

A Theory of Immersive Democracy

Autonomy, Participation, and Agency in a Digitalized Society

Lenn Blaschke

"The miracle that saves the world, the realm of human affairs, from its normal, 'natural' ruin is ultimately the fact of natality, in which the faculty of action is ontologically rooted. It is, in other words, the birth of new men and the new beginning, the action they are capable of by virtue of being born."

Hannah Arendt (*Vita activa*, 1958)

*A Theory of Immersive Democracy*¹

Immersive Democracy refers to a political and social practice that does not understand democratic participation solely as a rational-discursive process but explicitly integrates the affective, embodied, and existential dimensions of participation. This perspective builds on Hannah Arendt's concept of *natality* — the human capacity to bring something fundamentally new into the world.

According to Arendt, democracy should be seen less as a static condition and more as a dynamic space of political action, where people experience themselves collectively and create political realities through joint action. Immersive Democracy can also be understood as a space of collective beginnings, where citizens actively engage in political processes through sensory-emotional experiences, technological mediation, and symbolic orders.

The symbolic order, a concept from Jacques Lacan's psychoanalysis, offers an important framework for understanding how political subjectivation might occur within the context of Immersive Democracy. Lacan describes the symbolic order as a dense network of language, norms, and social rules that structure human thought, emotion, and behavior. By entering

¹ This text was created with the support of an AI language model (ChatGPT 4o) and subsequently revised by the author. Thanks to: Prof. Dr. Matthias Quent, Alina Mönig and *Radikale Töchter*.

this order — for instance, through language acquisition — the individual becomes embedded in social reality and begins to perceive themselves as part of broader social contexts (Widmer, 2018, p. 43).

In Immersive Democracy, this symbolic order is not understood as a rigid set of rules but rather as a dynamic structure that enables affective and symbolic experiences of political participation. Yet this is precisely where a key challenge emerges: How can it be ensured that the symbolic order, which mediates political experiences, does not function solely in an affirmative or manipulative way, but instead unfolds emancipatory potential?

Put differently: Can Lacan's symbolic order truly function democratically in digital spaces, or does it risk being deformed by algorithmic selection and capitalist interests?

Immersive Democracy goes beyond purely deliberative or representative models by emphasizing the active design of environments that affectively engage individuals and connect their being-in-the-world with political actions. While deliberative models understand political processes as being based on consultation and thorough consideration (Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, n.d.), immersion in this context does not merely refer to immersion in virtual or media-based experience spaces. Rather, it signifies the active embodiment of democratic principles in everyday life, allowing political action to be experienced as a creative, processual enactment of *natality*.

In an era where digital technologies increasingly shape the perception of reality, Immersive Democracy raises the question of how affective mechanisms and immersion-enhancing structures can be employed not merely for manipulation but for emancipatory self-empowerment. By emphasizing the concept of *natality* — the human potential to change the world through the new — it offers a perspective that envisions democratic processes as open, emergent, and radically participatory spaces of experience.

1 The Foundation: Immersion and Democracy as Lived Reality

The term *immersion* originates from the Latin word *immergere*, meaning "to dive in" or "to be embedded." In its original sense, it refers to the physical act of submersion in a substance — such as diving into water or during ritual baptisms. In a figurative sense, however, *immersion* describes not only a physical state but also a mental, emotional, or social absorption/embeddedness in a particular environment, reality, or structure.

In media and cultural studies, *immersion* is described as a state in which individuals become so deeply engaged in an environment or experience that the boundary between their own self and external reality becomes blurred. This can be triggered by narrative fiction, audiovisual media, performative art, or social dynamics. In immersive environments, the perceiving individual no longer feels like a detached observer but rather as an active part of the unfolding events — whether in a novel, a theatrical performance, a virtual reality experience, or a social movement (Schütz, 2015, p. 7).

This definition of *immersion* highlights that individuals can be involved in experiences not only cognitively but also affectively and physically. People experience reality not solely through abstract reflection but also through an embodied being-in-the-world shaped by emotions, sensory perceptions, and social interactions. Applying immersion to democratic practice opens the possibility of understanding political participation not exclusively as a rational-deliberative or representative process, but as a holistic, affective, and embodied reality.

An Immersive Democracy would thus not merely be a space for debate but, above all, a space of sensory-emotional, collective experience in which democratic self-empowerment becomes tangibly perceptible. At the same time, however, this expansion reveals fundamental challenges — particularly the question of whether affective involvement genuinely promotes democratic emancipation or rather heightens the risk of affective manipulation.

Especially in digital environments, which are heavily shaped by commercial and technological infrastructures, there is a risk that immersive experience spaces may not provide the anticipated autonomy but instead create new dependencies. Consequently, for Immersive Democracy, the critical question arises regarding the independence and freedom of the platforms on which immersion takes place, and how these spaces must be consciously and critically designed to unfold democratic potential without succumbing to manipulative practices.

2 Connection to Natality in Hannah Arendt's Thought

In *The Human Condition* (1958), Hannah Arendt introduces the concept of *natality* as a fundamental characteristic of human existence. While philosophers — from Plato to Heidegger — have often emphasized mortality as the

central feature of human existence in ontology, focusing on the awareness of finitude and life's orientation toward death, Arendt offers an alternative perspective: Human existence is not primarily defined by its mortality but by the potential to initiate something new.

This capacity is linked to the fact of birth — every human life begins with a unique entry into the world and carries with it the possibility of creating something original (Arendt, 2020, pp. 25–26).

Nativity thus represents an expression of existential openness that distinguishes the human condition. Humans are not only born into existing structures but also possess the ability to change these structures through their actions. For Arendt, this potential to bring something new into the world constitutes the essence of political action.

While labor and work in Arendt's thought are often characterized by repetition and purpose-driven activity, *action* is the realm in which individuals reveal themselves as unique beings and, through their interaction with others, contribute to shaping a shared world (Arendt, p. 23–24).

Nativity is therefore not merely a biological concept but also a political category: it points to the possibility of creating a world that is not defined solely by repetition, but by unpredictable, creative, and collective action. For Arendt, politics is thus not merely the administration of what already exists but rather a space of appearance, where individuals constitute themselves through action and actively shape the conditions of their world.

Politics as a Space of Appearance for New Beginnings

For Arendt, democracy is not merely an institutional order based on representation and legality but rather a vibrant space of political practice. She criticizes modern mass societies and bureaucracies for restricting opportunities for political action and reducing people to passive spectators rather than recognizing them as active co-creators of their shared world (Arendt, 1974, p. 198).

A vibrant democracy must therefore be more than a system of elections, rules, and procedures — it must be a space where political *nativity* can genuinely be lived. This occurs not merely through casting votes or managing what already exists, but through collective, public action that creates new realities. The world is not simply "administered"; rather, it is continuously renewed through human action (Arendt, 2020, pp. 42ff).

Here, the close connection between *natality* and democracy becomes evident: Democracy is not a stable order but an ongoing process of emergence and becoming. It is not a finalized state but a field of possibility in which people continuously discover new political forms and modes of expression.

However, this raises an important theoretical question that Arendt herself does not directly address: How can this existential openness and the creative potential of new beginnings be meaningfully translated into digital, immersive environments? This presents a potential tension, as Arendt primarily conceived political spaces as physical, real spaces of encounter, where individuals experience and engage with one another in embodied presence.

Transposing this concept to digital environments therefore raises the question of whether and to what extent the concept of *natality* can be authentically realized in digital contexts, or whether immersive democratic spaces may instead represent a mere simulation of new beginnings — one that, rather than opening up new possibilities for action, may in fact prove alienating.

It thus remains uncertain whether Arendt's concept can be straightforwardly transferred to immersive practice spaces, or whether this very translation into digital and affectively designed platforms requires a critical reassessment.

3 Affects, Affectivity, and Immersive Power

Affects as Political Forces: Expanding the Rational Citizen Concept

A central aspect of Immersive Democracy is its affectivity. While traditional democratic theories often assume a rational image of the citizen — for example, in John Rawls' liberal theories (1971), which conceive justice as a rationally calculated principle, or in Jürgen Habermas' deliberative democracy (1981), which emphasizes democratic decision-making primarily through rational argumentation and discursive processes — practice clearly shows that political processes are not driven solely by rational reflection but are equally shaped by affective, emotional, and situational dynamics.

This classical conception of democracy is largely based on the assumption that political decisions are primarily the result of rational deliberations,

arguments, and discursive processes. Yet, as previously highlighted, political reality is often far more complex: Political movements, social protests, and mobilizations frequently arise not primarily from argumentative processes but from intense affective experiences.

Voting decisions and political engagement are often driven by emotional states and moods, such as a deep sense of injustice, outrage, fear, or hope (cf. Frevert, 2022). These affective dimensions of political practice are precisely what lie at the heart of Immersive Democracy, which acknowledges and shapes political processes as affective and physically experienced realities.

Immersive Democracy draws a key conclusion from this insight: it seeks to promote political participation not only as a rational-deliberative process but also by actively incorporating the affective and emotional dimensions of democratic engagement. Rather than viewing affective forces as irrational or disruptive, Immersive Democracy deliberately asks how democracy can be designed when affective involvement is recognized as a productive component of political processes.

However, this requires careful theoretical reflection on the role and potential of affects, as explored particularly in *Affect Theory*.

Affect Theory: Affects as Pre-Reflective Forces in Politics

The significance of affects in political processes can be explained through *Affect Theory*, which builds on the works of Baruch de Spinoza, Gilles Deleuze, and Brian Massumi. In this framework, affects are not merely individual emotions or subjective feelings; rather, they are interpersonal (trans-individual) and bodily forces that emerge prior to conscious reflection. They move between bodies and subjects before these impulses are processed cognitively or linguistically (Mühlhoff, 2018, pp. 14f).

Spinoza describes affects as the capacity of bodies to be affected and to affect others. Affects arise within relational dynamics and are not isolated states of closed-off individuals but expressions of the causal interconnectedness of all things. In social and political contexts, they can be amplified, altered, or channeled (Mühlhoff, 2018, pp. 20f).

Massumi emphasizes that affects manifest on a pre-reflective level — they often operate before conscious opinion formation and shape how people perceive and respond to political events (Massumi, 1995, pp. 83–109). An example of this is visual or narrative staging in politics, which

impacts audiences not primarily through arguments but through feelings of fear, anger, or hope. A populist politician, for instance, may not require a coherent political agenda if they succeed in mobilizing followers through affective stimulation, evoking states of outrage, pride, or fear (Massumi, 2010, pp. 105f).

This demonstrates that democracy inherently encompasses both discursive-rational and affective dimensions. Precisely this insight underscores the need to critically reflect on the role of affects within Immersive Democracy, taking into account both their potential and the possible risks they may entail.

4 The Role of Mediality and Digital Structures

From Physical to Digital Democracy: A Shift in Spaces of Experience

Historically, democracy has often been understood as a space of collective, rational, and physically experienced encounters. From the ancient Greek *agora* — a village gathering place where festivals, assemblies, and markets took place, serving as a central institution of the *polis* (Höcker, 2008, pp. 2–4) — to modern parliaments or street demonstrations, political action has always been closely tied to embodied co-presence.

In an increasingly digitalized world, however, this democratic space is undergoing a fundamental transformation: Political participation is shifting more and more into virtual, algorithmically structured spaces, which has direct implications for how people perceive, experience, and shape political reality.

Digital media offer new opportunities for expanded and location-independent participation; at the same time, however, they carry the risk of strategically channeling affects, amplifying opinions through algorithms, or even rendering critical discourses invisible. This presents a key challenge for Immersive Democracy: How can digital spaces be designed to enable affective engagement without manipulating political processes or endangering democratic autonomy through algorithmic or commercial interests?

In particular, this raises the question of whether the affective and resonant dimension that is evident in physical political action can be authentically experienced on digital platforms — or whether what emerges is instead a simulation that ultimately limits or distorts political participation.

Digital Technologies as Mechanisms for Shaping Political Experience

The proliferation of digital technologies such as Virtual Reality (VR), Augmented Reality (AR), social media, and algorithmically curated platforms not only expands political spaces of experience but also significantly shapes and influences them. This development produces two parallel and interwoven effects:

On the one hand, digital platforms enable new forms of political participation by allowing people to connect across national borders, engage in deliberative processes, and collaboratively shape political decisions in virtual spaces.

On the other hand, these new political spaces are subject to control and regulation that is far from neutral; instead, they are shaped by platforms, algorithms, and economic interests. In her analysis of *surveillance capitalism*, Shoshana Zuboff (2019) has demonstrated that digital technologies are not merely neutral communication tools. Rather, through data extraction, algorithmic control, and personalized manipulation, they actively steer affects and perceptions in targeted ways (Zuboff, 2019).

Platform capitalism has thus created a new form of political power: While classical democratic systems were based on deliberative negotiation and public discourse, today's political debates are increasingly shaped by algorithmic selection and commercial interests. Who sees which information, which topics are made visible, and which remain hidden is no longer determined solely by political institutions but is now heavily influenced by technological infrastructures.

This development leads to a paradoxical situation: On the one hand, digitalization has indeed made democratic processes more accessible, interactive, and diverse. On the other hand, these very processes are often invisibly influenced by commercial, political, or ideological interests, potentially endangering fundamental democratic values such as autonomy and transparency.

A striking example of digital technologies' influence on political processes is the *Facebook-Cambridge Analytica data scandal*. In 2018, it was revealed that the British consulting firm Cambridge Analytica had, without users' knowledge or consent, harvested personal data from up to 87 million Facebook profiles. These data were used to analyze voter behavior and target political advertisements, notably during the 2016 U.S. presidential election and the Brexit referendum (AP News, 2025).

This incident highlights how digital platforms and the data they collect can be used to influence political decision-making processes, often without the knowledge or consent of the individuals affected. It raises critical questions about transparency, ethical responsibility, and the regulation of digital technologies in political contexts.

Despite the revelations and ensuing criticism, similar practices have persisted, underscoring the need for stricter data protection laws and greater oversight of the use of personal data in political campaigns (Wikipedia, 2025).

Immersive Democracy as an Alternative: Designing Digital Spaces Democratically

Immersive Democracy raises the question of how digital structures can be employed not for control or passive consumption but as active democratic spaces of experience. The aim is to understand digital technologies not merely as channels for political communication but as spaces of experience and *spaces of appearance*, where people can engage with democracy affectively, bodily, and interactively. This approach envisions digital environments that foster democratic engagement as something that can be felt, embodied, and collectively shaped.

One possible strategy for achieving this lies in the creation of interactive citizen forums that are designed not to generate algorithmic attention but to enable genuine political participation. Such platforms open up new forms of democratic decision-making by encouraging deeper political engagement and collective deliberation. Rather than relying on social media platforms shaped by engagement algorithms and clickbait logic, these forums provide dedicated spaces that focus on meaningful discourse and thoughtful exchange. Examples of such initiatives can be found in platforms like *Decidim*, an open-source tool developed by the city of Barcelona to involve citizens in political decision-making processes (Decidim, n.d.); *vTaiwan*, a digital platform used by the Taiwanese government to conduct public debates on legislative proposals (vTaiwan, n.d.); and *LiquidFeedback*, a deliberative online tool employed by the *Piraten Partei* in Germany that applies principles of liquid democracy (LiquidFeedback, n.d.). Each of these platforms illustrates how digital spaces can be intentionally designed to foster political participation in ways that are immersive, affective, and

interactive, rather than reinforcing passive consumption or manipulative practices.

Immersive Simulations: Experiencing Political Processes through Narrative and Interactive Design

Immersive Democracy explores how political processes can be made tangible through narrative and interactive simulations. Rather than conveying political education solely through texts or debates, immersive simulations invite people into dynamic experiential spaces where they can engage with different perspectives — whether through role-playing, interactive storytelling formats, or multisensory stagings.

Examples of this approach include *Democracy* (Positech Games, n.d.), a political simulation game in which players assume the role of a head of government and must make political decisions, and *100 % City* (Rimini Protokoll, n.d.) by the research and theater collective Rimini Protokoll. Using documentary methods, Rimini Protokoll makes political structures tangible by bringing 100 representative citizens on stage to demonstrate democracy in action. Such formats foster empathy, reflection, and active political participation by engaging individuals not just intellectually but also emotionally and physically.

Participatory Digital Narratives: Engaging Citizens in Shaping Political Processes

Participatory digital narratives empower citizens to actively shape political processes rather than merely consuming them passively. Through interactive digital storytelling, complex social issues can be experienced from multiple perspectives, fostering deeper understanding and encouraging stronger engagement. An example of this approach is the *INDCOR* project, which explores how interactive digital narratives can be used to address societal challenges such as racism, war, and disinformation (INDCOR, n.d.).

The goal of these approaches is to extend the affective and embodied dimension of democracy into (digital) spaces. While traditional political participation often relies on rational argumentation and text-based communication, immersive (digital) environments can convey political experience through bodily involvement, emotional resonance, and symbolic spaces for action. By engaging people on multiple sensory and emotional levels, these formats aim to deepen participation and foster a more experiential understanding of democracy.

Despite the potential of these immersive democratic approaches, some fundamental limitations and risks must be critically considered. In partic-

ular, the issue of the *digital divide* poses a significant challenge: Not all citizens have equal access to the necessary technologies or possess sufficient digital literacy to effectively participate in immersive formats of political engagement. As a result, rather than reducing existing social and economic inequalities, these disparities could potentially be reinforced.

Beyond issues of accessibility, a critical challenge lies in the question of the actual autonomy and independence of the platforms being used. Even open-source projects like Decidim are potentially reliant on technological infrastructures that may themselves be subject to commercial or political interests. The very possibility of *natality* in the sense described by Hannah Arendt — the freedom to initiate something new and radically reshape political spaces — could be restricted in digital environments if platforms and technologies are influenced by external actors or if algorithmic mechanisms subtly regulate user behavior.

Another significant limitation concerns the sustainability and long-term impact of immersive political experiences. While immersive simulations and participatory narratives can indeed stimulate empathy and political interest in the short term, it remains uncertain whether they can consistently strengthen political action over time or whether they risk becoming temporary, affective experiences without lasting engagement. These aspects require ongoing reflection and critical examination to ensure that Immersive Democracy does not become a superficial experience but instead fosters enduring democratic self-empowerment.

5 The Transition from Subject to Community: Socio-Psychological Aspects

The Political Subject Between Autonomy and Embeddedness

A central aspect of Immersive Democracy is the question of how the political subject is shaped and how it moves within a collective political space of experience. While classical democratic theories often conceive of the subject as a rational, autonomous entity, social-psychological and philosophical theories demonstrate that identity and political action are always embedded in social, symbolic, and affective structures.

The French theorists Jacques Lacan and Michel Foucault have made significant contributions to understanding the subject not as a closed, sovereign unit, but as a product of social relations and discursive power structures.

In his psychoanalysis, Lacan describes the subject as a being that is always situated within a web of language, symbols, and imaginary self-images. The subject does not perceive itself as an isolated individual but always in relation to others — whether within the symbolic order of language or through affective relationships with an *Other*. Political subjectivity, therefore, is not simply given; rather, it emerges through a process of identification and differentiation within a symbolic structure (Pagel, 2012, pp. 30f).

Foucault, in turn, describes the subject as shaped by power relations and discursive structures. Political identities do not arise from individual rationality but are produced through the conditions established by social institutions, norms, and rules (Breite, 2023, pp. 33f). Subjectivity is thus not autonomous but is formed by social dispositifs and mechanisms of governmentality, which not only regulate individuals but also guide them toward self-governance (Breite, p. 35).

These perspectives are crucial for Immersive Democracy because they reveal that political participation is not solely a matter of rational will formation but is also shaped by affective, discursive, and symbolic practices. People participate in democracy not just as individuals but always as part of social spaces in which they are positioned through experiences, affects, and power relations.

Immersive Democracy as the Design of Resonance Spaces

If political identity is understood not as isolated autonomy but as a relational practice, Immersive Democracy must ask how political spaces can be designed to engage people not only rationally but also affectively and physically. Hartmut Rosa's concept of *resonance* offers a particularly valuable framework in this regard. Resonance describes a vibrant relationship with the world in which individuals do not merely absorb information but are affectively moved and experience themselves as capable agents within their surroundings. In this understanding, democratic practice can be designed in a way that citizens no longer perceive themselves merely as passive listeners or spectators of political processes but actively recognize their own involvement and agency (Rosa, 2019, pp. 362–380).

Immersive Democracy builds on this idea by asking how political experiences can shift from being passively consumed to being actively co-created. The focus here is particularly on designing political processes in ways that

are not only intellectually comprehensible but also sensually and emotionally accessible. The goal is to create symbolic and affective spaces that genuinely empower people to act politically. Resonance in this sense is not merely an emotional reaction but rather a dynamic relationship between the subject and the political environment — one in which political agency emerges. A space of political resonance enables individuals to perceive themselves not as passive recipients of political measures but as active co-creators, whose emotions, bodies, and perceptions are integral to political processes.

Politics as Embodied Experience

Immersive Democracy must therefore go beyond classical participation models and understand engagement not only as a cognitive act but explicitly as an embodied experience. This requires consistently conceptualizing political subjectivation as a process: individuals are not born as "ready-made" citizens but develop their political identity through experience, perception, and action. Democratic participation thus unfolds not only through the expression of opinions but also through symbolic actions, collective experiences, and affective involvement.

Political processes are therefore never purely rational reflections; they are always also embodied by presence, social interaction, and sensory experience, as seen in demonstrations, assemblies, protests, or performative political actions. These forms of political participation extend beyond mere argumentation and use the body as a medium of politics.

Ultimately, this means that political spaces should not be conceived solely as neutral arenas for discourse but intentionally designed as affectively charged experiential worlds in which people do not merely understand democracy but directly experience and live it. Only in such spaces can political power structures be immediately recognized, critically questioned, and actively transformed.

From Subject to Community – Immersive Democracy as Collective Practice

Immersive Democracy departs from the classical notion of the isolated, rationally acting political subject and instead conceives political identity as a

processual, affective, and socially embedded formation. In this understanding, democracy is not merely a space for purely rational decision-making processes but an embodied, interactive, and affectively experienced practice in which individuals directly perceive themselves as part of a community.

Central to this perspective is the transition from the individual subject to collective experience: democracy is not primarily a mechanism of individual will-formation but a *resonance space* in which people perceive themselves as active political agents through their relationships with others and collectively create political reality through affective, bodily, and symbolic practices.

Immersive Democracy thus opens up a perspective that extends significantly beyond deliberative and representative models of democracy. It envisions democracy not only as a discursive or institutionalized practice but as a vibrant field of communal experience that makes political participation tangible in affective, embodied, and collective ways.

6 An Example of Immersive Democracy: Radikale Töchter and Action Art

The preceding theoretical reflections on Immersive Democracy — particularly regarding *natality* (Arendt), the symbolic order (Lacan), and *resonance* (Rosa) — demonstrate that political participation encompasses far more than rational argumentation or institutionalized procedures. In order for political processes to enable genuine participation, they must be affectively and physically tangible. A concrete example that embodies these theoretical concepts can be found in the action art workshops of *Radikale Töchter* (Radikale Töchter, n.d.).

Radikale Töchter employ methods of action art to facilitate political participation within immersive experiential spaces. Their workshops consist of performative, artistic, and activist interventions in which participants not only discuss political situations theoretically but also experience them directly on an affective and bodily level. During the workshops, participants independently develop their own action art concepts on issues that are personally meaningful to them. These concepts are then collaboratively translated into staged political interventions, where participants address political crises, make collective decisions, or develop performative forms of protest. Through the independent and creative development of such immersive scenarios, participants gain direct insight into how power structures, social dynamics, and affects can shape and influence political realities.

A central element of the workshops is the intentional integration of digital media and spaces. Digital research plays a crucial role: participants explore their political topics not only through analog sources but also via digital archives, online research, and social media. This digital investigation is not merely supplementary but often essential to the substantive depth of their work. Here, a clear connection to Immersive Democracy becomes visible — a model that understands both analog and digital spaces as equal sites of political insight and participation.

Moreover, the workshops deliberately incorporate digital media such as smartphones, social media, AI-powered tools, and other digital platforms into their creative processes. These digital tools function as stages, means of communication, or symbolic elements within the performative enactments, enabling participants to convey their political messages in innovative ways.

A particularly innovative concept within the workshops is the method of “Digital Stages.” In this approach, digital spaces are explicitly understood as arenas for political action art. Participants are encouraged to design their political interventions with digital publics in mind, thereby opening up new spaces for political participation. Many of the action art concepts developed in the *Radikale Töchter* workshops intentionally use digital platforms to generate visibility and mobilize political concerns.

This creative engagement with both digital and analog spaces illustrates the versatility with which Immersive Democracy can be shaped. By actively integrating digital media into immersive experiences, *Radikale Töchter* expand the traditional notion of action art to include a digital dimension, while simultaneously fostering initiative and self-efficacy among participants.

The approach of *Radikale Töchter* exemplifies what Immersive Democracy might look like in practice: through methods rooted in action art, they succeed in raising awareness for political processes, involving participants emotionally, and making it directly tangible that they themselves can be powerful agents within democracy. This suggests considerable democratic potential, as political experience is not merely consumed but actively co-created.

At the same time, it is important to critically reflect on whether and to what extent these workshops truly foster sustainable political change. While action art can create experiences that are immediate and emotionally powerful, it remains unclear how lasting and impactful the resulting political insights and impulses for action are. Can action art methods lead to long-term democratic subjectivation and resonance, or do these

experiences ultimately remain confined to the short-lived moment of performance? Furthermore, it is worth questioning whether affective and immersive strategies may unintentionally become manipulative — particularly when political content is primarily aestheticized and rendered consumable.

Radikale Töchter thus reveal both the potential and the limits of Immersive Democracy: they create vibrant spaces of political experience while also highlighting the challenges associated with affective, symbolic, and immersive methods. Especially the integration of digital spaces opens new opportunities for activating political engagement and strengthening participants' sense of empowerment — yet it also carries the risk that political processes may become flattened in the aesthetics of digital media and devolve into symbolic activism without long-term political impact.

7 Concluding Reflections and Discussion of Limitations

Immersive Democracy, by integrating affective, embodied, and symbolic experiences, offers a promising and expanded understanding of democratic practice—one that goes well beyond deliberative and representative models. By drawing on the human capacity for *natality* as conceptualized by Hannah Arendt and the idea of *resonance* as developed by Hartmut Rosa, it provides theoretical foundations for reimagining political spaces as radically participatory. It emphasizes that political participation should not be understood solely as a cognitive act but also as an affective and bodily experience.

At the same time, significant theoretical and practical challenges emerge that must not be underestimated. A central area of tension lies in the transferability of these theoretical concepts to digital and immersive spaces of experience. Rosa's concept of resonance, which describes a vibrant, responsive relationship with the world, may encounter limitations in digital contexts. The critical question remains whether immersive experiences can truly generate authentic resonance, or whether they risk producing a sense of alienation by simulating participation and agency rather than enabling them.

The appropriation of Jacques Lacan's concept of the symbolic order also raises critical questions: If political subjectivity is always embedded in social and discursive structures, one must ask to what extent digital, immersive structures can truly be autonomous and emancipatory — or

whether they inevitably reproduce symbolic orders that reinforce existing power relations and dependencies.

Another essential aspect concerns the technological and social infrastructure of immersive democratic forms. Digital platforms are often shaped by commercial and algorithmic logics, increasing the risk that political experiences may be affectively manipulated rather than fostering genuine participation. In light of existing social and digital divides, it also remains uncertain whether immersive democratic formats are truly accessible to all, or whether they might even exacerbate existing inequalities.

The action art workshops by *Radikale Töchter* vividly illustrate both the potential and the limitations of an immersive democratic practice. Their workshops, centered on performative and aesthetic interventions, make political participation directly tangible. However, it remains an open question whether — and how — they genuinely strengthen long-term political agency, or whether their impact is more temporary and episodic. This question marks a crucial task for future theoretical and empirical research.

It must also be acknowledged that *Radikale Töchter* represent just one example among many possible forms of immersive democratic practice. To develop a broader understanding of Immersive Democracy, it would be necessary to extend its principles with additional approaches and ideas — such as Philip Dingeldey's proposals for the establishment of a citizens' chamber (Dingeldey, 2025), or other concepts that emphasize autonomy, participation, and agency.

Ultimately, Immersive Democracy revolves around the core democratic goals of autonomy, participation, and empowerment. The various theoretical and practical challenges that emerge from this show that Immersive Democracy must not be understood as a fixed or finalized concept. Rather, it should be regarded as an open field of theoretical reflection and practical experimentation — one in which the affective, symbolic, and technological dimensions of democratic practice must be continuously reconfigured, critically examined, and empirically evaluated.

References

- Arendt, H. (2020). *Vita activa oder Vom tätigen Leben*. Piper Verlag.
Arendt, H. (1974). *Über die Revolution*. Piper Verlag.
Breite, E. (2023). *Die Verfügbarmachung der Literatur: Neoliberale Logiken und ihr Einfluss auf literarische Bildung*. transcript Verlag.

- Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung. (o.D.). *Deliberation*. <https://www.bpb.de/kurz-knapp/lexika/das-europalexikon/176777/deliberation/>
- Decidim. (o.D.). *Open-Source-Plattform für deliberative Demokratie*. <https://decidim.org>
- Dingeldey, P. (2025). Repräsentation und Partizipation zusammendenken: Bürger:innenkammer und parlamentarische Demokratie. *Bipar*. <https://bipar.de/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/Praesentation-Dingeldey.pdf>
- Frevert, U. (o.D.). Wohldosierte Emotionen. *Max-Planck-Gesellschaft*. <https://www.mpg.de/18101870/regieren-mit-gefuehl>
- Höcker, C. (2008). *Metzler Lexikon der antiken Architektur*. Metzler.
- INDCOR. (o.D.). *Interactive Digital Narratives for Conflict Resolution*. <https://indcor.eu>
- LiquidFeedback. (o.D.). *Open Source Plattform für deliberative Demokratie*. <https://liquidfeedback.com/de>
- Massumi, B. (2010). *Ontomacht – Kunst, Affekt und das Ergebnis des Politischen*. Merve Verlag.
- Massumi, B. (1995). The autonomy of affect. *Cultural Critique*, 31, 83–109.
- Mühlhoff, R. (2018). *Immersive Macht – Affekttheorie nach Spinoza und Foucault*. Campus Verlag.
- Radikale Töchter. (o.D.). *Radikale Töchter*. <https://radikaletoechter.de/>
- Rimini Protokoll. (o.D.). *100 % Stadt*. <https://www.rimini-protokoll.de/website/de/projects/100-stadt-7-1>
- Rosa, H. (2019). *Resonanz – Eine Soziologie der Weltbeziehung*. Suhrkamp.
- Pagel, G. (2012). *Jacques Lacan – zur Einführung*. Junius.
- Positech Games. (o.D.). *Democracy 4*. <http://www.positech.co.uk/democracy4>
- Schütz, T. (2015). *Gestaltete Erfahrungsräume und die Teilhabe an der „totalen, radikalen Fiktion“: Dimensionen immersiver Erfahrung im Gegenwartstheater am Beispiel von „Ventestedet“ von SIGNA und „John Gabriel Borkman“ von Vinge/Müller*. https://signa.dk/files/editor/Bibliography/MA_Skript_Schutz.pdf
- vTaiwan. (o.D.). *Digital deliberation platform*. <https://info.vtaiwan.tw>
- Widmer, P. (2018). *Subversion des Begehrens*. Turia + Kant Verlag.
- Wikipedia. (o.D.). *Facebook – Cambridge Analytica data scandal*. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Facebook%E2%80%93Cambridge_Analytica_data_scandal
- Zuboff, S. (2019). *Das Zeitalter des Überwachungskapitalismus: Der Kampf für eine menschliche Zukunft im neuen Zeitalter der Macht*. Campus Verlag.