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Creative resistance. Cultural practices, artistic activism and counter-hegemonic narratives on diversity

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Introduction: Participation and Resistance through Arts and Culture

1. Spaces of encounters

It is now widely recognized that culture, media and the arts have been transformed by migration, mobility, and diversity. These recent cultural and aesthetic transformations have offered another way of seeing identity, politics and society. Over the past few decades, there has been growing recognition of the ways in which media, the arts and performative practices are able to facilitate intercultural dialogue among migrant and host communities – thereby potentially empowering migrant participation in social life –, and to promote an understanding of the affirmative role of diversity within European societies. In this special issue, we interrogate these critical processes as a means to address the possibilities of a transcultural dialogue: one that opens up ideas of belonging and sets up new positions for dialogue that can transcend essentialised ethnic and national identities. Across the articles that follow, we evidence how film, theatre, photography, crafts, architecture, design, as well as social media, street art, festivals and practices of performance have a pivotal role to foster both innovative practical actions and alternative imaginaries on social phenomena.

At the same time, it is essential to better examine the processes that media, arts and culture imply in terms of participation and resistance when encountering diversity. Over the last three decades a constellation of projects has emerged, in which the production and fruition of culture are conceived not only as expedients for the reinforcement of fairer and more equal societies, but also as spaces of

counter-hegemonic recognition and belonging (Clini, Hornabrook and Keightley 2020). These projects originate from a dual necessity deriving from an increasingly diverse society. On the one hand, the necessity to find (and found) unconventional forms of participation in the public sphere that overcome traditional modalities, often unattainable for those who feel unrepresented by mainstream politics, as well as for those who rarely hold the “right to have rights” as Arendt (1966) puts it, or rather those who are recognised as members of a functioning political community. We define this sphere of action within the arts as *cultural participation*. On the other hand, the necessity to challenge and resist structural hegemonic discourses that essentialise ethnic and cultural diversity and de-humanize those who do not have the right to speak. We define this second sphere as arts as *resistance*. Both spheres can be considered part of cultural citizenship. Rather than the formal, legal frameworks that underpin belonging to a nation, cultural citizenship refers to the informal, cultural dimensions that facilitate belonging and enable one to contribute to, and shape, the dominant culture (Khan, Yue, Papastergiadis, Wyatt, 2017).

The sphere of arts as *cultural participation* originates from the erosion and the consequent reconfiguration of the political sphere, together with the shrinkage of traditional forms of political participation. As Swyngedouw (2011) evidences, this “retreat of the political” has been advanced by diverse scholars across different disciplines, who have pointed out that many contemporary challenges, from the initiatives of re-appropriation of the public sphere (Low and Smith 2013), to the growing privatization of services (Staeheli and Mitchell 2008), have seen a response in the rise of alternative forms of participation. This change is well represented by Rancière’s (1999) notion of “post-democracy”. For the philosopher, this term refers to “a political idyll of achieving the common good by an enlightened government of elites buoyed by the confidence of the masses” (Rancière 1999, 93), namely a consensus democracy based on arrangements among people about distributive issues and access to different kinds of resources. Whilst conflicts may exist in such a setting, they are swallowed up by a precise consensual system, where inequalities are socially accepted and there is little room for alternative modes of action.

Similarly, Crouch (2004) defines “post-democracy”, as a condition characterized by both a growing spectacularization of public electoral debate, controlled by management logics, and the passivity of the majority of citizens, who do not participate beyond their limited political function. According to Crouch (2004, 4), “behind the spectacle of the electoral game, politics is really shaped in private by interaction between elected governments and elites that overwhelmingly represent business interests. Under the conditions of a post-democracy that increasingly cedes power to business lobbies, there is little hope for an agenda of strong egalitarian policies for the redistribution of power and wealth, or for the restraint of powerful interests”. The scenario of a “post-democracy” is accompanied by what Bourdieu (2002) defined as the “de-politicization of the economic”, and Morgan (2003) as the “economization of politics”. Both authors thus draw attention to a fundamental change in how politics works: a change that includes the adoption of managerial technologies and administrative procedures, transforming politics into a form of institutionalized management. Moreover, post-democratic arrangements hinge on the mobilization and normalization of populism (Swyngedouw 2011).

These populist movements and parties are maintained by the nurturing of fear, the depiction of social events as crises and emergencies, and the invocation of spectres of pending catastrophes if urgent and decisive action is not taken. For example, in the European political debate the inflows of migrants and asylum seekers have been often described catastrophically, and are represented as a major contemporary challenge, more often than not as a threat (Balibar 2003; Musarò and Parmiggiani 2017). This is evident in the number of journalistic and scientific articles where migration is associated with the term “crisis”. Research by Archibugi, Cellini and Vitiello (2019) reveals that the topic received almost no attention until 2014, and then from 2015 interest increased significantly, declining only partially from 2017 onwards for journalistic articles and from 2019 onwards for scientific articles.

Institutional and political actors who are overtly inspired by illiberal principles – from Hungary to sovereign populist forces in Austria, Bulgaria, Poland, Czech Republic, Finland, Greece, Italy, and

Slovakia – formulate their political debate by riding the wave of general discontent with the negative effects of economic globalization, and distrust in the so-called establishment. Unable to engage with citizens' concerns, they have helped to conflate migration with insecurity, creating a fertile breeding ground for xenophobic, populist reactions. This “politics of fear” is also constructed around the so-called “migration crisis”, which is instrumentally magnified by those who politically benefit from it, and feeds and enhances the fears of citizens, formulating simple (static) and exclusive answers in response (Kymlicka 2016). As a consequence, today there is a strong consensus for a hard line on migration and calls for even stricter policies in Europe.

Despite this emerging body of thought on the dynamics of de-politicization, and, consequently, the rise of more autocratic forms of governing, other scholars highlight the increase in alternative forms of political participation. These forms no longer pass through traditional party affiliation or delegation to leaders of political organizations, but instead through less conventional ways, such as Beck's (1997) concept of “subpolitics”, Giddens' (1991) “lifestyle politics”, or Holzer and Sørensen's (2003) notion of “active subpolitics”. These forms of politics, whilst they may concern different fields, such as consumption, culture and creativity among others, nonetheless promote what Bennet (2003) defines as “self-determined” citizenship, which spreads thanks to relational capital and a network structure aimed at community action. From this perspective, culture becomes a vital and invigorating part of the public sphere.

At this point, it is also important to reflect upon the differences between the political and politics. In this regard, in introducing the “Political Paradox”, Ricoeur (1965) argued that “politics”, is intended as power relations between political actors, deriving from individual and collective interests, and the “political”, can be more broadly conceived as a shared public and collective space. It is within this space that we encounter the concept of “cultural participation” (Paltrinieri 2019), which refers both to the spheres of production and fruition of culture. Cultural citizenship thus refers to the possibility for audiences to actively participate in cultural production, to enter the wider sphere of knowledge production and knowledge co-construction.

Here, the notion of participation refers to a “maximalist definition of participation”, which is linked to decentralised and multidirectional spaces and decision-making processes (Carpentier 2017). According to Carpentier, the maximalist version of participation is useful in order to analyse different and emerging participatory practices developed in different social fields, including the symbolic/cultural dimension, the media sphere, consumption and cultural fruition, as well as other fields of social action. This perspective on participation is completed only when combined with the capacity to imagine a different future, promoting a long-term vision of collective action. In this sense, it is useful to consider what Appadurai (2004) defines as the “capacity to aspire”. To put it simply, aspirations are real cultural projects, a “horizon of the meaningful” (Hall, Critcher, Jefferson, Clarke and Roberts 1978, 24) a collective request for a better and happier life, understood as social well-being, and they have a precise temporal perspective. Imagining the future of a community means, therefore, to place oneself between the macro dimension of administrative policy planning and the micro dimension, represented by creativity and aesthetic participation, which concretise in artistic practices. In this, it is not difficult to grasp the political scope that cultural practices can express.

Second, at the crossroad between community imagination and political engagement, culture and arts can also represent spaces of *resistance*. Of course, the idea of culture as space of resistance is not new within cultural studies. In *Resistance through Rituals* (Hall and Jefferson 1975), for example, ethnography of young working-class people in post-war Britain reveals the strategies they adopted to resist mainstream adulthood and the imposed economic and social order. Through the creation of subversive meanings and, consequently, group identities, the youth creatively redefined the ascribed meanings and use of consumers good. Similarly, Hebdige (1979), elaborates upon the process of reframing the symbols of dominant culture and how such symbols may be used in unconventional ways. For Hebdige (1979) then, culture is negotiated through consumption, yet contemporaneously in resistance to dominant representations. Whilst the limits of subcultural theories – such as the lack of recognizing subcultures’ risk to be assimilated in the dominant culture, or their difficulties in creating a clear cut response to domination (Giroux 1983; Heath and Potter 2006; Winlow and Hall

2007) – need to be recognised, these theories nonetheless invite reflection upon how symbols, values and meanings play a crucial role in the process of domination and subordination, and the ways in which culture is reproduced “in its dominant or ‘hegemonic’ form” (Hall and Jefferson 1975, 13). Counter-hegemonic forms of resistance that, despite their differences, are considered by Slack (2016) as “affective resonances” (889), which can be both “neither inherently constructive nor inherently destructive” (890). Stuart Hall ([1983]2016) suggests we should conceive resistance as a process, “as the continual practices of working on the cultural domain and opening up cultural possibilities” (2016, 206). He continues: “The conditions within which people are able to construct subjective possibilities and new political subjectivities for themselves are not simply given in the dominant system. They are won in the practices of articulation which produce them” (Hall 2016, 206).

In the field of migration, for example, arts and culture can play an important antagonistic role: by displaying a politicised dimension of migration and diversity, and taking different voices into consideration, they can become an alternative form of political participation, an “aesthetics of subversion” (Mazzara 2019, 10). Artistic and cultural practices can (and should) be controversial, and, in particular, through dialectic process they can challenge the status quo of mainstream forms of political participation and create new possibilities to overcome the binary opposition of in/visibility, which characterises the modalities of representation of diversity.

In this regard, Mouffe (2007) suggests the centrality of the agonistic dimension of artistic and cultural practices that can subvert the dominant hegemony through a competitive approach in the public sphere. For Mouffe (2007), the negation of the conflictual dimension typical of the liberal approach implies an idea of consensus based on reason. This then determines a political hegemony which contemporaneously produces the exclusion of certain groups: “critical art is art that foments dissensus, that makes visible what the dominant consensus tends to obscure and obliterate. It is constituted by a manifold of artistic practices aiming at giving a voice to all those who are silenced within the framework of the existing hegemony” (Mouffe, 2007, 5). From this perspective, therefore, arts and culture can be a valid tool to counteract hegemonic discourses which are based on an

exclusive identity, mired at cancelling out diversity when it is perceived as being too distant from dominant values. As a space of resistance arts and culture can support a form of solidarity which is not based on hierarchical relationships, but rather a collectively motivated willingness and practice that strives for mutual support and reciprocity. Hence, through shared experiences and feeling of belonging together, but also through the struggles to overcome injustice and conventional power structures, artistic and cultural practices can be understood contemporaneously as both participation and resistance. Commencing with a critique of the distorted forms of representation of diversity as fixed, artistic intervention can not only sustain a new politics of visibility in the political sphere but can also become a space of resistance and activism in physical and symbolic collective spaces.

In conversation with this body of work exploring the role of arts in the promotion of cultural citizenship, this special issue aims to analyse how culture, arts and creativity can become spaces of active participation, conviviality and resistance. The basis for this special issue is rooted in the three-year international project *Atlas of Transitions. New Geographies for a Cross-Cultural Europe*¹ which aimed to explore intercultural exchange between European citizens and newcomers through performing arts, creative processes, and collaborative research.²

The project adopted an interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary approach. Collaboration between artists, researchers and practitioners was aimed at opening up both new paths for collective action and spaces where diversity is usually confined, as well as reframing narratives around migration and diversity. Atlas of Transitions thus developed several creative methodologies across different spaces and contexts, engaging local communities, migrants and refugees in shared experiences. Likewise, it utilised diverse languages, artistic methods and practices focusing upon the notion of participation. Within the project, the importance of realizing performances with a high artistic value was not

¹ See: <http://www.atlasoftransitions.eu/>

² The project, co-financed by the Creative Europe programme, included eleven partners in seven countries, mainly theatres and cultural organizations. The network was enlarged to seven university stakeholders, coordinated by the Department of Sociology and Business Law of the University of Bologna.

compromised by the need to facilitate forms of dialogue and conviviality (Gilroy 2004), or vice versa (Paltrinieri *et al.* 2020).

Many of the contributions in this special issue were presented during the Atlas of Transitions festival in 2019 (Mirzoeff, Frisina and Kyeremeh, Floridia and Mazzaglia). Other articles derive from the lectures given as part of the International Summer School “Performing Resistance. Dialogues on Arts, Migration, Inclusive Cities”, organized in 2020 to offer an original overview on the relations between migration, performing arts and public space (Papastergiadis, Horsti, Da Lage and Micheau, Camozzi).

This transdisciplinary collaboration within Atlas of Transitions generated the space to reflect on arts and culture as new and unconventional windows of opportunity for participation and resistance beyond traditional forms of political and civic engagement. While we have explored elsewhere the potential of artistic practices to create a renewed “right to the city” (Paltrinieri *et al.* 2020), in this special issue we examine the role of cultural participation and artistic practices of resistance in relation to diversity, creating blurred, new and ever-changing terrains.

The articles in this issue then engage with the ways in which arts can provide opportunities to bring together newcomers and host populations. If strangers are framed either as vulnerable victims or as dangerous outsiders, how can we use arts to challenge the opposition between us (citizens) and them (non-citizens)? How can artistic and cultural expressions engage audiences and empower people to accept and appreciate human differences? What is the cultural and political role of arts in challenging the dominant narratives and imaginaries on diversity? To what extent can arts and culture be considered critical tools for transcultural dialogue?

Moving within the wide field of cultural studies, the articles that follow seek to answer these questions via different perspectives and complementary fields of action. The tensions and connections of the subsequent articles are theorised via “practice architectures” (Kemmis 2009). The theory of practice architectures is a practice theory that draws attention to the modalities through which people, objects, discourses, relationships, activities and circumstances are entangled in practices in specific

contexts and times. In other words, this theory conceptualises all practices (cultural practices included) as being formed socially, namely through the encounters between practitioners, and analyses how these practices are enabled or constrained by specific elements. These elements consist in: what practitioners do (*doings*), the discourses that influence these practices (*sayings*) and the conditions in which they practice (*relatings*). This analytical perspective provides a roadmap for the articles that follow. Our hope is that this approach enables a better understanding of how culture and arts can intervene via a three-pronged approach when encountering diversity, namely in terms of innovative actions, social imaginaries and in the relation between individuals and groups.

Whilst this approach originated primarily as a means to understand the effects of action research in the social field, we believe it can constitute an alternative perspective to investigate the role of arts and culture. We maintain that this approach is capable of intercepting complexity in terms of preconditions, dynamics and effects, inherent in the very concepts of cultural participation and resistance in contexts of diversity. The “practice architecture” approach concerns participants’ practices, self-understanding as a process of reflexivity relating to these practices and the conditions under which they operate. According to Kemmis (2009, 9), what is to be understood by this approach is not only activities and their immediate outcomes, or the self-understandings of the practitioners and others involved in and affected by a practice, “but the social formation in which the practice occurs – the discourses (*sayings*) that orient and inform it, the things that are done (*doings*), and the patterns of social relationships between those involved and affected (*relatings*)”. Moreover, to better understand the meaning and the complexity of cultural participation, these three elements – practices, how we understand them and the conditions that shape them – inevitably need to be analysed within the same framework, so as to highlight the connections between them.

2. “Practice architectures”: saying, doing, relating

The socio-political role of arts and culture in relation to diversity has been recognized by many authors. As discussed above, Mouffe (2007) underlines the importance of artistic practices not as a uniform system of knowledge and actions, but as a dialectical and often conflictual process of cultural creation that challenges dominant and hegemonic discourses. Similarly, taking as an example the case of the United States, bell hooks (1990) maintains that arts and cultural practices had a fundamental role in sustaining individual and collective resistance strategies for Black communities living in countries dominated by white structures of power. Other authors have focused more on the cultural and artistic participation of migrants as pathway towards socio-political integration (Barsky and Martiniello 2020), as well as a physical and symbolic space where migrants and refugees can develop processes of intercultural participation (Martiniello 2016).

As an attempt to systematize this variety, we adopt the “practices architecture” (Kemmis 2009) approach as a framework to analyse how cultural processes and practices can generate alternative dynamics, foment forms of decoloniality, and de-construct the false binary of borders: between the symbolic and physical, the centre and the periphery, artistic and political intervention, and between watching, reflecting and acting. With this in mind, we borrow this theoretical framework as a roadmap to guide us through the complex entanglement of texts that are united by the desire to reflect, in different but complementary ways, on how culture can have a transformative power, albeit through different practices.

Since the “practice architectures” approach divides practices into what practitioners do (*doings*), the discourses that influence these practices (*sayings*) and the conditions in which they practice (*relatings*), we will focus on the following dimensions: cultural-discursive (in relation to the narratives that oriented and justified the practices); material (in relation to the aspects that define access to resources and spaces); and social-political (concerning the creation of social capital, relations and participation). We commence with *sayings*.

Sayings

The discursive dimension of the production of culture and arts is particularly important when referring to participation and resistance in relation to diversity. Firstly, as Castoriadis' (1997) "theory of the imaginary" suggests, imaginative processes and reality are deeply interconnected. The narrative dimension, therefore, is not only crystallised on a symbolic and cognitive level but also becomes a transformative agent that affects everyday practices. In other words, the way we see the world also shapes the world. A similar idea is endorsed by Di Fraia's (2004) concept of "socio-narrative representations", which indicates that narratives can have also a performative and transformative power.

Secondly, attention needs to turn to the modalities through which discourses and representations can become a form of re-politicization in cultural production. By re-politicizing we mean "an intervention in the state of the situation that transforms and transgresses the symbolic orders of the existing condition, marks a shift from the old to a new situation, one that cannot any longer be thought of in terms of the old symbolic framings" (Swygedouw 2011, 377). This not only produces new representations of social phenomena, but also influences human cognition and behaviour (Boland and Tenkasi 1995). In this sense, the potentialities of arts and culture reside precisely in the struggle "against pre-existing cultural and institutional narratives and the structures of meaning and power they convey" (Davies 2012, 25), stimulating counter-narratives on diversity.

The special issue opens with Nicholas Mirzoeff, renowned scholar and activist, who provides an analysis of the factors that determine the infrastructure of white supremacy and inequalities based on his lecture given as part of the Atlas of Transitions Festival in 2019. He suggests that the marble statue and improvised shacks mark what Hall (1996) calls the "limit cases" of whiteness's racialized hierarchy in the present conjuncture. Thus, the infrastructures of white supremacy form a material hierarchy, ranging from statues and monuments to "shacks", the informal housing shaping the landscape of global cities and the global South, a symbol of dispossession. In fact, as Fanon (2008) suggests, the world of statues produces optical distinction and hierarchical domination from the point

of view of coloniality. By describing three different yet symbolically related examples (“screens”) – the world of statues as racializing assemblage played out at Charlottesville, the dissent linking infrastructural and educational inequality to the legacies of colonial hierarchy in Cape Town, and the protests in Gaza – he develops a reflection on the spaces of appearance as the political ground where forms of domination can be reproduced. However, Mirzoeff concludes that coloniality and the dominant structures of power can be challenged, since “the possibility of remembering a decolonized, devisualized future keeps coming back” (p. XX).

Likewise, in examining the structures of injustice, Karina Horsti examines three cultural productions created as forms of civil investigation into the so-called “Tragedy of Lampedusa”, a shipwreck where at least 368 migrants lost their lives in 2013. Maintaining that civil investigation can also transform into forms of civil imagination, Horsti reflects upon two plays by Antonio Riccò (Germany) and a documentary video by Lampedusan Antonio Maggiore (Italy). According to Horsti, these cultural productions addressed the disaster through an investigative approach, aimed at understanding what happened in Lampedusa, and the reasons why the border authorities failed to rescue the migrants. Horsti concludes that there is a link between forms of cultural intervention to denounce an injustice (civil investigation) and a capacity to see the world in terms of conviviality (civil imagination). As such, this cultural production becomes not only a space of action, but also a space of collective reflection, and thus creates a circuit of representation which enforces the critical power of civil networks.

Doings

Artistic and cultural practices can transform into political spaces as active moments of construction of new egalitarian spatialities (Swygedouw 2011, 377) and relations. Thus, they can be considered collective processes through which equality is asserted not in terms of belonging to a coherent and unitarian system of (self)representation, but as a dialogical dynamic able to valorise diversities and

differences. This requires the development of cultural and artistic projects capable of transforming collaborations triggered by the process of cultural production into radically different behaviours and attitudes, while being inspired by precise philosophical and ethical pathways. A form of “participatory aesthetics” (Deleuze 2012), in which taking part in artistic work can foster change and awareness about actual social issues, linking the political, civic and artistic spheres.

Aiming at re-thinking recent philosophical theories on cosmopolitanism, Nikos Papastergiadis’ article investigates artistic practices in connection with philosophical theories of cosmopolitanism. In re-booting a dialogue between ancient theories on the cosmos and examples from contemporary art practice, he introduces the frame of aesthetic cosmopolitanism as an integration to normative cosmopolitanism. For Papastergiadis, while the latter focuses on normative considerations of ethical responsibility, civic rules and the construction of transnational institutions, aesthetic cosmopolitanism can be seen as a human disposition that opens up culture and ethics to the dynamics of difference. As a consequence, cosmopolitanism is always present because it is in the air: it is never revealed or discovered as an entity, as it is only experienced and imagined as a process. Therefore, it should neither be framed as the product of individual will and actions, nor as a philosophical perception from the past. On the contrary, it is revealed in the constant trace of communion, capable to disclose that the essence of humanity is exactly in the nexus between companionship and hospitality (Derrida 1999).

Switching from cosmopolitanism to transition, Emilie Da Lage and Béatrice Micheau interrogate the conflictual context of transitory migration in Calais, France. They explain the difficulties of developing spaces of research and intervention in such a polarized context, where the simple presence of artists, researchers or the programming of a play or an exhibition concerning migration is already in and of itself a form of commitment and political engagement. Da Lage and Micheau then aim to draw attention to the importance of what is not “public” in the work of creation. Workshops, rehearsals, preparations, meetings and communication practices can, therefore, become places for engaging forms of transformations through the constitution of alliances between the exiled and other

actors in the city. The violence, police brutality, lack of policies, and awareness of the temporary form of migration in Calais, led the researcher and artists to adopt an approach of care (Haraway 1991) in order to infiltrate the porosity of this border space. Critically exploring both this “emotional work”, but also whether or not emotions in a situation are expressed, Da Lage and Micheau conclude with a reflection on the capacity of design anthropology as a tool to move beyond an economy of creation and from research as an “extractive” process (data collecting) to a relational one, in which creation and research can be a site to foster relational worlds.

Relatings

In a society where there is a general orientation towards the satisfaction of material and immaterial needs through the purchase of goods and services, we experience a gradual loss of opportunities for connections and relational occasions. Even in contexts characterized by diversity, this trend risks creating a decline in participation, towards social poverty and a weakening of the sense of community (Bauman 2007), with profound repercussions on the psychophysical well-being of individuals. Nevertheless, it is now widely recognised that culture and creativity represent valuable hubs within communities and generate dynamics of vitality and socialisation. In this sense, the production of social bonds can be also conceived as a response to the processes of individualization that characterize our contemporaneity. Producing social capital means promoting networks, partnerships between actors with whom a shared value is produced, exchanges between knowledge and know-how. All these elements are also at the heart of new forms of cultural participation.

In her article on multicultural festivals, Ilenya Camozzi presents both the limits and the potentials of these “places of public celebration” (McClinchey 2008) in terms of practices developed by social actors engaged in these events. In an attempt to address the literature gap on multicultural festivals, especially within the sociological field, Camozzi gives an overview on the rise and main characteristics of such events. These events, Camozzi maintains, can be interpreted both in terms of

public rituals (Collins 2013) and cultural institutions (Santoro 2013) where culture is produced and circulated. Camozzi proposes a theoretical critical review of the concept of multiculturalism and cultural authenticity, conceptually opposed to interculturalism. She then presents two oppositional visions of multicultural festivals: one based on the cultural commodification of these events and one that instead conceives of them as generative opportunities, an interesting field of study for questioning and reinventing the very concept of multiculturalism (on the part of organisers, performers and audiences), while creating new social relations rooted in festival practices themselves.

Focusing on the relations between “artists of colour” born or raised in Italy since childhood and Italian society, Annalisa Frisina and Sandra Kyeremeh’s article explores the intersection between discursive interviews and an analysis of the literature and cinema produced by these artists. Here, the critical voices of the artists arise not only as a challenge to the racialization they experience, but also in relation to their origins, for which they are often considered as “illegitimate children of Italy”, since they are children born of (non-white) immigration. Thus, arts and culture become a means to amplify their voices and call out racism through the decolonization of the imaginary of “Italianness”. A process that is imbued with many difficulties, as Frisina and Kyeremeh discuss.

The final article presents a dialogue between Pietro Floridia, playwright and director of the intercultural company Cantieri Meticci, and the theatre historian Rossella Mazzaglia, around the performance of *The Nigger of the “Narcissus”* which debuted in March 2019 during the *Atlas of Transitions* festival. Using the performative event as a *leitmotif*, as well as Floridia’s directorial notebooks, titled *Cercando il Negro [In Search of the Negro]*, the dialogue contextualizes the postcolonial reading of Joseph Conrad’s novel within the current reality of increasing xenophobia that renders immigrants as threats. At the same time, the interview unveils the critical dimension and transformative capacity of theatre in today’s society.

3. A final comment

It is our contention that, as the inspiring articles contained within this special issue reveal, culture and creativity are at the base of a new meaning of participation and resistance. A resistance that is nourished by the process of imagination, opening the universe of the possible near future, as an intangible and free social resource that can be produced collectively and can be redistributed, nurtured precisely by cultural production and creativity. In different but complementary ways, the articles in this special issue demonstrate how arts and culture are social forces that can reshape political spaces: through the public manifestation of something that remained invisible, in constituting a break with the normal order of things and in offering materials and spaces for the empowerment of people.

Nevertheless, we are cognizant that participation alone does not mean that participants have full control over the meanings and images the artworks actually convey. In the worst-case scenario, participation can risk reproducing the same differences it claims to overcome. A critical lens when looking at cultural and artistic practices is also crucial. A lens that has been widely applied across many of the articles that follow. Papastergiadis, for example, assesses the values and the norms underpinning hospitality and commonalities (e.g., normative cosmopolitanism), while Mirzoeff reflects on the structures of power rooted in societies and reproduced through the material world of statues and shacks. Elsewhere, the focus moves from the forms of injustice to the practices that can subvert such (often) structural conditions. This can be seen for example in the reinvention of the concept of multiculturalism in multicultural festivals (Camozzi), the shift from civil investigation to civil imagination (Horsti), the practices of kin in border areas (Da Lage and Micheau), or the critical literature and films produced by the so-called “illegitimate children of Italy” (Frisina and Kyeremeh).

In our effort to offer a roadmap of the articles included in this special issue we proposed a model of interpretation composed of three different analytical lenses, yet it is important to emphasize how these lenses are strictly interrelated. Firstly, they are interrelated by their complementarity: the adoption of different conceptual frameworks, methodological tools and horizons of interpretation, together with a willingness to blur disciplinary boundaries, led to the construction of a multifaceted “archaeology of knowledge” around the potential of arts and culture for diversity, both in terms of

participation and resistance. Second, the boundaries between the three lenses are also porous thematically. Though dealing with relations in terms of ethical and civic rules, aesthetic cosmopolitanism relies on a creative and narrative dimension (artistic practices) that is expressed through the ability to overcome a normative version of cosmopolitanism (from *doings* to *sayings*). Similarly, but from the opposite direction, even if multicultural festivals can reinvent the concept of multiculturalism itself, owing to the relationships created between performers, organizers and audiences, it is clear that these relationships are rooted in specific social practices and rituals (*doings*). Furthermore, the concept of civil investigation itself, whilst based on civil imagination and, therefore, primarily related to the dimension of *saying*, is embedded in the collective practices of investigation (*doings*). Thanks to this porosity and complexity, the cultural and artistic practices examined in this issue emerge as spaces of participation, imagination and resistance, deriving not from the art of the possible, but from the art of the impossible (Žižek 1999).

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