MANCEPT 2018 – **Democracy and Aesthetics: Performance, Perception and Representation**

**Schedule**

**Monday 10th September**

11:00-12:30 Registration

12:30-1:30 Lunch

1:30-2:00 Welcome Speech

2:00-4:00 Session 1

*Opening Comments and Introductions*

Michael Räber (University of Zurich)

*Representation Beyond Boarders: Aesthetic Representation*

Michael Räber (University of Zurich)

*Difference and critique. Towards an aesthetic politics of representation*

Marina Martinez Mateo (Goethe University Frankfurt)

4:00-4:30 Tea and Coffee Break

4:30-5:30 Session 1 (continued)

*From Pitkin to Ankersmit: Representation and the Aesthetic Dimension of Democracy*

Pedro T. Magalhães (University of Helsinki)

5:45-7:00 Wine Reception

7:30 Conference Dinner

**Tuesday 11th September**

9:30-11:30 Session 2

*Preaching to the Converted: Satire in Political Context*

Daniel Abrahams (University of Glasgow)

*Songs as hidden transcripts? Music, protest and infra-politics*

Pierre-Yves Néron (European School of Political and Social Sciences ESPOL)

11:30-12:00 Tea and Coffee Break

12:00-1:00 Session 2 (continued)

*Aesthetic Public Reasons: Art and Civil Disobedience*

Jonathan A. Neufeld (College of Charleston)

1:00-2:00 Lunch

2:00-4:00 Session 3

*From a failed candid event to the ethics of democratic spectatorship*

Jan Bíba (Charles University Prague)

*Gadamer’s Critique of Kant’s Aesthetics and the Aesthetic Dimension of Contemporary**Democratic Practices*

Marcello Ruta (University of Bern)

4:00-4:30 Tea and Coffee Break

4:30-5:30 Session 3

*The Political Potential of Creative Absorption or Engagement*

Rebecca van der Post (Concordia University)

*Final Remarks*

End of Workshop (Conference continues on Wednesday 12th September)

Abstracts

Michael Räber (University of Zurich): **Representation Beyond Boarders – Aesthetic Representation**

This talk tries to carve out a conception of political representation that fits the contemporary circumstances of globalized politics by drawing on Michal Saward’s (“The Representative Claim” 2006; The Representative Claim 2010) quasi-pragmatist conception of political representation and on Dewey’s aesthetics.

Most theories of legitimate government acknowledge the inevitable relevance of representation, but the most prevalent conceptions of representation are based on ideas like authorization, delegation or trusteeship (etc.) and as such are founded on the idea that representation consists in an act that can legitimately only take place within pre-existing formal institutions. International politics, however, renders conceptions that are based on this logic of formalized electoral institutions unfit for representation on the international level where new political claims arise that have no formal representation.

Saward (2006, 2010) recently has invoked a concept of representation that can be called “aesthetic representation”, which is a promising alternative to entrenched conceptions of political representation. Saward compares politics with art. Just as an artist does not simply mimic reality, but sorts out and makes reality visible for us, representatives are creative, he holds. By making claims they present us with pictures of who we are and where we are going, and as such they also depend on audiences. To elucidate the actually political significance of representation, Saward proffers using a pragmatic attitude focused on learning how representation works, on conceiving the consequences of its appeal, and on highlighting its dynamic nature. The limit of the conception of “aesthetic representation” as advocated by Saward, however, is that it reduces the people to mere audiences (Frega 2017). By that, aesthetic representation in Sawardian terms does not only reject the idea that democracy ultimately resides in the will of the people, it also deems counterproductive the practice of democracies to more directly involve the people. Especially, Saward remains silent about the forms of relations and interactions that link representatives as claim-makers, subjects and audiences.

While Saward’s claim that political representatives are like artists in that they imaginatively create a representative image of those they take to represent echoes Dewey’s concept of aesthetic experience, Dewey’s conception of aesthetic experience rejects the view that the aesthetic is passive perception that renders the audience powerless. While Saward’s conception does not provide enough normative backup for his idea, I suggest that Dewey’s concept of aesthetic experience has this potential. Specifically, it can tell us, first, something about the nature of the interaction between political actors (representatives) and spectators (the represented) in general, second how the represented can be conceptualized as empowered democratic people and not just as mere passive spectators, and third how solidarity and common outlook can occur among them.

Marina Martinez Mateo (Goethe University Frankfurt) - **Difference and critique. Towards an aesthetic politics of representation**

Representative democracy seems to be in crisis. Traditional representative institutions like parties and parliaments are not capable of giving an “authentic” voice to the people who are supposed to be represented. In my paper, I want to start from the idea that this crisis is not only due to empirical reasons but has also to do with the paradoxical structure of representation itself: Representation includes two sides – one represented and one representing – which need to be connected and separated at once. Put more concretely: The representation of society by the state implies that the state is *other* than society, while it is nothing external to it. State and society are supposed to be autonomous and irreducible but, nevertheless, intrinsically connected. This claim, since paradoxical, cannot be fully realized. Thus, when there is representation, there is always someone who is not represented or someone who is not represented the way he or she would have expected to be.

Based on this paradox, there is the claim in political theory to finally overcome representation and to find a concept of democracy which is “postrepresentational” (Simon Tormey) or “presentist” (Isabell Lorey), instead. This claim is characterized by the attempt to reconciliate the difference between subject and form of politics. However, I would assume that this includes serious political dangers which should not be overseen. Such a standpoint runs danger to naturalize the acting political subject which is supposed to have a fixed identity and a presence without the necessity of being mediated with a specific political form.

In contrast to this approach, I suggest that we need to conceive of a new politics of representation which takes account of this dilemma. The understanding of representation in the aesthetic realm may give us an entry point for understanding what this could mean. Following Jacques Rancière, an understanding of arts which is aesthetic in a strong sense starts with a critique of representation. Arts begins, when it is acknowledged that an image will never be a perfect replica of reality. Every representation needs to accept an irreducible difference, an opacity, towards the represented. However, as aesthetics, this critique does not lead to a renunciation of representation. On the contrary, it makes room for understanding representation in a *new way*. Representation is liberated from the claim to represent “correctly”. That is: Criticizing representation in an aesthetic sense means to deal creatively with the insufficiency of representation. Aesthetics makes of representation an open structure, which does not try to be correct but to create something new and irritating.

This idea should be included in political representation (this is the approach by Frank Ankersmit and Michael Saward, among others). Instead of just criticizing political representation, we could affirm it on the ground of this aesthetic critique: as the free creation of rooms and stages where new political forms and subjectivities can be experimented and made visible. In my paper, I want to develop this by (1) analyzing representation in its paradox structure, (2) formulating an aesthetic critique of representation, and (3) thinking about the political forms this critique could take.

Pedro T. Magalhães (University of Helsinki): **From Pitkin to Ankersmit: Representation and the Aesthetic Dimension of Democracy**

Although the democratic regimes which most of us – in the West, at least – live in are representative democracies, representation has never attained, unlike democracy, the unquestionable status of an appraisive concept. In a way, the adjective *representative* seems to point to a fiddly, but necessary, element of modern democracies which ultimately prevents them from being *fully* democratic. The suspicion towards representation, of course, resonates loudly in the contemporary populist rhetoric against the mainstream political class, but perhaps this is just an awakening of the wave of political indifference that swept across the West in the transition to the twenty-first century.

Be that as it may, the truth is that political theory and philosophy have generally been unfriendly to the notion of representation. On the one hand, normative political philosophy has tried either to close the gap between representatives and represented, by conceptualizing participatory and deliberative mechanisms as inclusive and non- hierarchical as possible, or to ground representative institutions on a consensually shared theory of justice. On the other hand, empirical democratic theory, the basis of political science, has accepted representation without thinking too much and too deeply about it. Elections and representative institutions, as the famous phrase goes, allow us to ‘throw the rascals out’ – leader selection through a competitive electoral process is, according to this minimalist definition, what sets democracies apart from autocratic regimes.

In this paper we aim to reconsider the role of representation in democratic theory. Our point of departure is Hanna F. Pitkin’s *The Concept of Representation* (1967), probably the most detailed and erudite conceptual analysis of representation written to date. Pitkin signals out different dimensions of the concept – formalistic, descriptive, symbolic, and performative – and discusses both their political and non-political uses in depth. However, she does not pursue the implications of her findings for democratic theory. Much later, and with no reference whatsoever to Pitkin’s work, the Dutch philosopher of history Frank Ankersmit published a collection of essays on *Political Representation* (2002) where a new genealogy of representative democracy is put forth. Ankersmit employs concepts such as ‘political style’ and ‘political creativity’ in his rehabilitation of Continental traditions – French liberalism and German romanticism – which are usually ignored or neglected by contemporary democratic theory. We intend to show that a dialogue between Pitkin and Ankersmit, i. e. between the conceptual precision of the former and the original historical narrative of the latter, could serve to summon up and reconsider an eminently aesthetic perspective on democratic ideas and practices.

Daniel Abrahams (University of Glasgow): **Preaching to the Converted: Satire in Political Context**

In this paper I build upon a Gricean understanding of satire to argue that mass media satire and humour should not be expected to convince political opponents. In fact, in certain sorts of political divides, it should be expected to reinforce one’s opponents. This is because that the satirist may easily appear to their targets as exactly the sort of person they wish to defy, so the satirist accusing them of failing to meet some moral standard only serves to affirm the targets of their rightness. My argument comprises two sections.

First I will present an account of how satire criticizes. It makes use of Paul Simpson’s speech act model of satire (2003), which understands the fundamental dynamic satire being between the satirist, the audience, and the content or target of the satire. The target of a satire is subject to some sort of satiric criticism. This criticism is frequently made by way of turning the target into the object of humour. Humour may be either affiliative (laughing with) or disaffiliative (laughing at). Satiric humour is often disaffiliative, so it is often laughing at the target for failing to meet some sort of (often moral) standard espoused by the satirist.

Second, I will place satire in the context of mass media. Mass media, and mass media distribution, puts pressure on satire to attract and maintain a steady audience. This means that the audience must be treated affiliatively, and their preferences must be privileged. This greatly limits the opportunity for the satirist to genuinely criticize her own audience. This also means that disaffiliative humour will be overwhelmingly aimed outwards, away from the regular audience. Since affiliative and disaffiliative humour is so important to satire, satire centrally trades on questions of ingroup (us) and outgroup (them). The importance of group membership means that the sort of person the satirist is seen to be, and which groups they are perceived to belong to, are central to how their satire is received. If the satirist is perceived to belong to a group which the target or target group views as a political opponent group, then the target group may have no reason to take the satiric criticism seriously. Altogether this means that mass media satire’s capability to change minds is extremely limited.

Pierre-Yves Néron (European School of Political and Social Sciences ESPOL): **Songs as hidden transcripts? Music, protest and infra-politics**

Drawing on James C. Scott’ (1990) influential account of the various forms that resistance to domination takes, I will argue in this paper that protest songs, at least a *certain category* of them, are correctly described as “hidden transcripts”. I will do so by trying to do the three following things. First, I will try to show how Scott himself fails to take seriously his own suggestion that “songs” count as hidden transcripts. Second, I will try to clarify the relevance of songs, understood as hidden transcripts, in what Scott refers to as “infra-politics”. More precisely, I will attempt here to identify three plausible features of songs as hidden transcripts. Finally, I will make some comment about the fruitfulness of a “Scottian” account in thinking about the aesthetics components of democratic politics.

Hidden transcripts, in Scott’s account, are a subset of strategies that are used by subordinates in a specific form of politics that he refers to as “infra-politics”. Hidden transcripts are acts of resistance that take place “offstage” (Scott. 1990 p.4) and go “behind the official story”(p.1). And Scott explicitly suggests that songs are hidden transcripts. As he writes, we can see “rumors, gossip, folktales, songs, gestures, jokes, and theater of the powerless as vehicles by which, among other things, they insinuate a critique of power while hiding behind anonymity or behind innocuous understandings of their conduct.”

Here, Woody Guthrie’s “Ludlow Massacre” might prove to be a good example. Guthrie’s song about one of the darkest and bloodiest episodes of Labor history, has been often mentioned by H. Zinn as a significant influence in developing his important work on the popular history of the U.S. It was, for Zinn, a powerful “eye-opening” song genuinely documenting the ending act of what was maybe the most violent struggle between corporate power and labor in American history. From a Scottian point of view, we might want to say that this song is a form of hidden transcript that has been “unveiled” by activists and social scientists.

Unfortunately, Scott himself didn’t push his analysis of the role of songs in infra-politics very far. Therefore, I suggest that we need to develop a more articulated account of music within this kind of “infra-politics” framework. In order to so, I will test the relevance of various features of songs as hidden transcripts in a form of infra-politics. More specifically, I will focus on three plausible features: 1) the *ambiguity of authorship*; 2) the *disrespectability* of musical hidden transcripts; and 3) the *political electricity* of the first performance.

More broadly, I will try to show that using an “infra-politics” lens *à la* Scott to look a music might be a fruitful way to understand the complex aesthetic dimensions of democratic politics. It helps us building a theory of *political aesthetics*, to use Sartwell’ phrasing, i.e. an account of the aesthetic dimensions of politics that goes beyond a simple focus on propaganda or the pervasiveness of PR strategies.

Jonathan A. Neufeld (College of Charleston): **Aesthetic Public Reasons: Art and Civil Disobedience**

From Pussy Riot’s punk prayer and illegally erected counter-memorials on Monument Avenue in Richmond, Virginia to the Occupy movement’s encampments and disability activists’ dramatic crawl up the US capitol’s steps, a number of participatory and socially engaged artworks and political interventions do part of their work as public protest aesthetically. While every act of civil disobedience has an aesthetic component—there is a particular way that a voice sounds as it disrupts a senate hearing, a particular way a body looks during a sit-in or a hunger strike--only certain acts of civil disobedience make the aesthetic component an essential part of their message. In an act of *aesthetic civil disobedience*, I argue, the aesthetic structure of the performance is crucial to the act’s *public deliberative* function. The act’s aesthetic structure does not simply amplify or accompany the public message; rather, it is woven into the very fabric of that message. In this, acts of aesthetic civil disobedience can be contrasted both with non-aesthetic but socially engaged art (such as Tania Bruguera’s *Immigrant Movement International*) as well as acts of ordinary civil disobedience which, even if visually arresting (e.g., self-immolation or hunger strikes) do not aesthetically exemplify their meaning.

After establishing a working definition of aesthetic civil disobedience, I explore two questions (two worries, really):

1. What makes an act of aesthetic civil disobedience distinctively aesthetic?

2. How can an aesthetic component of an act of civil disobedience can play a role in *public reason*?

I briefly explore two answers to 1.—one from Jacques Rancière and one from Martha Nussbaum. While Rancière’s account of the redistribution of the sensible is a compelling account of the role the aesthetic can play in deliberation, it paints with too broad of a brush and doesn’t allow us to discriminate between a variety of aesthetic experiences that I argue are importantly distinct. More important, Rancière’s account of aesthetics and politics leaves no room for *justification*. Nussbaum’s account, while maintaining a strong connection to political justification, is far too narrow in its focus on art’s role in expressing emotion. Emotional expression, while important to some works of aesthetic civil disobedience, is not central to many others.

It might be tempting to short circuit question 2. by simply abandoning public reason in favor of, for example, Chantal Mouffe’s agonistic account of democratic will-formation. One might even argue that it is precisely the prominent aesthetic component in recent protests that serves as evidence against an account of those protests as acts of public reason. Although this move to discount aesthetic public *reasons* in favor of *agonistics* is tempting—especially given the paucity of attention given to aesthetics by deliberative democrats—I argue that it is too quick and, even when fleshed out, gives up too much, both aesthetics and in politics. Acknowledging a prominent role of aesthetic protest in politics need not undermine deliberative democracy’s commitment to public reason.

Jan Bíba (Charles University Prague): **From a failed candid event to the ethics of democratic spectatorship**

On the 13th of May 2017 during his meeting with Vladimir Putin the Czech president Miloš Zeman was surreptitiously recorded saying to Putin: “There are too many journalists. It is necessary to liquidate them.” Vladimir Putin, perhaps abhorred by the audacity of Zeman’s proposal, replied: “It is not necessary to liquidate them, it is enough to limit them.” I believe that in Jeffrey Green’s parlance it is possible to claim that this was a paradigmatic example of a candid event, but it was also a candid event that failed. Not only was Miloš Zeman despite this and many other scandals re-elected but a couple of weeks later he boasted with a model of a Kalashnikov rifle with a logo “Against Journalists” that he was presented by grateful citizens.

The paper suggests that the reason why the above-mentioned (candid) event failed also reveals an important drawback in Green’s notion of democratic spectatorship. Green’s position has been met with many objections. Its critics pointed to Green’s problematic use of theatrical metaphor and suggested that Green has resigned vis-à-vis liberal-democratic malaises, and that the defensiveness of his position betrays some key democratic values like autonomy, celebrating passivity instead. Many also objected Green’s elitism and naïve belief in the ability of mass media to provide moments of “candour”. (See e.g. Dobson 2014; Urbinati 2014; Fitzgerald 2015 a & b; Avramenko – Schwartzberg (eds.) 2014; Ryan – Flinders 2017; Hammer – Kajewski (eds.) 2017) However, it seems that none of these objections applies for the present case: the footage was presented by mass- and social media on a large scale not only in the Czech Republic, we are also witnessing an aggrandizement in citizens’ activity driven by an anti-establishment rhetoric and the recent presidential elections in the Czech Republic brought unexpectedly high voter turnout etc.

I believe that the present case points rather to a weak democratic identity of citizen-spectators in question and that Green’s theory of democratic spectatorship is – because of its normative deficit – unable to provide us with better understanding of the relation between spectatorship and formation of democratic identity. The paper claims that Green’s theory of democratic spectatorship is inappropriate mainly for three reasons: firstly, Green ignores the insights of theoreticians of the so- called representative turn, which allows him both to claim that contemporary democracies are non- or post-representative and place democratic spectatorship under the rubric of plebiscitarianism; secondly, building mainly on Bentham-Foucaultian panopticism Green pays no attention to spectators and focuses mainly on the impact of the disciplinary gaze on those who are being watched; thirdly, although he insists that his theory has a potential of bringing the People back to democratic theory as a collective spectator he never thematises horizontal relations among spectators. (Bíba 2017) For all these reasons I agree with Sandey Fitzgerald (2015a & b) that rather than a theory of democratic spectatorship, Green provides a theory of democratic voyeurism intent only on seeing political actors humiliated. This was confirmed in Green’s later writings where he defends “principled vulgarity” against political elites. (Green, 2017)

The paper therefore suggests that better understanding of democratic identity of citizens-spectators is needed. To fill this lacuna, the paper turns to a Cavellian notion of aversive democracy (Cavell 1988, Norval 2007) and claims that both its processual perfectionism and embeddedness in everyday practices of the ordinary provide a better starting point for understanding of the formation of democratic identity of citizen-spectators.

Marcello Ruta (University of Bern): **Gadamer’s Critique of Kant’s Aesthetics and the Aesthetic Dimension of Contemporary Democratic Practices**

The thesis that Kant's aesthetics is also relevant for Kant’s political thought has been directly formulated by Hannah Arendt, and indirectly by eminent Kantian scholars, such as Ernst Cassirer and Alexis Philonenko. In this respect, the second maxim of the *sensus communis*, “to think from the standpoint of everyone else” plays a strategic role, as only through it can aesthetic judgment be based on *public* grounds and therefore demand *general* agreement.

It is interesting, however, to notice that this sort of *political thinking* has, according to Kant, to be *performed*, so to say, in the realm of *possibility* rather than *actuality*: “We compare our judgment not so much with the actual as rather with the merely possible judgments of others, and [thus] put ourselves in the position of everyone else, merely by abstracting from the limitations that [may] happen to attach to our own judging” (*Critique of Judgment*, § 40). This passage is very important in order to evaluate the legitimacy of Gadamer’s reading of Kant. In this specific case, it should be noted that, among the “limitations” which may “happen to attach our own judgment”, there are also the ones relating to the concrete communities in which we live and which influence our taste. *Limitations are also public*. To abstract from all of them leads Kant to assume a position which is, *de facto*, a precursor of the notion of *aesthetic consciousness*, as described (and criticized) by Gadamer: “Since aesthetic consciousness claims to embrace everything of artistic value, it has the character of simultaneity [...] The simultaneity peculiar to it is based on the consciousness of historical relativity of taste. [...] In place of the unity of a taste we now have a mobile sense of quality” (*Truth and Method*, p. 78-79).

Gadamer’s alternative proposal, briefly, consists in the elaboration of the “performative” notion of *play*, where the *public* is not only *viewer*, but “belongs essentially to the playing of the play” (*Truth and Method*, p. 131) and is therefore *transformed* by it. The key notion here is the one of “belonging”, which also attests the necessary *finitude* of our thinking, including of our taste. There is no other way to overcome our private aesthetic limitations than to *take part in actual*, and therefore *historically determined, social cultural practices.*

Gadamer’s *performative* characterisation of aesthetics is, in our view, very significant in order to evaluate the aesthetic dimension of some contemporary democratic practices, contributing to the emergence of communities, which have at the same time an *aesthetic and political identity*, recognising themselves both in their political positions and styles of life. The Kantian idea of *aesthetic human community* seems to have been replaced by a plurality of *aesthetically and politically differentiated communities*, coexisting in the same public space. What remains to be understood, and what exceeds the limits of this intervention, is whether or not this is good news for the very idea of democracy.

Rebecca van der Post (Concordia University): **The Political Potential of Creative Absorption or Engagement**

This paper will consider the potential of creative absorption or engagement – here conceptualised as a vital form of aesthetic experience - to furnish a locus of non-hierarchical, non-instrumentalizing interaction between subject and object, and to destabilize the goal-driven understanding of human freedom and well-being that informs the self-understanding of western market society. Engagement, I argue, is a way to rehabilitate the political dimension of the aesthetic.

Marcuse has argued that, historically, western civilization and its culture have occupied two distinct realms, civilization being the zone of systemic adaptation to the necessary and culture, or the *aesthetic dimension* of human experience*,* being the “Archimedean Point” from which the given is subject to ongoing reappraisal and from which its further historical possibilities can be explored. However, as Marcuse continues, when culture is extruded through the instrumentalizing mechanisms of western civilization, its critical truth and its power to negate are disarmed as the space between culture and civilization collapses. The co-opting of culture by civilization moves culture away from critique and towards validation, and, with the accompanying loss of access to any realm beyond the given, moves society towards totalitarianism.

I propose that the mechanism propelling the collapse of culture into civilization has two components: the first is the conflation of the aesthetic dimension with ‘high culture;’ the second is the conflation of high culture with its own aggregated output. Yet if we turn to creative practice there is an opportunity to analyze aesthetic experience as a mode of doing (and therefore being) rather than as a series of cultural products.

Drawing on my formative experience as a concert violinist to explore the immersive state of being - engagement – that infuses creative practice, I find a possibility for a radical recalibration of our understanding of human agency and the relationship between subject and object. Embedded in our modern self-understanding as autonomous individuals is a conception of agency that presupposes subject/object relations of domination - the very notion of agential action suggesting change in the object in accordance with to the will or intention of the subject. Yet engagement opens us to areas of experience in which this model of agency loses traction and gives way to the operations of a different, collaborative agency as the boundaries between subject and object dissolve and the self and the material world begin to interact as porous extensions of one another. The experience of engagement suggests that the aesthetic *as doing* is ripe with critical and subversive potential which emerges through a non- hierarchic or even anarchic interplay between subject and object and in which freedom is experienced as collaborative submission to the demands and possibilities of the moment.

Noting the extent to which engagement is increasing marginalized within the practice of daily life I consider the possibility that in our own market society the creative processes essential to human well-being are colonized by the economic demands of a higher culture that mistakes itself for its own products. Where engagement is a victim, I find that it might also be an antidote.