

# **Subversiveness of Walking**

## **Feminist Artistic Strategies Challenging the Urban**

4CITIES Erasmus Mundus MSc in Urban Studies

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# Subversive walk

The **subversive walk** - a walking practice that **misappropriates** the everyday aesthetics of walking to **disrupt social order, established norms, or power structures** within a given context. In a subversive walk, the act of walking becomes a mode of resistance. It may confront issues of inequality, discrimination, oppression, and involve reclaiming public spaces.

- ultradétournement (Debord & Wolman (2006) [1956])
- SW is not a demonstration:  
demonstration -> conventional and culturally coded; *social order*  
subversive walk -> altering of conventional behaviors
- feminist approach: body and interconnectedness
- notion of *the minor* (Cindi Katz after Deleuze):

*„Constituting the minor is not about naming but about consciously working in a vocabulary in which one is not at home—where one has become 'deterritorialized'—but where one works that deterritorialization to its limits, forcing it to express something different” (Katz, 1996, p. 489)*

# Research questions and cases

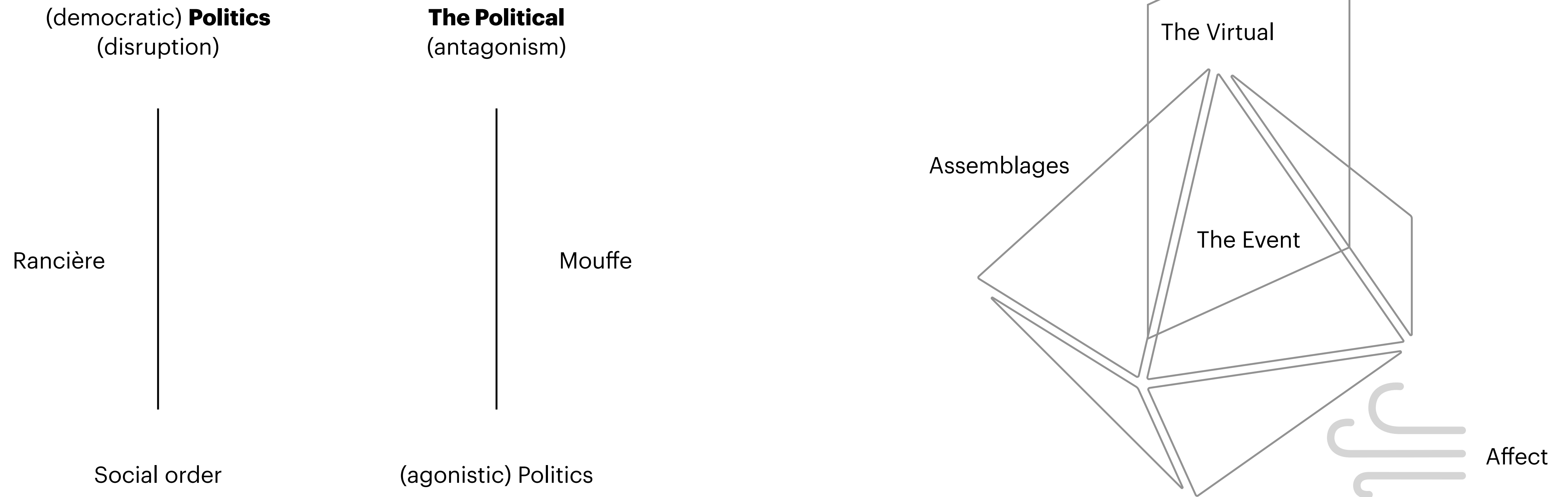
## **Research questions:**

1. How do feminist performers utilize a subversive walk in public space to raise political questions?
2. How can subversive walk serve as a method in urban studies to understand better power relations in public space?

## **Modes of the *subversive walk*:**

- a. An art project conducted by a performance artist
- b. An art project by an activist group
- c. A method in human geography by students within the university's educational framework

# Theoretical framework





# Research approach

- The thesis utilises theories from two different genealogies to **delve under the political agora and find the “seed[s] beneath the snow”** (Ward, 1996, p. 18).
- Methodological processuality - methods as secondary tools, flux (Boyd, 2022; St. Pierre, 2021; Vagle & Hofsess, 2016)
  - desktop & media research
  - interviews
  - performative workshops

Credits: Author  
Source: image generated with the assistance of DALL·E 2





# Mis(s)placed woman? 2009-2023

*“While **the political** as such cannot be staged—because **the founding event of antagonism always escapes representation**—it nevertheless must be staged in order to become visible at all. (...) This (...) is the true cause of every public: an absent cause to which political representation will then try to give a name.” (Marchart, 2019, pp. 55–56)*

*„On the street (...) the act becomes dangerous (...) because there are no theatrical conventions to delimit the purely imaginary character of the act” (Butler, 1988, p. 527).*

Source: Ostojić, T. (Ed.). (2022). Tanja Ostojić Mis(s)placed Women? 2009-2022  
A Collaborative Art Project. DEPO & Anadolu Kültür, p. 15





# Mis(s)placed woman?

From individualistic protocols of avant-garde provocation to protocols of collective action

Subversive walks as bodily practices:

- cultivation of conflictual political subjectivity (constitutive negative outside)
- community building ('impossible' constitutive inside)
- unstructured connections with places and people through affects

Picture taken on 30.09.2022 in Istanbul  
Source: Tanja Ostojić, private archive. Used with permission from the artist





# Mis(s)placed woman?

*“The Davidian moment” (Marchart)*

Solidarity action with Iranian protests after Mahsa Amini’s death (2022) - screaming walk

Screenshot derived from the video recorded on 30.09.2022 in Istanbul  
Source: Tanja Ostojić, private archive. Used with permission from the artist

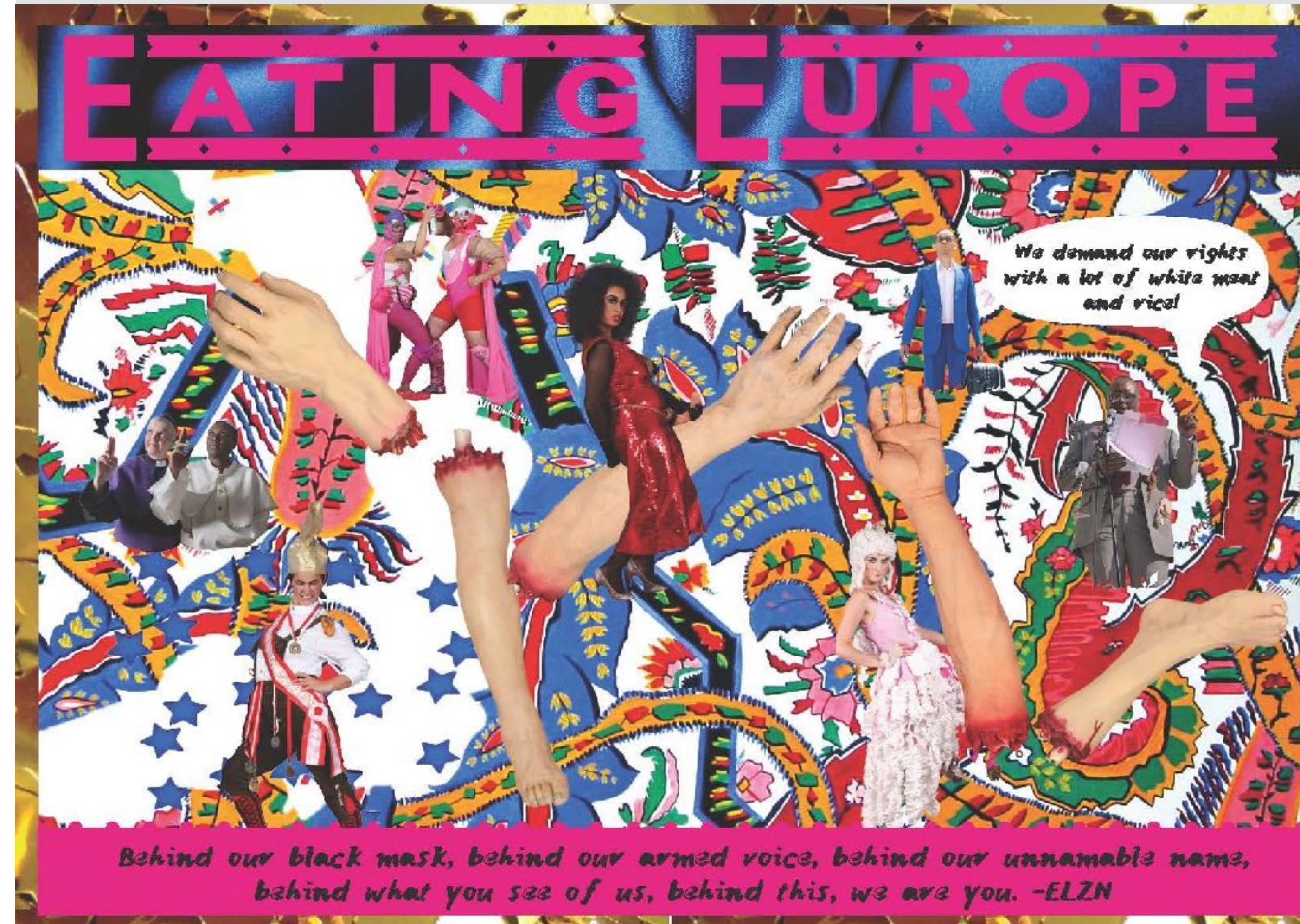




# Eating Europe 2013

*"the muddy waters of social struggle"*  
(Marchart, 2019, p. 14).

- An attempt to influence national elections
- Symbolic violence (the logic of antagonism) - evoking global conflict
- Subversion of catholic procession
- Links to Refugee Protest Camp Vienna



Poster announcing the procession.  
Source: post of Rebelodrom on Facebook event page "Eating Europe"



# Eating Europe

Staging *the political*: “abnormal” hyperreality, layering of conflict (3 in 1).

Subversive walk as bodily practice:

- collective, strategic, and organized action
- Queer alliance building (Butler, 2015)



Screenshots derived from the video recorded on 22.09.2013 in Vienna  
Source: published by Rebelodrom on Youtube under the title “Eating Europe - Maiz procession”



# Speculative workshops

Educative unit dedicated to 'right to the city'  
at the Geographic Institute, University of Bern:

- 4 performative workshops à 90min.  
“learning to be affected” (Latour 2004; Roelvink 2020)
- 5 Fluxus-rooted processual scores  
(blurring the line between art and life)
- discussions focused on “how felt difference might  
register in thinking” (McCormack, 2014)

Shot on 17.05.2023 in Bern, Switzerland  
Credits: author





# Conclusions

## Subversively walking...

### ... to be politicized (RQ 1)

- Walks as contribution to the symbolic field (Mouffe); but NOT a pure act of *politics* (Rancière)
- Establishment and maintenance of conflict (**constitutive negative outside**) i.e. symbolic violence
- community building, *performative cultivation of subjectivity over time through bodily practice* (Sparks, 2016) (**'impossible' constitutive inside**)
- aesthetic strategies questioning hegemonic discourse:
  - making social order ridiculous
  - i.e., over-identification (aesthetics of human trafficking)
  - disidentifications i.e., cannibals
  - contrasting compilation of culturally coded elements
  - citations: aesthetical engagement with the history/ symbolical value of the place
  - semantic shifts, experimentations with signs
  - guerilla strategy as affectual tactic (performing 'illegally')

### ... to be affected (RQ 2)

- enhanced reflections on micro-political level
- focus shifted from observing to interacting and interconnecting
- How to mediate the marginalized perspective?

### ... in social, political and cultural dimensions (+)

- **intelligibility** (Chambers 2013) and **context** - political conflictuality of the gesture (sub. walk) relies on the context; temporalization/ contextualization of concepts
- counter-globalization and soft solidarity (Horgan, 2012): female/queer migrant vs. Nationalist political regimes
- Score as a powerful tool shaping micro-political relations
- The risk of recuperation (Fluxus and digitalisation) - is decoding (DeLanda, 2019) and a 'minor' walk still possible?
- Subversive walk as a possibility for non-democratic geographies?



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**Thank you!**