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Introduction

The “government of anybody and everybody” is bound to attract the hatred of all those who are entitled to govern men by their birth, wealth, or science.

Jacques Rancière, *Hatred of Democracy*

Liberal democracy is in dire straits – the street revolts against markets and governments; voters propel anti-establishment parties into parliament; heads of state venture to save private banks with public money; and well-meaning public intellectuals of the Left and the Right demand, in the name of democracy, that more power be given to the people who are already at a loss how to handle the maddening complexity of the world they inhabit. In a word, democratic hopes have been thwarted by the current economic crisis - turned social, turned political, crisis. Notwithstanding increased street mobilisation, the impact citizens have on politics has reached its nadir. Public discontent, which was rising even during the prosperous 1990s, has reached new heights since the onset of the financial meltdown of 2008 and the ensuing economic and social destitution. The formerly silent spectators are not just demanding more accountability and transparency, they request different politics: they are turning to contention and contestation, rather than validation of rule through the rituals of electoral democracy. From Athens to Madrid, from Lisbon to New York and Istanbul, *los Indignados*, *the 99%*, *the Occupiers*, and a *Geração à Rasca* all send the same anxious message – a deep distrust in the capacity and willingness of elected officials to manage the crisis in ways that serve the common good.

And here we face a paradox: while the streets have seen the most intensive social mobilisation of the past decades, nothing meaningful follows in policy. Politics appears to have been confiscated by experts promising redemption through suffering: the politics of

austerity. Endorsing the “There Is No Alternative” (TINA) dictum that spurred the neoliberal turn in the 1980s, decision-makers have suspended decision-making. As some commentators have aptly remarked, we live in a time of post-politics. Public policy discussions are not even minimally plural: the “common sense” of austerity has displaced any substantive debate on resolving the crisis, as the societal crisis itself is being presented as just a crisis of public finance. The imperative of national competitiveness in the global economy has made the cuts in social provision appear unavoidable – a trend that in fact predates the crisis. As incumbent political elites are doing away with politics and the social safety net is wearing out, social risk is being thrust onto the weakest citizens. Under such adverse circumstances, democratic hopes vanish, giving way to desperation and right-wing fantasies. The aspirations to freedom that spread after WWII on both sides of the iron curtain – aspirations that made possible the democratic revolutions of 1989 – are now drowning in a swelling fear of freedom. The time for judgment and responsibility, for weighing options, for imagination and change, i.e. the time for politics, seems to have passed.

This volume argues for the need to overcome the naturalisation of the political discourse about the crisis and its iron-clad, unique solutions, and reclaim a notion of politics that involves several key elements: first, a meaningful commitment to making visible and problematising the forces stalling the democratic game; second, inclusive collective deliberations about alternative courses of action; third, the relativisation of expert knowledge for politics and resisting the concomitant temptation to reduce citizens to the status of clients, patients or mere spectators to elite decision-making; fourth, the free play of the imagination as a force of political innovation and institutional experimentation. Taken together, these interlinked elements constitute the essential background conditions for exercising what we would like to call “the right to politics”. If the Enlightenment’s emancipatory promise for a

life of experimental self-realisation is to have any real purchase, it presupposes a fundamental right without which democracy, self-determination, and any meaningful political engagement are impossible – the right to politics. Activating the right to politics is the only viable antidote to the toxic policy logic of “there is no alternative” that is now annihilating human control over the future, thus rendering policy decisions about our collective existence empty of choice and with that – void of moral content, thereby disabling political responsibility. In what follows, we will discuss each of these interrelated elements in turn, with a view to substantiating the theoretical promise this book makes.

The first condition for the exercise of the right to politics is that of identifying the agents responsible for the current predicament – as well as the social dynamics and structures making it possible – in a way that avoids vacuous references to impersonal, unpredictable, uncontrollable forces of the market whose impact nobody can appraise, foresee and withstand. The language of inevitability and catastrophe absolves the culprits of the responsibility to redress the harm and to try to prevent future crises. The only beneficiaries of the portrayal of the crisis as “inevitable”, “unforeseeable”, or “anomalous” are those responsible for the crisis and those carrying the guilt of failing to protect citizens in case of a crisis. We argue that no effective management of the crisis and its aftermath is possible without an honest reckoning and reflection about the non-inevitable policy steps and the institutional arrangements that led us here today. Several of the chapters in this book contribute important historical – legal and political – analyses that denaturalise the language of inevitability, thus supplying the basis for a meaningful debate about the current predicament.

Secondly, we take the essence of democratic politics to be the discerning and weighing of alternative courses of action, legislative proposals, practices, policies, candidates and institutional structures, in formal fora but also in alternative spaces for politics. Democracy presupposes choices and careful examination of competing options in view of

serving the common good. Yet the response to the crisis has been invariably austerity and structural adjustment for the sake of financial stabilisation. The dissenting voices have been marginalised and delegitimised through a variety of strategies: the “ideological” proposals of heterodox economists have been counterpoised to the scientificity of neo-liberal models – forgetting it was these models that brought about the crisis to begin with – while social movements have been taunted for being naïve, confused, incapable of delivering a plausible alternative solution. The ground was thus cleared for imposing the unique solution, a solution with massive negative effects on the already disempowered citizens. Several contributors to this collection build on work in the history of political thought and contemporary political theory to highlight the merits of rethinking the parameters of citizen agency and to assess alternative spaces and practices of claim-making beyond strong publics.

Which brings us to the third element of our take on politics: the desacralisation of science in order to undermine the epistemic privilege experts enjoy in contemporary democratic society. Appeals to science and expertise give technicians privileged place in decision-making. It is the supposedly neutral technicians – and not elected representatives – who decide on both the diagnosis and the therapy for the crisis, thus eroding further the already diminished political power of ordinary citizens. Given the increasing complexity of international markets, technicians’ voices are being granted predominant weight in decision-making. Such views of the role of experts obscure the fact that, in the name of objectivity and reliability, science and expertise serve as conversation and contestation stoppers: no deliberation makes sense once the scientists have spoken. Correlated with the privilege experts enjoy is the relegation of citizens to the status of clients or patients of unaccountable elites and their specialists in crisis management. The angry voices of those who bear the brunt of the austerity policies do not resonate in the halls of power. Citizens’ political efficiency – the capacity to have political claims translated in meaningful policies by political leaders –

has reached troubling lows. While we think there is effectively room for experts in democratic politics, we propose that their voice should be relativised, that their epistemic privileges be challenged, and that their claims of impartiality be always seen as suspicious by citizens who refuse to resign themselves to the role of spectators of elite decision-makers. Several chapters in this volume discuss the values that should guide experts' intervention in democratic deliberations and exemplify what such interventions might look like. In addition, imaginative ways of reclaiming politics by ordinary citizens make the object of a generalised reflection in this volume.

Last but not least, we argue that ours is a time when the courage of the imagination must be cultivated so that we can arrive at alternative visions of our common life for the future. The social destabilisation that crises trigger tends to unleash conservative instincts for clinging to the familiar in search of safety. It is by force of this logic that, in the middle of economic crisis, voters propelled to power the same center-right economically liberal elites whose neoliberal policies of extreme deregulation set off the economic crisis. If elections are any indicator of prevailing preferences, the popular vote at the nadir of the crisis in the mature democracies of Europe suggests that neoliberal capitalism has considerable popular support.¹ Yet crisis is the best time for institutional experimentation. When familiar blueprints prove useless and old solutions don't work, when suffering is enhanced by the very recipes applied to alleviate it – by prescriptions given without citizen input, it is time that we look for available sources we have for projecting a different image of our community. It might be the case that the image will only be a negative one – one that merely tells us what we do not want our community to look like in the wake of this crisis. Yet this will still be a great advance over stubborn rehearsing of the same old truths reified in our common sense. Some of the chapters in this book deal precisely with the challenges imagination faces in the era of post-politics. The possibility of a positive notion of critique and political mobilisation

that avoids the pitfalls of the beaten track makes the object of careful reflection in several contributions to this collection.

Given the contours of the account of democratic politics sketched here, it is important to emphasise that this book positions itself in opposition to recent contributions to democratic theory. Upon analysing the ever-diminishing space for meaningful democratic deliberations, some have proposed that we should tame our democratic expectations and calibrate our theorising in line with these new political realities. In an age when politics is experienced through the mass media as appearance and manipulation, in times of personalised politics and increased discretionary power of the executive, leaders produce public opinion rather than respond to it. We are told that in such circumstances, the time for an “ocular” understanding of representative democracy has arrived. Representative of this take on contemporary democracy is Jeffrey Green’s widely discussed *The Eyes of the People: Democracy in the Age of Spectatorship*, where the author invites the audience to reconcile itself with the idea that vocal models of democracy are out of touch with the ways in which citizens experience politics nowadays. A more relevant and useful matrix for thinking about democracy today would be, the argument goes, to focus on the eyes of the people as the locus of political empowerment. Most of our political experience is reduced to listening and watching professional politicians speaking on our behalf, so much so that the majority of citizens are not decision-makers, but spectators who relate to politics with their eyes. Given this reality, democratic theory is invited to reinvent itself “in a manner that respects the everyday structure of political experience” (Green 2010, 4–6). Sceptical of the impact the voice of the people can have today, Green proposes that the gaze of the people, which inspects and tries to capture leaders off guard, in moments of candour, can ensure surveillance over the leadership. A plebiscitary – rather than a deliberative or participatory – model of democracy is thus deemed appropriate for the age we live in: “the plebiscitary model I shall defend

strives for ideals especially suitable to the fallen conditions that shape the way democracy has come to be experienced today” (Green 2010, 7). Nowadays, he urges, politics is not about participative goal setting and deliberative decision making, it is mostly about empowering – an admittedly imperfectly legitimate – political class to govern. Popular empowerment lies with watching the leaders in a matter that examines, supervises, inspects and scrutinises. XX Such a scenario of the democratic game does allow the public to increase the pressures on elites for reason-giving and justification, And while Green admits the elite of participating citizens – the most likely audience for his book – will find his proposal problematic, he concludes that, for the mass of citizens, plebiscitary democracy is a more appropriate ideal.

Green’s diagnosis of the contemporary predicament might be correct; yet his fallacy (and the quiet folly of traditional social theory more generally²) is that he takes “the everyday structure of political experience” as a given. He discusses “the fallen conditions that shape the way democracy has come to be experienced today” as unalterable and asks us to adjust to these conditions. In the silent and sanitised world of ocular democracy, where the “masses” have no other political vocation but to bestow their blessing on politicians and experts, or sanction them with silent disapproval, the right to politics is demoted to a right to be governed.³ Green’s attempt to build an ethical model on the poor conditions of democracy today amounts to an invitation to theoretical resignation; it trivialises critique and should therefore look suspicious to those who believe in the necessity of reclaiming politics from technocrats, professionals and “saviours” of all stripes and colours, i.e. from the often impermeable and unaccountable class of political leaders. It is oblivious of the wisdom of the first, and often most insightful, adepts of democracy – that democracy is more than granting rulers a popular mandate to rule. In highlighting the power of democratic legitimacy and the fallibility of democratic governance, James Madison has warned that giving democratic form to despotic rule is among the greatest of political calamities.⁴ Democratic, responsive, power

is neither always responsible, nor always competent, as Alexis de Tocqueville already observed at the dawn of modern democratic government, because “the men who are entrusted with the direction of public affairs ... are frequently inferior, in both capacity and morality, ...are unskilful and sometimes contemptible”, while exercising arbitrary power “still greater than in despotic states” (Tocqueville, 1990 [1838]: 240-241, 209).

Contra Green and in tune with Madison’s and Tocqueville’s warnings, this collection seeks to capture the background conditions that make democracy – not ocular or spectatorial, but participatory and contestatory democracy – possible again. We should not reconcile ourselves with the diagnosis of the shrinking of the realm of politics and adjust the format of democracy, and the nature of critique, to that reality. Focusing on the gaze is futile, nay, perilous, if citizens have no power to shape the reality they perceive. Access to a wealth of information does not increase control over the very production of information. The worrisome ascent of far right, populist parties across Europe highlights the dangers of placing our hopes in the people’s supervisory capacities. Populist leaders candidly provide the kind of theatre that can enthrall the vision of the demos and supply it with ready-made, simplistic and deceiving visions of who is culpable for its woes.

The chapters in this volume constitute an invitation to resist resignation and contest the experts’ confiscation of decision-making, to think outside the hegemonic common sense, offer alternative diagnoses, and experiment with alternative cures. Generally, but particularly in times of crisis, it is perilous to underestimate, like the adepts of ‘ocular democracy’ do, the importance of challenging leaders’ managerial views of politics, and especially of proposing alternative courses of action. In this sense, the book prizes Hannah Arendt’s insight that contextual, reflective judgment is the political faculty *par excellence*. Through reflective judgment, novelty is possible in the political space. And, since everyone has the capacity to judge “without banisters”, citizens must re-appropriate politics and not let themselves be

transformed into customers, patients, or gazing spectators. The contributions in this volume invite the reader to ponder the imperative to reclaim politics, inside and outside conventional arenas of public life.

While thinking creatively is an ever-present feature of democratic politics, it is particularly important in times of political and economic crisis. We take uncertainty, fallibility, contention and contestation, plurality and imagination to be the defining features of politics. In denying all these features, i.e. in suppressing the possibility of novelty through a naturalisation of the TINA doctrine, the current democratic leaders have forgone a political approach to the crisis. Without fetishising crisis, we argue that it provides us with an opportunity for innovation, for contesting the ossified and silencing “common sense.” It is the time for alternative communities of judgment to assert themselves, muddy the clear waters of technocratic approaches to politics, expand the ethical universe to the economy, and provoke institutional actors to respond to new ways of thinking about “our” shared world. Against ocular views, the contributors to this volume see crisis as a time to act, not to adjust and resign ourselves to the confiscation of politics.

Given our understanding of the conditions for the exercise of the right to politics – as well as our concurrent scepticism towards ocular views of democracy – we have isolated three main concerns for our project: *First*, the *loci* of revival: where can democratic politics flourish in the wake of the crisis? What are the spaces where the right to politics could be meaningfully exercised? *Second*, the *modes* of revival: what are the practices that embody the right to politics? What strategies of generating constructive political conflict and reclaiming democracy should be adopted in order to effectively influence policy? In other words, what innovative practices can count as exercises of the right to politics and how can they be politically efficacious? *Third*, the *critique* of revival: how should we reinvent democratic theory to grapple with these challenging times? How can we theoretically reinvent ourselves

in order to account for the challenges – but also the opportunities – facing those who want to exercise their right to politics?

1. This collection is structured to address these three themes of the spaces, practices, and the critique of democracy's resurrection through a revival of the right to politics. The first part of the book seeks to identify new spaces for democratic politics to flourish, by raising a series of interconnected questions: Under what conditions can citizens discern viable social and political alternatives to the naturalised *status quo*? In what fora can citizens make claims efficiently? What are the geographies democracy needs to (re-) appropriate for its regeneration? Where can pressure be applied? Do we need to transform or rather substitute representative democracy? And can the new media empower protest? The authors in this section tackle these questions with a view to identifying productive spaces for democratic reclamation.

The first article in this part of the book responds to those who have lost faith in representative democracy. Against claims about its demise, Paulina Tambakaki works within an agonistic framework and tries to defend the salience of representative institutions by arguing that they can still be important venues and targets of claim-making. Her perspective avoids messianic tones and concedes that neo-liberal hegemony may not be vulnerable to punctual, precise claims that press for responsibility and responsiveness. Nonetheless, such processes of claim-making are likely to intensify the struggle against depoliticisation. It is by force of these contestatory dynamics of claim-making that representative institutions still have the potency to revitalise democracy

In contradistinction to Tambakaki, Keith Breen tries to expand our notion of traditional democratic spaces and contests the assumption, shared widely by ordinary citizens, elites, and theorists (including Hannah Arendt and Jürgen Habermas), that work processes and workplace organisation must rest in the hands of managers, not workers themselves. He

appeals to normative arguments for institutionalising meaningful forms of work and for workplace democratisation grounded on the ideal of freedom. To support these arguments, the chapter explores two important examples of successful workplace restructuring – Volvo’s innovations in automotive assembly in Uddevalla, Sweden, and the recent emergence of “worker-recuperated enterprises” in Argentina. Thus, the chapter directs attention to successful instances of institutional experimentation that suggest already available resources for activating alternatives to the neoliberal status-quo.

Jodi Dean’s contribution scrutinises another widely acclaimed space for democratic appropriation – the virtual sphere – and dispells our enchantment regarding the potentialities for democratic action thought to be latent in it. While the digital revolution has been celebrated as marking a new age for political mobilisation and participation, Dean argues that, as an expression of communicative capitalism, it is profoundly depoliticising. A distinction emerges between two independent forms of politics: politics as the circulation of content through the new media, and politics as the activity of officials. While democracy presupposes that communication in the public sphere influences political decision-making in formal institutions, a dramatic disconnect between these two forms of politics seems to mark the present. What is more, the multiplication of communications and their increased intensity prevents the formation of a strong counter-hegemonic position that would serve as a meaningful counter-force to the activity of officials. “Expanded and intensified communicativity neither enhances opportunities for linking together political struggles nor enlivens radical democratic practices—although it has exacerbated left fragmentation, amplified the voices of right-wing extremists, and delivered ever more eyeballs to corporate advertisers” (Dean, XX)

With voices across the political spectrum now calling for divesting the state from its coercive power over citizens and repatriating power to “the people”, the state has become an

unlikely venue of democratic politics. That is why Claus Offe's contribution to the volume is rebelliously illuminating as it places the state (back) in the centre-stage of democratic politics. Offe argues that public authority is suffering from a political affliction known as 'ungovernability', which is being played out, experienced, as a failure of democracy as a political regime. To vindicate democracy, we need, therefore, to rebuild the political infrastructure of public authority in such a way as to enable it to govern, again, in the public interest. Here Offe articulates a perspective of critique that focuses on the endogenous dynamics of crisis and renewal within the institutional arrangements that guide policy action by providing particular incentives to actors. He suggests that we "endogenise", in an institutionalist perspective, those factors that deprive democratic governments of their authority and capacity to act effectively. The perspective of theorising is thus framed to steer us away from both the rationalism of agent-centered models and the functionalism of anonymous structures – trajectories of analysis that have enabled many analysts of our predicament to make the shortcuts of either imputing the societal crisis to inept politicians and greedy bankers, or to the unruly play of untameable market forces. This in turn invites us to seek solutions in the direction of institutional re-structuration of contemporary capitalist democracies. Within this broad perspective of what we might call 'endogenous institutionalism', the contributions in the second and third section of this collection develop specific modalities of critique.

The second section of the collection addresses the theme of the practices of democratic renewal. What are the faculties and attitudes necessary for overcoming the current impasse? How can the represented begin to exist politically in a meaningful way, beyond the moment of delegation? Which new and increasingly influential modes of political discourse should be rejected, and why? And what new and untried modes of democratic politics should be

adopted, and why? The articles in this section perform two functions: a diagnostic one – various authors try to trace the historical processes that have brought about the current democratic deficits – and a therapeutical one, pointing to potential mechanisms of redress. While coming from two different disciplines (law and political theory), Tamara Lothian and Alessandro Ferrara share a historical perspective and reinforce each other’s conclusions and solutions. Ferrara’s analysis invites us to rethink our conception of democracy in its historical context and emphasises the challenges that recent economic changes pose for the possibility of accountable government by the people. Contemporary democracies have to face tremendously inhospitable conditions – within and beyond their borders. The market’s absolute power over democracy is the defining feature of contemporary politics: the market can influence the lives of all without being subject to the law. Laws – domestic and international – are made in view of providing an optimal setting for economic transactions. Harnessing the absolute power of the markets requires a realistically utopian vision of democratic re-embedding through the application of five principles – all deriving from the values of democratic accountability and transparency: “a) the revitalisation of the principle of separation of saving and venture capital; b) the principle of tax-payers’ ‘temporary takeover’ of banking institutions in distress; c) the principle of democratic ‘trickle-up’, as opposed to neoliberal ‘trickle down’; d) the principle of individual accountability for the aggregate effects of one’s economic actions and the creation of state run insurance plans, mandatory for all individual investors; e) the principle of the full accountability of rating agencies for the effects of their judgments” (Ferrara, XX) While not constituting a fully-fledged blue print, these guidelines constitute important starting points for denaturalising the language of inevitability and for imagining institutional innovation.

Lothian agrees with Ferrara in arguing that finance has become “the star example of ‘capture’ of government by powerful private interests!” (Lothian XX). Building on a rigorous

analysis of the historical processes that culminated in the crisis, Lothian offers a structural argument that positions itself against naturalising and depoliticising narratives about the origin of the crisis. Three crucial themes have been obscured in discussions over how to tackle the financial crisis: the link between redistribution and recovery, the connection of finance to the real economy, and the lack of democratic accountability. The diagnosis – as much as the treatment – requires us to look beyond the economy, rethink the very constitutional organisation of the state, and use law innovatively to protect democracy. Like Ferrara and Tambakaki above, Lothian believes in the capacity of representative institutions to experiment with various solutions within the framework of possibilities that democracy provides, with a view to building a toolbox of contextually attuned legal-institutional arrangements.

The next two papers shift the focus from the macro, institutional level to the level of citizen empowerment. Arjun Appadurai invites us to stop prizing politically efficient citizen action and to inquire whether there is something to be learnt from instances of political inefficiency. Even when failing to achieve their intended goal, claims to injustice the disadvantaged utter destabilise the contexts in which these claims are made. Thus, these very failures constitute a resource for achieving justice, rather than a cause of desperation. He directs our attention to the global South and examines the nature of deliberative contexts in poor democracies like India. In his paper, he investigates the role of apparent failures of efforts to increase the role of the poor in deliberative contexts, to suggest that what might seem failures in any given instance may transform the political environment in the long run. Building on insights from the philosophy of language and on work about failed performatives by Judith Butler and Shoshana Feldman, Appadurai argues that, while it is obviously the case that many statements by the poor have no positive effects within deliberative spaces, they may, when repeated, rehearsed and reiterated, contain the seeds of performative success.

Through a combination of philosophical and ethnographic work, he shows how failed claims by the poor can, in the long run, alter a disempowering and unfair context of deliberation. The challenge is to maintain sufficient political hope to continue the transformative work of failing.

Matthew Fluck's contribution critically examines the value of whistleblowing and the promise of transparency in times of political disenfranchisement and economic dire straights. The paper dispels the vain hopes we might be tempted to place in such practices and invites us to critically reconsider this crucial value of transparency. The emancipatory and legitimacy-enhancing function of transparency has been historically celebrated by the champions of democracy. Bradley Manning, Edward Snowden and Julian Assange currently enjoy global notoriety. While these instances of whistle-blowing make it appear that transparency is having a comeback, Fluck warns us not to overestimate the democracy-enhancing role that transparency – understood as access to information – plays nowadays. Instead of focusing on accessing pre-formatted data, citizens' efforts should focus on the quality of the data, on interpreting and assessing it critically. A conception of transparency as publicity – as collective citizen evaluation of the way in which data is produced – is more appropriate for the 21st C and the problems facing democratic societies.

In its third section, the book addresses more directly the issue of critique. The pluralisation of the places and practices of democratic engagement does not in itself guarantee that democracy would have any performative purchase. What does this all mean for democratic theory? How can we rethink democracy when the streets are bustling with mobilisation yet nothing gets through to those who govern? How can we reinvent a modus of thinking democracy to prevent democracy becoming captive of the powerful legitimisation resources of neoliberal capitalism that demand self-reliance and self-empowerment? Are our tools of critique sharp enough for making sense of today's reality or do we need to reconsider our

approaches? Do we need to reach out to other disciplines? And where can our hopes lie? The right to politics on which we assert that the effective resurgence of democracy depends, expands the spectrum of conceptualisation of democracy much beyond authoritative notions of self-rule. It demands that democracy takes a distance from itself, that it resists the seduction of becoming its own justificatory horizon.

Of all the authors in this volume Noelle McAfee is the one that most directly takes on the challenge of criticising the depoliticising, naturalising and conservative effect of neoliberal discourses about policy, in general and in particular in relation to the financial crisis. Building on the work of Hannah Arendt – and expanding her notion of the political to include social concerns – McAfee tries to contribute to current democratic theorising by proposing a notion of political deliberation that will hopefully help remedy legitimacy deficits. Her main argument is that, while acting according to different guiding principles, social movements and public deliberative bodies can complement each other in countering the depoliticising tendencies of political leaders disconnected from their constituencies. Incorporating insights from actual practices of contestation, the author offers an account of how political efficiency and accountability could be enhanced through a combination of public deliberation and social activism.

Nikolas Kompridis's chapter intervenes in debates over the work democratic theory can do in times of crisis and tries to offer an alternative account of critique. On his view, critique should play a disclosing role, one that reveals to us the possibilities for innovation for our future collective life. Building on Arendt and Gadamer and engaging with Foucault and Derrida, Kompridis seeks to displace the understanding of critique as interrogation and deconstruction. Instead, he pleads that we need to return to utopian thinking: no democracy is possible without utopian longing. To give concreteness to his notion of positive critique, Kompridis discusses students' reactions to the disproportionate use of police force on campus

in the UC Davis case. Through their silent human chain the students proposed an alternative way of being together as a community, thus exemplifying that utopian longing so essential for a positive notion of critique.

Tracing the emergent trend in democratic theory of sourcing the collective will from plural and diverse publics in the private and social spheres, rather than the public-political sphere, David Chandler's analysis focuses on what he names 'non-linear' approaches to democracy. These approaches seek to overcome the rationalist assumptions of the public/private divide, thus discerning the democratic potential of everyday life. Within these approaches, democracy is no longer seen to operate as a collective will standing above society; democracy becomes endogenous to society, thereby becoming a mechanism to distribute power more evenly through the social empowerment of individuals and communities in their everyday practices. Disclosing surprising affinities between the modes of thinking of John Dewey and Friedrich Hayek, Chandler simultaneously provides an alternative to authoritative discourses on democracy and a suggestive illustration of the traps such alternatives carry in their turn. For when we appeal to bringing government back to the people, and seek democracy in the personal decisions made in everyday life, don't we absolve public authority from its political responsibility? Does the devolution of power from the heights of political management to the depths of everyday life - devolution done in the name of democracy - deprive democracy of that infrastructure without which the right to politics loses its potency, as in the case of ungovernability Claus Offe addressed earlier in the volume? It was a deliberate choice of ours to refuse to take a side between the allegedly dated authoritative notions of democracy and the innovative approaches that sparkle with fresh ambition. Even as we urge democracy to re-invent itself mobilising the redemptive resources of the current crisis, we prefer to keep our awareness that, in the process, it risks to reinvent itself out of existence.

Taken together, the voices we've gathered in this volume invite readers to seek the resources needed to (re)claim democracy by invoking the fundamental modern 'right to politics' and securing the conditions for its actualisation. The overall ambition is to point out several possible mechanisms and venues for reclaiming politics and thus re-energise democracy, discerning possibilities to (re)constitute the places for democratic engagement, to (re)invent democratic practices and to (re)consider our understanding of social critique. Without falling prey to a romantic notion of the democratic public sphere, the book cultivates *realistic hopes*: *realistic*, for in seeking opportunities one must also take into account the difficulty of overturning the limits of the normalised possible; *hopes*, because a commitment to democracy is incompatible with resignation. In this sense we, as editors, see the chapters neither as definite diagnoses of our democratic predicament, nor as recipes to be followed, but as provocative invitations to a debate about the direction we take from here, politically and theoretically. It might be our personal biographies as thinkers brought into intellectual existence by a discontent with the everyday political reality of autocratic socialism in our native Bulgaria and Romania that has made us intolerant to stale political regimes, whatever their substance. A democracy resigned to its deficits is to us unpalatable. We are not ready to say, along with the Spanish indignados: "We are not against the system, the system is against us". It is not enough to tinker with an otherwise objectionable system to make it more inclusive. An inclusive, but lame democracy, comfortably reconciled with its flaws and adjusted to its professed limitations, void of the tempestuous energies of competing alternatives and conflicting interests, in a word -- a democracy that has given up its right to politics -- is hardly much better than its contemporary rivals, the uncertain autocracies of the post-communist world. We trust that a combative, restless, inspired democracy, nourished by

a rebellious penchant for experimentation and improvisation is attainable and therefore – worth a good fight.

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¹ Elections in 2010 and 2011 brought to power the centre-right in Spain, Portugal, Switzerland, Finland, Andorra, Ireland, Italy, Denmark, Britain, and the Netherlands – to consider only the ‘mature’ democracies of Europe. In that period the majority of the vote went to the centre-left only in Sweden, where the Social Democrats scored only 0,6 percentage points higher than the economically liberal Moderate Rally Party.

² Here we have in mind the difference between ‘critical’ and ‘traditional’ social theory, as conceptualised by Max Horkheimer – while the latter is committed to a correct description of social phenomena, the former scrutinises the structural and institutional circumstances of domination and oppression, seeking to identify a path of emancipation, “to liberate human beings from the circumstances that enslave them” (Horkheimer 1982, 244).

³ On the difference between politics and governance see Azmanova 2012, Ch.1.

⁴ ‘One hundred and seventy-three despots would surely be as oppressive as one’ (Madison, Hamilton, and Jay [1787-88], 311)