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Introduction – Space-Making and Practices of Resistance

by Katerina Paramana | Issue 15.1 (Spring 2026), Political Economy and the Arts

ABSTRACT Here, Katerina Paramana introduces the articles in the “Political Economy and the Arts” special section of this issue. In the current climate of geopolitical upheaval (from Ukraine, to Gaza, Iran, Venezuela, and Greenland), the articles illuminate what arts do to produce resistance at a micro level by re-writing problematic narratives, visibilizing marginalized communities, imagining alternative models and futures, and working towards equitable space-making.

KEYWORDS arts, performance, political economy, politics, power, resistance, space-making

The current volatile geopolitical climate is characterized by attempts of occupation of others' space for its resources in the name of security (Greenland), breaches of international law and acts of violence and war in the name of the war against drugs (Venezuela), and ongoing wars (Ukraine) and genocides (Gaza and Iran) in the name of security and stability.¹ Most recently (January 2026) Trump's authoritarianism has resulted in, among other atrocities, the murders committed by the US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE).² His imperialist moves have finally met some international resistance. For example, at the World Economic Forum in January 2026, in response to Trump's demand to buy Greenland, Prime Minister of Canada, Mark Carney, gave a critical speech on current geopolitics. Although still expressing liberal internationalist views,³ Carney's speech nevertheless

illuminated two things: first, that the “rules-based international order”—which has thus far allowed for morally bankrupt decision-making like the invasion of Iraq and the genocide in Gaza, while the West and their allies “made vague appeals to certain rules and universal principles”—was a façade; and second, that Trump has now, not just exposed, but exploded this façade.⁴

The detrimental effects of the US in the international geopolitical space have been accompanied by some hopeful developments in its national space, for example, Zohran Mamdani’s victory in the New York mayoral election. Mamdani advocates for an equitable and just society at the local space of New York as well as internationally through his proposed policies and his criticism of the global politico-economic order,⁵ demonstrating his, and his voters’, understanding of how resistance and change in macro systems begins with resistance and change in micro systems. Art practices play a significant role in the latter, for they enable us to understand the relationship between the micro and the macro, question problematic narratives, imagine alternative ways of relating and systems that can enable these, rehearse change, and intervene in the systems of which we are a part.

The articles in this section shed light on what arts do to produce resistance and change in micro systems by re-writing problematic narratives, visibilizing marginalized communities, imagining alternative models and futures, and working towards equitable space-making. Although this was an open call for the “Political Economy and the Arts” special section, space-making and practices of resistance emerge as shared themes among the contributions. The authors bring to this section their different (inter)disciplinary and geographical perspectives, and therefore a variety of approaches to cultural and creative practice and its relation to politico-economic concerns.

Panos Kompatsiaris, in “The Indigenous Turn, or the Spectacle of Otherness: Cultural Political Economies of the 60th Venice Biennale, *Foreigners Everywhere*,” < <https://csalateral.org/section/political-economy-and-the->

arts/indigenous-turn-spectacle-otherness-cultural-political-economies-60th-venice-biennale-foreigners-everywhere-kompatsiaris/> analyzes how this Biennale centered the figure of the “foreigner”—the refugees, migrants, queers, the non-Western others, the Indigenous—focusing on the Indigenous. Kompatsiaris suggests that the latter emerged as a symbolic figure that is particularly charged. He points out that the Biennale aims to ensure it remains relevant globally through a “spectacular inclusion of difference,” but that visibilizing this “othering” is also contingent on the Biennale’s institutional politics. He therefore reads the Indigenous both as a representational figure, as well as one that is a part of the Biennale’s cultural-political economy. He argues that the various framings of Indigenous cultures in this exhibition, while they make these cultures visible, nevertheless do so “in a highly exclusive environment where viewership is characterized by cultures of speed.” The specific framings of the cultures and traditions of the Indigenous, in fact, both visibilize as well as commodify identity. “Authenticity,” therefore, functions as both symbolic and economic capital, both flattening and fetishizing the heterogeneous histories of Indigenous peoples into a universalized category of “the Indigenous.” Kompatsiaris proposes instead the creation of spaces where representation of the Indigenous peoples, their diversity and historicity, moves beyond spectacle, via curatorial strategies which are more focused, slower, and territorially specific. These strategies, he suggests, would consequently function as practices of resistance to the Biennale’s cultural-political economy.

Ana Pais, in “Affective Economies of Freedom in Paradoxical Times,” <
<https://csalateral.org/section/political-economy-and-the-arts/affective-economies-freedom-paradoxical-times-pais/>> draws on Sara Ahmed’s work on affect, Sruti Bala’s on participation, and Franco Berardi’s on freedom to explore forms of “celebrating, performing, and capturing freedom” in different kinds of performative spaces. Through discussion on freedom and populism and analysis of three case studies—the parade of the fiftieth anniversary of

the Carnation Revolution, the performance, *25th of April 1974*, by the Portuguese company Mala Voadora, and a production of *The Seagull* by Argentinian director Guillermo Cacace—Pais examines how these different kinds of performances, taking place in both everyday and theatrical spaces and practicing resistance in different ways, “critically engage with the paradoxes of freedom.” She argues that freedom emerges as an embodied experience in performative acts where we share space with others in public, in the view of others.






In “Unsettling Political Economies: Instituting, Blurring, and Monstrous Space-Making,” < <https://csalateral.org/section/political-economy-and-the-arts/unsettling-political-economies-instituting-blurring-monstrous-space-making-argyropoulou/>> Gigi Argyropoulou explores how resistance to political economies might be practiced through a discussion of the work of EIGHT Cultural Institute for Arts and Politics, a cultural/social space founded in Athens, Greece in 2019. EIGHT was the continuation of several political and cultural experiments that emerged since the economic crisis in Greece at the end of 2009. Argyropoulou shares the practices employed by EIGHT, namely “instituting” (“a form of space-creating that refuses stabilization”); “blurring” (a process of dissolving categories and boundaries to create unpredictable spaces which resist fixed identities); and “monstrous space-making” (“a method of excess and refusal, capable of disrupting dominant political economies”). She points to their potential and to their relevance for space-making practices that resist existing operational models and reimagine systems from within.

In “Cultural Space as Resistance: Racialized and Immigrant Communities’ Artistic Practices and the Political Economy of Urban Development in Canadian Cities,” < <https://csalateral.org/section/political-economy-and-the-arts/cultural-space-resistance-racialized-immigrant-communities-artistic-practices-political-economy-urban-development-canadian-cities-sengupta/>> Ushnish Sengupta argues that these communities’ efforts to secure and

sustain cultural spaces are hindered by systemic challenges such as exclusionary urban policies, disparities in funding distribution, and real estate speculation. These challenges, in turn, hinder the continuity of cultural expression and the visibility and impact of marginalized artistic practices. The article examines how grassroots activism, artistic interventions, and alternative funding models become the ways in which these communities practice resistance to spatial erasure. It positions their “creative practices as sites of political-economic critique” and places where the creation of alternative futures becomes possible, and illuminates the connections between anti-Black racism, Islamophobia, and colonialism in “contested cultural space dynamics.” By examining sites of community-led cultural preservation and artistic resistance, Sengupta sheds light on art’s contribution to reimagining urban futures. He argues that policies which protect and invest in spaces which are culturally significant—and recognize them as both vital components of social infrastructure and political resistance and as important considerations to urban development projects—are crucial to sustainable multicultural urbanism. Contributing to the “Political Economy and the Arts” Special Section, the article shows the ways creative practices of racialized and immigrant communities “challenge dominant narratives of urban development” and, in doing so, assert the right of these communities to cultural sustainability as well as to spatial justice.

The articles in the special section of this issue, and the emerging themes of space-making and practices of resistance grounded in each article’s particular geographies, contribute to conversations in the “Political Economy and the Arts” Special Section and beyond on the interrelationships between political economy, arts, power, and resistance. We hope their different (inter)disciplinary perspectives in approaching and understanding this interrelationship further these conversations. I am grateful to the authors for their contributions, to the anonymous reviewers for their labor, and to *Lateral* for providing the space for these conversations.

Notes

1. The current political escalation, which, it can be argued, has its beginning in 2022, has been referred to by Franco Berardi as a "racist global war," in which genocide—first in Gaza, then in Iran—becomes the rule. Franco Berardi, "Racist Global War," *Autonomies* (2025), <https://autonomies.org/2025/06/franco-bifo-berardi-racist-global-war> < <https://autonomies.org/2025/06/franco-bifo-berardi-racist-global-war> >; "UN Human Rights Council Extends Iran Fact-Finding Mission, Condemns 'Deadliest Crackdown against Iranian People Since 1979 Revolution,'" *Centre for Human Rights in Iran* (2026), <https://iranhumanrights.org/2026/01/un-human-rights-council-extends-iran-fact-finding-mission-condemns-deadliest-crackdown-against-iranian-people-since-1979-revolution> < <https://iranhumanrights.org/2026/01/un-human-rights-council-extends-iran-fact-finding-mission-condemns-deadliest-crackdown-against-iranian-people-since-1979-revolution> >; "Disappeared bodies, mass burials and '30,000 dead': what is the truth of Iran's death toll?" *The Guardian*, January 27, 2026, <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2026/jan/27/iran-protests-death-toll-disappeared-bodies-mass-burials-30000-dead> < <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2026/jan/27/iran-protests-death-toll-disappeared-bodies-mass-burials-30000-dead> >. 
2. Melissa Hellmann. "Eight people have died in dealings with ICE so far in 2026. These are their stories," *The Guardian*, January 28, 2026, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2026/jan/28/deaths-ice-2026-> < [https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2026/jan/28/deaths-ice-2026->](https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2026/jan/28/deaths-ice-2026-) . 
3. He proceeded to refer to a "values-based realism," an "economic 'realism' that intensifies rather than constrains the market forces," and which has led us to the point we are now globally. Luke Savage, "Between the Donroe and Carney Doctrines," *Jacobin*, January 23 2026, <https://jacobin.com/2026/01/carney-davos-speech-international-multipolarity> < <https://jacobin.com/2026/01/carney-davos-speech-international-multipolarity> > . 
4. Savage, "Between the Donroe and Carney Doctrines." 
5. Emma G. Fitzsimmons, "Zohran Mamdani's Top 5 Priorities as Mayor," *The New York Times*, November 5, 2025, <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/11/05/nyregion/zohran-mamdani-nyc-mayor-priorities-agenda.html> < <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/11/05/nyregion/zohran-mamdani-nyc-mayor-priorities-agenda.html> > . 

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