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A Tree, a Roof, a Tent: Spatial Models for a New Democratic Paradigm

We live in a moment with perpetual references to profound democratic crisis. In the last two hundred years, democracy has been reduced to mean voting in free and fair elections. Yet, this is a relatively recent marrying of terms and concepts. For centuries, elections were considered a form of oligarchy, meaning rule by the few, and the true definition of democracy as people's power was originally associated with open participation and representation by lot. As the Ancient Greek democrats and others knew, elections are oligarchic in essence, distributing power unequally and leading to domination by a socioeconomic elite. One major downside of oligarchy is that it fails to tap the collective wisdom distributed in the entire population.

The crisis we have today is not a crisis of democracy, but a crisis of elected oligarchy. Our current governance institutions fail to reflect society's diversity, tearing people apart, and concentrating power in the hands of a few. In a context of multiple crises and climate emergency, they do not allow us to adequately weigh trade-offs and make difficult decisions, or to consider nature, the planet, and future generations. They are anchored in the short-termism of elections and the inward-looking logic of political parties. These perverse incentives are preventing action, exacerbating polarization, and fueling distrust.

Recognizing that the governance systems we are calling "democratic" are in fact elected oligarchies opens a path to building and transitioning to genuinely democratic institutions—to a new democratic paradigm of participation, representation by lot, and deliberation. The ideas of democracy as deliberation and democracy entailing equal rights and power, are widespread and at the heart of democratic practices in indigenous communities and many non-Western cultures as well. As Jay Griffiths writes in *Wild*, "accepting that there are different ways of knowing, different ways of speaking, is the beginning of democracy."¹ In this essay, we reflect on how our current spaces for democracy reflect that the institutions were in fact established with an oligarchic intention, and how new spaces for an alternative democratic paradigm could draw inspiration from historical and contemporary spaces that reflect genuinely democratic principles of openness, participation, and deliberation.

PARLIAMENTS AS REFLECTIONS OF AN OLIGARCHIC ELECTORAL PARADIGM

The pervasiveness of our current democratic model is visible in the way that power is spatially represented. In 2014, the Austrian pavilion at the Venice Biennale investigated the architecture of parliaments as places of power. The exhibition analyzed 196 national parliaments all over the world, most of which—regardless of their age, location, or the regime they represent—flaunt a

neoclassical style. “The survey shows how consistently the shell of almost every parliament in the world retells this story—a story which is Eurocentric in its content,” writes curator Christian Kühn: “The predominance of neoclassicism to this day is all the more surprising given that only just over 30 of the 196 national assemblies we studied gather in buildings erected before 1914. Another 20 date from the years 1915 to 1949, and the remaining 143 from the period thereafter.”

What is even more astonishing about this “monumental-neoclassical choir of world parliaments,” Kühn continues, is the fact that the majority don’t even come close to actually living what can be described as a democracy from a Western perspective. “The fact that [the shell of] North Korea’s parliament seems like a copy of its Finnish counterpart is surprising. How much hierarchy, how much authoritarian structure,” Kühn asks, “is inherently built into the parliament of an almost flawless democracy so that one of the most authoritarian states in the world could use it as a model for its own house of the people?”²

Let us take a look inside. *Parliament*, a 2016 book and website compiled by the Dutch architecture practice XML, investigates the general assembly halls of the parliaments of all 193 UN member states. Finland, which introduced a new constitution in 2000 bestowing considerable power to the parliament, features a semicircle like most European democracies. In contrast, North Korea’s main assembly hall is organized in what the authors call “the classroom”: “Here, members of parliament are seated behind each other in long consecutive rows, directed toward a single speaker who stands in front. The typology is particularly common in non-democratic regimes, China, Cuba, North Korea and Russia’s parliaments are all structured like classrooms... Ironically, the scale of the assembly hall seems to be inversely proportional to the country’s rank on the Democracy Index. Parliaments in the least democratic countries convene in the largest halls.”³ Finland’s parliament consists of 200 members. North Korea’s of 687.

But why temples to begin with? Why columns and pediments, white marble, and golden frescoes? Why has this become the “preferred and default style” for so many public buildings all around the world, so much so that the Trump administration even made it a US law, the Executive Order on Promoting Beautiful Federal Civic Architecture, signed in December 2020?⁴ Sure, the style alludes to the architecture of “democratic Athens and republican Rome,” as the Trump order says. The American and French Revolutions with all their social, moral, and political change needed an expression distinctly different from the previously dominant rococo and colonial styles which stood for absolutism and imperial power. But, as mentioned above, Kim Jong-II had a taste for neoclassical architecture too, and so did other authoritarian leaders,

such as Hitler, Stalin, and Mussolini, who all sought “to connect the grandeur of the Roman empire to their own power.”⁵

Historians assure us that temples were often used beyond their core function. The Roman Senate, for example, convened in temples, among other places.⁶ Yet even if we acknowledge this multipurpose functionality, it is not their most genuine intention, and we cannot help but wonder why, of all possible archetypes, the founding fathers of what we consider modern democracy housed their representative assemblies in architecture modeled after something so inherently undemocratic as a temple: built to praise one or a few gods and fully accessible to only a few privileged individuals—the priests who served the deities and acted on behalf of the faithful many. Sacrificial offerings as well as other rituals and cult practices were held at an altar outside of the temple, within a wider precinct. The temple building itself housed cult images, votive offerings, and shrines. Otherwise, with few exceptions, it remained empty and silent.⁷

What a misunderstanding.

Or maybe not. “What we today call democracy,” writes Hannah Arendt in her analysis *On Revolution*, “is a form of government where the few rule, at least supposedly, in the interest of the many. This government is democratic in that popular welfare and private happiness are its chief goals; but it can be called oligarchic in the sense that public happiness and public freedom have again become the privilege of the few.”⁸ This (mis)representation is not the result of an unfortunate development over time, but was consciously built into the system from the beginning. “Contemporary democratic governments have evolved from a political system that was conceived by its founders as opposed to democracy,” says French political scientist Bernard Manin: “Representative government was instituted in full awareness that elected representatives would and should be distinguished citizens, socially different from those who elected them.”⁹ From this perspective, the parliament-temple makes perfect sense, whatever the gods we all pray to may be.

As Manin highlights, the word “democracy” was never used to describe the institutions established at the turn of both revolutions, which have since been replicated and modeled to some extent across the globe. It was “representative government.” Only much later, as suffrage was expanded, did the term morph into “representative democracy.” Democracy was essentially enshrined as elections in the 1948 UN Universal Declaration on Human Rights. Today, we now often call this system “democracy” tout court.

Of course, fairly done, this kind of representation was and is an improvement on some of the alternatives: absolute monarchs, religious or ideological monopolies on power, or tyrannical dictatorships. But just because something is more democratic

does not make it our ideal democracy. In the moment of profound crisis in which we are living today, with so many people feeling disillusioned with the system, feeling powerless to truly shape the decisions affecting their lives, we need to question what have become our assumptions. What if elections were not the heart of democracy? What if we shifted political and legislative power to everyday people? What if we reintroduced the democratic practice of selecting assemblies by lot instead of election?

THE “DELIBERATIVE WAVE” IS GROWING, AND DELIBERATIVE INSTITUTIONS ARE BEING ESTABLISHED

Since the 1980s, a wave of such citizens’ assemblies has been building, gaining momentum since 2010. Over the past four decades, hundreds of thousands of people around the world have received invitations from heads of state, ministers, mayors, and other public authorities to serve as members of around six hundred citizens’ assemblies and other deliberative processes to inform policy making. In these assemblies, everyday people selected by lottery have proven time and time again that we are able to come together across diversity, grapple with complexity, listen to one another, and to decide together. Important decisions have been shaped by everyday people about ten-year, \$5 billion strategic plans, thirty-year infrastructure-investment strategies, tackling online hate speech and harassment, taking preventative action against increased flood risks, improving air quality, reducing greenhouse gas emissions, and many other issues.¹⁰

As governance systems are failing to address some of society’s most pressing issues, and trust between citizens and government is faltering, these new institutions embody the potential of democratic renewal. They create the democratic spaces for everyday people to grapple with the complexity of policy issues, listen to one another, and find common ground. In so doing, they create the conditions to overcome polarization and strengthen societal cohesion. They bring out the collective intelligence of society—the principle that many diverse people will come to better decisions than more homogeneous groups.

Research also shows that being a member of a deliberative body strengthens people’s agency. It creates a collective consciousness and allows us to harness our collective capacity. Moreover, deliberative institutions strengthen democracy by extending the privilege of representation to a much larger and more diverse group of people, allowing them to play an important role in shaping decisions affecting people’s lives.

In addition to the wave of one-off initiatives, permanent citizens’ assemblies already exist. The world’s first citizens’ council with people selected by lottery was institutionalized in Ostbelgien,

the German-Speaking Community of Belgium, in 2019. It was a demand that came from the presidents of parliament and government, who wanted to ensure that democratic institutions are evolving, and wanted to embed the positive aspects of citizens’ assemblies on an ongoing basis. The Ostbelgien parliament voted unanimously—across party lines—to establish the legal mandate for what is effectively their second chamber of citizens’ parliament.

While Ostbelgien is a small laboratory of eighty thousand people, the Vice Mayor for Participation in the city of Paris—one of the largest economies in the world—was inspired by Ostbelgien’s example and wanted the same for the French capital. The permanent Paris Citizens’ Assembly has been in operation since December 2020. In November 2022, a permanent Citizens’ Assembly for Climate was announced in the region of Brussels, beginning its



Figs. 1–2 Citizens’ Assembly in Dublin, 2022.

work in early 2023. Interest in establishing permanent citizens' assemblies is also growing, as new initiatives in more places are underway. The OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) has identified that there are already eight ways in which deliberative democracy has been institutionalized.¹¹

This growing list of new deliberative democratic institutions highlights the real need to reflect on designing new spaces—or adapting existing ones—to reflect their principles of open participation and deliberation. The architecture of most parliaments, as discussed earlier in this essay, highlights that those spaces are often designed for debate rather than deliberation. Most citizens' assemblies today are being held in other public or private spaces such as libraries, museums, hotel conference rooms, or elsewhere, since there is a real lack of spaces in official government buildings that are adapted for small group conversations and consensus building. If permanent deliberative assemblies are to be taken seriously and to hold real power and influence on public decision-making, then there is a need to have dedicated spaces that are designed for them that are adaptable, inclusive, and deliberative in nature.

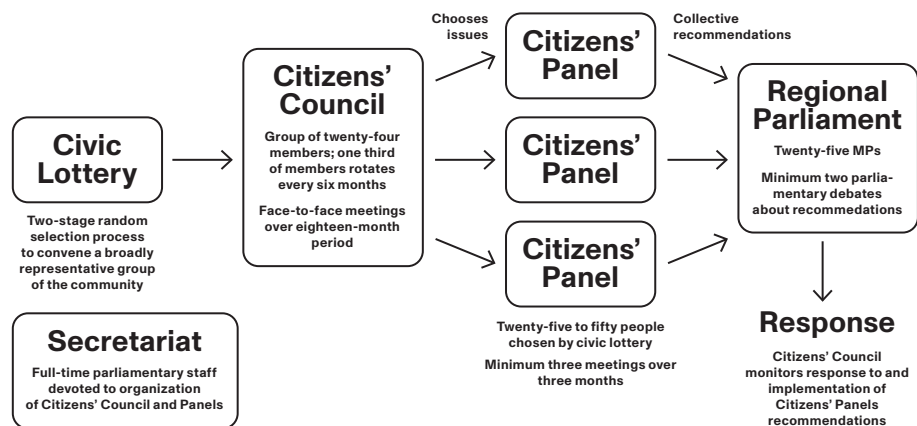


Fig. 3 The Ostbelgien Model: an ongoing citizens' council combined with ad-hoc citizens' assemblies.

DESIGNING DELIBERATIVE DEMOCRATIC SPACES

If the neoclassical monument is the architectural equivalent of democracy as we have known it in the past two hundred years, what would it be for a contemporary deliberative democracy? There have been deliberative citizens' assemblies throughout history and all over the world. Yet their physical expression or, in the case of historical artifacts, remnants, do not provide much concrete information about how architecture may have conveyed values such as equality, transparency, or an open culture of discussion. The Pnyx, for example, is a hill in central Athens and it is where, from around 500 to 300 BC, the people of Athens gathered for their citizens' assemblies, the ecclesia. An impressive number of six thousand

free males¹²—citizenship was out of reach for women, foreigners, minors, and slaves—came together in a large, semicircle, open-air auditorium, deliberating and deciding on laws and other important matters of the city-state. They were all educated for these civic duties, amongst others by training their rhetorical skills. Once the assembly was formally opened by the heald asking, “Who will address the assemblymen?” any member of the ecclesia was allowed to step onto the speaker's platform, the bema, and exercise his equal right to speak in public. Later, two covered galleries were added to protect dignitaries from sun or rain.¹³

The architecture of the Pnyx must have been impressive. During three construction phases, the size of the auditorium grew from a half acre to one acre.¹⁴ We certainly have historical evidence of speech and counter-speech at such large gatherings, and yet it is more likely that the ecclesia's main function was resolution, while debate was (mostly) a performative act.¹⁵ The real deliberation and negotiation happened elsewhere. In fact, it was the so-called Council of Five Hundred (the Boule), a legal body of five hundred citizens selected by sortition, who prepared the agenda for the ecclesia and ultimately ran Athens's affairs.¹⁶ Serving a one-year term, the members met at the bouleuterion, an almost square building located close to the main marketplace (agora) and appointed with wooden benches arranged in rows along the walls. Later, a new bouleuterion was constructed that featured a theater-like system of twelve levels of semicircular benches¹⁷—very much like what we see in many parliaments today.



Fig. 4 A model of the Pnyx assembly area after its third and final reconstruction, ca. 340 BC, on display at the Museum of the Ancient Agora (Stoa of Attalos), Athens, Greece.

The semicircled auditorium and the speaker's plinth, sized for six thousand, five hundred, or, as in the case of today's Finnish parliament, two hundred people, are common features across time and place. The key difference between now and then is not so much in the architecture, but in *who* gets to be in the architecture: any citizen. Today, the only spaces open to any citizen are public spaces—town squares, markets, parks, beaches and, to a more limited extent, also infrastructure including public libraries, sports stadiums, train stations, and airports. Spaces, in other words, that are permeable, temporary, and ever-changing, adaptable and receptive, diverse and relative in character, informal rather than prescriptive, ephemeral rather than monumental. They are defined by movement and transition, by social interaction and activity. They are many different things all at once, all openly laid out. They are non-objects.

The Japanese architect Kengo Kuma pursues similar goals in his work. "The subject and space must be connected once more," he writes in his book *Anti-object: The Dissolution and Disintegration of Architecture*. "To that end, the object must be stripped of its privileged status,... architecture must be stripped of [its] privileged status; everything must be reduced and restored to a state of wilderness."¹⁸ And quite beautifully, some pages later, he goes on: "If we want to design a wilderness we must design space as if we were composing music; we must cast ourselves in time and extract sounds from the particles of the wilderness."¹⁹

Kuma's anti-objects resonate a lot with what we mean by non-objects. Yet, he has a different focus. In the preface Kuma says, "I am opposed to the presence and atmosphere of certain works of architecture that I have chosen to call objects... To be precise, an object is a form of material existence distinct from its immediate environment."²⁰ So in a variety of subtle and beautiful ways, Kuma sets out to make architecture melt into its surroundings, "leading us to an aesthetics of disappearance, rather than image or form," as Brett Steele, Director of London's Architectural Association, and now Dean of the UCLA School of the Arts and Architecture, writes in the introduction.²¹ In contrast, we are interested in architecture that provokes and shapes specific social engagement and activity, or vice versa. How do people communicate with each other in a built environment, what novel ways of interacting do they come up with once they meet limitations, and what does that mean for architecture?

SPACE SHAPES BEHAVIOR

Protest movements are interesting laboratories in this regard. "Bring tent," read a poster by *Adbusters* magazine calling to "#occupywallstreet September 17th" (of 2011). And although the former were initially banned, up to 250 people turned New York's

Zuccotti Park into a protest camp for the coming two months, with medical, sanitation, food, and media areas as well as a general assembly.²² Protesters—many more than the 250 who stayed overnight—gathered up to twice a day to deliberate and decide on the movement's next actions. With amplification equipment being banned by the authorities, the speakers made themselves heard by means of "human microphones"—listeners repeating the speaker's words until they reached those at the furthest limit of earshot. In response protesters devised a system of hand symbols. Want to talk? Raise your hand. Agree? Raise both hands. Disagree? Fingers downward.²³

Before reaching Zuccotti Park, general assemblies had been key to decision-making in the protest movements at Cairo's Tahrir Square as well as Barcelona's Plaza de Catalunya, and they would be so in Istanbul's Gezi Park and Hong Kong's Umbrella Movement. Skeptical in the beginning, New York's occupiers and their observers soon developed a fondness for the deliberation process. "The anarchists' way of operating was changing our very idea of what politics could be in the first place," wrote cooperative-governance expert Nathan Schneider in *The Nation*. "This was exhilarating. Some occupiers told me they wanted to take it home with them, to organize assemblies in their own communities. It's no accident, therefore, that when occupations spread around the country, the horizontal assemblies spread too."²⁴

It is no accident that the architecture surrounding the Occupy assemblies consisted of tents. "With the capacity to appear and disappear suddenly, [tent architecture] is ephemeral. Its constituent parts are also collapsible, organically facilitating compromise and resurrection," says Gregory Cowan, an architecture researcher and scholar at the University of Westminster. Specifying on the twenty-eight-year tradition of the Aboriginal Tent Embassy in Australia, he goes on, "The ephemeral and complex folds and spaces of the... Embassy provide a useful and critical aesthetic contrast with the massive and monolithic white [federal] architecture of a colonial society."²⁵

This is not to suggest tents, or open-air spaces, as architectural prototypes for deliberative parliaments. Rather, it is meant as a reminder that space does shape people's behavior. Therefore, we can choose to build architecture that enhances deliberation and respectful communication rather than manifesting current political power relations and modes of conversation. A *togu na*, for instance, can be found in any Dogon village in Mali or Burkina Faso, West Africa. Functioning as a place where the male elders of the community gather for debate and some shade, it is a structure open to all four sides with a hefty thatched roof and often delicately-carved-stone or wood pillars. In many cases, the ceiling is too low for a person to stand upright, which forces people to stay put,

even if discussions about village affairs get heated.²⁶ Who knows how many times this architectural feature has helped to cool down a hot temper before things got out of hand. It is tempting to take it as a hint for a different culture of communication—and architectural intention—than, say, the benches at the UK’s House of Commons, which face each other, literally, “at sword’s length.”²⁷



Fig. 5 Togu na in a Dogon village, Mali.

The togu na is also what inspired Pritzker Prize laureate Francis Kéré’s 2019 “Xylem” pavilion at the Tippet Rise Art Center in Fishtail, Montana.²⁸ Being a native of Burkina Faso, Kéré has often publicly regretted the fact that contemporary African architecture so rarely draws from the continent’s own nature and culture, instead copying Western styles.²⁹ With “Xylem,” he turns the tables and brings a West African archetype to the US. Named after a tree’s main transportation system for water and nutrients, the visitors’ pavilion borrows the togu na’s open structure, cushions, and hefty roof. And it seems to insinuate that appreciative communication—or palaver, as West Africans call it—is just as vital for society as water and nutrients are for trees.

DESIGNING OPEN AND DELIBERATIVE SPACES FOR A NEW DEMOCRATIC PARADIGM

The West African tradition of meeting under a tree—referred to as a palaver tree—make consensual decisions in the interest of a community represents another fertile starting point from which to rethink the design of spaces where an alternative democratic paradigm can be enacted. It was the palaver tree that provided Kéré with the inspiration and formal reference for a larger-scale building and the center of Benin’s political power, the National Assembly, under development since 2019 and currently under con-

struction in Porto-Novo. The shape of the tree as a gathering space is used as the formal starting point of the building, which looks radically different from any other national assembly in the world. Featuring an elevated canopy as the “crown,” a large hollow “trunk” provides access to the different levels of the building, while creating a central, cross-ventilated courtyard that allows passage. While the main assembly hall on the ground floor is still designed as a classical semicircle, the National Assembly of Benin manages to connect typologies and traditions of decision-making stemming from different paradigms. Additionally, Kéré’s project features a large public park surrounding the National Assembly. Connecting both is a vast shaded space that seeks to encourage gathering and deliberation for all citizens, in what Kéré describes is an effort “analogous to the assembly hall on the opposite side.”³⁰

While architects showcase, at times, a worrying tendency to overprogram spaces and predefine what activities should take place where, the openness with which Kéré has designed the adjacent spaces of the National Academy of Benin echoes a kind of spatial freedom that is also present in the expansive spaces of the Rolex Learning Center, developed by Japanese architects Kazuyo Sejima and Ryue Nishizawa (SANAA) for the Swiss university École Polytechnique Fédérale de Lausanne (EPFL). Inserted in the university campus, a sprawling set of buildings that slopes down a gentle hill to reach the shores of Lake Geneva and overlooks the imposing, snow-capped mountains of the Swiss Alps, the center is ostensibly a library, but its design creates possibilities for open-ended uses, flexible gatherings, and diverse ways to meet. “The concept of the building was to make one very big room, where people and programs can meet together to have better communication,” said Nishizawa in 2010 to *The Architectural Review*, thus overturning Le Corbusier’s dictum of a strict separation of space according to its function. “There are no walls to divide, so any program can meet anywhere. It is more like a park.”³¹ The building’s impressive thin-shelled concrete canopy defines different heights for larger spaces—such as the auditorium, restaurant, and the library—with lower heights for passages, open areas inside or outside, and nooks and crannies that prompt smaller or larger social gatherings as well as moments of individual solace. The real feat of this ensemble is the way in which the students and visitors to the center can appropriate the space and use it in different ways, which, even if in this case is not done with political deliberation in mind, certainly speaks of a different understanding of what a gathering space can and should be.

The open-endedness of vast spaces, and the creation of possibilities for their use by those who come together in them, is a recurrent feature of SANAA’s work. In her role as the artistic director of the 12th International Architecture Exhibition—Venice

Biennale in 2010, Kazuyo Sejima also tested the limits and possibilities of space. In this vein, the Biennale was aptly titled “People Meet in Architecture.” In her statement of intentions, Sejima was clear about the ambition behind her endeavor. Perhaps unsurprisingly, hers was a biennial of dematerialization, where surfaces and walls mattered less than sound, atmospheres, and light. The Rolex Learning Center opened the exhibition at the Corderie dell’Arsenale, featured in a movie by German filmmaker Wim Wenders. Other works included *Forty Part Motet* by Canadian artist Janet Cardiff—a sound installation composed of forty speakers, each projecting the voice of a choir member singing Renaissance composer Thomas Tallis’s *Spem in alium* motet—and *Cloudscapes* by Tetsuo Kondo Architects and engineering firm Transsolar. It comprised a ramp that ascended to the height of the Corderie, providing the experience of traversing a cloud, with changing temperature and humidity, breaking conventions and barriers of what space could be. Most importantly, these installations came alive and fulfilled their potential when visitors swarmed them—when people *met* in architecture.

Although Sejima’s biennale was apolitical at times, the embodied experience of visiting and traversing these installations was a powerful reminder of how, when architecture holds back—or is held back—it is actually people who make space. So, how much can architecture hold back to allow people to make space, space that people can use for learning, gathering, exchanging knowledge, deliberating? An exercise in restraint can be found in the public program of documenta 14 that took place in Kassel 2017. Here, the program “Under the Mango Tree—Sites of Learning,” convened by the diverse team of artists, educators, and curators, including Simranpreet Anand, Sepake Angiama, Clare Butcher, Candice Hopkins, Anton Kats, and Sabiha Keyif, who brought together ten different artist-led initiatives, schools, libraries, and project spaces from various parts of the globe. The program extended across several days and sought to investigate forms of collective learning and unlearning, by focusing on indigenous knowledges, oral histories, and nonhierarchical modes of exchange. Throughout, the focus was on the “essentiality of what it means to be with, to be in communion with one another,” taking inspiration from the writings and work of Brazilian educator and activist Paulo Freire, and with the ultimate goal of learning from each other, connecting and “grafting” knowledges together in search of extending “new branches for the future.”³² If this is sounding very much like an exercise in deliberation, it is not a coincidence at all.

“Under the Mango Tree” chose to focus only on the encounters between participants, appropriating existing structures for basic shelter needs and a nomadic, fluid structure. Could we draw inspiration from this and imagine a mobile, flexible structure

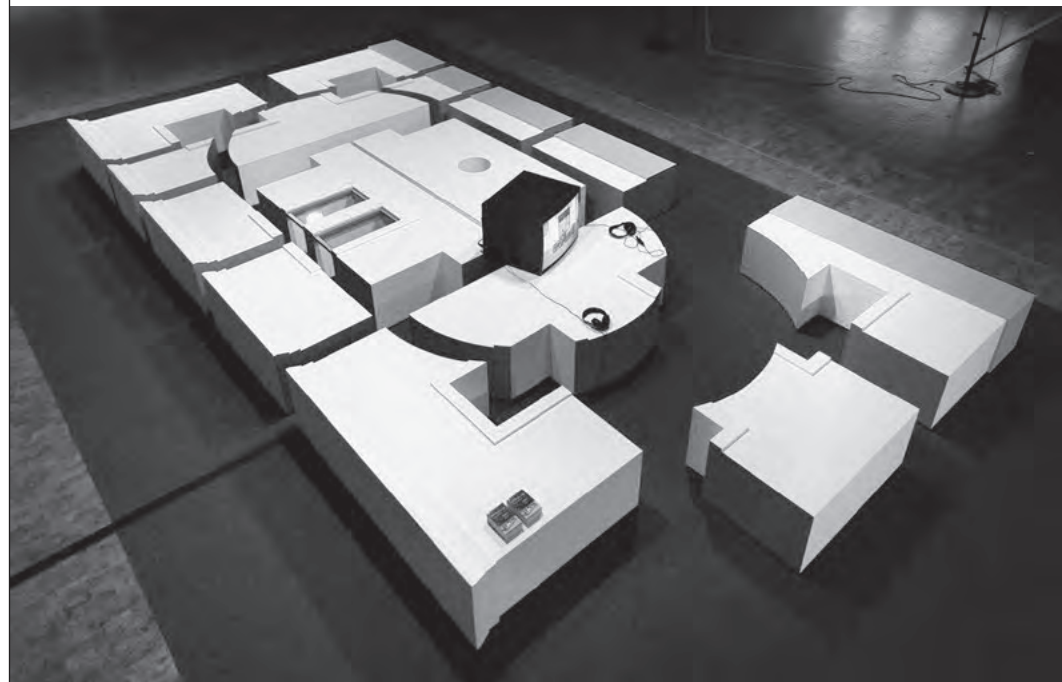


Fig. 6 DAAR, *Ente di Decolonizzazione (Entity of Decolonization)*. Installation view at Akademie der Künste, Berlin Biennale 2022.



Fig. 7 DAAR, *Ente di Decolonizzazione (Entity of Decolonization)*. Activation through a decolonial assembly, Napoli, May 2022.

that can serve the needs of deliberation? A recent project by DAAR (Decolonizing Architecture Art Research)—founded by Sandi Hilal and Alessandro Petti—might offer clues for what this could mean. Titled *Ente di Decolonizzazione (Entity of Decolonization)*, the project seeks to profane and subvert an example of fascist, colonial architecture in Borgo Rizza, Sicily, by taking its facade and turning it into seating elements that host what the artists call



Fig. 8 DAAR, *Ente di Decolonizzazione* (Entity of Decolonization). Activation through a decolonial assembly, Berlin, June 2022.



Fig. 9 DAAR, *Ente di Decolonizzazione* (Entity of Decolonization). Activation through a decolonial assembly, Napoli, May 2022.

“decolonial assemblies.” Presented in Naples (2022), Berlin (2022), and Brussels (2023), the project is activated on every location by hosting several of these assemblies, which always interact with the surrounding context, questioning fascist legacies and their impact today. “Modernist architectures, both in the former colonies and the colonizing countries, have been built as isolated, sacred objects to be admired,” Hilal and Petti state, proposing that it is not enough to reuse these sites. Rather, “they need to be profaned, to be used in active opposition to their original intent and to become open for new common uses, different from that which they were

designed for.”³³ The symbolic gesture of sitting and dismantling an existing paradigm could offer clues for what a deliberative space in a new democratic paradigm could be—starting from an active dismantling of the building typologies associated with electoral democracy that we still revere today, but also allowing for flexibility and reconfiguration according to the needs of each deliberative assembly.

While these recent examples indicate directions in which a spatial model for a new democratic paradigm could develop, they nevertheless build on historical examples of spaces for assembly and deliberation that humans have been inhabiting for thousands of years. From the Pnyx to the *toгу na*, people have been coming together for centuries with some degree of success. Architecture should not only revisit what has been, but also dismantle and dissolve the current spatial typologies associated with the oligarchic systems that we live in today. Part of the transition toward a new democratic paradigm must be enacted in the spatial experience associated with that future—dedicated spaces that are open, flexible, participatory, and deliberative.

1 Jay Griffiths, *Wild* (London: Penguin, 2006), 72.

2 Christian Kühn, “Provisorio / Zur Einleitung,” in *Plenum. Orte der Macht, Um_Bau 27*, ed. Österreichische Gesellschaft für Architektur (Basel: Birkhäuser, 2014), 14.

3 XML, *Parliament* (Amsterdam: XML, 2016), 20.

4 India Block, “Trump Orders New Government Buildings Must Be ‘Beautiful,’” *Dezeen* (online magazine), December 21, 2020. The order was undone by President Joe Biden just weeks later.

5 Kai Gutschow, “Why So Many Architects Are Angered by ‘Making Federal Buildings Beautiful Again,’” *The Conversation* (February 12, 2020), accessed January 13, 2023, <https://theconversation.com/why-so-many-architects-are-angered-by-making-federal-buildings-beautiful-again-131423>.

6 See Bernhard Linke, *Antike Religion* (Munich: Oldenburg Verlag, 2014), 36.

7 See Karl Kerényi, *Antike Religion* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1995), 209–13.

8 Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution* (London: Penguin, 2006 [1963]), 261.

9 Bernard Manin, *Principles of Representative Government* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 94.

10 OECD, *Innovative Citizen Participation and New Democratic Institutions: Catching the Deliberative Wave* (Paris: OECD Publishing, 2020).

11 OECD, *Eight Ways to Institutionalise Deliberative Democracy*, OECD Public Governance Policy Papers 12 (Paris: OECD Publishing, 2021).

12 In later phases, the Pnyx could host up to 13,800 people, although there is “doubt that so many Athenians were ever assembled on the Pnyx.” Mogens Herman Hansen, *The Athenian Ecclesia: A Collection of Articles, 1976–1983*, vol. 1 (Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum Press, 1983), 249.

13 Hansen, *Athenian Ecclesia*, 115–249; J. D. Lewis, “Isegoria at Athens: When Did It Begin?” *Historia: Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte* 20, nos. 2/3 (Spring 1971), 129–40; Teresa M. Bejan, “The Two Clashing Meanings of ‘Free Speech,’” *The Atlantic*, December 2, 2017.

14 Hansen, *Athenian Ecclesia*, 130.

15 See Jochen Bleicken, *Die athenische Demokratie* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 1995), 198–209.

16 Hansen, *Athenian Ecclesia*, 123–30.

17 “Bouleuterion,” *Persus Encyclopedia*, Tufts University Digital Library, accessed January 26, 2023, <http://www.persus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus:text:1999.04.0004:entry=bouleuterion&highlight=bouleuterion>.

18 Kengo Kuma, *Anti-object: The Dissolution and Disintegration of Architecture* (London: AA Publications, 2008), 89.

19 Kuma, *Anti-object*, 115.

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Figs. 1–2
Photos: Maxwell Photography.

Fig. 3
Illustration by DemocracyNext based on a description in OECD, *Eight Ways to Institutionalise Deliberative Democracy* (2021).

Fig. 4
Photo: John S. Y. Lee.

Fig. 5
Photo: Michele Alfieri / Shutterstock.

Figs. 6–9
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