Communicating Academic Knowledge Beyond the Written Academic Text: An Autoethnographic Analysis of the *Mirror Palace of Democracy* Installation Experiment

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The article first discusses five approaches that aim to transcend, complement, or overturn the hegemony of the written academic text. These five approaches are (1) the cluster of science communication, science popularization, and knowledge dissemination; (2) the cluster of knowledge exchange, and participatory, transformative, and interventionist (action) research; (3) multimodal academic communication; (4) the cluster of visual anthropology and visual sociology; and (5) arts-based research. As each approach deals with (overcoming) the hegemony of the written academic text differently, the first part of the article details these approaches. In the second part, the *Mirror Palace of Democracy* installation experiment, which had the explicit objective of moving beyond the written academic text while still remaining in the realm of academic knowledge communication, is autoethnographically analyzed. The experiment allowed reflection on the integrated and iterative nature of academic communication, on the hybrid academic–artistic identity, and on the diversification of publics. Both the theoretical discussion on the five approaches and the *Mirror Palace of Democracy* installation are part of a call for more experimentation with, and theorization of, multimodal and/or arts-based academic communication.

Keywords: academic communication, multimodal scholarship, arts-based research, installation art, democracy, representation, participation, contingency

In academic communication, the written text[2] has achieved a hegemonic position. Apart from being omnipresent in academia and crucial to the performance of academic identity (Ivanič, 1998), we should

keep in mind that academic writing is also a specific genre (Bazerman, 1988, p. 8). This (acknowledgment of the) particularity of academic writing has a series of implications. Crucial is that academic writing cannot absorb and represent all knowledge: "Scientific formulations are a human construction and thus are heir to all the limitations of humanity," as Bazerman (1988, p. 294) writes. This then opens the door for the argument that, as no hegemony is ever total (Mouffe, 2005, p. 18), other forms (or modes) of communicating academic knowledge remain possible and even desirable.[3] The particularity of each mode also produces opportunities for the communication of knowledge, as each particular form has its own affordances (Gibson, 1979; Norman, 1988) and their combination can enrich academia because of, as Literat and associates (2018) wrote about multimodal scholarship, "its potential for more comprehensive and inclusive inquiries, analyses, and representations that can be socially, culturally and politically transformative" (p. 569).

This article reports on a particular experiment,[4] in which the art installation *Mirror Palace of Democracy* (*MPD*) was used to communicate a theoretical reflection on the contingency of democracy in relation to media, representation, and participation. This experiment did not aim to discredit academic writing, but instead investigated the capacity of the (genre of the) art installation to communicate academic knowledge. As an experiment, it was informed by five bodies of literature—some autonomous, others affiliated to particular disciplines—that each in its own way challenges the hegemony of the written academic text. These approaches are briefly discussed in the first part of this article and then summarized in an overview. The second part of this article reports on the autoethnographic analysis of the *MPD* installation experiment. This analysis is structured and supported by three key dimensions that characterize the five approaches, and that have been developed through a series of cross-fertilizing iterations between the literature review and the autoethnographic analysis. The more detailed discussion of these three dimensions—the nature of knowledge production, subject positions, and relations with publics—is thus reserved for the second part of the article.

Beyond these theoretical reflections about the nonwritten academic text and the analysis of the *MPD* experiment, this article is also driven by a warm plea to consider using nonwritten academic texts more in media and communication studies, where it is still rare. Of course, several other academics have argued before in favor of multimodal and/or arts-based research (media and communication) scholarship (see, e.g., McPherson, 2009, in the context of digital humanities). And some practice it.[5] Sometimes, this is done in

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(p. 8). Literat and colleagues (2018) use both "text-based" and "paper-based" academic formats. Here, the concept of the "written text" is considered to be the most appropriate, keeping in mind that the concept of the "text" is defined in a broad sense to "include every form of mediation in language, sound, smell and image" (Lewis, 2008, p. 5).

[3] Of course, written texts also frequently contain other communicative modes (see Elkins, 2007), and also the oral mode is often used, for instance, for conference presentations.

[4] *Experiment* is used here in the common sense meaning, referring to a situation in which I engaged in a (for me) new activity, with the objective of stimulating learning and innovation.

[5] These examples are structured following the five approaches, which are discussed later.

more modest ways, for instance, at TED and TEDx talks[6] or when engaging in knowledge exchange activities (see Freeman, 2016). In other cases, these examples are more structural, as, for instance, the work of the multidisciplinary Collective for Advancing Multimodal Research Arts[7] or scholars at the Communication Studies Department of Concordia University (Chapman & Sawchuk, 2015). Communication and media studies scholars also publish their nonwritten texts in such specialized journals as the *Journal of Video Ethnography*; *Tecmerin: Journal of Audiovisual Essays*; and *Audiovisual Thinking, the Journal of Academic Videos*. Moreover, both the International Communication Association and the International Association for Media and Communication Research have featured exhibitions at some of their recent conferences, the former with the 2017 *Making & Doing* exhibition[8] and the latter with 2018 *Ecomedia Arts Festival*,[9] taking gentle steps toward (the acknowledgment of) nonwritten academic texts. But more could be done in our field at the level of theorizing these practices and deploying them. This text is thus also meant as an informed and informing appetizer.

Academia and the Nonwritten Text

Even if the written text is the hegemonic mode for communicating academic knowledge, there various approaches that challenge these "hegemonic conceptions regarding legitimate modes of scholarly inquiry, analysis and representation" (Literat et al., 2018, p. 566). These aim to transcend, complement, or overturn this hegemony. On the basis of an extensive narrative literature review, I identified five approaches. The first two—the clusters of (1) science communication, science popularization, and knowledge dissemination; and (2) knowledge exchange, and participatory, transformative, and interventionist (action) research—are relatively autonomous. Some have argued (e.g., Trench & Bucchi, 2010) that they are actually (emerging) disciplines in their own right. The three other approaches are more embedded in particular disciplines—namely, writing studies, anthropology, sociology, and the arts— even though they have moved into other disciplinary arenas as well.

The first approach is the cluster of science communication, science popularization, and knowledge dissemination, which not so much tries to provide alternative academic tools for communication, but aims to translate existing academic work (and publications) in other texts that use linguistic repertoires adjusted to a nonacademic readership in order to democratize the reception of academic knowledge. Simultaneously, this approach is concerned with the understanding and awareness of science as a whole (Burns, O'Connor, & Stocklmayer, 2003). Bryant's (2003) definition of *science communication* as "the processes by which the scientific culture and its knowledge become incorporated into the common culture" (p. 357) is illustrative of this focus on the academic field as a whole, even though the examples he mentions in his article—referring to, for instance, the moment when "ABC

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[6] See, for instance, Sonia Livingstone's TEDxExeter talk at
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SyjbDUP1o0g.

[7] https://www.camrapenn.org/

[8] https://tinyurl.com/hl4vrpq. The theme book of the 2017 International Communication Association conference (on interventions) also has one chapter on the exhibition (Henderson, Hogan, Christian, & Erni, 2018).

[9] https://oregon2018.iamcr.org/ecomedia

television was filming a news item" about Bryant's (2003, p. 357) research—are indicative of the importance of the micro level, with communication about the work of individual scholars.

Bryant's (2003) example also indicates the importance of (mass) media within this approach in acting as mediators and communicators, or "knowledge brokers" (see Meyer, 2010). For instance, Kara's (2015, p. 161ff) overview of knowledge dissemination strategies, which have the "ultimate aim" of allowing "your research and its findings to take on a life of their own and be disseminated further by other people and talking and writing about your work" (p. 177) explicitly and extensively addresses the role of mainstream media in combination with blogs, podcasts, and social media (see also Müllerleile, 2014). One of the consequences of this emphasis on the role of external brokers is that the identity of the academic—or, in Laclau and Mouffe's (1985, p. 115) terminology: the academic's subject position(s)—remains articulated in more traditional ways. Moreover, even if the production of nonwritten texts, or differently written texts, is a significant component of this approach, these texts tend to be seen as second-stage or post-ante publications that are proceeded by written academic texts and are then translated into new (and more "accessible") texts for publics that nevertheless remain disconnected from the process of knowledge production itself.

A second approach, which responds to the first and is thus still related to it, is the cluster of knowledge exchange, and participatory, transformative, and interventionist (action) research. Kara (2015) defines *knowledge exchange* as "a more egalitarian approach that implies a two-way process of sharing knowledge among researchers, practitioners, service users and other interested people" (p. 176). Also more interventionist approaches (e.g., participatory action research; see Fals-Borda & Rahman, 1991; Reason & Bradbury, 2001), which have the more explicit objective of impacting particular social realities and contributing to social change, place significant emphasis on knowledge exchange and sharing with the aim of democratizing knowledge production itself.

This more exchange/collaborative/participatory (cluster of) approach(es) becomes significant in the context of this analysis for two reasons, even if they do not always (advocate the) use (of) nonwritten academic texts. First, they are characterized by an altered power balance between academics and nonacademics, which redefines the subject position of the academic, whose voice is no longer seen as privileged. This approach counters the idea that knowledge linearly flows from academia to other fields (Blundell, 2017, p. 308), something that this approach shares with others, for instance, with multivoiced and polyphonic ethnography (Tyler, 1986) and with (some parts) of arts-based research, to which I return later. Here, the emphasis on social change produces more hybrid academic subject positions, for instance, through the integration of academic and activist subject positions (Routledge, 1996, p. 405). Second, the collaborative/participatory dimension necessitates the development and implementation of communicational tools and formats that support these dialogues, enabling for these more dialogical forms of knowledge creation (Matschke, Moskaliuk, & Cress, 2012; H. Mitchell, 2006; Murdock, Shariff, & Wilding, 2013; UNICEF, 2015). Moncaster and colleagues (2010, p. 170), whose article contains a survey on industry knowledge acquisition tools, is one of the few publications in this field that also refers to audiovisual tools (namely, television programs and films). Most of these publications emphasize the importance of communicative tools for knowledge exchange, but often restrict themselves to written texts in combination with oral (informal) communication.

The other three approaches are embedded in particular disciplines, and focus more explicitly on countering the hegemony of the written academic text by providing space for nonwritten texts and for acknowledging the iterative nature of knowledge production. They also share the objective of expanding their disciplinary boundaries, both at the level of their communicative practices and the (potential) publics they (can) reach. The third approach is multimodal academic communication, which is particularly present in the field of composition[10] (situated in the broader field of writing studies), with, for instance, books such as *Multimodal Composition: Resources for Teachers* (Selfe, 2007), *Toward a Composition Made Whole* (Shipka, 2011), *Multimodal Composition* (Lutkewitte, 2013), and *Bridging the Multimodal Gap* (Khadka & Lee, 2019). The conceptual inspiration for this approach comes from multimodal theory, which (obviously) does not explicitly focus on academic communication. *Multimodality*, in this broad sense, refers to "the use of several semiotic modes in the design of a semiotic product or event, together with the particular way in which these modes are combined" (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2001, p. 20), but this broad conceptualization is then deployed to theorize multimodal academic communication.

This multimodal approach explicitly argues, in the words of Murray (2009), that the challenge is "not one of substitution, rather one of addition" (p. 8). She defends the written text "with its sequential structures, disciplinary expectations, and, ultimately, nonaffective tone," but also argues for the need to complement it with what she calls "nondiscursive texts," "with its layers, images, and, without a doubt, pervasive affectivity" (p. 8). Part of the argumentation used by this approach relies on the idea that academic communication has never been, and cannot be, restricted to written texts (Lemke, 1998, p. 87), but at the same time, the multimodal academic communication approach still suggests explicating the importance of nonwritten texts and expanding their use in academic communication, thus also expanding the academic subject position beyond the academic writer. Still, even though the nonwritten text can be "visual, haptic, aural, olfactory, and gustatory" (Murray, 2009, p. 8), in practice, we often find in this approach a strong focus on "texts that incorporate words, images, video, and sound" (Takayoshi & Selfe, 2007, p. 3; see Thorndike-Breeze, Block, & Brown, 2019, for the use of comics) driven and enabled by the affordances of the online.

A fourth approach, which also tackles the hegemony of the written text, can be found in the cluster of visual anthropology and visual sociology, which have a long tradition in expanding their academic communicative practices by articulating written text, photography, and film. But we should also keep in mind that before the label *visual* was combined with anthropology, key anthropologists such as Margaret Mead already integrated photography and written text, grounded in a critique on anthropology as a "discipline of words" (Mead, 1995). One example is Mead's collaboration with Bateson, which resulted in the 1942 book *Balinese Character: A Photographic Analysis* (Bateson & Mead, 1942).[11] When focusing more on visual anthropology, we can find, for instance, in Hockings' (1995) *Principles of Visual*

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[10] Multimodal academic practices are much older and widespread than the label itself, evidenced by the importance of the scientific illustration (see, e.g., Ford, 1992); in the meanwhile, these practices have moved beyond the field of writing studies.

[11] Also, the integration of literary elements in anthropological writing was used and advocated, among others by Geertz. As Barone (2008) summarizes it, Geertz "described and advocated for the storytelling and poetic qualities of ethnography" (p. 107).

Anthropology—originally published in 1975—the record of the importance (and long history) of ethnographic films. Even if Hockings is still careful about the capacity of film to communicate academic knowledge, later work in visual anthropology more clearly acknowledges the use of photography and film for "conveying research results" (Holm, 2008, p. 326), arguing that these communicative modes can "be engaged in the processes through which ethnographic knowledge is created and represented" (Pink, 2004, p. 1). These practices also translated into the establishment of specialized journals, as, for instance, the *Journal of Video Ethnography*, which aims to "advance the social scientific use of video/film as a method for exploring human society, systems, and cultures and as a medium for presenting the findings of those explorations."[12]

Although visual sociology is still more geared toward the analysis of the visual (Holm, 2008, p. 327), a number of authors have argued for using the visual to communicate academic knowledge. In his article "The Scope of Visual Sociology," Grady (1996) argues[13] that the proliferation of new technologies has "created new modes of representing information as well as entirely new media for communicating research findings" (p. 10). Chaplin (1994) makes a similar argument in her book *Sociology and Visual Representation*, critiquing that "we tend to take for granted the pre-eminence of the written text in almost all areas of knowledge, and to regard any accompanying visual material as subsidiary to it" (p. 3). She not only argues that "social analysis is beginning to make more use of visual representation," but also that it "*should* make more use of visual depictions, unconventional typography and page layout in its analysis" (p. 2).

The fifth and last approach discussed here is arts-based research.[14] Arts-based research is more specific than artistic research (Klein, 2017), even though it is related. As Leavy (2015) writes, arts-based research[15] is "*a set of methodological tools used by researchers across the disciplines during all phases of social research, including data generation, analysis, interpretation, and representation*" (p. ix, emphasis in original). Still rooted in academia, it consists of a search for different communicational modes to communicate academic knowledge, or, to use Leavy's words, it "advances critical conversations about the nature of social scientific practice and expands the borders of our methods repository" (p. 11). Leavy's (2015, pp. 11, 19, 294) claim, that arts-based research is an "alternative" paradigm, distinct from the quantitative and qualitative paradigms, might be slightly excessive, but at the same time, it should be acknowledged that the focus on resonance and evocation (Leavy, 2015, p. 294) makes arts-based research particular. Moreover, its emphasis on doing (making) brings in the idea that knowledge is or,

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[12] http://www.videoethno.com/

[13] One concrete genre that Grady (1996, p. 18) suggests is the visual essay. A similar argument could be made about the essay film, which is discussed by Alter (2018, p. 5) as "filmed philosophy."

[14] Arguably, arts-based research could be extended to practice-based research, but this is beyond the scope of this article. Also, different labels for arts-based research have been used. For instance, in Canada the label *research creation* is frequently used (see, e.g., Loveless, 2015).

[15] Arts-based research is not the only intellectual project that aims to integrate more artistic repertoires into academia. For instance, fictocriticism, a (mostly) feminist set of projects, aims to combine fictional writing, theory, and critique (Gibbs, 2003; Haas, 2017). But arts-based research is particularly relevant here because of its shift away from the written text.

expressed more modestly, can be embodied and produced through the creation of the artistic practice itself. To use Cooperman's (2018) more poetic formulation, "Arts-based research is a research of the flesh where our source material originates from the closeness and collaboration of the bodies and voices of one another" (p. 22).

Arts-based research's use of artistic communicational repertoires partially still implies the use of written texts to communicate (academic) knowledge, however. One seminal example is Leavy's (2011) novel *Low-Fat Love*, which uses a fictional format to communicate (interview-based) research about women's relationships with partners and relatives and with their own body. In addition, the wealth of artistic communicational repertoires allows using a variety of very distinct nonwritten communicational tools. Leavy's (2015) overview gives a first idea of the possibilities:

> Representational forms include but are not limited to short stories, novels, experimental writing forms, graphic novels, comics, poems, parables, collages, paintings, drawings, sculpture, 3-D art, quilts and needlework, performance scripts, theatrical performances, dances, films, and songs and musical scores. (p. ix)

There are many examples possible, ranging from ethnodrama and ethnotheater (Saldaña, 2005, 2011), which respectively translate research findings into a dramatic script and generate a live performance on the basis of such a script, to installation art (Lapum, 2018).

The five approaches can be summarized as in Table 1, but it should be immediately noted that this overview is bound to be limited, not only because of the impossibility of doing justice to the complexity of (and contradictions within) each of these five approaches, but also because of the overlap among them. For instance, Kara (2015), who focuses on knowledge dissemination, has an extensive discussion on the use of artistic repertoires for academic dissemination. She lists many examples, many of which could be just as well discussed as examples of arts-based research. One other example is the renaming of the visual anthropology section in *American Anthropologist*. The new name *multimodal anthropology* was motivated by the section editors through the "changes in the media ecologies we engage as anthropologists, changes that have broadened our perspective to include other forms of media practice, while remaining inclusive of visual anthropology" (Collins, Durington, & Gill, 2017, p. 142).

One of the more interesting areas where the overlap becomes very tangible is related to participatory practices. In this article, participatory research has already been discussed as part of the knowledge exchange approach, but some authors writing about arts-based research argue that participation is key to the latter approach as well, emphasizing the opportunities for joint knowledge production: "At the heart of arts-based inquiry is a radical, politically grounded statement about social justice and control over the production and dissemination of knowledge" (Finley, 2008, p. 72). Others consider (visual) arts-based participatory methods, with "research participants creating art that ultimately serves both *as* data, and may also *represent* data" (Leavy, 2015, p. 232) as a subset of arts-based research or consider them as two separate traditions that can be combined (Gutberlet, Jayme de Oliveira, & Tremblay, 2017). In this sense, it is, for instance, remarkable how the photovoice genre/method—"the

combination of participant created photographs and narratives" (Jarldorn, 2019, p. 1)—features in many of the approaches that were discussed here.

Table 1. An Overview of the Five Approaches.

Approach	Objective	Relation to academic discipline(s)	Dominant mode(s)	Relation to public(s)	Subject position(s)	Knowledge production
Science communication, science popularization, and knowledge dissemination	Democratize knowledge reception	Post ante	(Mass) media	Disconnected target group	Traditional academics working with knowledge brokers	Two linear stages
Knowledge exchange, and participatory, transformative, and interventionist (action) research	Democratize knowledge production	In multiple disciplines	Dialogical formats (dominance of oral and written)	Joint knowledge production	Hybridizing academic subject position	Dialogical
Multimodal academic communication	Expand writing	In writing studies (and beyond)	Audiovisual and online	Expanding publics	Postwriting academic subject position	Iterative
Visual anthropology and visual sociology	Expand anthropological writing	In anthropology and sociology	Film and photography	Expanding publics	Postwriting academic subject position	Iterative
Arts-based research	Expand knowledge production and communication	Combining arts with multiple disciplines	Artistic repertoires	Expanding publics	Hybridizing academic subject position	Iterative

The *Mirror Palace of Democracy*

The *MPD* is an art installation (see Bishop, 2005, for a clarification of and critical discussion on installation art) that was part of the Respublika! arts festival, which took place November 4, 2017–January 19, 2018, in Cyprus. Respublika! was curated by me, and organized in collaboration with the arts center NeMe and the Cyprus Community Media Centre. The *MPD* installation was one of the 17 art works in

Respublika!'s Participation Matters exhibition. It was also created by me as a theoretical reflection, but also as an experiment to transcend the written academic text.

The *MPD* was an assemblage,[16] a simultaneous materialization and symbolization[17] of the contingency of democracy as a location of permanent ideological struggle over its own meaning and nature, very much driven by Laclau and Mouffe's (1985) discourse theory. It also was an assemblage that reflected on how different ideologies engage in a political struggle, offering different, sometimes contradictory, points of identification to the citizenry, to whom they are communicated through a variety of media, with their often-strong emphasis on personalization (Bennett, 2012) and the visual (Veneti, Jackson, & Lilleker, 2019). Finally, the *MPD* aimed to communicate how this ideological struggle over the hearts and minds of the citizenry is also an embodied struggle, inscribed on the body politic in always unique ways, but still inescapable.

To communicate this discursive-theoretical model of democracy, the *MPD* used the house-of-mirrors concept, which is a traditional attraction at amusement parks and fun fairs. The house of mirrors consists of a maze, in this case constructed with transparent acrylic panels, nontransparent melamine panels, and mirrors (see Figure 1). The house of mirrors can in itself already be seen as a metaphor for democracy, as it positions visitors in a maze that has not been created by the visitors (delegating power to a creator), but which requires the visitors' actions to function. The mirrors in the installation also show the individuals, but replicate them, producing a visual collectivity—a one-person people. At the same time, the palace's mirrors complicate the notion of representation, creating semiendless reflections, which produce diversity and change. In the house of mirrors, representation is necessarily unstable.

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[16] See Carpentier (2017, p. 4ff), Guattari (1993, p. 14), and DeLanda (2006, p. 12) in addition.

[17] The specificity of an installation as a discursive and material assemblage makes it impossible to fully capture it in this article (or in a film, or in any other mode). Even if this is also the point of this article, it does complicate the visualization of the *MPD* in this article. Also, the specificity of the *MPD* installation at the Respublika! exhibition made it impossible to include a reflection on the hegemony of the written academic text, which affected the visitors' experience.
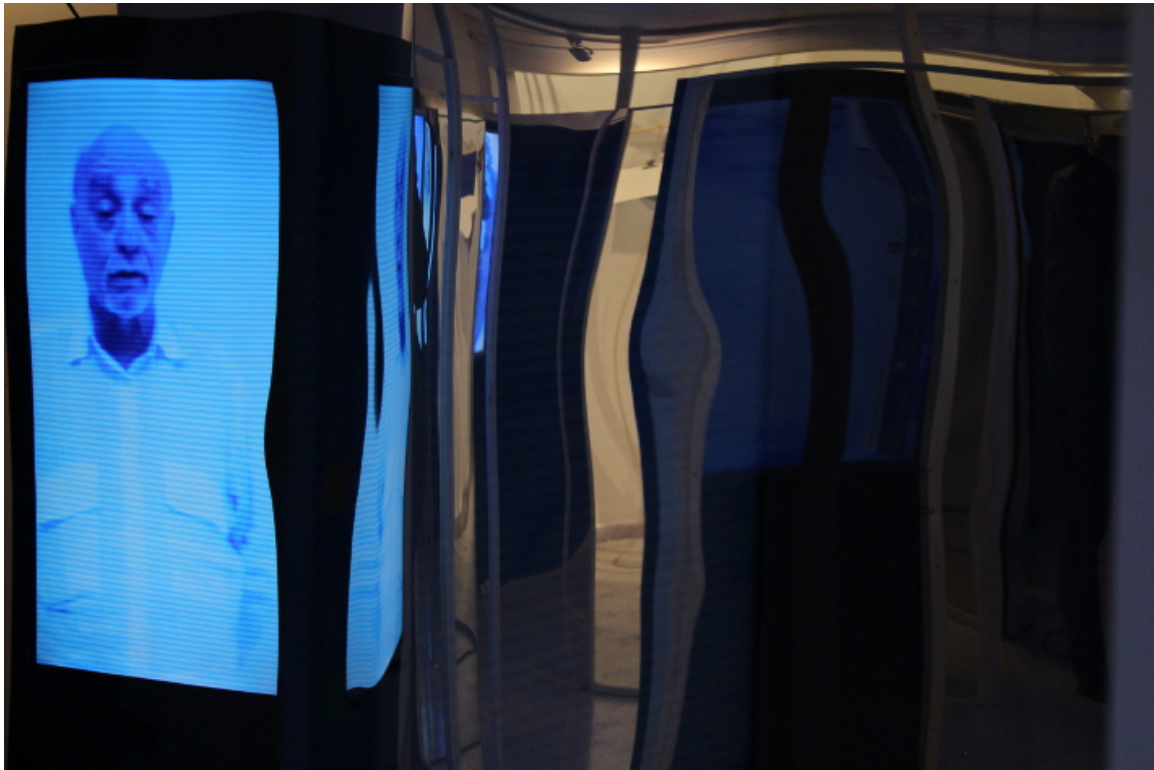
Figure 1. Photo from inside the **Mirror Palace of Democracy** *(photo by author).*

The *MPD* adds a dimension to this play with representation and participation by bringing in five ideological voices that speak on behalf of "the people" and represent the claim that ideologies have on "the people" (see Carpentier, 2019, p. 153, for the transcripts). Each voice—represented by an actor who was rendered on a TV screen, almost as large as life—explicitly speaks on behalf of "the people" through the repetition of the sentence, "I am the people." They invite visitors to identify with their solidarist, liberalist, militarist, authoritarian, and nationalist voices, but the palace also materially embeds (and traps) the visitors within these voices.

At the same time, the five voices and their ideological claims taken together are contradictory, signifying that democracy can (and has to) accommodate for, and is grounded in, diversity. All five voices claim homogeneity and stability, but their juxtaposition simultaneously signifies democracy's heterogeneity and contingency. Moreover, some of the selected ideological projects also signify the limits of democracy and the threats that particular ideologies pose for democracy, incorporating the notion that democracy is never established and realized. All five ideological projects are communicated by a particular individual, resembling a hologram, which are screened in the house of mirrors (see Figure 2). Through this process, they become replicated and performative variations occur, destabilizing them, but also merging them with each other, merging the visitors with them, and merging them with the visitors. Democratic contingency

and the mediated contradictions within democracy become both signified and written onto the bodies of the visitors.[18]

Figure 2. Photo from inside the **Mirror Palace of Democracy** *(photo by author).*

Communicating and Producing Knowledge in/Through the *Mirror Palace of Democracy*

The *MPD*'s experimental nature and the rarity of these kinds of experiments in the field of media and communication studies (and in the field of political theory, for that matter) arguably produce the need to reflect more extensively on the process and outcome of this project. As an experiment, the *MPD* was inspired by the five approaches discussed in the first part of this article, even if the *MPD* is more closely affiliated with the multimodal and arts-based research scholarship[19] approaches and more critical toward the dissemination approach. At the same time, the iterations between the literature review and the *MPD* analysis also allow clarification of some of the key dimensions of these five approaches while using them to structure and support the analytical reflections in this part of the article. Methodologically, an

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[18] This and the two previous paragraphs have been published before, in Carpentier (2019).

[19] This label also incorporates visual anthropology/sociology, as multimodality is now often used in this approach as well. Anthropology/sociology are not explicitly mentioned for brevity's sake.

autoethnographic procedure has been used to ground this reflection. In this type of qualitative research method, "personal experience (*auto*)" is "systematically analyze[d] (*graphy*)" in order to understand "cultural experience (*ethno*)" (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2010, para. 1). In this particular case, the personal embodied but also entextualized experience of constructing the *MPD* provided the foundation for this systemic analysis.

What the experiment first demonstrates is the integrated and iterative nature of the different components of knowledge production, in which the communicative dimension cannot be segregated from the entire process of knowledge production (see Murray, 2009, p. 8). In this context, iterability gains a meaning that is very much in line with its (qualitative) methodological meaning (Aspers & Corte, 2019). This argument has been made before, also in relation to academic writing (see, e.g., Bazerman, 1988), where the written text, as a communicative tool, is seen to impact knowledge and how exactly ideas are articulated, communicated, and remembered. The acknowledgment of the knowledge-generative capacity of communicative tools and the deep implementation of the communication of knowledge in the entire process of knowledge production have not remained restricted to the written text, however (W. Mitchell, 1994); also, the *MPD* demonstrates the deep correlation between knowledge production and its communication.

In their manifesto on multimodality, Wysocki and associates (2019, p. 19) argue that the "practice of making" is not disconnected from "critical activity," or, in the particular case of the *MPD*, that the construction of an installation itself also (iteratively) contributes to theory formation. They write,

> Furthermore, practices of making and critical activity must be rendered mutually supportive. Such a perspective does not privilege one or another paradigm but sees them as two sides of the same coin: analysis informs production; production informs analysis. . . . (p. 19)

Of particular importance here is the generative capacity of the differences among different communicative modes: Gaps of signification open up between them, offering opportunities for reconceptualization and rearticulation (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009, p. 14).

The *MPD* installation, when being conceived and constructed, produced its own dynamics, and in/through its materiality, made almost-autonomous demands to rethink and broaden the theoretical framework. In practice, many operational decisions had to be made when constructing the installation, a process with its own logics and serendipities, and some of them had significant theoretical repercussions. A few examples can illustrate this: First, issues of (visitor) safety became even more an issue when one of the NeMe coordinators had a fairly unpleasant encounter with one of the transparent acrylic panels (thinking it was an exit, which it was not). This spot was then, right before the exhibition opened, marked by a note warning visitors that "running into the walls of democracy can be painful" (see Figure 3). This, in turn, brought in an emphasis on affect that had, until then, been virtually completely lacking in the theoretical framework.
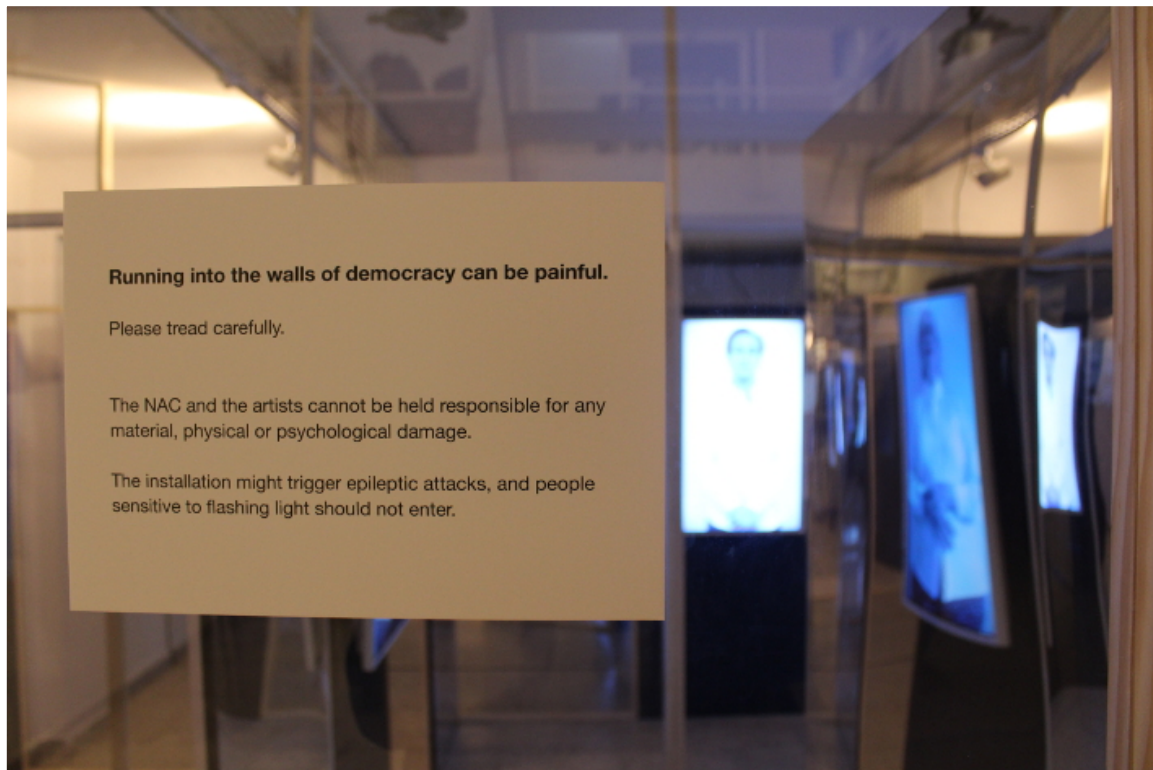
Running into the walls of democracy can be painful.

Please tread carefully.

The NAC and the artists cannot be held responsible for any
material, physical or psychological damage.

The installation might trigger epileptic attacks, and people
sensitive to flashing light should not enter.

Figure 3. The running against the walls sign (photo by author).

But the most significant (and unresolvable) question that came out of the material construction of the *MPD* was the question about the limits of democracy. It was unavoidable for the square-shaped *MPD* to have an outside, produced by its walls and the gallery's walls. It also had to have an entrance and an exit. The physical construction of the mirror palace not only raised the theoretical question about this outside, but also what the exit (theoretically) meant. The installation was constructed in the gallery's basement, allowing for a small spiral staircase to be used as the exit, with its reference to the (upward) vortex metaphor (see Figure 4). Even more compelling was the final stage of the installation, after the exhibition ended, which consisted of the demolishment of the installation. This stage served as a grim reminder that democracy can easily end, and if/when this occurs, it will (most likely) be by the hands of its citizens.

Figure 4. The exit stairs (photo by Sakari Laurila, courtesy NeMe).

Second, the experiment demonstrates the complexity and hybridity of the subject positions that were involved. Cooperman's (2018) writing about arts-based research nicely exemplifies this point: "We choose to risk that identity as part of undoing the systems of power which so neatly construct and produce who and what we are" (pp. 22–23). Creating an assemblage of artistic and academic repertoires, theories of democracy, representation and participation, and material components that included wood, acrylic and melamine panels, mirrors, and TV screens at least complicates the subject position of the academic. The authorship of the *MPD* demonstrates how the subject position of the academic can be articulated with other subject positions, such as the subject position of the artist, affecting both subject positions through the articulatory process, without annulling the subject position of the academic.

Even though both subject positions share elements (e.g., creativity and intuition, as Janesick, 2001, argues), their explicit combination into what Sinner (2014) calls "artademics," for lack of a better term,[20] has a number of implications, which also became apparent through the authorship of the *MPD*. Academic-artistic practices, as the *MPD* made clear, demonstrate that both subject positions can be reconciled, and that they are (thus) not mutually exclusive. It is, in other words, possible to maintain an

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[20] There are alternatives, however. Finley (2008), for instance, refers to "artists as researchers/researchers as artists" (p. 73), which is a bit long to be used here.

identification with an academic subject position, performing systematicity, a sense for precision and abstraction, an ethical positionality and transparency, and dialogical referentiality,[21] in combination with the deployment of artistic repertoires that does not lead to the instrumentalization of the artistic, but instead respects its complex commitment to aesthetics, and the sense of abstraction, ethics, and dialogical referentiality that also characterize the arts, albeit differently. Moreover, these practices demonstrate that this reconciliation is potentially beneficial, allowing for the enrichment of academic and artistic communicative repertoires and for the development of knowledge in general. Third, these practices demonstrate that academia is not the exclusive site of knowledge production, but that many different societal fields, including the arts, also engage in knowledge production, and that the myth of a singular center of knowledge production does not hold. It is, as Finley (2008) writes, "an act of rebellion against the monolithic 'truth' that science is supposed to entail" (p. 73). And finally, the *MPD*, as a form of knowledge communication driven by a hybrid academic-artistic subject position, allowed taking more charge of the communicative process, decreasing the dependency on knowledge brokers that is typical for the traditional knowledge dissemination approach. This renders the academic-artist more autonomous, avoiding what Fahnestock (1986) calls "scientific accommodations."

The previous paragraphs are not aimed to suggest that the reconciliation of these subject positions was easy. In particular, there is the issue of skills that are part of the performance of both subject positions as their absence might disrupt the hybrid subject position of the "artademic." As Capous-Desyllas and Morgaine (2018) write in their preface, "Some proponents of [arts-based research] stress that it is necessary for researchers to develop requisite skills and techniques in the chosen art form so as not to appear amateurish in their endeavors" (p. xii). Finley (2008), for instance, suggests training for those who are not sufficiently familiar with artistic practice. The same argument could be made for the academic component. Other strategies consist of the establishment of collaborative teams (Eisner, 2008), or simply being less demanding, as, for instance, Leavy (2015), suggests: "[Arts-based research] is not art for art's sake. It is a different thing that is artistic, but not *only* artistic" (p. 30). The *MPD* experiment demonstrates that the creation of a support team[22]—two carpenters to build the construction (see Stavros Anastasiou at work in Figure 5); Yiannis Colakides, an arts center coordinator as well as an architect; and Siddharth Chadha, a production assistant who trained as a community filmmaker—combined with the specificity of installation art and with an "artademic" comfortable with and knowledgeable about both this art form and academic research sufficed.

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[21] Defined here as the explicit connection to a body of academic knowledge.

[22] Additional support was provided by the Uppsala Stadsteater in Sweden (with its actors Emil Brulin and Åsa Forsblad Morisse); nonprofessional actors Vaia Doudaki, Gary Gumpert, and Annika Waern; and Respublika! assistant curator Olga Yegorova.

Figure 5. The construction phase, with carpenter Stavros Anastasiou (photo by the author).

Third, the experiment shows the ability of projects such as the *MPD* to reach diversified publics. A considerable part of the literature that deals with the five approaches expresses significant optimism about the ability of the nonwritten academic texts (or differently written texts) to reach different and/or larger publics. For instance, Leavy (2015) writes that "the turn toward artistic forms of representation brings social research to broader and public audiences, mitigating some of the educational and social class biases that have traditionally dictated the beneficiaries of academic scholarship" (p. 292). Literat and associates (2018), writing about multimodal scholarship, use a similar argumentation, even though it is formulated more

carefully. They write that, "by communicating research conclusions in multiple modes and on multiple platforms, scholars can reach beyond traditional academic audiences" (p. 572). Accessibility of the content is, for Literat et al., key in achieving this increased reach, which in turn is said to offer citizens the opportunity to engage more and better with research findings.

An increased and more diversified public reach is not the only argument used in this context, however. As mentioned in the knowledge exchange approach discussion, participation in knowledge production—knowledge sharing—is also articulated as a possible outcome. In their article about multimodal scholarship, Literat and colleagues (2018), for instance, point to the ability to "co-create knowledge with research participants" (p. 568). In some cases, the participatory argument is used in a broader sense as well, in which the possibilities of a recalibration of the power relations between the academic field and other societal fields are mentioned, not only opening up spaces for shared knowledge production, but also opening up opportunities for achieving more diverse interpretations (of knowledge communication), as Leavy (2015) argues, when she writes that "research-produced artworks can democratize meaning-making and decentralize academic researchers as 'the experts'" (p. 26).

The *MPD* experiment partially supports these optimistic voices. The approximately 200 visitors of the Respublika! Participation Matters exhibition were clearly not exclusively academics, as witnessed through on-site observations and informal interviews, combined with an analysis of the entries in the visitors' book. Moreover, the 207 unique views of the *A Visit to the Mirror Palace of Democracy* film on Vimeo[23] and the 1,814 downloads of the Respublika! catalogue[24] are also unlikely to originate from academics only, even if hard data are missing. But at the same time, the art gallery, even when no entrance fee was charged and the gallery was located in the center of a major Cypriot city (Limassol), still creates new exclusions.[25] The use of artistic repertoires opens up spaces for publics who are not employed (or studying in) academic institutions; however, art institutions are not necessarily accessible to all either. Even if this should put a damper on the enthusiasm of some multimodal and arts-based scholarship proponents, we should not forget that the idea of a "general public," lumping together all nonacademics, is an unhelpful myth, and that we should think in terms of a diversity of publics (or target groups) with a diversity of characteristics that can only be imperfectly reached through a diversity of channels.

The *MPD* did not live up to the high expectations when it comes to participatory knowledge production, as we can find in the knowledge exchange approach and in parts of the arts-based research approach. As its creator, I remained firmly in control of the conception and construction process (even though I was assisted by a support group). The *MPD* was much more closely related to interactive art, offering "activated spectators" (Bishop, 2005, p. 102) opportunities to immerse themselves in the art work and physically experience the contingency of democracy, or, in other words, to have an embodied experience of its ideologically cacophonic nature. The art work still needed the body of the visitor to enter the mirror palace and to have the videos inscribed on her/his body. Nevertheless, even if it was

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[23] https://vimeo.com/249194905

[24] Data at the time of writing: September 1, 2019.

[25] For this reason, a number of Respublika! events and performances were located outside the NeMe Arts Centre, but the *MPD* was exhibited in the center.

interactive, it was still a highly structured theoretical text that explicitly shied away from being too open or too "readerly" (Barthes, 1974, p. 4). Even if also "writerly" texts are open to interpretation, rendering the *MPD* too "readerly" might push it outside the realm of academic research communication. This is arguably one of the areas where the celebration of interpretative multiplicity and textual openness (Leavy, 2015, p. 26) needs to be qualified. Still, offering visitors the opportunity to experience democracy's contingency produced affects of satisfaction that I hardly ever experienced as an author of written texts. Moreover, being able to guide visitors through the entire exhibition (as Respublika! curator) and discuss their experiences after exiting the *MPD* was a unique, highly rewarding, and pleasant experience that authors of written academic texts hardly ever encounter.

Conclusion

Both the overview of the five approaches—all in their own way calling for textual diversity when communicating academic knowledge—and the *MPD* experiment can be (and are intended to be) read as invitations for scholars in media and communication studies (and beyond) to complement the use of written academic texts with alternative modes of academic communication. A number of fields have made considerable headway in deploying these still novel modes, and they offer good reasons to at least engage in more experiments with multimodal and arts-based research scholarship, to critically evaluate them and learn from them, and to then consider including these alternative modes in our "regular" communicative repertoires.

This is (obviously) not a call to abandon the written text, which has been proven vital in the century-old history of academic inquiry. The written text has particular affordances that work well with theory formation, argumentation and counterargumentation, referentiality, and more. It is, for instance, a conscious decision to capture the autoethnographic analysis of the *MPD* in a written academic text, making an individual creative experimental experience visible and adding a layer of meaning to the ensemble of reflections by, and on, the *MPD*. Moreover, Jagodzinski and Wallin (2013, p. 21) have described the present conjuncture as characterized by postalphabetization, warning for the consequences of reduced literacies. Arguably, there is a need for increased and accumulated literacies, not for less; from this perspective, there are good reasons to be careful for academics not to contribute to a logic of replacement. In other words, Murray's (2009, p. 8) argument for addition over substitution is more valid than ever.

At the same time, as I have argued, the alternative (artistic) modes of communication do have something to offer that is too promising to ignore at the levels of knowledge production, and its communication, hybrid subject positions, and diversification, interaction, and participation of publics. But here, too, there are reasons for being careful and to avoid the overenthusiastic celebration of these alternative modes of academic communication. Given the complexity of reconfiguring the academic assemblage, doing the identity of work of hybrid subject positions, and acquiring and deploying the necessary extended skill sets, multimodal and art-based research scholarship should remain an invitation and not become a requirement. But, inversely, when academics do engage in these novel practices, there is a need for institutional appreciation and support, which are also still too often lacking (Leavy, 2015, p. 266ff). Even if there is still a long way to go—in particular, in the field of media and communication studies—carefully and critically moving forward, creating a critical mass of academics who are willing to engage in more experiments, will eventually also allow enriching the field.

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