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The Uncertain Architecture of Democracy

According to many critical thinkers of 'the political', uncertainty is at the very basis of democracy – as French theorist Claude Lefort famously put it: “democracy is instituted and sustained by the *dissolution of the markers of certainty*.” But, if uncertainty is the underlying architecture of democracy, what does such an architecture look like? If it is predicated on indeterminacy, how can this architecture (and thus, democracy) ever be actually materialized? This question, at once aesthetic and political, is another way of asking if and how critical theory may lead to *concrete* change, and what role real, material architecture may have in the process.

Although their definitions differ significantly in detail, for both Jacques Rancière and Hannah Arendt 'the political' of democracy is a highly particularized phenomenon, rather than a system of social organization or a concrete 'form' of society. So even though the political is determined by space, it cannot be reduced to it as a measurable, quantifiable object. This, therefore, poses a question for architecture: does architecture, being (always and by definition) the reification of an order, structurally exclude itself from democratic politics? The particularity of forms of architecture, as concrete articulations of ideas of society and/or forms of social organization, presents us with the paradox of architecture as an apparent solidification and stultification of discourse antithetical to Arendt's and Rancière's definition of democratic politics as a transient, contingent, and fundamentally uncertain event. Is there, then, such a thing as a 'democratic architecture'?

This paper presents three possible avenues of inquiry for addressing the uncertain architecture of democracy: architecture as 'pure' representation (architecture as discourse, mythology, and literature); within the practice of architecture as a political activity; and spaces which enable political subjectivization through “disidentification,” as seen in some manifestations of contemporary art spaces and practices.