility of a final realization of democracy” as it “would result in the elimination of the political and the negation of democracy”. Norval emphasizes this openness as a key factor for dealing with the normative issues as she sees Derrida’s term ‘democracy to come’ as an essential part of a radical democratic theory. The term is a way of describing how democracy is always a form of promise, of something to strive for, but never to be fully

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109 Mouffe clearly states that she does not necessarily see this as a model for the rest of the world, but instead emphasizes the specific context of this form of liberal democracy, in Mouffe, *Agnostics*, p. 36.
112 Dean, *Democracy and Other Neoliberal Fantasies*, p. 94.
realized. It is also in Norval’s reading of Derrida a promise requiring critical practices in order to keep that open futurity of democracy, that there is more to it then what we see and have today. This futurity is connected to the question of a future democratic community and its inclusions as well as the threats that are posed to democracy, internally and externally.\textsuperscript{115} In this study the art events can be read as including potentially critical practices.

A concept connected to this open futurity, and highly relevant for the art sphere, is \textit{imaginary horizons}, which when simplified can be described as goals that one strives towards while knowing they will never be fully reached and will also change. Laclau och Mouffe emphasize the importance of not abandoning radical visions and horizons in the name of pragmatism or in fear of the totalizing myth.\textsuperscript{116}

The answers to the normative question differ within the field of radical democracy, depending on how other conceptualizations are made, such as the possibility of resistance to a given political order. When reading Rancière and Mouffe together a compelling perspective is added on the perceived normative gap. They clearly share their concerns on the political and concerning their critique of the deliberative and liberal theoretical fields. A striking difference between the two is how they engage theoretically with democratic institutions. Mouffe as we have seen sees no alternative to having democratic institutions, but instead argues that they should be defended and democratized even further. Rancière, on the other hand, does not engage on this level at all and Norval goes as far as saying that: “Rancière has little patience with the ordinary business and concerns of democracy. Nor does he think it has anything to do with participation, or with an ethos or a way of life.”\textsuperscript{117} Although I agree with Norval that Rancière’s take on democracy is generally more pessimistic than Mouffe’s I am not sure it includes Rancière’s dismissal of participation. On the contrary, Rancière’s examples of political moments\textsuperscript{118} are when particular claims become heard as the universal claims that they already were in a sense. Rancière’s emphasis on a presupposed equality that becomes apparent and sensible to us in a


\textsuperscript{116} Laclau and Mouffe, \textit{Hegemony and Socialist Strategy}, pp. 190-192; see also Norval, \textit{Aversive Democracy}, p. 97.

\textsuperscript{117} Norval, “Democracy, Pluralization, and Voice”, p. 305. However, I agree with Norval’s argument that Rancière is highly relevant as “he is one of a very few theorists who persistently raises the question of the limits of the political community, which is a matter of voice, of whose voice may be heard and of how the space of argumentation itself it [sic] delimited.” In Norval, “Democracy, Pluralization, and Voice”, \textit{Ethics \& Global Politics} 2, no. 4 (2009a), p. 306.

\textsuperscript{118} I am using here the term political moments as a way of simplifying and making the terminology more similar to Mouffe’s – so as to avoid confusions. Where Rancière is clear on the distinction between politics and police, it is not as apparent what the difference is between the political and politics. It would be more correct to speak of moments of politics proper, or just politics as “when the natural order of domination is interrupted by the institution of a part of those who have no part”, in Rancière, \textit{Dis-Agreement}, p. 11.
political moment links his view on a democratic life precisely to manifestations of that equality. Rancière writes in *Hatred of Democracy* that we do not live in democracies but in “states of oligarchic law, in other words, in states where the power of the oligarchy is limited by a dual recognition of popular sovereignty and individual liberties”.¹¹⁹ He continues in relation to how states permit “democratic life”:

‘Permit’ is obviously an ambiguous word. These freedoms were not the gifts of oligarchs. They were won through democratic action and are only ever guaranteed through such action. The ‘rights of man and of the citizen’ are the rights of those who make them a reality.¹²⁰

I read this quote as Rancière indeed giving weight to democratic participation – just not the one we refer to in our everyday discourse. The pessimism of Rancière is about the difficulty of predicting the outcomes, of beforehand calculating the effects and about the dominating power as a force that incorporates and suppresses exactly those potential political moments and activities. Most practices and articulations do become incorporated into the police activity.¹²¹ The police should here be understood as the “system of distribution and legitimation”¹²² that we normally within political science call politics.¹²³ Rancière emphasizes that it is not to be summarized as state apparatus as this would give a false opposition between state and society. Instead:

The police is thus first an order of bodies that defines the allocation of ways of doing, ways of being, and ways of saying, and sees that those bodies are assigned by name to a particular place and task; it is an order of the visible and the sayable that sees that a particular activity is visible and another is not, that this speech is understood as discourse and another as noise.¹²⁴

It is clear that in comparison to Rancière we see that Mouffe, although not specifying all the details, does make clear what the principles should be and that she sees no other option than to work within given framework. A different way of interpreting these theorists’ answer to the normative questions of democratic subjectivity and interaction is to look at how they themselves interact with others in their texts. Norval notes how theoretically proposing a certain democratic ethos of pluralism can also be enacted in how one theoretically interacts with

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¹¹⁹ Rancière, *Hatred of Democracy*, p. 74. This clearly has similarities to Mouffe’s argument that there is a tension between the liberal and the democratic traditions within the model of liberal democracy.
¹²⁰ Jacques Rancière, p. 74.
¹²¹ See e.g. Rancière, *Dis-Agreement*, pp. 16-19.
¹²² Rancière, *Dis-Agreement*, p. 28.
¹²³ This also means that Mouffe and Rancière do not conceptualize the term politics in the same way, although their different perspectives are compatible none the less.
¹²⁴ Rancière, *Dis-Agreement*, p. 29.
one’s interlocutors in writing. This refers to how Connolly’s writing has been
described as a “rhetoric of democratic negotiation”. Applied to Mouffe, we
clearly notice an agonistic writing style, as Mouffe does engage with her inter-
locutors directly and as sharing a common space – but nevertheless always
pointing out the differences, as if not to hide away the antagonisms. Rancière,
on the other hand, writes much more opaquely, often not even naming the
theorists that he is disagreeing with. One could interpret his writing style as if
the actors (here other theorists) did not matter much, as if their interventions
were only a small part of a bigger picture. This is perhaps not surprising in
relation to Rancière’s thinking concerning political moments and democracy.

Drawing on the futurity of the notion of democracy to come, I would like to
turn to the importance of fleshing out how democratic subjectivities are con-
structed. I will in this regard draw on Norval’s work *Aversive Democracy*. Through
engaging with both deliberative and post-structuralist approaches to democracy,
Norval’s model focuses on a Wittgenstein inspired perspective of a democratic
grammar and the “interplay between tradition and novelty in democratic poli-
tics, but seeks to avoid the tendency to treat all forms of novelty as radical
breaks, and all tradition as mere repetition of the same”.

Norval identifies a lack within democratic theory in relation to analysing
democratic subjectivities:

The failure in deliberative and post-structuralist conceptions of democracy to ac-
count for these moments in which we assume democratic subjectivity leaves us
unable to think through how it is that we become democrats, and make demo-
cratic subjectivity ours.

Besides these more general shortcomings, Norval also identifies within the
post-structuralist account a “bracketing of normative questions and an overem-
phasis on the political as dislocation and disruption. As a consequence, the
grammar of ongoing democratic politics has remained largely unanalysed and
under-theorized”. Jezierska adds to this the need for a broader understanding
of “the meeting of the other”. The critique of too much focus on disruption
will be taken into account in this study, where the aim is to be open to the nu-

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ances in the interaction and not only focus on potential dislocations. The relational dimension has been understudied when analysing democratic argumentation and the aim is to show how an emphasis on realtionality can further our understanding.

I argue that the post-structuralist conceptualizations of the way every object and subject gain meaning in relation to other objects and subjects needs to be more fully taken into account. We need to draw further on Mouffe’s ascertainment of the constant struggle for hegemony as meaning a constant contingency that also manifests itself in a micro context. That means we should pay attention to not only how every identity is constructed through a relation from the point of view of that subject but that the reception of that identity, subject position or subjectivity becomes a part of it. There is no identity that stands alone; this is particularly the case with democratic subjectivities as it is always about building a community, of sharing this thing called democracy.

My contribution to furthering our understanding of the moments when we become democratic subjects is to focus on the interactions on a detailed empirical level. By not only analysing the art events as examples of certain theoretical arguments, I argue that we get a better understanding of what Norval calls the grammar of democratic politics and of subjectivities as well. Through an empirical analysis firmly based in radical democratic theory we can get to the complexities of the democratic and political subjects to come.

Art and radical democracy

What is the place of art and cultural expressions within the framework of radical democracy? Mouffe has discussed art in relation to agonistic democracy, and by pointing to the critical potential of art and its place within a radical democracy she describes the importance of art for silenced voices. Mouffe claims that the arts can be a space where other voices and alternatives can be articulated, and that they are therefore particularly important for silenced voices. Because hegemony is so closely connected to ascribing meaning there is always a political dimension in art, as it intervenes in our cultural perceptions. That does not mean that art is always critical towards the hegemony at that given point in time and space. It can also be a part of its creation and how it is being upheld. Critical art is therefore always, according to Mouffe, art that shows the dissensus that reigning consensus tries to hide – this as art has the potential of revealing those exclusions that are always there but are not always acknowledged.131 Furthermore, Mouffe sees a potential that artistic practices can “contribute to the construction of new subjectivities”.132 Mouffe does not make a distinction between political and non-political art as she sees a political dimension in art in

131 Mouffe, “Art and Democracy”, pp. 11-12; Agonistics, pp. 85-105.
general as it is part of “the constitution and maintenance of a given symbolic order or in its challenging”. Mouffe furthermore opposes the often assumed privileged position of the artist. One example of this image of the artist is Caroline Levine’s argument that “the will of the majority and the deliberately minoritarian avant-garde are structurally opposed, which means that they are destined to come into conflict as long as the logic of the avant-garde is active in democratic contexts”. Mouffe argues, in contrast to Levine’s affirmative conception of the avant-garde artists, that it is not useful to talk about avant-garde artists as it is not possible to make any radical critique that is a total break with the old. In other words, the way both Rancière and Mouffe refuse to speak of an avant-garde of artists differs from popular conceptions of artists as especially equipped to narrate and portray political meaning and ideas. Instead, Mouffe emphasizes how critical art needs to be analysed through the political:

Another frequent misconception consists in envisaging critical art in moralistic terms, seeing its role as one of moral condemnation. Given the current situation, where there are no longer any agreed upon criteria for judging art production, there is a marked tendency to replace aesthetic judgments with moral ones, pretending that those moral judgments are also political ones. I regard all of these conceptions as ‘anti-political’ because they fail to grasp the nature of the hegemonic political struggle.

This relates to the more general observation of how political issues are increasingly being discussed in moralistic terms.

**Dissensus and intelligibility**

Although both Rancière and Mouffe stress art’s relation to political subjectivities, it seems that Rancière is even more sceptical about the potential political role of art than Mouffe is. This is, as might be expected, in line with their general take on democracy. Rancière critically describes the notion of critical art as a way of overcoming the tension that lies within the idea of a relationship between the political aims of an artist and its artistic means. What Rancière

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133 Mouffe, “Art and Democracy”, p. 11.
136 Mouffe, “Art and Democracy”.
137 See e.g. Girma Negash, “Art Invoked: A Mode of Understanding and Shaping the Political”, *International Political Science Review* 25, no. 2 (04, 2004), 185-201.
139 See e.g. Mouffe, *On the Political*.
140 This difference can be seen in how artists are discussed in relation to Mouffe’s agonistic democracy where the artists are often positively seen as a part of re-politicizing democratic practice, see e.g. Stavrakakis, “Challenges of Re-Politicisation”.
disputes is the causal chain from “intellectual awareness and political action”\(^\text{141}\). He continues:

What occurs instead is a shift from a given sensible world to another sensible world that defines different capacities and incapacities, different forms of tolerance and intolerance. What occurs are processes of dissociation: a break in relationship between sense and sense – between what is seen and what is thought, what is thought and what is felt. Such breaks can happen anywhere and at any time. But they cannot be calculated.\(^\text{142}\)

What Rancière is stressing here is the fact that we cannot judge in advance the political effects of a work of art. What Rancière is more unclear about is the question to what extent we should try to achieve those “processes of dissociation”\(^\text{143}\) or if there should be other motivations at play.

As a matter of fact, political art cannot work in the simple form of a meaningful spectacle that would lead to an ‘awareness’ of the state of the world. Suitable political art would ensure, at one and the same time, the production of a double effect; the readability of a political signification and a sensible or perceptual shock caused, conversely, by the uncanny, by that which resists signification. In fact, this ideal effect is always the object of a negotiation between opposites, between the readability of the message that threatens to destroy the sensible form of art and the radical uncanniness that threatens to destroy all political meaning.\(^\text{144}\)

As an illustration of exactly this tension between being intelligible and keeping the uncanny feature that can make the art and its imaginary a potentially subversive resistance, Linda Zerilli draws on Wittig’s example of the Trojan horse and concludes that if it “is not recognizable as a horse, it will not be taken into the city” and “[i]f it is too recognizable – not too strange, that is – it will not function as a war machine”.\(^\text{145}\) This negotiation between readability and the radical uncanniness will be analysed through the term of *intelligibility* – how the artwork is or is not perceived as having a clear, readable message and how the form of the message influences how it is received and what weight it is given. Through this term, intelligibility, we add an analytical dimension that is rarely included in democratic theory – a dimension highlighting the relationality of any message, of any social object.

The fact that we cannot know beforehand what the effect of different art projects will be, if it will for example create some form of disensus, does not mean that we cannot analyse certain politicizations in the art projects themselves.\(^\text{146}\) This means that in the events that I am analysing I can say something

\(^{141}\) Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator*, p. 57.
\(^{142}\) Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator*, p. 75.
\(^{143}\) Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator*, p. 75.
\(^{145}\) Zerilli, *Feminism and the Abyss of Freedom*, p. 79.
about the political issues that are put into action in the art object, and I can
analyse the debates that follow, but I cannot by only looking at the art object
predict the effects. Just because an artist in her work of art has an aim of chal-
lenging the closed nature of psychiatric wards does not mean that a person that
sees her art piece at an exhibition will necessarily start to question how these
hospital wards are functioning and whether they have access to them via demo-
cratic means. Furthermore, even though that person would start thinking about
these things, there is no guarantee that that person will take it any further, and
that person might not even think of it anymore after leaving the exhibition
room. Perhaps that person will perhaps come to the conclusion that these
wards must be of this closed nature and that it is only right that representaives
of the state have these means of using violence for compulsory care at hand. It
might even strengthen them in the belief that the psychiatric care system is a
well-functioning one.

Another dimension of the relational character of an artwork and its audience
is the question of credibility. Amy Mullin discusses how within activist art there
is the crucial dimension of credibility, and of how an artwork is received by its
“community of interest” – understood here as a community not demarcated
geographically but rather by cultural or social values or experiences. In order
to gain credibility an activist artist must, according to Mullin, preferably either
do extensive research or have experience of engaging with the community that
they are working with. This in contrast to the risk of being “seen as patronizing
outsiders who drop in briefly to make an art work”. Although Mullin is dis-
cussing activist artists who often work in close collaboration with a particular
community, this has bearing on other artwork as well. When choosing to en-
gage with a certain political issue in your artwork, such as racism or mental
health institutions with an intention to problematize, shed light on or inspire a
public discussion, the artist can be understood as also dealing with a certain
community of interest in relation to that artwork. When it comes to questions
of racism, for example, the artist could claim that there are two different com-
munities of interest the artist wants to reach, a community that might identify
with having experienced racism as it is portrayed in the art and, on the other
hand, a community that might be the target of the artist to become more en-
lightened, people who themselves do not experience racism but are either active
or more passive parts of those racist structures and expressions. It is in other
words a matter of a community of interest that directly relates to the artwork
rather than being a group of critics, art colleagues, etc. By this expansion of the
term you might also claim that just as there is no point in distinguishing politi-
cal art from non-political art there is also an activist feature in much of the art

147 The term appropriated by Mullin comes from Carol Condé and Karl Beveredge, in Amy
148 Amy Mullin, “Feminist Art and the Political Imagination”.
that we normally do not classify as activist art – as it attempts to intervene in our imagination and sensations of the world.

**Imaginary horizons, fantasy and investments**

Let us for a moment turn back to imaginary horizons, in order to understand how an art event and its imagination can have a democratic function. Imaginary horizons are not only a matter for subversive articulations but a part of any hegemonic struggle. Anna Marie Smith describes the process of how a hegemonic discourse increases its authority and states that “[a]t its highest moment of authority, the hegemonic discourse becomes an imaginary”\(^{149}\) and further that “[p]olitical struggle does nevertheless depend in part on the ability to imagine alternative worlds”.\(^{150}\) The weight of imaginaries is connected to how they also form “horizons of intelligibility”.\(^{151}\) As an example of this, Smith describes how Thatcherism in Great Britain was successful partly because it managed to function as a social imaginary and through that “the hegemonic discourse becomes embodied in a number of different key institutions”.\(^{152}\)

Mouffe connects to the Gramscian idea of the common sense prevailing in a society and to how the domain of the cultural is a key factor in constructing, upholding and challenging that common sense.\(^{153}\) Common sense should here be understood as the cultural resources that shape people’s perception of the world or as the site “on which the dominant ideology is constructed” and “for the resistance to that ideology”.\(^{154}\)

Norval for her part turns to Wittgenstein and the concepts of political grammar and aspect change in order to grasp how change occurs in a democratic imaginary and subjectivity. Political grammar is understood by Norval as “those horizons delimiting what is intelligible and, hence, what may count as possible reasons in any given context”.\(^{155}\) Aspect change describes the process of a subject changing its way of seeing and perceiving things, so as to be able to say: “Now I see things differently!”.\(^{156}\) The change is precisely in the seeing, “the practice or objects remains the same, yet is seen as new”.\(^{157}\) For Norval these terms both account for how changes in political grammars and subjectivities occur at the same time as they clearly show that there cannot be a total break

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149 Smith, *Lacau and Mouffe*, p. 171.
151 Smith, *Lacau and Mouffe*, p. 77.
with what has been. Moreover, in these changes Norval sees imagination as a key concept.¹⁵⁸

Political challenges through imagination or fantasy have been studied within feminist theory, which is being increasingly appropriated by democratic theorists. For example, Judith Butler is mainly known for her work within feminist and queer theory but has come to be increasingly read as a part of a broader democratic theoretic field.¹⁵⁹ Butler's view of a radical democracy contains a dimension of keeping open, not closing for demands or alternatives that may be articulated but that today cannot be foreseen.¹⁶⁰ Butler furthermore stresses that for a society to be democratic it needs conflicts and controversies.¹⁶¹ These are arguments well in line with Mouffe’s basic claim of the agonistic pluralism and the political. Butler views fantasy as “part of the articulation of the possible”¹⁶² and “what allows us to imagine ourselves and others otherwise”.¹⁶³ The constitution of what is possible is, according to Butler, far from some kind of luxury but rather a necessity and it could only be seen otherwise by persons already articulated as possible.¹⁶⁴ Butler further states that fantasy has been a key feature within feminist thinking of a ”future that is not yet” and that fantasy is therefore more about another version of the real rather than something that is not real.¹⁶⁵ In a similar way Drucilla Cornell connects utopian thinking with an exploration of the possible when she stresses that the imagination has its limits but that it also works as a way of thinking of that which is yet not possible to represent.¹⁶⁶

All these theorists describe how hegemonic orders also invariably involve how we think and see practices and things around us. This also means we have different investments into those imaginaries and therefore we sometimes react with emotions when they are challenged. A reasonable assumption is that the more you have invested into a certain imaginary the more emotions you are likely to display when it gets challenged. Drawing from Ahmed we can see how

¹⁵⁸ Norval, Aversive Democracy, pp. 100-104.
¹⁶⁰ Butler, Undoing Gender, pp. 226-227; see also Chambers and Carver, Judith Butler and Political Theory, p. 138.
¹⁶¹ Butler, Undoing Gender, p. 39.
¹⁶² Butler, Undoing Gender, p. 28.
¹⁶³ Butler, Undoing Gender, p. 29.
¹⁶⁴ Butler, Undoing Gender, pp. 29-31.
the emotions displayed publically in an event, carry a relational character as well in the way that they circulate, rub off and have a certain sticky character, even if different subjects are affected differently. Ahmed furthermore describes how the figures of the feminist troublemaker and killjoy help us see how articulating or acting in dissonance with the dominant norms comes to be branded as the source of unhappiness. When a feminist speaks out or reacts to sexist speech then the trouble is placed with the feminist rather than with the person making sexist statements. The objecting feminist can even be seen as killing the joy presumed to be present. By working critically with the trouble that emerges in an event, different investments in certain imaginaries and hegemonic perceptions become more readable.

In relation to subject formation and how they become invested in certain symbolic orders, there is an important difference between different contributors within radical democracy, in how they view psychoanalytic theory, in particular Lacanian theory. I agree with the choice that Smith makes when she chooses to emphasize “Gramscian contextualization” to a higher degree than the psychoanalytic dimensions of Laclau’s work. Smith discusses the critique posed by, for example, Butler on the lack of taking into account historical specificity on the part of psychoanalytic perspectives as of Žižek or the later works of Laclau. Butler has on different occasions discussed how a Lacanian perspective comes to take on a universalistic formalistic character. I also agree with Lloyd that even though Butler rejects the Lacanian framework that the psychoanalytic perspective does play an important role in Butler’s work but that it is more directed to questions of the constitution of the subject and less to issues of resistance. Mouffe refers to some of the key notions of psychoanalytical theory, but in my reading of Mouffe it is still the Gramscian concept of hegemony and the primacy of the political that is at the centre. Furthermore, Mouffe has consistently emphasized the importance of contextual awareness.

Others within the school of discourse theory have ventured more into the psychoanalytic strand and further developed Laclau’s turn to viewing the subject as a subject as lack. In Mouffe’s writing this was not an explicit turn,

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170 Smith, *Laclau and Mouffe,* pp. 80-82.


170 Smith, *Laclau and Mouffe,* pp. 80-82.


173 Wenman explores the difference between Laclau and Mouffe as mainly about the relation between the particular and the universal, where Wenman in Laclau’s writings finds “a fetishism of the category of totality and contempt for ‘mere particularism’, in Mark Wenman, “Laclau or Mouffe? Splitting the Difference”, *Philosophy Social Criticism* 29, no. 5 (2003), p. 601. Although, Wenman’s reading differs from my own in many respects it can be argued that this emphasis on
although she mentions the subject as lack in one of her earlier writings, and therefore I do not see it as an essential part of the theory of agonistic democracy that she proposes. There is a difference in emphasis first and foremost where it is the political that is at the core of her argument.

Space of conflict

It is in line with Mouffe’s conceptualization of the political and the social that the space of conflict will be analysed. In my appropriation it is a political space that arises and makes apparent boundaries and exclusions of those social spaces that surround us on a daily basis, as in the construction of a contingent order of social objects, such as mental health care institutions or of relations between citizens in a post-colonial nation. As Howarth argues, space is not synonymous with place, but place (or places) is a part of the space constructed. This will become clear as the space that arises in the different art events connects in different ways to the place that they happen within. Moreover, plurality is a key term as a space can also transgress those places, showing the multi-layered construction of a certain space and the different relations to a place that different subjects construct.

Any arisen space will be “unstable and temporary” and therefore needs to be analysed as a construction in time as well as of place. Within the spaces of conflict that arise within the art events there is a continual struggle over the question of what and who are deemed appropriate within that space as it connects to other spaces that are more specifically defined, such as a space of citizenship as necessary for critique within a certain demos.

Instead of space of conflict we could talk of the more general space of argumentation as Norval does, who in line with Howarth emphasizes their contingent character as they are not neutral spaces ready for the inclusion of more claims and demands but on the contrary: “[f]or new demands to appear on the stage, the space of argumentation itself has to be reconfigured”. In my analysis space of conflict is the more fitting term as my art events have their starting point in a very specific conflict and are not interventions in the traditional spac-

the universal in Laclau coincides with the theory on the subject as lack and gives a possible interpretation of why this turn became much stronger with Laclau than with Mouffe.

es of argumentation. Thereby the element of felt provocation is highlighted as well as how the construction of this new space is distinctly attached to the concrete art object. Those particular spaces in turn affect other spaces of argumentations, as well as other stages and arenas, and can give impetus to new ones as well. We now turn to how the political and democratic dimensions in these spaces of conflict can be analysed.

**Political dimensions**

When analysing the political dimensions of the four art events, the focus will be on practices and articulations of politicization and depoliticization, as well as the constitution and reception of political subject positions and subjectivities.

As the events have been selected on the basis of displaying a public dissensus, we can assume some political practices present in the event. The question is how potential political practices and articulations take place within a terrain of an ongoing struggle regarding how to make meaning out of what is happening. In the analysis of the events we therefore study not only the potentially political but also depoliticizing practices and articulations.

Processes of politicization consist of political articulations. Drawing on Laclau and Mouffe articulation serves as the basic unit for the analysis as “any practice establishing a relation among elements such that their identity is modified as a result of the articulatory practice”. That means that any identity or political discourse consists of articulations and that they are not given beforehand. The non-determinate character of the political articulations is a central notion, as also Norval describes:

> The practice of articulation focuses attention on the processes through which identities, demands, and claims are expressed and put together into political programmes. It starts from the theoretical premise that there are no demands, interests, or identities that per definition or in essence belong together. Rather, much of the work of politics consists in rhetorically producing alliances, forging together demands and giving content and expression to interests.

As becomes clear here, there is no inevitability when it comes to resistance against subordination. It is not the subordination per se that gives rise to resistance and “[o]nly in certain cases do these forms of resistance take on a political character and become struggles directed towards putting an end to relations of subordination as such”. That means that what Laclau and Mouffe are referring to is a type of action whose objective is the transformation of a social

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180 Smith, *Laclau and Mouffe*, p. 87.
relation which constructs a subject in a relationship of subordination”.\textsuperscript{183} Glynos and Howarth add that there is a necessary public dimension in this, and they conclude that “a demand is political to the extent that it publicly contests the norms of a particular practice or system of practices in the name of a principle or ideal”.\textsuperscript{184} It is in this naming of a principle or ideal that gives the political articulations a transgression from the particular to the universal.

Just as there are political articulations there are also practices and articulations that work in the other direction, namely to depoliticize a certain issue or demand. The term depoliticization is widely used in political studies\textsuperscript{185} but here it is used as conceptualized within radical democratic theory. As a key term within the field it captures practices and articulations that keep a normalized or sedimented order in place. Capturing the relation to the dominant order, Žižek calls depoliticization the “the basic aim of antidemocratic politics” and “the unconditional demand that ‘things should return to normal’”.\textsuperscript{186} With Mouffe’s terms we can see it as the hegemonic intervention occurring whenever the hegemony gets threatened, disrupted or dislocated. Moreover, depoliticizing practices are necessary for any order or discursive construction to conceal its political origin – and thereby the notion that it could be different. In other words, much of the everyday business of what we call politics consists of depoliticization. Or as Rancière states: “Depoliticization is the oldest task of politics, the one which achieves its fulfilment at the brink of its end, its perfection on the brink of the abyss”.\textsuperscript{187} Similarly, and even more strongly than Mouffe, the argument by Rancière is that most of what happens in our democracies is a part of the police distribution of the sensible and not politics proper. Practices of depoliticization are part of keeping this distribution of the sensible, of keeping things and people in their right and proper place.

In the concrete analysis of the events there are many ways that practices and articulations of depoliticization can take place, but I will focus in particular on the interaction in the texts and on responses to articulations that articulate, for example, a demand or a power relation. The responses can include attempting to shift a certain argument from the universal or political to the particular personal or moral. A response that omits to take into account a previously politically articulated demand can also be part of a depoliticizing practice.

In reading art events the stated intentions are addressed as part of a broader context of positioning oneself and one’s artwork in the public discussion. In the chosen art events there are recurring references to the potential intentions of the artists. These intentions include, for example, having a political intention or

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{183} Laclau and Mouffe, \textit{Hegemony and Socialist Strategy}, p. 153.
\item \textsuperscript{184} Glynos and Howarth, \textit{Logics of Critical Explanation}, p. 115.
\item \textsuperscript{185} See e.g. Matthew Flinders and Jim Buller, “Depoliticisation: Principles, Tactics and Tools” \textit{British Politics} 1 (2006), 293-318.
\item \textsuperscript{186} Žižek in the afterword in Rancière, \textit{The Politics of Aesthetics}, p. 70
\end{itemize}
only an aim to provoke, or to play. Whether a stated intention by an artist is the actual one cannot be determined, and thus it is the articulations of them that are studied. However, what we can know is the outcome of the object itself as an outcome of an intention from the artist, as consequences of certain artistic choices. Another way of taking intentions into account is to view them as a part of the context of the artwork itself. A proclaimed intention can be a way of trying to move from the particular to the universal – as well as the opposite. Furthermore, it can be a strategy for artists when under pressure to say that their work is not political but only artistic as a way of protecting themselves in the public debate. In the analysis I track these proclaimed intentions to see how they are received and if they develop further in that public discussion.

In moving from the particular to the universal, different representational forms of ‘we’ emerge. Mouffe defines political identities as “always collective identities, constructed in the form of a we/they relation”. Identity is always in relation to something, and it is this relational dimension of we/they that also makes it impossible to ever have a society without antagonism. This is why subject positions can be viewed as “points of antagonism and […] forms of struggle”. When it comes to reading subject positions in the art events I will make use of the distinction that Smith makes between structural positions and subject positions.

Structural positions are, for instance, gender, race and class, which are always understood through a political discourse and subject positions are a thus a form of interpretative frameworks. The relationship between subject positions and structural positions is far from a simple one, and Smith states that “we can nevertheless assert that an individual’s sense of her structural positions – the way she lives in her structural positions and responds to them – is shaped not by the mere fact of the structural positions themselves, but by the subject positions through which she lives her structural positions”. Studying how political subjects are being constructed means paying attention to the political articulations that translate the particular into something universal. The relationship of these political subject positions with other subject and structural positions will be taken into account, for example regarding how artists can be viewed primarily in the perspective of their structural position while consequently ignoring their political subject positions. Also, the possible tension between different subject positions is of interest, such as when one position is recognized as impossible to combine with others.

188 Bal, A Mieke Bal Reader, pp. 245-248.
190 Mouffe, Agonistics, p. 136
191 Mouffe, Agonistics, pp. 4-5.
192 Laclau and Mouffe, Hegemony and Socialist Strategy, p. 11.
193 Smith, Laclau and Mouffe, p. 58.
When Mouffe speaks of art she brings to the fore art’s possibility of giving rise to new political subjectivities. In relation to political identities and subject positions, how are these subjectivities to be understood? Smith describes structural positions and subject positions as “facets of subjectivity”,\(^\text{194}\) which would then make the term subjectivity superfluous when already examining the other two. Norval speaks more of moments of subjectivity, linking it to moments of dislocation or changes in how a subject sees the world.\(^\text{195}\) Moreover, Norval does not speak of subject positions in relation to these subjectivities, and therefore also does not distinguish between the two. In an attempt to make a distinction between the two, Kelly Oliver connects historical and political context to subject positions and ethical dimensions to subjectivity:

Subject positions, although mobile, are constituted in our social interactions and our positions within our culture and context. [...] Subject positions are our relations to the finite world of human history – what we might call politics. Subjectivity, on the other hand, is experienced as the sense of agency and responsibility that are constituted in the infinite encounter with otherness, which is fundamentally ethical. And [...] they are always profoundly interconnected.\(^\text{196}\)

Although the distinction made between the contextual and ethics here may be too sharp, Oliver has a strong point in trying to distinguish between them. In the analysis of the art events subject positions are studied as deeply embedded in the discourse, where subjects are constrained in their so-called choice between the subject positions available and possible at a given time in a given context. The relational dimension also includes political subject positions as they are made publically and are therefore in part dependent on how they are received as valid or not. I use subjectivities to describe the process of becoming a political subject in the way that it includes a certain awareness, and how there is a link to the political in ascribing itself to a name or a principle of the universal. It is therefore closer to a moment, as Norval puts it, but I choose to keep it more open as a process as I want to include the responses. I also interpret Norval’s moments of subjectivity as very much linked to democratic subjectivity and to a democratic ethos. In contrast, the political subjectivities are not necessarily linked to this sense of sharing a democratic community, but can consist of different kinds of ‘we’ as in an articulation of a subordinate relation that can thereby be challenged and resisted.

An important part of the resistance within a hegemonic order is the question of voice. As Norval has emphasized, that question of voice is not only a matter of inclusion but also of “the possibility of a deprivation of voice”, and therefore of processes of domination.\(^\text{197}\) Norval continues by making clear that demo-

\(^{194}\) Smith, \textit{Laclau and Mouffe}, p. 59.
\(^{195}\) Norval, \textit{Aversive Democracy}, pp. 141-186.
\(^{196}\) Kelly Oliver, “Witnessing and Testimony”, \textit{Parallax} 10, no. 1 (2004), p. 82.
\(^{197}\) Norval, “Democracy, Pluralization, and Voice”, p. 298.
Democratic theory needs to pay more attention to the practices, mechanisms, processes that “allow movement from noise to speech, from inaudibility to audibility” or invisibility to visibility. In reading the events, this will be done partly by using Rancière’s conceptualization of speech and noise.

There is order in society because some people command and others obey, but in order to obey an order at least two things are required: you must understand the order and you must understand that you must obey it. And to do that, you must already be the equal of the person who is ordering you. It is this equality that gnaws away at any natural order.

Through this gnawing away there is also possibility of resistance, of moving from only being considered as noise to becoming a part, being heard as speech, as voice.

Democratic dimensions

When we now turn to the democratic dimensions, the analytical focus is on democratic subjectivities and ethos in the sense of actively sharing a democracy. This means studying different identifications and constructions of how to act democratically as well as the ways the interaction in the event takes place. In the concrete events it is not always easy to separate the democratic dimensions from the political ones as they often follow from political articulations or some sort of dislocation, a disruption of the status quo. The way to separate them when reading the art events is to focus on the conditions of the interaction and on what is expected of a democratic subject in each event, that is to say the way a shared democratic space is constructed and demarcated. The democratic dimensions emphasize what it means to be participating democratically and how we can read democratic subjectivities in relation to actively sharing a community. As Mouffe states:

A radical democratic citizen must be an active citizen, somebody who acts as a citizen, who conceives of herself as a participant in a collective undertaking.

As Mouffe makes clear here through the notion of the active citizen, when separating the democratic dimensions from the political the active sharing is the key. Norval’s conceptualization of a democratic subjectivity also has this dimension of actively sharing a democratic collective where we have commitments and obligations to each other regardless of other points of disagreement.

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200 Rancière, Dis-Agreement, p. 16.
or conflict. This is in line with Brown who warns against “equating the political with democracy” and argues that:

[s]haring power does not require that we adhere to a common position, […] only that we agree to be democrats, that we agree to share the power that governs us, and that we commit ourselves to democratizing the powers that would otherwise rule us.

Therefore, to act democratically is always to perform a relational act; it is an action based in a community that is the receiver and responder to that action. This relational aspect means that the space of democratic exchange is necessarily also a public space. More specifically, it is always a plurality of public spaces. Dean claims that forms of participation such as commenting blogs, signing online petitions or clicking a like button are in fact not real participation but what she, borrowing from Žižek, calls interpassivity. This interpassivity rather than leading to political activity gives a false impression of being active and of political participation. The art events studied are filled with these kinds of activities that Dean rules out. Even though I agree with Dean that the activities and practices described most often are not political in the sense of articulations that transgress the particular, I do grant them some importance when it comes to sharing a democratic community. In these blogs and other online practices there is a sense of joining in on something considered shared and relevant to a certain community.

Furthermore, we also find here where the democratic ethos falters: where we see antagonisms rather than agonism and where we see what the normalized view on democracy is – what the borders and limits are and who can act in it. As Norval points out:

The terrain of democratic theory can be conceived of as that domain in which the central questions at stake are those concerning ‘voice’: who can speak, when, in what capacity, for whom, with what legitimacy, in what tone?

Moreover, if we do not limit democracy to only the traditional arena, but rather include it as a thing we all share, then blogs can be viewed as part of that as well as other arenas. Just as in parliamentary debates and newspaper articles, we can in blogs analyse the hegemonic borders of the term of democracy – how it is, for example, interpreted to belong to some more than others.

These borders are in turn connected to symbols and images of how a democracy should be as the “production of images and symbols […] play a crucial role in democratic theory,” as Norval points out.

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204 Mouffe, Agonistics, p. 91; “Art and Democracy”.
205 Dean, Democracy and Other Neoliberal Fantasies, pp. 31-32.
role in the construction of a democratic imaginary”.

Drawing on Ahmed as well as Dean we could call it a democratic script. In Ahmed’s exploration of ‘happiness’ she describes how:

[…] happiness is not simply used to secure social relations instrumentally but works as an idea or aspiration within everyday life, shaping the very terms through which individuals share their world with others, creating ‘scripts’ for how to live well. Going along with happiness scripts is how we get along.

If we exchange happiness for democracy we see the notable parallels with the ways in which certain articulations are a part of creating a particular democratic script. Moreover, as in Dean’s account, a certain democratic script can be invoked. Different forms of democratic engagement emerge, and become recognized as being – or not being – within the democratic way of behaving. References to democratic institutions and symbols can therefore be read as forms of identifications with a certain perception of how a democratic society should be; in the art events this is mainly a reference to a Western liberal democracy.

We can here make use of Butler’s appropriation of the Althusserian term interpellation where Butler emphasizes the room for resistance and subversive responses in the subjectification process. The original example is of the police officer that hails a person passing by. By responding to the hailing this person both becomes a subject within this framework and confirms the authority by which the policeman called out. What Butler does is to say that this interpellation can be responded to differently and also subversively, and therefore adds an element of distortion to the interpellation by the authority – although within the boundaries of the given power relations.

In the art events we can look for interpellations for certain ways of participating in democracy. This can be compared to Mouffe’s assertion that there is no place for a total revolution – as in an end of politics – but nonetheless the possibility for counter hegemonic practices within a given hegemony.

In my reading of Butler and the subversive practices she describes, there is possibility for resistance where there is room for making trouble. In relation to


208 Jodi Dean, “The Democratic Deadlock”, *Theory and Event* 10, no. 4 (2007); see also, Dean, *Democracy and Other Neoliberal Fantasies*.


210 Dean, *Democracy and Other Neoliberal Fantasies*, pp. 82.


democratic interaction, community and argumentation this trouble-making dimension is a crucial one when it comes to the studied art events as the arts themselves constitute potential trouble makers. They are potential trouble makers in the way that they do not conform to certain prescribed forms for a democratic argument or claim concerning what we consider to be the ‘normal’ way of doing democracy—although most art objects do not include trouble making of this sort.

In reading the art events I keep it an open question whether the artists in these events through their artworks can be seen as taking part in constructing a shared democratic space—and whether the responses made are articulations of democratic participation. As a “collective undertaking”, as Mouffe calls democratic participation, there is the element of relationality that puts the responses in the fore. There is a range of possible responses: ignoring, supporting, trivializing, threatening, etc. A key factor in reading these responses, not only as political articulations but also potentially democratic, includes the dimensions of opening or closing down as well as inclusion or exclusion. That is, do the articulations contribute to a space of democratic argumentation in the sense of inclusion and openness? With this I do not mean a space free from conflicts but a form of ethos of agonism, of sharing a space and recognizing the importance and contingency of that space.

Earlier, the term aspect change was used for describing how one suddenly comes to see the world differently. Norval speaks of how this aspect change also can be viewed as a description of a “reactivation” of democratic subjectivity, a reactivation of the “aspect dawning” that is the “first moment of assuming democratic subjectivity: Now I am a democrat!” that is central for democratic subjectivities. In the art events this can be read as moments when subjects publically assume a democratic position, of expressing a democratic subjectivity—such as situating oneself as an artist as having a similar societal responsibility as a journalist. Based on the concept of responsiveness Norval describes how we have responsibilities towards each other in how we relate to others and position ourselves. This involves how we respond to each other and the judgments we make. Norval continues:

Each of us is responsible. We cannot escape responsibility by pointing to the rules of a game, or some objective framework within which we are operating.

As a way of conceptualizing the potentiality for democratic action Norval uses the term exemplar for describing how the articulation of certain claims goes beyond the existing discourse or grammar and thereby “acts as a call to open

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214 Mouffe, *Democratic Politics Today*, p. 4.
ourselves up to other, foreign possibilities”.

Such exemplars are, according to Norval, not a part of the everyday practices and “for them to appear, a state of affairs need to be dislocated in some sense”. The connection made between the exemplar and dislocation reflects how the political and democratic dimensions are often interwoven in the theoretical discussion. The exemplars that Norval speaks of in many ways resemble the moments of politics proper conceptualized by Rancière, emphasizing democracy’s basic foundation of equality. Only by making that equality apparent can we have political moments, which in turn are democratic manifestations. The assertion of equality is thereby central concerning what makes something a democratic claim as it shows the equality already there as a presupposition. However, in this study I will make a sharper distinction between the political and democratic in order to be able to also capture the more common and ongoing practices and articulations of democracy.

The analysis of the democratic dimensions focuses on the construction of those shared spaces of democratic argumentation and on the shared construction of a democratic ethos, rather than on finding radical breaks or exemplars. This means we follow Norval’s invitation to in more detail describe the formation and upholding of democratic subjectivities and ethos. If political articulations are mainly about what we are saying concerning relations of oppression, then democratic articulations can be said to revolve around how we say things, what we hear (to hear other voices as equals) and what our expectations are of the responses. Therefore, it is necessary to analyse not only the individual articulation of a democratic subjectivity and identification but also how it is received and how the receiver positions her/himself. Actions taken by the involved persons are also a part of this, for example engaging in a certain discussion or not.

Democratic spaces can open up unexpectedly but are, however, under constant negotiation and can collapse at any moment, or transform into antagonism rather than agonism. To conclude, democratic dimensions consists of us finding ourselves sharing a community, a democracy with strangers – what do we expect from them, from ourselves, and who is allowed to do what and in what way in that democratic space and promise we share?

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220 See also, Norval, *Aversive Democracy*, p. 182.
221 Rancière, *Dis-Agreement*, pp. 16-18. For a discussion of Rancière’s conceptualization of equality see e.g. Ross, “Historicizing Untimeliness”.
3. The foreign trouble of Petra Bauer and Annette Krauss

We always have to take into account the culture of every minority in the Netherlands. Sorry but Sinterklaas festivity belongs to our culture!!!! So keep away from it!!!!

In my eyes the Sinterklaas festivity is a children’s celebration, as such free from racism and politics. Still a couple of bunglers know at the expense of the Dutch state to make an innocent popular festival burdened.223

The high number of exclamation marks in the quote indicates the strong emotions articulated in relation to the art event that will be analysed in this chapter. In 2008, artists Petra Bauer and Annette Krauss were part of an exhibition at the Van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven with their art project Read the masks – Tradition is not given. The project explored the character of Zwarte Piet224 (Black Pete) in the extremely popular Dutch December tradition Sinterklaas. Zwarte Piet is a painted black helper to the white bishop Sinterklaas (Saint Nicholas) who comes with gifts for the children. Every year in early December the arrival of Sinterklaas from Spain is celebrated nation-wide with for example presents for the children. To aid Sinterklaas with the presents there are helpers accompanying him, a number of Zwarte Pieten.225 The art project became so heavily criticized that a part of the project had to be cancelled.


In mijn ogen is het Sinterklaas feest een kinderfeest, wat zo los van racisme en politiek. Toch weten een stel prutsers op koste van de Nederlandse staat een onschuldig volksfeest beladen te maken.”

224 I will not translate Zwarte Piet or Sinterklaas, but keep the Dutch terms throughout the text, also in plural: zwarte pieten and sinterklazen.

In my analysis of this event emphasis will be on how the artists make trouble in different senses. The art project is firmly positioned in a context of previous struggles and democratic work, but still manages to create new trouble. The event thereby highlights how every democratic work and subjectivity is situated in between, to speak with Norval, traditions and originality.226

The chapter starts with an overview of the space of conflict by tracking the art project as well as the ensuing public debate. The political dimensions are analysed by looking at how the figure of Zwarte Piet becomes politicized or not and how the different political subjectivities and collective ‘we’ are constructed in the event. Lastly, we look deeper at the democratic dimensions and of how the two artists actively work with democratic symbols and patterns of exchange.

First of all, however, as a part of the tracking of the event, an outline of the empirical material analysed will be provided.

Tracking the event

The debate in this event started on a local level, and a big part of the material stems from local sources, such as the Eindhovens Dagblad with almost 200 online comments on the articles. When the debate grew more intense national newspapers increased their coverage, and especially in De Telegraaf there was a large number of readers’ comments.

All the newspaper articles are collected through the LexisNexis database, and a search has been made from 2008 to 2011 on search terms, (zwarte piet OR Petra Bauer OR Annette Krauss OR Van Abbemuseum OR (“Kunst AND protestmars”)). The search resulted in around 100 articles specifically concerned with this topic. All readers’ comments have been accessed through the newspapers’ websites.227 The critical opinion pieces in the weekly newsmagazine Elsevier together with linked readers’ comments have been accessed through the magazine’s website.

The television and radio programmes have been accessed through the Netherlands Institute for Sound and Vision, with the same search terms as in the printed press. I have also manually looked through some television programmes that normally feature current issues just to make sure that the description of the programme had not omitted a short clip or any other kind of mentioning. I have also included regional and local television programmes that were available

226 Norval, Aversive Democracy.
227 In the Eindhovens Dagblad all the comments were gathered in one thread, which was linked to all articles covering the topic. I have quoted the comments to these articles as comments on the first article that was published.
in the archive of the institute. The search resulted in less than ten relevant pro-
grammes.

When it comes to social media and blogs, I have included basically every-
thing I could find. One problem concerns accessing the online material, for not all is still available or archived. In the empirical material, I occasionally see trac-
es of lost blogs and websites, mainly in online comments referring to other posts. However, judging from comments to those lost statements they do not indicate any substantial difference. Some comments consist of broken links to video clips that likely have been removed because of copyright issues.

One of the blogs that reported on the art project was *GeenStijl*, which is an edited news blog characterized by satire and an explicit aim to provoke. There was a high number of comments on the posts on the blogs.

Statements from politicians and the parliamentary question posed by politi-
cal party PVV have been included as well and accessed through the parliament’s own website and the municipality website of Eindhoven.

Material produced by the museum is also included, such as information about the exhibition on the official museum website. The exhibition that came later and included a follow-up from Bauer and Krauss is included through my notes from my visit. My first encounter with the art project was at a conference for gender research and the artists’ presentation included a conference pro-
gramme that has provided background information to the project. The debate that was held at the museum is available online and I have included that in the empirical material.

All translations from the empirical material are my own.

Read the masks – Tradition is not given

The Van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven, the Netherlands, hosted in 2008 an ex-
hibition under the title *Be(com)ing Dutch*. On the museum’s website the exhibi-
tion was presented as “unusual in the Netherlands because it takes an outright political and social subject and translates it into artistic terms”\(^{229}\). The theme of the exhibition was to explore what it is to be or become Dutch and one part of the exhibition was an art project by Petra Bauer and Annette Krauss called *Read the masks – Traditions is not given*. Focus for the artwork was the Zwarte Piet character.

Zwarte Piet has previously been described as inherently racist\(^ {230}\) and there are accounts of foreign visitors’ surprise of the tradition\(^ {231}\). Mainly white people

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\(^{228}\) Unfortunately, a radio programme that included the artists answering listeners’ calls was missing from the archive at the *Netherlands Institute for Sound and Vision* and I have not been able to access it any other way.


\(^{230}\) See e.g. Mieke Bal’s claim in an introductory text to another art project on zwarte Piet by photographer Anna Fox: “No relativisations are possible of the deeply racist ideology that under-
with black make-up dress up in a servant’s suit and sometimes wear curly wigs and golden earrings. The Zwarte Piet is a joyful character, and dances and jumps around. Even though the tradition of Zwarte Piet has changed over the years it is still considered problematic, as Rebecca Brienen states.

Zwarte Piet’s skin color is not ideologically empty […]. Piet nonetheless still fills the same role that black figures did in early modern paintings: he is colorful, visually lively, subordinated, and he brings gifts to and entertains a majority white audience. He remains a problematic but beloved product of a racist tradition.232

Bauer and Krauss expressed a wish to discuss Zwarte Piet and the racist and colonialist connotations that they identified. The aim of the project is described by the artists themselves in a reflection on the debate:

The past 50 years have seen moments of protest against Zwarte Piet arise now and then. Although there have been some changes in the way this tradition is played out, we still think it remains problematic. We wondered if it was possible to re-open the discussion about a cultural tradition that has been depoliticized, neutralized and incorporated into collective memory and contemporary consciousness? What would this involve? Who has the right and the means to initiate such a discussion?233

In the exhibition hall the artists had placed white placards with black printed text on the floor against a white wall. On the placards the artists had printed slogans used from earlier protests in the Netherlands, for example “Zwarte Piet a white man’s construction”.234

The artists had planned to use the placards during a performance consisting of a protest march scheduled to be held a couple of weeks before the end of the exhibition. The march was to be held in collaboration with two Dutch anti-racist organizations: Doorbraak and Untold. The protest march was according to the artists planned as a playful positive event, but was cancelled by the museum.235 This was due to massive objections and threats directed towards the museum and the artists after the protest march had been highlighted in the

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234 The placards at the exhibition can be seen for example in a television news item, Netwerk, 23 November 2008, [television programme], FUNX.
235 Marcel van Engelen, 1 September 2008, “De ludieke mars tegen Zwarte Piet is gezwicht voor bedreigingen”, Dagblad De Pers.
local media. The artists themselves reported “thousands of comments and e-mails” some of them containing threats of violence.\textsuperscript{236} Charles Esche, director of the museum, explained the decision to stop the march: “I could see in the eyes of the police that they could not guarantee the safety for the people participating”.\textsuperscript{237} Given the decision to cancel the protest march, a debate was arranged as a collaboration between the museum, the city of Eindhoven and the artists to discuss the project and the reactions to it.

The project has of now developed into a total of four parts: the installation at the exhibition, the protest march that did not take place, the public debate and a film that explores what happened during the first phases of the project. The film has been screened in several countries\textsuperscript{238} and was, together with a chalk board with a written history of protests against Zwarte Piet, exhibited at the Van Abbemuseum in 2011 in an exhibition that marked the 75\textsuperscript{th} anniversary of the museum and had the title \textit{The City as Muse}. Their contribution at this exhibition could be regarded as a fifth part of the project.

\textbf{The public debate}

The exhibition \textit{Be(com)ing Dutch} opened 24 May 2008, but it was not until the end of August that a debate arose. The artists described that it was an article in the conservative magazine \textit{Elsevier} that became the start of the debate.\textsuperscript{239} In the local newspapers a number of critical articles were published and judging from the readers’ comments on those articles they spurred strong emotions directly. The debate is very intense for a few days, but still mainly on the local level. 29 August a statement from the museum and the artists is published in \textit{Elsevier} explaining the decision to cancel the march. Thereafter the debate starts to fade out.

The planned debate after the cancellation prompted parliamentary member Geert Wilders, leader of the right-wing, islamophobic \textit{Party for Freedom}, PVV, to pose a question in the parliament to the minister of Culture and Education. The question consisted of four issues where Wilders is concerned about Zwarte Piet being portrayed as racist and wants the minister to publicly announce the figure as not being racist, take action to decrease the funding to the museum and educate the artists on Dutch culture.\textsuperscript{240}

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{236} Bauer and Krauss, “Read the Masks: Tradition is Not Given”, p. 83.
\textsuperscript{237} Monica de Ruijer, 5 December 2009, “Roep om roetvrije Piet klinkt weer”, NRC Handelsblad. In Dutch: “Ik zag in de ogen van de politie dat ze niet konden garanderen dat het veilig zou zijn voor mensen die meelopen”.  
\textsuperscript{238} The Dutch premiere of the film was in December 2009 in Utrecht and was followed by a discussion. Since then it has been screened e.g. in 2010 in Bristol, UK and in Stockholm, Sweden. 
\textsuperscript{239} Zwarte Piet, Yes or No, Debate/Debat 2008, www.youtube.com, [2015-05-15]. 
\end{flushleft}
Rita Verdonk is another politician that participates actively in the debate and whose name is being referenced to a high degree in the different comments. Verdonk was in 2008 starting a new political party *Trots op Nederland* (Proud of the Netherlands) and had in April held a speech where she warned that Zwarte Piet might be under threat. Several comments refer to this speech, both as a description of how the artists were entering a “mine field” and of how Verdonk has been threatened because of her opinions. This is also the framing when she was interviewed on the national radio programme *Goedemorgen Nederland*.

The debate that is held in October 2008 leads to renewed attention in the media, but not to the same degree as in August and with less intensity. The film made by Bauer and Krauss also gets reported on in the media, but to even less degree than the debate. In other words, the intensity of those days in August never comes back.

Particular to this event is how the debate becomes really centred on the tradition itself and much less on the actual art object. This means that the core of the discussion regards whether the artists have the right to criticize the tradition and not whether their art project is good or real art. The focus on the tradition itself makes it more complicated to draw the boundaries of the event; however, I have restricted my analysis to statements that explicitly refer to the art project by Bauer and Krauss.

The debate on Zwarte Piet has been extensive in recent years and some of the texts reporting on the figure or previous debates refer to Bauer and Krauss and their project. In 2011 two persons were arrested when they protested in Dordrecht against the Zwarte Piet character. The policemen accused the protesters of disturbing the celebration of the arrival of Sinterklaas. The arrest was filmed and after the film was made public it led to a public debate. It was later concluded that the arrest was not according to the regulations. Also, during the years 2012–2014 there have been protests against the racism of the tradition, and there have also been attempts to adjust the tradition. For example, in Amsterdam, the local guidelines state that the Zwarte Pieten should not have golden earrings. A key figure in the protests is artist Quincy Gario who has been organizing resistance under the title *Zwarte Piet is racisme* (Zwarte Piet is racism). There has also been an organization formed called *Zwarte Piet Niet*.

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241 See also, Van der Pijl and Goulordava, “Black Pete, ‘Smug Ignorance’”, p. 267.
244 Interview with Rita Verdonk, on *Goedemorgen Nederland*, 29 August 2008 [radio programme], KRO.
(ZPN). When a working group within the UN in 2014 declared the tradition of Zwarte Piet racist it received considerable attention in the media, including statements by the then prime minister Mark Rutte.

**Main emotion: Hostility**

The event is characterized by strong emotions expressed primarily by people that are critical of the artwork. The main emotion of hostility is predominantly directed towards the artists, but is also connected to others not considered Dutch:

> How we here in Holland what festivities to celebrate, we decide ourselves. We don’t need no German, no Swede, no Antillean, no Surinamese, no Cape Verdean, no Sudanese, no Somalian, in short: no DOG is required.

There is also widespread anger expressed in the comments and feelings of being misunderstood, but what makes the main emotion for the event hostility is the strong theme of comments such as this one:

> WE DUTCH have the right and the freedom to arrange an exciting and fun Sinterklaas period every year. If someone does not feel comfortable with this then he can make use of another Dutch right, namely the freedom to leave!

Hostility is also directed towards the Van Abbemuseum and in particular the director of the museum Esche. The museum “should be ashamed”, lose their

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subsidies,\textsuperscript{252} and Esche is claimed to have a leftist political agenda and to be childishly playing about.\textsuperscript{253} While \textit{Untold} does not get much attention, the organization \textit{Doorbraak} is spoken of with strong vocabulary characterized by animosity.\textsuperscript{254}

The hostility is often linked not only to those directly involved in the project but also towards the political left in general\textsuperscript{255}, artists\textsuperscript{256} or certain immigrant groups within Dutch society\textsuperscript{257}. In the online comments to the newspaper articles the language used is rough with derogatory terms, both sexist and racist, and a very direct tone.\textsuperscript{258} Ron Eyerman describes how after the murder of Theo van Gogh “[a]ll the taboos about political and social correctness, at least in public behaviour, seemed to vanish”.\textsuperscript{259} The strong emotions often connect to a debate on multiculturalism that in the material can be read as already laden, which would then be in accordance with Eyerman’s argument. Although not explicitly articulated, a notion of fear can be read in the comments that make this connection, especially in the sense of a warning of a possible disintegration of Dutch culture. This relates to Ahmed’s description of how articulations of fear in relation to a narrative on terrorism often come to emphasize traditional norms and values.\textsuperscript{260} In the debate on the artwork by Bauer and Krauss such a movement can also be read more generally than just the particular issue of Zwarte Piet.

The artists and the representatives of the museum express more of disappointment than pronounced anger and their statements are not attached to as

\textsuperscript{254} See e.g. Laura Ingalls, 26 August 2008, Comments on “Zwarte Piet staat weer eens ter discussie”, GeenStijl [blog], www.geenstijl.nl, [2 November 2011].
\textsuperscript{255} See e.g. L. Feyaerts, 26 August 2008, Comments on Robin van der Kloor, 26 August 2008, “Pleidooi voor afschaffing Zwarte Piet in Van Abbemuseum”.
\textsuperscript{257} See e.g. jan, 12 November 2008, Comments on “Kunstenaarsduo maakt film over ‘rasistische’ Zwarte Piet”, www.elsevier.nl, [2 November 2011].
\textsuperscript{260} Sara Ahmed, \textit{The Cultural Politics of Emotion}, pp. 76-78.
strong emotions as the ones critical of the protest march or the project as a whole. In the comments that support the artwork there are also not as strongly expressed emotions. Occasionally there are comments articulating discontent with the tone of the argument in the online comments, but this is mainly connected to freedom of speech rather than to issues of racism.\(^{261}\)

Political dimensions

The analysis of the political dimensions in this event focuses on the trouble made through the artwork and how it is read as something outside of politics. Particular attention is given to the ways a collective ‘we’ is created in relation to the discussion on Zwarte Piet.

**Politicization and depoliticization**

A tension in the event is on whether to read the art project as political or as pure art. In the early statements by the artists and especially in the expressions by museum representatives ambivalence can be read. For example, a depoliticizing move can be read when the museum director states that “art is no opinion and also no politics”\(^ {262}\) and that “the march was meant as a playful, artistic activity march, but through the criticisms by others has become a political activity”.\(^ {263}\) In contrast, the statements by the artists explaining their purpose and aims with the art project frame it politically, not only by explicitly articulating that they want to problematize the tradition of Zwarte Piet and the structures behind it, but also by expressing the wish that the discussion will be taken “away from them and the project to be able to enter society with full force.”\(^ {264}\)

The general framing in the early media texts emphasizes a perceived political statement and the link with Doorbraak\(^ {265}\) and the march in particular is articulated as having a political meaning rather than a purely artistic one.\(^ {266}\) This dis-


\(^{262}\) Peter de Graaf, 30 August 2008, “Protestmars Zwarte Piet afgelast na bedreiging; Interview Charles Esche”, *de Volkskrant*. In Dutch: “Kunst is geen opinie en ook geen politiek”.

\(^{263}\) Yolanda de Koster and Rob Schoonen, 30 August 2008, “Van Abbemuseum blaast ‘zwartepietentocht’ door stad af”, *Eindhovens Dagblad*. In Dutch: “De tocht was als een ludieke, kunstzinnige actie bedoeld, maar door die beoordelingen van anderen is het een politieke actie geworden”.


tinction made between art and politics has consequences for the judgments made as it is linked to an argument that art does have a legitimate claim to occupy public space, but regarding political practices not necessarily so. In a reader’s comment this is made clear: “The museum can within its own walls exhibit what they want, place a text under it as they wish, so that we can choose if we would like to view such a project, but why was this march necessary?”

The art project is in many of the online comments constructed as part of a broader agenda of political correctness. References to political correctness can in one sense be read as acknowledging a political conflict, but in another sense can be read as shifting the attention from the actual figure Zwarte Piet to a perceived agenda from the collaborating parties. That agenda is argued to have nothing to do with the actual figure Zwarte Piet.

Closely connected to the political correctness is the articulation that a leftist agenda is being played out. The collaboration with Doorbraak is taken as proof that the project is about politics and not art. The director of the museum is furthermore described as leftist, but the articulations are not as straightforward when it comes to the artists. Although being termed as “leftist-fascists" they are also articulated as not knowing enough of the background, not understanding or being, in some way duped by Doorbraak.


272 See e.g. Frits Booy interviewed on, OBA Live, 27 November 2008, [radio programme], Radio 5, NPS.


Often the notion of a political agenda is combined with a discourse on migration and constructed as a threat to the Netherlands and to Dutch culture. As in the following quote from a comment to a blog:

Unfortunately for the artists and the Van Abbemuseum, the Dutch people don’t agree. They’ve put up with a lot of Multiculturalism over the last few decades, but abolishing Zwarte Piet – that’s a bridge too far.\textsuperscript{275}

One strand of politicization, although not dominant, is when the Dutch history of slavery and colonialism is mentioned as a context for why Zwarte Piet could be seen as problematic.\textsuperscript{276} These kinds of direct articulations are rare in the empirical material. Instead, slavery and colonialism are mentioned when responding to an assumed critical stance, and the response is mainly to argue that the colonial past is totally irrelevant for Zwarte Piet and for today’s society in general.\textsuperscript{277} Occasionally the slavery reference is articulated as discrimination through being accused of supporting slavery, for example stating “I never had a slave!”\textsuperscript{278} Some argue that there are structural problems in Dutch society, but that Zwarte Piet has nothing to do with it and thereby that the critique is misdirected. One example of this is claiming that when the role of Zwarte Piet is played with an immigrant accent it is simply an incorrect portrayal that has nothing to do with the real Zwarte Piet.\textsuperscript{279}

Several commentators make comparisons that trivialize a potential political reading and race as a power hierarchy. Examples of this include comparisons with Santa Clause, that he should be banned because he is an animal abuser due to the use of reindeer.\textsuperscript{280} Ghosts are taken as an example of how white people could be offended and that Zwarte Piet is better because he is the children’s friend.\textsuperscript{281} Different black things are listed as ridiculous examples of what may be

\textsuperscript{275} Rudolf, 8 September 2008, Comments on Annelies van der Veer, 8 September 2008, “Sinterklaas, Sinterklaas en natuurlijk Zwarte Piet”, [blog post], http://hoeiboei.blogspot.com, [9 October 2011]. (Original quote is in English)

\textsuperscript{276} See e.g. Zwarte Piet, Yes or No, Debat/Debate 2008, www.youtube.com, [15 May 2015]. As a contrast this is a key dimension for the art event with the monument of Anton de Kom by artist Jikke van Loon. I will explore this in more depth in chapter 6.


\textsuperscript{279} Frits Booy interviewed on, OBA Live, 27 November 2008, [radio programme], Radio 5, NPS.


banned next, such as “black ink, black electric cables, black televisions”. Recurrently, references are made to companies changing the name of the chocolate-coated marshmallow treat ‘negerzoenen’ (Negro kisses) with statements that the whole discussion is ridiculous. Food products are often used as examples when listing things that may be banned, for example white foods or products named after a certain region. Furthermore, there are references to the fact that the Sinterklaas tradition is also celebrated in the former Dutch colonies, for example in the Antilles, thus proving that the tradition cannot be racist.

One way of depoliticizing, or at least of removing it as a political issue from the Netherlands, is to argue that there are much graver problems elsewhere. A link is made to the artists’ intention regarding their choice of the Dutch context instead of countries in Africa by explaining that the artists would not have been provided for there: “[o]f course it is much more lucrative for Bauer and Krauss to fight ‘racism’ in the Netherlands”.

The artists are in some statements constructed as having a personal motive of gain. Bauer and Krauss are argued as just wanting attention or as doing something easy in order to get subsidies. The director of the museum is argued to have a personal interest in promoting a political agenda and of using the museum for something that is not appropriate for a public cultural institution.

The most dominant strand of depoliticization is that the Sinterklaas festivities is a children’s festival and therefore has nothing to do with racism: “Let them be children”. The argument is that the children are in a seemingly separate sphere from the world of grown-ups with its politics and conflicts and that the celebration comes from them. Children are by definition innocent and therefore separate from all forms of politics. One way of not dealing concretely with the Zwarte Piet character is to speak as if it was the “children’s celebration” that is being problematized rather than specifically the figure itself. Zwarte Piet thereby becomes attached to the actions of children rather than of the grown-ups around them.

We will now look further into how the notion of the innocent children is constructed in relation to Zwarte Piet and racism.

**Innocent children**

An important part of how the articulation of the innocent children plays out is how culture and traditions are placed outside the proper political realm. There is a clear distinction made between culture and politics as in the following quote:

Sinterklaas is a festivity for children! My daughter (3 years) is crazy about sinterklaas and zwarte piet. Discrimination has she never heard of yet. The artists on the other hand are the real racists: they see a ‘black’ where I (or we Dutch) just see zwarte piet.

It is made very clear here that the children’s celebration cannot possibly be in any way racist. This line of argumentation simplified suggests that children are innocent and children love Zwarte Piet – therefore Zwarte Piet is also innocent. This reasoning means that any claim that Zwarte Piet is racist will also affect the innocence of the children, since how could innocent children like something that was racist without being racist themselves – and the same goes for the parents. Since the children’s festival cannot be racist the artists are the ones to blame for the racist associations; they become the ‘real’ racists.

By having linked the children to the evaluation of Zwarte Piet, any problematizing of the figure can be seen as an accusation of the children and the parents. The artists become troublemakers, or in Ahmed’s words, killjoys when

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they start poking in the seemingly cosy and happy traditions. In relation to happiness Ahmed writes:

[…] happiness is not simply used to secure social relations instrumentally but works as an idea or aspiration within everyday life, shaping the very terms through which individuals share their world with others, creating ‘scripts’ for how to live well. Going along with happiness scripts is how we get along. To get along is to be willing and able to express happiness in proximity to the right things. The child thus has a happiness duty. […] Going along with this duty can mean simply approximating the signs for being happy – passing as happy – in order to keep things in the right place.293

Translating Ahmed’s conceptualization to the art event would mean that going along with the particular script of the Dutch tradition of Sinterklaas is how one gets along in Dutch society. Happiness should be expressed in relation to the festivity together with all the other happy people. Criticizing Zwarte Piet means that you disrupt the order and that things become out of place.

The particular script of enjoyment regarding Sinterklaas is attached to a construction of a national cultural heritage, which makes any disruption to it even more sensitive. This can be seen in the many articulations of wanting to give to your own children the wonderful things and traditions that you yourself experienced.294 By linking the children of today to the children of the past the Sinterklaas tradition is articulated as an indispensable Dutch tradition to be passed on to coming generations. The emphasis on having personal experiences of the celebration as a child strengthens an articulation where only the group that has these experiences can voice an opinion or demand concerning the celebration. Furthermore, the cultural heritage framing strengthens the articulation of the issue as being purely cultural and of the festivity being at the centre of sharing a culture through the generations. Articulating the tradition as something consistent through time makes it external to political changes and thereby the political realm.

Recurrently, the whole discussion is deemed wrong, and is described as an “attack on the Dutch cultural heritage”, and people are urged to “stay away from our children!”295 The implication is that discussing the tradition and the festivities in this way transforms it into something bad. This is often articulated in relation to other festivities such as Islamic holidays, as in the question “[w]hat is the next step, that we only can celebrate the sugar feast [Eid al-

Through this kind of statement the Dutch heritage is articulated as under pressure to change but that other, meaning non-Dutch, traditions are not.

**Zwarte Piet makes trouble**

The trouble happening in the event not only occurs as pointing out dissatisfaction with the tradition but also as a way that unspoken notions and interpretations are brought out in the responses to the art project. A particular order of the sensible, to speak with Rancière, becomes more visible when it is disrupted. The artwork and the ensuing debate can be read as enforcing articulations on what or who Zwarte Piet is. By having to clarify the presence of Zwarte Piet in the Dutch tradition one also has to make explicit the meaning of the figure. As Zwarte Piet is normally taken for granted, a part of the trouble consists of having to relate him to other known figures and how he appears to others that are not familiar with the tradition.

Since the artists themselves exclude Zwarte Piet from their exhibition, and therefore assume that people already know of the tradition (which all of the Dutch museum visitors surely do), the absence of Zwarte Piet becomes tangible in light of the hypervisibility of Zwarte Piet during the time leading up to the celebration. The arrival of Sinterklaas and the Zwarte Pieten is in mid-November and in the weeks up until the big celebration on 5 December much of Dutch everyday life is marked by the celebration. Stores are decorated accordingly, and preparations for the celebration are included in schoolwork. During these weeks there is no way a resident in the Netherlands could miss that it is Sinterklaas. The choice to not have pictures of Zwarte Piet can be read as expressing that the very portrayal is in itself problematic, which makes the artists stand on the outside. By not participating or associating with visual representations of the figure the artists expose how something embraced by so many may still be considered wrong. The hypervisibility is thereby disarmed as it no longer protects against looking deeper at what meaning the figure of Zwarte Piet may carry.

In the exchange taking place there are different versions told of the origin of Zwarte Piet often going back much further than 1850 when it was introduced in a children’s book by schoolteacher Jan Schenkman. Within the existing

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297 Jacques Rancière, *Dis-Agreement*.

literature there is not one consistent narrative on where Schenkman got the inspiration for the figure. The development from Zwarte Piet includes devil-like characteristics, serving Sinterklaas and later a more joyful figure and painted more accordingly as a blackface, as it is known from the American minstrelsy tradition.\textsuperscript{299} In the debate we see clearly that there is not one fixed explanation regarding Zwarte Piet, especially in the online comments.

A good example of how the event’s discussions on the origin of Zwarte Piet can be found in the online comments is an article in \textit{Eindhovens Dagblad} where initially most arguments against the tradition being racist is based on the popular explanation that Zwarte Piet is black because of the soot from the chimney. One person then posts excerpts from Wikipedia describing the different theories on the origin of Zwarte Piet, thereby putting the commonly told narrative of the chimney climber into question. The reaction to this follows mainly two routes. The first is to disregard the information, for example claiming that everyone knows that you cannot trust Wikipedia\textsuperscript{300} or that it does not matter because “[t]hat is how I learnt it and a lot of children have as well”.\textsuperscript{301} The second route, is to say that it simply doesn’t matter if Zwarte Piet was “a white chimney sweeper or a negro”; it is still not racist and the tradition should stay as it is. The fact that there is not one single explanation confirmed is used as an argument for keeping the version with climbing down the chimney. Some point to the fact that the figure has been adjusted over the years, and that the version today of the joyous Zwarte Piet is positive and unproblematic\textsuperscript{303} and that focus should be on existing slavery today in Africa and Asia.\textsuperscript{304} These articulations can be read as defusing the historical connotations of racism and furthermore that

\textsuperscript{299} For a description of the minstrelsy shows in America see e.g. Richard Osborne, “‘Blackface’ Minstrelsy from Melville to Moby” \textit{Critical Quarterly} 48, no. 1 (2006), 14-25; Robert Nowatzki, “Blackin’ Up is Us Doin’ White Folks Dooin’ Us: Blackface Minstrelsy and Racial Performance in Contemporary American Fiction and Film”, \textit{LIT: Literature Interpretation Theory} 18, no. 2 (04, 2007), 115-136.
the narrative of Zwarte Piet being black after climbing the chimney never really was a condition for accepting how the figure looks and acts.

A different route is taken when instead of doing away with the historical attachments they are made less negative by for example stating that what is sensitive in an American context is not automatically so within Dutch culture. A different version that Zwarte Piet is a freed slave but this is a marginal one in the debate.

There is a clear tension in the different statements between, on the one hand, saying that Zwarte Piet has nothing do with racism or with race at all, and on the other hand numerous comments online in connection with newspaper articles that equate Zwarte Piet with people from Africa, Muslims or immigrants in the Netherlands. One example is stating that the then minister for development cooperation is giving “detrimental billions donations to corrupt zwarte pieten regimes and to zwarte pieten tribal wars and their warlords”.

A question for interpretation of the different responses is how to read the different layers in the comments. Whereas the journalists and official commentators are mostly clear regarding what kind of text they are writing or what message they want to convey, this is not always the case with the commentators online. A recurring description of Zwarte Piet is of him as funny, acrobatic, dancing and simple-minded, a depiction resembling established denigrating caricatures of black people. At first glance we could say that they are simply re-representations of old stereotypes. However, if we take into account the notion of being reproached by the ‘politically correct’ we could also read these articulations as potentially consciously choosing the stereotype in order to provoke. In other words, the articulation of the stereotype may be an intentional response to a presumed framing of it as racist and politically incorrect. When interpreting the different statements we cannot presume ignorance, and many of the comments actually indicate an awareness of what different derogatory

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306 For a description of this version see, Van der Pijl and Goulordava, “Black Pete, ‘Smug Ignorance’”, p. 273.


309 See e.g. Van der Pijl and Goulordava, “Black Pete, ‘Smug Ignorance’”, p. 287.
stereotypes and terms there are, as in the following comment: “I have never really met a darker fellow human being...ah NIGGER that was called Piet”.

At the same time there are statements that can only with difficulty be read as ironic or simply provoking through stereotypes. One example is a description of Zwarte Piet as being framed within a gesture of well-meaning, where Zwarte Piet is counter posed to how black people are pictured within the television programme of “Opsporing verzoekt”. Regarding this programme where unsolved crimes and wanted criminals are highlighted, the commentator concludes that this is “much worse for our darker fellow human beings than a children’s friend, that once a year is present just cosy, fun, uncomplicated, that actually shows honesty and genuineness”.

There is in the event a strong feature of very direct language, with, for example, terminology that if used in many other languages would be considered clearly racist. The direct language is often combined with a very strong assertion that the tradition is absolutely not racist and neither is Dutch society. There is in other words a paradoxical situation of very strong and laden words used in the exchange and at the same time total refusal of any racism as in the following comment: “[h]ow sick do you have to be in your head to assert that Zwarte Piet is a conscious racist expression by the white community”.

On whose behalf do we speak?

When interrogating the different potential subject positions taken, and the collective ‘we’ that is articulated, it is important to ask on whose behalf representational claims are being made. The artists themselves emphasize how earlier protest movements, films, etc., have problematized the tradition of Zwarte Piet. However, they do not make strong representational claims in the sense of speaking for a wider group being oppressed. This may be linked to the fact that they are not considered an insider of the group being wronged, but are

rather considered to be in a middle position, white but not Dutch. Instead, the artists stress the collaboration with the two Dutch organizations, and thereby strengthen the representational claims made by the organizations.

Reading the official statements from the artists themselves, a link between the figure of Zwarte Piet and Dutch society is not always very explicit. The artists express their surprise that it is such a sensitive topic in today’s society but otherwise do not make any links to present racism. However, in many of the comments it is assumed that the artists do make this link to Dutch society and presumptuously racist structures. The art project becomes articulated by commentators as a part of a multiculturalist agenda and this receives responses voicing opinions on migration and integration in the Netherlands. There is a strong strand of ‘we’ that is being threatened by migration to the Netherlands, as in the following quote:

Now, currently I am once again converted to the ‘Sinterklaas belief’, rightfully so, in the Netherlands we have plus/minus 15.000.000. Non-immigrant Sinterklazen, who can no longer make something magically appear out of the sack, their sacks with ginger nuts have been eaten empty by 1.6000.000 immigrant Zwarte Pieten. 315

The articulations of a perceived threat against the white or the non-immigrant group is in some instances connected to an urge to mobilize, as in: “[f]ellow country-men, put up a fight against this kind of rubbish. What is black, must stay black.” 316

Particular to this event is also the fact that the artists are not criticized for not belonging to the group that they can be considered to speak for, namely the ‘black’ minority in the Netherlands. Instead, the main critique is that they do not belong to the ‘white’ Dutch that have experienced the tradition as children themselves. In an article from 2015, a teacher describes the hostile reactions he received from his colleagues when a photo of him taking part in protests against Zwarte Piet became public. The teacher argues that he was thought to have broken a “white front of unity” 317. There are some hints in the empirical material of Bauer’s and Krauss’s skin colour being a sensitive subject, and of


the artists being identified as white, for example likening them to “traitors to one’s country”.318

The characteristics of the articulated ‘we’ is mainly linked to nation, culture, history and tradition. Religion becomes important in an articulation of the others as the constitutive outside of the ‘we’, but is only rarely explicitly stated as a characteristic of ‘us’.319 Interestingly enough, this is despite the fact that Sinterklaas is referenced as a bishop’s tale and that the tradition has an evident Christian origin.

As earlier mentioned, a key term in the exchange is cultural heritage with an emphasis on a cultural ‘we’, and the responsibility to maintain and preserve the cultural legacy that constitutes that very community. An issue not much problematized in the exchange, but one that is expressed in the arranged debate at the museum, is the question of whose culture and whose heritage.320 In short, whose children count in this collective ‘we’ that is articulated. Also, the analysis shows that the heritage is not problematized in relation to a colonial past but is on the contrary articulated as something separate. Just as today’s politics has nothing to do with Zwarte Piet, the politics of the past are irrelevant for the celebration.

**Democratic dimensions**

In this event the analysis of the democratic dimensions will focus on two things. Firstly, the analysis concerns how the two artists explicitly engage democratically through their art project. Secondly, as the analysis of the political dimensions has shown there is a strong element of constructing a national or cultural ‘we’. These collective identifications could be a pathway to discussing a joined democratic community, but as we will see there is contestation regarding who has the right to be a part of a democratic discussion. Due to their position as foreigners, Bauer and Krauss are not deemed legitimate parties in the discussion.

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Democratic exchange and silence

A noteworthy feature of this event is how a democratic script is drawn upon already from the onset and how the art event so early on engaged representatives of the political system. The artists include the responses and the strong reactions in the art project by being a part of a panel discussion and also by making a film that goes deeper into both the figure of Zwarte Piet as well as why it is so difficult to speak of this tradition within Dutch society.

Even though the most intense debate lasted only a short time period there were several politicians that engaged in the discussion. The local party representative for the right-wing party Pim Fortuyn List (LPF), Rudy Reker, made a critical statement and formal question to the Municipal Executive in Eindhoven. The twelve questions posed were answered by the Executive who argued the importance of standing up for freedom of expression and of art's role to discuss different societal issues. At the same time, the answers did not indicate a stance on the question of Zwarte Piet. A council member for the Labour Party (PvdA), J. van den Biggelaar, wrote an opinion piece in the local newspaper as a response to Reker’s statement and argued that freedom of expression has to be defended, also by the LPF.

On the national level it was PVV, Party for Freedom, that brought attention to the exhibition. Three members of the PVV, including the party leader Geert Wilders, posed a formal question in four parts to Ronald Plasterk, at the time minister for education, culture and science. The first question was simply if the minister was familiar with a news item describing the debate, and the second was if the minister was willing to denounce the allegation that Zwarte Piet is racist. The third related to public funding of the museum, and asking if the minister was willing to take action to stop the funding. The fourth and last question posed: “Are you ready to personally give the two German ladies (P.B and A.K) a lesson in our Dutch culture in order to help them overcome their adjustment problems”.

In the reply, the minister, Ronald Plasterk, expressed regret that the march had to be cancelled due to the “extreme negative attitudes and threatening vio-

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324 Plasterk represented the Labour party (PvdA).
325 Fritsma, Sietse; Bosma, Martin and Wilders, Geert, KVR33999. Question handed in 30 October 2008, answered 11 November 2008. Wilders mistakenly presents the artists as German, Krauss is German but Bauer is Swedish. In Dutch: “Bent u bereid de twee Duitse dames (P.B en A.K) persoonlijk les te geven over onze Nederlandse cultuur ten einde hen te helpen hun aanpassingsproblemen in Nederland te overwinnen?”
lence,” and stated art’s important role but did not want to engage himself in the debate. On the question of the museum’s funding Plasterk stated that it is the responsibility of the municipality and not the state. Plasterk furthermore did not see any reason to give “further instructions to those involved” and instead points at the freedom to openly discuss cultural phenomena. The issue of whether the figure of Zwarte Piet may have racist connotations is thereby not elaborated on by the minister.

In the exchange there is not much value attributed to the public debate that has emerged. Although the artists construct a discussion of Zwarte Piet as necessary and valuable they also articulate how the debate has distorted the art project. This suggests that it was not the right kind of debate that emerged, as it did not stimulate the discussion that was hoped to be inspired by the planned protest march. Among the commentators critical of the art project a recurrent articulation is that the debate is either ridiculous or even potentially dangerous. There is an uneasy notion of already having given up other things claimed racist and of not wanting to get the ball rolling with new bans. Furthermore, the questioning of the tradition in this way is argued to risk inadvertently aiding right wing populists, like Rita Verdonk. However, there are statements that do not necessarily support what they perceive as the message of the artwork, but that still argue that the freedom of expression has to be guarded and that the cancellation of the march is therefore worrisome.

Even though an exchange does take place in the art event there are not many encounters or in-depth interviews. In general, the public discussion is dominated by the voices that are critical towards the art project and especially the protest march. However, there is little mention of any reluctance of the involved persons to participate in the public debate; on the contrary, many of the statements claim that the artists are not silent enough.

328 Peter de Graaf, 3 September 2008, “Felle reacties tonen hoe gevoelig Zwarte Piet ligt”, de Volkskrant. Also museum director Esche describes it as damaging to the artwork, see Unsigned, 29 August 2008, “Protest tegen Zwarte Piet gaat niet door”, NRC Handelsblad.
Let’s engage democratically!

When we now turn to possible democratic subjectivities, we first look into the artists’ articulations of wanting to engage and stimulate a democratic discussion. Bauer and Krauss actively work with engaging a democratic form. From the start we see in the artwork a usage of key symbols of democracy, namely the protest march. In fact, the banners and placards are very low-key, in black and white, and there is nothing obviously provoking in them. Also, the artists include civil society by collaborating with two Dutch organizations. By reusing earlier slogans on the placards the artists are placing their artwork as a part of more general democratic work on the specific subject of Zwarte Piet. This becomes even clearer on the follow-up exhibition where there is a big chalkboard with a written overview of different protests against the Zwarte Piet figure. The protests are specified chronologically, and Bauer and Krauss thus literally write themselves into a history of protests.

The fact that there was a protest march planned in the city of Eindhoven, starting from the museum and going through the city, seems to have been too provocative to be accepted. A question that can be asked regards who is allowed to occupy the public space and to claim it as a space for artistic and political practices. The uncanniness of the artwork comes to play a role here as in partly mimicking parts of the tradition. Similar to how the Trojan horse works as a war machine, through its familiarity the planned march can be read as a distorted allusion to the traditional march of Sinterklaas. When Sinterklaas arrives in the Netherlands supposedly from Spain by boat there is a march where Sinterklaas walks off the boat with his horse and his helpers, the Zwarte Pieten. A big crowd with children and their parents are there to cheer and welcome them. Therefore, a possible reading of the strong emotions is that a march can be seen as too close an imitation of the actual tradition and as therefore hitting closer to home than can be accepted. When the media started reporting on the art project it was not the placards standing in the museum but the march that was highlighted, especially the fact that it was going to be held outside of the museum.

There is a strong feature of counter-mobilization in the online comments, for example planning a counter-march or in some way disturbing the artists’ march or the debate that took place in the museum. Furthermore, there are

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332 Zerilli, Feminism and the Abyss of Freedom. See also Rancière, The Politics of Aesthetics, p. 63.
333 See e.g. Interview with Rita Verdonk, 29 August 2008, Goedemorgen Nederland, [radio programme], KRO.

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examples of party mobilization such as when a commentator encourages to “[n]ot get angry just vote for PVV!”

The aim to start a discussion that is articulated by the artists and the museum becomes problematized in the debate held at the museum. A question is posed from the moderator to the director of the museum regarding whether or not the questions being asked through the artwork itself are being asked openly. The moderator’s query can be read as a way of problematizing the democratic exchange, of how the seemingly neutral way of stating that asking questions is a good thing, can also hide a normative standpoint that directs the question in a certain way. Esche also acknowledges this, saying there is no way of neutrally asking a question. In that sense it can be said that the intention is indeed to make trouble. Although Bauer states that they do not want to be “reduced to simply trouble makers”

Although a discussion is stated as valuable there is also concern regarding whether it is of the right kind. In a statement from the Van Abbemuseum regarding the cancellation of the march, the focus is not on safety issues but rather on the fact that it would no longer lead to the right kind of discussion.

We have received a lot of strong/violent reactions. These reactions, where there have been threats of violence, now lead to that the discussion is more on subsidy allotment, freedom of expression and public order. This only leads away from what we wanted to raise. A march will only strengthen the diverting effect. Therefore we are forced to cancel the march […] At this moment going forward with the march in our eyes has no added value, because the chance for a nuanced exchange of ideas has become minimal.

Both the artist and the museum state that they have not given in to threats but that the artwork was destroyed by the threatening remarks. The museum argues that there is a need for a continued discussion and that the museum will arrange a debate together with the artists. Thereby, the discussion is brought back into the space of the museum and under the control of the arranging parties.

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We can read these articulations as a discrepancy between the discussions sought after by the artists by having a part of the artwork in a public space and the discussion actually taking place. The interaction that follows the news reports on the planned march becomes a hindrance for a discussion on the actual topic of Zwarte Piet as there is no room for the initial questions asked by the artists. In light of the “extreme reactions”\textsuperscript{341}, the discussion does not hold the values wished for.

The framing of different statements as extreme or extremist is recurrent in the event, which we can interpret as a questioning of their democratic value. Especially the collaboration with Doorbraak is framed in extremist terms.\textsuperscript{342} Reker from LPF describes the organization as “extreme left antidemocratic” and criticizes how Doorbraak has disrupted meetings held by Rita Verdonk and Geert Wilders. Reker further links the actions and slogans by Doorbraak to possibly inspiring to violence against politicians and the political assassinations of Fortuyn and Van Gogh.\textsuperscript{343} Verdonk is very critical towards the organization on a radio programme where she is interviewed.\textsuperscript{344} Eyerman has argued how in the wake of the murders of Pim Fortuyn and Theo Van Gogh the Dutch public debate has become increasingly polarized and often accompanied by accusations of extremism.\textsuperscript{345}

The artists on their part address the negative and confrontational reception and frame it as a problem for democracy:

\begin{quote}
We find it problematic that the Van Abbemuseum has to cancel this march. The march was supposed to be a platform for opinions that have not previously been heard- in the past and in the last days. We ask ourselves what kind of community we live in if you as an artist do not have any freedom of expression, and where one cannot take public critique or disagree with each other.\textsuperscript{346}
\end{quote}

The trouble that Bauer and Krauss make can be read as highlighting important features of radical democracy. However, if we problematize this we could look

\textsuperscript{341} Verklaring Van Abbemuseum, Elsevier 29 August, 2008.
\textsuperscript{344} Interview with Rita Verdonk, 29 August 2008, Goedemorgen Nederland, [radio programme], KRO.
\textsuperscript{345} Eyerman, The Cultural Sociology of Political Assassination, p. 127.
at the statements by participants in the discussion that the artists only allow for a certain response. The artists themselves argue that they wanted to hear voices other than the ones normally heard on this topic. They thereby articulate a clear democratic goal of being able to also discuss the difficult topics. We can read a part of the artists’ trouble making as wanting to talk about something that everyone knows but that we should be silent about.

**Different responses**

A strong feature in the readers’ comments is questions regarding how Zwarte Piet could possibly be racist, often marked by repeated exclamation or question marks. Although formally a question, this is primarily a statement that ends rather than allows for a discussion. The tone of the question posed and the surrounding text suggests that there is no valid answer to the posed question. Thereby, the question becomes an affirmation that Zwarte Piet is not racist, and a way to foreclose the possibility of a genuine question inquiring why Zwarte Piet is considered by some as racist. This fits with the dominant articulation that the tradition is not open for discussion; it just is what it is.

One strand of responses is the one that claims that the march should have been able to take place as planned. The reason for this is stated as the protection of freedom of speech and of artistic freedom, even if one does not agree with the message. The argument is that the law on freedom of speech applies in the case of the march and that it was a shame that the march had to be cancelled. There are also some that articulate it as if the museum is giving in to threats. Occasionally, in the online comments supportive statements are made, for example that “[f]oreigners can offer us a mirror.”

A part of the dismissal of the discussion as such is the ridiculing that happens through the framing of the articles, especially with the chosen pictures. The pictures are often of a happy Zwarte Piet, or as in one magazine article, a Zwarte Piet with a surprised face and the by-line that the artists are surprised at the tradition. In general the focus in the news reporting is on the planned protest march and on the critique towards the march. There is much less on the

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actual figure of Zwarte Piet. One example of a non-problematization of the figure can be found in a radio interview with politician Rita Verdonk. On the radio programme Verdonk argues that Zwarte Piet is a young white man who has become black by going through the chimney. What the interviewer instead focuses on is whether Verdonk thinks that the subsidies to the museum should be withdrawn.\textsuperscript{353} In other words, there is a silence in large parts of the traditional media on the topic of whether Zwarte Piet has racist connotations.

The threats that are reported in the media can also be seen in a few of the comments, for example: “[i]n the sack with that museum and also the German and Swedish allochtonen [immigrants] (preferably plastic and well tied up) to Spain”.\textsuperscript{354} The sack in this quote refers to the sack with presents that Sinterklaas brings with him from Spain, according to the children’s story. A representative of Doorbraak states in an interview: “they want that us to die, they want to kill us”.\textsuperscript{355} Furthermore, some of the threats are articulated in a both misogynist and racist way.\textsuperscript{356} All in all, the high number of critical comments can be read as an attempt to not only stop the march from taking place but also to close down the discussion regarding Zwarte Piet. The exchange taking place therefore is less characterized by, in Mouffe’s words, agonism, but rather by a hostile or even violent we/they relation.\textsuperscript{357}

\textit{Foreign trouble makers}

Throughout the event and in all media channels Bauer and Krauss are presented as foreign artists. The distinction is often made already in the first opening line of an article or introduction on a radio programme, sometimes with their names being excluded altogether.\textsuperscript{358}

As foreigners, Bauer and Krauss are portrayed as unable to understand the tradition in a true sense and that consequently they should not be criticizing it.\textsuperscript{359} In some cases this is specified further in relation to experience: “[t]he two

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{353} Interview with Rita Verdonk, 29 August 2008, \textit{Goedemorgen Nederland}, [radio programme], KRO.
\item \textsuperscript{355} Marcel van Engelen, 12 November 2008, “De ludieke mars tegen Zwarte Piet is gezwicht voor bedreigingen”, \textit{Dagblad De Pers}. In Dutch: “maar men wil dat wij sterven, men wil ons afmaken”.
\item \textsuperscript{356} See e.g. amiga, 26 August 2008, Comments on Fleischbaum, 26 August 2008, “Zwarte Piet staat weer eens ter discussie”, GeenStijl [blog], www.geenstijl.nl, [2 November 2011].
\item \textsuperscript{357} Mouffe, \textit{On the Political}.
\item \textsuperscript{358} Netwerk, 23 November 2008, [television programme], FUNX.; \textit{Goedemorgen Nederland}, 3 September 2008, [radio programme], NCRV.
\end{itemize}
artists, who never as children have celebrated the traditional children’s festival”. Bauer and Krauss are told that “[i]f the Dutch tradition doesn’t suit you, then leave Holland, and let us be, go poke in your own culture”.

In the parliamentary question from the PVV the statement does not see Bauer and Krauss as entitled to criticize a Dutch tradition since they are not Dutch themselves. The sensitivity of foreign critique regarding Zwarte Piet was noted several years earlier by Mieke Bal who argues that “of course, there is no easy way for nationals of any Western country to point the finger at their neighbour’s racism without a good dose of self-reflection”. There are occasional explicit positions taken as foreigner, and some that voice critique against the tradition of Zwarte Piet, claiming they are no longer suitable and that “especially non-Europeans do not feel comfortable when the Pieten-army comes marching through the Netherlands”.

The foreignness in the event is strengthened by statements pointing out that Esche, the director of the museum, is himself not Dutch but British. Furthermore, neither the years that Esche and Krauss have lived in the Netherlands nor their knowledge of Dutch is considered enough to mitigate the foreignness. In the attempt to critically explore the tradition of Zwarte Piet, the artists came to symbolize a foreign elite that wants to rob the regular Dutch people of their most beloved Dutch tradition.

Bauer and Krauss become a part of this framing when they emphasize that they are collaborating with “two Dutch groups” and claim that the critique is “in the country”. This becomes a response to the interpellation of them as foreigners that strengthens it further. Thereby, their position on the outside is enhanced through the very link that was supposed to attach them to the inside. By answering to the interpellation as foreigners with less possibility of understanding and right to critique, there is a reinforcing of the hegemonic articula-

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362 Fox and Bal, Zwarte Piet.


tion regarding how Zwarte Piet is only an issue for the Netherlands and for Dutch people.

The demos implied in the articulation is, as we have seen in the analysis of the political dimensions, a demos that predates the migration flows and that does not include the new citizens coming from those flows. It is a demos that is divided into different groups that are perceived to have different interests, and those interests are conflictual, which means that every demand needs to be weighed in relation to what other groups are either gaining or loosing. Illustrative of this is how the figure of Zwarte Piet is recurrently put in the context of celebrations and customs within Islam.\(^{367}\) Historian Sandew Hira describes in the Dutch context how the superiority of Western culture has been linked to colour, for example through the Sinterklaas celebration. This has changed today, however, to be more about religion than colour and Hira argue that in the Netherlands “[t]he Muslims are today’s Negroes”.\(^{368}\)

The split is also seen through the static view concerning who can be Dutch. One example is a comment arguing that the artists are not totally wrong because “[b]lacks are simply not called Piet, just as no Dutch are called Mohammed or Shaka or something like that”\(^{369}\). Also, the artists are claimed to be creating a stronger divide between immigrants and non-immigrants and xenophobia.\(^{370}\)

The demarcation made between different groups connects to a strong discourse within the Netherlands stemming from an early distinction between ‘allochtoon’ (immigrant, including second generation) and ‘autochtoon’ (non-immigrant). These are terms that are used in the comments as well as in interpreting them. It is important to note that in public communication ethnic origin is commonly referred to. One example is a report made by the city of Amsterdam on the topic of Zwarte Piet, where a large number of inhabitants in the city were interviewed. In the report, the findings were classified through ethnic origin, such as Dutch, Ghanaian, Surinamese, and Antillean.\(^{371}\) In the same report Bauer and Krauss are mentioned in the background section to the survey.


and introduced with their nationalities. Some of the terminology used in the online comments hence reflects a wider public discourse.

Just as party leader Geert Wilders suggests that Bauer and Krauss be educated on Dutch culture there are online statements arguing the need for explaining the Zwarte Piet tradition to “new inhabitants and young people not born in the Netherlands”. There are also articulations questioning why the artists as foreigners are getting subsidies from the Dutch state.

It is thus clear that the kind of democratic trouble that the artists are creating should not come from foreigners but be kept within the framework of the nation. Restricting critique to only be relevant if it comes from insiders (of the Dutch culture/nation) implies a tension with a basic fundamental feature of equality. In this way it strengthens the strong construction of a ‘we’ that has participated in the tradition, for the participation implies being complicit and possibly responsible. These tensions are the key components of the trouble that came to be in this event, both those manifested in the artwork as well those unexpected.

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4. The noise of Anna Odell

I have been mentally ill during many years and have after many years of struggle managed to get myself back to a more or less normal life, whatever normal is. My opinion is that as mentally ill you are automatically assigned a victim role. This means that other people assert the right to define the experience of the person being ill, and the power over what is good or bad for that person. And when it suits the person with the power to define, then that person can always claim that someone taken ill doesn’t understand its own good or is not in its right mind.

The quote above is from the artist Anna Odell who in a matter of only a few weeks went from being virtually unknown to being widely discussed in Swedish media and politics, and among people in general. This chapter analyses the art event that started in January 2009 when Swedish art student Anna Odell simulated a psychosis on a bridge in Stockholm. The staging was filmed and includes footage of when Odell was forcefully put into a police car and driven off to the psychiatric emergency ward. This became the starting point of a public debate that comes and goes in waves and generated a large amount of media coverage.

My analysis of this event focuses in particular on the critical question of exercising and owning a political and democratic voice – and of being recognized as a voice. Nevertheless, before analysing the political and democratic dimension, an overview of the space of conflict is in order. This begins with presenting the empirical material and thereafter giving an overview of both the art project and the debate that evolved around it. With this as a basis I turn to the political and democratic dimensions that can be read from the event.

Tracking the event

The empirical material for this event consists of a large quantity of texts. The television material includes three channels: the non-commercial public service company channels SVT1 and SVT2 and the commercial channel TV4; the radio

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material consists of the public service radio channels P1, P3, P4. The radio and TV material have mainly been accessed through the National Library of Sweden’s collections of audiovisual media by using the Swedish Media Database. I have conducted searches on ‘Anna Odell*’and/or ‘konstfack*’ and/or ‘konst*’ for the time period of January 2009 and onwards. I then excluded the texts that did not engage with the actual event and added some programmes that did not show up in the search (such as news programmes and Ring P1, a listeners’ programme). Where Odell is featured as a main topic, and especially where there is a broader discussion, I have transcribed the programme as a whole.

The search for newspaper and magazine articles have been done through the press databases Mediearkivet and Artikelsök. The databases include both the main Stockholm-based media and a number of regional newspapers. I have included readers’ comments on the online articles from the bigger newspapers, especially Dagens Nyheter because of the central position that its culture section holds within the Swedish debate; in this case, also on the debate regarding Odell’s art project. The comments are from the online versions of the articles.

Within social media I look at the Facebook groups that were started, both in support of Odell and against her project and also against the University College of Arts, Crafts and Design. A considerable number of blogs also reported on the project and the debate, and it is almost impossible to get a complete overview of the blogs, including all the comments that the bloggers receive concerning their posts. The selection of blogs mostly concerns those linked to other media such as internet editions of newspapers or through Newsmill, a debate website. Newsmill was at the time a loosely edited site for debate, and the debate thread (The provoking art) of the Odell event included 83 texts, as well as a large amount of readers’ comments.

Besides the regular media coverage I have included press releases by a couple of non-governmental organizations and more particularly looked into the documents concerning RSMH (Riksförbundet för social och mental hälsa) more closely. The selection has in other words been a form of tracking, where I have expanded the material with texts and agents that have appeared in the margins of my other material. I have also included the court recordings from the trial against Odell and the written ruling. The recording was made available online by public service radio, Sveriges Radio. Yet another source is my own notes from the original exhibition.

**Unknown, woman 2009-349701**

A peculiar feature about this art event is that it is actually the preparation, the working process, which becomes the provoking factor. It is in other words not the final art object – under the title Unknown, woman 2009–349701 – itself but the
process towards producing the art object that leads to a highly polemical public debate.\textsuperscript{375}

In January 2009 it became publicly known that an art student had simulated a psychosis on a bridge in Stockholm with the concealed purpose of being brought to an acute psychiatric ward for compulsory admission and treatment. The plan, as became known later, was to make a re-enactment of a previous occasion where the artist had had that experience. The filming of the events on the bridge includes people walking past her and some also stopping by to help, and later police officers forcing her to come with them into a police car. In a later statement Odell explains that by staging the psychosis and triggering the same chain of events as in the earlier case, she wanted to make visible the conditions prevalent within the closed psychiatric wards and to be able to report on the situation there without being met with disbelief because of her illness.\textsuperscript{376}

Odell spent one night at the ward, and was put in a belt and medicated against her will. The following morning she revealed to the doctor that it was an art project. In order to make sure that she would be believed she entrusted her brother with material showing the preparations for the project. As can be heard on the recordings in the final artwork the doctor became very angry and did not engage in any further discussions with Odell. The final art object is exhibited in May 2009 at the University College of Arts, Crafts and Design as a part of a larger exhibition with all the students’ exam projects. It consists of three parts.\textsuperscript{377} The first includes filmed sequences where she in advance talks to, for example, psychologists and a lawyer about what the consequences might be after the staging. Odell’s questions revolve both around the risks that she is personally taking but also whether she could be viewed as breaking the law in any way. Anonymous calls were also made to different psychiatric wards to ask how they would react to such a staging – very different answers were received from both doctors and regular carers.\textsuperscript{378}

The second part of the installation is the film with Odell on the bridge. It is filmed from quite a distance and since it is evening and dark you cannot see individual faces, but you can follow what is happening. You also cannot hear anything that is being said, only the sound from the traffic passing on the bridge.

\textsuperscript{375} For an aesthetic analysis of Odell’s artwork within the field of theatre research see Willmar Sauter, “Unknown Woman by Anna Odell: The Event, the Trial, the Work - Reflections on the Mediality of Performance”, \textit{Theatre Research International} 37, no. 3 (2012), 249-264.

\textsuperscript{376} Sofie Curman, 8 May 2009, “Anna Odell spelade sig själv”, \textit{Dagens Nyheter}.

\textsuperscript{377} The description of the art exhibition is based on my own notes from my visit at the exhibition.

\textsuperscript{378} Notes from exhibition at the University College of Arts, Crafts and Design, May 2009. See also Ingrid Elam, 22 May 2009, “Ingrid Elam om Anna Odell: ‘Ett berörande konstverk’, \textit{Dagens Nyheter}.
The third part of the final artwork consists of a video showing a bed with the belts accompanied by an audio recording of the conversation held with the doctor in the morning when Odell reveals that it is an art project. It takes a while before the doctor realizes what Odell actually is saying and the doctor does not have any further questions regarding the project’s purpose or further development. The doctor refers to the staff’s good care of Odell and to her earlier illness and asks if this is some kind of punishment towards the mental health services. Then the doctor asks her to leave. Odell has continued to work with the art project adding parts from the trial and also hosting panel debates on the original artwork.379

The police complaint that was made by the staff at the hospital led to Odell in August 2009 being convicted of dishonest conduct and violent resistance. The court ruled that Odell should pay a fine, although a low one, considering that “she primarily had the intention not to commit a crime but only to within the framing of an art project to call public attention to an issue – psychiatric compulsory care – which she thought should be debated”.380

Three waves of public debate

Three waves of public debate can be identified in the material. The first wave was after the re-enactment became known to the media, according to Odell through someone working at the hospital, and a big public discussion emerged.381 Odell at first refused to comment and referred to the artwork as being unfinished. In her first statement to the media she says: “I don’t want to risk my project. But it is well thought through and no ploy”.382 Thereby, the first heated discussions are paradoxically when there strictly speaking is no art object yet.383

379 Kalmar Art Museum showed a continuation of the work during the summer 2009 (June 13–July 29) under the title Reconstruction. The same constellation was exhibited at Konsthallen in Luleå 10–31 October 2009. In April (18–20) 2010 another continuation was exhibited at Strand in Stockholm including panel discussions with Anna Odell herself and invited guests. 17 October 2015 – 17 January 2016 an exhibition under the original heading but including the newer objects was held at Kulturhuset in Stockholm

380 Stockholms Tingsrätt, 31August 2009, Nr B 3870-09, p. 9.

In Swedish: “att hon i första hand hade för avsikt inte att begå brott utan endast att inom ramen för ett konstprojekt fästa allmän uppmärksamhet på en fråga – psykiatrisk tvångsvård – som hon ansåg borde debatteras”.


The second wave occurred when Odell’s artwork was displayed as a part of an exhibition in May 2009 where she started to explain her art project in more detail. The exhibition and Odell’s narrative led to a renewed interest for her project in the media. The third wave of the debate surrounded the court trial in August 2009.

During the three waves of debate we see different narratives develop in conflict with each other. The first narrative around Odell is mainly based on accounts made by the hospital staff. This is a group that thereby becomes one of the central agents in the discussion. In particular it is the chief of the ward in question, David Eberhard, who is active in the debate and criticizes Odell heavily. The arguments by Eberhard are mainly that Odell does not have anything substantial to say about the psychiatric care system, that she is just playing and that she has caused damage to the hospital and to the staff, both economic and emotional. He suggests that she “gets a haircut and a real job”.

Eberhard’s narrative resonates in the online comments to newspaper articles, blogs and Facebook groups where this theme of Odell causing distress among the staff, other patients and people on the bridge is a dominating one. A recurring argument is that Odell’s enactment led to longer waiting times and less good care for other patients that were at the same ward at the same time. Also Odell, together with the college, is accused of wasting not only hospital staff’s time but also the police’s time in coming to the bridge and driving her to hospital.

In the press, the staging was discussed mainly on the cultural pages – in particular from the second wave and onwards – but also for example in the editorials. In the opinion pieces, different positions were taken depending on at least in part the author’s political colour, with a slightly more positive angle within left-wing press. When analysing the texts from an intertextual perspective there is one opinion writer that stands out in the way her texts are picked up by other commentators, namely Hanne Kjöller at the liberal national newspaper Dagens Nyheter. Kjöller wrote a personal piece, only a few days after the staging, focusing on the people that stopped to help Odell on the bridge and referring to an incident where Kjöller herself had helped a young woman. Kjöller exemplifies with the story of Peter and the Wolf and warns that people might not want to stop and help, if thinking that it might just be an art project. This assumption

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384 Besides the hospital staff at the actual hospital other health care professionals got involved in the debate, see e.g. Jonas Binnmyr, 31 January 2009, “Etikprövning kan hjälpa alla berörda i konstfackselevsdebatten”, Newsmill, www.newsmill.se, [10 May 2010].
that people might not help in future situations echoes in other texts, sometimes referring to the same story of Peter and the Wolf.\textsuperscript{387}

The only time Odell made a longer statement before the work is exhibited is when she made a request in the media to get into contact with those persons that had helped her on the bridge. Besides thanking them for their help she wants to know what they think of the situation. In the same text she refutes the idea that the purpose was to explore “whether psychosis is a form of lie”.\textsuperscript{388}

The notion of the psychosis as a lie that circulated (mainly online), was from a blog where an anonymous doctor working at St Göran’s hospital discussed the event and published a short excerpt from the 15 page long project description left by Odell at the hospital in the morning when she revealed that she was an art student.\textsuperscript{389} The fact that Odell at this stage did not want to discuss the work makes this short excerpt more influential.

The art world in general is mainly supportive\textsuperscript{390} towards Odell – although many of them are reluctant to give detailed comments before the actual art exhibition has taken place. Instead, they take an active part in the debate that concerns more principal issues on what should be allowed in the name of art: Are you allowed to break the law, etc.? A recurring answer to that question often posed by journalists is that breaking the law can sometimes lead to good art but that there is no exemption from the law for artists. If they break the law they can get convicted – and the art object can still be considered of artistic value.\textsuperscript{391}

The strategy of not discussing the work until it would be exhibited is also one taken and defended by Konstfack, (The College of Arts, Crafts and Design),\textsuperscript{392} although the principle Ivar Björkman spoke to the media on different occasions stating that he had “full understanding for if anyone who now thinks that Konstfack has not been considerate towards vulnerable groups, used socie-
tal resources”.

Björkman further states in the same interview that the art college will conduct an internal investigation in order to clarify if the college has done anything wrong.

The silence surrounding the project, and the furthermore somewhat unclear message from the principle, helped the first narrative to become a dominant one. Odell is described as having assaulted the hospital staff through, for example, biting and spitting. At the day when she revealed to the hospital that she has been simulating the psychosis she told them that it is a restaging of an earlier ‘real’ event, and she also leaves the project plan with the staff. Furthermore, she offered to discuss the event with the staff. In the first phase the ones that had the most information at hand and were willing to speak was the hospital staff. Magnus Bärtås, who at the time of Odell’s staging was a professor at Konstfack’s art department, describes in a footnote in his dissertation (on a different topic) the process and the debate on Odell’s art. According to Bärtås the information leaked to the media came from somebody at the hospital. Bärtås claimed that the first media story that came to circulate also became the dominating one until Odell’s court case where some of the allegations made by hospital staff against Odell were taken back. According to Bärtås this was partly because of Odell’s reluctance to discuss the artwork while it was still in the making and partly because media stories of this kind often become dominating.

Björkman received critique for both being too lenient and for not standing up for the college’s students, see, Johanna Adebäck et al, 30 April 2009, “Konstfacks studenter: Våga tala konst!”; Dagens Nyheter; Hanne Kjöller, 20 April 2010, “Konstfack: Ignorant eller bara arrogant”; Dagens Nyheter; Johan Söderström, 18 February, 2009, “Konstfacks kriminella konstigheter”; Dagens Nyheter. One reason for why the spotlight was so strong on the art college itself was that there was another so-called art scandal during the spring of 2009 where the artist NUG (also an art student at Konstfack) in his video art showed a person painting graffiti on a public transport underground train. The Minister of Culture Lena Adelsohn Liljeroth at the time saw the art and exclaimed that this was damage making and not art and left the exhibition, see e.g. Erika Svantesson, 14 February 2009, “Kulturministern upprörd av videokonst”; Dagens Nyheter. The principle of the university college was called for a hearing to the parliament to discuss the events of NUG, see Lova Olsson, 19 February 2009, “Konstfacks rektor kallad till riksdagen”; Svenska Dagbladet. Although an interesting issue in itself, I will not go into in any depth on the role of the university college or the consequences for its internal work.


394 The evaluation later reached the conclusion that no wrong had been done within the existing framework but also identified the need for clearer rules. Furthermore, they stated that under the new proposed rules Odell’s enactment for the art project would not have been allowed, see, Ivar Björkman, 3 March 2009, “Ivar Björkman: ‘Vår utredning visar Konstfack gjorde fel’”; Dagens Nyheter.

when it comes to provocative art.\textsuperscript{396} I agree with Bärtås that the first story comes to be the dominating one, although I do not share the view that the court trial comes to reverse that story in the strong way that Bärtås claims. At that point the debate revolved to a significant extent around the legal implications and was already less heated, which gives her less space in the media. Also, the fact that she was convicted also gives her critics the opportunity to voice their criticisms once again. This was, for example, the case in the main television news programme \textit{Rapport} the same day as the court’s ruling becomes known. Odell and Odell’s fiercest critic, David Eberhard, both commented on the verdict and the question of violence against the hospital staff was not brought up at all.\textsuperscript{397} Odell argued that although she is not happy with the verdict the trial has been positive in the sense that it has renewed the debate on the actual issues and has clarified that she did not use violence against the hospital staff.\textsuperscript{398} Although most dominant during the trial the topics concerning the legal implications are important throughout the whole event. In the beginning there was a discussion on whether the artwork should be exhibited at all, given that a report of a crime had been made to the police. The statement from the principle of Konstfack, that they would see how it developed, ensured that debate to live on.\textsuperscript{399}

In all three waves there was also a group of comments and commentators that focused on the aim expressed by Odell: to shed light on the situation in the closed psychiatric wards. This includes some health care professionals, people with either mental health problems themselves or close family members and some journalists that put it into a context of ‘wallraff’ journalism (undercover journalism).\textsuperscript{400} Lastly, there is a strand of texts that discuss the ongoing debate on a meta-level and put it in a context of other phenomena, of other art pro-

\textsuperscript{397} \textit{Rapport}, 31 August 2009, [television programme], SVT 1. A rare exception of a discussion of the details that became known in the trial is the following: Tommy Engman, 1 September 2009, “Ska allt hänga på ett presskort?”, \textit{Newsmill}, www.newsmill.se, [10 May 2010].
\textsuperscript{398} \textit{Nybetsmorgon}, 1 September 2009, [television programme], TV4.
\textsuperscript{399} Interview with Ivar Björkman in \textit{P4 Extra}, 28 August 2009, [radio programme], Sveriges Radio P4.
jects, economic recession, earlier critique against, and research on, psychiatric care, etc.

Main emotion: anger

When analysing the event and space of conflict, one key to reading the investments made into the hegemonic order is to look at the emotions expressed. Already in the first article about Odell’s staging, the theme of anger becomes apparent. Eberhard is described as “furious” and another member of staff being “deeply upset”.

The strong emotions are most visible in the earliest stage when the purpose of the art object is still unknown. They are present in all of the genres, although expressed somewhat differently dependent on the framing. During this phase of the debate commentators often express anger based on their own experiences and contrast them to Odell as an artist, here an example from a comment on a blog:

I cannot find words for this so called artistic experiment. I and my family are involuntarily close to the psychiatric care. It feels as if I am being spit on in the face.

As in this example, the more personal stories are often accompanied by expressions of strong emotions. In the beginning the anger is most often directed towards Odell herself, but it also includes the university college, Konstfack – in particular her supervisors – and artists in general. What are then the reasons given for the anger expressed?


The anger is mostly articulated through two critical arguments: that what Odell has done “uses societal resources, [and] it is insolent against other patients, the staff – against everybody”. Odell is argued to having taken advantage of the staff or ‘real’ patients and also to have wasted resources and tax money. As in a comment on a news article:

Anna Odell is ungratefulness and greediness personified. She gets her life saved thanks to police and health care staff doing their job and these are the thanks. [...] Anna Odell did without a doubt this to make a name for herself in the art world and at the cost of our tax money and other involved people’s time, commitment and feelings.

A distinction is thereby made between the institutions of a welfare state – of the good state – and that of an individualist career maker. This will also be a strong factor in how the artwork is read as political or not.

The anger is often expressed together with a call for a feeling of shame from Odell, sometimes directly: “I think you, Anna Odell, should feel ashamed”. In fact, shame becomes, next to anger, the main feeling discussed, although it is attributed to what other people should feel rather than what is actually being felt. A rare exception is when a well-known psychiatrist commented on the trial by saying that she “and several other colleagues feel ashamed” of the hospital’s report to the police. On the other hand, supportive statements often express gratitude and link it to a perceived courage.

The dominance of the emotion of anger in the event leads to us paying further attention to how that anger is articulated in relation to politicizations and to the possibility of a democratic exchange. How does the anger either open up or close down a democratic discussion, and what does the anger illustrate when it comes to different investments in the hegemonic order?

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410 See e.g. Henrik Bredberg, 2 February 2009, “Konsten med konst”, Sydsvenskan.
Political dimensions

When turning to the political dimensions of the event, the focus is on what it is to say something political or be recognized as a political voice. This is a key to the processes of politicization and depoliticization that take place in the event, which will be dealt with first in dialogue with Rancière. Thereafter, we look deeper into the shifts that occur in relation to being heard as a voice. Lastly, we bring in Brown’s discussion of wounded attachment and ressentiment to look deeper at some of the political articulations.

Politicization and depoliticization

By analysing processes of politicization and depoliticization we see a conflict between articulations of political relevance in the sense of saying something general regarding society and the political community and articulations deferring it to the sphere of the personal. An example is claiming that: “it is pointless to look for criticism of society with Odell. Unknown Woman is a deeply personal work.”415 This thereby constructs an opposition between the personal and social critique. As the aim of the art object is in this discussion considered to be a key issue for reading the art object as possibly more than something ‘only’ personal, there are many speculations concerning what it could be.

As stated earlier there is anger connected to the claims that Odell only wanted to make money and have a successful career. Odell is said to want her time in the spotlight and to choose the simple way to make a name for herself.416 Sometimes the provocation itself is described as being the sole purpose, rather than it being linked to her career.417 In short, in the eyes of the critics the project is egoistic and non-political in the sense that it is about personal gain and not about public benefits. These articulations are in some cases being gendered, for example calling Odell “a spoiled little princess”,418 as well as given denigrating sexualized connotations.419

When Odell has publically stated certain motives there has remained a considerable number of critical comments maintaining that she did this as a career trick, but there is also an added element: that Odell wanted to get back at the

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417 See e.g. Johan Söderström, 18 February 2009, “Konstfacks kriminella konstigheter”, Borås Tidning.
psychiatric care for personal reasons, that she “wasn’t happy with the psychiatric care” that she had received earlier and was conducting a “personal vendetta”. Also, the previous claims of Odell having tricked the staff, police, etc., started to include doubts concerning Odell’s motives and the truthfulness of what she has said, raising the possibility of hidden motives.

When judging the actual finished artwork at the exhibition the positive statements take two different routes: one focuses on the personal component as the best quality of the work and the other specifically lifts it up from the personal by, for example, stating that there is “no gluttony in personal traumas but a well-balanced examination of the dark corners of psychiatry”.

When Odell’s explicitly stated aim of exploring a system is reduced to something personal, this resonates with feminist art theory’s analysis of how female artists have to struggle in claiming a universal position within a hegemonic culture that denies them that very position. The art object becomes depoliticized when framed as the artist’s personal drive rather than a general or political one. The artist is then read as making a particular claim rather than a universal one.

Another strand of depoliticization in the material is that Odell is just playing about; she is portrayed as being childish and playful. One example of this is when Konstfack is described as a “playhouse for the bored upper class youth”, which highlights both the idea of playing and the recurrent opposition constructed between the elite and the people in the event. In a review of the artwork the journalist describes hearing and tiring of the “narcissism and childish defiance” in Odell’s voice, thereby making Odell’s voice not only personal but also childishly so. Once again gender plays an important role in

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422 See e.g. Magnus Krantz, 20 February 2009, “Konstnärer som gör det väldigt lätt för sig”, Västerbottens-Kuriren.
423 For example: describing the most interesting feature of the work as her “personal working-through of an experience”, see statement by Mårten Castenfors, in P1 Morgon 24 August 2009, Sveriges Radio P1. See also similar reasoning by Åsa Nilsonne in the same programme.

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the construction, as in referring to the artist as a “spoiled little girl”\textsuperscript{428} and “little Miss Odell”.\textsuperscript{429} Norval describes a similar situation from Ibsen’s play \textit{A Doll’s House} where the protagonist Nora is deprived of her voice when she is said to speak like a child and is therefore unable to understand the world.\textsuperscript{430}

Furthermore, gender comes into play as the art object is evaluated through being constructed in opposition to what women artists normally do or at least should do. A woman visiting Odell’s exhibition in May 2009 was interviewed on television and claims then that what Odell is doing is not art and compares it to another work of art at the exhibition: “a girl has painted pretty drawings, really pretty, all praise to her, but something like this, this is not art”.\textsuperscript{431} The visitor here chooses to compare Odell to another female art student who she calls a “girl” and speaks of her work as pretty and as drawings, thereby strengthening the girly connotations. On another occasion a journalist makes a similar comparison when he describes art as being anything from a “cute small picture to a thing like this”\textsuperscript{432} (meaning Odell’s work). Also, in \textit{Ring P1}, a radio programme on public state radio where listeners can call and discuss different matters, Odell is connected to these female connotations when she is described as young and beautiful; this is thereafter contrasted with her alleged violent behaviour.\textsuperscript{433} Being a young beautiful woman is apparently put in opposition to the kind of art she might be working on. In general, her physical appearance is a recurring topic, often connected to her history of mental illness, such as stating that “she looks like a psycho”.\textsuperscript{434}

\textit{The turn from outsider to insider (From noise to speech)}

It is in form of a paradox that Odell’s work becomes strongly connected to her status as an ex-patient. It both renders her non-credible and makes her relevant in many people’s eyes. After Odell reveals her own history of mental illness the tone of the debate becomes less harsh in regard to her – at least within some of


\textsuperscript{431} \textit{Aktuellt}, 12 May 2009, [television programme], SVT2. In Swedish: “fina”, “jättefina”.

\textsuperscript{432} \textit{P1 Morgon}, 28 January 2009, [radio programme], Sveriges Radio P1. In Swedish: “söt liten tavla till en sån här sak”.

\textsuperscript{433} \textit{Ring P1}, 27 January 2009, [radio programme], Sveriges Radio P1.

\textsuperscript{434} Hajen Seracko, 25 August 2009, Comment in the Facebook group “Sätt Anna Odell i kumlabunkern” [21 October 2009]. In Swedish: “tycker hon ser ut som en psycho…!”.
the mainstream media. It seems the fact that she had been ill made the artwork more acceptable.\textsuperscript{435}

This change in the debate, when Odell decided to comment on the project and tell of her own history of mental illness, illustrates how experience becomes a key term for evaluating the artwork. Before Odell revealed her history of mental illness there were several examples of people bringing up their own experiences and contrasting them to Odell’s presumed only-artistic interest in the subject. Here we see subject positions, such as ‘I have myself had mental illness,’ ‘I as a close relative to someone with illness’, etc.

There is an opposition made between those with experience and those without, especially in responding to those defending Odell. For example, “Have you yourself sat in a psychiatric emergency ward and studied what happens? I have”.\textsuperscript{436} There is also an opposition made between the psychiatric health professionals and the artist and thereby also a differentiation between different kinds of experiences: “The people who work at the psychiatric emergency ward presumably have more experience and considerably better knowledge on the subject that the artist wants to shed light on than the artist herself or her defenders”.\textsuperscript{437}

When Odell decides to go public with the aim of the artwork she seems to do it reluctantly. In the initial statements she does not want to go into any detail, as it is has not yet been exhibited, but you can already see a potential raising of the issue from the particular to the universal level. In an interview she defends the method and says that it can be “justified by my purpose, my knowledge of what I am doing and my experiences of mental illness”.\textsuperscript{438} She continues by refuting that she would do this only for the sake of provocation or attaining fame and instead hints at a political level: “Artists, just like journalists, have a task in society that means that we have to move a bit on the border of the allowed if there are important motives”.\textsuperscript{439} In other words, what Odell does here is not just refer to, for example, freedom of art or a personal

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\textsuperscript{438} Anna Odell cited in Sofia Curman, 4 March 2009, “Mitt verk får berätta”, \textit{Dagens Nyheter}. In Swedish: ”rättfärdigas med mitt syfte, min kunskap om det jag gör och mina erfarenheter av psykisk sjukdom”.

\textsuperscript{439} Anna Odell cited in Sofia Curman, 4 March 2009. “Mitt verk får berätta”, \textit{Dagens Nyheter}. In Swedish: “Konstnärer, precis som journalister har en uppgift i samhället som gör att vi måste få röra oss lite i utkanten av det tillåtna om det finns viktiga motiv”.
interest but to a purpose based on knowledge and experience and to a task in society as an artist. When she later describes her purpose in more detail she speaks specifically of the power upheld by institutions such as psychiatric care and of how she was not deemed credible as a patient.440

Her statements and general questioning of the psychiatric care can be read as political in the sense that it no longer focuses exclusively on her as an individual and on her illness but on more general aspects: the disbelief of patients with mental illness, the lack of transparency in psychiatric care, the power of the state over its citizens to forcefully implement care, etc. As Odell herself says in the artwork, mental illness is today not considered a criminal act, but the compulsory care can easily be experienced as a punishment.441

This picture of attempted politicization is, however, not clear-cut. Some statements by Odell seem to shy away from the political, for example her stating in a press meeting: “I don’t want to be a debater of mental health care, I want to be an artist”.442 This can be read as a way of saying that she does not want to work within the regular framework of political debate but wants to keep within the artistic framing, which then also allows her to pose questions rather than to provide the solutions. This interpretation is supported by Odell’s statement that she is not interested in lecturing on how things should be but is rather saying people can form their own opinion after seeing Odell’s work, as there are “no simple solutions”.443 Odell alludes to a form of political participation that differs from the dominating one as it attributes an inherent value to the questions and argumentation rather than to the promotion of a specific solution.

The turn from outsider to insider that Odell goes through is further highlighted by how a potential political reading of the art object comes to be advocated strongest by an organization that recognizes the issue of not being believed when you are mentally ill – illustrating thereby how Odell can be read as speaking of something more than just herself. Odell explains in relation to the exhibition in May that she saw no other way to make people aware of what is going on at the actual psychiatric ward:

I cannot think of a better way. If I would have tried to discuss the treatment methods of the psychiatric care in my role as an ex-patient instead of as an artist, I would once again be in the situation where I am not considered credible.444

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441 Notes from art exhibition at Konstfack, May 2009.
Odell points here to the question of credibility and how that is linked to our different positions in relation to others, here explicitly that the patient position is a difficult one to combine with credibility. This, I will argue, is in the core of this event.

_Making political speech out of collective noise_

The statements by Odell herself do not claim to speak for a particular group, and use the pronoun I more then we. In contrast to Odell’s statements of an ‘I’ (although connected to joint structures and regulations), Odell is constructed as a representative and part of a ‘we’. It is a non-governmental organization, The Swedish National Association for Social and Mental health (RSMH), that becomes her biggest supporter. It manifests its support openly, for example by holding a demonstration outside the court house during Odell’s trial.\(^{445}\) Already in May 2009 a press release by RSMH expresses support for Odell and the artwork.\(^{446}\) In the statement, RSMH gives Odell their full support and expresses a request for the prosecutor to withdraw the charges made in May 2009 against Odell. The statement gives support to Odell’s claim that there is a need for a discussion on the autocratic ways of the closed psychiatric care. Furthermore, it highlights the issue of people with mental health problems being treated as criminals as they are being handcuffed and forcefully escorted to the hospital by the police and detained. It is clear that RSMH is specifically supporting the possible political interpretation of the artwork. Odell’s work is made into an articulation of a wrong when the statement makes a clear connection between Odell and people with experiences of mental health problems:

> When chief physicians within psychiatric care, politicians and journalists are oppressing Anna Odell and dismissing her project on the treatment of people with a mental disability as irresponsible and pointless, then you simultaneously oppress and dismiss a lot of people with mental health problems who identify with her story.\(^{447}\)

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\(^{445}\) See picture of the demonstrators illustrating the article by Fredrik Öjemar, 24 August 2009, “Jag behövde inte spela sjuk längre”, _Dagens Nyheter_, www.dn.se, [17 February 2013]. A couple of comments in the article also criticize RSMH for their support.

\(^{446}\) The official statement went through the internal democratic channels as it was approved by the “förbundsråd” of the RSMH, which is a council consisting of representatives of the 21 districts and which gathers twice a year to offer long-term advice on principal issues to the organization’s board (www.rsmh.se).

\(^{447}\) Press release, May 2009, RSMH. In Swedish: “När chefsöverläkare inom psykiatrin, politiker och journalister trycker ner Anna Odell och avfärder hennes projekt om bemötandet av människor som ha en psykisk funktionsnedsättning som oansvarigt och meningslöst, då förtrycker man...”
What RSMH does through this section is link Odell’s statement of one person, one experience – and therefore a particularistic one – to a larger group of people that share her experience and thereby give her claims a universalistic dimension by arguing that there is a group whose opinion and experiences are not being included on the same grounds as the psychiatric professionals, politicians and journalists. The statement thereby identifies the three key actors (physicians, politicians and journalists), who in the general debate have been able to speak out on the project, and clearly argues that these three groups are not speaking for all of us. The potential identification is with Odell and not, for example, with the psychiatric professionals.

In the RSMH magazine *Revansch* the chairman of RSMH writes a note shortly after the press release was issued. In his text he expresses RSMH’s support and credits Odell for succeeding in starting a debate that they themselves and others have not been able to do in many years.\(^{448}\) The chairman expresses a hope that this debate will lead to a more humane care and emphasizes that Odell “exposed these abusive behaviours within the Swedish psychiatric care which only someone who has been in contact with can bear witness on”.\(^{449}\) The fact that Odell has experience of ‘real’ mental illness herself gives her an insider perspective and an authenticity that makes her particular claim universal in the eyes of the RSMH.

How can we analyse this strong support given by the RSMH? In other arenas we have a much more split opinion of the art, including critique against Odell for not respecting people with mental illness. In my reading, the strong support is directly linked to the artwork’s focus on how patients within psychiatric care are disbelieved and not taken seriously when they give their account of what they experience within the closed walls of the ward. Odell highlights the way in which some people’s voices are not recognized as such but rather as noise. This can be picked up by RSMH as the organization already has articulated politically the need to take into account the voices of the patients as well as the professionals. I would here like to turn to Rancière regarding how the art object becomes a part of showing what Rancière states as “the equality of any speaking being with any other speaking being”.\(^{450}\) Rancière continues:

> Political activity is whatever shifts a body from the place assigned to it or changes a place’s destination. It makes visible what had no business being seen, and makes heard a discourse where once there was only place for noise; it makes understood as discourse what was once only heard as noise.\(^{451}\)

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By re-enacting her previous experience, Odell tackled the victim role by going back to the same situation but this time as a person that counts: a person able to speak back and to be recognized as speaking back. In Rancièrian terms Odell is claiming a right to be acknowledged as a speaking being, also with mental illness. The previous position of contributing to the noise is now turned into a position of having a voice.

On the larger public scene this was a claim that could not easily be heard, but within the smaller public of RSMH this claim was a familiar one. Claiming the right to be heard moves from being a claim of one person to becoming a claim for a number of people, thereby showing its potentiality for disruption. Generally held views regarding everybody’s right to be heard and taken into account are shown to not include those with mental illness. The supposed universality of taking into account all voices reveals itself as desperately lacking and with it the image of the good state taking care of all its citizens. The RSMH are not protesting for a general freedom of art and of artists in general, they are supporting this artist’s political dimension in her artwork.

Nonetheless, the turn that Odell is making from the artist, the outsider, to the insider perspective of mental illness does not come without its costs in the form of being taken seriously. There are several references to madness attributed to Odell and her project. Already in the beginning the project is described as a “project of madness”, etc. Furthermore, there are associations made between the staging and the suggestion that anyone doing such a thing must be suffering from mental illness, or that we cannot know that Odell is not sick or that she might be “mentally ill who played artist” or “how does Konstfack know that Anna Odell didn’t simulate well-being”. What we see here is how Odell’s position as having a voice continues to be put into question and turned back into noise. It is her previous illness that makes it possible to put her back into that category. This continued negotiation (or conflict) in the event shows that any potential movement from noise to speech is far from straightforward or given.

Although RSMH very clearly takes a position this hardly resonates in the discussion – especially not in comparison with, for example, the before-mentioned David Eberhard and Hanne Kjöller. Furthermore, there is no evidence of a change in the positioning regarding speaking on behalf of the mentally ill as assumed by some commentators critical of Odell’s art.


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In the movement from noise to speech the issue of credibility is a core issue and continues to be a dilemma for Odell as the previous illness is still sometimes interpreted as giving her less credibility. In light of how the debate softened when her experiences became known it shows a paradoxical situation where credibility is both connected to a requirement of having authentic experience and to how that very experience may make you less credible.

One example of this is when psychiatrist Åsa Nilsonne acknowledges in the wake of the trial some positive effects of Odell’s artwork while at the same time describing Odell as not having any memory of the first ‘real’ event. Moreover, she states that more information from the staff afterwards could have helped “and then maybe Odell would have been saved a large amount of the worry that drove this project to be”. Nilsonne’s statement excludes Odell’s aim of questioning whose reality becomes the dominant one. It does not take into account the issue of whose story is judged believable and therefore turns Odell’s story about her earlier experience back into noise.

Even though many statements are more positive after Odell’s reference to her own experience of illness, they are also sometimes used against her: “she has been ill herself and speaks of feelings of fear and then she acts so that others with similar feelings have to wait to get care”. Odell is also several times described as being a part of the elite when her own history is known, and therefore the purpose of reversing a victim role is not accepted as a legitimate purpose as Odell is no longer considered a victim.

Even in the more positive narratives the earlier illness plays an ambivalent role. In the news articles there is a change in emphasis when Odell’s previous illness becomes known. Initially starting mainly with a description of the staging on the bridge, the articles increasingly start by describing Odell’s history of illness. In a couple of interviews with Odell there are descriptions of how the journalists see a large number of scars on her arms, adding to the picture drawn of Odell as an ex-patient. Her subject position becomes posited by these narratives mainly as someone previously ill and still in that experience. By

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455 *P1 Morgan*, 24 August 2009, [radio programme], Sveriges radio P1. In Swedish: “och då hade kanske Anna Odell kunnat besparas väldigt mycket av den oro som drev fram det här projektet”.


bringing up the scars, Odell is posited as not quite on the other side, of not being completely on the healthy side in the dichotomy of illness and being well. At the same time this new emphasis opens up a possibility for Odell to explain in more depth what she attempts to do in her art as the focus on the art project changes from more critical questions concerning the staging on the bridge to Odell’s own motives and history. Nevertheless, this also means, as shown earlier, that the project can also be ascribed to a purely personal level as when a journalist “wish[es] that her attempt to get rid of her demons will be successful”.459

(Re)resisting victimhood

Connected to the process from noise to voice, and the political articulation of a wrong, is the question of victimhood. Odell herself described how she, through the police charges, might be being moved from the victim category to one of the perpetrator.460

In a broad sense, victimhood seems to circulate between different perpetrators, both with Odell as a victim and as the perpetrator.461 Odell is the victim of the healthcare system both then and now; she is the victim of the staff; she is the victim of the school that did not stop her; she is the victim of her illness that is claimed to still be there; she is the victim of bad advice from people around her. Odell, on the other hand, is also creating new victims: the hospital staff, society in using its resources, fellow patients at the ward, ‘real’ patients and their families, the people that helped her on the bridge, the police, future patients, people that do not receive any help, the taxpayers, etc. It is therefore as though the victimhood has to be put somewhere when discussing or commenting on the art project. The victimhood becomes fixed in the discourse in the sense that it can be displaced, transferred but not deleted. Instead, it becomes a struggle over who the ‘real’ victims are. These different placements of victimhood and emotions become a way of constructing a different political ‘we’ based on different articulations of wrongs.

One way of reading these strong statements concerning perceived victims, and earlier mentioned depictions of Odell as wanting personal revenge, is through Wendy Brown’s discussion of Nietzsche’s concept of ressentiment and

460 See e.g. Kulturnyheterna, 12 May 2009 [television programme], SVT.
461 This similar to how Sara Ahmed describes how emotions come attach themselves to some subjects, see Ahmed, The Cultural Politics of Emotion.
462 The construction of the police force as a victim is not nearly as strong as fellow patients or hospital staff. Rather, a link is made to our tax money that pays for their wasted time. This could be related to the traditional view of police officers not as victims but as holders of the state monopoly of violence. Furthermore, the police are not active in the debate and only spoken for by other commentators.
how it connects to feminist and other political subjectivities. Brown describes how the initial pain or wound stemming from injustice, oppression and domination becomes a form of attachment in the sense that it is used less to picture an alternative vision than asserting a certain moral claim. The crux is that “in its attempt to displace its suffering, identity structured by *ressentiment* at the same time becomes invested in its own subjection”. Brown further sees this as something very much present in the context of late modern societies as she states that the “late modern liberal subject quite literally seethes with *ressentiment*”. If we accept Brown’s argument that *ressentiment* is in fact a significant feature of the liberal model then the categorizations of revenge can be read as a way of making sense of the artwork that rhymes with an existing framework of making similar claims. Thus, besides the reading of these statements as depoliticization, we can also read them as presenting the ‘normal’ way of handling pain or a wound in the past. The time aspect becomes clear in Brown’s description: “[r]evenge as a ‘reaction,’ a substitute for the capacity to act, produces identity as both bound to the history that produced it and as a reproach to the present which embodies that history.” Unknown, woman 2009-349701 differs in the sense that rather than bringing the wound as a constituting feature of the present identity, the incapacity to act in the first point of time is displaced through the repetition of the event. Instead, the wound might even be said to be undone through the active repetition – this in contrast to Brown’s reference to Nietzsche where stilling the pain also means infecting the wound again.

In many of the statements, there is a picture drawn of a system under strain, of a welfare state under strain that Odell is posited as threatening or humiliating. As in the following from a journalist, an assertion is made that Odell is not the first threat and that the police and healthcare staff are heroic:

> In the bargain, police and healthcare staff – who once again had to exert themselves in soul and body for compensations that cannot impress anyone – got their reality parodied and their efforts ridiculed.

That the same institutions, especially the police, are institutions of power and hardly a repressed group in society, or that the threat against these institutions can only with difficulty be attributed to individual art students, is rarely mentioned. As we have seen earlier, the anger is articulated mainly on behalf of fellow patients (or real patients), the staff, police and tax payers trying to make an

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466 Brown, *States of Injury*, p. 73.
honest living and is connected to a perception of Odell having wasted societal resources and ‘our’ tax money. One possible reading of the strong emotions attached to this issue is their connection to a defence of the idea of the good welfare state. As one commentator somewhat ironically puts it, Odell is criticizing “the holiest of it all – the psychiatric care paid by tax”. In the statements there is sense that the welfare system is under threat, which can be put in a context of structural changes in Sweden in the years preceding the event, with a high level of media discussion as well as public protests. To be criticizing such a central part of the welfare system like health care institutions thereby becomes especially provoking.

Reading the many gendered articulations around Odell further points to the possibility that there may be something particularly sensitive about the fact that she is the one attempting to shed light on these otherwise closed institutions. One way of reading this is with Raka Shome’s words of “the relationship between white femininity and national identity”. A possible interpretation is that it is especially provoking that a young white Swedish woman wants to problematize such an essential part of the Swedish national identity as the welfare state institutions. The white femininity signifies being ‘one of us’ and maybe more importantly ‘one of those who it was all built up for’. This is in concordance with popular notions of how the welfare state regimes have been especially beneficial for women. It also provides perspective on how the attitudes changed when Odell revealed her own experiences. This made her categoriza-

värden”.
tion as a victim more palpable, which is in turn necessary for the articulation of the welfare institutions, national identity and white femininity.\textsuperscript{472}

The idea of victimhood that comes to circulate in the event becomes linked to both violence and criminality. Although Odell herself speaks of the victim role being reversed, it is the police complaint that starts a discussion where an opposition is made between art/discussion/raising awareness and criminality. It can be read as a way of depoliticizing the artwork by saying that all Odell was doing was committing crimes. In line with that, the term ‘stealing’ is used: “Odell’s make believe psychosis has stolen resources from a strained psychiatric care and thereby from patients with real needs”.\textsuperscript{473} Also the statements made by Eberhard, that Odell was violent towards the staff, contribute to constituting Odell as either criminal and/or truly crazy.\textsuperscript{474} By articulating Odell as violent her statements become less credible, especially since they make her look crazy. In this context there is a particular tension, especially in the early phases of the event where Odell is constituted as crazy but is also considered to be well enough to be both prosecuted and exempt from the right to the regular doctor-patient confidentiality, since she is not considered ill and therefore not a ‘real’ patient. Compared to the first official complaint of the event, namely the complaint by the hospital, the second complaint receives very little attention. The second is a complaint to the Parliamentary Ombudsmen, JO, on the possible breaching of medical confidentiality. This is picked up by some commentators and the statements by hospital staff were criticized,\textsuperscript{475} but there are also opposite statements referring to Odell as not “being a patient in it’s true meaning”\textsuperscript{476}

\textsuperscript{472} In addition, in the preceding years several auto-biographical books by women suffering from mental illness often with descriptions of self-harm had been published, see e.g. Sofia Åkerman, \textit{Zebraflickan} (Västerås: Författarhuset, 2007); Berny Pålsson, \textit{Vingklippt Ängel} (Stockholm: Forum, 2004); \textit{Känn Pulsen Slå} (Stockholm: Forum, 2008). For a feminist critique of this trend see, Anna Hallström, 2005, “Varats olidliga ältande”, \textit{Bang}, no. 1.

\textsuperscript{473} Henrik Bredberg, 2 February 2009, “Konsten med konst”, \textit{Sydsvenskan}. In Swedish: “Odells hittepåpsykos har stulit resurser från en ansträngd psykvård och därmed från patienter med verkliga behov”.

\textsuperscript{474} Eberhard’s early narrative of Odell as violent becomes a dominant one and picked up by many journalists, see e.g. \textit{P4 Extra}, 28 January 2009, [radio programme], Sveriges Radio P4; Magdalena Reuterswärd, 29 January 2009, “Konstelev polisanmäld av psykakut”, \textit{Helsingborgs Dagblad}.


and of being a “bluff-patient”.\textsuperscript{477} JO decided not to investigate the matter further.\textsuperscript{478}

In especially the readers’ comments there are several statements that Odell is just covering up criminal behaviour by saying it is art, and comparisons are made with other crimes, such as committing physical assault, theft or rape, and then just saying it is art.\textsuperscript{479} The numerous references to criminality and stealing raise the question of punishment, and the idea that Odell can view a potential prison sentence as just a part of her artwork.\textsuperscript{480} When discussing the appropriate punishment, the opposition made between artists and honest tax payers continues. As in this comment in the public Facebook group, “Put Anna Odell in the Kumla prison”:

But if we put her in jail then she will cost us taxpayers even more money. Isn’t it enough that she played with our money when she made her idiocy ‘art’?? Can we not expel her instead??!!\textsuperscript{481}

Democratic dimensions

We now move from the political dimensions to the democratic exchange that takes place in the event. Particular attention is given to the different responses that I claim are pivotal for understanding the development of the art project as a democratic undertaking. Lastly, the contestation on how to interpret this undertaking is put in context of Rancière and Mouffe.

Democratic exchange and silence

In the analysis of the democratic exchange we see how different responses fit or not fit within the established democratic script. An example of this was how Odell’s early silence came into tension with expectations concerning how to conduct a public debate and became constructed as a problem.

One of the ways that the RSMH chose to show their support for Odell was to demonstrate outside the courthouse during Odell’s trial.\textsuperscript{482} This way of offer-


\textsuperscript{481} Annamaja Grip, 22 September 2009, Comments in Facebook group “Sätt Anna Odell i Kumlabunkern”, www.facebook.com, [21 October 2009]. In Swedish: “Fast om vi sätter henne i fängels så kostar hon oss skattebetalare ännu mera pengar. Det räcker väl att hon lekte med våra pengar när hon gjorde sin idioti ’konst’?? Vi kan väl utvisa henne istället??!!”.

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ing their support through a peaceful manifestation with traditional placards fits within the boundaries of what is generally considered proper democratic behaviour. In other words, the demonstration invokes a democratic script that is recognizable and nonthreatening. Through their active participation RSMH adds to the democratic potential of the artwork, thereby not only recognizing the political dimension of the art object but also the democratic one. The demonstration, however, does not receive much attention in the media and does not bear any weight on the final judgment regarding whether the artwork is considered to be disrespectful towards people with mental illness in general. This highlights the paradox of acting properly democratic while at the same time attempting to challenge hegemonic power relations.

The question of who sets the framework for a democratic discussion arises when Odell and the art school are criticized for not entering the discussion as soon as it arises. The argument, amongst others, insists that as soon as the work of art becomes a part of the public discussion then the creators behind it are obliged to participate in the discussion.483 This is in Swedish expressed as “att ta debatten”, which implies that there is already a debate that you should take on and that if you do not take it on then you act irresponsibly:

But just as you say, to precisely not take on the debate as it comes that, that, that is irresponsible I think, and it is also something that of course will add to the conception of art and artists as odd and irresponsible people that already exist.

The stance taken by Odell and the art college, that the artist should not have to explain her work methods before the artwork is finished, is countered with the argument that this hinders the discussion sought, and that Odell cannot expect people to wait with their reactions.485 This points to how different logics are at play in the different fields: the media debate and the artistic platform. In the media discussion the sought for tempo is a rapid one, where responses and reactions should be as quick as possible, whereas in the artistic field slowness is a good quality in the sense that a process should be allowed to take its course before responding to a certain artwork. This difference in what is considered a desirable or necessary pace of response has direct consequences for whether

482 During the event there was one other march connected to the event, namely the Pepp march for art which was held due to the discussions on Konstfack and the so-called art scandals. The march was not in favour of Odell specifically but in support of art in general. See, Gunnar Sörbring, 24 May 2009, “Studenter på marsch för den fria konsten”, Dagens Nyheter.
484 Mårten Arndtzén in P1 Morgon, 28 January 2009, [radio programme], Sveriges Radio P1. In Swedish: "Men precis som du säger, just att man inte tar debatten när den kommer det, det, det är ansvarslöst tycker jag, och det är också något som naturligtvis kommer spå på den föreställning om konst och konstnärer som underliga och ansvarslösa människor som finns redan”.
the discussion emerging is considered democratic or not. If a rapid exchange is the prerequisite for acting democratically then the artistic field will fail this on many occasions. If there is a prerequisite for having thought properly through your arguments and claims for a longer time than this will exclude a large number of statements. The interesting thing is not that these two ideals exist but rather that they in this event clash so often, and that there is a low tolerance for these clashes. Clearly, the hegemonic view is that you should enter the public debate when it arises – waiting is not an option if you want to be considered acting properly democratic. Also, taking on an existing debate is a prerequisite for acting democratically and responsibly.

Odell’s stated reasons for the silence are questioned accordingly: “Anna Odell has acted dark and difficult” – thereby also adding to the interpretation of Odell as dishonest. Odell herself claims it to be more “responsible towards those who at one time have suffered from mental illness to wait with trying to explain what I have done until it is available for everyone to see”. Also, as we have seen, there are arguments saying Odell should have spoken when she was actually ill instead of waiting (thereby also dismissing the claim that she would not have been listened to). There are in other words strong norms concerning the right moment to enter a debate and when you are allowed to speak from a certain position.

What the linking of the enactment to a trait of dishonesty does, besides discredit Odell as a voice, is construct an opposition between the art world (elite) and the people (understood as the ordinary people). The critique against the perceived elite in relation to the presumed higher aims of the arts is articulated both in the general media and the comments, by both regular readers and people who could be defined as a part of that elite but who do not explicitly identify as such. Odell is contrasted with ordinary people, for example criticizing “cultural elitists who are so busy with demanding respect for themselves that they forget to show some for other human beings”.

Ordinary people become connected with what is right and plainly common sense and the elite with silliness, and whoever does not categorically condemn Odell’s action becomes associated with the elite. Some statements discuss strong emotions in the framing of the debate, describing it as, for example, “class hatred”.

Through these constructions a demarcation is made of what is relevant for public space, and the democratic discussions within it. What can be categorized as a silly question

487 Anna Odell, 4 March 2009, “Mitt verk får berätta”, Dagens Nyheter. In Swedish: “ansvarsfullt mot dem som någon gång lidit av psykisk sjukdom att avvaka med att försöka förklara vad det är jag gjort tills det finns att se för alla”.
for the elitists is taken off the public agenda and therefore becomes democrati
cally irrelevant.

Claims of democratic subjectivity: I am a democrat!

Here we turn to the issue of democratic subjectivity and of articulations of
sharing a democracy. In connection to the May exhibition there are statements
by Odell that can be read as answering to some of the critique raised against the
art project.

In my opinion I have not done harm to the Police or the psychiatric care as I
have not aimed at any individual person but have examined a system. One has to
be allowed to move within the margins if there is something one wants to say, if
that is the only way to be able to show something. It is not the question whether
I have the right to do it because I am an artist. It is because I think that all people
should have that right in a democratic society.⁴⁹⁰

The critique against Odell for being an irresponsible artist that is putting her
own career over other persons’ wellbeing is met in this quote as it makes two
important points. Firstly, that Odell is targeting a system and secondly, that she
thinks that what she is doing is not something that should only be the right of a
select few in a democratic society.

It is important to more closely examine these claims of citizens’ rights. In
the above quote it is clear that certain rights are attributed to persons living a
democracy, and that she constructs herself as a part of that rather than a specif-
ic group with particular rights. This is not as clear in the first phase of the
event, but the statements seem to evolve in relation to the responses she re-
ceives. Not only do Odell’s statements answer, directly and indirectly, the re-
sponses and the critique, but she also incorporates them in a later art exhibition.
Panel debates are held that include some of her critics – thereby opening up for
the interaction to continue. Analysed through Norval’s conceptualization of
aspect dawning Odell’s articulations can be read as saying: I’m a democrat! Articu-
ating herself as a democrat comes as a response to accusations, after the en-
actment was leaked to the media, of being non-democratic, that is criminal,
and disrespectful to our shared institutions and to a group in society already
low in the hierarchy. There were alternative routes to take, for example to con-
tinue being silent, claim art’s special role or ally herself more clearly with

⁴⁹⁰ Anna Odell in Kulturyhetera, 12 May 2009, [television programme], SVT. In Swedish: “Jag
anser inte att jag har skadat polis och psykvård för jag har inte gått någon enskild person utan jag
har undersökt ett system. Man måste få liksom röra sig i utkanterna om det är något man vill
säga, om det är enda sättet att kunna få visa någonting. Det handlar inte om att jag har rätt att
göra det för att jag är konstnär. Utan det är för att jag tycker att alla människor bör ha den rätt-
tigheten i ett demokratiskt samhälle”.

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RSMH. Instead, the statements point to a public statement of exercising general democratic rights, and thereby express a democratic subjectivity.

Although emphasizing everyone’s right, there are also statements by Odell that highlight her status as an insider of the topic that the art object tackles. The following quote from Odell does not condition speaking of mental health care to only those with experience but surely adds it as a positive element in the more general question of who can speak of what.

It is not so that I have that right because I am an artist, but I think that with my background and experience that I have both experience and understanding for the complicated world that psychiatric care is.\(^{491}\)

On other occasions Odell compares art to journalism, for example arguing that the event would have been differently received if she had been a male journalist.\(^{492}\) Also, the journalism comparison becomes topical during the trial given how journalists are protected by certain constitutional laws that the regular citizen is not.

**Different responses**

Here I will look more closely at different forms of responses in the event, in the sense that they relate to democratic exchange or subjectivity.

We start with responses that are **supportive or critically democratic**. This group of responses includes both those that explicitly support both the artistic form and the message of the art project and those who are not sure of the aim, or of the aim’s success, but do acknowledge both the message and the sender of the message and in their answers open up for more discussion by either Odell or others. This includes, for example, support for the artwork that is related to experience of knowing someone with mental illness.\(^{493}\) Furthermore, some responses bring up the question of inequality within psychiatric care and the


\(^{492}\) See e.g. Odell interviewed in P3 Kultur, 2 July 2010, [radio programme], Sveriges Radio P3. In her cinema film from 2013, Återträffen, Odell also brings in her previous art project and the critique that it was not well thought through and that someone else might have needed help for real. In the film this is posed as not deserving an answer but as more of a repeated comment that is more tiring than upsetting. Also in this movie there are sequences showing Odell running on what seems to be a bridge, which can be interpreted as a reference to the enactment on the bridge. These possible references have curiously enough not been picked up by reviewers of the dominant media.

need for this to be put on the agenda.\textsuperscript{494} Thereby a link is made to a more general value for society at large.

A large number of the statements adopt an authoritarian or condescending style of response, as if the message was: \textit{Leave it to the experts!} We can read assertions of being experts of democracy, psychiatric care, critical investigation, etc. This line of argument does not include an equality of all voices and can be contrasted to a supposed democratic ideal and how we think of democracy and its citizens. If we assume that some things are too risky for some people – and not worth the price, even if it is in the name of democracy – we are limiting the scope of democratic activity. Who would then be the guardians of the democratic community, of the democratic script?

One set of responses that are of concern here are the public responses made by representatives of the democratic system. Several politicians participated, including representatives of two parliamentary parties’ youth leagues, arguing Odell had not only wasted valuable resources but also jeopardized trust for the system as a whole.\textsuperscript{495} The politician that became the angriest was Birgitta Rydberg, a regional politician from the Liberal People’s Party (Folkpartiet), who demanded that Konstfack apologize as well as pay the costs for Odell’s care.\textsuperscript{496} Rydberg explains her anger by saying that Odell took a hospital bed that should have gone to patients. Furthermore, she warns that Odell’s work may have strengthened prejudices against psychiatric care and that this may cause regular people to become scared of seeking psychiatric emergency care because they think that you will be locked up and put in a belt just for going there.\textsuperscript{497} Rydberg generally seems to accept the description initially offered by Eberhard, describing Odell as violent and aggressive and takes a firm stance on the side of the staff against Odell.\textsuperscript{498} As a politician, Rydberg therefore takes the position of the system, the authority, rather than the citizen. Other public responses include the social media group “No more money for Konstfack”, which was started by local politician Mathias Sundin, also from Folkpartiet.\textsuperscript{499}

Claiming authority as well as referring to regular people, Birgitta Rydberg also trivializes the artwork by arguing that the board of Konstfack should have used “plain common sense” in evaluating whether Odell’s artwork should have been allowed. Rydberg uses the Swedish word “bondförruften”, which literally


\textsuperscript{496} Debatt, 29 January 2009, [television programme], SVT1; P4 Extra, 28 January 2009, [radio programme], Sveriges Radio P4.

\textsuperscript{497} Debatt, 29 January 2009, [television programme], SVT1. These articulations further highlight how different groups or subjects are compared and posited against each other.

\textsuperscript{498} P4 Extra, 28 January 2009, [radio programme], Sveriges Radio P4.

\textsuperscript{499} Facebook group “Inga mer pengar till konstfack”, www.facebook.com, [10 May 2010].
translates as “farmer’s reasoning” and thereby connects with a common sense of the people, opposed to that of an intellectual elite. Rydberg’s states that if this common sense had been used then they would not have allowed their students to “monkey about”. By using her position of authority, Rydberg here states what common sense is or is not and thereby distances herself from the supposed elite. Describing the art students’ work in this manner does not open for any possibility of it having artistic or political value. Furthermore, it can be read as attempts to close down its democratic potential.

In a similar manner, David Eberhard repeatedly, in both written and spoken comments, makes ridiculing statements about Odell’s work. This happens, for example, when he laughs while the TV host of a debate programme is explaining the reason behind Odell’s unwillingness to explain her work before it has been exhibited. In the same programme he uses the word “silly” to characterize the purpose that Odell has expressed in the project plan that she left in the hands of the doctor that discharged her from the hospital during the reenactment. On another occasion he uses the word “foolish” to describe Odell’s work. It is only from a position of authority that one can pose such an argument, as it takes for granted that the position of the self is neither foolish nor silly.

The expert dimension also includes mental health institutions. A part of the de-authorization of Odell, Eberhard claims that one has to have psychiatric competence in order to “evaluate the quality” of Odell’s work. Eberhard himself explains:

“Yes because what she is trying to do is to provocatively claim that the psychiatric care has done something they shouldn’t… and then you have to have psychiatric competence”.

Competence is here constructed as only for the professionals and not for regular people or even patients. Eberhard is not prepared to expand the notions of who has the competence of evaluating the psychiatric care but makes a clear demarcation between those competent and those non-competent, or in Ranciérian terms, between speech and noise.

There are also articulations that position Odell first and foremost as a student, such as advice on how she should have edited the video in her artwork.

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502 *Debatt* 29 January 2009, [television programme], SVT1. In Swedish: “tramsigt”.
504 David Eberhard in *Debatt*, 29 January 2009, [television programme], SVT1. In Swedish: “Jo för att det som hon försöker göra är att provocera fram att psykiatrin har gjort någonting som psykiatrin inte borde göra … och då måste man ha psykiatrisk kompetens”.

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and claiming that she is “biting off more than she can chew”. The framing of these often adopt a paternalistic character – even among the more supportive statements. This can be partly explained by the fact that Odell is at the time of the event still an art student, but it is a feature that follows the evaluation of the event made often by very different agents and for seemingly different reasons, for example reflections on the role of the art college, questioning whether they should have “let a student under supervision do such a difficult thing as this”. The school becomes the primary agent, and not Odell herself.

There is a group of responses that construct the art object and the artist as a threat to our common institutions and the trust towards them. The emphasis is on the common and the public, such as the law, the trust between people and our welfare institutions and an opposition between the right-minded and the others. I read these statements as saying that the artwork is not part of what we regularly define as our common democratic debate. Instead the claim is the following: *This is not democratic!* After the verdict Eberhard states that he believes that Odell’s work has had negative effects on “the trust between psychiatric patients and psychiatric staff” – in a way pointing to a disruption of the dominant power relations or alternatively that the psychiatric professionals are more on guard than before. Articulations of Odell as violent also contribute to this. Disruption of existing power relations is linked to being irresponsible, and thereby points to the investments made into that hegemonic order of power.

Many of these statements I read as attempting to close down the exchange. By closing down I mean here that the response seems to mainly discard the original message as not worth listening to. Thus it is not a total dismissal since it does provide an answer, but it does not invite a further discussion, and it does not acknowledge the first speaker as an equal partner in the democratic interaction.

The last cluster of responses is characterized by, in Mouffe’s term, antagonist relations. Here we see how there are arguments made that are an attempt to totally close down the democratic interaction. It is not only silence but also threats or hints of violence. I analyse this as what Mouffe describes as the danger when you do not channel conflict through the political sphere: you no longer have agonistic but antagonist relations. Another way of reading these statements is as a form of hatred of democracy. Rancière speaks of a hatred of democracy, which he sees as portraying itself in a new form consisting of an idea that there is too much democracy. Anna Odell’s enactment can be seen

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506 See e.g. Mårten Arndtzén in P1 Morgon, 28 January 2009, [radio programme], Sveriges Radio P1.
507 David Eberhard in Rapport, 31 August 2009, [television programme], SVT1. In Swedish: “förtroendet mellan psykiatriska patienter och den psykiatriska personalen”.
508 Mouffe, *On the Political*, p. 5.
as a form of too much democracy by shifting the agency and right to interpretation from the authority to the object of the authority.

The threats are found mainly in the online comments, for example stating that “a shot in the forehead would be a fitting present”.\textsuperscript{510} It was reported in the media that there had been threats made towards Odell, and the university college and that she had security guards with her during the exhibition in May 2009.\textsuperscript{511} Occasionally, the statements are directed straight towards Odell, for example: [a] shame that you didn’t fall down [from the bridge]”.\textsuperscript{512}

Eberhard also makes harsh statements, such as that “she’s welcome back so I can give her a shot of haloperidol myself, and then we’ll see how much fun she has”.\textsuperscript{513} At the end of 2011 Eberhard wrote a letter offering at least half an apology for this statement, where he says it is not “power talk from the medical programme but suburban language”\textsuperscript{514}

\textit{Not proper democratic work}

A pattern that emerges in the exchange is that Odell’s art project and the following debate is not considered as proper democratic work, in the sense that it does not follow the regular norms on democratic participation, and in some cases even poses a danger to those norms. Odell is at times interpellated as a threat to democracy as the art object is compared not only previously crimes but also to crimes connected to authoritarian regimes.\textsuperscript{515}

Another common angle in order to evaluate the democratic significance is the recurring comparisons to journalism. It starts early in the event as parallels are made to wallraff journalism. When the artwork is compared to journalism it

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{510} Per Haddäng, 24 September 2009, in Facebook group “Sätt Anna Odell i kumlabunkern” [21 October 2009. In Swedish: “Nackskott i pannan är en passande present”.


\end{footnotesize}
is most of the time considered as bad journalism, and the dividing line in regards to journalism becomes the perceived personal feature in the artwork.\textsuperscript{516}

In relation to the trial, discussions are raised concerning the possible consequences for journalists\textsuperscript{517}. The discussion consistently only includes artists and journalists. Unlike what Odell and RSMH claim, the right to expose misconducts through undercover actions is in the hands of professionals and not the regular citizen. It is a question of what different professions have the right to do and not of general democratic rights of citizens. The conclusion seems to be one that ends in a claim of restoring order where every group has its own place.\textsuperscript{518} Despite claims made that the artwork has provided valuable insights there is no sign of a radical shift regarding the patient’s voice entering the public discussion similar to the one hoped for by writer Åsa Moberg.\textsuperscript{519}

When evaluating the art object’s societal relevance there are different criteria used that focus on efficiency or end results, for example when claiming that if Odell should come to reveal any wrongs then the artwork will be evaluated differently.\textsuperscript{520} I read these statements as a part of a discourse where the state, and in this case the welfare state, is inherently good with only occasional conflicts or bad conduct stemming from unequal power relations. Consequently, the price is not worth paying for the disruption unless something really was wrong from the beginning. This contrasts starkly with both Mouffe and Rancière who dismiss the thought of a consensus without suppressed conflicts but rather emphasize the conflictual nature of the political. If one assumes that there are always power relations constituting the existing hegemony then you can also argue that there is an inherent value in exploring and criticizing our so called shared institutions, whichever they may be and how minor the end result. This notion, that if and only if Odell had discovered something then it might have been worth the price, is connected to an idea that it is not enough to simply pose the question and that it is necessary to have “some analysis and presentation of conclusions”\textsuperscript{521} Odell is perceived as not being precise enough, and that she: “seems so unclear about what exactly she wants to portray, that it remains blurred wherein the wrongs of the care lie”.\textsuperscript{522} It is also claimed that


\textsuperscript{517} Kulturnytt in P1 Morgon 24 August 2009, [radio programme], Sveriges Radio P1; Studio Ett, 24 January 2009, [radio programme], Sveriges Radio P1.

\textsuperscript{518} Rancière, \textit{Dis-Agreement}.

\textsuperscript{519} Åsa Moberg, 19 May 2009, “Modigt lagbrott av Anna Odell”, \textit{Svenska Dagbladet}.

\textsuperscript{520} Mårten Arndtzén in P1 Morgon, 28 January 2009, [radio programme], Sveriges Radio P1.


\textsuperscript{522} Cecilia Verdinelli, 19 May 2009, “Psikatrins behöver testas och utmanas”, \textit{Göteborgs-Posten}. In Swedish: “Men det är åndå synd att Odell verkar så oklar över exakt vad det är hon vill visa, att det förblir diffust vari vårdens övergrepp legat”.

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Odell does not “show any evidence”\textsuperscript{523}, “reveal anything, criticize anything”\textsuperscript{524}. Counter-articulations claiming Odell’s procedure as “methodical and conscious” can also be read in the comments\textsuperscript{525}. There are also references that suggest Odell’s installation shows societal institutions working rather well\textsuperscript{526} and strong criticisms that the whole debate has wrongly not been about psychiatric care but about art\textsuperscript{527}.

Another feature of the non-proper democratic work is the form itself. There appears to be something provocative in the form itself that does not rhyme with the sought after efficiency. The critique mainly states that it was all fake, all just a game\textsuperscript{528}. Odell’s work can be analysed as putting a conscious repetition in motion, a repetition that is central to a post-structuralist perspective of radical democracy, whether a Derridean notion of iteration or a Foucauldian genealogy\textsuperscript{529}. In the iteration of identities, practices, etc., there is also a potential for resistance. Butler describes this through her notion of the performative and through the concept of interpellation\textsuperscript{530}. Ahmed emphasizes this feature of Butler’s work where “norms appear as forms of life only through the concealment of the work of this repetition”.\textsuperscript{531}

What Odell in a way does is derive the iterative aspect and in some ways take control of it and through that add an element of resistance. By putting herself in the same position as in the earlier ‘real’ event Odell’s work can be seen as a double movement, both as showing a new interpretative framework for what she experienced in the “real” psychosis event but also as showing the materiality of such an event by undergoing it again. She could actually have as a main goal that her body would no longer be under her own control but be facing the pain of being medicated and restrained by force. The repetition that Odell stages can be read as a complicating factor for intelligibility as the form becomes part of the message, so to speak.

\textsuperscript{523} Hedvig Weibull, 14 May 2009, “Anna Odells verk avslöjade föraktet för konsten”, Borås Tidning. In Swedish: “visar inga bevis”.
\textsuperscript{526} See e.g Karin Magnusson, 17 May 2009, “Odells konst får fram klasshatet”, Aftonbladet.
\textsuperscript{528} This critique has some similarities to the critique against post-structuralist theory of discourse as somehow making the material conditions less prominent. Smith states: “It should nevertheless be emphasized that the claim that we interpret power relations discursively does not contradict in any way other claims regarding the material effects of power relations, namely that the humans who are caught up in what we call exploitative and oppressive relations actually do experience pain and suffering.” In Smith, Laclau and Mouffe, p. 61.
\textsuperscript{529} Smith, Laclau and Mouffe.
\textsuperscript{530} Butler, Gender Trouble.
The heavy critique and the anger against Odell can, in Rancièrian terms, be read as an attempt to get back to the status quo, to the right order of things, of reworking the distribution of the sensible back to their proper place. Mentally ill people, or patients, do not speak, and are not one of those who can think of the future and society. Rancière uses examples from Roman times of plebeians who are not counted as one of the speaking parts but still expected to understand and follow orders. In a similar manner we could say that the mentally ill are expected to follow the orders from the staff in the healthcare institutions but not deemed credible to speak of what has happened. According to the police logic, Eberhard, on the other hand, possesses the qualifications for authority and is automatically part of the speaking parts. Thereby, Odell is challenging what Rancière calls the police logic when she is claiming the right to speak of something that she was previously denied.

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532 Rancière, *Dis-Agreement; The Politics of Aesthetics.*
5. The representations of Makode Linde

I think there is something silly here when you are going to sit and claim Afro-swedishness as something that only you have the right to be, I also have the right to be Afro Swedish and I am Afro Swedish and I have the right to speak about it in a way that I find interesting.534

The quote is from the Swedish artist Makode Linde who in April 2012 designed a cake that came to be debated all over the world. Pictures of how the then minister for culture, Lena Adelsohn Liljeroth535, cut a slice of this cake came to spread fast, not only in social and traditional media within Sweden, but also internationally. Linde had, together with four other artists, been invited to create a cake for World Art day, an event arranged by KRO, the Swedish Artists’ National Organization at the Modern Museum in Stockholm. KRO was celebrating their 75 year anniversary and besides the cakes there were seminars held during the day on the theme of artistic freedom and censorship in a global perspective. The minister for culture held a speech during the day and was asked to cut the first piece of the cake, which she did.

Pictures taken at the occasion spread fast through mainly social media and showed a smiling minister cutting into the cake. Inspired by the figurine Venus/woman from Willendorf, the cake portrayed a woman’s body from neck to upper legs. The cake had a dark layer of marzipan, and the artist’s own head was sticking up from the table where the cake was laying as if it was part of the cake. Golden neck rings, resembling tribal ornaments, connected the cake body with the artist’s head, which was painted in an accentuated blackface. Every time someone cut into the cake, laying bare its red inside, the artist screamed as if being in pain. In the video clip released online you can hear the screams from the artist, as well as background voices and laughter from the participants at the event.

One image of the minister for culture turned out to be especially provocative as she is seen feeding the artist with a piece of the cake cut from the lower abdomen. The main critique was that the incident had become a racist manifestation, and both the artist and the minister for culture received extensive criti-
The organization National Association of Afro-Swedes, ASR, became one of the strongest critical voices, demanding that the minister for culture should resign. The critique and the pictures spread fast and started a debate with strong emotions in a large number of media forums, both national and international.

My analysis of this event, which became known as “Tårtgate” (Cakegate) within social media, will emphasize how notions of representation become a key for understanding the debate. Representation in the event touches upon two meanings of the term, namely as an essential part of a Western liberal democratic script, and also as reading images as representations. Besides an interrogation of different representational claims and contestations the tracking of the space of conflict in this event leads us back in history. Only by tracking the different traces of meaning that the images hold can we fully analyse the contesting interpretations of the artwork and how they condition the democratic exchange that takes place.

The account of the event will start with a presentation of the empirical material and thereafter follows a description of the artwork, the debate and the main emotions. Finally, the analyses of the political and democratic dimensions of the event are addressed.

Tracking the event

Due to the intensity of the debate the quantity of the empirical material is in this event very large. I have selected mainly national Swedish media, but also included international media when it surfaces in my Swedish material, for example where there are statements directed to one of the key actors or when people based in Sweden write texts for international media.

The radio and television material has been accessed through the National Library of Sweden’s collections of audiovisual media by means of the Swedish Media Database. The search has been on “Makode Lindé OR tårtgate OR tårtkonst* OR tårtskandal”. Some programmes did not deal with the event itself and were excluded. I manually went through the news broadcasts for the first week as these do not show up in the catalogue. I did the same with the popular listeners’ programme, Ring P1. All in all, the selection amounted to 39 programmes where I have transcribed in full the relevant parts.

Newspapers have been accessed through Mediearkivet with the same search criteria as the television and radio programmes. I have also double-checked the big newspapers by going through all their online material. Only a few of the articles had reader’s comments attached. During the period of the event several newspapers had closed down the commentary function, either totally or partially. This was connected to a public discussion on the claimed insufficiency of the moderation systems being used.
A large number of both national and international blogs are analysed. Within social media material the artist’s official Facebook page has proven very fruitful with a high number of comments from already very early on in the event. I have decided not to include Twitter material even though it can be argued that debate took off partly because of photos circulating on Twitter. The reason is that interpreting the very short statements is tricky, and often requires knowledge of the sender in order to identify, for example, irony.

The video clips from the event were uploaded by the curator of World Art Day 2012, Pontus Raud, onto Youtube where there are almost 8000 comments regarding the two clips to be found. When going through the comments I noticed that they also include cut-ins from other platforms, often in different languages, making it difficult to analyse them as one coherent exchange. Since the comments to the clips did not appear in my other material, except for references to the quantity of comments, I have decided to only analyse them on a more general level.

Particular for this event is how the boundary between previous research on the topic and the empirical material becomes blurred. Several of the people active in the debate have written scholarly texts on the Linde’s artwork and the ensuing debate, either as a main topic or as an example of the Swedish context. One example is an anthology that was published in 2012, which deals with race and whiteness in contemporary Sweden. The cake is mentioned already in the first paragraph in the introduction of the anthology, as well as in several of the other contributions. Another example is a published e-mail conversation between researchers discussing the cake. In my analysis these texts will be read more as a background as they are, strictly speaking, not part of the regular flow of debate in the wake of the event.

Makode Linde’s cake

In this event it is not totally clear what the art object actually is, not only because of the element of performance but also because there are other objects being added. The picture taken by Marianne Lindberg de Geer, also an artist, as well as the pictures and video clips by the curator Pontus Raud can be viewed as art objects in their own right.

It is also not wholly clear if there is an official title of the artwork. In the early phase the cake goes under the title Painful cake, for example as the title of

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536 This was the number of comments in May 2015.
537 Tobias Hübinette et al., ed., Om ras och rithet i det samtida Sverige (Botkyrka: Mångkulturellt centrum, 2012).
539 In the beginning the cake is referred to as Painfull cake, but this seems to be a spelling mistake rather than an intentional spelling.
the video clip. However, this does not seem to be the official name. Linde speaks in the days after the event of the “clitoridectomy cake” and “female genital mutilation cake”. In the empirical material the name becomes a part of framing the artwork, for example describing it as: “performance, installation or what one can call the spectacle”. For the sake of the analysis, I will refer to the art object simply as the cake, meaning also the performance.

As we will see, the framing of the cake comes to be contested, but Linde describes how: “[t]he cake was meant to symbolize mass graves, cutting-up and female genital mutilation. I wanted it to feel unconformable to cut it and that it would get people to reflect”. In the television news we get a glimpse of the design sheet for the cake. Clearly, the figurine Woman from Willendorf is the main source of inspiration, but with the adding of the black marzipan and the blackface to it. Thereby, it fits within Linde’s series of works under the title Afromantics where he combines well known images and symbols with an exaggerated blackface. The practice of painting predominantly white people originates from the American minstrel shows that developed in the 19th century. Black people were at that time not allowed to be on stage, and the minstrel shows served both the purpose of entertaining as well as giving white people an opportunity to make meaning around issues of race in the American setting.

Linde frames the cake as a part of his Afromantics series, and mentions Venus as one of the images to be transposed through the blackface. The figurine of Woman from Willendorf may have been chosen specifically to fit within a context of other artists, who can be assumed to recognize the idea behind the cake – however this not specifically articulated.

544 Rapport, 17 April 2012, [television programme], SVT1.
545 On the sketch it says Venus from Willendorf, which is the name that this figurine used to go by. Most of this type of female figurines from the Paleolithic period (c. 24,000 BCE) previously went by the name Venus. Because of the figurine’s emphasized female feature, it was termed as Venus, as in the Roman goddess, during the period when it was found, the early 20th century. Thereby the interpretations of the figurine also came to be directed to fertility and ideal images of womanhood. See, Marilyn Stokstad and Michael W. Cothren, Art History, 5th ed. (London: Pearson, 2014).
If we read the artwork as performance art, then the participation by the minister for culture becomes a key dimension of the final artwork. This is especially due to the fact that she goes beyond just cutting the cake; when the artist starts screaming, Adelsohn Liljeroth takes a fork and feeds him a piece of the cake. According to Linde the minister at the time said to him “Your life will become better”, which Linde interpreted as the minister showing insight into how the happening will benefit him as an artist.

The fact that the work of art cannot simply be limited to the actual cake makes the debate and judgments of the cake more complex, which Linde himself emphasizes: “I think a lot of people get the artwork mixed up with the image of the minister for culture cutting the cake, and I think they are pulling something out of its context.”

Linde has continued referring to the cake in his artistic work. In the exhibition Taboo Fetisch there are solid pieces of cake that clearly are to be associated to the cake. Moreover, Linde has been very active in the debate concerning the artwork, and in June 2012 he took part in an organized discussion during a festival on whether the minister for culture should resign or not.

The public debate

Already from the start the event was characterized by strong emotions. Initially taking off in social media, by 18 April there were summaries in the printed media concerning the reactions on Twitter as well as statements that regular journalists have proved themselves slow in comparison. In the digital and broadcasted media channels the first articles arrived already 17 April, only two days after the happening. A reason for why the debate picks up so fast is likely due to the readiness of many of the involved to participate in the debate, which means there is an exchange between the key actors early on. The debate also spreads fast internationally.

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549 Sofia Roström Andersson, 19 April 2012, “Ditt liv kommer att bli bättre”, Aftonbladet. In the same article it says that the minister has not refuted this, but also not confirmed what had been said in detail.

550 Makode Linde in Epstein i P1, 17 April 2012, [radio programme], P1. In Swedish: “]ag tror väldigt många blandar ihop verket med bilden av kulturministern som skär i tårtan och… jag tror de rycker nånting ur sitt sammanhang”.

551 Taboo Fetisch was in 2013 at Konsthallen Lokstallet in Strömstad, Sweden and also at Galleri Jonas Kleerup in Stockholm.


555 See e.g., Morgenbladet, 20 April 2012; Janell Hobson, 20 April 2012, “Let Them Eat Cake”, [blog], msmagazine.com, [1 April 2012]; Jonathan Jones, 20 April 2012, “Racist Swedish cake,
The intensity of the debate was the highest in the early phase, and thereafter it slowly faded out. There were no different waves in the public debate spurred by external events. The retrospective by Linde at a gallery in Stockholm was discussed and reviewed and the cake mentioned again but this did not spark the same kind of debate as in the beginning. In connection with other exhibitions, cultural awards nominations and an assault on Linde in 2013 some media revisited the event, but the coverage did not set off a heated debate.

In the beginning the discussion focused on the potential aim of the artist in making the cake. Since Linde enters the debate so early on his articulations of the intention were discussed. However, Linde did not give any straight-forward explanations, claiming the need for room for different interpretations. A recurring description by Linde is that the aim was to “create a discussion about racism”. There are contradictory statements made by Linde on whether the aim was to highlight female genital mutilation or not. The narrative of the problematizing of FGM as the aim of the artwork became a strong one throughout the event. There are also recurrent interpretations of the happening as a trap for the minister of culture, but statements from the artist deny that the intention was to trick the minister. Generally, the FGM theme received the strongest hold in the international media while in the national media it was kept more open concerning what the actual intention behind the art performance was. In the national media the theme of the World Art Day was also highlighted to a greater extent.

A central feature in the debate is how the exchange becomes tied to the critique posed early on. The main part of the statements focused on whether the

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556 See e.g. Kulturnytt, 18 May 2012, [radio programme], P1; Kulturnyheterna, 18 May 2012, [television programme], SVT1.
initial critique was justified or not, which gets linked to a specific reading of the artwork. Since the initial critique focused on racism this also becomes the key issue. There are two strands present: one focusing on whether the cake and artists’s performance was racist and the other whether the spectators and participants in the art performance acted in a racist way. The minister of culture is in the centre in the different articulations on the responsibility of the participants at the museum.

In the traditional media channels the work of art is mainly positively depicted. Besides the organizations voicing their critique, the strong emotions and critical voices are mainly found within social media and in commentaries on articles, blogs and the video clip.

Among the organizations, the fiercest critique comes from the organization National Association of Afro-Swedes (ASR) calling it a “spectacle” and a “racist manifestation” and demanding that the minister resigns. One of the association’s spokespersons wrote an opinion piece in the British newspaper The Guardian. Also, the National Association for Ending Female Genital Mutilation (RISK) and Africa Groups of Sweden posed critique publically. Initiatives were also taken by organizations outside of Sweden. European Network Against Racism (ENAR), wrote a letter to the prime minister asking him to publically condemn the incident. Also Black Feminists UK wrote an open letter to the minister of culture in connection with a planned visit by the Swedish minister for culture to the Swedish Embassy in London. Besides the open letter, a protest and a petition were organized.

Of the different actors involved, there are three that received the fiercest critique. The artist was criticized for the cake and performance itself, and the minister for culture was accused of being racist when she laughingly cuts into the cake. The Modern Museum, where the event was held, was criticized for allowing their space to be used for the art project, even though the museum was not one of the organizers. A few days after the event, the museum received a bomb threat and was forced to evacuate the building for some hours; however, no bomb was found. A complaint against the museum was also made to The Parliamentary Ombudsmen (JO), but did not result in any measures taken.


against the museum. The museum made an official statement clarifying their role in the event. In the empirical material I could not find critique against Marianne Lindberg de Geer or Pontus Raud, even though they could be considered the ones that actually took the artwork out of its context, namely the specific event and the performance connected to it.

Among other artists, there are not many who participate in the debate. One exception is Elisabeth Olsson Wallin who makes critical statements and cancels a donation of a collection of her artwork, stating that she does not want her pictures associated with the event. In contrast, the Swedish Artists’ National Organization, who organized the event, articulated support for the artist.

In the first days there are three opinion pieces published in the tabloid paper *Aftonbladet* by the three key actors. The first one is by written by the National Association of Afro-Swedes, ASR, and is followed by both the artist himself and the minister for culture. The minister also invites the ASR for a meeting to discuss the events. Besides the minister there is not much mention of politicians articulating standpoints in the empirical material.

In the different media the event is covered mainly in the cultural sections, but there is also coverage in the regular news and by several editorial writers. Only very few politicians give statements, and none of the citations by politicians in the analysed texts are from party leaders.

**Main emotion: Disgust**

There is a significant difference in how many emotions were expressed in the different media. Predominantly, the emotions are articulated in comments on articles and in social media, while in the traditional media the discussion is much more constrained. A common feature among the articulations of emotions is that it was “shocking” and that “[t]he cake was disgusting.” Similarly the cake and the performance are also articulated as being “in utterly bad

570 The only thing I have found hinting at a critical stance is a text by Clemens Poellinger who states that it is not the artist primarily that introduces the media attention but that it needs a mediator, and that in this case it was Pontus Raud. See, Clemens Poellinger, 30 May 2012, “Medierna går gärna i fällan”, *Svenska Dagbladet*.
571 *Aktuellt*, 19 April 2012, [television programme], SVT2.
572 See e.g. Clas Barkman, 18 April 2012, “Krav på avgång efter tårtskandal”, *Dagens Nyheter*.
574 Nadilay Bam’s, 17 April 2012, Comments on facebook.com/MakodeLinde, [11 November 2012].
The following comment on Linde’s fan page on Facebook summarizes it well:

I was horrified and enraged when I saw the photos of this cake and assumed that it was a Caucasian that had created something so racist. The real horror was that you are of African descent and cannot see the damage that you are doing. Every ‘sambo’ face that you create is setting our people back closer to the time when these disgusting images were accepted and we could do nothing about them. After all of the effort that we have made to get rid of them for a Black man to use them as though they mean nothing is truly appalling. Worse you make mockery of all of our sisters that have been and still are being subjected to genital mutilation. You should be very ashamed…[my emphasis]

The commentator directs the statement directly to the artist urging him to feel ashamed. The calling for a feeling of shame is recurrent in many of the comments and the shame is not only attached to the artist but urging as well that “[a]ll involved should be ashamed of themselves”. In the quote above we see how the impression of mockery is connected to a feeling of anger. Likewise, articulations pointing out humour as one of many ways to discuss difficult topics are connected to anger, as when stating that the women are subject to FGM: “would not find this the least bit humorous!” The strong emotions are also articulated in relation to the perceived commodification of this type of images as the artwork gets articulated as “capitalizing on the suffering of others”.

It is more difficult to say what the emotions are in the statements from the ones taking a stance for the artwork. There is a certain distance taken, and the clearest emotion is rather a form of impatience, as in questioning why some of the critical voices do not understand what the artwork is actually about. The ones really expressing appreciation for the cake or the performance do it with less emotion, although clearly, for example: “It’s very provocative and I loved

582 See also, Barbara Coar, 18 April 2012, Comments on facebook.com/MakodeLinde, [11 November 2012].
it”. On a few occasions there are descriptions of how an initial response of strong emotions changes when the artwork is examined in more detail, which results in seeing new dimensions in the work and the initial emotion changing accordingly.

Political dimensions

When we turn to analysing the processes of politicization and depoliticization in the event, one important aspect concerns how certain images come to reactivate past constructions of blackness and gender. In the event we also see how reading a statement as political or not is dependant on who is making that statement. Furthermore, in the extensive and heated debate there is terminology used that we recognize as politically charged but that is nonetheless not a straightforward politicization. The analysis of the political dimensions starts with the central contestation in the event concerning whether the incident was racist, not racist or anti-racist as well as on the construction of the different collective ‘we’ as a part of those contestations.

**Politization and depoliticization**

A key factor for the political dimensions in the event is the fact that the critique and protests all came afterwards rather than when the performance took place. There were also no comments at the actual event that made explicit an intention or anticipated reactions, making the field of interpretation more open for contestation.

An early input, a short text with a photo in a national tabloid paper by one of the participants Lindberg De Geer, focused on the conditions for working artists and not on racism at all. This suggests that it was not so clear-cut if there was a specific political message in the performance. If we read politicization processes as partly constituting a collective ‘we, as in mobilization, then that does not happen in the performance moment.

As it seems that most commentators agree that the cake in fact does show a stereotype, as when describing it as a “stereotypical African woman”, the main question becomes whether the usage of this stereotype is racist or not. Granting it is a racist caricature, the only way to redeem using is to judge it as an anti-racist action. This opposition between it being racist or anti-racist

586 See e.g. Ring P1, 24 April 2012, [radio programme], P1; Anna Brodow Inzaina, 26 May 2012, “Makode Linde behärskar semiotiken som metod”, Svenska Dagbladet.
comes to dominate the entire discussion, which becomes marked by a polariza-
tion. In other words, the responses tend to give a clear yes or no to the ques-
tion of racism.

As mentioned earlier there were two strands in the debate on racism: one
focusing on the artwork and the other on the participants. The dominant read-
ing of the artwork itself states simply that it cannot be racist because of the artist’s
background. This means reading the artwork closely tied to the artist’s own
background and of constructing the artist as ‘black’ or Afro-Swedish. We see
here an example from a political columnist in the left-wing tabloid Aftonbladet.

Due to this the National Association for Afro-Swedes thinks that Lena Adelsohn
Liljeroth should leave her post. It was a tasteless, racist manifestation that alluded
to cannibalism. One can probably interpret it like that. But the artist, Makode Aj
Linde, is himself Afro-Swedish and often brings up questions like racism, xenophi-
phobia and slavery. Therefore the purpose of this the cake installation reasonably
cannot have been pro-racist.

In the quote the artist’s other works are taken as proof that it should not be
interpreted as racist. Thereby, the artist is constructed as already proven to be
an established anti-racist artist. The position as anti-racist strengthens the read-
ing of the intention as anti-racist and subsequently gives it a political framing.
The assumed link between an artist being black and thereby automatically being
anti-racist is problematized by commentators critical of the artwork who in-
stead emphasize either the object per se or the situation that arose when the
minister cut a slice from the cake.

Depending on the purpose described, the action of the participants at the
performance is also interpreted differently. Most statements do not pose cri-
tique towards the minister for culture and the other participants, but instead
depoliticize the actions taken. One way of doing this is to state that the partici-
pants were just taking part in a performance and cannot be criticized any more
than an actor playing a part in a film can be. Other forms of depoliticization

589 In line with post-structuralist theory race is conceptualized in this study as a historically con-
structed category. Therefore the use and articulations of the terms ‘race’, ‘black’, ‘of colour’,
‘white’ are analysed rather than taken as given.
590 Lena Mellin, 18 April 2012, “Toppolitiker kan inte komma oförberedda”, Aftonbladet. In Swe-
dish: “För detta tycker Afrosvenskarernas riksförbund att Lena Adelsohn Liljeroth ska lämna sin
post. Det var en smaklös, rasistisk manifestation som anspelade på kannibalism. Så kan man
säkert tolka det. Men konstnären, Makode Aj Linde, är själv afrosvensk och tar ofta upp frågor
som rasism, främingsfientlighet och slaveri. Alltså kan avsikten med tårtinstallationen rimligen
inte ha varit prorasistisk.”
591 Ehsan Noroozi interviewed in Studio Ett, 18 April 2012, [radio programme], P1; Kitimbwa
Sabuni, interviewed in P3 Nyheter, 17 April 2012, [radio programme], P3.
592 Johan Wirfält, 17 April 2012, “Därför är Makode Lindes konsstymningstäta årets största
svenska konstögonblick”, [blog], rodeo.net, [28 March 2015]. See also, Kajsa Ekis Ekman, 25 April
are articulating what happened as an expression of Swedish naivety, of following a Swedish cake eating tradition or of being taken by surprise and therefore taking actions as more accidental than deliberate.

Lastly, a recurrent statement is that it was a lose-lose situation for the minister, and that the critique would have been even harsher if she had refused to cut the cake, as it would have been framed as her not wanting to take part in the performance of a black artist. What these different interpretations do is to separate art from the political, and thereby relieve the minister from accountability; after all, it was just a matter of art.

More politically phrased comments to the happening emphasize the performance dimension of the artwork, for example the tense situation at the event as a sign that the artwork was successful. Some argue that the biggest strength of the art performance was that it managed to set a trap for the minister for culture and that the success of the artwork is due to the minister and other guests falling into the trap. The participants’ actions thereby strengthen the relevance and meaning of the art object. There are also statements that the minister went too far when feeding Linde with a piece of the cake. However, statements by Linde do not pose a critique towards how the participants acted, but on the contrary defend the minister and the other participants against claims of contributing towards making it a racist manifestation. Moreover, Linde argues that there was no trap intended for the minister.

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593 Sven-Olov Lööv, 20 April 2012, “Tårtspektaklet en manifestation av svensk naivitet”, Östersunds-Posten. Critical race scholars have argued that there is a notion of race not being relevant in the Nordic countries, and which they term as “nordic exceptionalism”, see Ylva Habel, “Rörelser och schatteringar inom kritiska vithetsstudier”, in Om ras och vithet i det samtida Sverige, ed. Tobias Hübinnette and others (Botkyrka: Mångkulturellt centrum, 2012), p. 72. Habel argues the relevance of the term in relation to Linde’s artwork in an interview on the radio programme Kulturradion Nya Vägen, 24 April 2012, P1.


597 See e.g. Karin Olsson interviewed in Studio Ett, 18 April 2012, P1. Also Linde emphasizes the dimension of creating an uncomfortable situation; see Makode Linde, 19 April 2012, “Tårtkalaset är ett uttryck mot rasism”, Aftonbladet.


599 See e.g Dennis Dahlqvist interviewed in Kulturnytteterna, 18 April 2012, SVT1.


One dimension of depoliticization is the sometimes fast turn between describing the artwork as a political statement but then shifting towards humour when claiming, for example, that those critical of the artwork do not have a sense of humour. There are also numerous puns made in reference to the cake, often in the headlines. Making jokes when describing what happened can be read as a way of making the issue look less serious and less politically interesting. Similarly, in a couple of interviews the discussion ends with the journalist asking Linde if the cake tasted nice, and thereby ending the interview on a light note and consequently trivializing the topic.

Reading the artwork as anti-racist means that the initial critique must be misleading, for if the artist and the artwork can be framed in political terms (that means here as anti-racist) then the critical reading of the artwork is flawed. Thus there is a double movement in many of the texts that articulate the artwork as bearing a political meaning while at the same time depoliticizing the statements that are critical towards the artwork. This is mainly done by articulating the critical voices as having “misunderstood”, not wanting to understand, not understanding the context, having a lack of understanding of Swedish history or wanting media attention.

Often the explanations regarding why the critique is irrelevant are combined with a notion of some people taking offence too easily, that pretty much anything can be regarded racist nowadays, or that emotions are running high. We can read this as a process of discrediting the critique of the artwork as well as the speakers’ political voice. There are also articulations that move the actions of the artists, and other participants, to a personal level, claiming for example that they have acted out of stupidity. The artist is also argued to only be seeking

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603 Gomorron Sverige, 19 April 2012, [television programme], SVT1; P4 Extra, 19 April 2012, [radio programme], P4.
609 See e.g. Jörgen Fransson, 19 April 2012, Comments on facebook.com/P4Extra, [15 January 2015].
attention, performing a PR-coup\textsuperscript{611} or of being confused. There are examples of wanting more political action from the artist: “All your posts are self-promotion, there is not one link to any charity or any films that deal the subject at hand, which is female genital mutilation.”\textsuperscript{612}

The allegation of racism is reversed to implicate those who made the initial claim. This is shown by portraying the people critical of the happening as the ‘real’ racists, as not caring about African girls that are the victims of FGM, and arguing that the whole discussion is racist.\textsuperscript{613}

Similar to the argument of the cake being a trick, there are notions that the artwork is successful because it exposes the flawed Western/White/Colonial view on Africa/black people/black women, for example framing it as activism where “Linde’s scurrilous portrait of the African mutilated woman, surrounded by guffawing chalk-white upper-class, makes our western society visible”.\textsuperscript{614} The argument often continues by stating that it is not the minister that should resign but the system, and in this way placing the accountability outside of the individuals in the event. We can interpret this as the system being racist, not the individuals – even when they expose the system by representing and reproducing it. What this does is make the question of responsibility unclear.\textsuperscript{615} Moreover, the minister’s intentions are argued to be irrelevant and that the critique against the cake shows how the “cake woman in then end becomes devastated also by her expected defenders”.\textsuperscript{616} The minister describes Linde’s aim as: “through provocation challenge the historical image of

\textsuperscript{611}See e.g. Clemens Poellinger, 19 April 2012, “Ministern borde flytt”, Svenska Dagbladet; Ulf Hedman, 19 April 2012, “Näringsliv, försvarsminister och tärtkalas”, Ölandsslagen.

\textsuperscript{612}Colleen O’Reilly, 23 April 2012, Comments on facebook.com/MakodeLinde, [11 November 2012].


\textsuperscript{615}This can be compared to Sara Ahmed’s work on institutional policies on race-equality where she identifies how the collective becomes without individuals, which also “might allow individual actors to deny or refuse responsibility for collective forms of racism”, in Sara Ahmed, “The Nonperformativity of Antiracism”, Meridians: Feminism, Race, Transnationalism, no. 1 (2006), p. 107.

\textsuperscript{616}Katarina Rosengren Falk, 19 April 2012, “Kritiken ytterligare kränkning”, Feministiskt perspektiv, feministentiskperspektiv.se, [26 March 2012]. In Swedish: “blir tårtkvinnan till slut också skövlad av sina förväntade försvarare”.
racism, abuse and oppression".\textsuperscript{617} There are, however, exceptions to this, for example arguing that the minister’s actions show that she is unsuitable as a minister of culture.\textsuperscript{618}

Lastly, there is a visible presence of readings of the cake as a representation of the Other in Western imagination that are theoretically informed but lead to different interpretations on how to judge the artwork and the actions of the participants.\textsuperscript{619} Some defend the artist but claim that the minister should have acted differently while others claim that they all took part in, once again, displaying a denigrating representation of black women.\textsuperscript{620} As we will see, the historical context of images and exhibitions of the black female body is crucial for reading the event.

\textit{Activating past images and representations}

We now turn to how the ghosts of past images appear in the limelight by interrogating what the cake is identified as, and what it comes to represent. Making sense of the cake, and thereby giving it identity, happens within a context of already existing discourses and includes a re-activation of past images and representations. This means that the contextualization of the event needs to provide a background for these re-activations.

In the initial media coverage, it was mainly the ‘blackface’ that was discussed, and as it is an established term there is not much contestation or variation on this. It is more uncertain how to name the cake body. The most common description is that of the cake as a black woman, African woman, or native woman and some clearly state that it is a caricature or a scurrilous portrait. Linde describes it as “the gigantic marzipan-negress that constitutes the cake’s body”\textsuperscript{621} but this is not a term that gets picked up by others. Sometimes the

\textsuperscript{617} Lena Adelsohn Liljeroth, 18 April 2012, “Lena Adelsohn Liljeroth: Konst måste få provokera”, \textit{Aftonbladet}. In Swedish: “genom provokation utmana den historiska bilden av rasism, övergrepp och förtryck”.

\textsuperscript{618} Stefan Jonsson, 22 April 2012, ”När de vita skär i den svarta tårtan”, \textit{Dagens Nyheter}; Håkan Holmberg, 18 April 2012, “Uppriktigt sagt om en minister bortom det fattbaras gräns”, \textit{Upsala Nya Tidning}.


\textsuperscript{620} See e.g. Kitimbwa Sabuni interviewed in \textit{Nyhetsmorgon}, 18 April 2012, [television programme], TV4; \textit{Ring P1}, 19 April 2012, [radio programme], P1.

\textsuperscript{621} Makode Linde, 19 April 2012, “Tårtkalaset är ett uttryck mot rasism”, \textit{Aftonbladet}. In Swedish: “den gigantiska marsipan-negressen som utgör tårtans kropp.”
FGM dimension is included, as in “mutilated black woman” and some explicitly linking the stereotypical images to a notion of ‘the other’. The early reference by de Geer to the figurine Venus of Willendorf becomes marginal in the debate, since it is instead other images of Venus that are familiar to many of the commentators, namely Black Venus and Hottentot Venus. Of these two it is the identification of the cake as Sara Baartman or ‘Hottentot Venus’ that is the strongest. To be able to track this event we need to know more about the interpretation made of the cake and what meaning is constructed through those interpretations. This is especially important given the strong divide in the empirical material between those who know of these past images and those who do not. As we will see, the participants in the debate have such different framings of what has happened that the intelligibility of their speech becomes an issue.

One example of the identification of the cake as the ‘Hottentot Venus’ is the UK-based open letter to the minister of culture where the cake is termed as the “The Venus Hottentot Cake”. Also, in a Facebook comment this surfaces: “If only they could leave Sara Baartman alone… Even after 150 years, they won’t let her soul rest.” The sensitivity of the image lies in the history of Sara Baartman, who was a South African khoikhoi woman. From the time she moved to Europe in 1810 she became a part of the freak shows as ‘Hottentot Venus’ and was displayed to show her physical characteristics. After her death in 1816 a cast of her body, as well as actual parts of her body, were displayed in a public museum in Paris. After pressure from, amongst others, feminist activ-

622 Aktuellt, 17 April 2012, [television programme], SVT2.  
623 In the context of this, then, it also seems impossible to describe to cake as a black Swedish woman, or as an Afrosweede. The link between ‘the other’ and colonialism, seems to predestine the cake to be the stereotypical African.  
624 Although there is occasional mentioning of it, e.g. Michelle McKnight Davis, 22 April 2012, Comments on facebook.com/MakodeLinde, [11 November 2012].  
625 Josephine Baker was known as Black Venus, see e.g. Sianne Ngai, “Black Venus,Blonde Venus”, in Bad Modernisms, eds. Douglas Mao and Rebecca L. Walkowitz (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 179-205; Barbara Hobson and Marika Lindholm, “Collective Identities, Women’s Power Resources”, p. 95.  
626 Lisa Collins describes how “the ‘Hottentot Venus’ and the ‘Black Venus’ are linked by virtue of being the two most visually fetishized Black female bodies in Europe”, in Lisa Collins, “Economies of the Flesh: Representing the Black Female Body in Art” in Skin Deep, Spirit Strong: The Black Female Body in American Culture (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2002), p. 112. There are obvious difficulties here with the term hottenot Venus as hottenot is a derogatory term, which originally comes from the Dutch word for stuttering.  
627 See e.g. Stefan Helgesson, 25 April 2012, “Motsägelsefull och meningslös: Rasism är inte en fråga om gester och utseende”, Dagens Nypeter.  
628 MrsAfropolitan [blog], 22 April 2012, “An Open Letter from African women to the Minister of Culture: The Venus Hottentot Cake”, [25 March 2015].  
ists, Baartman’s remains were finally brought in 2002 to South Africa for a burial, and a ceremony in her memory was held.\textsuperscript{630}

The artwork’s combination of the blackface with the white/European Venus of Willendorf can therefore be interpreted in very different ways. It is not at all certain that what is being perceived is blackness upon whiteness; it can also be viewed as already black and as repeating an iconic image of blackness. This may risk reinforcing the very stereotype that the aim may be to problematize, because Black Venus, or Hottentot Venus, are already key images in the Western context despite differences in knowledge concerning these representations.

A dominant strand in the debate is that the cake symbolizes ‘blackness’ or ‘African’ in general, and that it becomes articulated as a black woman or even as an image of the other. References are made to the historical context where the black woman has come to be the ultimate ‘other’ within both scientific and cultural representations. Some commentators read the art object as a comment to that history. However, this reading is also problematized in the exchange. In some of the responses to the identification of the cake as the typical African woman, there are attempts to correct what is seen as a misleading representation. The corrections state, for example, that this is not what an African woman looks like, or that the link to FGM is misleading.\textsuperscript{631} The descriptions of FGM in these exchanges includes terms such as “cruel and barbaric”\textsuperscript{632}, echoing past white engagements with FGM as well as reflections on what post-colonial feminist scholars have pointed to, namely how FGM becomes central for white feminism. A caller to a listener’s programme articulates how the event has caused damage to the solid work that is being done against female genital mutilation because here we come back to the 1975 reactions which say black women

\textsuperscript{630} There are different spellings of the name in different texts, including the diminuitive form of Sara in Dutch, Saartje. I have chosen to follow Clifton Crais and Pamela Scully as they are the ones who have done the most extensive research on the topic, see Pamela Scully and Clifton Crais, “Race and Erasure: Sara Baartman and Hendrik Cesar in Cape Town and London” Journal of British Studies, no. 2 (2008), 301-323. See also Rosemarie Buikema, “The Arena of Imaginings: Sarah Bartman and the Ethics of Representation”, in Doing Gender in Media, Art and Culture, eds. Rosemarie Buikema and Iris van der Tuin (London: Routledge, 2007), 70-85; Zine Magubane, “Which Bodies Matter? Feminism, Poststructuralism, Race, and the Curious Theoretical Odyssey of the ‘Hottentot Venus’”, Gender and Society vol. 15, no. 6 (2001), 816-834.

\textsuperscript{631} See e.g. star10, 22 April, Comments on Kenya Stockholm Blog, “Artist Makode Linde is a Confused Racist Mulatto, 21 April 2012, www.kenyastockholm.com, [1 April 2015]. A part of why the FGM narrative becomes so strong is the dominant narrative that the minister cut into the genitals of the cake. As was occasionally pointed out this is not the only possible interpretation, and in one text it is stated that is actually the legs that were cut. See Viggo Cavling, 23 May 2012, “Makode Linde: Jonas Kleerup Galleri”, www.expressen.se, [9 January 2012].

\textsuperscript{632} Expat1, 27 April 2012, Comments on Victoria Kawesa, Viktorija Kalonaityte and Ellen Belmore, 20 April 2012, “Mute and mutilated: black women and the cutting of the ‘racist’ cake”, www.thelocal.se, [1 April 2015].
say that white women shouldn’t tell us what we should do, I think right now I feel exactly there.\textsuperscript{633}

The listener calling in presents herself as a representative of an organization for Eritrean women in Sweden and points to a certain knowledge production’s equivalential links between whiteness and civilizational superiority.\textsuperscript{634}

From a post-colonial theoretical framework we can interpret the focus on FGM or the ‘black’ woman as a historical stereotype, a de-emphasis of racist practices and structures of today. As Magubani argues “[b]lackness is a less stable, observable, empirical fact than an ideology that is historically determined and, thus, variable”.\textsuperscript{635} This variable feature risks being overshadowed by the strong image of the other, which Anne McClintock describes as “that most tedious, generic hold-all: ‘the postcolonial Other’.\textsuperscript{636} Contextual and political differences risk becoming invisible, in this case identifying the cake as this ultimate other can mask how race operates in the time and place of the cake. The different articulations in the exchange that want to correct how the cake is identified as a black woman can within this framework be interpreted as highlighting blackness as precisely variable.

\textit{We who are being represented}

As we have seen, this notion of being ‘yet again’ represented in a derogatory way, and of history repeating itself, highlights a subject position that is simultaneously in the centre and absent, namely the one of ‘the cake’. As this ‘yet again’ is connected with pain, past and present; it leads to the question of whether the results make the pain worth it. It is in light of this questioning that we gain a better understanding of the strong want for clearer intentions, comments, and political actions, and why the minister’s actions become so significant.

\textsuperscript{633} Mehret Dawid, 19 April 2012, in \textit{Ring P1}, [radio programme], P1. In Swedish: “[…] skadat den gedigna arbete som görs mot kvinnlig könsstympning för att här kommer vi tillbaka till den här 1975s reaktioner som säger svarta kvinnor säger att vita kvinnor ska inte tala om för ss vad vi ska göra, jag tror just nu så känner jag mig precis där”.

\textsuperscript{634} The connection that the caller makes of white women telling black or African women what to do is a key notion within feminist post-colonial theory. See e.g. Mohanty, “Under Western Eyes”; hooks, \textit{Talking Back}; Anne McClintock, \textit{Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest} (London: Routledge, 1995); Spivak, \textit{Outside in the Teaching Machine} (London: Routledge, 1993).

\textsuperscript{635} Magubane, “Which Bodies Matter?”, p. 823. Magubane’s emphasis on the historical specificity of how we within the research community make categorizations and let some objects stand as examples of something general is relevant also for my study. This means being careful when using for example certain labeling both from the empirical material and the previous research. For an account of how the different variations of the blackface tradition can be read from a specific economic and political situation see Miller, “The Black Dandy as Bad Modernist”, p.188.

\textsuperscript{636} McClintock, \textit{Imperial Leather}, p. 11
In the online comments and blogs, especially the international ones, there is resonance between much of what postcolonial research has emphasized and what is considered problematic in the art performance. We see how there is knowledge of how past representations have been a part of a racist and dehumanizing practice.\(^{637}\) The identification with past wrongs and representations creates a ‘we’ that has to judge whether this repetition of past caricatures was worth it, whether there was a purpose and setting that makes it alright for ‘us’ to be looked at in this way. As Henriette Gunkel describes in connection with photographs of naked black women, questions are raised “about who is representing whom, under which conditions, and with what purpose” and furthermore “who has the right to look?”\(^{638}\) When describing the cake, the nudity is often included as in “stereotypical African naked woman”\(^{639}\).

Linde articulates an aim to “humanize the cake and not just make it into a mute object but make it more interactive”.\(^{640}\) The artist’s head is interpreted very differently in the empirical material, in the sense of whether it makes the cake more human or not. Some argue that the artist is taking it too lightly himself, and others seem to not really connect the two. One reading is that the screams make it uncomfortable, and therefore are the key to the performance. However, there are also statements claiming that it should after all only be considered as a cake, and not as a woman.\(^{641}\) In other words, there is no one dominant reading of whether the artist’s head is undeniably representing the same as the body cake.

Linde’s screaming can be interpreted as adding agency to the cake, and given accounts of how representations of black women have been haunted by the issue of agency,\(^{642}\) this could be read as taking the position of the black woman. However, in discussion it is not so clear that the woman represented by the cake is interpreted as having agency. In the online comments we see how the fact that the cake body is lying down and unable to protest in any way, and then screaming and ultimately made to be sliced and eaten, is seen as problematic. Also, the supporters argue the absence of agency as one of the merits in showing the inequality and oppression that black women face.

\(^{637}\) MsAfropolitan [blog], 22 April 2012, “An Open Letter from African women to the Minister of Culture: The Venus Hottentot Cake”, [25 March 2015].

\(^{638}\) Henriette Gunkel, “Through the Postcolonial Eyes”, p. 82.

\(^{639}\) Rapport, 17 April 2012, [television programme], SVT1. In Swedish: “stereotyp afrikansk naken kvinna”.

\(^{640}\) Makode Linde, 17 April 2012, interviewed in Epstein i P1, [radio programme], P1. In Swedish: “förmänskliga tartan och inte bara göra den till ett stumt objekt utan göra det mer interaktivt”.

\(^{641}\) See e.g. Karin Olsson interviewed in Studio Ett, 18 April 2012, [radio programme], P1.

Just as it is pointed out that black women are absent during the performance there is also a link made in the empirical material to the absence of involvement by the women affected.\(^{643}\) The absence makes the different representational claims more transparent as there is no given point from which to speak in the artwork. In the exchange there are different representational claims such as in the open letter from Black Feminists UK: “[a]s representatives of African women on the ground, we have the experiential privilege to convey to the Swedish Embassy’s Ministry of Culture the fury that we have seen, particularly from African women […].”\(^{644}\) The ‘we’ claimed to be represented is an international ‘we’ as it focuses on ‘African women’ and claims relevance for not only women living in Sweden but for all ‘African women’ regardless of national origin. This international feature is a feature in many of the representational claims, and is sometimes articulated on a level of mobilization:

It’s time for us all to move from apathy to constructive outrage articulated, and exercise our rights to acknowledge that we are tired of being subjected to the characterisation of the African female experience in such a derogatory way that does not even have the courtesy to include the African woman who is affected by this issue.\(^{645}\)

Articulations from organizations and individuals in Sweden focus on the national context and make claims based on being a part of Sweden. The critique is focused more towards the minister for culture as a representative and thereby the contestation is mainly on representation in relation to Sweden and less on a personal level. The ASR’s claims furthermore focus on the racism more than on gender specifically; this is in contrast to the international commentators. Also in the online comments and blogs the gender aspect is much more distinct with references to how black women are depicted in today’s popular culture as well as the historical background.

As the representational claims are a key feature in this event, both through the artist, the organizations critical of the happening, and comments from a wide range of people, the link between representation and potential mobilization becomes clear. As Mouffe states:

It is through representation that collective political subjects are created, and they do not exist beforehand. Every assertion of a political identity is thereby interior, not exterior, to the process of representation.\(^{646}\)

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\(^{646}\) Mouffe, Agonistics, p. 125.
**Political subjects and authenticity**

Bearing in mind the poor supply in Sweden of artists that could define themselves as AfroSwedes one would have hoped that the National Association for AfroSwedes would be a bit more familiar with the art that I do.\(^{647}\)

The fact that it was produced by a Black artist is totally irrelevant!!! Black people can be just as woefully ignorant about the dynamics of racism and how it plays out in our societies. Any point he was trying to make has been obliterated by his profound internalized self-hatred.\(^{648}\)

A core dimension in the event is the contestation of the artist’s subject position and its connection to the artwork’s purpose. As the two quotes above illustrate, there were starkly contrasting readings, with Linde himself positioning himself as AfroSwedish and black. Most commentators in the traditional media construct him as black or AfroSwedish, and often make a special point of it as when stating that Linde does not look like the guy on the Kalles kaviar-tube.\(^{649}\)

A direct link is made between the artist’s position and the disputing of the critique against the artwork.\(^{650}\) There are two main responses to the connection made between Linde being black and the flawed critique. The first emphasizes that the fact he is black does not influence how we should judge the art. Occasionally, the argument is combined with claiming that Linde suffers from self-hatred, \(^{651}\) is a sell-out\(^ {652}\) or a “house negro”.\(^ {653}\)

The second way of responding is through a questioning of Linde’s position as black or AfroSwedish. This questioning became a resilient feature, for example in a book by researchers who were active in the exchange it is argued that there is a colour blindness in Sweden, which contributed to the fact that: “[m]any debaters, especially white, wanted to portray Linde as AfroSwedish and

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\(^{648}\) Kwamla Hesse, 17 April 2012, Comments on facebook.com/MakodeLinde, [11 November 2012];

\(^{649}\) Kalles kaviar is a popular Swedish brand of caviar paste, and is considered very typical Swedish. Ever since the 1950’s the tube has had a picture of a blond boy. For comparisons of Linde with the Kalle kaviar boy, see Lena Kvist, 21 April 2012, “Dags att prata om viktiga saker i stället”, Borås Tidning; Ulf Hedman, 19 April 2012, “Näringsliv, försvarsministrar och tårtkalas…”, Ölandsbladet.

\(^{650}\) Kevin Breinholtz, 19 April 2012, Comments on facebook.com/P4Extra, [15 January 2015].

\(^{651}\) Zach Clifton, 18 April 2012, Comments on facebook.com/MakodeLinde, [11 November 2012].

\(^{652}\) See e.g. Fever Rbg, 18 April 2012, Comments on facebook.com/MakodeLinde, [11 November 2012], also, Alashea Harris, 18 April 2012, Comments on facebook.com/MakodeLinde, [11 November 2012].

turn his art into an antiracist voice for the Afro Swedish minority in Sweden.”\textsuperscript{654} In the same book the making of the cake is read as an example of how a “non-white also can stage whiteness”.\textsuperscript{655} This contestation of Linde’s position is brought up early on, for example in the online comment: “I can’t help but to get the impression that the Swedish black organizations don’t think Makode is ‘black enough’, which is deliciously hypocritical.”\textsuperscript{656} This questioning of Makode as Afro Swedish, and the ASR’s non-engagement with him and his account, is seen as highly problematic also within the traditional media.\textsuperscript{657}

Linde himself points out how his mixed origin gets debated: “[h]ottest topic right now: how to reply to the weird black racists who are trying to hold my mixed race against me…”\textsuperscript{658} Linde is, for example, described as “You are not black sir you are a mulato”\textsuperscript{659} or “a twisted, brainwashed Oreo Cookie”.\textsuperscript{660} Linde speaks of himself as cocoanut, while at the same time emphasizing that origin cannot become a prerequisite for speaking about certain issues.\textsuperscript{661} Although Linde positions himself as Afro Swedish he does not condition making the cake on his being part of this group: “some say that my art would be more interesting if I was white or if I was a woman or…”.\textsuperscript{662} Furthermore, the statements made by Linde are articulated mainly in terms of ‘I’ rather than ‘we’, for example relating to his own experience of racism rather than referencing others in sharing that experience.

On a general level the artwork becomes intelligible by being linked to the skin colour of the artist. However, the identity of being black is filled with different meanings: biological characteristics, cultural belonging or political consciousness and activism. The articulation of Linde as a political subject becomes dependent on him being read as black, but this perceived representational claim


\textsuperscript{655} Hübinette et al. in an endnote to the introduction in Om ras och vithet i det samtida Sverige, p. 219. In Swedish: “att icke-vita också kan iscensätta vithet”.

\textsuperscript{656} Jakob Thorin, 27 April 2012, Comments on facebook.com/MakodeLinde, [11 November 2012].

\textsuperscript{657} Rakel Chukri, 20 April 2012, “En tårtbit i pusslet : Vad konstverket avslöjar framgår inte av debatten”, Sydsvenskan.


\textsuperscript{659} Yoblack Chile, 17 April 2012, Comments on facebook.com/MakodeLinde, [11 November 2012].

\textsuperscript{660} ZamZam Maxamed Rusheeye, 18 April 2012, Comments on facebook.com/MakodeLinde, [11 November 2012].

\textsuperscript{661} Jenny Damberg, 2012, “Makode Linde”, Konstnären, no. 2. See also, Ring P1, 25 April 2012, [radio programme], P1.

\textsuperscript{662} Makode Linde, 17 April 2012, interviewed in Epstein i P1, [radio programme], P1. In Swedish: vissa påstår att min konst vore intressantare om jag var vit eller om jag var kvinna eller…”

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is also protested against explicitly: “Makode Linde you don’t represent me as being in the black race... and you are an embrassment (sic) to me and my ancestors!”663 The reference to the ancestors is recurrent, alluding to a struggle going back in time. The fact that most art critics were not at the actual performance, and therefore do not comment much on the actual artwork, may have strengthened the emphasis on the structural position of the artist.

The importance of representation becomes evident when it is articulated that the artist only represents himself and is therefore not interesting to discuss – this in contrast to the minister.664 As Norval argues, full representation is impossible and is closely linked to voice.665 Thereby, by a hearing a certain voice as political you also construct a certain representation. Nevertheless, these will be under contestation and in this event it is intrinsically attached to a struggle over authenticity. It is by constructing Linde as an authentic black that he can also become an authentic anti-racist, thereby opening up for attaching racism to someone or something else. In reading the exchange taking place it is as if there is a need to define what authentic racism is and to give it its proper place.

Democratic dimensions

As we now move to analysing the democratic dimensions of the event we focus on the framing of the exchange and the subjectivities possible within it. We analyse in particular the special role assigned to the minister for culture and the strong emotions evoked by the pictures of her laughingly cutting a slice of the cake.

Democratic exchange and silence

The exchange that happens in many ways follows the dominant liberal democratic script. When the initial critique is primarily articulated by ASR and through social media comments, the main actors all make statements, including the artist who is already in the first few days interviewed by several newspapers as well as by television and radio. The debate quickly spreads from the social media to traditional media. A meeting between the minister for culture and the ASR is held behind closed doors a few days after the World Art Day to discuss the critique raised.666

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663 Sharon Davis Green, 18 April 2012, Comments on facebook.com/MakodeLinde, [11 November 2012].
664 Ehsan Noroozi, interviewed in Studio Ett, 18 April 2012, [radio programme], P1.
665 Norval, “Democracy, Pluralization, and Voice”.
The intensity of the debate and its fast spread is taken by some as proof of the work to be successful. Although Linde himself does not position himself as having a specific democratic role, he does articulate the discussion that followed as significant.

An interesting part of the interaction is the fact that Linde has a public fan page on Facebook, which means that people were able to direct their critique and praise directly to the artist. The first comments are already posted on 17 April, and some of them explicitly ask for explanations from Linde. Although Linde rarely replies, it is clear that the commentators perceive themselves as taking part in joined discussion.

However, even though the key actors actively take part in the initial debate there is still critique towards silence. The critique is mainly directed towards the ASR for not wanting to express opinions on or judge the concrete art object. ASR consistently refrains from commenting on the art object and the artist, arguing that “they have their freedom and probably know their own boundaries.” In one opinion piece the silence from ASR on the artwork is articulated as a double insult, as it should not only be the minister’s actions discussed but also the cake itself. The ASR’s not engaging with the artist is part of an emphasis on public institutions and representatives, in particular the minister for culture and how she should have acted. The argument is that the minister holds power and should have better knowledge of racism, both contemporarily and historically. Moreover, the defenders of the art and the minister articulate a special responsibility but then defend the freedom and independence of the arts. This is considered particularly important or valuable given the minister’s previous history of judging another work of art as simply not art. The minister of culture also receives critique for not participating in the debate on the actual art object. In other words, there are explicit expectations to take part in the discussion and not shy away from commenting on the concrete art object/performance.

The public critique prompted the Modern Museum where the event took place to send out a statement on 18 April stating that they “sympathize deeply” with the event’s theme to “fight against censorship and for freedom of expression” and that

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667 See e.g. Chloe Hopson, 17 April 2012, Comments on facebook.com/MakodeLinde, [11 November 2012].
670 The reference is to another event in 2009 where Adelsohn Liljeroth fiercely condemned a video installation with graffiti painted on an underground train.
Moderna Museet understands and respects that people get upset by the pictures and the film clips from World Art Day, especially when they are taken out of their context. The intention of KRO and Makode Linde was to shed light on and discuss the racism of today, not to strengthen it. Moderna Museet of course takes exception to all forms of racism.\footnote{“Tydliggörande kring Moderna Museets roll och ställning angående World Art Day”, www.modernamuseet.se, [15 January 2015]. In Swedish: “Moderna Museet förstår och respekterar att människor blir upprörda av bilderna och filmklippen från World Art Day, särskilt när de tas ur sitt sammanhang. KRO:s och Makode Lindes intention var att belysa och diskutera dagens rasism, inte att förstärka den. Moderna Museet tar självklart avstånd från alla former av rasism.”}

In the statement, a stance is not taken on whether any forms of racism actually took place. Also, the feeling expressed is stronger when taking a stance for freedom of expression. All in all, the statement can be read as a response to an expectation of saying something, while at the same time not wanting to make a public judgment on the actual art object.

There is a sense of urgency expressed in several of the articulations that the issue should engage more civil actors, for example urging Swedish feminists to engage in the debate.\footnote{Mariam Osman Sherifay interviewed by TT Spektra, 18 April 2012, “Kulturministern blev inkastad i det här”. See also, sherry, 29 April 2012, Comments on “Artist Makode Linde is a Confused Racist Mulatto”, 21 April 2012, Kenya Stockholm blog, [blog], kenyastockholm.com, [1 April 2015].} Similarly we see organizations responding as if expected to do so, for example Africa Groups of Sweden, who pose critique but do not demand any public apologies or resignations.\footnote{“About the negro cake”, 25 April 2012, www.afrikagrupperna.se, accessed through archive.org, [15 May 2015].} Instead, the organization calls on the minister for culture to initiate a discussion in Sweden on the lack of knowledge on colonial history and the adherent images of Africa, as well as urging the involved parties to “make a concrete contribution to the struggle against FGC, in order to make the aftermath of this event at least in some way serve the cause”.\footnote{“About the negro cake”, 25 April 2012, www.afrikagrupperna.se, accessed through archive.org, [2015-01-15]. Through an intervention by African feminists and scholars the term FGC, Female Genital Cutting has increasingly been replacing the term FGM.} Here the previously mentioned weight of the potential value of the art project against the hurt it evokes becomes visible.\footnote{“About the negro cake”, 25 April 2012, www.afrikagrupperna.se, accessed through archive.org, [15 January 2015].} By acknowledging the hurt evoked by the artwork, and by urging for contributions to the concrete struggle, the organization sheds light on the unequal price that is paid by having the public discussion. This is treated by some as inherently valuable.

Comparatively speaking, in the statements from both the museum and Africa Groups of Sweden the notion of context is central, but in different ways. One way of looking at context is to mention it as a political and historical context or awareness of structures of oppression, which we see in the references to, for example, Baartman. In contrast, in the museum’s statement it is a context of
an art world, a museum or an artist’s larger work. In many of the comments in the traditional media we recognize similar articulations:

There is no consideration taken that the cake was a part of a performance and therefore cannot be pulled out of its context. The scandal is an example of how difficult it is to carry out art outside its four walls and when the will to misunderstand is combined with the unwillingness to understand.677

Understanding the performance implies in the quote that you had to be there, or at least understand what it would have been like to be there. Implicit is that the artwork needs to be met by participants with the will to understand it correctly.

Demands of democratic accountability and subjectivity

In the event there are numerous references to the arts’ special role within a democratic society. However, we do not find many statements of a democratic subjectivity in the radical democratic sense of responsiveness and a readiness to listen and engage with each other’s demands.678 In the debates held with invited guests on television and radio the discussants have tended to avoid talking to each other use the host as intermediator.679 Also, over time we only rarely see shifts in the positions taken, shifts which could otherwise have signalled a more open dialogue. Instead, the positions tend to become even more fixed.680

Accountability and what it should entail becomes contested in the event. An opposition is constructed between focusing on the arts’ role in democracy on the one hand and the responsibility of democratic representatives to be inclusive, represent the whole population and have historical awareness on the other. The two strands can be read as different emphases of liberal democracy. The first one is freedom of expression and art as democratic rights, and the second emphasizes pluralism within democracy and the responsibility to represent all of the citizens in a democracy.

Among those focusing on freedom of expression there is a strong identification with defending the artist’s right to the performance.681 This also means a

678 Norval, Aversive Democracy.
679 Debatt, 19 April 2012, [television programme], SVT1; Nyhetsmorgon, 18 April 2012, [television programme], TV4.
distinction made between art and politics, which makes it less important for the minister to engage with the artwork itself than to support the right to create it in the first place. The minister herself expresses how leaving would have been in opposition to the theme of the day, namely freedom of expression.\footnote{Lena Adelsohn Liljeroth, interviewed in \textit{P3 Nyheter}, 17 April 2012, [radio programme], P3.}

The minister for culture’s role as a representative is especially emphasized by ASR and others critical of the artwork. The argument is that the minister should represent the people as a whole and by taking part in the performance she no longer fulfilled that task. In the many comments there are expressions of the minister as not being sufficiently aware of how the Swedish population of today is constituted. We can read these statements as if saying: \textit{We are also a part of your demos and you are not representing us!} This also becomes connected to the attention that the event has received in international media, as confirmation that even if they are a minority here there is wider support elsewhere.\footnote{See e.g. Zakaria Zouhir interviewed in \textit{Nyheterna 06:30}, 19 April 2012, [television programme], SVT1.} This paradoxically means claiming the support from outside the national demos in order to be recognized as a legitimate part of the people.

In the online comments the artist is accused of only being interested in personal gain and of being a sell-out, which can be interpreted within a broader historical context of commodification of race,\footnote{See e.g. Scully and Crais, “Race and Erasure”, p. 305.} which some of the statements make explicit. This thereby disrupts any ideal image of the special democratic role of the arts.

For the minister and other participants it may have been reasonable to beforehand assume that the KRO and the museum would play their designated democratic roles, including not supporting a racist artwork. The framing of the artwork may have contributed to a less critical glance, as it is a sender that is trusted within the dominant discourse.\footnote{This can be compared to the other event where Adelsohn Liljeroth fiercely condemned a video installation with graffiti painted on an underground train. This may have been according to well-known ideological differences, while with racism, for example, it is taken for granted that everyone, and perhaps especially art institutions, take a stance against it.} However, this can only happen among those who see the institutions as their own. If, on the other hand, you take into account the historical context of public institutions being a part of a racist context, you cannot presuppose an antiracist interpretation.\footnote{Especially when taking into account how public institutions have been complicit in this commodification. For example, within science and museums we can problematize the notion of how the public institutions in a democracy can be relied on. See e.g. Sadiah Qureshi, “Displaying Sara Baartman, the ‘Hottentot Venus’”, \textit{History of Science} 42, no. 2 (06, 2004), 233-257.}

Being accountable as a democratic representative in this view would imply listening and to having a critical contextual awareness rather than focusing on the general universal principles of freedom of speech within a liberal framework.
In the analysis of the political dimensions we see a strong tendency towards articulations of identity-based politics. Identity politics is often framed in terms of ressentiment, an attachment to historical wounds, and this is the case in the exchange over the cake as well. A question that arises in this event is how to understand the hegemonic power or discourse as a part of the ressentiment. Recognitions of the wrongs of the past in relation to a notion of the ultimate other are not necessarily followed by progressive demands of change. If ressentiment is to be understood as being stuck in an identity construction based on victimhood, and thereby hindering political articulations, then we can also question what political and democratic effect the inclination to show our West/colonialism/racism/whiteness has.

Articulation of past wrongs may in the end not challenge but actually reinforce the hegemonic order. Democratically this poses a problem, as such articulations acknowledging a wrong may silence the demand that can potentially develop from an articulation of a relation of oppression. The crucial factor is for whom the articulation is speaking. Representation thus again becomes a key term, and there is a clear struggle over who gets constructed as the true representative, often exposing essentialist notions of fixed identities or groups to represent.

Other statements emphasize the absence of the affected subjects, both in the creation of the artwork and in the debate following it. In the traditional media we see recognition of this absence when journalists interview regular women that they identify as black in order to ask them what they think of the cake and the actions of the minister of culture. By seeking them out a statement is made on who is affected and whose voices have not been heard. However, as just regular people on the street they are not granted the same introduction as experts. In one radio interview, they are not being named, not being given any background and are only interviewed briefly. The women are singled out on the basis of their bodies, thereby asserting a rigid view on race. However, they do not going into depth on this topic through, for example, follow-up questions concerning ways they might be exposed to racism within the Swedish society.

**Different responses**

In the large amount of comments it is not always clear where the responses are targeted, for instance if it is the art object, the photo of the minister or the critique. All three are recognized as provocative in the debate.

In the traditional media there is clear authority given to the artist as a democratic voice through a description of him and his work, which defines him as antiracist. In references to his earlier work the emphasis is on the *Afromantics*

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687 Brown, *States of Injury.*
series, which thereby tones down those aspects that might work against his credibility as an informed and aware antiracist.\footnote{There are only occasional mentionings of Linde’s other work, as a DJ or a previous incident where he was convicted of animal cruelty when he let out live chicken in a night club. See, Natalia Kazmierska, 21 April 2012, “Kulturministern – en av alla medellklasstanter”, Aftonbladet; Clemens Poellinger, 19 April 2012, “Ministern borde flytta”, Svenska Dagbladet.}

As we have seen, one important strand is the one stating that democracy must stand up for the arts, and that the minister as a public person was brave to take part in the performance.\footnote{See e.g. Karin Olsson, 18 April 2012, “Äter tårtan och har jobbet kvar”, Kvällsposten.} The artist and others as well state that the discussion that has emerged is of value, as if to say: how can it be wrong when we are obviously in the middle of a discussion? The firm stance is mirrored by articulations claiming the cake is racist and thereby undeniably inappropriate. When the object is the problem per se, then the intention or the colour of the artist does not mitigate the damage.

Part of the statements claim that it is ridiculous to be discussing this at all, and that we should devote our time to more important things. As the argument goes, if we accept freedom of speech, then there was no wrong done and no need for discussion. In the online comments there are articulations linking what has happened to an ongoing debate on multiculturalism with arguments such as the following: “[a]nti-racist is a code word for anti-white”.\footnote{WhiteLight, 20 April 2012, Comments on Victoria Kawesa, Viktorija Kalonaityte and Ellen Belmore, 20 April 2012, “Mute and mutilated: black women and the cutting of the ‘racist’ cake”, www.thelocal.se, [23 March 2015].} Others claim the blackface tradition is not relevant in Sweden and that we should instead discuss “ordinary racism” so as not to commit an “intellectual error of thinking”.\footnote{MsAfropolitan [blog], 22 April 2012, “An Open Letter from African women to the Minister of Culture: The Venus Hottentot Cake”, [23 March 2015].}

Articulations that come to a judgment on whether the artwork and the actions of the involved were racist or not are characterized by a strong tone of We know the right answer! This includes both the supportive and the critical statements. Statements by the artist, however, are answered mainly to correct perceived misunderstandings or deceptions.\footnote{David Lindén, 7 August 2013, “Smaklöshet är ej rasism”, Ledarbunken [blog], btledarblogg.wordpress.com [23 March 2015].} In this way, there are limited openings for further discussion, despite the many claims that the discussion is what proves the work successful. Just as one side claims that either you stand up for the arts or not, the other claims that the object is essentially racist and any association with it is out of the question for a democratically elected representative.

There is in other words very little room for grey zones, for questions rather than answers. Due to the polarized discussion of racism, it becomes a question of not only being right or wrong but also of being good or evil. The contestation, in other words, is articulated through a moral register. We have seen this in the placement of who is the ‘real’ racist and of the opposition made between
criticizing the performance and supporting the fight against FGM. Moreover, the online comments are typically followed by exclamations marks, for example: Racist! Go home! Idiot! Sell-out!

As we know from radical democratic theory, when the political visions are missing we do not have a democratic clash between different political projects. Political articulated visions are not articulated much in the exchange. Symptomatically, one of the few mentions of political difference comes up clearly regards the ’68 movement and Apartheid in South-Africa. The closest framing of the discussion in a traditional political terminology of left and right is in the comments on the UK-based The Guardian website where the question is brought up whether Sweden can no longer serve as the ideal political system for the British left. In the Swedish material we do not see similar articulations concerning a political left-right perspective of how to read the cake and its aftermath.

Without clear political alternatives, according to Mouffe, we risk antagonism, which we also see examples of. The attempts to close down the discussion entirely are often directed straight at the artist on his Facebook fan page and include threats, for example: “You self hating bastard you should be strung up!” Typical for these statements is how Linde is accused of betraying his own people, of being misogynist and, occasionally, they are also homophobic. Not all attempts to close down the discussion are connected to threats of violence. One commentator urges people not to comment on the Facebook page but rather to flag the artist’s posts as offensive so that Facebook will “take them down or close his site”.

**Paradoxical white female laughter**

A laughing white woman, flanked by a row of festively-dressed, likewise laughing white people cutting a cake portraying a life-size black naked woman. The woman’s head belongs to the male artist Makode Linde himself.

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694 Mouffe, *On the Political.*

695 See the thread of comments on femenetik [blog], 17 April 2012, “Rasistisk tärta mot könsstigmning”, www.femenetik.se, [9 January 2015].

696 See comments on Jonathan Jones, 20 April 2012, “Racist Swedish cake, you say? Let’s have a slice of the outrage”, *The Guardian*.


699 See e.g. Freesoul Evolution, 18 April 2012, Comments on facebook.com/MakodeLinde, [11 November 2012].


701 Håkan Holmberg, 18 April 2012, “Uppriktigt sagt om en minister bortom det fattbaras gräns”, *Upsala Nya Tidning*. In Swedish: “En skrattande vit kvinna, flankerad av en rad festklädda,
The racist thing I see is the white laughter at black agony not the cake itself. [...] I don’t see this as ridicule at all but a call for humanity.  

As the two quotes illustrate there are strong emotions connected to the white women laughing in images of the incident. The laughter is described as anxious or uneasy and is clearly a provocative factor. Interestingly enough, I do not find any comments on men laughing despite there also being images of that. It may be that a perceived lack of identification from the minister as a woman is found more provocative.

One way of reading how the laughter becomes so provocative is that the laughter reveals a division in the demos. The division is a reminder of a historical context of racism and oppression that makes the community of today not necessarily a democratic sharing. If we follow Honig’s argument of sharing a community with strangers, then we could here say that it becomes clear that some are more as strangers to us than others. The strangeness is articulated in a news interview: “I think she [minister for culture] should come to a suburb where there are lots of dark-skinned people and cut this cake and see what happens there”.

The division also makes clear that the cake can become a laughing matter for only a part of the community. Carol Henderson describes artefacts from Baartman as “symbolic reminders of a life lived and lost”. Similarly, we can ask of the cake: who can be reminded of what and what knowledge is presupposed by being reminded? Consciousness of the history of the black female body as a comical spectacle, and of how “signs [...] of resistance have been undermined by the historical and contemporary circulation of obscene images” makes laughing difficult. The image of the white laughing minister reinforces and constructs the white woman as the one not haunted by these repre-

likaledes skrattande, vita personer skär upp en tårta som föreställer en svart naken kvinna i naturlig storlek. Kvinnans huvud tillhör den manlige konstnären Makode Linde själv”.

In an interview Linde later corrects the narrative of the white and homogenous audience at the happening, and refers to people visible in the clip from youtube, see Aaron Israelsson, 22 June 2012, “Makode Linde”, Faktum, faktum.se, [28 March 2015]. This goes against his earlier statement by him where he argues that as far as he could see he was the only non-white person there, in Makode Linde, 19 April 2012, “Tårtkalaset är ett uttryck mot rasism”, Aftonbladet.


Honig, Democracy and the Foreigner, p. 38.

Naima Mahmoud, 17 April 2012, interviewed in Rapport, [television programme], SVT1. In Swedish: “Jag tycker hon borde komma till en förort där det är fullt med mörkhyade människor och skära i den här tårtan och se vad som händer där”.

Henderson, “AKA: Sarah Baartman, the Hottentot Venus, and Black Women’s Identity”.


Samuels, “Examining Millie and Christine McKoy”, p. 70.
sentations and as the one not being exposed. The historical connections are brought up by a Sweden-based freelance journalist:

And as for Linde, his symbolically cannibalistic art work actually perpetuates a modern version of the White Man’s Burden: the idea that Westerners have a moral responsibility to enlighten Africans and wean them off primitive behavior. That’s the real reason why his cake was distasteful.710

The event makes it clear that we should not speak of one audience but of multiple ones with various backgrounds, which makes the cake intelligible in different ways. The circulation of images and video clips led to more than one audience at the actual performance.

If we stay within the performance then the question arises if there were certain reactions that were supposed to arise among the spectators? There are different opinions on this in the empirical material, often connected to a seemingly impossible situation for the minister. What many of the comments articulate is that the performance was meant to result in a critical viewpoint on racism and colonialism. What becomes paradoxical here is that the only voices that problematize the issue at hand are the very ones that are then being deemed to have misunderstood the art object. Does this furthermore mean that the artwork only succeeds with a predominantly white audience?711 In a review of Linde’s retrospective exhibition a journalist argues the artworks’ efficiency as it “does not require any experience of one’s own of racism because they are terribly clear that anyone can understand how it works and feels, even ethnic Swedes”.712

In many of the statements there are comparisons made, as in arguing what would not have become a laughing matter? It is argued that it would be unthinkable to cut and eat from the cake if it, for example, was a caricature of a Jew713, a life-size model of the Swedish Princess Estelle714 or a Mohammed caricature715. There are also comparisons that turn it around, claiming if the cake had been white, no one would have bothered to say something,716 but most comparisons claim that not just any group will be the object of such a spectacle.

711 This is a key issue within critical race studies, how whiteness and ‘white world making’ becomes the standard for how we make sense out of the world. See e.g. Habel, “Rörelser och schatteringar inom kritiska vithetsstudier”.
712 Mårten Arndtzén in Kulturnytt, 18 May 2012, [radio programme], P1. In Swedish: “de inte kräver någon egen erfarenhet av rasism, för att de är så fruktansvärt tydliga att alla kan förstå hur den fungerar och känns, till och med etniska svenskar”.
713 See e.g. Ehsan Noroozi, 18 April 2012, interviewed in Studio Ett, [radio programme], P1.
714 Ring P1, 19 April 2012, [radio programme], P1.
715 Ring P1, 23 April 2012, [radio programme], P1.
716 John Monty, 19 April 2012, Comments on facebook.com/P4Extra, [15 January 2015].
In some of the texts the border between the black woman as the cake and the white woman cutting the cake becomes a matter of negotiation. One example is when the artist Lindberg de Geer describes how she “understands that Afro-Swedes have taken offence at the images and the video clips from the event”, and this is described in relation to her grandchild with a “black father”. This articulates her as someone with better understanding that others, while still maintaining distance. Her position stays firmly within the white inside but as someone who understands the outside. Furthermore, the understanding is articulated through proximity to a physical characteristic rather than as engaging with a different contextual framework. Generally the whiteness of the participants in the happening is emphasized by many of the commentators.

Ultimately, there is a paradox of different publics and what was intended by the performance. Some of the articulations supporting the artwork emphasize a change happening among the spectators of the performance, when the initial humoristic framing “leads to questions of power and colonial gaze”. This reading of the shift in the audience presumes the very gaze supposedly needing to be problematized and does not pose the question of whether it would be better to not have had a colonial gaze. Paradoxically, the white people’s laughter while cutting into the cake is taken to show that racism is still prevalent in our society as well as the success of the performance, but at the same time, the claim is that it was neither wrong to laugh nor to cut the cake. Thus the very racism the artwork sheds light on is what makes it antiracist, yet no one has to bear the burden of actually being a racist.

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718 See e.g. Mårten Arndtzén in Kulturradion Nya Vågen, 24 April 2012, [radio programme], P1.

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mijn opa is zo bloot
zo heel erg bloot op heel zijn eigen plein
hij wil zijn kleren aan
maar hoe zal ik hem voordoen
dat je bloot voornaam gekleed
kan gaan in pak plus das en tas
en nog veel meer dan meer hoewel toch ietwat bloot?
[...]

my grandfather is so naked
so very naked on his very own square
he wants his clothes on
but how can I show him
that you in the altogether importantly dressed
can walk in suit plus hat and bag
and even much more than more but still somewhat naked?
[...]

Poet Antoine de Kom writes here about a statue of his grandfather, Anton de Kom. The nakedness described in the poem is a reference to the critique posed against a monument that was constructed in Anton de Kom’s honour in 2006, in the Southeast of Amsterdam, the Netherlands, on a central square bearing his name. Anton de Kom is a well-known Dutch-Surinamese author and independence fighter. The monument made by Dutch artist Jikke van Loon led to protests, in particular from people living in the neighbourhood of the monument. What was intended to be a commemoration of De Kom became a contestation over how and what to remember from the past.

The analysis of this event will be focusing on questions of memory and silence and how the past becomes constructed in the present. The chapter starts with mapping out the event and the space of conflict, as well as giving a description of the empirical material. Thereafter, I turn to the political and democratic dimensions of the event.

720 Antoine de Kom, “[Mijn opa is zo bloot]”, de lieve geur van zijn of haar, (Amsterdam: Querido, 2008). The poem was first published, 14 July 2006, in the newspaper NRC Handelsblad.
721 My translation.
Tracking the event

The empirical material for this event consists mainly of texts from the newspapers. The public debate was mostly conducted in the written media; within social media and blogs there were not many texts to be found. This is probably due to the local character that this event came to be framed within, making it a mainly local news issue, and also because in 2006 social media were not as influential as they came to be only a few years later.

All the newspaper articles are collected through the LexisNexis database and a search has been made from 2006 to 2010 on search terms (standbeeld OR monument AND Anton de Kom) that have been double checked with other search terms that could have been complementary. The results constitute around 150 relevant articles. They include the big national newspapers, but it is clear that it did not become a big discussion in them. For example, in the Volkskrant (a left-wing newspaper) there are only articles that have been bought from a news agency. In the NRC Handelsblad, (a right-wing newspaper), there is one longer article with independent interviews with relevant people. This is clearly considered a local issue, and it is in Het Parool, an Amsterdam-based newspaper, that the issue receives the most news coverage. Something to be noted in the newspaper data is that it is only a handful of journalists that report on the debate. In Het Parool one columnist and one reporter seem to have received the assignment to follow the debate and how it evolved. This means that, in light of the relatively small number of articles, these journalists became more dominant in the newspaper texts than would otherwise have been the case. There are a couple of texts by members of the jury that appointed the winner of the commission to make the Anton de Kom memorial, and those will be specified in the analysis. There were not many interviews with Jikke van Loon, the artist, but I have paid special attention to the texts where she articulates her view on the critique in order to analyse the interaction that occurs in the event. I have not found any reader’s comments on the newspaper articles.

When it comes to social media and blogs, I have included basically everything I could find. As the event happened in 2006, the amount of discussion online was not as high as in the events that happened later and are also studied in this thesis.

The television and radio programmes have been accessed through the Netherlands Institute for Sound and Vision, with the same search terms as in the printed press. I have also manually looked through some television programmes that normally feature current issues just to make sure that the description of the programme had not omitted a short clip or any other kind of mention. I have also included regional and local television programmes that were available in the archive of the institute. The search resulted in seven relevant radio and television programmes. There are also a couple of short programmes made available on YouTube, among them an interview with Jikke van Loon, which I have added to the selection.
An issue to take into account is how to speak of the different groups mentioned in the empirical material. As feminist and post-colonial scholar Gloria Wekker describes, the “complexity of Suriname’s genesis and its cultural and linguistic richness” means there is a varying terminology for the different population groups. This requires careful attention to the different terms chosen in the empirical data and for putting them in the relevant context.

Another challenge in the empirical material is that because the debate did not become very big in the sense of involving a high number of participants (in the media that is to say), there is a risk of exposing the people that did participate. I have tried to focus on the main features of the debate and less on the people themselves, but for clarity’s sake I still include information in the footnotes regarding who is saying what. What makes this challenge less difficult is that when tracking what happens in this event the articulations lead me more towards the wider context rather than the persons involved in the contestation.

Van Loon’s monument of Anton de Kom

Before turning to the actual art object and the debate that followed in its wake, a very short description of Anton de Kom is in place. This is in order to enable a better contextualization of the responses to the art object and of how it fits within the Dutch-Surinamese relations.

Anton de Kom (1898-1945) was an anti-colonialist writer based mainly in the Netherlands who fought for the independence of Suriname. He is the author of the book *Wij slaven van Suriname* (We slaves of Suriname) originally published in 1934. De Kom was primarily active in the Netherlands after being expelled by the Dutch authorities from Suriname in 1933. Besides criticizing and working against the colonial power, De Kom was inspired by Marxist theories and worked together with socialist and labour-organizations both in the Netherlands and in Suriname. During the Second World War De Kom took part in the communist branch of the resistance. In August 1944 De Kom was

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724 For a discussion on how the terms Afro-Surinamese and Afro-Dutch were partly inspired by African America and debates in the late 1980s on identity, see Johanna C. Kardux, “Monuments of the Black Atlantic: Slavery Memorials in the United States and the Netherlands”, *Journal of Transnational American Studies* 3, no. 1 (2011), 87-106.

725 However, I have been careful in not repeating the rare statements that relate to the private affairs of some of the involved parties. Since none of these statements had any direct bearing on my analysis this was not problematic.

arrested and sent to a German concentration camp where he died in April 1945.727

It was in the 1970s that De Kom started to become an important figure for Surinamese people and became associated with the fight against colonialism. Later, in the military rule of the independent Suriname in the 1980s, representatives of socialist parties proclaimed de Kom a national hero – as Peter Meel states: “the military paradoxically turned to an advocate of nonviolent resistance and an opponent of totalitarian control”.728 Meel further describes that after democracy was reinstated De Kom “was fixed in statues, his name linked to streets and squares, his life and works publicized in articles, books and documentary films, both in Suriname and in the Netherlands”.729

Demands to commemorate De Kom with a statue were also raised in the Netherlands, and in early 2000s it was decided that a statue of Anton De Kom would be erected at a square, also bearing his name, in a neighbourhood in the SouthEast part of Amsterdam where a large Surinamese minority lives.

In this event, the location of the artwork is essential for the analysis. The neighbourhood, which is also called the Bijlmer and is a part of the city district of Zuidoost, was built in 1970s, originally for the middle class in a growing (and dominantly ‘white’) Amsterdam. When Suriname gained independence in 1975, a large group of Surinamese people migrated to the Netherlands.730 The neighbourhood became increasingly what Smets and Den Uyl call a “‘black’ neighbourhood”731 with a multitude of nationalities. People moving from Suriname often underwent a painful realization of not being included in the community – this in contrast to the positive image of the Netherlands given for example in Surinamese children’s schools. 732

Starting as an initiative from local residents, the planned monument became a project run and owned by the local municipality council. A jury was set up with ten art experts and ten representatives from the local community. Four artists were asked to give proposals for the monument, two white Dutch and two Surinamese. Through a process where the public was invited to vote on the different proposals, both in a public venue in the neighbourhood and on the internet, Jikke van Loon’s proposal was chosen.

Van Loon made a bronze statue with Anton de Kom naked and almost appearing to rise from stone. The positive statements regarding the statue argue

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727 The biography of Anton de Kom by Alice Boots and Rob Woortman describes both De Kom’s life and how his name and legacy has been upheld after his death, in Anton de Kom: Biografie (Amsterdam: Utgeverij Contact, 2009).


730 Wekker, Politics of Passion, p. 56.


that it signals the strength that De Kom showed in his lifetime.\textsuperscript{733}  The model for the statue was made out of wood selected by Van Loon in Suriname and she describes how she wanted to depict De Kom’s “pride, strength and warmth”.\textsuperscript{734} When asked about the nudity Van Loon argues that the physical body is her “language”\textsuperscript{735} or “inspiration”.\textsuperscript{736}

On the opening day, it became clear that the statue was very controversial. There was a group of people protesting against the statue claiming that it evoked a racist and colonial history. What seemed to evoke the fiercest protests was the fact that he was naked, and the protesters said that De Kom should have been portrayed in a more dignified manner. They stated that “[w]e are not slaves anymore”.\textsuperscript{737} In addition, some of the statue’s critics have pointed to the fact that his hands are not visible and give associations to colonial traditions of chopping off the hands of slaves. Also, critique was directed to the perceived emphasized genitals on the statue.\textsuperscript{738}

The protestors wanted the statue removed and a committee was formed under the name: Comité Een Waardig Standbeeld Anton de Kom (Committee: A Dignified Statue Anton de Kom). Eduard Buitenman was one of the most active representatives of the Committee and became an important participant in the following debate. Besides demonstrating and being active within the media debate, formal complaints were filed on the grounds of no sufficient building permit for the monument as the residents had not had the possibility of being heard.\textsuperscript{739} However, they have not been successful and the monument is still on the square nine years later.

The public debate

Most of the debate occurs around the unveiling of the monument, starting some time before and peaking when the unveiling was being reported. When the protests continued in form of formal complaints to the city then there were also reports on those, but framed as mainly a local issue.

\textsuperscript{733} See e.g. Annet Zondervan, 20 April 2006, “Aangevoerde ‘bewijzen’ van racism getuigen van een jammerlijk vertroebelde blik”, Het Parool.

\textsuperscript{734} Van Loon interviewed on 1 op de middag, 24 April 2006, [television programme], AVRO. In Dutch: “fierheid, krachte en warmte”.

\textsuperscript{735} Van Loon interviewed on 1 op de middag, 24 April 2006, [radio programme], AVRO. In Dutch: “taal”.

\textsuperscript{736} Zorg en hoop, 22 April 2006, [radio programme], NPS. In Dutch: “inspiratie”.


\textsuperscript{738} On a television programme Eduard Buitenman is filmed while distributing a flyer where the critique against the monument is listed: the nudity, chopped-off hand, deformed hand, similarity to a corpse and emphasis on the genitals. See, Premtime, 23 April 2006, [television programme], NPS.

\textsuperscript{739} See e.g. Meershoek, Patrick, 20 February 2008, “Toetsen van omstreden ontwerp voor beeld Anton de Kom schoot erbij in: Rechter komt mogelijk zelf kijken in Zuidoost”, Het Parool.
There are relatively few people involved in the debate. It includes mainly local politicians, the artist, a group that formed a committee to protest against the statue and, lastly, jury members. The debate is also mainly of low intensity, but is reported on every time there are new developments. One such development was when the report by i-Nova was made official and described unclarities in the process leading up to Van Loon’s proposal being chosen.

The local character is also reflected in the politicians giving comments as it is mainly representatives from the local city district. There are also few statements by other artists that are not in some way involved with the monument already.

The event fades out, but the protests against the monument are several years later still recurrently brought up in texts referring to the monument. In this event, which comes so close to not becoming an event at all, it is therefore not always clear where one should say that it has come to an end.

**Main emotion: Insult**

In the empirical material we see expressions of emotions being mainly attached to the protestors of the monument. We find these strong emotions not only in their own articulations but also being attributed to them in accounts by journalists and others in the media.

The main emotion articulated by the protestors themselves is being subjected to insult, for example claiming “[t]he sculpture is a coarse insult” or that “[t]he image is racist, insulting, offensive, stigmatizing”. Similarly, the statue is claimed to be “hurtful”.

A striking feature is how the claims of insult are linked to an already present feeling of injustice. The insult becomes more severe in light of an already present injustice. We can read the strong articulations on dignity in this context, as injustice also entails the need to regain dignity. In fact, the term dignity becomes highly contested when making the artwork intelligible, as signalled by the name of the protestors’ group *Committee: A Dignified Statue Anton de Kom*. The protestors argue that the monument is insulting and not dignified at all, while

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the defenders of the monument argue on the contrary that it incorporates a “sign of dignity and primordial strength”.744

Particular for this event is how the emotions themselves come to be a part of how the protests are interpreted. This is also due to the actions taken being interpreted as emotional, for example covering the statue with the Surinamese flag directly after the unveiling.

When we now turn to the political dimension we will analyse how the emotions are employed and how the feeling of insult relates to the more basic and consistent feeling of injustice that emanates from a perceived silence and reluctance to deal with the past.

Political dimensions

When analysing the political dimensions in this event we see a core tension in how the different articulations are framing the art object and the protests as either political or non-political. We see the tension as contestation over a particular or universal reading of what is happening in the event. Moreover, in this event the processes of politicization and depoliticization attach themselves to different spaces and contexts.

Politicization and depoliticization

An unveiling can end with concealment. It happens rarely, but it belongs to the possibilities if people get angry – which some gladly do.745

You are the dominant culture here. You look at the statue and see an artwork. But what would you think if a black sculptor would deliver a naked statue of Anne Frank?746

The two quotes illustrate two key features in this event, namely emotions being emphasized in depoliticizing articulations and the importance of context. It is a context that highlights the question of a hegemonic political grammar and of political articulations attempting to disrupt or dislocate that grammar.747 Moreover, it sheds light on the different traditions within which the articulations take

747 Norval, Aversive Democracy, pp. 126-137.
Norval describes, in relation to intelligibility, that “[i]f we lack the new, we are forever trapped in tradition; if tradition is entirely absent, the new will be unintelligible.”

Smith similarly describes how: “[p]resent articulations must resonate with normalized traditions to become effective, but they also introduce novel redefinitions of those traditions at the same time.” In this event it becomes important to speak of tradition and public in plural as the intelligibility of the articulations functions so differently within them. Let us start by examining some of the ways articulations of depoliticizations are made.

A dominant strand of depoliticization in the newspaper material is when the protests are categorized as small and personal. In the dominant narrative it is a small group of protestors rather than a critique shared by a high number of people in the neighbourhood, for example describing the key representative of the Committee as a “relative loner.”

Categorizing the protests as small is also found in a statement by Van Loon where she describes the protesters as a small group, in Dutch: “klein groepje” – thereby using not only the diminutive form of group but also adding ‘small’, resulting in a double effect. This very small group made, according to Van Loon, “a lot of noise”. This articulation of the protests as mere noise resonates with the Rancièran notion of categorizing something as noise as a way of depoliticizing it. In line with this the protests are often not termed as protests but as “hassle” or “running amuck”.

The protests are articulated as emotionally charged, and the protesters are recurrently being described as angry. This early narrative of the small group of angry Surinamese becomes dominant, even echoing in a later scholarly article.

In general there are recurrent references to feelings, for example that “emotions ran high” or that “[t]he protesters are driven by the negative”. Almost

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749 Smith, *Laclau and Mouffe*, p. 83.
753 Rancière, *Dis-Agreement*, p. 30. See also chapter 4 where I use the concepts of voice and noise to analyse the event of Anna Odell’s artwork, Unknown Woman 2009-349701, in 2009.
two years later, this narrative is still strong as an account of the continuing protests: “[a] small group of Surinamers stubbornly keep on resisting the artwork by Jikke van Loon”. Another example is the description of how the representative of the Committee “started again with his traditional lament over the police and politics”. Reinforcing this articulation of emotions is the usage of the Dutch word “schreeuwen”, which can be translated as screaming or shouting but is not a word typically used in relation to political protests.

Connected to this focus on emotions is a framing of the issue as something typical for Suriname and Surinamese people. Van Loon describes how she was warned by people from within the Surinamese community of picturing De Kom naked but that she also heard: “Jikke, don’t worry about it, this is typical Surinamese. Today they make a big fuss, next week everyone has forgotten about it.” This not only depoliticizes the issue but also paints a ridiculing and infantilizing picture of Surinamese people.

This is part of a general feature where a distinction is made between the Surinamese and Dutch. This distinction is made throughout the articles without problematizing how to define the two terms. Apparently elected representatives in the city district are, for example, termed “Surinamese authorities”. There are also internal distinctions constructed within the Surinamese group. This includes the before-mentioned Afro-Surinamese, black Surinamese and, in one example, they are divided into “official Surinamese” (meaning that they

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759 Unsigned, 20 December 2007, “‘Dit is niet in de geest van Anton’”, Het Parool. In Dutch: “De tegenstanders worden gedreven door het negatieve”.
766 The term Afro-Surinamese relates to the plural Surinamese society. With a complex colonial history the Surinamese population consists of different ethnic groups of which the largest are Hindustani, Creole/Afro-Surinamese, Javanese and Maroon. Wekker, Politics of Passion, pp. 57-59; Ulbe Bosma, “Introduction: Post-Colonial Immigrants and Identity Formations in the Netherlands”, in Post-Colonial Immigrants and Identity Formations in the Netherlands, ed. Ulbe Bosma (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2012), p. 16.
hold a public office), “angry Surinamese” and “regular Surinamese”. In one case there is a hint that the internal conflict could stem from class differences and differences in clothing are referenced as pointing to this. The descriptions of clothes furthermore emphasize the particular feature of the protestors by describing how the colours of the women’s headscarves match each other. The contestation becomes attributed to Suriname rather than to remaining conflicts from times of slavery.

By framing the issue as a Surinamese issue rather than a Dutch or joint Surinamese and Dutch one, the responsibility for the situation is transferred from a shared problem to an isolated one and is therefore easier to frame as non-political. It is also reported in the newspapers that the local authorities warn against “white journalists that have come to see black people fight against black people”. This emphasizes the presence of a white gaze that dominates, as this is clearly in relation to white people’s eyes; it is towards the white gaze that concerns are raised in relation to keeping a united front. The portrayal of the Surinamese group as divided also makes the group of protesters look smaller and thereby possibly easier to dismiss.

One exception in the written media reports of its construction as an only Surinamese issue comes from a municipality district spokesman:

Residents, also Surinamese, have formulated the commission. The jury and the public could express their opinions. This sculpture is moreover not only for Surinamese. De Kom was in the resistance in the Netherlands, something that makes him an even greater hero.

This is clearly written as a defence of the choice of art objects and can be read as using De Kom’s connection to the Netherlands as a way to lessen the importance of the group of protestors.

All this points to a strong paradox on race in the empirical material as it is both considered important and not important. On the one hand it is often explicitly stated if someone is ‘black’ or ‘white’ when mentioned in the articles, for exam-

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769 Frank der Nederlanden, 30 August 2007, “Frenk is geen racist”, Het Parool.
770 See e.g. Patrick Meershoek, 20 December 2007, “Kibbelen over de nagedachtenis van een dode held: ‘hazes doe je ook niet in onderbroek met een pijpje pils’”, Het Parool.
772 This ‘white’ or ‘western’ gaze has been described and theorized within postcolonial theory, see e.g. Mohanty, “Under Western Eyes”; Spivak, Outside in the Teaching Machine.
ple in brackets after names of people\textsuperscript{774}, or in describing the protestors as “Afro-Surinamese”\textsuperscript{775}. On the other hand it is made unimportant in the sense that race and racism are generally not included in the interpretative framework of the event and the protests. It is the protestors that frame the issue within a context of racism, both contemporarily and historically, and this is not mirrored in the general discussion. A few other articulations on race instead allude to the protestors as prejudiced against the artist because she is white, which prompts a representative of the Committee to respond by stating that this is not of importance\textsuperscript{776}. The chair of the jury, Annet Zondervan, however, describes the Committee as having a troubled gaze and therefore dismisses the “evidence”\textsuperscript{777}.

A part of the depoliticization is how the family and descendants of Anton de Kom are connected to the monument and the debate around it. By linking the monument of De Kom to whether the family is happy with the monument or not is articulated as non-political. We can read this, through Chantal Mouffe, as a shift towards the moral register rather than a political one in these statements\textsuperscript{778}. The defenders, for example, state that “[t]he relatives of De Kom are shocked by the ‘sharp, disrespectful statements’ about the monument”.\textsuperscript{779} Later, the depicted support from the De Kom family turns out to be somewhat oversimplified\textsuperscript{780}.

Comparisons to other art objects, both existing ones and potential ones, play an important role in framing the debate as political or not. They can be grouped into two categories that point to different ways of either reading the responses to the nudity as politically valid or not. One group of comparisons relates to Dutch national monuments or white popular Dutch people, and makes the claim that they are not being treated equally. We will return to these comparisons in relation to memory work. The other cluster compares the nudity of De Kom to the nudity of Michelangelo’s David sculpture, so as to show nudity in

\textsuperscript{774} Frenk der Nederlanden, July 3 2007, “Frenk viert de vrijheid”, \textit{Het Parool}.
\textsuperscript{775} Patrick Meershoek, March 6 2007, “Zuidoost is geen slavenplantage”; PvdA-top laatste hoop opposanten Beeld Anton de kom’\textit{, Het Parool}. In Dutch: “Afro-Surinamse”.
\textsuperscript{776} Rob Rombouts, April 7 2006, “Nabestaanden Anton de Kom ‘persoonlijk gegriefd’ door opwinding over zijn monument”, \textit{Het Parool}.
\textsuperscript{777} Annet Zondervan, 20 April 2006, “Aangevoerde ‘bewijzen’ van racisme getuigen van een jammerlijk vertroebelde blik”, \textit{Het Parool}. In Dutch: “‘bewijzen’”.
\textsuperscript{778} See e.g. Mouffe, \textit{On the Political}, p. 75.
\textsuperscript{779} Unsigned, April 12, 2006, “Tweespalt om ‘rasistisch’ beeld Surinaamse verzetsheld”, \textit{Leeuwarder Courant}. In Dutch: “De nabestaanden van De Kom zijn geschokt door de ‘scherpe, respectloze uitspraken’ over het monument”. See also, Rob Rombouts, 7 April 2006, “Nabestaanden Anton de Kom ‘persoonlijk gegriefd’ door opwinding over zijn monument”, \textit{Het Parool}.
\textsuperscript{780} Patrick Meershoek, 20 December 2007, “Kibbelen over de nagedachtenis van een dode held; ‘hazes doe je ook niet in onderbroek met pijpje pils’”, \textit{Het Parool}.
art as something natural. By comparing to a statue from far back in time, it can be read as an outdated issue, that the question of nudity is behind us. Differences also become hidden in the comparison such as that David is a biblical hero and not a ‘real’ person whose monument is in relatively close proximity in time to his death. For a more symmetrical comparison a renaissance portrait of an important person in that time would be more fitting, making it hard to find one with nudity. The comparisons with other projects furthermore enable moving the issue to the domain of an internal art issue rather than a general political one. There are also more general statements that the artwork is not racist but that it was wrongly commissioned or that Van Loon did not stick to the specifications of the commission.

The protestors’ political articulations mainly centre on how the image of Anton de Kom resembles stereotypical images of slaves, through the chopped off hand, the nudity, and the exposed genitals. Gunkel has noted that colonial discourse on sexuality and race has been intertwined, and the association from the protestors is therefore a clear referral to the colonial history. Gunkel argues how a history of colonial oppression makes the naked black body a complicated and difficult object for artists and further points to relations between racial discourses and colonial knowledge production.

It is not only references to slavery and colonial times that are being articulated in the event but also racism and exclusion today, which includes statements of not being taken seriously or not being listened to. Furthermore, the past gets linked to the present when the monument is articulated as proof of oppressions today and as an attempt to show “who our masters are”. By using the language of past oppression a connection is made between the past and the

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782 This can be compared to the claim by Balkenhol that “fantasies of tolerance and libertarianism, conceptualized as opposed to pre-modern, backward, and potentially dangerous others are mobilized ever more forcefully in the public sphere in the Netherlands”. In Balkenhol, “The Changing Aesthetics of Savagery”, p. 82. By using an example from the renaissance, in itself a far from problematic symbol of cultural advancement, and of pointing towards the enlightenment and modern times the comparison becomes even more laden.


present. Also, the process preceding the unveiling is articulated as happening in a racist context\textsuperscript{789} and articulated in relation to white politicians and how the local district has had difficulties concerning community services and work opportunities.\textsuperscript{790}

The politicizations seen in the event are attempts to make visible a link from racism in the past to present day racist stereotypes and subordination. These articulations of trying to make these connections intelligible can be described as part of a memory work, to which we now turn.

\textit{Memory and silence as political}

What the politicizations and depoliticizations in this event point to are the making of memory and forgetting as a key dimensions for understanding the conflict and the debate. As Raka Shome states:

Memory making is a highly political process, for it necessarily involves suppression, erasure, and exclusion. For every story told about the national subject, and about who is imagined as that subject, there is some story that is not being told, that is not allowed to emerge, and that is lost and forgotten in the politics of remembering. And it is in this not-telling, in this forgetting, that the racialized, gendered, and sexualized technologies of memory making become evident. \textsuperscript{791}

Cultural memory is, as Bal points out, produced through collective agency and is performed rather than carried – although these performing acts are not necessarily “consciously and wilfully contrived”.\textsuperscript{792} Similarly, Van Alphen describes how “[m]emory is not something we have, but something we produce as individuals sharing a culture”.\textsuperscript{793}

In the research on remembering the Dutch slavery past there is a consensus that there has been a dominating silence, and this is described by Kardux as a “long overdue confrontation”, “collective forgetfulness” and “historical amnesia”.\textsuperscript{794} Philemona Essed and Isabel Hoving describe the repercussions of this when they claim that “[d]utch racism is indeed subject to institutionalized igno-

\textsuperscript{789} Eduard Buitenman quoted in Patrick Meershoek, 20 June 2006, “Procedure vergunning wellicht onjuist; hoorzitting vol emoties, maar ook met argumenten”, \textit{Het Parool}.
\textsuperscript{790} Abaysa Alken quoted in Marlies Dinjens, 17 May 2006, “Onderzoek naar kunstwerk Anton de Kom”, \textit{Het Parool}.
\textsuperscript{791} Shome, “White Femininity and the Discourse of the Nation”, p. 325.
\textsuperscript{794} Kardux, “Monuments of the Black Atlantic”, p. 91.
rance”. More and more demands of breaking this silence have been made, and research has identified how a memory regime of silence has gradually been challenged by a US-inspired ‘black’ regime of memory”. When this silence is increasingly disrupted the question of the how becomes increasingly important: how it disrupts, gets re-silenced or reframed. When analysing memory work it is not only a matter of analysing “if there is memory, but how there is memory, even if we call it ‘forgetting’.

Already during the unveiling of the De Kom monument the question of the past and how to deal it becomes a matter of conflict:

Too many people keep poking in the past. To speak with my father’s words: as long as we don’t shake off our slave mentality, we will never be fully-fledged citizens.

The quote is by Judith de Kom, daughter of Anton de Kom, and the appeal to the protestors at the unveiling is reported as not having much success with the protesting group. The statement can be read as touching on a conflict concerning what it is to be a citizen and what is needed to be done in relation to the past. It is also an implication of who should be doing something, namely the victims of the slavery rather than the perpetrators. To shake off one’s slave mentality can be read as an appeal to stop resisting and rather forget. If we are silent about what happened, then we will become equal members of our democratic society? The memory work would then postulate an active forgetting, where you can become a subject within this society but only if you do not become a political subject through politicizing the subordination and oppression that you experience.

Van Loon is reported to have referred to the fact “that there is still a lot of pain connected to the history of slavery”. She continues by stating: “The national hero was, to tell the truth, made by the wrong side”. This way of speaking of two sides from the past of slavery of course omits what actually


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happened in the past and instead focuses on the two sides as implicitly meaning black and white people today who in the now make up these two sides. However, these two sides are not to be connected to the categories of perpetrator and victim as was the case during the time of slavery. In another text local politician Jude Kehla Wirnkar expresses something similar when he argues that “she could never have done it right”, implying that it was beforehand an impossible mission.

Eduard Buitenman situates the debate towards De Kom’s fight against colonialism and argues that he was betrayed during the Second World War. Buitenman claims that this still has bearing today in the Netherlands as “society still has difficulty with resistance against colonialism”. Buitenman describes a conscious attempt to depoliticize De Kom, although not specifying by whom. Comparing the two resistance fights rarely happens, and when it happens it is in the form of background facts to De Kom rather than situating the debate in, for example, an ongoing resistance.

An example of difficulties with speaking of the protests in relation to the past is a short news item produced by Dutch news agency ANP (Algemeen Nederlands Persbureau), which was picked up by a number of newspapers. In the short text the conflict is explained by referring to the view of the protestors: “[t]he naked portrait leads according to them to too much thinking about the history of slavery”. What we see here is a twist of the claim that De Kom is pictured as a slave, which involves racist connotations into the history of slavery as something that can be thought of too much. Another way of reading the claims by the critics is that because the history of slavery and racism is not taken into account, monuments can be fixed that attach themselves to racist representations. Rather than being a matter of too much thinking about the history of slavery, one can read the critique against the monument as stating the opposite.

There is a contestation regarding who should be allowed to symbolize slavery and on whose terms, which problematizes the notion of how “[o]ur experiences and memories are therefore not isolating us from others; they enable interrelatedness – culture”. The sharing of a society and a culture means here that the past experiences are not necessarily shared and accepted. Collective memory is always a construction, and as Kardux argues often a “romantic construct […] linked with a concept of national unity”.

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802 Unsigned, 26 April 2006, “‘De Koms piemel niets voor politiek’”, Het Parool. In Dutch: “Ze had het nooit goed kunnen doen”.
806 Unsigned, “Standbeeld Anton de Kom beklad (2), ANP. In Dutch: “De naakte beeltenis doet volgens hen teveel denken aan het slavernijverleden”.
807 Van Alphen, “Symptoms of Discursivity”, p. 120.
between slavery’s past and today’s society can be provocative but also form a basis for articulating resistance. Balkenhol describes how “[s]lavery, and the relations between black and white that have been shaped by it, constitute an ethical horizon that fundamentally informs Afro-Surinamese agency.”

One way that this is visible in the event is that the De Kom monument is made sense of in light of previous events, for example describing it as a “second trauma” after the national slavery monument by one of the committee members. The national slavery monument by Edwin de Vries was unveiled in 2002 and sparked a heated debate. One of the issues raised was the location chosen for the monument, which was considered neither central enough nor bearing any direct historical connection to the colonial slave trade. Furthermore, on the inauguration day a high number of Dutch officials participated, among them the queen, which prompted strict security measures, which meant that the hundreds of mainly Afro-Dutch/Surinamese-Dutch were not allowed to enter behind the high security fences and were instead allocated another spot in the park with a video screen showing the inauguration. The handling caused strong protests as it was read as an exclusionary act from the Dutch government and high representatives.

**Space as political, geographical and temporal**

In this event space becomes a crucial factor. Not only because the art object is a statue with a permanent spot to stand on but also because of the different spaces that are constructed. Emilia Palonen describes how what she calls city-text (statues and street names) mostly goes unnoticed in our everyday lives and that it is only when they become “contested or celebrated with unusual vigour, i.e., when they become politicized” that we pay attention to them. In this particular event it is of course a case of contestation.

In the newspapers a space is demarcated consisting of the neighbourhood. Like in one text reporting on a meeting in court house where the address in the inner city is made explicit, the journalist describes the gathering as “a nice pot [of people], and sometimes it was just as we were at Ganzenhoef”, which is the name of one of the metro stations in Amsterdam South-East, and the con-

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813 Frenk der Nederlanden, 16 November 2007, “Frenk staat op”, *Het Parool*. In Dutch: “Een gezellige pan, en soms was het net alsof we op Ganzenhoef waren”.

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contrast is likely to be considered evident – not least considering the description of the judge as a “young, blond woman with a friendly face”.

The focus on the city district of Zuidoost as different from the rest of Amsterdam or the Netherlands becomes heightened when people from the neighbourhood are described:

A woman with a white turban kept on screaming: ‘Mockery…insult!’ Next to her an older, robust man with a camouflage cap on, he didn’t say much, the incarnated tenacity with in his mouth a lonely golden tooth that on and off glittered in the spring sunshine.

In the weekly magazine *Elsevier* the report is described as “a lethal insight in the multicultural cacophony of Amsterdam South-East.” The text ends with this: “Of course what is meant is the ‘Dutch’ are in the wrong.” Similarly, Balkenhol has argued how a notion of being the victim of “moral blackmail” can depoliticize the issue of racism.

A year after the unveiling of the monument a folder was published and distributed by the city district with a picture of the De Kom monument. In the folder the protests against the monument are described as part of the context concerning how the neighbourhood has previously had conflicts that have developed into tensions and “black-white-discussion.” This text, written almost a year after the inauguration of the monument, shows how at the event’s start, at least some seem to be discussing it on a more general level – although in this case it is in more of a neighbourhood context than a post-colonial discussion.

Through the memory work in this event we can read the constructions of temporal spaces, where the distance or non-distance to the past differs. As Van Alphen describes it in relation to the Holocaust:

There is no distance from something that once happened and cannot be remembered. Many survivors still live in the situation of the camp, which precludes the possibility of a distance from it. It is precisely because for them the past of the

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815 For example, being described as having “vulnerable character”, in Patrick Meershoek, 29 June 2007, “De mantel der liefde in Zuidoost”, *Het Parool*. In Dutch: “kwetsbare karakter”.
Holocaust continues that narrative frameworks that make use of the sequence past, present, and future are inadequate.\textsuperscript{821}

Van Alphen’s use of the word distance in this quote is well chosen, as time becomes a kind of a space with big traumas, such as the Holocaust or the Transatlantic slave trade.

Commemoration of traumas can be seen as creating physical or material signs in our shared space that testify to this non-distance between the past and presence that is sometimes there. It is another monument that becomes the reference point for comparing and evaluating, namely the National Monument at the Dam Square in Amsterdam that commemorates the fallen fighters during the Second World War. Curiously, this monument was also controversial in relation to Dutch colonial history. The monument was decided on shortly after the end of the Second World War in order to remember and honour the ones that lost their lives in the war, but already at the start it became controversial concerning how and if to include the soldiers in the Pacific War that fought in the former Dutch colony of Indonesia. Iris Van Ooijen and Ilse Raaijmakers argue that rather than seeing the remembrance of the Second World War in competition with the remembrance of colonial history, memory works multidirectionally – and can even sometimes be mutually strengthening.\textsuperscript{822} What Van Ooijen and Raaijmakers focus less on is the how in both remembrances it is done from a Dutch white perspective, from the metropole – and not from the perspective of the colonies. Remembering the Dutch colonial past is in many ways a complex issue, especially the paradoxical task of remembering that it includes a remembrance of the Dutch resistance against the Nazi occupation and the Dutch forceful unwillingness to recognize and acknowledge the Indonesian struggle for independence that followed straight after the end of the Second World War.\textsuperscript{823} This paradox is present also in relation to the monument of Anton de Kom as he acted both as an activist for an independent Suriname and was in the Dutch resistance against the occupation.

\textsuperscript{821} Van Alphen, “Symptoms of Discursivity”, p. 119.
\textsuperscript{822} Iris van Ooijen and Ilse Raaijmakers, “Competitive or Multidirectional Memory? The Interaction between Postwar and Postcolonial Memory in the Netherlands”, \textit{Journal of Genocide Research} 14, no. 3-4 (2012), 463-483.
\textsuperscript{823} At the time just after the Second World War the Dutch regime fought and pushed back the Indonesian struggle for independence. There was not at this time a strong or organized struggle for independence in Suriname for different historical reasons, so this paradox is most strongly connected to the former colony in Indonesia. For research on the post-colonial history and especially the Dutch East Indies see e.g. Paul Bijl, \textit{Emerging Memory: Photographs of Colonial Atrocity in Dutch Cultural Remembrance} (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2015); Ewout Frankema and Frans Buelens, eds., \textit{Colonial Exploitation and Economic Development: The Belgian Congo and the Netherlands Indies Compared} (London: Routledge, 2013); Gert Oostindie, \textit{Postcolonial Netherlands: Sixty-Five Years of Forgetting, Commemorating, Silencing} (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2010).
The centrality of the Second World War as a reference point is evident through the many articulations that connect to it. Jeroen Dewulf analyses the monument of De Kom in a context of commemoration of the Second World War rather than as a post-colonial remembering. Dewulf argues that the lack of connection to the Second World War makes it difficult for other groups to become a part of the culture of remembering and that “the commemoration of the war was anchored in a strong sense of common suffering, of a kind of wound that the Dutch nation shared; this unifying element was so strong that it was perfectly compatible with a degree of diversification in the national commemoration. In the case of slavery, however, the unifying element is absent.”

In connection with the court case it is claimed that the monument cannot be defined as only relevant for the people living in closest proximity but that it is “of significance for all Surinamers in the Netherlands” just as the National Monument on the Dam square is not only of importance to its closest neighbours. It is also claimed that a “great Dutch statesmen” or a “white hero” would not have been depicted in this way.

Comparisons with Dam square were also made in the debate on the national slavery monument where it was argued that it should be placed on Dam square since the square is a central space in the city. That is not the case with the De Kom monument; instead, the two spaces are brought into comparison as to highlight the national relevance – and at the same time claim the Anton de Kom square as a national space.

The monument is also compared to the very popular singer André Hazes who also was honoured with a monument after his death. The claim is that it would never have been accepted to portray him “in his underwear with a small beer bottle in his hand” or as one of the protestors states “Even André Haz-

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829 Eduard Buitenman gives an example of such a historical Dutch hero when referring to the impossibility to a similar depiction of Admiral de Ruyter, in Radio 1 Ochtendjournaal, 25 April 2006, [radio programme], NOS.
831 This can be compared to Balkenhol’s description of how Dutch-Surinamese in the Netherlands articulate themselves as having been part of the Netherlands for a very long time and of being inherently Dutch. See, Balkenhol, “Emplacing Slavery”.

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es is celebrated in a suit!" The comparison to the white Hazes can be read as not so much taking the political aspect away from De Kom but rather to emphasize the meaning that De Kom has. Hazes was in his lifetime widely popular and has become a symbol of the Netherlands and particularly of Amsterdam. Through the comparison with Hazes a linking is made that shows De Kom as something that is of symbolic importance that extends beyond the pure facts of his deeds.

The tracking of the space in the event leads us to the importance of memory work as well as to spaces in plural and different levels. We see a distinction made between the neighbourhood and Amsterdam, between Suriname and the Netherlands, and we see a space that consists of time, where the different time frames constitute a very different space of understanding and experience. The wider space of conflict turns out to be a construction of a plurality of spaces.

**Political subjects and who has the right of interpretation?**

When we now turn to political subjects, we do not only read how they are being constructed but also who has the right of interpretation in this event. The interpretation means not only assuming a position to speak for others but also to politically articulate a relation to others and the power relations in the past and the presence. Articulating an interpretation of the art object becomes in this sense also a possible political articulation, and consequently recognizing or dismissing those interpretations become a part of recognizing legitimate political subjects. This in turn comes back to the intelligibility, where in this event it can mean both the art object and the protests.

In a couple of texts the journalists ask people if the art object is racist or not. This implies that there is a right or wrong answer to the question of whether the monument is racist or not that is independent of the protests. For example, in one article, judgments are presented from one of the participating descendants of Anton de Kom as well as one of the initiators of the monument, a man named Roy Groenberg who is presented as having succeeded in persuading a cookie producer to rename a certain chocolate sweet after pointing out the racism in the previous name. Groenberg is through this presentation constructed as someone who can judge on the matter with authority. Both of the responders state that the monument is not racist.

The different interpretations of the artwork also become a matter of competence and the capacity or will to understand the artist’s work. There are statements claiming that everyone should come and make their own judgement and

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that for others it will be clear what Buitenman has misunderstood.\textsuperscript{835} There are also references to the colonial history as being a hindrance to interpreting the art object.\textsuperscript{836}

The interpretations given in the interviews differ widely, and one defender both agrees and disagrees with the critique when he states that “The life of De Kom was in the token of banishment, amputation and being stripped”.\textsuperscript{837} This is very different from the other defenders that emphasize that it is not the point to illustrate an amputation or the likes.\textsuperscript{838}

The articulation of the monument signalling strength and pride is not unproblematic in a post-colonial context. The attribute of male strength can has connotations as a part of a broader discourse on slavery, described by Balkenhol, where physical strength could give the male slave a voice but at the same time not necessarily more agency.\textsuperscript{839} Balkenhol refers back to historical representations and ideas of how “blackness equalled savagery and that, as a consequence of their infra-human nature, black people were immune to physical and mental pain”.\textsuperscript{840} The strength argued by the defenders of the monument can in this light be seen as connecting back to that historical opposition made between civilization and savagery, and as Balkenhol describes De Kom’s “trade mark being a suit and hat”,\textsuperscript{841} this distinction between civilization and savagery becomes even more emphasized.

In the exchange we can read a struggle over who is allowed to decide what a link is between the art object and Suriname, for example in relation to the tree used in the making of the monument being stated as a symbol of Suriname.\textsuperscript{842} This is also the case during the unveiling when the Surinamese flag is first removed and then put back by the protestors. What De Kom himself would have thought, or what would be in the spirit of De Kom, furthermore becomes a part of the contestation over the right interpretation.\textsuperscript{843}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{835} See e.g. interview with Van Loon in \textit{1 op de middag}, 24 April 2006, AVRO.
\item \textsuperscript{836} See e.g. Annet Zondervan, 20 April 2006, “Aangevoerde ‘bewijzen’ van racism getuigen van een jammerlijk vertoebolede blik”, \textit{Het Parool}.
\item \textsuperscript{837} Roy Groenberg quoted in Rob Rombouts, April 7 2006, “Nabestaanden Anton de Kom ‘persoonlijk gegriefd’ door opwinding over zijn monument”, \textit{Het Parool}. In Dutch: “De Koms leven stond in het teken van verbanning, amputatie en ontbloting.”
\item \textsuperscript{838} See e.g. \textit{Premtime}, 23 April 2006, [television programme], NPS.
\item \textsuperscript{839} Balkenhol, “The Changing Aesthetics of Savagery”, p. 75.
\item \textsuperscript{840} Balkenhol, "The Changing Aesthetics of Savagery", p. 75.
\item \textsuperscript{841} Balkenhol, "The Changing Aesthetics of Savagery", p. 86.
\item \textsuperscript{842} See e.g. Harold Schouten, 15 February 2007, “Beeld De Kom zal altijd blijven boeien”, \textit{Het Parool}. For a discussion on the different meanings attached to the artist’s choice and emphasis of the wood from Suriname, see Boots and Woortman, \textit{Anton de Kom}, pp, 432-442.
\item \textsuperscript{843} See e.g. Unsigned, 20 December 2007, “Dit is niet in de geest van Anton”, \textit{Het Parool}.
\end{itemize}
Democratic dimensions

We now turn to the democratic dimensions of the event where the focus is on how the exchange takes place and silences. An important dimension here is the call for a response that Norval describes as part of any democratic claim. I will focus particularly on democratic exchange as a way of constructing and confirming a democratic ‘we’, of sharing something we call democracy. The contestations and acts of cultural memory remain important when analysing the democratic dimensions, but instead of reading the politicization and depoliticization, we look at how the articulations construct legitimate democratic subjects and publics.

Democratic exchange and silence

This event is the one closest to becoming a non-event as it does not reach the same intensity, and there is a struggle to get a problematization of the monument on the agenda. After the initial phase it is external factors that come to revive the discussion, such as the evaluation report on the selection process. Several key actors in the event, the chair of the jury, the local politicians and the artist seem reluctant to engage in the discussion. The initial statements can be read as a way of trying to engage just once in the debate in order to thereafter not participate anymore. Although the chair of the jury does meet some of the arguments in a written opinion piece, her statement does not invite to further discussion.

Significant for this event is that in the empirical material there are no explicit threats found. In other words, the debate does not develop into any kind of death threats or descriptions of potential violence.

The protestors work mainly within an accepted democratic framework with, for example, holding a protest march roughly a year later through the inner city of Amsterdam to the mayor’s office as well as the head office of the Dutch Labour party, PvdA. This protest march receives little media attention but in the reports we recognize the links made to both times of slavery and of German occupation. On one of the posters it says: “Amsterdam South-East is neither a slave plantation nor a concentration camp”. Thereby, references are drawn to De Kom’s political resistance, but it can also be read as the monument itself being a sign of oppression, as another poster is reported stating: “The fucking Nazi-statue must go”.

845 The mayor at the time belonged to the PvdA, Partij van de Arbeid (The Dutch Labour Party).
ment to a totalitarian ideology and a historical Netherlands as an occupational power, the protestors articulate themselves on the side of democracy, defending democratic values. This also reinforces the centrality of the Second World War as a given point of reference.

It is not clear who threw paint at the statue a year after its inauguration but that does of course go outside of the mainstream democratic script. The protests during the unveiling are also articulated as being outside of how one should act democratically or object to the monument. A recurring claim is that the expression of critique from Eduard Buitenman comes too late. Both Annet Zondervan and Harold Schouten articulate this in relation to Buitenman having originally been a part of the jury process.\textsuperscript{848} Together with statements describing the protests as driven by factors other than only the actual monument, there seem to be expectations of how the public debate should be constructed to which these protests do not adhere.

\textit{The process was democratic!}

In the defence for the statue one argument dominates and that is that the process was democratic. There are, for example, references made to the “efforts from the city district”\textsuperscript{849} to “involve as many inhabitants as possible in the process”.\textsuperscript{850} Also Van Loon herself states that “[t]he statue has come to be after a very thorough procedure. After pretty much everyone could have their say, my design ended up as the best one. It is a democratically chosen statue”\textsuperscript{851}

In contrast, the committee critical of the monument emphasize that they do not consider the process to be fair and transparent. The shortcomings of the selection process are linked by the committee to other political issues in the local district: “I have the idea that white political figures decide what happens in Zuidoost. On the other hand there are many black politicians here that are incompetent and follow the lead of the white administration”\textsuperscript{852} Another

\textsuperscript{849} Elvira Sweet quoted in Patrick Meershoek, 7 February 2007, “Hele deelraad kritisch: Elvira Sweet wist niet wat er leefde”, \textit{Het Parool}. In Dutch: “inspanningen van de stadsdeel”.
\textsuperscript{850} Elvira Sweet quoted in Patrick Meershoek, 7 February 2007, “Hele deelraad kritisch: Elvira Sweet wist niet wat er leefde”, \textit{Het Parool}. In Dutch: “zo veel bewoners bij het process te betrekken”.
\textsuperscript{851} Van Loon quoted in Patrick Meershoek, 19 June 2006, “‘Ik zou De Kom een tweede keer net zo afbeelden’”, \textit{Het Parool}. In Dutch: “Dit beeld is tot stand gekomen na een zeer zorgvuldige procedure. Nadat zo’n beetje iedereen er zijn zegje over heeft kunnen doen, is mijn ontwerp als beste uit de bus gekomen. Het is een democratisch gekozen standbeeld”.

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member of the committee describes it as a “set-up” and as a “big lie”. After it becomes known through the report by i-Nova that the process was far from transparent, the debate slightly changes with some of the flaws of the process being included in background descriptions. Van Loon comments on the findings by saying that they are all new to her and that she “didn’t know anything about the procedure”. She furthermore states that “the initiative for a statue has been given a lot of dedication by everyone. It is a shame that it doesn’t end with only laughing faces”.

The articulated lack of laughing faces can be put in perspective through Sara Ahmed’s description of feminist killjoys and how “feminists are read as being unhappy, such that situations of conflict, violence, and power are read as about the unhappiness of feminists, rather than being what feminists are unhappy about.” Similarly, lamenting that there were not only laughing faces at the unveiling can be read as those non-laughing faces becoming the problem instead of the initial reason for the non-laughter. Ahmed makes a parallel to the “figure of the angry black woman”, which is a figure that also circulates in the exchange, especially in the descriptions of the protestors at the unveiling. As an angry black woman you can become, to borrow Ahmed’s words, “affectively alien because you affect others in the wrong way: your proximity gets in the way of other people’s enjoyment of the right things, functioning as an unwanted reminder of histories that are disturbing, that disturb an atmosphere”. Although Ahmed’s analysis focuses on feminist killjoys and on the tensions within feminism, her point is very much valid in the event. Besides the apparent troubling and unwanted reminders of the past, we have already seen how in the event the protestors become categorized as angry and of how that anger is depicted of having a purpose of its own, reflecting what Ahmed terms as killing joy.

Also, we see how the exchange only to a very small degree actually tackles the claims put forward by the protestors, claims that connect to both a past and

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855 See e.g. Patrick Meershoek, 20 February 2008, “Toetsen van omstreden ontwerp voor beeld Anton de Kom schoot erbij in; rechter komt mogelijk zelf kijken in zuidoost”, *Het Parool*.
a present of racism. Instead, the supporters of the artwork refer to the process as being democratic and finished. The articulation of the democratic process as complete can be problematized from a radical democratic perspective. There is no process that can do away with the political or the contingent and exclusionary feature of any consensus, and therefore any process or decision can potentially be contested.\textsuperscript{860}

In the empirical material we see a contestation of whether the process can be defined as being finalized and over or as still open for discussion. This tension highlights how the framing and rules of the game can come to dominate the democratic debate. However, even though the report’s critique becomes known, this does not entail, to refer to Norval, an aspect change.\textsuperscript{861} The political grammar does not change; the articulations instead stay within the hegemonic and sedimented grammar.\textsuperscript{862}

The democratic features and links to the local community that are drawn upon are in relation to the process of choosing and can thereby fit within a liberal democratic script. It is in other words not a form of community art,\textsuperscript{863} that has taken place as the citizens only can participate either by being a jury member or through voting in an initial phase and thereby choosing between a set of given art proposals. As Mullin has described in relation to activist art, the artist’s credibility within the “community of interest” is crucial for how the art object is received.\textsuperscript{864} Although there are no statements made by Van Loon that suggest that the De Kom statue should be defined as activist art, you can still talk of a community of interest that is connected to the statue – this especially as the commission of the artwork from the start was a result of activists wanting to commemorate De Kom. In the studied material neither the chair of the jury nor Van Loon articulates a relation of that sort to a community of interest.

Besides referring to the process as democratic, local politicians articulate a separation between art and politics. For example, local political representative Elvira Sweet argues that “[it] is not for politics to decide if an artwork is beautiful or ugly”\textsuperscript{865} and speaks of “beauty flaws”.\textsuperscript{866} The issue is shifted to aesthetics rather than the political aspects of the monument as a commemoration of a

\textsuperscript{860} Mouffe, \textit{The Democratic Paradox}.
\textsuperscript{861} Norval, \textit{Aversive Democracy}, pp. 111-115.
\textsuperscript{862} Norval, \textit{Aversive Democracy}, pp. 132-138.
\textsuperscript{863} For descriptions of projects of this kind see e.g. Fagerström Linda, “Samtida konst i offentliga rummet”, in \textit{Plats, poetik och politik: Samtida konst i det offentliga Rummet}, eds. Fagerström Linda and Haglund Elisabet (Malmö: Bokförlaget Arena, 2010), 6-21.
\textsuperscript{864} Mullin, “Feminist Art and the Political Imagination”, p. 199.
\textsuperscript{865} Elvira Sweet quoted in Patrick Meershoek, 27 January 2007, “Zuidoost. Meer greep op kunst; ‘Monument voor Anton de Kom blijft staan’”, \textit{Het Parool}. In Dutch: “Het is niet aan de politiek om uit te maken of een kunstwerk mooi of lelijk is”.
\textsuperscript{866} Elvira Sweet quoted in Unsigned, 21 February 2007, “Beeld De Kom blijft”, \textit{Het Parool}. In Dutch: “schoonheidsfoutjes”.

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person explicitly political. Another local politician states principally that “[p]oliticians should not express their opinion on art”.  

Clearly, there is a tension here between the publically funded artwork and the explicit goal of a democratic and transparent process, on the one hand, and a principal declaration that politicians should not interfere with art on the other, as the art should be free from political influences. The artworks are therefore ideally seen as separated and free from the political sphere – even though the demands for a monument clearly stem from a political engagement expanding the type of memory work that has hitherto taken place in the Netherlands.

These demands are part of a wider movement, which involves, for example, the construction of the national slavery monument. In fact, in this particular event the context is as essential for reading the debate and contestation as the art object itself.

**Different responses**

What I will try to do here is to discuss the different responses in relation to a possible democratic exchange, as answering to demands of sharing a past, a memory, and a future – in short a society. Although there is a public debate in the media, the event still carries a strong feature of silence. This silence is both in the way that there are not many people participating in the debate, but also silence in reference to the claims made. The arguments made by the protestors are often not being met and the contextual factors brought up by the protestors do not get noticed.

The silence can be read as democratically problematic as it shows the different importance attributed to the issue. This further relates to how the cultural memory that is part of the shared common sense of a certain society cannot disconnect from the past. As Bal states “[n]either remnant, document, nor relic of the past, nor floating in a present cut off from the past, cultural memory, for better or for worse, links the past to the present and future.”

In relation to trauma victims, Susan Brison describes the essential relational character to trauma memory and a need for someone to listen. At the same time Brison describes how limits are set up when it comes to what can be remembered and for how long. It could be described as a constant reframing within the cultural memory, and as Brison states: “In order to construct self-narratives we need not only the words with which to tell our stories, but also an

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868 The context of previous controversies around for example the National Slavery Monument is of course another factor that the elected representatives are aware of.


audience able and willing to hear us and to understand our words as we intend them”. Although Brison discusses this mainly on an individual level I think this also has bearing on the responses to the critique – especially as the protests are not a singular event but one of several demands being properly listened to and respected as the ones carrying the post-colonial consequences and knowledge. Guno Jones describes how critique has been raised against how white people are cast as the objective experts and black people as the more subjective and emotional when it comes to discussing and portraying the Dutch slavery past. According to Mieke Bal, art can:

\[\ldots\] mediate between the parties to the traumatizing scene and between these and the reader or viewer. The recipients of the account perform an act of memory that is potentially healing, as it calls for political and cultural solidarity in recognizing the traumatized party’s predicament. This act is potentially healing because it generates narratives that ‘make sense’.

If we view our shared memory as important for sharing a democracy, then a monument can be read as part of how within radical democratic theory we speak of a common sense, or of shared fabric and sense-making. At the same time Huyssen describes how monuments, contrary to what may be proclaimed, are not always a way of remembering, but can also be a way of forgetting: “[t]he more monuments there are, the more the past becomes invisible, the easier it is to forget: redemption, thus, through forgetting”. If this is so, then how can we read what is being forgotten in this particular event? If we take a cue from the demand that he should have been depicted as he generally was dressed, namely in suit and hat, then what becomes forgotten is De Kom as a member of Dutch society, as living a family life in the Hague, as an intellectual, etc. Perhaps more importantly, he is forgotten as someone that could engage in the independence of Suriname from the Netherlands and at the same time also show solidarity with the Dutch resistance against the occupation. If we follow this line then this also comes close to the difficulty within Dutch memory-work of making sense out of using violence to beat down the independence movement in Indonesia in the wake of the Second World War. A sharp difference had to be drawn between the fight for independence and democracy in the Netherlands and the demands for the same in Indonesia. When De Kom is depicted through an imagery associating with slavery, the remembering can be

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872 Guno Jones, “De Slavernij is onze geschiedenis (Niet.): Over de discursieve strijd om de betekenis van de NTR-televiesieserie De Slavernij”, BMGN - Low Countries Historical Review 127, no. 4 (2012), 56-82.
874 Mouffe, On the Political; Norval, Aversive Democracy; Rancière, Dis-Agreement.
directed to the more general topic of slavery rather than the specific colonial past of the Netherlands. What also becomes forgotten is how De Kom read slavery partly through a perspective of labour rights and included in his activism contract labourers from the Dutch East Indies and India. Not only do these articulations construct different demos but they also make a demarcation of what can be considered an appropriate topic for a democratic debate within those selected demos.

In the responses to the protestors there is a strong feature of *ridiculing* when they are framed as somewhat silly or even suspicious. One example is a description of how Buitenman is posing for the photographer, and another example is the tone that Van Loon uses when dismissing the critique of the exposed genitals on the statue.

Ha, well, why now people all the way from Groningen to Zuidoost would come to see that enormous genital part. What would people have said if I would have given the statue small genitals? But, seriously […]

There is also a feature of showing *distance* to the debate. Descriptions of the protests as emotional, while not displaying any personal emotions, not only create a distance, but also make the protests look suspicious. Moreover, the presence of children in the protests is articulated as a clear warning sign according to one of the columnists, which adds to this distant gaze.

**People to come?**

Within radical democratic theory there is an emphasis on imaginary horizons as well as on the impossibility of ever reaching a consensus that catches all demands and conflicts. Thus there is a double movement in striving for a radicalization and democratization of our existing democracy, as well as an argument that we can never get to that point. As a democracy to come it is a promise that cannot be fulfilled but one that nonetheless puts demands on as citizens. According to radical democratic theory, this notion of to come should not be conflated with an evolutionary modernist concept of progressive development. Any imaginary horizon is and should be open for contestation, and there are no short-cuts that can do away with the political. Just as there are no guarantees

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876 Meel, “Anton De Kom”.

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that a work of art is progressive or critical we cannot assume that art is somehow ahead of its time.

In this event the future, just as past and present, is very much at the fore. These are sometimes made very concrete, as on how to explain to De Kom’s young descendants that the monument depicts their great grandfather. There are also descriptions of how children are present at the unveiling, both in the group of organizers and the protesters, and that one young protestor has a protest placard paralleling the tradition of Zwarte Piet and adding the monument as yet another injury, thereby making a link between the past and future.

The two jury members that defend the choice of art object are the ones that articulate the strongest special character of art and task of the artist. Harold Schouten, a member of the jury, states:

Art sometimes has to challenge, make it more extreme, magnify, or explicate to achieve the expressivity that is necessary for giving an image meaning. An artwork as monument must therefore not only work in the now but also for a longer term.

The work by Jikke van Loon has next to its classic and traditional qualities also another fascinating and maybe not at first easily understood: the work keeps its mystery, the man with closed eyes, his inner power, his urgent posture, cut out of the amorjosa [trees growing in Suriname], ‘carved from the good wood’.

The conceptual qualities will for a long time be able to captivate the spectator.

In this quote there is a lingering idea of the artist ahead of her times, that the art object will be not only for viewers of today but also in the future. We also see how the critique seems to be attributed to the art object being difficult to understand rather than looking further into the actual claims made by the critics. It is in other words not the right gaze that is judging the art object. A difference is thereby made in relation to assumed competences of the subjects interpreting

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882 See chapter 3 for an analysis of an art event concerning the December tradition of Sinterklaas and his helper zwarte piet.

Het werk van Jikke van Loon heeft naast zijn klassieke en ambachtelijke kwaliteit ook een andere fascinerende en misschien niet direct te begrijpen kant: het werk behoudt zijn mysterie, de man met gesloten ogen, zijn innerlijke kracht, zijn indringende pose, gehakt uit de gele kabbes, ‘uit het geode hout gesneden’.

Die conceptuele kwaliteiten kunnen de toeschouwer ook voor lange tijd blijven boeien.”
the artwork. This can be compared to Rancière’s emphasis on the equality of intelligences, which breaks down any such presupposed assumptions of a difference in competences or intelligence.  

The chair of the jury, Annet Zondervan, describes the controversy as “fascinating” and “terribly interesting”. She continues:

This is totally in the spirit of De Kom. One of our tasks is to bring up societal discussions through art, and that is exactly what now happens. That is an addition to the artwork. Because of this the life of De kom is once again of concern. That was the purpose of the statue.

Here the debate itself has inherent value, and similar to the earlier quote the artist is portrayed here as having a critical role of challenging in order to raise a discussion. Also, the quote seems to imply an audience that had forgotten De Kom. Similarly, in the newspaper reporting, there is a public constructed that seems to imply a reader that is part of the white Dutch population. This is, for example, evident when Van Loon is being interviewed as the discussion so clearly takes for granted two separated spheres (the Dutch and the Surinamese). This means in terms of sharing a democracy that there is a presupposition of who constitutes the public. A rare example a contestation of this is when Prem Radhakishun, a well known television host, objects to being introduced as Surinamese when asked to comment on the monument. He instead insists on being Dutch.

The traditional liberal view of art’s special role that we see articulated in the debate is shared by, for example, Caroline Levine who claims that “the will of the majority and the deliberately minoritarian avant-garde are structurally opposed, which means that they are destined to come into conflict as long as the logic of the avant-garde is active in democratic contexts.” In Levine’s argument we see how the majority is often viewed as a unified public despite posing the question of how the “people’s will” is defined and how democratic societies “respond to art’s challenging marginality”. Levine further argues the need for

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889 Knooppunt Kranenberg, 24 April 2006, [radio programme], NCRV.
890 Levine, Provoking Democracy, p. 38.
891 Levine, Provoking Democracy, p. 38.
taking into account a futural aspect, namely a public to come that may view the
art differently and in a more positive way.\footnote{Levine, Provoking Democracy, pp. 42-72.}

According to Mouffe and Rancière the notion of artists as a marginalized
minority in relation to ‘the people’ needs to be rethought. A key dimension that
needs to be included in the analysis of this event is the notion of different pub-
lies. In this way we can hopefully also escape the implicit notion of the artists as
a per se ‘challenging minority’ having a better political understanding that is in
some ways ahead of its time. What this event of the De Kom monument shows
is that it is far from easy to declare that art in public spaces is an expression of a
minority against a majority public expressing dislike.

Even when supposing a certain democratic meaning in art conflicts or art
events I would argue that when it comes to the statue of Anton de Kom the
inherent complexity becomes clear. Despite the many articulations claiming that
the artists and other professionals are the ones that can interpret the monument
in the right way, and that future judgements will prove them right, there is no
inevitability in such a process. What, however, becomes clear in the event is
how this process will be intrinsically attached to the memory work taking place
in the Netherlands concerning its colonial history and how that history is still
present in today’s society. Just as the protestors articulated themselves as part
of broader and longer struggle within a demos that they claim their place with-
in, a future political struggle may very well attach themselves to the articulations
made in relation to the De Kom monument. How the monument will be inter-
preted by a future people, a people to come to paraphrase Derrida, is a matter
of, just as today’s interpretations, a complex relationship of current and past
power relations. Moreover, as the event clearly illustrates, intelligibility is in the
centre when it comes to the possibility of a democratic exchange within the
complex layers of power, memory and silence.
In the introduction I described my aim of interrogating the democratic and political work taking place in the four art events. In this concluding chapter, I will discuss the four art events together so as to highlight key general features. By reading the events against each other I will make some suggestions on how my analysis contributes to the theoretical understanding on radical democracy and specifically on democratic subjectivities.

The structure of analysis for the events was to analyse political and democratic dimensions separately (although often closely linked) in order to get a clear picture of what is happening in the events. This division proved to be fruitful in each event, and points to it also being of value for other studies. The dimensions enabled a reading of the different events where I could contrast them to each other but still keep the contextual sensitivity to each event.

A methodological reflection that I would like to make is the importance of being analytically open to the complexities in the empirical material. Drawing from post-structuralist theory, we often come to portray identities and articulations through a binary filter. Although in themselves fruitful categories, we need to remind ourselves of what becomes hidden by taking too simple an approach. As McClintock argues: “Bogus universals such as ‘the postcolonial woman’, or ‘the postcolonial other’ obscure relations not only between men and women but also among women”.

What from a bird’s eye view may appear as an evident polarization, a clear border towards a constitutive outside, may once you examine the details more closely be a struggle, a contestation and in movement. In other words, what is true when looking at a general overarching level may not be so when focusing on a specific course of events. In the Linde event it was clear that it was not enough to look at the isolated statements to be able to understand what was happening in a democratic sense. We also needed to analyse the interaction and the specific context to be able to see how the large attention in the event can be read as in fact a silencing of a particular reading of the artwork.

This concluding chapter begins with an overview of the political dimensions in the four events where the focus is on the conditions of political speech and subjectivities. By emphasizing the interaction that happens we disclose the contestation over what it is to say something political and how the possibilities of

assuming certain subject positions directly affects whether a voice is interpreted as political or not.

Thereafter, the democratic dimensions and what they imply for the theoretical framework are accounted for. Identifications with a certain democratic script that also condition what is perceived as democratic or not will be contrasted to the democratic subjectivity of responsiveness specified within radical democratic theory.

The last part of the recount is dedicated to the specific character of art played out in the events, with emphasis on intelligibility and imaginary. By choosing art events specifically, my aim was to analyse the conditions of political speech and democratic exchange in a non-traditional (in a political sense) part of the public sphere. Seeing the specifics of art will help us decipher some of the practices that constitute and condition political speech and subjectivities as well as democratic exchange. In addition, the strong emotions will be put in the context of art’s more open-ended character.

In the introduction I recounted Norval’s call for a better understanding, within radical democratic theory, of how democratic subjectivities come to be. Also, I wanted to be able to interrogate the contestation that happens in the construction of political subjects, voices and demands. I argue that the analysis of the four events is a contribution to both these tasks, and the remainder of the chapter consists of fleshing out what can be deduced theoretically from my findings. I have three points that I would like to make, drawing from the empirical study of the events and from engaging with radical democratic theory.

Firstly, I will argue for the need to more fully take into account the relational dimension already implicated in post-structuralist theory when we analyse democratic exchange and conditions of exercising a political voice. The question of how democratic subjectivities are formed needs to be answered in a way that takes into account the complex processes recognizing a shared (and exclusive) community and possible responses within the hegemonic discourse of that community.

In line with the emphasis on the conditions of possibility for the construction of subjectivities, my second point is that the four events disclose attachments and investments in a hegemonic order of a liberal understanding of democracy. The democratic script constructed in the events directly influences how statements and subjects are read as part of a reasonable democratic exchange and of statements being read as political or not.

Thirdly, I look deeper at the strong emotions and how they are linked to physical bodies. As intertwined with hegemonic discourses the strong emotions expose not only investments in that order but also its constituting exclusions. The four events, I argue, illustrate Mouffe’s core argument within radical democracy that without proper democratic channels for mobilizing collective emotions or affects there is a risk of a dangerous situation of antagonism.
Political dimensions in the four art events

The framework of radical democracy provides crucial insights into the political dimensions in the four events. By analysing processes of politicization and depoliticization the contestation and conflict comes to the fore.

In each event there is a dissensus marked by a contestation of what meaning to give to the artworks and specifically of the aim behind the artwork. The power relations set the stage for how certain voices are listened to or not listened to, as well as what is allowed to be a constituting part of the dominant narrative. Also, it becomes clear how some voices are read as political and others not, and how this is an ongoing contestation that does not gain closure. It is, all in all, four public debates that simultaneously display, produce and conceal power relations and structures.

Especially in the early phases legitimacy based on the structural positions in the concrete context are pivotal. In the Odell event this is most clear where the hospital staff is immediately granted credibility and legitimacy when describing what has happened. The early narrative is also one that comes to dominate throughout the event.

The art event with the monument of Anton de Kom by Van Loon was the one closest to being a non-event, and yet still the analysis laid bare processes of politicization that in light of the other events were quite productive. The political reading of the artwork, and of the following discussion, came to be part of a series of demands being made in relation to the colonial past in the Netherlands. At the other end of the spectrum we have the Linde event with the cake where we have this huge number of texts and statements. At the same time, the analysis of those texts do not show a correlating degree of politicization. In other words, there is no necessary connection between the media scope and the political work performed. In the Linde event my analysis shows that a large part of the articulations are actually attempts to depoliticize the debate.

In the four events, there are several forms of depoliticization observed. Shifting the issue from the general to the personal is a common move, for example explaining the artwork by Bauer and Krauss as simply trying to get attention and make money. In the Odell event there are articulations of her primarily having personal aims with the art, thereby shifting the issue from the universal to the particular. Another reoccurring articulation is to shift the focus to other issues claimed as more important. Moreover, by articulating a claim in different terms, it can be transformed and sometimes depoliticized. In the Van Loon event, the critique against the monument is argued to be a result of people wanting something to get angry at and not choosing a relevant object for that anger. In the Linde event there are statements made that the debate is focused

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894 When we now read the events against and with each other I will for simplicity’s sake refer to the events through the artists’ names. This unfortunately gives a misguided impression of the artist in the centre, but I have it deemed it to be the most reader friendly choice.
on the wrong issue, that there are much more pressing ‘real’ issues that should be discussed.

Furthermore, seemingly political articulations are, when scrutinized, not so clear-cut, especially if we start interrogating what the articulations mean in terms of demands. Is there a demand being articulated, and if so, to whom or in relation to what? Is there anything that risks getting dislocated through the demand? What at first glance is a political articulation of Linde’s cake as a symbol of Western dominance and imperialism while defending the participants’ actions in the performance can also be read as keeping the status quo, of depoliticizing. If there are no wrong actions taken and no accountability or responsibility for the allegedly racist structure exposed, then there is also no recipient of the political demand or articulation of oppression. Forming a political frontier in order to mobilize becomes impossible and the result is a depoliticization.

By paying attention to the context and empirical setting the analysis gives a complex picture of exercising a political voice and of being recognized as a political voice. The recognition of political speech is in the four events closely related to how the speaker is interpreted as speaking for others and if the speaker is considered being one of those spoken for. In the Odell event this is a key feature as this makes the reading of her and her artwork turn from very negative reactions to more positive ones. Odell’s account of her own illness made her artwork more legitimate. However, this turn was not uncontested, and her position as a former patient could also be used to turn her speech back into, in Rancièrean terms, noise.

What the movements between speech and voice in the Odell event also show is that having a political voice is far from static. The same articulation can be read and recognized differently depending on the surrounding factors; for example, information on whether the speaker is to be considered an insider or outsider in a group being represented or spoken for. This differs from the way political articulations often are analysed: focusing on the political meaning independent of how it is recognized or the context of that recognition or non-recognition.

If it in the Odell event was mainly a question of gaining credibility on account of the artist’s own experience of the artwork’s topic then this became a conflict in the Linde event. Linde’s position as speaking for a ‘black’ community or experience was put into question by people critical of the artwork. On the other hand, the analysis showed that Linde’s position was recognized by the mainstream media as legitimate and that several commentators argued the absurdity of questioning his position. Just as in the Odell event Linde’s own subject position became crucial in the reading of the artwork, thereby illustrating in Laclau and Mouffe’s terms how subject positions can be “points of antagonism”.

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895 Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, p. 11
In the Van Loon event the artist’s position is not as much in focus, although it is made clear that the artist is not of Surinamese origin but white Dutch. Instead, we see how the critical voices position themselves against a perceived pattern of a white Dutch lack of understanding. In the event with Bauer and Krauss we see an almost reverse contestation, where it is not a question of the artists’ legitimacy in relation to who they can be argued as speaking for, namely a black minority in the Netherlands. Instead, they are constructed as less legitimate in light of their position as foreigners and specifically their lack of self-lived experience of the celebration as children. It is in other words a problem that they are not on the inside of those they can be seen as criticizing rather than those who are argued to be wronged by the stereotypes in the celebration.

When it comes to representation and speaking for more than oneself, there are different strategies of involvement chosen in the artworks. Bauer and Krauss explicitly draw on previous political demands and publicly collaborate with two civil organizations with political anti-racist agendas and thereby seek involvement with and attachment to ongoing and previous political struggles. None of the other artists involve other actors to this extent in their artworks. Odell does, as a part of her artwork, speak to healthcare professionals as well lawyers, and others, in order to discuss her planned performance, but has not articulated any collaboration with other parties. Van Loon has described how she went to Suriname as a part of the preparation for the monument and discussed her speaking to individual Surinamese people, but otherwise she does not claim to have involved the Surinamese community. This is instead argued to be included in the process leading up to the artwork being chosen, as a local process in the city district. In the Linde event the lack of involvement is criticized harshly, especially in relation to the strand in the debate where the aim is perceived to be mainly to highlight female genital mutilation, FGM. As Linde himself lacks any direct experience with the topic, it is argued that he should have involved some of the many organizations that work against FGM.

Based on the four events we can problematize the construction of a collective ‘we’ when speaking for others, as we clearly see examples of representational claims that do not include a political mobilization. The different collective ‘we’ that are articulated in the events are often not of a political character as they do not mobilize around a political agenda but rather identities such as, “we the healthcare professionals”, “we Surinamese”, “we white”, etc.

One conclusion that can be drawn is that we need deeper insight into how different concepts of the collective ‘we’ are constructed in hegemonic discourses as well as in the more commonly studied political mobilizations of resistance. The different forms of collective ‘we’ that occur in processes of depoliticization are dynamic and often easily adjoined to a terminology that signals progressivity, thereby masking the conservative move inherent in any depoliticization. This is in accordance with findings by, for example, Wendy Brown on how the neo-
liberal discourse has come to be adjoined to political movements with an identity-political agenda. 896

In all four events it is evident how different statements are always read in the context of who is making them. This may seem unproblematic, but it sheds a different light on how we conceptualize political speech and political struggle as the articulations are constricted by the position of the speaker – often in unpredictable ways. This unpredictability makes it difficult to set up hypothetical situations as models for how to engage with the political in a democratic way.

Democratic dimensions in the four art events

When we turn to the democratic dimensions, we specifically try to engage with the active sharing taking place (or not taking place), that is the public exchange and subjectivities expressed and constructed. In the four events it became clear that the script of liberal democracy was a dominant factor when articulating something as democratic or positioning oneself as part of a democratic exchange. A more difficult question was whether we in some of these articulations also see expressions of democratic subjectivities in a radical democratic sense.

One way of reading different notions of how a democratic citizen should act is to look at how a debate is described by its participants. There are recurring references to the debate in the wake of the art objects as something inherently positive and even as proof of a successful work of art. As we have seen when analysing the political dimension, there is no necessary connection between the amount of coverage and political importance. For example, in the Van Loon event there was not so much public debate, but still signs of political mobilization and a democratic ‘we’, at least on a local level. The articulations were linked to a wider democratic work, which was directed towards breaking the silence on the colonial history in the Netherlands.

All four events display contestations of what is being discussed and whether it is the right thing to discuss. In the Odell event several commentators argue that the health care system is not being discussed at all, only art and Odell herself. In the Linde event the topic of discussion is highly contested, ranging from FGM, racism, artistic freedom, the minister of culture’s accountability, Linde’s credibility, etc. Claiming to articulate a certain topic as the ‘real’ problem means also discrediting others as irrelevant. In the Van Loon event an important part of the exchange is the struggle to make it an exchange in the first place, to make it relevant to discuss. The Bauer and Krauss event is slightly different from the other three as it actually engages with the figure Zwarte Piet, and less on, for example, artistic freedom, although this strand of argumentation is also present.

896 Brown, Politics Out of History, pp. 20-22; States of Injury, pp.64-67. Within the Swedish context see Tollin, Sida vid sida.
When analysing the different kinds of responses and articulations in the exchange the four events show many similarities. There are dismissals based on the arguments being too emotional. Some ridicule the topic as such or the position of the speaker. This is often connected with a questioning of authority and of potential representational claims.

Ridiculing can also be analysed as depoliticizing, and it shows the close link between the political and democratic dimensions. Nevertheless, if we try to set aside the depoliticization then we see that the tone in which these responses are articulated does have bearing on the exchange and the imagined shared community. As Norval makes clear, this tone in which some can speak is a part of the question of voice within democratic theory. In other words it goes back to the question of a democratic ethos and the conditions of a space for democratic argumentation.

Do we see a democratic ethos in the art events? There is in general not a strong strand of constructions of a democratic ‘we’. When it is explicit it is more of a referral to something as non-democratic and therefore as a suggestion to close down the discussion, for example comparing the artwork by Odell to art with fascist connotations. It is in other words by articulating something as outside of the established way of acting democratically that the boundaries of that very framework become visible.

If we read the responses as either opening up or closing down we see examples of both. There are both supportive and critical comments that open up for further discussion. The threats made in the exchanges are mainly expressed in the social media, and that is where the exchange comes closest to breaking down (as illustrated by the comments removed by the moderator). If we understand democratic subjectivities as a conscious sharing, and thereby a need to have something to do with each other, then we do not see much curiosity in the debates. There is some in the Odell event, after it becomes known that Odell herself has experienced mental illness. It seems that the fact that time passed after the initial media coverage made that discussion possible.

A striking feature is the presence of a normalized democratic imaginary and articulations of identification with that imaginary and its symbols and practices. In the analysis of the four events there is a democratic script that functions as the horizon against which actions are judged as being democratic or not. In this script there are some symbols and practices drawn upon that are considered legitimate. This includes the protest march, used by the artists Bauer and Krauss and by a non-governmental organization in the Odell event. It also includes a certain expectation of taking part in a debate that arises. This is especially evident in the Odell event where Odell’s silence in the early phase was considered very problematic. It also includes an expectation of answering to questions that go beyond what you wanted to comment on; this is the case in the Linde event where the National Association of Afro-Swedes, ASR, who

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wanted to discuss the role of the minister of culture, was criticized for not wanting to discuss the artist and the artist’s intentions.

The artists themselves articulate different positions and identifications with democratic practices and symbols. Odell, who is at first silent, comes to position herself increasingly as a democratic citizen with certain rights and responsibilities. This is reinforced by the court case against her where the comparisons with journalism are intensified, which highlights the possible democratic work that art can do.

Considering the choices in the artwork, and the articulations by Bauer and Krauss, there is a conscious ambition to work within a democratic symbolic framework. The artwork draws on previous democratic struggles and uses one of the core symbols of democracy: the right to protest collectively in a public space. Moreover, Bauer and Krauss also emphasize their collaboration with civil society organizations. The critics, too, are closely linked to the democratic structural framework, working within both local and national institutions.

We do not see a similar clear attachment to the democratic script when it comes to Linde, especially as the debate evolves the tension of who is to be included in the ‘we’, that is to say, the basis for Swedish democracy is highlighted as there is a demos that goes beyond the national border. The articulations by Linde are also contradictory as they both emphasize experience of oppression and speak from a position of ‘I’. Linde does not explicitly speak for a general black experience or articulate a clear ‘we’. Within the dominant narrative Linde’s work is linked to liberal principles such as freedom of expression and the artists’ right to provoke through their artwork. Despite the recurrent references to democratic principles it is evident in the four events that when the hegemonic discourse becomes challenged there is less of responsiveness and openness than proclaimed through the reference to liberal democracy’s core values such as freedom of speech.

In the Van Loon event emphasis is on democracy as a procedure, where Van Loon refers back to the process on the local level. We see here a more narrow view of what a democratic process means, where the critics aim for a broader approach and where an account is taken of the structures and patterns of what is happening. By not viewing them as isolated incidents and something that is relevant to all of us there is an opportunity for a democratic work that opens up for a responsiveness in the ‘we’ of the democracy. For this responsiveness to work it is also necessary to acknowledge the asymmetry in knowledge and experience concerning what is happening. Only then can we listen to each other without, for example, dismissing people on the account that they are allowing themselves to be carried away by strong emotions. As Norval argues, a democratic space also needs to be able to take into account inchoate demands.\footnote{Norval, “No Reconciliation without Redress.”}

Depending on the position from which we speak, the common space of democracy will be experienced differently. This is extremely clear in the four
events, and although unsurprising given what we know from earlier, it nonetheless strengthens this conceptualization of the created ‘we’ as always a temporary fixation and the result of conflict and struggle. As such, we can never take neutral positions in that space, just as that space is never neutral.

The boundaries of the demos come to the fore more than I had anticipated. Especially in the Bauer and Krauss event we see in the empirical material that the artwork is incorporated into an already ongoing Dutch discussion on multiculturalism, Islam and migration. Given the tension in the Netherlands on these subjects, with the murders of Pim Fortuyn and Theo van Gogh, the art project in a sense fuels an already charged discourse. There is a construction of a ‘we’ that is taken to be threatened by migration, and that constitutes one of several fundamentally different parts of the demos. The construction of a split demos affects the possibility of a shared democratic ethos and hinders a sense of a shared community. In Rancièrean terms, we can read the articulation of certain exclusionary demos as a way to try to stop making “visible what had no business being seen”. From Mouffe, we recognize this tension between the exclusion inherent in any notion of a demos and the universality embedded in a liberal rights discourse.

In the Van Loon event, where we see the emotions coming from a minority within Dutch society, we do not see the same activation of the discussion concerning multiculturalism. In this case it is more a matter of a non-response to what the minority is articulating. In the Linde event we see similar points made but not to the same degree as in the event with Bauer and Krauss.

The public institutions are attributed special weight in the events as symbols for the nation and the democratic system. Whenever there is discordance between our expectations of the institutions and how they are perceived to be performing we see in the empirical material arguments to bring the institutions back to the status quo. In the Linde event the minister of culture is criticized as an institution rather than as a private person. It is the symbol of the minister that is of importance.

Identifications as part of a community are also made in relation to accusations of wastefulness regarding tax money and public institutions. Especially in the Odell and Bauer and Krauss events there are demands to stop further subsidies to the art college and the museum. In the Odell event, it goes as far as articulating that punishment is deserved for spending public money in the wrong way. The construction of a ‘we’ of tax payers is a category separate from the democratic citizen. It is a matter of ‘our’ money being used in the wrong way rather than a matter of shared concerns being dealt with in the wrong way.

900 Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox*. 
How the specific character of art plays out

By analysing the political and democratic dimensions in the space of conflict in the four events we can also say something about the specific character of art. *Intelligibility* is a key term for understanding how the artworks and the artists as subject positions come to be constructed and contested. As art does not claim to have a clear message, and on the contrary often invites different interpretations by the viewers, the process of intelligibility becomes enlarged, as if being put under a magnifying glass. All sense-making and meaning-making includes this element, but it is more visible in relation to art.

Intelligibility operates within a field of existing power struggles and the dominating narrative has a powerful impact. In the Odell event, we see how hospital staff and other figures of authority firmly state the irrelevance of the art project as being just a matter of playing or fooling around and not possibly as something having any artistic or societal value. Although this is seen in a different light later in the project, there are some things that seem to have stuck throughout the process, and the power of that interpretation does not become problematized in a degree proportional to the impact that it had. In contrast, in the Van Loon event there is a struggle to even acquire a narrative on the monument that differs from its official presentation.

For it to become an event there has to be an interpretation early on that constructs the artwork as problematic, offensive, provocative or in some other way legible for a public discussion. This interpretation and the attention that it receives is a key feature throughout the duration of all four events. There was nothing given in the four art objects that made these reactions predictable.

A key to understanding intelligibility in relation to the four events is to ask the question: To whom is it intelligible? In the Van Loon event this question was crucial as the monument became contested by the very community that the monument was meant to be important to, that is “the community of interest”.

The local community’s reading of the art object was so different from the artist’s, and that of many others, that there was no shared discussion on how to understand the monument and what it symbolized.

In general, we see in the four events how it is less about factual circumstances than about certain narratives that become persistent and are intelligible in a hegemonic discourse. In the Linde event the inspiration from the *Woman of Willendorf* never really becomes an accepted fact, and this thereby allows for other meanings to be assigned to the cake. These different meanings came to be directly connected to the possible subject positions within the event. Since the maker of the cake was constructed as impossibly racist then the conditions of discussing the cake narrowed. The attention and demand for explanations, answers, apologies or other responses can lead to new political and democratic articulations. The demand resulting from a perceived provocation opens up for

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901 Mullin, “Feminist Art and the Political Imagination”.

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mobilization that is in many ways unpredictable. There is, in other words, just as Mouffe states, a potential in art’s character of fantasy, visions and horizons of political mobilizations and articulations that in a sense moves more freely within the discursive field from which it derives meaning.\footnote{Mouffe, ”Art and Democracy”} However, this does not necessarily mean progressive mobilizations. In, for example, the Linde event, we see articulations of racist structures and oppression as well as counter responses claiming that anti-racism has gone too far. In other words, the artworks’ uncanniness\footnote{Rancière in an interview by Gabriel Rockhill in Rancière, \textit{The Politics of Aesthetics}, p. 63.} is a double sword: both potentially radical and open to being attached to already established patterns of meaning. The possibility of different interpretations meant in the four events that the attention and debate came to attach themselves to other discursive fields already laden with conflict and strong emotions or passions.

Nevertheless, the unfixed character of art and of the want of traditional political mobilization can in the four events be read as containing a radical potential. In all four events the strong emotions do expose some of the boundaries and exclusions of the hegemonic order and thereby its contingent nature. Through the exclusions the distribution of the sensible, to speak with Rancière,\footnote{Rancière, \textit{The Politics of Aesthetics}.} becomes emphasized, in addition to possible practices and articulations of resistance. In the Bauer and Krauss event, a new horizon of intelligibility included a non-presence of Zwarte Piet.

Specific for art is the importance of the \textit{form} itself, which makes its uncanniness potentially stronger. The form can create a Trojan horse effect that leads to trouble. This trouble can be understood in many ways, but perhaps most important is the way that investments in the hegemonic order become visible when that order is perceived to be threatened. The way art can make the contingency of any order at least partly visible is directly connected in the four events to the form and the \textit{how} of the message.

The four art events demonstrate how the openness of the art makes trouble where there is supposedly consensus as it can come across as silence being broken. It seems there is something deeply troubling about Odell’s artwork’s emphasis on who is considered a credible subject, or the critics’ pointing out associations with colonial imagery and paradoxical silence manifested in Van Loon’s monument. There is no explicit disagreement regarding the basic principles of every person’s right to be heard, mentally ill or not, or the fact that the Netherlands has a colonial past that has influenced its present form. Still, trouble is created in the context of being given an artistic form. Similarly, in the Linde event, the main support for the cake was articulated in relation to it exposing racism, but it nevertheless did not seem to disclose a racism of which we were unaware, and there were no racist actions by the participants identified.
Embedded in the form is a difference in tempo in relation to a more traditional public debate within mainstream media. Art is for most artists a slow process, and does not follow the regular route of availability and fast answers. This tension was especially evident in the Odell event, and the difference in tempo highlighted the conditions under which our everyday democratic discussions are meant to be undertaken. In the Linde event the artist articulates the need to interpret the cake in the context of his other works whilst the debate initially focused mainly on the cake and the performance. Bauer and Krauss also continued to work with their project after the public debate had faded, thereby highlighting the difference in intensity and time of attention.

Democratic subjectivities and complex relationalities

As Mouffe argues, works of art can be an important part of constructing political visions and subjectivities. There is, however, nothing predetermined to happen through a particular work of art, and the construction of subjects and visions will be a matter of political reading and judgment. The four art events demonstrate a need to take the responses into account when analysing an art object as a political articulation. In isolation the artworks are often assumed to have certain qualities or characteristics that would gain from being read within its context. Only then can we understand the conditions of political subjectivities as well as being and becoming a democratic subject in a space of conflict or argumentation. This means incorporating to a fuller extent the relational character of all meaning-making processes and expanding it to relationalities in plural.

When it comes to subjectivities, one important conclusion of the analysis is that the relationality is much more dependent on the contextual situation than implied by the abstract examples of theory. Subjectivities need to be analysed in relation to other subjectivities, responses and contestations.

The relationality is complex, contingent and conditional. Its complexity consists of it being multi-layered and far from abstract theoretical examples of ‘I’ and ‘the other’. When acted in public spaces it not only includes several others but also a notion of the non-participating viewers. Moreover, it is never fixed but changes throughout by highlighting the basic condition of the contingency of any object, and the different subject positions that can contradict and come into tension with each other. There is nothing pre-destined or predetermined in the relationality, yet there are strong limitations concerning what can happen, which is why it is also conditional. The relationality is not only conditional regarding time and context but also the position of the speaker and the receiver. The position of the speaker and the form of the claim or argument will influence not only if it is heard at all but also the intelligibility and credibility of what is being said. It is also conditional on the different levels of investments in the current order that the interlocutors have and on the perceived threat to that order by the argument or claim made. The amount of democratic or non-
democratic trouble that occurs depends on how these relationalities play out in the concrete setting.

In the four events it becomes clear how complex and dynamic the processes of meaning-making are. If we take the Odell event as an example it is not a matter of Odell being the only untrustworthy patient or art student in relation to the medical doctor and chief of the ward. The relation constructed between them is dependent on the reactions of others, of patterns of authority and credibility that are endorsed through the main media channels. It is also dependent on structural positions such as age and gender and race. Furthermore, it is dependent on its happening at a certain time and place by attaching itself to already present discursive contestations. This means that the articulations and subjectivities are constructed in a way that is more complex than implied when used as de-contextualized examples in theoretical accounts.

For the noise to become speech, there was something more needed than just Odell’s artwork and her articulations. Her speech had to be supported as a voice; it had to be given universality. This is a feature not fully fleshed out by, for example, Rancière who focuses on the moment of the political in the sense that a certain articulation in itself succeeds in disrupting by making visible what should not be seen or by disrupting the disruption of the sensible. There is a tendency within radical democratic theory to emphasize the big moments, but we need to be able to understand the process of political moments as something ongoing and sometimes slow.

Taking into account reception and interaction is a key to understanding the four events. It is not just a matter of effect on people having seen a particular artwork but a debate being conducted by people who have never even seen the artwork first hand. The response in itself can trigger a continued democratic work. It is in the interaction that the distinction between the democratic and the political dimensions becomes clear through the radical democratic theoretical view of how a democratic exchange includes a responsiveness that implies an opening up, a will to engage with each other in a given democratic framework.

The four events also point to a need to further develop the possibility of the exemplar. Norval describes how a subject becomes democratically exemplary through “a process of engagement, of affirming consent and expressing dissent, which is the activity of a democratic community” and mentions Nelson Mandela as an exemplar. I argue that we, in order to gain a better understanding of the construction of democratic subjectivities, need to take into account processes of exemplarity on a less grand level. Furthermore, I argue that the analysis needs to include the reception of these exemplars, which is the process where an articulation and subject position becomes an exemplar through others saying: Yes, we are here, you are articulating our demands! What is closest to


this in the Odell event is when she receives strong support from *The Swedish National Association for Social and Mental health* (RSMH). Here we see a strong contrast in the Linde event where this did not happen. In the Bauer and Krauss and Van Loon events this was not a key factor as none of them claimed to be on the inside of the community their artwork was addressing, although the Bauer and Krauss event is a confirmation of the addressed issue being a problem for others, and not a question of them being accepted as a representative. In the Van Loon event it is the monument itself that is articulated as not being representative or being a body to identify with. In other words, the historical person Anton de Kom is clearly an exemplar for the local community, but the statue does not allow for that recognition. De Kom, as he is portrayed in the monument, no longer functions as an exemplar.

Furthermore, when highlighting the actual process of the construction of exemplars there is an opening for taking into the account the less successful ones within the theoretical understanding as part of understanding, in Norval’s words, the relation between agreement and disagreement on an ontic level. From a radical democratic perspective, it is perhaps not only the outstanding exemplars with a secure place in the history of exemplars that are of importance but also the less successful ones.

Another way of viewing the relationality when it comes to democratic subjectivities is in relation to accountability. In the Odell event we might interpret Odell’s plea for making contact with the people that had helped on the bridge as a way of taking responsibility for her actions, of being accountable. Odell also wanted to discuss this with the staff at the ward where she was admitted, which can be interpreted in a similar manner. It is not here a matter of responsiveness, as in being open to the ‘other’, but of considering oneself accountable for the actions taken within a shared democratic community against other members in that community. This kind of accountability, in other words, cannot only refer to a good intention or others’ misunderstanding but requires acknowledging a relation to others as relevant within a shared community.

**Apolitical individuals**

When taking into account the complex processes of constructing subjectivities the four art events demonstrate the importance of the discourse within which we interpret each other’s practices and articulations. More than I first expected, there was a dominating democratic *script*, which we recognize as a part of a liberal framework, that became a decisive factor in how the spaces of argumentation were constructed and of how the events played out. The trouble that happened in the four events could often be linked to being troublesome for a liberal order that is so naturalized that it saturates our every exchange.

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The naturalized liberal framework has important consequences for what we expect of ourselves and others as part of a democratic community. The interpretations of what is being said and done are very much based on the notion of the individual as the important actor. Often actions are explained through self-benefit, for example furthering one’s career, getting media attention or avoiding criticism. This is a more common framing for the interpretation than, for example, that a statement is read as a part of political work or collective interests.

Brown highlights how a “liberal form of democracy entails a sharp distinction between personal liberty and political rule” and furthermore how “if individual freedom rather than shared power is located at and as the heart of democracy then the demos will not rule”.\textsuperscript{908} In light of a democratic script with liberal connotations being evoked and constructed in the events it is therefore perhaps unsurprising that one consequence is making sense of claims and demands from an interpretative framework of individual motives, freedom and goals.

In all four events the proclaimed or assumed individual intention of the artists becomes decisive for how the participants in the debate judge the artwork. Repeatedly, a proclaimed intention is articulated as something that makes a certain interpretation of the artwork impossible. The weight placed on the intention results in the artwork not standing independently, but rather only being intelligible through the individual that created it. Knowing the true intention becomes of utmost importance. The only exception here is Van Loon, where her intention is not really doubted regarding not having intentionally chosen the colonial association. Van Loon is instead argued to not have the right insight or knowledge to be able to understand the pitfalls when creating the monument.

The intention does not stand on its own, however, for it becomes embedded in the context of power struggles and contesting narratives. For example, in the Odell event, there are certain aspects emphasized more than others. Odell’s personal experience and desire to work that through is established as soon as it becomes known. What is not included in the dominant story of the event is how she wanted to problematize how patients are not deemed credible. This part of her proclaimed intention is barely noticed even when it becomes clear that the hospital staff did give an accurate account of how she acted during the performance. This shows that even though the intention is pivotal in the different articulations that explain and interpret the artwork the intention still needs to be given meaning and ordered within the dominant narrative.

Related to the emphasis on the individual and identity there are aspects of ressentiment in all four events. Historical wounds of slavery and racism were drawn upon in both the Linde and Van Loon events. This is mentioned somewhat in the Bauer and Krauss event, but there are not nearly as many articulations as in the other two. In the Odell event the ressentiment is connected to

\textsuperscript{908} Brown, “Sovereign Hesitations”, p. 125.
the experience of being a patient within the health care system and literally re-enacting a past experience of being a victim.

Similar as to the ressentiment attachment there are articulations where the subject position of the Western culprit is taken. It is a form of taking on a historical guilt and attaching oneself to the wound. At the same time it does not require anything of the culprit, but rather exonerates him/her simply by taking on the guilt. Moreover, just as ressentiment can keep us within the category of the victim and hinder political mobilization the culprit side can reaffirm the power relations of the initial wrong. There is only one part of society that can assume guilt in this manner, without having to pay any price for doing so. This, in turn highlights the others as unable to assume that position.

Another aspect of the individual focus is that organizations and movements are downplayed in the discussion. Most speak on their own behalf, and even when there are organizations that could be represented they seem to be absent. One example of tension concerning how to address this in the mainstream media is in the Linde event where on different occasions women assumed to identify as black are sought to give their opinion on the artwork. At the same time, in a listeners’ programme on the radio, there is a woman calling in as the chair of an organization for women from Eritrea claiming both experience with working against FGM and to represent a broader opinion. Based on the empirical material I cannot speculate on the reason for this absence, but can only conclude that there is one. The tension may, however, be related to how the discussion often becomes centred on the artist’s right to artistic expression and universal principals within liberal democracy – principals that are connected to the individual. Within that context there may not be any natural space for collective movements. At the same time, it is the organizations that succeed the best in lifting the claims and demands from the particular to the universal. The possibilities of exemplars are much scarcer than when mobilizing collectively. The fact that the individual is so favoured in comparison with the collective indicates the limitations of the conditions of possibility for us as democratic citizens.

Moreover, these findings highlight the necessity of focusing theoretically on mobilization within a hegemonic liberal democratic framework. There is a risk that artists are viewed as more or less independent agonist actors, which I argue is not sufficient, as this would be simplifying the democratic and political practices needed for a radical democracy. Agonistic democracy, I argue, can only with difficulty be argued to be possible for individual actors to apply in the singular, as in saying that I am acting agonistic but not you. Also, it does not mean just turning to the big political movements that are challenging the liberal order, but rather including how articulations of collective demands in an everyday context, on a micro level, work in relation to the construction of democratic subjectivities. It means a general shift in emphasis, from individual subjects

\[909\] See e.g. Stavrakakis, “Challenges of Re-Politicisation”.

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identifying as democrats through being individuals sharing a democratic community, to identifying as democrats on the basis of being part of collective struggles within a democratic community. Only then we can start interpreting and responding to each other’s demands as arguments in a way that is potentially both political and democratic.

Emotions, vulnerable bodies and violence

An important conclusion to be drawn from the analysis of the four events concerns how democratic and political work that is undertaken is always a work framed by a corporeal materiality. Within democratic theory the focus is on voices and articulations, but in the four art events studied it becomes apparent how significant the body is. As described earlier, different articulations are interpreted from the structural positions that they are being spoken from.

For Odell and Linde, their own bodies are key parts of their artworks, and especially in the Odell event she herself emphasizes the vulnerability of the body. In the Van Loon event the monument itself as a body is in the centre while in the Bauer and Krauss, it is the bodily appearance of Zwarte Piet that is problematized.

Linde, Odell and Bauer and Krauss all received death threats in the empirical material that I have studied. Therefore physical violence is present as a shadow during the events in the discussion, as if at any time the dialogue can break down and take an aggressive form. The threat of violence influences the conditions of any democratic exchange even if we do not explicitly talk about it. There is always the risk of antagonism in Mouffe’s words, and as Mouffe has stated, we see how art is discussed in moralistic terms with the risk of being misleadingly framed as political.

My analysis of the four events strengthen Mouffe’s argument that if collective passions are not channelled democratically we risk ending up with identity politics and violence. The events show how citizens of a democracy can become vulnerable when acting outside the traditional script of maintaining individual liberal rights or the representational system. The space of argumentation becomes narrow and the presumed dialogue is accompanied by a threat of violence. Given the tone of much of the exchange, I am inclined to agree with Dean’s pessimistic view on the democratic possibilities of online practices.

To be further pessimistic it could be argued that what we are observing in these four events was mainly a question of ressentiment and a liberal identity discourse and less an actual political event. This would fit with the emphasis by Rancière on the rarity of politics and the overwhelming order of the sensible.

However, I argue that what the events show is not just emotions connected to a dominating imaginary but also attempts to disrupt and resist that imaginary.

910 Mouffe, Agonistics, p. 104.
911 Dean, Democracy and Other Neoliberal Fantasies, pp. 31-32.
Focusing primarily on the scarcity of politics risks excluding those practices and articulations that can potentially become a political event and that are a part of the struggle of that event’s coming to be at all. We need to take into account the very unpredictability of any event and the ongoing tensions between politicization and depoliticization, speech and noise, as well as between visibility and invisibility.

The strong emotions of anger, humiliation, hostility and disgust reveal not only the close links to the bodies engaged in the exchange but also the way the events are firmly situated in the context wherein they happen. This is most evident in the way that the art objects themselves draw on images and symbols that carry traces of their origin and usage. The emotions also express investments not only in a hegemonic order but in different imaginaries. This kind of imaginaries are key to understanding the exchange that happens as well as making clear the close connection to collective mobilization and passions. As Mouffe makes clear, passions are “the various affective forces which are at the origin of collective forms of identifications.” There is a clear decisive impact on how an argument is interpreted depending on contextual and structural factors, such as power, class, gender and race. Statements are always read in relation to these, and the subjects are positioned accordingly.

Credibility, authority and authenticity become contested when it comes to whether certain voices should be listened to or not and how they should be interpreted. In the end it comes down to intelligibility, can they be heard as speech at all? Moreover, we can connect Rancière’s notion of speech to intelligible bodies, similarly to how Sudeep Dasgupta argues that how “the potency of words derives from the possibility of incarnating themselves in anybody and all bodies, and being understood as words rather than noise.” The analysis of the four art events makes evident that what people are saying is constantly being contested and interpreted in relation to who is saying it, and what place that person has in different power hierarchies in that particular situation and time. In the exchange in the events we see how positions of being neutral, rational or sensible are taken. This illuminates the strong notion of a need and possibility for such a position in the public debate. However, as we know from radical democratic theory there is no neutral position to be found that can point to a rationality being expressed, or not expressed.

After all, we live, in Butler’s words, precarious lives, which follow us and constitute us in any exchange or space of democracy. The promise of democracy can therefore not do away with this precariousness or the potential antagonism. Making democratic trouble, whether through art or not, and envisaging

914 Butler, Precarious Life.
new horizons continues to be a necessary part of the ongoing demands, promises and events of a potentially radical democracy.
Sammanfattning


I kapitel 1 presenteras avhandlingens analysram och dess interdisciplinära karaktär. Genom att studera fyra offentliga diskussioner och konflikter kring konstverk synliggörs skapandet av demokratiska och politiska subjektiveter liksom gränserna för vad som räknas som politiskt tal. Fokus är själva debatten och det ”space of conflict” som uppstår i samband med konstståndelsen. olika tolkningar av konstverken är en del av denna debatt, men själva konstobjekten analyseras inte. Konstståndelsernas utveckling följs i analysen tills de ebbar ut.

Likaså analyseras konkret hur vissa utsagor öppnar upp för fortsatt utbyte medan andra tvärtom stänger ner och där hot om våld blir det yttersta exemplet. Det unika i varje händelse reflekteras också i skillnader vad gäller teoretiskt fokus i de fyra empiriska analyserna.


I kapitel 7 sammanfattas resultaten från de fyra händelserna. I alla fyra konsthändelser visas de komplexa konflikter som finns inbäddade i villkoren för politiskt tal och demokratiskt utbyte samt för konstruktioner av legitima politiska och demokratiska subjekt. Tre huvudpångor görs utifrån den empiriska analysen. För det första, visar de fyra händelserna tydligt att den relationella dimensionen inom den radikaldemokratierefererade förståelsen av ett demokratiskt etos och politiskt tal behöver tas i större beaktande och fördjupas också genom empiriska undersökningar. Genom att analysera den interaktion som sker kan vi bättre förstå de processer varigenom politiska och demokratiska subjekt blir till. Artikulationer av olika subjektiviteter är beroende av hur de mottas, och samtidigt är dessa relationaliteter föränderliga och avhängiga rä-
dande kontext. Hur mycket ”democratic trouble” en viss händelse kan leda till är beroende av hur dessa relationaliteter utspelar sig i den konkreta kontexten.

För det andra, visar de fyra händelserna starka identifikationer och investeringar i en liberaldemokratisk ordning som utgör en tolkningsram för vad som anses demokratiskt eller inte. Olika utsagor relateras till liberala idéer om yttrandefrihet och individuella intentioner snarare än till politisk identifikation eller kollektiva identiteter.

För det tredje, är det tydligt att de starka känslor som finns i de fyra händelserna, fientlighet, ilska, avsky och skymf – samt i vissa fall tystnader – bör tolkas i relation till investeringar i den hegemoniska ordningen. I tre av de analyserade konsthändelserna uttrycks mycket starka negativa känslor och även hot mot konstnärerna. I en av händelserna är hoten så allvarliga att en del av konstprojektet ställs in av säkerhetsskäl. De ofta förekommande aggressiva tonerna och explicita hoten styrker Chantal Mouffes betoning av den affektiva dimensionen av varje konstruktion av ett politiskt ’vi’. Utan demokratiska kanaler för kollektiv mobilisering och politiska passioner riskerar den kollektiva identifikationen att bli artikulerad som en fienderelation.
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