The Sciences of the Democracies

Jean-Paul Gagnon
and Benjamin Abrams *et al.*

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Note about authorship

The authors cosigning this work should be taken as conveying their enthusiasm for and critical collaboration on this approach to the sciences of the democracies. This is not a blanket endorsement of all points defended in its pages. For example, a main site of disagreement exists between authors who argue that epistemic leadership is necessary for the advancement of democracy in the world and other authors who, instead, argue that academics who specialize in democracy should form egalitarian networks, partnerships, alliances, and the like with non-university-based scholars and practitioners of democracy (such as private citizens and their groups, politicians, and non-governmental organizations). This, they argue, should especially be cultivated with peoples who are receptive to having their ideas and practices problematized through recurring critical exchanges. The authors of this book have tried to balance disagreements like these to strike a tone of neutrality for the reader. The authors invite readers to develop their own arguments about which, if any, approaches proposed in this book they might like to participate in, contest, or support.

Throughout these pages, the words 'democracy', 'democratic', and 'democratization' should be read as if inverted commas are always present. This is to acknowledge that these terms are standing in for a long list of more specific signifiers. These other signifiers may only have in common the fact that they are not definable as involving autocracy (absolute and unchallengeable rule). We explain this further in the pages that follow.

About the authors

Jean-Paul Gagnon is a philosopher of the democracies with the University of Canberra. His first book, *Evolutionary Basic Democracy* (Palgrave, 2013), was nominated for the Stein Rokkan Prize (Rokkan was a student of Arne Næss whose 1950s works on democracy influenced Gagnon's). He is presently writing (as sole author and with colleagues) several books on, or directly from, the 'sciences of the democracies and cognates' approach to the study of democracy.

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Key points for readers

For governments and public officials

In order to generate more political legitimacy and trust, combat author-itarianism, enhance policies, and continue democratizing human societies, it is important to fund basic research into the ideas and practices of democracy and cognate terms (e.g. collective governance, *manapori*, *minshu/minpon shugi*). Increasing base research funding to universities would enable them to hire more democracy researchers into secure positions. Establishing a nationally competitive research grant on democracy and removing paywalls for democracy-related academic journals would ensure that new ideas are constantly being investigated and openly communicated. It is also, however, necessary to establish a social benefit, or living wage, so that independent researchers can sustainably pursue their inquiries into democracy. We further aver that government and public institutions should co-construct *and* co-deliver 'democracy research committees' and 'democracy degrees' that offer practical insights into and training in various kinds of democracy *with* researchers and practitioners but also with interested citizens, residents, visitors, and philanthropists. Such committees and degree programmes would produce practical knowledge that could be implemented in policy-making and legislative processes, especially as concerns regulatory impact assessments conducted by governments and other institutions.

For citizens, residents, and visitors

Democratization can happen anywhere you are and everywhere you may go. It can occur in yourself; in your home/family/shared house/camp; in your school (however that's defined), workplace (ditto), or civil association (e.g. club, hospital, place of religious worship, aged/special care facility, apartment/condo building); online; and in government institutions and political parties from the local to the global. You have the choice of *how* to democratize – there are thousands of options for you to draw from – and only *you* can do this, only *you* can action this, alone and,

when you are ready or when the opportunity arises, with others. What we have learned so far is that democratizing our lives, or the social spaces we most frequently inhabit, is difficult work – it can truly be personally challenging, even risky, depending on your context. So please feel free to reach out to any of the authors with your questions and concerns. We will do our best to help.

For researchers and practitioners (or one and the same)

A 'sciences of the democracies' is at your feet. It offers an ethno-quantic frame (time + space + language + culture + species) for the artefactual study of 'things democratic' in the world which stem from five sources of knowledge (individuals + groups of people + non-textual media + texts + non-humans). It raises challenging philosophical, institutional, educational, and methodological questions for you to ponder and presents formidable obstacles for you to consider. It proposes the birth of an entirely new type of democratic theorist – the enigmatic 'Fourth Theorist' – a yet-to-exist theoretician who can theorize democracy from a big data position of many thousands of democracy concepts derived from textual and non-textual media. Perhaps *you* will become the first instantiation of the Fourth Theorist, or maybe an advanced artificial intelligence product will beat us all to it (probably with our help).

For philanthropists (big and small)

Anyone interested in donating, or investing, any amount to support democracy research should consider reaching out to democracy researchers and practitioners directly. Not only is getting to know researchers and practitioners a pathway to new friendships; it is also a means for you to get involved in the research work yourself. Donations or investments made *directly* to the researcher's or practitioner's fund (this should be tax-deductible, held in trust by their university or another regulated institution overseeing their work) immediately increase their capacity to undertake the labours described in this book and the other pro-democracy labours we have not been able to mention in these pages. University departments can, for example, be approached directly to create endowed chairs for democracy studies; and estate, to house both democracy research and democracy researchers and practitioners, can

be bequeathed or otherwise gifted to your choice of university, college, school, or research institute as well. There are many ways to support ongoing democratization efforts and, especially, to defend democracy in times of alarming democratic decline.

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Matthew Flinders, Michael Saward, and Michael Freeden, in particular, gave generously of their time to read our work and critically support the ideas that we are exploring. We could not have found our balance without their guidance.

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The authors would also like to thank Pat Gordon-Smith and Elliot Beck of UCL Press, along with the anonymous reviewers, for considering our work and for helping us spot excellent opportunities for further developing this book and more sharply presenting its mission to (re)propose a different, and we think more just, study of democracy.

1
The story of this book

> The peoples of the world ... have never been more conscious of the conflicting and contradictory ideas which surround them than in recent years. Ideological conflicts are present everywhere, between nations, within nations, between minds, within minds.
>
> Few words have played a greater role in these disagreements than the word 'democracy'. The problem is one of vast implications. It is not just a question of terminology. It has its background in contrasts of historical development, of social conditions, of political patterns. It is deeply entangled in the immense cluster of problems raised by the impact of technology and industrial civilization on the lives of peoples everywhere. It is not only a problem of philosophy – it is a problem of war or peace.[1]

This is a book of many authors, but one voice. Its purpose is to pluralize our understandings of democracy by collecting, describing, and thereafter comparing and analysing all of democracy's different meanings as can be found across time, space, language, culture, and species (what we term the 'ethno-quantic domain' later on in the book). This is a necessarily audacious academic undertaking (as is critically explained in three out of the four essays in response at the end of this book: see Chapters 8, 9, and 10). Our aim is to better understand democracy by undertaking philosophical, institutional, educational, and methodological programmes of research and outreach that are, in almost all cases, hitherto untried.

The book was first drafted by Jean-Paul Gagnon after the 2022 Joint Sessions of the European Consortium of Political Research (ECPR) – a type of intensive conference for a small group of experts

to discuss their ideas over five or so days. That draft was subsequently built upon by other authors, such as Benjamin Abrams, Kei Nishiyama, Brigitte Geissel, and Gergana Dimova. This process of authorship will be explained later as it is uncommon but, from a democrat's perspective, quite useful for the investigation of big topics like democracy.

The 2022 Joint Sessions were focused on a debate that had grown over the preceding year from a public-facing essay that Gagnon was invited to write by the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) for their *Religion and Ethics* section (edited by Scott Stephens). This was his 2021 essay 'Words of democracy: Rescuing an abandoned science',[2] which argued for a resumption of Arne Næss's advice to democrats. Næss argued that political philosophers should, with the greatest care, gather from the world, categorize together, and professionally analyse democracy's many definitions so that they might develop what Næss called a *terminus technicus* (technical term) for democracy. For Næss this meant a technical definition of a necessarily international, or global, cross-cultural, and almost certainly cross-linguistic nature (as Næss himself knew many languages) for the democratic ideas that exist in this world (e.g. the Aymaran *ayllu*,[3] Balinese *banjar*,[4] or the *sabha* and *samiti* assemblies[5] of India's Vedic period), and can be found across time and space (e.g. current women-only village politics in Umoja, Kenya;[6] medieval Ireland's *óenaig*;[7] or the ancient but continuing practices of *calpullin* in Mexico and the USA today).[8] The authors of these *Sciences of the Democracies* build from this idea.

Richard McKeon and Stein Rokkan, though, were more specific about how we should create this *terminus technicus* for democracy. They averred that it should be done through 'intense analysis and painstaking empirical studies' and that this work 'may, if conducted by researchers free of direct ideological entanglements, prove a powerful weapon against oversimplification'.[9] Their encouragement remains relevant for us today as the oversimplification of democracy, done mainly by political parties across the globe who claim to be the heralds or keepers of 'true democracy' (a notable theme in the 2024 US elections), remains a grave concern.

Næss was a Norwegian philosopher commissioned by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in the late 1940s to make sense of a qualitative survey they had run on the meaning of democracy. News about this survey,[10] essays in response to it, and a 500-page report on it – edited by McKeon and Rokkan in 1951 – can be freely found in UNESCO's digital library online.[11] UNESCO had wagered that asking 500 thinkers from their available network what democracy means (over 80 ended up providing responses)[12] would lead

to some scientific clarity for that word. It was hoped that this study would ease ideological tensions between the USA and the Soviet Union as both of those world powers were at that time laying claim to 'true democracy'. Scientific clarity for democracy was, therefore, sought by UNESCO to try to ease that tension. It was, in fact, decided in Mexico City, in November 1947, that UNESCO's director-general (none other than Julian Huxley) would 'arrange for the preparation, by a philosopher, of a plan for an enquiry concerning the fundamental concepts of liberty, democracy, law and equality'.[13] Næss would become that philosopher.

In analysing the responses to UNESCO's survey, Næss and his colleagues came to the reasonable conclusion that no number of scientific pronouncements would change the interests of nations, nor would any number of scientists, philosophers, historians, and the like enjoy success in altering the nature and purpose of superpower propaganda. The point of clarifying democracy's meanings and purposes, its histories and practices, a clarification to be conducted by experts undertaking the 'intense analysis and painstaking empirical studies' of democracy's vast knowledge record, was (and remains) rather to help peoples from around the world to more clearly understand their situations and pinpoint the problems within them. It is meant to help people see through the propaganda, to understand the meanings and the possibilities before them, and to judge for themselves on that basis if conflict is necessary.

To deliver on this promise, Næss's plan was to establish a well-funded team to 'organize philosophically detached debates between nations, between opposed ideological camps: to elucidate, through international exchanges of views, the divergencies of usage and interpretation, to analyse the normative foundation of those divergencies and to search for potential sources of reconciliation'.[14] The hope in this work was to enable peoples to pursue *their* respective democratizations (again, because nation-states and political parties produce and tend to pursue their own interests), even to empathize with and aid each other across national boundaries (however defined), and to avoid, or at least lessen the effects of, becoming limited, bounded, stunted, and so forth, by the oversimplified ideological constraints imposed on them by propagandistic nation-states (which is all of them).

Næss hinted that the more you know about the democracies of this world, across cultures, their respective histories, in consideration of their trajectories into their respective futures, in deference to the nuances of democratic terms and themes as they are found in all languages, then the more you can do to deepen democratic concepts and

democratic movements in your life or among your concerns. As you build this proficiency in democracy knowledge, you can do more to improve existing attempts at democracy, to extend them, and to introduce new ideas as may fit your situation or your level of curiosity. In short, the more you know about democra*cies*, the more you can be a democrat of some kind.

The return of philosophy to the study of democracy

Gathering, organizing, and studying knowledge and know-how on all sorts of different democracies (this includes ideas as well as practices) is a power-up, a fact- or evidence-driven upgrade, for all sorts of different democrats. As Quincy Wright put it, 'the problem is to develop a wide understanding of the different current uses of the term [democracy] and the differences in their practical implication'.[15] The argument given in this book not only agrees with this problem statement – it extends it to non-current uses of democracy (and cognate words across all languages) as well. It does so because current, conventional, and dominant uses of the word 'democracy' are culturally specific – they cannot, therefore, be universal for the Anthropos. Benoy Sarkar saw this more than a hundred years ago: every notion, or idea or concept, is the residuum of one or more cultures. Is it fair, then, for a few notions of democracy to dominate all others?

Despite the need for it and the many promises it could fulfil, the effort to create a technical terminology of and for democracy was abandoned as an intellectual labour not long after it was proposed. Næss offers one explanation for this in the beginning of his 1956 book *Democracy, Ideology and Objectivity*.[16] The abandonment was mainly due to insufficient funding for the project by UNESCO member states but also due to a lack of interest in the need for and process of this work, even from those who knew about it at the time (Næss refers to a small group of Norwegian scholars who continued the work, like Jens Christophersen, but this was 'on a disconcertingly narrow basis'). As he writes, '[i]t is the sincere hope of all who have worked on the original plan [as given above], that comprehensive research [on democracy] will materialize in the not-too-distant future'.[17] It never did.

One further explanation for why the plan never took off involves an altogether different strand of research and conversation in democratic theory that was developing at the same time – this being behaviour-alism or numerical and statistical social scientific methods. As John

Gunnell explains,[18] David Easton was chiefly responsible for setting North American political science on this track by way of his 1953 book *The Political System*. The book was so influential that 'Heinz Eulau once remarked', as Gunnell writes, 'that Easton's [book] was in effect the autobiography of his generation of political scientists'.[19] While there is a growing chill today in relation to this brand of so-called American political science, and especially so due to much-needed efforts at decolonizing academia,[20] it was intoxicating for many people in the 1950s and for most of the remaining twentieth century. Hans Daalder claims to have heard Arne Næss 'express the view that Rokkan was lost to serious scholarship when he exchanged philosophical concepts for numbers and statistics'.[21]

With hindsight, it is clear that philosophy lost the fight with American empirical social sciences in the twentieth century as the means in prime to ensure that advances in democracy research could be made. But as we show in this book, it has not been wise to move in this direction without having first understood as many histories, workings and meanings of democracies as possible. Democracy's empiricists are today, for example, returning to democratic theory to introduce new variables for their studies (for who among us knows of the ostensible influence of *dasa raja dharma* among Rakhine governors or those governors elsewhere influenced by Theravadan principles?), to refine the concepts backing their instruments (for who among us ever uttered the words 'post-colonial stress disorder'?),[22] and even to explain now aberrant results (for who among us understands the difference between reconciliation and decolonization, or demarchy and democracy?).

There remains a dire need to establish a stable, and global, pursuit of this necessarily never-ending research into democracy's words and concepts (never-ending because the meanings of democracy are always changing). For example, in the introduction to his much-cited *Preface to Democratic Theory*, Robert Dahl confesses that he 'made no effort to survey all or most of the traditional theories about democracy'.[23] While he likely would have crossed paths with McKeon and Næss, and certainly did with Rokkan (they collaborated in the 1960s), the plan that democracy's philosophers had hatched through the UNESCO survey did not seem to him important or was not deemed important enough to be mentioned to him (Dahl, for instance, did not cite McKeon or Næss in any of his influential books). Perhaps this was because Dahl thought such work unnecessary, just as Arnold Lien did. Lien, for example, writes, '[e]ven if all the chapters of these histories [of democracy] have not been assembled into one gigantic volume, they are sufficiently available to

warrant substantial deductions'.[24] Are they, though? And for whom? How do we know this if we do not first *try to know* the fuller extent of the options to deduce or infer from?

Consider, for instance, the games and feasting that typically accompanied a *kurultai* (collective decision-making council long common to much of Central Asia)[25] or the ethic of *Hózhó* which guided the Diné/Navajo in their inclusive and consensus-building culture of decision-making.[26] Are they to be dismissed by the ignorance of no analysis and no discussion? Could the addition of feasting and games, or some measure of enjoyment, for electors in Western countries increase engagement with the political formalities they are meant to sustain? Could a stronger adherence to aspirational values in times of consult-ation have led to less pain for the peoples that public policies and their (mal)administration so often, and so injuriously, affect?

And what of lessons that could be learned for democratic practice today from Greater Ashanti's experiences in participatory governance[27] and administrative decentralization,[28] which were said to both improve governance for subjects and consolidate the state's centralized political power? Note how that tenor differs from Crozier, Huntington, and Watanuki's advice, which we will shortly discuss, for governments to strengthen themselves by pushing the people away.[29] And what of the Songhai empire's success in establishing a pluralist society, where leaders sought input from all 'shareholders' of the polity to try to build consensus and at least some measure of popular will as they formulated policy?[30] As we know from our contemporaries today, the democracy of the West has been deleterious to many African and Asian peoples, alongside indigenous nations in the so-called Americas, as representa-tion, parties, and electioneering tend to worsen conflicts and tend to lead to the rule of strong oligarchs backed by violent states.[31] Could this have been avoided had imperialist scholars of democracy, with all their influence, first done their homework? One would have thought that the Haudenosaunee's Clan Mother rule,[32] or the property laws in the *Minangkabau adat*,[33] would have interested Carole Pateman and other feminist, but also participatory, democrats of the twentieth century. And yet they feature nowhere in their works.

We can only deduce for democracy from that which can be deducted. We can only infer for democracy from that which is inferable. If what you know is limited to your context, to your circumstance, then what you write deducts *from* that and infers *for* that. Næss, McKeon, and others involved in the UNESCO project had a sense of this, and that sense has since returned.

It is this logic that renders the words of another twentieth-century virtuoso of democracy studies, Giovanni Sartori, correct when he wrote that the study of democracy is 'largely single-issue minded' and that this has produced a field of knowledge characterized by 'splendid fragments in splendid isolation'.[34] As uncomfortable as it is to admit, the empirical fact of democracy studies is that it has said much about very little. This was recognized over a century ago but, again, our field took little notice. 'We do not know', wrote Benoy Sarkar in the *American Political Science Review* in 1918, 'age by age, and country by country, precisely to what extent the peoples actually participated in the work of government'.[35] We are missing most of the puzzle of democracy (including all the other words in English and all other languages given to democratic themes and practices), focused as we have been on certain pieces of it, unwilling as we have been to gather up the other pieces and see how they might fit together, or not, to see how they might instruct the future, or not.

Gagnon's corrective to this situation was simply to argue for the resumption of the philosophical labour that democracy's scholars had eschewed since the mid-1950s, or earlier if we look to Sarkar's work. The fact is that Næss's book for UNESCO, this being *Democracy, Ideology and Objectivity*,[36] and McKeon and Rokkan's book *Democracy in a World of Tensions*[37] quickly fell into obscurity. Even Sarkar's excellent essay has only been cited less than two dozen times – no one ever taught us that it, or the aforementioned books, were the classics or 'seminal' texts of our discipline. This was almost certainly due to the rise of behaviouralism and the fashionable ideas of empirical social sciences where method was worshipped over content by cliques of Euramerican statisticians. It would be works like Dahl's 1956 *Preface to Democratic Theory*, with its normalizing influence of theorizing about democracy from a few familiar and notably American examples, that would succeed in capturing the attention of democracy's future students, that would limit democracy to mean so little.

Gagnon, therefore, urged anew: let us gather up democracy's words, look into democracy's synonyms, traverse languages, build a global coalition of scholars to do this work, and then proceed to interrogate the meanings and uses attributed to those words for their democraticity (however that might be explained). Such a work can enable words to be traced genetically,[38] to be compared, to be grouped into families, to be associated with specific values and practices, to be clarified against their outcomes and benefits, and so on. Gagnon argued, as Arne Næss did, for a *terminus technicus* to serve humanity's understanding of democracy in all its varied forms across all its varied words.

This position struck a nerve among professional democratic theorists. Within weeks of Gagnon's ABC essay being published, an international debate sprang from this call to resume the abandoned labour. Conversants both challenged and extended Gagnon/Næss/Sarkar's argument. The challenges were many: it is too risky to dilute democracy's core meanings today (these being liberal, representative, and electoral) given the myriad threats they are facing; to gather is an endless, and pointless, pursuit as not all meanings should be treated equally – only the concepts that succeed through the battle of time should be given the attention of experts; the hope of describing democracy's endless meanings is naïve and falls prey to the same logic as Borges's mapmaker – the work will never be done and its fruits never enjoyed as there is simply too much to examine; and so forth. Many, too, were the extensions of Gagnon/Næss/Sarkar's argument: focusing on texts is fine but let us not stop there as knowledge of democracy is also generated from non-textual media (such as the Reichstag's glass dome), from individuals (such as Chinua Achebe), from groups of people (such as China's merchant guilds), and from non-humans (like bees, ants, wild dogs, dolphins, and meerkats) as they, too, must solve collective action problems; it is not just words and their meanings which require collection but so too *how* the words and meanings have been wielded; it doesn't do to study democracy's words in isolation, their connections must also be mapped; and so on.

Several dozen papers germinated from this discussion in a matter of months. Most were published in short form through the ECPR's blog site *The Loop*. Today, there are more than a hundred essays engaging this topic (for more on this, see Chapter 11, Saltnes and Bull's essay in response).[39] This was why a meeting of experts at the Joint Sessions in 2022 was held. Gagnon chaired the event and, together with participants, they noticed over the days of their discussions that four themes were emerging in relation to how, and under which conditions, a sciences of the democracies project – one that builds from UNESCO's initial effort – could be made to happen. These themes were (1) philosophy, (2) institutions, (3) education, and (4) methods. Gagnon then proposed to draft a book around these themes (as reflected in its final structure) and for participants to, thereafter, interrogate, explore, add to, and sharpen the ideas within it. The point in this was to try to produce a book that would bring an already vibrant discussion, with many conversants and many uncertainties and debates, into one voice. This is that book.

A year after the book was proposed, and now with a draft in hand, Gagnon approached Kei Nishiyama, one of the first to critically respond[40]

to his ABC essay and who was also a 2022 Joint Sessions participant. Gagnon asked Nishiyama to read the book and, if he had the time and interest, to contribute to it. Nishiyama accepted the offer. He expanded sections across the book, offered comments across several arguments, referred to new literature, and clarified many lines. His contributions meshed seamlessly into the book's nature and argument because the arguments were not novel or otherwise foreign to him: they were generated by discussions with him and by the discussions he participated in from the outset. It was this pattern of invite, send notes back, and revise, then invite anew with the revised copy of the book, and so on, that was repeated over 30 times by Gagnon across a nearly three-year period.

This process has generated a book on democracy unlike any other: it is in its very making a democratic undertaking. It speaks from different standpoints but in one voice. It offers an argument for how democracy can and should be studied, embodied, and taught from a global chorus. Crucially, our *Sciences of the Democracies* returns philosophy and theory to the heart of democracy studies but not at the expense of other approaches like those used by behaviouralists and sociologists. If we are to understand the fuller variety of democratic ideas that exist in this world, most of which democracy's professional students are ignorant of, we will need all methods as may be appropriate to undertaking these significant tasks before us – hence, a *sciences approach* to studying democracies. As Michael Saward writes in these pages, it is this book's 'openness to the new, the unexpected and the critical' that defines the heart of it (p. 135).

An exploration of key ideas

The 'sciences of the democracies' start with description. Michael Freeden is clear about the need to do this, for 'in any empirically based examination of the expressions of human thinking, we need first and foremost to examine the properties of the raw material we study' (p. 139 in this book). Because we propose to look throughout the world, across what we call the 'ethno-quantic domain' (this being time, space, language, culture, and species), and because we propose to do so *without* a guiding definition of what democracy is, we are likely to collect quite a lot of information about democracy and this information is likely to vary widely, not only in its quality – as in the depth of a given idea – but also in terms of what sort or sorts of democratic values it is invoking (if any). Further to this, our information is going to be varied

as we aim to continuously collect it from no fewer than five sources that exist in the ethno-quantic domain. These are the earlier-mentioned (1) individual humans, (2) groups of humans, (3) texts, (4) non-texts, and (5) non-humans. Just modelling how this work could happen was challenging enough, but we got there in the end (see Chapter 3 in particular).

To begin our work, we first need to *describe* the very thing we collect. For example, let's say a historian uncovers a diary from a nineteenth-century traveller in Kunming, China. It is written in late classical Mandarin, it is the equivalent of fifty A4 pages long, it contains several thousand characters, they are drawn by hand, the author's gender is not known, it was found in a Beijing archive, it was given to the archive by an unknown donor, and so on. After describing the diary's physical and bibliographic details, we move to describing its content. Several passages in the diary describe an account of a teahouse in Kunming where strangers were discussing their respective political affairs. The author's description of the setting leads us to believe that this discussion was public, so this was not a secretive meeting, and it brought to mind comparable accounts of eighteenth-century coffee-houses in England (or early nineteenth-century *pulquerías*/cantinas in Mexico and taverns or saloons in Canada and the United States where farmers, businesspersons, politicians, and such tended to talk and mingle). From this, we can code the entry as bearing evidence of a public sphere for that time, place, language, culture, species, and evidentiary type.

The idea behind finding, organizing, and analysing information of this sort – and consciously without end (we imagine Sisyphus happy; for a challenge to this, see Chapter 8, Flinders's essay in response) – is that with ever more entries, from across the ethno-quantic domain and from at least those five different informational sources, we can start to pursue different forms of analysis. Agreeing with Freeden who urges us to *understand* democracy's artefacts and not simply describe them, we aspire to conduct analyses that take us beyond mere description (important as that first step is) to the politics of judging evidence in context, of comparing accounts for their democraticity (their democratic credentials or merits), of joining accounts into family categories or even cultures and languages of democracy, of trying to find linkages (direct or indirect) between accounts, of tracing the evolution of specific themes or techniques of democracy, and of arguing for the operationalization of specific accounts for the politics of now, of today, wherever in the world that may be.

The chief practical point of this work is to provide anyone with the chance to use this information relative to their needs and interests: a person, whoever *you* are, is meant to be empowered by this information, however that may suit your needs and tastes. We therefore pursue this work with the firm conviction that a democratic theory that tries to free itself from political ideologies and academic conventions can at least provide a *fairer starting place* for the clarification and discussion of democracy's ideas. We agree with UNESCO, and the many participants in their 1949 survey, that open information of this sort 'is an important means for promoting co-operation and common action'[41] in a time when oversimplification about democracy remains not only rife but accentuated in mainstream politics and public discourse.[42]

The most common challenge to this idea of ours is that doing this work *without* a strong definition of democracy – of what democracy is or should be – will lead to including ideas that are not democratic. This is a logic that has been conventionally used in democracy studies and the reason we resist it is because it has led to an overfocus on particular ideas of democracy – ideas, it should be noted, that different peoples, in different places, and at different periods of time, felt were not suffi-ciently democratic or not a case of democracy at all. As John Plamenatz wrote in 1949, '[e]verybody says that in modern times "democracy" has meant different things to different people and to the same persons at different times. I do not … deny this fact. It is something that every political theorist must accept.'[43] We cannot lose sight of the fact that certain (always contested) ideas of democracy have been popularized at the expense of other ideas of democracy *without* first knowing what those other ideas were or are. Such intellectual work has not been seriously attempted since UNESCO broached the idea. The point here is that we do not have a singular, or true, definition of democracy – this we have never had, likely never will have, and probably should never have as it is for many reasons undesirable to obtain – so we have the duty to assume that accounts of democracy, whatever they are, will have some sense of (whatever form) of democracy to them. C. J. Lewis puts it best by saying: '[u]nless or until there is a clear, understood, and agreed upon meaning of "democracy" the question whether "democracy" should be used in one way rather than another is a question which has no answer. Any answer offered will merely exhibit a preference or prejudice of [she] who answers.'[44] Michael Saward issues a warning here: 'any temptation to think that [mountains of data] can represent the world (of 'democracy') has to be resisted' (Chapter 9, p. 137). It is therefore for us, peoples and experts together (although some say this work should

just be for experts to conduct as the uninitiated will not be able to work at this level of analysis), to decide what counts as democracy or democratic, and why, and what doesn't count, and why.

We wish to gather and describe ever more knowledge of, on, for, and about democracy principally, but not exclusively, to generate more options for peoples to choose from whenever they feel the urge or need to democratize some aspect of their lives: be that a state institution, an electoral system, a workplace, a financial instrument, a school, a legal system, a club, a household – even a self. We want to do this in as fair and balanced a way as possible to avoid repeating the mistake of oversampling from one time, place, language, culture, species, or method. And it is our aim, in producing this information, to be able to establish better theories for democracy and democratization (what it is, what it can or should do) – theories that current democratic theorists, with their severe overemphasis on certain traditions of political development, cannot presently produce. So we are, in short, trying to use basic research, and certain principles of open information, to sort presently uncollected and little-known or unknown information about democracy in our world, to offer – to any democrats who might care to access this information of ours or to those who are curious about democracy – a great deal more to consider, to utilize, to add to, to build from, and to be inspired by.

In developing this idea, we needed to study how democratic theorists have worked both historically and recently in relation to knowledge about democracy. This survey was a humbling experience for us as the exercise showed, embarrassingly, how little we each know about democracy's manifestations across the ethno-quantic domain and how limited we are in relation to language (what, for example, is *xalq parvarlik* – how does one even pronounce this expression?) and to methods (democratic theorists tend to be text specialists), and in communicating our findings (it seems democratic theory is tremendously unpopular as more people know about quasars than about qualified electors). Our findings on how democratic theorists work showed that it is more common for a democratic theorist to know of a few theories and models of democracy, and quite a few of the theorists who have worked on those theories and models, but not much more than that. We came to realize that a new class of theorist would emerge once it becomes possible to work from, for example, several *hundred*, potentially thousands, of theories and models of democracy, as may emerge from our work in the ethno-quantic domain.

We term this class the 'Fourth Theorist' and wonder about the sorts of work they could do, how this could contrast with what we democratic

theorists do today, and to what ends. The Fourth Theorist is a yet-to-exist theoretician who would conceive of democratic theories from hundreds or thousands of democratic concepts – both textual (say a curation of thousands of high-quality essays) and non-textual (say a curation of thousands of different paintings, songs, films of repute). For example, if a Fourth Theorist (Michael Saward, in Chapter 9, wonders if they will be a form of artificial intelligence) were asked by the mayor of a large city for ideas on how their polity could become more democratic, we should expect the conversation to be rather different from what it would be if one of us authors, or you the reader, were asked the same question. The Fourth Theorist might, for instance, ask where the mayor's concern is: in this case it is advocating for a reform to the city's electoral process. Instead of, for instance, working the mayor through systems from first-past-the-post to mixed-member proportional representation, the Fourth Theorist could offer options of sortition-based structures where registrants could be randomly selected to fill a legislative body and of regular deliberative forums on identified policies.

'Well, too easy, we can manage that now', you might (and would be correct to) aver. But we would expect the Fourth Theorist to go further than that, in terms of both options and detail. For example, the mayor might have flagged a concern over groupthink in their council and, in response to this, the Fourth Theorist might offer a technique of independent verification that has been perfected by the western honeybee over tens of thousands of years. The mayor might have raised a concern over unethical behaviour as their councillors continued, in their discussions, to disparage the residents of their city as ignoramuses. The Fourth Theorist could, in that situation, offer a technique invented by the Tlaxcallan Nation in pre-Columbian Mexico where aspiring politicians had to undergo one to two years of civic training, even forms of ritual torture, and a series of tests – all conducted by priests of their polity and guided by the fusion god Tezcatlipoca-Camaxtli, who emphasized the holiness of the people – before they could enter the assembly. But perhaps that is rather too different, and therefore extreme, for the culture of that city and its council! So, other options in terms of the training, selection, and review of councillors could be utilized from other parts of the world with values a little closer to those of that city (if a little less amusing).

Although we can articulate examples of what a Fourth Theorist *might* do, we still cannot show what a Fourth Theorist *can* do. We will not know their capacity until the day that person, collective (or, indeed, artificial intelligence or cybernetic organism), exists. The point is, they will be able to offer options and details, ideas and justifications, practices

and techniques, hybrid systems where many theories or models blend together without obvious contradictions, and so forth, at a scale that we can only presently guess at. In this way, the prospect of a Fourth Theorist remains a provocative enigma.

Reading this book

This book contains novel ideas, difficult questions, and challenging propositions for you to consider, and especially for you to think about taking up in your own practice. This book can also, however, be read as a challenge directed at a pernicious habit in American (the dominant) democratic theory which Crozier, Huntington, and Watanuki popularized in 1975 in their now infamous *The Crisis of Democracy: Report on the Governability of Democracies.* Their book was prepared for the Trilateral Commission, an international, and influential, discussion group founded in 1973 by David Rockefeller and Zbigniew Brzezinski. It will be enjoying its 50th anniversary in the same year as these *Sciences of the Democracies* are published (2025) – that happenstance offers a meaningful contrast and, fundamentally, a consideration for the reader to take on.

Both *The Crisis of Democracy* and *The Sciences of the Democracies* aim to serve continuous, ever greater democratization. The books, however, could perhaps be no further apart in how they propose to get humanity to that sunnier destination – a place where a person's political, economic, legal, and social circumstances could be democratic throughout and not, as is so common today, partially democratic (for some) in politics and devoid of democracy (for most) in their day-to-day lives. The chief site of difference is that Crozier, Huntington, and Watanuki defend an elitist Western European model of democracy, premised on elections, strong institutions, and rights, which can be democratized from a top-down approach over time. The idea for them is to incrementally improve a state's capacity to respond to citizen demands and to make their demands more reasonable through public education about the state and what it can and cannot do. Consider how they conclude their report:

> … the effective operation of a democratic political system usually requires some measure of apathy and noninvolvement on the part of some individuals and groups. In the past, every democratic society has had a marginal population, of greater or lesser size, which has

not actively participated in politics. In itself, this marginality on the part of some groups is inherently undemocratic, but it has also been one of the factors which has enabled democracy to function effectively. Marginal social groups, as in the case of the blacks, are now becoming full participants in the political system. Yet the danger of overloading the political system with demands which extend its functions and undermine its authority still remains. Less marginality on the part of some groups thus needs to be replaced by more self-restraint on the part of all groups.[45]

Their diagnosis of the 'crisis of democracy', which still applies to this day and is readily apparent across conventional political science, is that people are insufficiently educated about democracy and are placing unreasonable demands on their state institutions: their desire to participate in politics is destabilizing governments, the rule of law, and economies. Therefore, governments need to explain these limits to the populations they serve and enforce those boundaries to maintain stability.

Our *Sciences of the Democracies*, instead, begin from the position that there is no singular meaning for democracy in the world – only many. Like Crozier, Huntington, and Watanuki, we do include politicians and public servants in the people that we hope will read our book, but we are not presenting a report to certain governments and wealthy or otherwise influential persons who participate in a conversation within a preset ideological frame (Rockefeller was a wealthy banker and Brzezinski a hawkish political scientist, for example). We are, instead, presenting an invitation to all peoples to consider how democracy can be understood and practised differently. Whereas Crozier, Huntington, and Watanuki worry over *too much democracy*, we worry that there are *not enough democracies* in practice within a person's life.

To express the difference between the books in a sea life metaphor, one could say that Crozier, Huntington, and Watanuki seek to strengthen a specific, and unfortunately elitist, clam. They want it to be strong on the outside and capable of serving life on its inside; its organs must manage and constrain, and rebuke and teach, the very cells that compose it. In short, do whatever is good for the clam. We, however, are concerned with trying to understand the coral reef on which their clam resides, for there are so many different types of life here – there is so much difference, largely in form and undiscovered possibility. While we do think the authors, and, by extension, the 1974–5 composition of the Trilateral Commission (Seymour Martin Lipset, for example, was a signatory of Crozier, Huntington, and Watanuki's report), were wrong in their advice

that people's desire to participate in politics should be rebuked and state institutions strengthened to rule/serve them, we can appreciate the good intention behind their advice.

A guided (or restricted), and conditionally permissive (or limited), democracy – what Herbert Spencer[46] once correctly identified as an ever-enlarging oligarchy – can gradually become more democratic without destabilizing a country's economy (or inconveniencing financial elites), its rule of law (or its fascist integrity), and its capacity to defend itself (or its ever-present threat of violence – the sort that guarantees, uncomfortably, the existence of every known liberal democratic country). The problem is that this advice makes the categorical error of presuming that the clam is the reef. It removes from possibility the appreciation of other ways of doing and being democratic, which governments of all sizes should be able to consider as per their respective interests, to test out in terms of their costs and merits, and so too should this be made possible for the very peoples these governments are meant to respond to and serve.

What, then, will the future of democracy and democratization be? Is it to be the continued embrace of ignorance through the continued disavowal of other forms of democracy, because any other form is presumed impractical and dangerous to governments as we know them? Or is it to be a pursuit of basic, descriptive research, that may offer peoples, businesses, institutions, and governments of all sorts many ideas on how they might like to be democratic?

We couldn't possibly end this preface with an oversimplification of this sort as that would render us no better than mid-twentieth-century propagandists. Also, the post-structuralists among the authorship would protest, allergic as they are to such dichotomies. Perhaps the key is to be found in the balance between the staunch – even militant – defence of certain theories, models, and practices of democracy as are commonly known to us today and all the still unknown possibilities that good inquiry can reach for to deepen, extend, introduce, or even remake democracy wherever it has taken or may still take root. The answer is for you to determine as you cover the distance of this book.

Notes

1   UNESCO, 1949.
2   Gagnon, 2021c (https://tinyurl.com/29964tj2).
3   See, for example, the works of Mara Bicas, 2020, and Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui, 1990.
4   See Carol Warren's 1986 exposition of Balinese community organization.

5   See Benoy Kumar Sarkar's 1918 essay on the democratic nature of ancient India. This is not an essay to pass up because it is over a hundred years old – the author works cross-culturally and much of what is written there matters for us today.

6   See Elizabeth Tadic's 2010 documentary on Kenya's women-only village, *Umoja: No Men Allowed* (https://www.wmm.com/catalog/film/umoja/).

7   Patrick Gleeson, 2015, describes the democratic nature of medieval *óenaig* – he considers them the 'pre-eminent assembly of each level of community and kingdom in Irish society' (p. 33).

8   Ernesto Tlahuitollini Colín, 2014 (especially Chapter 2), discusses the *calpulli* practice in Mexico and the USA.

9   McKeon and Rokkan, 1951, p. 472.

10 See, for example, *The Courier*'s 1949 'What Is Democracy?' issue here: https://tinyurl.com/yp27a49h.

11 See https://unesdoc.unesco.org/home.

12 We could not obtain the list of the 500 thinkers initially invited by UNESCO to participate in the survey, so we do not know if women or thinkers from Africa, East Asia, West Asia, or Central Asia were invited to comment. UNESCO reports that over eighty thinkers sent responses back – but the available digital record from the UNESCO archive only shows closer to forty scripts, all by men. Most are from American and British universities, some are from continental Europe, one is Argentinian, and two are from India (but trained in British universities before returning to India). Measured against today's standards for best practice in open-ended surveys, this is far from ideal. There would be merit in reproducing the study with UNESCO on an improved methodological footing.

13 See UNESCO, 1947, item 5.2.1.1, p. 34.

14 Naess, 1956, p. 11. (His name was spelled 'Naess' in this book.)

15 Wright, 1949, p. 1.

16 Naess, 1956, pp. 11 and 12.

17 Naess, 1956, pp. 11 and 12.

18 See Gunnell, 2013.

19 Gunnell, 2013, p. 190.

20 Omarjee, 2018.

21 Daalder, 1979, p. 339.

22 Attributed to Mo Chara of the Irish-language, and loudly anti-British, punk/rap group Kneecap (see, for example, their song 'Get Your Brits Out').

23 Dahl, 1956, p. 1.

24 Lien, 1949, p. 1.

25 Hope, 2012.

26 Werito, 2014.

27 Tordoff, 1962.

28 Arhin, 1967.

29 See, especially, Crozier, Huntington, and Watanuki, 1975. Read 'Conclusions: Toward a Democratic Balance' (p. 113 ff.) in a chapter authored by Huntington.

30 Gomez, 2018.

31 For the logics underscoring these claims, see Oduor, 2022, for East Africa and Chatterji, Hansen, and Jaffrelot, 2019, for an aetiology of majoritarianism in India today.

32 See Rodriguez, 2017, especially p. 37 ff.

33 Schrijvers and Postel-Coster, 1977.

34 Sartori, 1987, p. x.

35 Sarkar, 1918, p. 606.

36 Naess, 1956.

37 McKeon and Rokkan, 1951.

38 See, especially, Manriquez, 2022.

39 To read the essays, visit: https://tinyurl.com/2s3vjxjp.

40 Nishiyama, 2021b.

41 McKeon and Rokkan, 1951, p. 523.

42 See Abrams, 2022a.

43 Plamenatz, 1949, p. 1.

44 Lewis, 1949, p. 6.

45 Crozier, Huntington, and Watanuki, 1975, p. 114.

46 Herbert Spencer, 1851, p. 237.

2
The sciences of the democracies and cognates

… we are living through times increasingly characterised by democracies failing and falling into autocracy, despotism, and disrepair. It is therefore not an overstatement to say that we need to show our best approximation of democracy's 'total texture'.[1]

Situating democracy

Beyond recent accounts of rising authoritarianisms are the less discussed instances of non-democracy in one's everyday life which merit equal concern from governments, practitioners, and researchers alike.[2] Indeed, the strange stability of authority, obedience, and tokenism in the family,[3] school,[4] workplace,[5] hospital,[6] retirement home/aged-care facility,[7] prison,[8] military,[9] apartment building,[10] even the self[11] – or, better put, the long-standing inability of democracy's prizefighters to displace authority within those places[12] – renders possible an altogether different appreciation of democracy's struggles in more political spaces, those which prove to be the master focus of democracy's mainstream scholarship (e.g. institutions, parties, law, policy and administration, opinion, behaviour). For if our social spheres are predominantly characterized by non-democracy, should it really be any surprise that liberal, electoral, and representative democracies are said to be fading in countries across the globe by those who have risen to the challenge of measuring them (e.g. International IDEA, Varieties of Democracy, the Economist Intelligence Unit)? Here, as with Seymour Martin Lipset's 'social requisites',[13] the presupposition is that the conditions of the social sphere beget those of the political sphere. A democratic society would

exude, expect, and even demand a democratic polity; an autocratic society would pave the way for tyranny.[14]

But perhaps that's the wrong way around. It has long been the habit of scholars in political science to suppose that it would be a democratic *political* sphere which would invariably exude,[15] expect, and even demand democracy in the social sphere.[16] After all, doesn't the subaltern of any social situation require just and toothy laws to bite on their behalf? Would it not be easier, and wider-reaching, to instil a sense of cultural leadership in public laws and the thorough administration thereof than, for example, to try to convince a tyrant manager to mend their ways in the workplace or the home? And so the good hands of philosophy, institutionalization, public education (or proselytization, less kindly), and methodology, have worked, and reworked, at statecraft, nation-building, world politics, budgets and parliaments, local councils and devolution,[17] among myriad other typically political subjects (or *topoi*). Here we can locate an age-old struggle of mending hurt or contesting power (in whatever shape it takes) that is concentrated in the hands of the few to give it to the hands of as many as possible – or to all, in ideal terms.[18] And here we bear witness to the incredible difficulty of achieving such ambitions, as they involve constant political struggles on always shifting grounds.[19]

This necessary and interminable politicking, so often rendered for millions-upon-millions of people by conventional mass media into rancid rancour or a toxic pantomime of its usually beneficent intentions,[20] is difficult for many people to live with. The authoritarian, in this, can then promise finality over continuity,[21] harmony over polyphony, certainty over uncertainty, unity over division, truth over lies, and all the rest, as if any bureaucracy equipped with even the greatest trove of taxes could have this capacity. But that's the beauty of simple stories.[22] Why peer beyond the veil when public (and increasingly more private) struggles, responsibilities and accountabilities, civic duties, and ethical quandaries are all that await you?

Whether perceived from the social or the political, the private or the public standpoint – each bearing its own economic and legal concerns – or from some third, fourth, or *n*th standpoint in between these binary opposites (which actually compose each other if you think further on the matter),[23] it is easy enough to appreciate the paradox that 'democracy is on the ropes'[24] at a time when democracy has perhaps never been more in demand.[25] The imagery can be of a conventional boxing match: in one corner is democracy and in the other is authoritarianism, and the ring under the feet of these combatants changes colour depending on the

place they are witnessed to be fighting in, on, or over – sometimes that is said to be the world. Maybe, at the end of our analyses, it really will be that simple. But, before that moment comes and for anyone trained in the critical arts, or for anyone to whom this mode of perception comes naturally, such a struggle between clear concepts is near impossible to accept. For what is this democracy that we – so-called democrats of ten thousand different stripes and colours – are cheering for ringside, or advising in the corner between bouts, or equipping before the fight, or even fighting as, toe-to-toe with the so-called adversary? And, to complete the question, who is this so-called adversary that we seem to be perpetually struggling against? Sometimes, indeed, the adversary appears to be itself a type of democracy and not some variant of autocracy.[26] Sometimes the adversary is someone who speaks the words of democracy but in the next breath congratulates the status quo.[27] And sometimes those who are labelled the 'adversary' for being resistant to democracy are undeserving of that appellation: simply weary as they are of, for example, contemporary democracy's baggage, including colonialism, racism, sexism, capitalism, and exploitation. We must, then, first identify who we are and what it is that we are cheering for (i.e. the democracies)[28] if we are to have any idea of who we are *not* and what it is we are fighting against (i.e. the non-democracies).[29]

Polysemy, homonymy, and signifier pluralism

The word 'democracy' means many things, practices, ideas, and phenomena – and arguably always has.[30] It is, therefore, polysemous,[31] in that many meanings have been ascribed to it. Its basic etymology – 'power of the people' (*demos kratos*) – holds potentially endless meanings.[32] But it is also homonymous.[33] 'Democracy' has been used by many across the world to mean different things: hope for a better life, development, participation, peace, emancipation, voting, fairness, rule of law, equality, 'what I/we want', and so on. To complicate the issue, 'democracy' is not the only signifier for ideas or practices that may conventionally be termed democratic – there are hundreds of other words, from hundreds of other temporal, spatial, cultural, linguistic, and speciated originations,[34] that signify similarly, if not the same. We will, henceforth, refer to this combination of time, space, culture, language, and species as the 'ethno-quantic domain'. Our first challenge, then, is to figure out what is meant by democracy in the ethno-quantic domain and whether the afore-mentioned boxing ring (however it is to be defined) contains but one

combatant or whether it contains – or should contain – very many more. Whilst the latter decision risks democracy's prizefighters turning on one another, crowding the ring like this could simply offer less room for the adversary (autocracy/authoritarianism) and can be read as a victory in itself.

As for the adversary, it, too, is not safe from division by a thousand definitions. For what composes 'autocracy' or 'authoritarianism'? It is everything that cannot be said to be democratic and therefore all that falls into the 'non-democracy' or 'anti-democracy' box. It is despotism, tyranny, oligarchy, theocracy, monocracy, manocracy, mobocracy, technocracy, plutocracy, corporatocracy (in its Big Business register), gerontocracy, totalitarianism, corruption and grift, non-transparency, anti-accountability, crime, not getting what one could reasonably expect from public goods, demarchy, a state's violence against 'its' people; and also, in many minds, both epistocracy (the rule of the knowledgeable) and meritocracy (the rule of people who have, in some manner, distinguished themselves). As explained by Charles Mills and Carole Pateman, it is democracy founded on unequal racial, economic, and sexual contracts.[35]

Are all of them being fought at the same time in the name of democratization? If so, how does it work, where does it take place, and by whom is this being done? To render this consideration into a more familiar and popularly medieval format, perhaps what is needed is to move our attentions away from the elite jousting of 'liberal representative democracy' versus almost everything else to the *mêlée* format (or royal rumble, for contemporary wrestling buffs) where entry is open and all adversaries may form alliances to contest their supposedly nefarious foes. In short, all sorts of democracies may be in, or come to form, various alliances to fight all sorts of 'autocracies' (with their own dastardly alliances) in the hopes of clearing them from the field or ring, or at least containing them in a corner, perhaps now for non-violent conversations. That being achieved, the democracies vie among themselves for their prizes and honours and strive to remain virtuous, preferably in non-competitive and mutually supportive cooperative alliances, lest they make deals with authoritarianists and degrade into the very image of those they have just overcome.[36]

To some, such points may come across as overly semantic (here is the first critic) and as an unnecessary philosophical intervention into a fight as old as time – what could this work possibly change or hope to affect (here is the second critic)? To the first critic we respond that we agree with Ludwig Wittgenstein (see his *Philosophical Investigations*) in that language is our principal means for constructing reality. Language,

the terms and grammars we use, shape how we see the world. We challenge reality by speaking and acting, and understand that creating language is a political action in itself. As was written on the wall of the Czech Museum of Literature (level 1, 22 November 2022), and attributed to an unknown author,

> [People] emphasize the significance of language. Aware of the fact that humans understand the world and themselves through words, they warn against the loss of their ability to name faithfully. They fear that the world will be struck dumb, that it will be defeated by meaningless verbosity and that the lie will not be distinguishable from the truth.[37]

There is, therefore, nothing overly semantic here, as a semantic question prods at the realities we picture or frame in our minds and conceptually inhabit. Although further empirical research is needed to finesse this claim, work hitherto has shown that the more people know of democratic practices, the more they are able to support some form of democracy, be that in their private, public, economic, or legal lives.[38] To use a cookery comparison, if someone's knowledge of rice is limited to the preparation of just one dish with just one type of rice grain, the possibilities for using rice are restricted for that person. But if they know their *mansaf*s from their *pilaf*s, their short grains from their long, their range of varieties (browns, reds, brokens, blacks, glutinous, whites, and wilds), then all this multiplies their opportunities for using these types of rice, considering their cultural and ecological anchors, weighing up their merits and demerits for a certain dish or mode of preparation, and striking the culinary match of gustatory innovation. Surely, we hypothesize, it is the same for the democracies. Semantics qua reality provides a powerful springboard into this.

To the second critic, our aim is to first describe an ever-changing total texture of democracy with the aim of thereafter generating democratic theory from a hitherto unproduced, and therefore untapped, body of basic descriptive research. This aim is original and may produce beneficial outcomes for democratization in places ranging from the individual to the Earth. We will not know what those outcomes will be until we have first agreed upon and then met our initial descriptive and then theoretical aims. We cannot do this ahead of the work, as such determinations are empirically informed and necessarily case-based.[39] We do, however, hope that such outcomes will mean *more* democratic innovations and a *tougher* workout in order to contest the authoritarians

around us or in us and the authoritarianisms out there in the difficult-to-access institutional realms that rule or govern us.

To put it differently, we are hoping to offer a better description of the reality of democracy, which we, for the moment, believe will lead to more democracy in social, political, economic, and legal spheres and, therefore, less non-democracy wherever one may look or be. The inherent logic in this is that a more thorough, and pluralist, description of democracy will lead to a better understanding of democracy's nuances and mechanisms. This, in turn, can lead to a better understanding of democracy's working conditions, and where those workings are best placed in one's life. That outcome, in itself, can reveal normative tensions both between different forms of democracy themselves (e.g. liberal versus radical versus industrial) and between these different forms of democracy and the imperatives of, say, paternalism, patriarchy, or despotism. This, finally, may result in more culturally concrete, pro-democracy reform proposals that may be unlike any we have previously seen either as scholars or practitioners of some democratic form.

This does carry with it the presupposition that democracy is always better than non-democracy, as we follow the advice provided by the likes of Kristoffer Ahlstrom-Vij (the alleviation of ignorance),[40] Carl Henrik Knutsen (economic stability and growth, lower child mortality, greater literacy rates),[41] Anna Drake (responding to structural injustice, understanding/humanizing others who may be radically different from oneself, fostering respect, engaging with others as moral and political equals),[42] and Pascal Lupien ('more equitable access to public goods').[43] Such writers have shown that living in a democracy, participating in democracy, or trying to be democratic confers a suite of benefits that are not as prominent – and in some instances are undetectable – for the people who inhabit the non-democracies, for those who are excluded and devalued, for those who do not participate, and among those who do not attempt to be democratic.[44] The logic of more and better democracy wherever humans and non-humans are to be found on Earth is an ethical mission, a moral work of anarchism[45] and acephalous living, and it is certainly supportive of a civilizational ambition that must, surely, be the social equivalent of sustainable nuclear fusion: and that is, of course, to end tyranny and undo authoritarianism.

We follow Carole Pateman[46] and Iris Young,[47] in particular, by intending to collaboratively apply our ethics through partnerships, and to have them applied by others on their own as they please, especially on stereotypically non-political entities like families, schools, workplaces, and individual selves. For it is, we agree, in such social spaces (they are,

of course, deeply political) that tyrannies and authoritarianisms have their shameful strongholds today. To become free from the tyranny of our iron minds, of abusive kin who enfold their violence with the walls and doors of what should otherwise be peaceful homes, of authoritarian teachers and managers who invigilate hierarchy and host examinations on conformity, of bosses of any kind (for the 'boss' stems from ideas intolerable to the aspiring democrat),[48] and so forth could ignite a self-sustaining chain reaction, a movement of life that is suffused by the democratic spirit. That idea, that practice, should it ever run through the Anthropos like Anne Norton's wild buffalo,[49] could be tectonic in its revolutionary impact upon our day-to-day lives. But we also hold the hope that political parties, politicians, institutions of government, and apparatuses of governance will, of their own accord, seek different, if not new, ways to function without their usual authoritarian tools. Such is the animus, in terms of contemporary gravitas, that motivates these sciences of the democracies.

There is a further point to this work which is given in response to Matthew Flinders's commentary (Chapter 8). It has to do with the politics of democracy that Flinders mentions and ensuring that our positionality is clear. It begins with our plan to vigorously contest the 50th anniversary of Michel Crozier, Samuel Huntington, and Joji Watanuki's 1975 report to the Trilateral Commission on the so-called crisis of democracy (as touched on in Chapter 1). Their report issues advice to numerous governments, public officials, corporations, and wealthy individuals (that is, members and affiliates of the Trilateral Commission) on how to handle the cries for greater participation and involvement of people in governance – what could be regarded as a collective howl for democratic reform from the 1950s–70s cultural revolution of the West which still lives on in the hearts and minds of many today. Crozier, Huntington, and Watanuki's advice to the members of the commission was to reaffirm the status quo of exclusionary, structurally racist and sexist, and fundamentally representative democracy. They wrote as follows:

> In the past, people have found their purposes in religion, in nationalism, and in ideology. But neither church, nor state, nor class now commands people's loyalties. In some measure, democracy itself was inspired by and its institutions shaped by manifestations of each of these forces and commitments. Protestantism sanctified the individual conscience; nationalism postulated the equality of citizens; and liberalism provided the rationale for limited government based on consent. But now all three gods have failed.

> The democratic expansion of political participation and involvement has created an 'overload' on government and the imbalanced expansion of governmental activities, exacerbating inflationary tendencies in the economy.[50]

The authors said that the 'overloaders', these democratic reformers of the cultural revolution, showed an ignorant desire to participate in governance, to be involved in government, as not everyone can participate all of the time. Their desire was, therefore, ignorant because it makes only for unreasonable demands upon governments and state institutions. Today, of course, we know that there is nothing unreasonable about all sorts of peoples wishing to participate in government and governance or politics more generally. The Trilateral report is, for this very reason, an act of infamy in the history of global pro-democratization politics. That much is clear. Discouragingly, however, it has been grossly overvalued for decades now. And its shadow is real. Its influence remains pernicious. Our hope is that *The Sciences of the Democracies* can offer a complete alternative to Crozier, Huntington, and Watanuki's bad advice by presenting the case that more democracy – or the mantra 'democracy, democracy, everywhere democracy' – is the one to critically embrace.

Research programmes

The position just outlined was established after the European Consortium of Political Research (ECPR) held its 2022 Joint Sessions at the University of Edinburgh and online (for more on this, and on how this book came to be written, see Chapter 1). Prior to that now sustained and collective inquiry, the justification for what was then, in the singular, the 'science of democracy' was purely philosophical. It came from the 14 years (circa 2007–21) of research that Jean-Paul Gagnon conducted on the question of 'What is democracy?', which focused on texts to the intentional exclusion of all other sources of knowledge on democracy. Gagnon adopted this approach because texts can be likened to artefacts – they are a stabler object for study than, say, the opinions of living people. Following Arne Næss and Giovanni Sartori, in the main, Gagnon[51] posited that the study of democracy has hitherto been semi-arbitrary and blinded by convention. This tradition has, as a result, pushed from view most other knowledge on democracy as can be found in texts. And where should or can one go to find such texts at the margins of our view? The answer is nowhere, for democracy's researchers have not yet addressed

their first, their prime, responsibility, which is to undertake basic, descriptive, and organizational research into democracy's meanings and the texts that put those meanings forward. Consequently, most of our textual knowledge lies fragmented, like potsherds, awaiting collection and study, possibly even discovery. It was this 'disciplining of the discipline',[52] and the irrevocable fact of this lesson which critics have not yet been able to disprove or disavow, that generated the international discussion and debate which the ECPR is presently formalizing through its short essay series. This is 'possibly the most significant, informed and timely [discussion] on the study of democracy ever published'.[53]

Whilst we hold the hypothesis that our findings, as we realize the works proposed in this book, will result in the growth of democracy and the contraction of non-democracy in the world, in, for example, families and local governments through to nation-states and multinational organizations whose aim it is to influence global order, we can only begin to reliably test that hypothesis after completing (or sufficiently advancing) a series of challenging and necessarily interwoven programmes of research, addressing philosophical, institutional, educational, and methodological dimensions of the topic.

The philosophical dimension

One of the most difficult facts for anyone to reckon with, and this includes democracy's so-called experts, is that the word 'democracy' does not hold, nor has it ever held, one singular meaning. It has only ever held many meanings. As Gallie[54] continues to remind us, democracy is an essentially contested concept par excellence.[55] Indeed, and this is just in the English language, the word 'democracy' has already been given thousands of different meanings,[56] which has resulted, and now moving to all tongues, in much political confusion from antiquities into our contemporary modernities. For democracy may, to some, mean elections run by the steady hand of fearful oligarchs lest 'the goats gain the keys to the garden' (a line John Keane once gave at a conference in his trademark mockery of oligarchs), whilst for others it may mean the full participation of all who wish to participate in every sphere of life, including 'in the kitchen, the nursery and the bedroom'.[57] These advocates will not recognize each other's models as valid conceptions of democracy: Joseph Schumpeter's children[58] or other minimal proceduralists[59] see impracticality or less favourable outcomes in the models of Carole Pateman,[60] Roberto Unger,[61] Chantal Mouffe and Ernesto Laclau,[62] William Connolly,[63] Fred Dallmayr,[64] and Sheldon Wolin;[65] whilst Wolin

et al. and their advocates[66] see only rotational elitism – or 'aristocratic bias'[67] – in Schumpeter's implausible[68] democratic theory, with not much democracy to be had in it at all. And, of course, such constitutive conflicts should not be dismissed out of hand, as the demarcation line between what we can consider democratic and non-democratic (even anti-democratic) is also fundamentally contested.[69] As Pateman put it in 1970,[70] Schumpeter's theory of democracy

> bears a strange resemblance to the anti-democratic arguments of the last century. No longer is democratic theory centred around the participation of 'the people' … or the prime virtue of a democratic system seen as the development of politically relevant and necessary qualities in the ordinary individual; in the contemporary theory of democracy it is the participation of the minority elite that is crucial and the non-participation of the apathetic, ordinary man lacking in the feeling of political efficacy, that is regarded as the main bulwark against instability.

Beyond such 'model wars'[71] are at least two further considerations: (1) that knowledge on democracy comes from more than just texts and (2) that we can know, study, and practise democracy (and have done so) without even using that word, symbol, or sign. Yida Zhai, in particular, is expert at exploring democracy without using 'the d-word'.[72] In regard to the first consideration, knowledge on democracy can be coaxed from our selves through reflection or from others through interviews or different interventions; from groups of persons through surveys and interviews or interpretive observation; from art, architecture, semiotics, film, and sound (i.e. non-textual media); and from observing the behaviour of non-humans (i.e. non-human democracy as observable among western honeybees, Canada geese, and even forests, corals, and composite minerals like opal, among myriad other examples).[73] To truly understand our own conceptions of democracy, we must re-search the political imaginaries that constitute background conceptions of what is and what is not democratic and who and what the *demos* consists of.[74] Thus, if the gathering of texts about/on/of/for democracy constitutes building a data mountain, then re-searching the knowledge about/on/of/for democracy from these other sources will constitute building yet more data mountains. Together they would form an 'epistemic mountain range' or an interwoven system, a fabric, of knowledge sources on democracy.[75]

We are far from succeeding in giving even a satisfactory minimal approximation of any single mountain of data on democracy, fragmentary

as research into any of these immense bodies has been, so we do not yet know what will come from the efforts of the theorists who will have the capacity to produce or handle – as if in the palms of their hands and quite possibly so through computer-powered means – such mountains of data. These theorists are yet to exist: we term them 'Fourth Theorists' and they are expected to produce strong theory for democracy from a more comprehensive and balanced footing in democracy knowledge (for more on the Fourth Theorist, see Chapter 1 or keep reading). Also yet to exist are the mountains of data, the epistemic mountain range, required by Fourth Theorists to do their work. So here is an instance of discovery awaiting us – a hypothesized shore lying on the other side of our present ignorance.

In regard to the second consideration, a career can be spent on a thing, like collective governance or group decision-making, that many readers of this book would comfortably identify as democratic or a democracy of some kind.[76] This point carries even further: there are many words in this world, symbols or signs if you prefer, for ideas or practices that could be – depending on who is observing them and what they understand democracy to be – considered democratic in their conception or existential, and therefore independently observable, form. Consider the Han Chinese *min zhu* (people are the master/sovereign, among other variations), the Maori *manapori* (representative government), *wa:diashe:*' (we will hold a council) from the Seneca, the Polish *ludowładztwo* (the people's or folk's authority), the Plains Cree *ᐃᒣᐊᐧᐱᐃᐧᐣ* (*mâmawapiwin* – meeting/gathering/assembly), the Korean *minjujuui* (the doctrine of popular rule), the German *Volksherrschaft* (people's government), the Nahuatl *pōhuiliā* (a discourse about accountability and community connections), the Zulu *Ukuxoxisana* (to negotiate or deliberate), the Amazigh/Berber *agraw* (representative council or more formal community meeting), and hundreds of further words.

As Frederic Schaffer makes clear in a *Democratic Theory* interview,[77] each of these words holds its own cultural, spatial, and temporal anchors. That is, each holds its own nuanced meaning, or meanings, that often only make sense in situated context, sometimes (like *min zhu*) being variegated in meaning across the ethno-quantic domain. Many do not exist in isolation from other cultures but have, for example, been influenced by the English sign of 'democracy' and the hegemonic baggage that so often accompanies it (which is sometimes welcomed and sometimes not), or vice versa; whilst others predate or have remained isolated from that modern English signifier and are,

instead, the autochthonous births[78] of things that many an English speaker today would term, call, label, or name democracy or democratic, and vice versa. Ali Aslam, David McIvor, and Joel Schlosser call them 'earthborn(e) democracies'. A Mandarin speaker very likely would, for example, find comparative value in the concept of responsive democracy (is there something *min zhu*-esque here?); a speaker of Malagasy could question the patriarchal or even elitist nature of certain *fokonolona* by reading feminist democratic theory into/against them; and, as Josiah Tlou explains,[79] the concept of economic or workplace democracy can be made deeper through a familiarity with the ancient Setswana concept of *kgotla* – whose ongoing usage, as is claimed by the Kgotla Foundation, makes Botswana 'the oldest democracy on earth'.[80] This all gives added credence to the nineteenth-century Czech democrat Bernard Bolzano's exhortation, 'people – learn each other's language'.[81]

Whilst the Western academic record, and probably the world's academic record, are underdeveloped with reference to these 'foreign words', Laurence Whitehead[82] gives us *all* hope because he explains how such concepts are mutually intelligible. What this means is that we can each share our own understandings of democracy, *min zhu*, *kgotla*, or *pōhuiliā*, for instance, and profit from these exchanges as concerns the further, the better, democratization of every place, everywhere (arguably the teleology, the end point or goal, the autotelic mission of democratic theory).[83]

That said, Schaffer gives us yet more to consider: it is not *merely* (if such a word can be used in the face of already overwhelming data) a question of other words that we must take into account. There are also the different usages of the originally Greek appellation that has come to be so familiar to so many of us across so many different languages in use today. Ancient δημοκρατία (*demokratia*) does not mean the same thing as 'democracy' in contemporary Englishes, and nor do the *démocratie*, *demokratia*, or *Demokratie* of nineteenth-century France, Finland, and Germany, respectively. Ancient δημοκρατία does not even mean the same thing in Athens, Greece, today. Whilst on paper it may look as if we (users of some derivation of the ancient Greek appellation for a form of life and a mode of governance much older than those of Athens) are all working with the same word, and therefore wielding a more or less cohesive concept (like apple, smartphone, or fire), the evidence resoundingly demonstrates otherwise. Words may look the same, but their meanings change over time through use. For example, Josiah Ober, a historian of democracy, explains how *demos kratos* need not mean 'power of the people' but can also mean the people's capacity to get things done.[84]

When it comes to the word 'democracy', we are, instead, in the medium of vast seas of contested meanings which have usually mixed together and, of course, continue to do so at increasingly faster and grander rates as liquid modernity globalizes (as more and more people of different ethnicities, religions, experiences, and languages mingle across the world, in person, digitally, and so on).

What are governments and public officials and researchers/practitioners and citizens/residents/visitors and philanthropists (big and small) alike to do in the face of all this knowledge and of all these considerations of democracy? The only answer seems to be to get better at understanding it, to be more precise about our meanings for it, and to coax more of it into the world in the hopes of mending hurt and diluting power – or just 'mending democracy' as Hendriks, Ercan, and Boswell recently put it[85] – so that there's less power to hurt people with. In regard to dilution, there are no greater agents for it than oceans and seas. These old gods have, as Jennifer Greiman reminds us through her analysis of Herman Melville's 'ruthless democracy', always been agents of escape and freedom for humans and non-humans alike: sailors and pirates have mutinied, slaves have sailed away to freedom, and whales have both fought at the surface against their hunters and fled to the depths 'in order to live rather than to kill'.[86]

The institutional dimension

At this point we have in place the philosophical inquiry into building an epistemic mountain range for democracy studies. But this is only a quarter of our considerations in these sciences of the democracies: the next part concerns an institutions-building project that is framed and fuelled by the philosophy that precedes it. The institutions-building project is itself fuel for the public education dimension of the sciences of the democracies and the methodological approaches needed to measure their successes, if any.

The philosophical work – which takes stock of the concepts used in diverse philosophical traditions – reveals democracy to mean many things and sets out to describe them. This labour introduces new types of democracy, and with each type of democracy gained, a world is opened to human understanding. It is the intention of some participants in these sciences of the democracies[87] to record these types in an open and descriptive manner and, for this purpose, a digital encyclopedia makes sense. It was, for example, proposed at the 2022 Canadian Political Science Congress to begin work on such a multimedial institution through

a portal to be called 'DemThings.Org'. As Hans Asenbaum[88] and Seema Shah[89] argue, one of the methods for describing democracy is to ask culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) or otherwise marginalized peoples what they think it is or should be. This can be assisted by digital networks that may be accessed through the ubiquity of smartphones, devices that are unparalleled in human history for their connective potentials.[90] Such an undertaking, which has been carried out with different sorts of informants the world over, using methods ranging from focus group interviews to mass surveys,[91] yields information that is well suited to curating museum exhibits and art installations – the Museum of Australian Democracy in its partnerships with the University of Canberra is one example.[92] Efforts like these can generate institutions.

Other examples of such institutions include making a wiki out of democracy's epistemic mountain range (perhaps collaborating with Wikipedia to do this), creating a dictionary of the democracies, building a crowdsourced online reference book for democratic practices like Participedia, emulating Francis Bacon in the generation of 'books of curiosities' (*sylva sylvara*), coding and designing digital 'specimen drawers' to track the evolution of certain types of democracy, and – here emulating digital storehouses of knowledge – dutifully creating a library of texts that use the words of democracy to establish the world's first open library of democracy. Further proposals for institutions are put forward in Chapter 4 of this book.

The most contentious proposal for a new institution comes from the critics of these sciences of the democracies. Gagnon's approach, which builds from work by Arne Næss and Benoy Sarkar in particular, is, to many democratic theorists, overly accepting in its unscrupulous welcome of all words of democracy – even such insalubrious terms as 'illiberal democracy' and 'despotic democracy'. These are clearly not 'real' or 'true' forms of democracy but are rather signs for non-democratic regimes playing ideological dress-up: it has, for example, since the mid-twentieth century, been the habit for authoritarians to seek legitimacy through minimal and usually ersatz democratic practices (e.g. rigged elections, state-owned media touting the 'people's democracy', window-dressing exercises to tick development/consultation boxes, the use of democratic innovations like participatory budgeting or deliberative mechanisms to feign people's involvement in governance, and so forth).

There must, then, be some means to adjudicate what counts as an acceptable form of democracy and what, by consequence, does not – a demarcation line is required. As Zala et al. note, '[n]ormative theory cannot be built wholly from empirical bricks'.[93] This is a challenging

institutional proposition because it is not clear who is to do this work nor how. For example, one proposal is a global and diverse council of experts who meet regularly to provide guidance to the world on what – in terms of theories and practices – counts as democratic, why that is so, and to what degree. It is intended to be expert-led. Other scholarly associations have equivalent councils for their own objects of inquiry and for the benefit of the people of the world – think of the periodic table or the Earth's geologic strata; these are *curated* intellectual products that are generated by experts who are trusted to do their advisory work for noble reasons alone. There is the proposition before us of doing the same for democracy.

Suspicious of the epistocratic and positivist nature of such a proposition, some propose another option: approaching the work on an equal footing with, for example, pro-democracy non-governmental organizations (NGOs), democracy advisers, and guides. The work would be network-driven and academics could, for example, support democracy's practitioners in their respective networks by acting as their sparring partners, for part of an academic's greatest service to others is, after all, using their capacity to problematize practices and question assumptions. There is scope here, too, for participation by any person who might like to be involved, as there is much, already, in the way of citizen science that exists to guide such an arrangement.

The educational dimension

Whichever of the above-mentioned institutions take root, we are, ultimately, faced with the high hurdle of democracy studies' public-relations problem. The accusation, which appears anecdotally well-founded but deserves research to test its veracity or at least extent, is that our target audience – the Anthropos or people of the Earth – are mostly unaware of our intellectual products and, especially, the advice on democracy and democratization that we are trying to articulate and curate, sometimes *with* and sometimes *for* them. Whilst we trade in, deepen, and explore one of the most common concepts in the world, our works are uncommon, even embarrassingly obscure. If it is our intention to provide useable things to the people who should use them, then we are not succeeding in this capacity, although the deliberative wave (#delibwave)[94] – despite its problematic hegemonic behaviour in democratic theory at present – is hopefully the exception to this observation. Therefore, discussions among the authors of this book turned to techniques that can be deployed to avoid the irrelevancy of

our earlier proposed philosophical and institutional efforts. Indeed, here we have the capacity to undertake research into the work of translating our intellectual products into more accessible formats but also into citizen-led democratic theory.[95]

Some of these propositions (rather shamelessly) include presenting to, training, or otherwise collaborating with captive audiences (in classrooms, religious congregations, prison halls, retirement recreation rooms) so as to share our work with them; placing gnomes[96] or other statuary about any given polity with QR codes (or other such links) directing passersby to this or that work we have undertaken; the creation of a less textual medium to render our ideas to others in more accessible, conversational formats; working with existing institutions (e.g. Wikipedia, Goodreads, Quora) to help them in their missions but at the same time direct traffic to our own. It is important, too, to restate the value of the efforts that academics already undertake, such as hosting public debate events, curating podcasts, posting short videos (this is especially popular among academics in China), writing blogs or newspaper articles and other such 'grey literature', and, of course, teaching, which remains an undervalued means for knowledge transfer.

The aim in all of this is to share our work by communicating it to those in other silos and to other networks, especially ones unfamiliar to our own. There is, in this, the hope that we may be able to generate research partnerships with the people in those other silos and networks, to share previously unconsidered ideas and practices, and to help as best we can those persons or groups who may wish to apply our ideas or advice in ways that are meaningful for them. We also intend, equally, to learn from the persons and groups we meet. In a nutshell, this book and its multifarious contributions also point towards the need to 'democratize theorizing about democracy' – such as through the aforementioned citizen-led democratic theory – which involves systematically integrating people (so-called lay-citizens) into the process of reconceptualizing and rethinking democracy, its practices, and its institutions.[97]

However, this discussion on education and public relations led to an unexpected question: is it *really* our business to be seeking out captive audiences, installing statuary laced with our work around various towns and cities, setting up a journalistic bureau, or establishing informal partnerships with other institutions that would be of mutual utility? Just as there are reasons for why we should do this (e.g. it may result in the uptake of more democracies in the world and the net benefits this confers), there are also reasons for why we should not be doing this (e.g. we may contaminate our sources of study and thus stifle the

innovation or self-selection therein; it may get us all into political trouble; also, it is potentially an inherently elitist and epistocratic as opposed to a democratic approach in that it suggests we know better about democracy). Perhaps the moral weight of the 'shoulds' is greater than that of the 'shouldn'ts'. Perhaps doing all that we can to get word of our offerings out, if only to collaboratively explore their utility or utilities, is a necessary minimum for ensuring the legitimacy of our craft and kind.

And then there is the consideration of interdisciplinary collaborations – the understanding that we need not do all of this work alone and that we can not only form large, interdisciplinary working groups, as Farneti[98] urges us to do with legal scholars, but also conduct our work in an open and public way with all sorts of research partners (e.g. researchers/practitioners in different fields, students taking our classes, professionals working with relevant NGOs, staffers in government, 'lay people' involved in conceptualizing and conducting academic inquiry through collaborative action research, expertise networks of NGOs, think tanks, and university units).[99] That said, we acknowledge the difficulty of forming such partnerships and offer strategies that may be useful in overcoming them in Chapter 5.

The methodological dimension

Our philosophical work has shown the need to build an epistemic mountain range to make possible the emergence of what we term the Fourth Theorist;[100] our institutional work needs to enhance democracy development services; and our educational work needs to, at least, increase the awareness and utility of our intellectual products among the Anthropos. Thus, our methodological concerns are focused on the means for doing these things and on measuring their impact. There are, consequently, four elements to be considered: (1) how to collect and organize information on democracy or *min zhu*, *manapori*, *minshu shugi*, and so on; (2) how to study and analyse this information; (3) how to measure our objects of analysis; and (4) how to expand the use of our objects among the Anthropos through, for example, communication and knowledge translation.

Let us first consider the challenge of collecting and organizing knowledge of democracy from plural sources. As earlier stated, there are at least five sources of knowledge to draw from: (1) individuals, (2) groups, (3) non-textual media, (4) texts, and (5) non-humans. Each will yield its own mountain of data which comes in the form of immutable material artefacts. An investigator of any of these sources must first

reckon with the nature of the object of analysis and the specializations but also limitations of the knowledge it produces. For example, individuals – so long as language and ethics pose no problem – may be conversed with or asked to undertake some form of testing, to get to the bottom of what they define as democracy or what they know of democracy. It is to be expected that there will be differences in results from person to person as the investigator goes along with their study. It is also to be expected that the same person, asked to participate in the same study, at a day or a month or some years removed from the first encounter, may have changed their mind or learned something new or be feeling differently than before and so may give an altogether different result; or the same person may simply respond differently if the investigator happens to be someone other than the original researcher.

Then, of course, individuals are not always accessible and they are mortal. Most will not be leaving behind treatises on what democracy is or should be, and so, if it is our aim to dutifully record as much as we can from this source of knowledge, we need to do more of it and safely store the items of information, as if they were rare seeds. Once stored, the information (from interviews, tests, surveys, structured conversations, etc.) needs to be coded and made available for study by as many means as possible. Some investigators may, for instance, wish to measure the pauses that an informant makes in an interview and would, therefore, likely make sound use of an audio analysis software program. Others may wish to build a semantic map between all informants and would, therefore, require the rendition of all interviews as machine-readable text files so that an artificial intelligence's textual analysis software program may perform the investigator's bidding. A data mountain is built as more information is drawn from more individuals and as more studies of these results occur to inform and therefore influence yet more of this research work. Each mountain poses different methodological challenges to the investigator and yields differently specialized knowledge. For example, as concerns types of democracy among non-humans, Romero and Dryzek[101] remind us that the researcher must rely on listening and observing to make sense of non-human communicative practices. Furthermore, big data can be shaped into mountains in various ways: a user might like to draw a specific form of democracy, or a place in the world, a time period, a methodology, or whatever, to the highest point in a topological simulation.[102] We will go through each mountain in the body of this book.

The analysis of each mountain, or of all mountains (the epistemic mountain range), such being the work of the still non-existent Fourth

Theorists, may reduce or increase the complexity in the data that will hopefully one day lie before us in ever greater amounts and in ever greater precision. From individuals, groups, non-textual media, textual media, and non-humans may come the realization that 'things democratic' have mainly to do with a set number of further irreducible criteria like material equality, participation, procedural fairness, peace, and so forth. It is also conceivable that such analyses may result in demonstrating the contagion of ideas, the impacts of ideologies, the influence of catastrophes (human-caused or natural), and so on upon democratic thinking/thinking about democracy. There is, further still, the possible analytic outcome of *increased* complexity through, for example, a Fourth Theorist's avowal that five sources, five mountains, of democracy data do not suffice in delivering on their promises – that other sources, presently unknown to us, must be added.

From such increasingly balanced and well-founded arguments premised on the ever-better data we can generate and study in the world may come new strong theories for democratization and/or the revalorization of existing theories of democracy: theories that will bear upon the world and, through their ideals and instructions, hopefully lead to mending and preventing hurt and diluting power, or to altogether other outcomes outside of our present cognition. As previously remarked, this may lead to the generation of more democratic innovations for the use of people, businesses, organizations, governments, and so on. But to get there will require an immense degree of organization among democracy scholars (broadly conceived) to ensure balance in the division of our labours, common information repositories, adequate software and reliable computers to run such programs, and also regular conferences and more publishing outlets to better communicate our findings.

Beyond the issues of collection and analysis lies the question of measurement. Following International IDEA[103] and the Varieties of Democracy (henceforth V-Dem),[104] arguably the two most theory-aware measurement indices for democracy in the world (at the level of nation-states, at least), we can appreciate that there is an appetite among policy-makers to know the state and the degree of different sorts of democracy at different government levels (from local through to global). Put differently, those elected to power or those holding the reins of influential non-governmental authorities wish to know what sorts of democracy are detectable in the world and how they are faring. For example, a senator in Canada who might have read *The Economist*'s[105] recent praise of deliberative democracy may wish to know how much of it is present in the province or territory they represent and, if it is present,

whether it is living up to its touted promises. Now if democracy means ever more things and if such things do not share common indicators and if the task is now to look for such things below,[106] at, and above the level of the nation-state, then such an undertaking for International IDEA, V-Dem, and the like is nothing short of gargantuan. This raises questions of capacity and methodology, but also the question of the worthwhile-ness of such an undertaking, which we detail in Chapter 6 and, together with Ramon van der Does, openly question at the end of Chapter 7.

The final methodological consideration has to do with learning from on-the-ground trials that test the suitability of one or more sorts of democracy in a given situation. An investigator may, for example, earn the trust and consent of a local council to run ethical experiments in their town. The investigator may, for example, wish to see which form of democracy is most effective at informing bylaws that residents would, in the great majority, consider to be procedurally fair, sufficiently inclusive, and meeting their expectations. The technical aspects of trials like these are impressive, but they pale in comparison to the difficulty of building the required relationships to undertake these studies and pale further in comparison to the *political* risk involved in undertaking such research. The same can be said, but here in terms of risk generally, for conducting pro-democracy research in families, schools, workplaces, and civic institutions like prisons or hospitals where the implementation of democratic protocols may upset long-standing authoritarian regulations, procedures, arrangements, and habits.

What is to follow

What follows are detailed accounts of each programme of research, which were initially given during the 2022 ECPR Joint Sessions, clarified after the close of the sessions with the help of copious notes taken by the sessions' directors, and lastly improved upon by all authors of this book in turn. This book is offered in the spirit of open and honest inquiry. We hope that it will interest policy-makers, researchers/practitioners, citizens/residents/visitors, and philanthropists (big and small),[107] so that they may collaboratively support proposals put to them from this trail-blazing approach to studying democracy and trialling innovatory democratization programmes. We also hope that it will provide helpful markers on the road to further research and inspiration for any person or groups of people to democratize their lives.

Notes

1 Flinders, 2021a, final paragraph.
2 See Applebaum, 2020; Babones, 2018; Bieber, 2020; Chacko, 2018; Guasti and Mansfeldova, 2018; Curato and Fossati, 2020; Aslam, McIvor, and Schlosser, 2019; Keane, 2020; Morgenbesser, 2020; Vogt, 2019; and Wodak, 2019, for a small selection from the literature.
3 See, e.g., Koganzon, 2021.
4 See, e.g., Tafa, 2002.
5 e.g. Pausch, 2014; Felicetti, 2018; Nishiyama, 2023. For a detailed study of workplace culture in twentieth-century teahouses in Chengdu, see Wang, 2004.
6 See, e.g., Hossny et al., 2023.
7 See, e.g., Walmsley and McCormack, 2020.
8 Democracy within prisons may surprise the reader. See Ercan and Dzur, 2016, and also Dzur, 2008, 2012, and 2018, for more on 'democracy in unlikely places'. See Poama and Theuns, 2019, for an argument in favour of extending the franchise within prisons, traditionally sites of electoral exclusion (see also Theuns, 2019).
9 Fowkes, 2014. See, especially, Chapter 8, 'The search for democracy in the armed forces'.
10 See, e.g., Treffers and Lippert, 2019.
11 Hermans, 2020.
12 This inability leaves democracy's prizefighters open to the valid criticism of hypocrisy.
13 Lipset, 1959.
14 Françoise Montambeault, Magdalena Dembinska, and Martin Papillon, 2020, argue that 'shifts in the equilibrium' between actors involved in any social situation are required to create 'deliberative niches' or, we contend, any niche for any form of democracy to manifest therein. Such work is inherently political, although it would likely not feature as such in conventional political science as the actors are not politicians in the formal sense. We give this example to signal the overlap between categories like 'social' and 'political' but also 'legal' and 'economic'. For more on the distinction between the social and the political, see Flinders and Wood, 2018.
15 e.g. Pratt, 1955; Neubauer, 1967; Crozier, Huntington, and Watanuki, 1975; Shin, 1989; Frey and Al-Roumi, 1999; Shin and Lee, 2003; and Bellinger, 2019.
16 Claasen, 2019.
17 One account deserving further research is the claim of Dugald Munro, 2014, that local councils suffer a legitimation crisis due to their lack of democratic capacity – specifically their limited capacity, or in some instances total incapacity, to represent the interests of their community. Mark Chou's recent insights into local government practices in Australia (e.g. Chou, 2020; Chou and Busbridge, 2020; Busbridge and Chou, 2020; Chou, Moffitt, and Busbridge, 2021) support Munro's claim.
18 One recently uncovered example comes from ancient Egyptian cosmology and concerns the story of how death rights, traditionally reserved for pharaohs (aristocrats), became democratized by a mythological deliberation between gods of the underworld. These gods had decided that humans had advanced enough to merit the same treatment and opportunities in death as the pharaohs who ruled them in life. This democratic impulse appears in numerous stories of cosmology (e.g. Prometheus steals fire; the angel Lucifer in Christian theology gives knowledge). As Lord Byron once quipped, 'The Devil was the first democrat'.
19 Heeding the words of Bustikova and Guasti, 2019, we understand that research into democracy – in fact, any practice of democracy – cannot be apolitical. To detail hurt is to speak of an injustice. To identify power, and seek to share it, is to threaten the privilege of the power holder through the dilution of their power. Pausch, 2019, also emphasizes the importance of promoting *cultures* of democracy which are based on weaker peoples rebelling wherever there is power over them (or over others) to rebel against in the pursuit of emancipation and solidarity.
20 Weinberg, 2022, p. 2.
21 Roberts-Miller, 2021.
22 Pausch, 2016a.
23 Kaim, 2021a and 2021b.
24 As Tinker, 2004, Lee, 2020, and Giroux, 2021, among others, put it. It is, however, more conventional to refer to 'democracy in crisis' or the 'crisis of democracy'. As this crisis literature

is vast, we recommend publications that use political history techniques to explain the bigger trends involved in the ailments of today's liberal democratic regimes. Keane, 2022 and 2019; Przeworski, 2019; Runciman, 2018; Son, 2018; Urbinati, 2016; Ercan and Gagnon, 2014; Hay, 2007; Crouch, 2004; and Manin, 1997, are a few recommended readings from a more extensive list.

25 Dimova, 2020, pp. 257–90.

26 Dimova, 2021a.

27 Fougère and Bond, 2018.

28 Dimova, 2021b; Theuns, 2021a; Hendriks, 2010; Saward 2021a, 2021b; Geissel 2022.

29 See Chantal Mouffe's *Democratic Paradox*, 2000. Also, Hager Ali, 2022, has raised an excellent call for the study of 'autocracies with adjectives', as non-democratic, less democratic, or anti-democratic regimes have traditionally – and for too long – been lumped together. Such regimes are, Ali argues, just as diverse as the democracies in their conceptions and empirical manifestations and, therefore, just as deserving of detailed analysis. It may, in fact, be argued that a 'sciences of the autocracies' should be pursued in parallel to the 'sciences of the democracies' described in this book.

30 Statements to the effect of 'there are many types of democracy' have been published, in each decade, for the last 49 decades (for the detail on this, see Gagnon, 2024). Indeed, we can leap back to Aristotle who is said, by Arne Naess, 1956 (p. 51), to have defined democracy in his *Politics* no less than seven times. James Hyland reaffirms this in saying that 'Arne Naess et al. claim, in fact, to have identified 311 different meanings of "democracy" in Western literature since the first use of "demokratia" by Herodotus' (see Hyland, 1995, p. 266). Or we can rely on the scholarship of archaeo-anthropologists (e.g. Boehm, 1993; Graeber and Wengrow, 2021) who have done so much to detail the variegation of democratic arrangements before the last major ice age gave way to the rise of major civilizations. By all accounts, social arrangements and behaviours that many today would consider to be democratic or a democracy of some sort or another cannot be said to have ever been 'singular' or credibly universal for the Earth in their conception in one or more world views at any given time.

31 Held and Gagnon, 2014 and 2011.

32 Hansen and Goenaga, 2021, 2024; Goenaga and Hansen, 2022.

33 Osterberg-Kaufmann and Stadelmaier, 2020.

34 e.g. Dahlberg, Axelsson, and Holmberg, 2020.

35 Mills, 1997; Pateman, 1988.

36 These metaphors are inspired by the 'chess board' of Hager Ali, 2022, which pits conceptions of 'autocracies' against conceptions of democracies in a game theory of contestation.

37 We join Michael Saward in warning, equally, about the loss of languages and how the democratic spirit is encoded within them.

38 See, e.g., Chapman et al., 2024.

39 Zala et al., 2020.

40 Ahlstrom-Vij, 2020.

41 Knutsen, 2021.

42 Drake, 2021.

43 Lupien, 2018.

44 An aside on dogmatism and proselytization in democratic theory is required at this point. Whilst some 'strong democratic theorists' treat the disbelievers (pagans?) of their favoured model rather harshly, and thus run into the ethical problems of overzealousness and indoctrination (cultism?), we feel that our invitation to deploy democracies everywhere (socially, politically, economically, etc.) and to do so in an always greater number and to an always fuller capacity does not run into these sharp reefs. The reason for this is because we advocate for – at this point – many hundreds or thousands of democracies in conception or practice. Whilst it is our position to have no tolerance for the non-democracies, as they have time and again proven to generate hurt among people and to concentrate power in the hands of the few, our normative path is uncompromisingly pluralist. There are, in short, so very many ways of pursuing democracy and of being democratic that we choose not to play for any particular team. Our support is, rather, for the league of the democracies – our support is for them all.

45 Norton, 2023.

46 Pateman, 1988.

47 Young, 1990.

48   The English word 'boss' comes from the Dutch *baas*, which, from the late nineteenth century, meant 'overseer' or 'master' and typically, the world over, signified 'a white male'. One saving grace for this otherwise sour history is that there is some evidence to suggest that poorer/dispossessed/subaltern people in seventeenth-century New Holland/New England took the otherwise 'respectful' Dutch word *baas* (meaning 'head of household') and repurposed it for derogatory use. Strangely, many people today, in various forms of wage contract slavery, seem to enjoy having a boss (because it means they have some money, have respect because they have a job and a boss, and so on). They seem to have lost track of the grime that was arguably first engrained in the 'boss' word when it was carried into English. For more, see Southern (2000) and Koot (2016).

49   Norton, 2023.

50   Crozier, Huntington, and Watanuki, 1975, pp. 159–61.

51   See, especially, Gagnon, 2018, 2021a, and 2021c.

52   Asenbaum, 2021.

53   Flinders, 2021b.

54   Gallie, 1956.

55   Temple, 2021.

56   Gagnon, 2021b.

57   Pateman, 1988.

58   e.g. Medding, 1969; Elliot, 1994; Lakomski and Longuet, 2004; Brennan and Freiman, 2022.

59   e.g. Norberto Bobbio, Robert Dahl, Giovanni Sartori; see Yturbe, 1997, for more on this rendition.

60   Pateman, 1988.

61   e.g. Unger, 1998.

62   Mouffe and Laclau, 1985.

63   e.g. Connolly, 2013.

64   Dallmayr, 2017.

65   Wolin, 2019.

66   e.g. Benhabib, 1996; Tønder and Thomassen, 2005; Little and Lloyd, 2009; Dean, 2009; Wenman, 2013; Vick, 2015; Coles, 2016; Apostolidis, 2017; Kim, 2018; and Paxton, 2019.

67   O'Toole, 1977, p. 455.

68   Mackie, 2009.

69   Theuns, 2021b.

70   Pateman, 1970, p. 104.

71   Dean, Gagnon, and Asenbaum, 2019; Mark Warren, 2017.

72   See Zhai 2018, 2022a, 2022b, in particular.

73   See, e.g., Seeley, 2010; Seely and Gagnon, 2014; but also Asenbaum et al., 2023.

74   Machin, 2022.

75   Jensen, 2014, p. 7, defines systems as 'a set of functional relationships in which the system's varied members participate'. We follow his definition in this book.

76   Our debts go firstly to John Dryzek, who made this point at a Centre for Deliberative Democracy and Global Governance (University of Canberra) seminar in 2015.

77   See Schaffer and Gagnon, 2023.

78   For more on the autochthony of concepts, see Aslam, McIvor, and Schlosser, 2024.

79   Tlou, 2021, especially Chapter 6, p. 68 ff.

80   Visit the Kgotla Foundation website here: https://kgotla.com/foundation/.

81   Attribution of this phrase to Bolzano is from Jean-Paul Gagnon's notes taken during a visit to the Czech Museum of Literature, 22 November 2022. Thanks go to the Czech Academy of Science, and Petra Guasti, as they made this trip to the museum possible.

82   Whitehead, 2021.

83   Walsh, 2018, pp. 46–50, describes how this teleology is unappealing to some, particularly individuals who identity as 'right wing' or 'conservative' due to concerns over having their individual liberties constrained by majoritarianism of any kind.

84   Ober, 2008.

85   Hendriks, Ercan, and Boswell, 2020. Our use of 'mending' is, however, broader than that of Hendrik, Ercan, and Boswell, who use it in the context of 'reconnecting' the broken string of representation through deliberative democracy mechanisms.

86   Greiman, 2023.

87   e.g. International IDEA, 2021, and Participedia.net.
88   See Asenbaum, 2022, 2021, 2019, and 2018.
89   Seema Shah, 2023.
90   Taylor, 2019.
91   Vlahos, 2021.
92   Mitropolski's, 2014, point about the crucial role schools played in the development of
      egalitarian political culture in the West can be extended here to suggest, as others have
      done (e.g. Finkel and Smith, 2011; Weinberg and Flinders, 2018), that schools should
      offer students training in various democratic practices because this will likely extend to
      democratization outside of the school, particularly in the political sphere.
93   Zala et al., 2020; Theuns, 2021b.
94   The deliberative wave refers to the surge in popularity of deliberative mini-publics or
      deliberative democratic innovations, especially in local governments around the world. See
      Goldberg and Bächtiger, 2023, for more.
95   Geissel, 2023.
96   This suggestion is inspired by the resistance movement of Wrocław's residents during their
      later communist period. As discovered during the 2019 ECPR General Conference, which
      was held by that city's main university, gnomes dot the city in all sorts of locations. Originally
      installed in mixed media (whatever was at hand for residents), many of them are now cast
      in bronze to commemorate them for as long as bronze lasts or the gnomes are tolerated.
      They were, in their original invocations, a sign of resistance to totalitarian rule and a symbol
      of hope for democracy. They serve today as a reminder of what freedoms may be lost to
      authoritarian zeal.
97   Fleuß, 2021c, pp. 136–7; Krick, 2022a.
98   Farneti, 2017.
99   Krick, 2021, 2022a.
100   Fourth Theorists are researchers who can manipulate one or more of democracy's data
      mountains using computational and comparative techniques. As a result, Fourth Theorists
      have not yet existed. For an explanation of theorist typology, please see Chapter 3 in this
      book.
101   Romero and Dryzek, 2021.
102   It must be noted that not all authors agree over the mountain metaphor. Some prefer the
      metaphor of music (see Temple, 2021, in particular) or of deeply variegated natural biomes
      like rainforests or swamps. These other metaphors accentuate more horizontal, or relational
      (see Shih 2021), approaches to the data and may suit the user better.
103   International IDEA, 2022.
104   Varieties of Democracy, 2023.
105   The Economist, 2020.
106   See Gagnon and Fleuss, 2020.
107   See Murchie and Gagnon, 2019.

3
Data mountains and their democratic theorists

> The sources of ambiguity of 'democracy' should be sought not only in the competing definitions and emotional overtones of the term but also in the competing semantic systems by which the definitions are supported at different times and in different circumstances.[1]

A path through Sartori

The earth is filled with quite different democratic worlds, each with problems and mental patterns of their own. Do you, for example, know the difference between 大衆 (taishū) and 市民 (shimin), where the former begets a democracy of passive, apathetic crowds who follow their leaders and the latter a democracy of active individual citizens 'who are autonomous and interested in political affairs'?[2] This question was inspired by Giovanni Sartori because it shares in his desire to protect democracy – after all, 'an essential condition for the survival of a democratic system is the [very] intelligibility of the idea of democracy'.[3] Yet, it aims to do so with an altogether different approach. Where Sartori looked to the *political* instantiations of democracy around him, in the world he could perceive, we look to broader sources of knowledge on democracy – five of them: (1) individuals, (2) collectives, (3) non-textual media, (4) texts, and (5) non-humans – with the understanding that our perceptions are limited, that there are *many* worlds that we can perceive and just as many cosmologies for us to perceive such worlds through, and that our first imperative is to describe and *then* to get involved in the politics of strong theory.

We have done far too little describing[4] and far too much strong theorizing in democracy studies to date – a rebalancing through basic research is badly needed. A reason for this is that we are unnecessarily limited in what we theorize about because we do not have a broad and well-detailed fundament to start from, nor an understanding of which sorts of democracy are more or less desirable to different sorts of peoples under different sorts of conditions.[5] As Pablo Ouziel states, the fragments of knowledge on democracy that we presently hold are in character, if not arbitrary, then certainly parochial.[6] But, instead of working against arbitrariness or parochialism, we work as Sartori did, as we conventionally do, which is by relying on our own understandings of what democracy looks like or should be, and we therefore push the meaning of democracy in these same directions – each instance a rivulet mistaking itself for a sea[7] – to the exclusion of all other possibilities. This often leads to condescending, insulting, and otherwise injurious outcomes for members of the out-group, especially those who do not use the 'd-word'[8] or those who may wish to 'look at [democracy] from a variety of viewpoints'.[9] This is an unfortunate mark of ignorance and a pitfall of a field that has not yet done its basic work. We are, as a consequence, stuck in an 'age of confusion' about democracy and have unnecessarily restricted ourselves to the study of certain 'splendid fragments in splendid isolation' from each other.[10]

The only corrective to this state of ignorance is to pursue a novel means of studying democracy, one that has its roots in the geographical works of historical wanderers like Herodotus or Ibn Battuta (or Confucius, Mencius, Magellan, Polo, etc.), and in the curiously undervalued efforts by UNESCO, Arne Næss, and Jens Christophersen in the mid-twentieth century. For wanderers like Herodotus and Ibn Battuta, the finest education could only be wrought from travel and first-hand experience. Their worlds were, therefore, inherently empirical and interpretive: with each journey, their senses would be filled with rich detail that would be added to their mental tapestries, their fabrics of knowing, which they would, in turn, impart to others through their erudition, their accounts, their tales in both written and oral media. These accounts were highly prized by political powers as they gave such actors potentially credible information on the basis of which theories, stratagems, and policies could be devised. Our present moment, the nature of our time, can be characterized as ethno-quantic and pluralistic: it is ethno-quantic because we, unlike Herodotus and Ibn Battuta, have access to vaster stores of knowledge which span even greater ranges of time, space, culture, language, and species and which are regularly

enriched through multitudes of scientific inquiries. There has never been a more productive time in the quest for empirical and interpretive understandings of democracy than today. We have, for example, the concepts to think *planetarily* and to parse knowledge of democracy out into evenly divided temporal, geographic, cultural, linguistic, and speciated sectors that we can seek out through travel and observation – but we will come to that soon.

Our present moment is also pluralistic because more and more people, scholars (broadly conceived) included, are awakening to the fact that there is no such thing as one reality, or one story of creation, or one shared experience of life: our cultures, languages, personal contexts, and minds are far too heterogeneous and interconnected for any such singularity to be true for every person past, present, and future.[11] We have a chance to do what Herodotus, Ibn Battuta, and other wanderers never did: we can travel vast fields, even worlds, of democratic experience mediated through myriad individual minds (organic and artificial), cultures, languages, and species. We can also render this information palatable, even enjoyable, for ideally all people so that they, in turn, can devise their own theories and stratagems for being democratic in some way, or for doing democracy of some kind.

This vision is, however, constrained in our present reality to the kinetic elite or wealthy persons who are served by borders, not constrained by them, as states such as Saudi Arabia with its purchasable permanent residency vie for their custom. Erica Dorn and Federico Vaz[12] detail how most people, scholars of democracy included, who are not well-financed elites are unlikely to ever be a Herodotus or Ibn Battuta of our times. They are excluded from travel and access to information, as both are costly. This, consequently, hinders their capacities for interpreting the facts of democracy and situating them into their respective realities.[13] Dorn and Vaz's point is also true for thinkers who try to wander digitally, as software products are habitually paywalled, leaving the well-resourced, wealthy, or otherwise privileged among us firmly ahead of the global majority. This restriction of access not only diminishes our capacity to add experiences of democracy that are foreign to us to our own mental tapestries. It also means that it is the duty of democracy's philosophers to share data, publish open-access items, and create opportunities for physical and digital travel for as many of their peers and collaborators as possible.

UNESCO, Arne Næss, and Jens Christophersen did not, as far as we can tell, think this way. Their concerns were deeply political and focused on trying to avoid a third world war, one they thought might

be roused by disagreement over the meaning of democracy between the USA and USSR in the mid-twentieth century. This is why, in the late 1940s, agents of UNESCO organized an international survey of just over 80 experts (mostly white European males) to get to the bottom of what democracy meant.[14] The results of this survey were anything but conclusive, as responses were not only contradictory but of varying lengths and polemical qualities. This is likely why UNESCO decided to commission a philosopher to make sense of their survey results. Enter the Norwegian philosopher Arne Næss, who undertook this work in the early 1950s with the assistance of Jens Christophersen and Kjell Kvalø. Næss and his assistants would produce the book *Democracy, Ideology and Objectivity* in 1956, which Christophersen would follow with his own book *The Meaning of Democracy as Used in European Ideologies from the French to Russian Revolutions* in 1968.[15] These two books succeeded in showing that texts have a tremendous capacity to store, and therefore impart, hundreds of meanings of and for democracy.

Taken together, the ethno-quantic and pluralistic wandering and the realization of the capacity of texts leads to the further realization that there are many sources of knowledge of democracy. Texts are, obviously, one of them but so too are individuals, groups of people (collectives), non-textual objects like art and architecture and symbolic social inter-actions, and also non-humans – there is, after all, a rich tradition of theorizing politics from observing non-human beings (e.g. Aristotle: 'man is a political animal'; Aquinas: 'if human beings were suited to living alone, as many animals do, they would require no other guide to their end, but each individual would be a king unto himself'; Emerson: 'the happiest man is he who learns from nature'; Raynor: 'the bee as "undeniable evidence of God's laws" in eighteenth-century political economy',[16] etc.).

The point on non-humans extends to artificial intelligences as well. Whilst a product of human engineering and design made with, and made possible by, a variety of metals, minerals, rubbers, and plastics (often mined and manufactured in criminally inhumane conditions), and certainly monsterish (à la Frankenstein's monster) in their dependence on electricity for life, artificial intelligences are increasingly becoming if not non- then certainly in- or post-human (certainly inhumane regarding the aforementioned point on how the raw materials required for artificially intelligent life are produced and conveyed to the monster's masters). In relation to democracy, artificial intelligences offer their observers the chance to analyse how people (both political elites and private citizens) engage with them. For example, we wanted to see what

would happen if we asked OpenAI's ChatGPT, Version 3.5, to perform the following two tasks: (1) 'Writing from the perspective of a parliamentarian or congressperson, answer the following question: "How do I represent the interests of my constituents?"' and (2) 'Writing from the perspective of a private citizen, answer the following question: "How can I practice direct democracy?"' Within seconds, this large language model returned 11 principles for the representative (e.g. listen and empathize, don't judge, be transparent and accountable for your actions) and 12 principles for the private citizen (e.g. attend public meetings, participate in all standard political activities, build consensus in your network). All of the principles provided were reasonable. Given the result from this one brief experiment that utilized a free artificial intelligence product (free, that is, for people with access to the website and the website's minimally required user interface), it is fair to anticipate that practising democrats might usefully ask a large language model to help them with their respective needs.

Studying artificial intelligences also offers an opportunity to critically consider the *sustainability* of such encounters between democrats and machines, as artificial intelligences presently require vast amounts of electricity, which does contribute to both atmospheric carbon and nuclear waste. It can, already, be suggested that studying the democratic ways of organic non-humans may lead to more salubrious outcomes, such as sensitivity to the pressures that organic non-humans face from human encroachment and pollution, and, thereafter, advocacy for a reduction in or total removal of these pressures. To complicate this intersection, we ran a third experiment to determine whether ChatGPT 3.5 could perform an inquiry into non-human democracy. We asked it, 'Do coral reefs express democracy?' The response intrigued us. Again, within seconds, the model explained that 'there are certain ecological principles and parallels that can be drawn between the way coral reef ecosystems function and some aspects of [human] democratic societies'. The parallels it outlined included interdependence and cooperation,[17] diversity and representation,[18] and resource allocation.[19] The AI, ironically, ended on the importance of environmental stewardship.[20] Whilst our AI test-subject lacked something in its phrasing, it did draw reasonable parallels between the concepts of coral reef and democracy. The benefits of studying democracy in relation to organic versus inorganic non-human life are, therefore, perhaps not as clear as we had initially supposed. That said, and as Ugur Aytac makes clear,[21] an artificial intelligence's algorithmic protocols are boundedly rational in their own ways, designed as they are by economically interested businesses and

their human agents. So asking them about democracy is still drawing information (or indeed, hallucinating) from particular, and arguably dominant, standpoints – ones that have been criticized over the course of the few years that precede this book by a wide array of people, institutions, and governing bodies.

The many sources of knowledge of or on democracy are immense, they often require their own methods for knowledge capture, and they vary in their mutability as observational objects or interpretive concepts. We will turn to thoroughly describing each source in a moment, as we first need to consider metaphor as a method for the organization of knowledge. Earlier in this book, we referred to these sources of knowledge as mountains and suggested that, together, they could form an epistemic mountain range that Fourth Theorists could familiarize themselves with or, more humbly, try to understand. We obtained the mountain metaphor from an account of Alexis de Tocqueville given by Leo Damrosch.[22] According to Damrosch, who studied Tocqueville's then unpublished letters and other communications, it was difficult for the French aristocrat, upon his return from 'Abya Yala' (the Americas), to make sense of his copious travel notes. He had a large trunk full of them. 'How is anyone to make sense of this?' he is said to have asked, lamentingly. It took some eight years before he could order his notes and, Damrosch claims, this was done through the means of metaphor. For Tocqueville, his trunk of notes was like a busy city. And what is the first thing someone does to understand a city when they visit it? They walk its streets, talk to its people, sit in its piazzas or by its fountains, dine in its restaurants, and stay in its rooms – they take in the finer grains of detail. But to *fully* grasp the city, one must leave it, go to a nearby hill or other vantage point such as a weather balloon, and look upon the city as a whole: there, from a distance, a view can be gained of all that unruly information, and a different clarity begotten.

Whilst stemming from Tocqueville,[23] our mountain is different. It, in itself, is made as items of knowledge of a certain kind are recorded (e.g. texts of democracy). It grows as texts are added, and its shape, or character, is definable in terms of its bibliometric and bibliographic qualities. The same goes for the other mountains of information recorded from individuals, collectives, non-textual media, and non-humans. It is not simply our aim to *build* such mountains. We seek to also make it possible for anyone to, (again metaphorically), stand on one or more or *all* of these mountains and look upon any object (a city, a home, a workplace, a school, a person, a country, a government ministry, a world) with a different clarity of mind. Such clarity can only be created from an

understanding of vast bodies of data, to shed light on the question: are these places in some sense democratic and, if not, how might we assist them to become so? As intimated in Chapter 1, we hope that in the future people who have the capacity to understand the mountains – the Fourth Theorists – will generate less arbitrary or parochial and exclusionary theories of democracy and that they will also generate a new set of democratic innovations, perhaps even training or development pathways, for people the world over to use in their lives (social, political, economic, legal, and so on). As Ryusaku Yamada argues, '[t]he existing lenses through which we view democracy are often fogged, and may obscure what needs to be seen'.[24]

Mountaineering

Each mountain of data, of information, that can be recorded about democracy has its own requirements in terms of where to find the information, how to record it, and how – thereafter – to study it. This means that there are at least five empirical domains for research in the field of democracy studies which someone, perhaps the earlier-mentioned international commission or an open and non-hierarchical network of democracy's experts, needs to keep track of if our research work is to be done in an even manner. This includes what researchers themselves focus on, as the question of, for example, what one or more types of democracy can be used for is just as important as the question of how they are to be defined, classified, compared, and so on.[25] There is also the question of how these five mountains, these five informational sources, can be studied together and what may come of this. We consider each of the five mountains in turn in the sections that follow.

The individual mountain

The data source for this mountain is the living human individual and the information they contain in themselves. As Markus Pausch[26] writes, people 'already have an idea of democracy in [their] minds, and a notion of what is good or bad about it. Otherwise, [they] would not want to discuss the topic.' And, as Zizi Papacharissi demonstrated in her *grand tour* of the world in which she asked people what they think of democracy,[27] Pausch's assertion is certainly the case. Individuals across the globe are already, in their own manner, attuned to democracy. Given that the human population of individuals is projected by the United

Nations to reach 8.5 billion by 2030, and to rise by a further 1.2 billion by 2050, that makes for an immense set of data points, or, to be less reductionist, that makes for an immense number of potential collaborators to explore democracy with, one to one. Skirting the question of whether each person in the world should be asked what they think democracy is,[28] or what it should or can be, the ambition to achieve this is laudable – even in the face of its own improbability.

The first reason for its laudability is that such an approach treats every person (irrespective of age or other qualifications)[29] as a sacred equal, as a carrier of information in their body about 'things democratic', from their own constructed world view, from their own timeline, space, and deeply personal context. Our only way into reality is through language and, as each of us brokers this relationship, we store information that perhaps no one else has stored themselves. Accessing this information, from just one person, can therefore have the power to resonate with millions. The second reason is that interviewing individuals, observing them, participating in their lives, interpreting their psyches and behaviours through open conversations, playing research games with them (e.g. q-sort, game theories, future casting, digital playgrounds), and so forth, as individuals and ethics permit, can yield information that no survey or more collective- or aggregative-oriented approach to the study of people could ever hope to provide. The grain of detail and nuance, as well as the relationship building and collaboration, that can be achieved through one-to-one research like this is only possible through the researcher's focus on one person at a time. This detail has the potential to generate personalized insights into the past, present, and future of democracy. Key to building this mountain of data is keeping track of where the research is happening and collating anonymized results into a central digital storehouse so that users can, for example, read individual accounts or deploy computational software to search for patterns in the sum of the data. This point on data organization, storage, and access applies to all the other mountains discussed below.

The collective mountain

Whilst efforts on the individual mountain may lead to aggregable outcomes, it should not be assumed that such aggregations of the aforementioned data will make the extraction of information on democracy from human collectives (groups, associations, institutions, populations, etc.) redundant. The reason for this is that groups form their own logics and opinions, ones that individuals on their own may

not share. For example, Pierre Rosanvallon has, in his own works, focused on institutions, such as corporations, in a bid to develop concepts of democracy.[30] He justifies his approach by explaining that '[t]he philosophical history of the political maintains that beyond ideologies and prejudices there are positive representations that … need to be taken seriously: they constitute real and powerful infrastructures in the life of societies'.[31] Further to this, some individuals would not care to divulge certain information in front of others but they may divulge it in a one-to-one research setting with stringent anonymity conditions. Whilst there may be overlap, which would make for an interesting research question, it should not be assumed that a study of the aggregate of individual opinions will yield the same information as interviewing or surveying or otherwise studying groups of persons (small or large).

Groups offer a mishmash of information; they are often bodies of compromise and rapid-fire interpersonal communication. This communication does not, moreover, have to be verbal. As much as body language can convey meaning on the level of the individual, the physical interaction of individuals can be a source of information about the ideas and political theories held by that group. For example, in her 2024 book, Kathleen McCrudden Illert explores the circle of thinkers and politicians who surrounded Sophie de Grouchy during the French Revolution. She demonstrates how the physical organization of a *salon* (a traditional elite eighteenth-century space for meeting and sharing ideas) or even the way a couple interacts within a marriage can provide evidence of people's political philosophy. Engaging in friendships and relationships, she argues, can itself be a form of philosophizing and theorizing, and by investigating these interpersonal relations, historians and theorists can reconstruct the ideas of those who have left few written traces.[32] Groups can embolden people or they can make them shy. Groups also frequently change in their composition. The group dynamic, in short, offers an altogether different sort of informational source, and tapping that source requires a different set of methods. These include focus group interviews, group observation, deliberative mini-publics, mass surveys, committee or jury work, and deliberation days.[33]

The non-textual mountain

There is a large, long-standing literature on democracy as it is imbued into non-textual artefacts such as architectural, artistic, semiotic, symbolic, sensory, audible, visual, and engineered or design products.[34] Whilst this

canon is ignored by most of conventional democratic theory (indeed, non-textual objects are often not figured into 'the mess' of democratic logics),[35] it does yield its own set of potentially infinite data points (as do both the individual and collective mountains). Think of yellow umbrellas (Hong Kong protests), milk tea (the East Asian pro-democracy alliance), the AK-47 (a weapon/symbol, for some, against starvation), green upper-arm bands (Iranian feminist solidarity), blank sheets of A4 paper (used by various protest groups in mainland China), fannish culture (on- and offline anti-capital and anti-copyright communities), Nüshu script (a women-only language, created by women in the Hunan Province of China to obtain freedom of expression), underground heavy metal music (Saudi Arabian resistance to theocracy and patriarchy), artefacts of black magic or signs of the occult (used by women in places as different as Chinese villages and Weimar Germany to contest male power), gnomes (twentieth-century Wrocławian resistance to totalitarian communism), *Stolpersteine* (stones 'scattered throughout Europe',[36] and designed by artist Gunter Demnig, to cause passersby to stumble and, thereafter, see the name of a Nazi victim),[37] both statues of liberty (the hope for freedom and a new life), mass graves outside residential schools or children's shoes or the colour orange (recollections of the horrendous pain suffered by Indigenous Persons in colonial contexts like Canada and a movement for decolonization), war memorials (the awful price that was paid in the fights against fascisms), empty shoeboxes (a reminder of genocide and the promise of 'never again', for anyone), the 'Anarchy A', long hair, natural hair, the peace symbol, the inverted pink triangle (reclaimed by LGBTQ+ activists), sausages (a symbol of electoral democracy in Australia during voting time), flowers like the tulip (the symbol of Kyrgyzstan's 2005 revolution) – the list is potentially endless.[38]

Symbols are, in their behaviour, the same as words: they are visual signs that, if we have some experience with them, bring to mind certain referents, as noted above. Like words, non-textual objects mean things and can serve as reminders, trigger action, or entice shifts in perspective. And, if we don't take their meaning, if nothing comes to mind, we know that here is the moment to pursue the meaning of such things through typically text-based research. But images, buildings, spray paint, tattoos, ruins, and so forth sometimes require a more sophisticated – or at least less common – means of tracing their meaning. Google, for example, offers its users the capacity to search their storehouses using images (what Google, for example, terms the 'reverse image search'). Its computers will try to match the image the user has uploaded and will return similar images with textual information, perhaps video or audio

accounts of the image in question as well, if any are freely available. At times, this strategy fails, as the image that the user uploaded returns no matches, or the image was corrupted or in the wrong format, or the user did not take the picture at the time and must rely on textual recollection of the image in the hopes of finding it through textual searches and resuming from there. Instances such as these typically require turning to local experts or to area experts elsewhere in the globe and interviewing them about the symbol – which is also a possibility for textual signs that, when traced, offer little insight into their meaning or the intention behind their creation. The non-textual source type also includes untranscribed recordings of video and audio or recordings of media that do not contain the spoken word (e.g. instrumental music or sounds, video footage without commentary). What is more, Kathleen McCrudden Illert and Sean Gray have shown the importance of *silence* as a potential source of democratic theory. Even lack of speech can be a fruitful resource.[39]

The textual mountain

Texts are conventional democratic theory's traditional source of knowing about democracy. Words, on their own, are signs. Words do not exist in limbo. They are generated by human beings – and now by artificial intelligences as well – and they are always generated in actual situations and for a purpose. We can only understand their meaning if we understand their underlying intentions, but we can, in attempting to access their meaning, build more meaning into those terms as we make sense of them. We may even be inspired by them and put forward an instance of neologism by giving the sign, that word, new meaning. Words, according to Searle,[40] are representations that we bring to bear on reality. Strung together, they offer us a language, a means for conveying what we – through the mediation of our minds – indirectly experience as reality. This means that languages of democracy, which are often assisted by metaphor, emerge from words and their meanings.

It is essential here, however, not to shrug off the understanding that 'democracy' is but one sign, from a long list of many other signs like 民主 (*min zhu*) in simplified Mandarin, 民主主義 (*minshushugi*) in Japanese, 민주주의 (*minjujuui*) in Korean, ประชาธิปไตย (*prachathiptiy*) in Thai, *manapori* in Maori, *Volksherrschaft* in German, *asue* in Bahamian creole (*asue* is the word for a community's 'rotating savings and credit association'),[41] or even 'group decision-making' back in English, for things democratic in the world. Simply being open to these ideas allows

you to '[explore] different notions of democracy'.[42] This fact alone makes writing about democracy difficult as we could be equally referring to *min zhu*, which has 'power of the people' as one of its meanings. As explained in the preamble to the book, this is why we ask for inverted commas to be imagined each time the signs democracy, democratic, democracies, democrat/s, democratize, and democratization are used in this book – this is in recognition that democracy is *not* the chief sign in the world for non-authoritarian and non-autocratic ways of life and means of governance, but simply one of many.

This recognition raises a challenge that exists in each of the other sources of knowledge about democracy as well, which is that studying it requires crossing the aftermath of *Bab-ilu* or Babel – in other words, we need, if only to alleviate our ignorance, to work across as many languages as possible. According to Kenneth Katzner and *Ethnologue*,[43] there are no fewer than 7,000 languages in the world – more if you count dialects of a language which are, in some instances, unintelligible one from the other. There is perhaps no greater barrier to the pursuit of these sciences of the democracies than the absolute need – for reasons of equality – to conduct the work in, and to communicate the work back in, as many languages as possible. To do so only in English or only in the more popular global languages such as Spanish, simplified Chinese, French, and Arabic is insufficient and will, if not resisted, keep our craft in the shadow of arbitrariness, parochialism, and laziness.

The non-human mountain

Whilst the proposal of non-humans as a source of knowledge on democracy is likely to be novel for you if you are not a democratic theorist, it is in fact merely an extension from an old habit in political theory of observing the behaviour of non-human entities and contrasting that behaviour with the habits of the human (or vice versa). For example, Bernard Mandeville published his *Fable of the Bees* in 1714 and caused controversy by using the example of a hive to argue that private vices lead to public benefits. Earlier, and better known, are Plato's invocations of animals in his explorations of philosophy and ethics, and Aristotle's claim that the human is a 'political animal'. Earlier still were Aesop's fables, or Daoist and Confucian tales, which included observations of animals and drew lessons from them for humans to consider. They remain, even after millennia, unexpectedly pertinent. For example, Aesop's tale of the two frogs offers caution to us all as the period of the Anthropocene deepens in its climatic implications for both humans and non-humans. It goes as follows:

Two frogs lived together in a marsh. But one hot summer the marsh dried up, and they left it to look for another place to live in: for frogs like damp places if they can get them. By and by they came to a deep well, and one of them looked down into it, and said to the other, 'This looks like a nice cool place: let us jump in a settle here.' But the other, who had a wiser head on his shoulders, replied, 'Not so fast, my friend: supposing this well dried up like the marsh, how should we get out again?'[44]

The inspiration for non-human democracy came from the works of Conrad, Roper, and List,[45] Seeley,[46] Suchak et al.,[47] and also Christopher Boehm,[48] among others. These thinkers engage in subtle research into how non-humans live their lives, make decisions, resolve or avoid conflict, solve problems, and, ultimately, survive if not thrive in their own contexts – often under horrendous pressure from human encroachment and human-caused degeneration of the ecological systems they live in and rely upon. Unlike what may be said to be conventional biology, these scholars do not stop at, say, the description of animal behaviour. They do this and *then* draw lessons from the animals they have observed – lessons for humans.[49]

We have seen this occur often in fields outside of democracy studies, such as in architecture (termites inspired the design of a mall in Harare), robotics (the neurons of a part of a trained bee's brain were transformed into code for a machine drone to use for flying), the production of fabrics (spider silk is being synthesized to produce vestments; the seed of the burdock plant inspired the invention of Velcro), medicine (synthetic barnacle glue is being used to keep bone implants in place), and so on. Curiously, however, this approach – often termed biomimicry – to learning about our chosen subjects in the world is not a convention for the study of democracy. As Gagnon wrote in his triptych of public-facing essays intended to help establish and popularize the theory of non-human democracy,[50] we humans stand to benefit much in terms of inspiration for democratization, analogies to enable democratic innovation, and even instruction on doing democracy from observing the ways of non-human entities (vegetal, inanimate, and artificial life included).[51]

An example is gelatinous zooplankton, such as jellyfish, which 'occupy every trophic niche'[52] in the oceans and estuaries of the world. They are, therefore, diverse and ubiquitous. They perform vital ecosystemic functions, including carbon sequestration and the protection of freshly hatched younglings of other species, and they are food sources

for many animals, humans included. Yet, these are life forms without a central nervous system coordinated by a brain; they do not have eyes or ears as we understand such organs. They are, instead, perhaps the world's most skilled beings in terms of cellular perception and intercellular communication, for this is how they detect their food, avoid their predators, find their peers, and otherwise gauge the conditions they are in. It is simply amazing to watch any common form of medusa jellyfish, for instance, as these creatures are responsive in real time to their environment, and all without a brain – at most having a decentralized nervous system with nerve clusters acting as informational hubs.

Now, what has this got to do with democracy? The jellyfish is a surprisingly good analogy for a democratic state. Both have discrete boundaries that keep the entities intact but also intermediate with the rest of the world from their points of view. On the inside, there is no one brain, only a decentralized network of cells or people that are constantly mediating, sensing reality, and conveying those senses to other cells and people.[53] These cells and people form various arrangements (nerve clusters, parliaments), some more stable than others, which persist across time (generations). And, as with some jellyfish and democratic states, they can live potentially forever, should they be able to avoid danger outside of the body or illness within it. Now, if it is the hope of a democratic state to sustain itself, just as it may be the intention for a jellyfish to continue living, both changing as they do so, then we can draw lessons from one and apply them to the other.

The jellyfish needs to keep constantly in touch with its conditions and this requires rapid-fire communication between most, if not all, of the cells that make up its body. That already is an astoundingly difficult requirement for the people in a democratic state to achieve. There is so much information to be shared; furthermore, not all information is good, nor are all individuals equally privy to it – there are fake news and lies, propaganda and secrets, partial truths and the full hurtful truth (or many of them) to contend with. If anything, the jellyfish's life is incomparably simpler than that of a democratic state with the communicative complexity of the individuals that compose it. The jellyfish serves as a source of inspiration for democratic states as regards, in this case, the aim of their survival. Thinking about the democratic state in light of the jellyfish (or with Chat GTP 3.5)[54] allows us not only to deepen and extend, but also to critique the classic imagery of the body politic, as found, say, on the frontispiece of Hobbes's *Leviathan*, with the executive at the head and the burghers in their chainmail. And the jellyfish is but one example, from many thousands, of a discussion on democracy that

can start from the observation of non-human life. Such observation provokes a shift in focus to the way in which human politics is embedded within the non-human environment and the fact that humanity is both a biological species and, in the Anthropocene, a geological agent. The *Anthropos* works in tension with the political *demos* to disrupt, stretch, and re-entrench democratic boundaries.[55]

Such attention to the ecological conditions of human politics, then, also drives a reassessment of democracy. Lucy Parry, for example, avers that it is immoral to think of non-humans simply in extractive and instrumental logics. In interacting with non-humans we also have the capacity – duty, even – to represent their interests, to add our understandings of their voices into the human-generated political systems that have affected non-humans for millennia. As Eva Meijer[56] writes, this act of representation, of bringing non-human voices into parliaments and other powerful human institutions, can foster the development of what they, Robin Wall Kimmerer,[57] and others term 'interspecies democracy'.[58] As with agriculture, one cannot simply continue taking from the land, or any source (including the data mountains in this book), without giving back to it. It is this taking from, and not giving back, which has led to the ruination of representative democracy's institutions in particular. This perspective instils an ethic and practice of reciprocity and relationality, and also caregiving, between taker and source, institution and resident, academic and resource. Scientists and data compose each other. They are enmeshed and must find ways of mutually benefiting one another, as otherwise opportunities lapse, dust gathers, and entropy redirects the energies that could have been given to others in the universe.

Bringing democracy's informational sources together

Fascinatingly, there are countless objects in the world which generate information that can be approached from most, sometimes all, of democracy's informational sources. Thomas Bunting's[59] study of baseball serves as a good example. The game in itself is played, viewed, and managed by both individuals and collectives and it can be observed through non-textual and textual media. There is even the possibility of eliciting information from the way various non-humans (birds, grass, weather) interact with the game and the peoples participating in it. A team of researchers could, hypothetically, seek to understand the relationships between baseball and democracy through these five informational sources. Individuals can be interviewed about how racial issues are, and have been, made prominent by players, spectators, and

media commentators alike. Groups of people can be surveyed about the understandings they have of different team approaches to training and play: are they democratic, as the Golden State Warriors in the National Basketball League are said to be?[60] The symbols that the players carry on their jerseys, the animal and vegetal products that go into making balls, bats, shoes, and gloves, the distribution of seats in the stadium, the body language of participants at game day, the provisions for spectators, the price of participating, the conditions of workers at the stadium, and so forth can be observed to detect what intentions may rest in them and what, if anything, can be said about them in relation to democratization. Written commentary, from traditional and social media, can be analysed on the spot using geo-tagged semantic methods to elicit information about democracy; there is also scope for this real-time research to be assisted by an artificial intelligence. Even the ways in which non-humans are treated by humans and behave around a popular human activity, such as a Major League baseball game, can be interpreted to tease out inspirations, lessons, and similes for democratic practice.

Popular events, like baseball games, pandemic responses,[61] and societal grieving,[62] or subjects like political parties,[63] war,[64] and remembrance,[65] can be subjects for multidisciplinary teams of researchers to generate data on democracy through a variety of methods, as suggested in the example above. But so too can objects, like sushi (or many other foods).[66] Combining the data from any such intervention would provide a multifaceted result, which logically offers more context,[67] interstices, overlaps, intersections, and insights than one-sided or fewer-sided studies.

Fourth Theorists

Fourth Theorists emerge when first, second, and third order theorists have compiled sufficiently large data sets from one or more of the above-described data sources on democracy. It is not yet clear what 'sufficient' means. This is likely to be determined and continually reappraised by a commission of democracy experts and/or self-appointed Fourth Theorists *or* by a decentralized plurality of researchers who may over time claim that enough information has been gathered for one or more data sources so that a Fourth Theorist may emerge. For Gagnon, and here only with reference to texts, sufficiency appears to mean when thousands of 'democracies with adjectives' have been thoroughly described, the texts that refer to them organized into an accessible online library, and

the bibliometric/graphic details of such texts carefully compiled into structured databases. This amount of data, whilst not exhaustive, would be already by far the most comprehensive set of textual information available to work with in the history of democracy studies. Crucially, the data would be accessible through artificial-intelligence-assisted computational analytics, thus making it possible for a researcher, a Fourth Theorist in this instance, to manipulate the data with the turn and click of a mouse, twist of a hand and tap of a finger, tracked eye movements, and voice commands.[68]

Before we proceed to prescribing what motivates Fourth Theorists (familiarity of a mountain; familiarity of the epistemic mountain range; the motivation underscoring both), we need to explain this typology of numbered theorists, as it is rather unusual. The typology stems from observations of the collected works of both deceased and living democratic theorists or thinkers, like Thomas Hobbes or Edmund Burke, who have been concerned with democracy. Type I theorists are scholars who have worked on things democratic without using the word 'democracy' – they are, instead, preoccupied with group decision-making, collective governance, *faatemokalasi* (democracy in Samoan), and so forth.[69] Type I theorists do not, in short, use the 'd-word' in their research, but their research is on themes that are typically addressed in democracy research. Type II theorists are rarer than Type I theorists, as they refer specifically to only one form of democracy, one adjectival democracy, such as industrial democracy or *faatemokalasituusao* (direct democracy). Type III theorists are by far the most common and form the core stock of scholars given to the study of things democratic. They refer to two or more, sometimes a dozen, forms of democracy such as representative democracy, liberal democracy, deliberative democracy, black democracy, direct democracy, digital democracy, radical democracy, agonistic democracy, green/environmental democracy, even Martian democracy[70] – the same point extends to other languages that use adjectives to modify nouns. But no Type III theorist has ever exceeded these mixed handfuls of democratic concepts because it has not yet been made possible to study, say, one hundred, one thousand, or seven thousand such concepts, or more, in the same moment. That capacity only comes from collecting, ordering, digitally constructing, and opening access to such curated big data.

Unlike first, second, and third order theorists, the Fourth Theorists come into existence when they familiarize themselves with the information of one or more mountains, or become familiar with the information of all mountains brought together. Familiarity means a

thorough understanding of the information and the capacity to wield that information through computational means for the purposes of analysis and theory generation. This could consist of descriptive theory – such as on the nature of one or more mountains – or it could be more normative and prescriptive, and given to the generation of strong theory. From the familiarity of a mountain comes the capacity not only to explain research gaps – which are to be filled by the work of first, second, and third order theorists – but also to find trends and narratives in the data, which can be communicated to inform researchers/practitioners, government and public officials, citizens/residents/visitors, and philanthropists alike. The same outcome applies to the familiarity of all mountains brought together, but with an additional element: the ability to tell grand narratives. We hope that such superlatively evidenced and story-driven accounts of what makes a democracy, or what makes something democratic, will provide conceptual and scientific armament to pro-democrats, or more humbly those who may be democracy-curious, in the world. We further hope that such an outcome would make it very difficult for non-democrats to continue wearing the costumes of democracy; a stronger factual and evidentiary basis for what makes democracy democratic, so to speak, should make it much harder for autocrats and authoritarians to engage in fake democracy through imitation.

We note that each order of theorist is equal in importance to the others, for all are required to work together and, of course, it is encouraged for theorists to move as they please between the sorts of work that theorists of all types do. Some scholars may prefer to do the interpretive work of observing an individual and generating a story of democracy from that collaboration. Others may prefer the considerably different experience of observing non-humans, such as Canada geese or white-winged choughs, in the field and devising inspirations for or lessons on human democracy from them (recall that this is where democracy meets biomimicry). Some may prefer to use surveys to try to grasp what the people of a city such as Lima, Luanda, or Lisbon want of democracy and then prescribe, or generate, a democratic innovation or system from that information with them and for them. Others still might prefer to undertake the quiet study of symbols that are meant to invoke one or more forms of democracy – such as the female figure or the medieval *Bundschuh* – and to devise a democratization stratagem from their deployment in an autocratic/authoritarian regime, for example. The same can be said for the study of texts, such as the growing archive on black democracy and the expanding literature on

how Asian migrants think of and practise democracy in, for example, the United States.[71]

Each order of theorist must also, however, be attuned to the way their subjectivity influences the definitions of democracy they espouse. As Marcin Kaim points out, 'observation, and making sense of reality, are processes of subjective exclusion of fragments of the total'[72] and '[d]emocracy is in a constant process of re-articulation due to repeated conceptualization and study'.[73] Theorists are, in other words, active participants in the formation of knowledge on democracy. And, like all other researchers, in all other fields, they are entangled with their subject matter, and their personal subjectivities do imprint upon what they produce. For the sake of democracy, theorists need to be aware of their impact upon it and be honest about their normative choices in relation to it. Hence, the key is for scholars to do this work openly, honestly, reflectively, and in as balanced a manner as possible. The final requirement is for research results to be assiduously recorded and made accessible to others through free-to-access and well-structured digital databanks (i.e. five distinct mountains of data in open access).

Notes

1 McKeon and Rokkan, 1951, p. 195.
2 Yamada, 2021.
3 Sartori, 1962, p. 5; emphasis added.
4 Sadeqi, 2022.
5 Hammersley, 2021.
6 Ouziel, 2022.
7 Chan, 2015, p. 9.
8 Zhai, 2022b; Osterberg-Kaufmann and Stadelmaier, 2020. See also Hamilton, 2015, for an account of how Western mainstream accounts of democracy – namely deliberation and electoral minimalism – fail in post-colonial non-Western countries like South Africa. Or see Jahanbegloo, 2015, who problematizes the very same Western accounts of democracy for their reliance on representation as opposed to non-violence and non-domination, concerns that are more pronounced in, for example, certain Indian cultures and amongst the followers of Mahatma Gandhi. Capinska, 2016, takes Jahanbegloo's point further by demonstrating the inherently coercive, and therefore violent, nature of liberal democratic regimes.
9 Felicetti, 2021.
10 Sartori, 1987, p. x.
11 Jonathan Rose and Cees van der Eijk, 2022, have made an interesting point on how researchers detect what people want from the future. Instead of asking about retrospective events, how people feel about them, and what could be done differently, the authors show that *prospective* analysis can lead to aspirational, reform-oriented – even hopeful – policy generation for democratization.
12 Dorn and Vaz, 2022.
13 See Ewert, 2021, for a discussion on the role of interpretation when it comes to democracy's ostensibly static facts.
14 McKeon and Rokkan, 1951.
15 Thanks are given to Christopher Hobson for directing attention to Jens Christophersen's book.

16 Raynor, as cited in Milne, 2006, p. 34.
17 'Coral reefs are characterized by complex ecological interactions and interdependencies among different species. Just as democratic societies rely on cooperation and collaboration among diverse individuals and groups, coral reef ecosystems thrive when various species work together in a balanced manner.'
18 'Coral reefs are home to a wide range of species, each playing a unique role in the ecosystem. This diversity can be likened to the representation of different voices and perspectives in a democracy. Just as diverse citizens contribute to the democratic process, the variety of species on a coral reef contributes to its overall health and functioning.'
19 'While not a direct expression of democracy, competition for resources and space within a coral reef ecosystem can be seen as a form of natural selection. Organisms that are better adapted to their environment are more likely to survive and reproduce. In a democratic society, resource allocation and decision-making are often influenced by the preferences and needs of the majority.'
20 'While not a democratic process, the health and preservation of coral reefs require collective efforts from local communities, governments, and international organizations. Similarly, democratic societies often engage in discussions and policies related to environmental conservation and sustainable resource management.'
21 Aytac, 2022.
22 Damrosch, 2010.
23 There is a similar metaphor which Machiavelli uses in his prefatory letter to Lorenzo de Medici in *The Prince*. Here is the translation by Tim Parks in the Penguin edition, 2009, p. 4: 'Just as artists who draw landscapes get down in the valley to study the mountains and go up to the mountains to look down on the valley, so one has to be a prince to get to know the character of a people and a man of the people to know the character of a prince.'
24 Yamada, 2021.
25 Sabloff, 2021.
26 Pausch, 2021.
27 Papacharissi, 2021.
28 See Ewert and Repetti, 2019, on democracy's social codification.
29 Nishiyama (2021a, 2020, 2017a, and 2017b in particular) cautions against treating children and young people as insufficiently trained to articulate their experiences of democracy that they have participated in or the democratic movements they may have instigated. See also Wall, 2021.
30 Rosanvallon,1992, 1998, and 2000.
31 Rosanvallon, 2001, p. 200.
32 McCrudden Illert, 2024.
33 Ackerman and Fishkin, 2004.
34 Ryan and Flinders, 2017; Mendonca, Ercan, and Asenbaum, 2020; Asenbaum and Hanusch, 2021.
35 Meriluoto, 2021.
36 Nicole Glass, 2018. Available online: https://www.germany.info/us-en/welcome/03-Jewish-Life-Germany/-/1308424.
37 Norton, 2023.
38 See Abrams and Gardner, 2023, for a volume that deals examines the power of 'symbolic objects' such as these in depth.
39 McCrudden Illert, 2023; Sean Gray, 2023.
40 Searle, 1969.
41 Freeman and Williams-Pulfer, 2022.
42 Setälä, 2021.
43 Katzner, 2002; *Ethnologue*, accessed 21 March 2025, https://www.ethnologue.com/insights/how-many-languages/.
44 Aesop, 1912 [~mid-sixth century BCE], 'The Frogs and the Well'.
45 E.g. Conrad, Roper, and List, 2010.
46 Seeley, 2010.
47 Suchak et al., 2016.
48 Boehm, 2015.
49 E.g. Donaldson, Vink, and Gagnon, 2021.

50 Gagnon, 2015a, 2015b, 2015c.
51 The theories being advanced by the following, among others, are adding both variety and sharpness to the ways in which non-humans and democracy do, and can, interact: Donaldson, 2020a, 2020b; Vink, 2020; Joe Gray and Patrick Curry, 2016; Celermajer et al., 2023; Meijer, 2019; Eckersley, 2020; Machin, 2019, 2022; Machin et al., 2023.
52 Madin and Harbison, 2001.
53 E.g. Pausch, 2016b.
54 This was ChatGPT 3.5's response to the question 'What has a jellyfish got to do with democracy?': 'The term "jellyfish" is sometimes used metaphorically to describe a type of political behavior or attitude that is characterized by indecisiveness, lack of firm principles, and a tendency to go with the flow rather than taking a strong stance on issues. In this context, the connection between a jellyfish and democracy lies in the criticism that some individuals or politicians within a democratic system might exhibit jellyfish-like behavior, lacking clear convictions and frequently changing their positions based on popular opinion or political expediency.'
55 Machin, 2019.
56 Meijer, 2019.
57 Kimmerer, 2021.
58 Vink, 2020.
59 Bunting, 2018.
60 E.g. Gagnon and Fleuss, 2020, p. 6.
61 Lacelle-Webster, Landry, and Smith, 2021; Guasti, 2020a.
62 E.g. Snyder, 2018, during Black Lives Matter.
63 E.g. Rodd, 2019, regarding *Frente Amplio* in Uruguay.
64 Pirsoul, 2019; Rosow, 2018.
65 Rosow, 2018.
66 Issenberg, 2008.
67 Specian, 2022.
68 As Luke Temple has pointed out, this work will likely only succeed through collaboration with computer and data scientists because this sort of training is not habitual for democracy scholars.
69 It may be worthwhile to *not* use the word 'democracy' as, according to Toralf Stark, it can trigger people and throw discussions off track. Instead, democracy can be spoken of without using that word. This can be a valuable line of research and activism for Type I theorists to pursue.
70 André Bächtiger, Seraphine Arnold, and colleagues at the University of Stuttgart are leading an investigation into deliberative democracy's potentials for the red planet. See also Burling, 2005.
71 E.g. Lipsitz, 2020; Spengler, 2021; Kuo, Malhorta, and Mo, 2016.
72 Kaim, 2021b.
73 Kaim, 2021b.

4
New institutions: models for the useability of our data

> The door [to democracy] is open to all kinds of misunderstandings, and if one person wants to disagree with another, it is easy to do so and to point out reasonable arguments. What is needed … is terminological clarification and empirical research, not proclamations and rhetorical debates.[1]

A model and an encyclopedia

One of the greatest difficulties in the pursuit of these sciences of the democracies is keeping track of information that has already come out and that is coming out from all five sources of information available to us of/for/on/about or in some other equivalence to democracy. And that is because this work is being done in the ethno-quantic domain: it is happening globally, in many languages, and much of it is historical or refers to different time periods (a time in the past, perhaps mythologized, or a desired time in the future, perhaps overstated). Given that thousands of descriptions of democracy have been made and that many more (perhaps more than ever) are presently being made, it behoves us to establish some means of organizing this mass of information about democracy into constructed digital databases and visually representing it. What we propose is to use the Earth as a model for recording which places in the world information on democracy is about (breadth) and which times this information refers to (depth, past and future), with this model world being divided in space and time by equal units (symmetry, for fairness and ease of organization). What this may look like as a manipulable model (preferably digital in form) is a globe that a user can

select with their mouse, touchpad, eye movements, or voice, and where they can choose to zoom into a space to see what sorts of information exist about things (artefacts) democratic attributed to that place. There may even be scope to track how certain transient, migratory, or nomadic democracies pass through parts of the globe, such as those embodied by certain birds, cetaceans, peoples, and fish.

The user might, however, be more interested in historical accounts, or prognostications about the future, and could then select that spatial unit and extract it from the globe to see where in the sedimentary layers information lies or, by contrast, where in the atmosphere above the ground the premonitions for the future of democracy are floating – as if in the heavens. Now drawing inspiration from Participedia (a global crowdsourcing platform for democratic innovations), such a model would give people with internet access the means to uncover information about democracy in the ethno-quantic domain – information that could lead to democratic actions or actions for democracy – and also to spot lacunae, which could lead to citizen science projects, collaborations with researchers, undergraduate or high school assignments, perhaps even the development of future researchers of democracy through students aspiring to undertake higher degree theses. A resource such as this, which is discussed in detail in this chapter, would be capable of sustaining potentially countless democratic actions, research projects, educational experiences, and further institutions relating to democracy.

Rediscovering and uncovering the democracies through explorative, descriptive, and empirical research – as we are proposing in this book – can help us plan for democratic futures, because it is this basic scientific work that serves to inform democratic theory, policy, and practice. This project is also key to decolonizing and decentring democracy through its uncompromising, continuously learning, equalitarian (or non-discriminatory) approach to democracy data.[2]

We democracy researchers should, however, keep in mind that 'predominant understandings of democracy [such as data published in expert journals] have not evolved in a political vacuum. Rather, power imbalances strongly impact(ed) what is considered "relevant" [for democracy] – and which traditions of political thought we know about in the first place'.[3] While data mountains as such are unlikely to revolutionize democratic theory and practice on their own, for without analysis data are simply data, they 'may evolve [through use] into a valuable point of departure for a "decentred" understanding of democracy. … Future research should therefore focus on the question of "what can

we do with [data mountains]" – and how shall we proceed?"[4] Dannica Fleuß, in particular, highlights in this context the merits of these data mountains not just for theoretical work, but also for the development of novel 'conceptual and methodological frameworks for comparative research' and, based on this, for fresh and unconventional visions for 'democratic renewal and reform'. To be clear, a data mountain that compiles 'unusual' and 'surprising' forms of democracy does not make a revolution. It can, however, act as a starting point for collaborative efforts by researchers, practitioners, citizens, and funders to renew democratic theory and practice.[5]

But how can we get there – to this promised land of democratic renewal and both better understood and widely used democratic actions? And how can we constructively deal with this enormous amount of textual and non-textual data on democratic practices across the globe? The answer to the second question will, admittedly, take a host of institutions of description, presentation, and judgement – which emanate from the collected data that compose democracy's five informational mountains.

As regards the first question, if the institutions proposed in this chapter succeed, by gaining common use in societies around the globe, then perhaps we will be able to detect, or somehow sense, that democratic renewals of the sorts we have in mind here are already underway. As concerns democracy's institutions, and as has been theoretically outlined in the previous chapters, the first among such institutions is the afore-mentioned digital model of the world,[6] which is divided into equal parts. Data on democracy that have already been produced (e.g. texts) can be organized in this model based on which place(s) in the world and which time (in the past or future) they refer to. The back end, or software and coding side, of this model begins with a data point: this could be an interview about democracy with a person, a survey on democracy of many persons, a video documentary on, say, ancient pro-democracy graffiti, an essay on flatpack democracy, or a podcast on the democratic behaviours of social wasps. Each data point alone, however, cannot be plotted in the model without further detail, such as where in the world the study was undertaken (say Espirito Santo in Brazil for the individual interview, Ghana for the survey, the ruins of Carthage in Tunisia for the video documentary, several towns and villages in the UK for the essay, and a number of field stations in a Malaysian forest for the social wasps) and what time period the work refers to. This would be the present (e.g. 2025) for all but the video documentary, whose content dates to the Punic Wars (264–146 BCE). The data points, equipped with this

information, can now be plotted in the model, and a user, should they wish to, can select the entry to read or download the data it refers them to. All of this could be done through a graphical user interface (a program that visualizes the data in a model of the Earth).

This model would offer a means for organizing the data on democracy that have already been produced and for keeping track of the data that are continually emerging. The data could, conceivably, be entered manually by a human or automatically by a bot and, thereafter, be checked for quality by human researchers. The structure described above is, of course, only one example of a way to navigate the data. In future there would, for instance, need to be detailed and robust metadata input for the data points, with careful thought given as to what would need to be searchable in the world model (e.g. data source, data type, method used, author's/artist's gender, language). For example, a user may wish to know the weight of data mountains to gain a sense of which is more developed or bears the most information. If we, as researchers, do not provide such metadata, then this user's particular query is unlikely to succeed. The model should, for this reason alone, be developed openly and be kept open by following already established democratic software,[7] 'OpenAI',[8] and community-driven technological development protocols.[9]

In imagining the model, which we have taken to calling DemEarth, and reflecting on the data of democracy we are familiar with, we hypothesize that early iterations of the model will have data mainly from survey and textual sources that are plotted in mainly Global North and Western locations and histories. We presume this will be the case as most of the literature we know is survey-driven and given in text. Should this be the case, the model would be able to clearly suggest areas of the world, or time periods in those areas, for which research on democracy is needed to bring more balance, equity, and fairness into the model. In the case of, say, Western Europe, which is survey- and text-research heavy, the model would also be able to suggest that more research is required from the individual, non-text, and non-human approaches. This capacity, which would be improved through practice and investment over time, makes it possible for the team steering the model – who are serving and supporting the network of researchers behind it – to produce an annual report on the state of democracy research, bearing details on the sorts of research undertaken and offering recommendations on where future research should be conducted.[10] Such a report would likely be of interest to democracy supporters, funders, actors, educators, and of course researchers across the globe.

Second to this model, we suggest, is a multimedial reference work, which we propose to house at DemThings.org (a domain secured, to go live in future). It is to be a dictionary, an encyclopedia; an archive of texts and non-texts. And it is ultimately meant to produce a data visualization interface for users who wish to wield or otherwise explore ever larger data on democracy with the assistance of a democratically produced artificial intelligence. Let us return to the example of the eighteenth-century drawing of a honeybee hive – inspired by Mandeville's poem *The Fable of the Bees*, which French anti-monarchist revolutionaries adopted – as our focus.[11] This stems from the non-textual data mountain (or informational source), as it is a drawing, a symbol of republican ambition, imbued with the hopes of government through the election of one's peers and their representation of one's concerns. In the back end, the code and database side of DemThings, the symbol would be given its own folder and entered as a pictograph (e.g. a .PNG or .JPG file). The editors of DemThings would commission a short dictionary description from relevant experts for that pictograph and then they would commission an encyclopedic essay that describes it from experts as well. The dictionary and encyclopedia products would go into their respective subfolders of the beehive pictograph. At this point, each text in the available or accessible literature that refers to the pictograph is collected into a subfolder of computer-readable documents (e.g. PDFs), with bibliographic/metric details (e.g. if known: author/artist name, author/artist gender, type of publication, place and date of publication, publisher name) and any other metadata that may be useful for descriptive research purposes (e.g. length of publication, language it is written in, number of pages, media type) recorded using spreadsheets (e.g. documents of an .XML file type). These spreadsheets would go into their own subfolder. The last subfolder to be generated, which is particular to the non-textual media source, is a collection of known images of the beehive drawing. The images are given subfolders of their own to capture their pictographical/metrical information (e.g. if known: date the image was published, location where it was first found, name of author/artist).

At this point we have our first entry in DemThings, which is treated as a starting point as it is always open for revision by those who are concerned with the beehive pictograph. This is in keeping with, for example, the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* and similar works. A user can obtain a short definition of the beehive (dictionary) or its full-length description (encyclopedia). They can access one or all works, of those available to us through copyright, that refer to the pictograph (archive of texts), or view one or multiple uses of it (archive of images).

But they can also go further by selecting the option to view infometrics derived from the texts and/or images to see which locations in the world the pictograph is most associated with, to see levels of interest in it over time (a play on the Google Ngram), or to see which words or images are most used with reference to it (so-called proximal semantics/semiotics). The user might also wish to run their own research by deploying textual analysis software on texts or image analysis software on visual content. DemThings, envisioned in this way, is a tool for data organization, for education, and for supporting further research. Now imagine this reference work with thousands of entries and the capacity to manipulate the totality of these data: the outcomes for researchers, especially Fourth Theorists (a so-far unknown class of democratic theorist able to wield one or more of democracy's data mountains), are provocative in their unknown potential. This reference work would be interfaced with the Earth model, as it would be logical for both institutions to refer to one another.

Artificial intelligence and democratic theorizing

We have mentioned artificial intelligence a number of times in this book, so we will pause here to explain what we have in mind with reference to institutions. Whilst artificial intelligence products are convention-ally *and* controversially developed by large technology companies, or so-called Big Tech, there is a community-driven trend to democratize artificial intelligence by providing open-access products. These products, such as the Allen Institute's OpenScholar, are typically purpose-built by volunteers and students through close, and typically repeated or continuous, collaborations. With reference to DemThings, our plan is to work with open-access communities to develop purpose-built algorithms that could over time, for instance, perform tasks requested by its users (such as answering questions or returning data) and also return data to DemThings' editors regarding user behaviour statistics. These statistics, as Google Search and Wikipedia have demonstrated in their own work, have the potential to offer – both to DemThings' editors and to its wider community of users, supporters, and stakeholders – information that can lead, for instance, to an encyclopedia reflecting user interests better, thus making it, or aspects of it, more useful. It may also, however, offer insights into specific democratic actions which may enable overtures to be made to specific community- or government-based actors, groups, or institu-tions to see if they might be open to a global community of democracy

researchers supporting their work or sparring (helpfully, constructively) with their ideas and practices. Further to this is the potential for user statistics to create research questions that may or may not require grant funding to pursue through, preferably, a citizen-led science approach. This could, for example, play out in the following four steps:

1. User statistics demonstrate an interest in grass-roots Caribbean democratic innovations.
2. This signals, after investigation by the editors, a shortage of information about this topic in both the encyclopedia and the broader existing literature.
3. That finding generates a research question (e.g. What democratic innovations exist in the Caribbean region and how can they be found?).
4. And this, ultimately, leads not only to research design work but also, concurrently, to overtures made by, for example, the editors of the encyclopedia toward relevant community- and government-based groups in the Caribbean region, even to locally based NGOs, to see if they would like to collaboratively drive this research forward.

Here, Hans Asenbaum's experiences with 'democratic theorizing' are particularly germane. Asenbaum, who came to work on the concept of 'democratic life' or 'living democracy' with Black Lives Matter activists, demonstrated that the project evolves through the perennially underrated human art of conversation.[12]

It is our hope that this dual service by an artificial intelligence will enable both users and DemThings editors to help one another to meet their respective aims or interests and, potentially, to organically find sites for collaboration. The artificial intelligence is, in this way, a catalyser for interactions, ideas, events, research projects, and, perhaps most assuredly, the behaviour of DemThings users. One aspect of such behaviour which is especially relevant in a time of rising authoritarianism is users' inquiries into democratic action. And it is here that our artificial intelligence could be asked to serve users a little more proactively by asking them about their democratic interests. A common occurrence with individuals and groups across the globe, at least those digitally connected with sufficiently capable devices, is that they are establishing working relationships with various artificial intelligences. Professionals and students in the full range of scholarly and practice-focused fields are asking various artificial intelligence products for solutions to problems and insights into puzzles or questions. Provocatively, there is some

evidence to suggest that theologians and the devout alike are conversing with the artificial embodiments of sacred prophets[13] – ones trained on holy scriptures or ones asked to impersonate holy figures such as Mohammed (peace-be-upon-him), the Buddha, Jesus, various biblical figures like Abraham, and many Hindu gods.

We hope to work collaboratively and unprovocatively within this movement to produce our own artificial intelligence service, one trained on an ever-expanding fundament of thoroughly described democracy data and their associated texts, that (who?) would support, even encourage, the practical uptake or development of diverse democratic actions – effectively whatever the user is interested in doing. Michael Freeden (see Chapter 10) writes that democracy's allies need a vade mecum – a comprehensive source at hand – to consult, and here we think that this source may turn out to be more active (alive?) than text could ever hope to be. That said, we do recognize that the type of machine learning we would require of our desired artificial intelligence collaborator will take time. The human and also environmental labour that is needed to create, train, troubleshoot, and service such an artificial intelligence should not be overlooked. With that in mind, we should expect only modest – and certainly not difficulty-free – results moving forward.

Is there need for a world council of democracy experts?

According to many, but not all authors of this book, the main problem with the Earth model (DemEarth) and the reference work (DemThings) is that they treat information on democracy without discrimination: all conceptions of democracy (including equivalences like *min zhu* and ਲੋਕਤੰਤਰ [*Lōkatatara*]), if they can be rendered into both or either the model and reference work, are welcome. This problem leads to a third institution whose role it is to judge the democraticity (to borrow a term recently repopularized by Hélène Landemore[14]) of the entries into both the model and the reference work. We need, in other words, to identify and apply criteria of inclusion in a manner that sorts acceptable conceptions of democracy from unacceptable ones.[15] This labour of judgement is proposed by some scholars[16] to be the remit of an international advisory council of experts. Their function is to deliberate amongst themselves so that they may assess contested conceptions claiming the mantle of democratic, on a case-by-case basis, to form a guide on democratic things (artefacts) in the world for pro-democrats, or the democracy-curious, to rely on. These flags would form part of the metadata that will accompany

every entry into, especially, DemThings: the dictionary, the encyclopedia, the archive. At its core, the intuition behind this advisory council of experts is to acknowledge the epistemic value of all conceptions of democracy as they are voiced in the world without any a priori normative judgement, and to be clear about the means used to justify this advice, while at the same time making it explicit that this does not mean that all ideas about democracy are equally valuable or worth pursuing.

Indeed, as Anna Drake makes clear, it is every person's responsibility to consider how each of the democracies respects, or does not respect, the moral and political equality of all people. 'If we want meaningful narratives to emerge' from our data mountains, she writes, 'we must confront foundational challenges to [each of the democracies] and centre these in our analysis'.[17] This problem, Drake emphasizes, is one that persists even in deliberative democracies, where the stated aims of more and better inclusion exist alongside ongoing structural injustice, including systemic racism. Adding to Drake's emphasis, James Tully et al., in their book *Democratic Multiplicity*,[18] aver that any and every conception of democracy known to us should be considered for its ability to respect, render equal, and commune with *all* beings – not just humans. In fact, Tully et al. ask more of us, and this adds to the labours of any future advisory council or network: whilst conceptions of democracy can be gathered individually and, as such, respected as equals in this first stage of research, subsequent, more normative stages of analysis need to consider how conceptions interrelate, overlap, mutually sustain, and otherwise connect with each other.

Merit goes to those conceptions that *can* demonstrate the aforementioned or the potential to do so, at least so say Tully and colleagues. Here we can mobilize Laurence Whitehead's non-expert approach to adjudicating what counts as a democracy (has sufficient democraticity to it).[19] And that is 'the deliberative filter of citizen opinion'.[20] The tension between what may be termed the Drake, Tully et al., and Whitehead positions as regards who is to judge what counts, and does not count, as democracy/democratic – and the knowledge that it is often those with the most power and who stand to benefit from maintaining inequality who tend to make these judgements – comes down to a suspicion of incompetence on the part of non-experts and the acknowledgement that it is not democratic for experts to decree what is and is not democracy/democratic. This knowledge, and this decision capacity, rests only with 'the people' wherever and however they are composed. That said, Drake, Tully et al., and Whitehead do not strike such absolutist positions in their works.

Toralf Stark, Norma Osterberg-Kaufmann, and Christoph Mohamad-Klotzbach[21] place a requirement for consensualism on such a council of experts, as its members would first have to form a consensus on what the core of any democracy that they are judging is before being able to pass judgement on it. This will likely require formal theory to establish precise concepts with rules around the factitious, or empirically grounded, variables that are designed to protect the concept from stretching. The hope in this work is that impostor concepts and false positives will not deceive people, as they will be flagged by the council of experts as such, and that this, in turn, will make it more difficult for autocrats and authoritarians, at least those bearing more obvious stripes and patterns,[22] to gain power through the use of democratic catch-phrases and ersatz institutions. We hope that people will, equipped by this advisory service of experts, be better able to deny non-democracies and non-democrats their day, but will also have access to an important source of data to study under what conditions such impostor concepts are more likely to be used, by which kinds of actors, under what kinds of shapes and guises, and with which probabilities of success. Let us call this the guidebook to political knavery.

This ambitious vision, however, faces philosophical, ethical, and practical difficulties. From a philosophical point of view, the question is: if we do not have a singular concept, a sole definition, of democracy, then how are experts – or anyone for that matter – to judge through deliberation, discussion, personal reflection, or some other means what is democratic or not? One example includes the rapidly increasing literature on whether meritocracy is inherently non-democratic. Some argue that meritocracy excludes people from deciding the conditions of their lives due to its knowledge requirements,[23] many of which are not equally accessible by all members of any given community. Others, however, have framed meritocracy as an ambition that can reside *inside* liberal democratic regimes and can, therefore, be used as a dynamic in the service of such regimes – meritocracy in the service of democracy, so to speak.[24] Therefore, it is not possible to judge meritocracy as being non-democratic.

Perhaps, for democracy, the answer is to be found in definition through negation – a technique with a long history in apophatic theology, where theologians define their God by what it is not. A diverse advisory council of experts – or a decentralized network of democracy scholars (broadly conceived) – may find it easier to agree upon what democracy is *not*, rather than what it is, and from there allow all that is not flagged as problematic into the list of things (artefacts) democratic for the world's

pro-democrats or democracy-curious to use. For example, a council or network may define autocracy as the rule of one person over all others. A definition of democracy by negation would, in this instance, mean that any concept(ion), theory, model, idea(tion), practice, type, form, frame, definition, denotation, or otherwise that *does not mean* autocracy could mean democracy or be democratic. This, however, does not circumvent what happens when a people, however defined, together decide to make themselves into an autocracy. For *that* group of people (e.g. a family, workplace, village, or nation), this outcome was made democratically and is, therefore, the sort of democracy they want.

This issue has long plagued democracy's scholars. On the one hand, such an outcome from a people deciding, for whatever reason, to have an autocracy plainly means that they have committed 'democide' – the suicide of their democracy by democratic decision.[25] However, on the other hand, is it not undemocratic to make that assertion over others when democracy could, ostensibly, be about equals forming the decisions they want together (consequences be damned)? And all of this is further complicated by the fact that there is no single definition or theory of democracy to resort to – only many – and the members of this body of 'many' often do not get along and often view each other as not being validly or practicably or realistically democratic. Who can find their way through such a maze?[26]

And so we enter the difficult waters of ethics, for how can the democracies of the world be determined through epistocratic/ expertocratic means?[27] Should not such judgements be the sole prerogative of the people, experts included among them as equals, as some theorists[28] have also proposed? This question returns us to an unavoidable conflict over who directs or is to direct democracy and democratization: is it to be enlightened ones (and how do we determine who such people are?) or is it to be everyone, ignorant and unenlightened as they may be (and who is to force people into such insalubrious categories)? Perhaps the most that such a council of experts – or a decentralized network of scholars (broadly conceived) – could hope for is to be accepted as a trusted source of advice on what makes a democracy or a thing (artefact) democratic, just as other peak scientific bodies are with respect to their subjects of concern (e.g. carbon modelling, social distancing). This may require a more participatory, inclusive, and consensus-driven (therefore less conflictual) democratic procedure, perhaps even politics, for the council or network to follow.[29] On the other hand, research into all known meanings of democracy may yield a single and irreducible definition, or common core, which could lead to more scientific confidence about what

makes a democracy or what makes some thing (artefact) democratic. It deserves to be noted that many authors of this book are dubious about whether such an outcome would happen, and they question the autocratic nature (rule of one definition over all other definitions) that such a core would have should it ever eventuate.

It is at this point, after organization, description, and judgement, that the options for developing further institutions pluralize. And that is because people who would seek to create specimen drawers, museum curations, art installations, wikis, taxonomical charts, and so forth would be served by a well-structured model, reference work, and trustworthy advice on what democracies there are in the world, what these democracies take their meaning or meanings to be, and what can be said to count from among their great variety as democratic or not and why that is the case. What follows is an account of different institutions which have already been proposed out of these sciences of the democracies, and which would be served by DemEarth, DemThings, and the advisory council or network.

Proposed institutions for the study of democracy

The taxonomical specimen drawer

The digital, taxonomical specimen drawer was proposed by Ernesto Cruz Ruiz.[30] The idea is to select a concept of democracy, such as liberal democracy, and to then collect all known data about it. Those data are then rendered into a timeline (by publication date), relationships between the data are traced (by citations or semantic relationships), conceptions of liberal democracy are divided along that tracing, and then individual but still connected iterations of liberal democracy are organized to demonstrate the concept's evolution. Given the hegemonic and privileged nature of democracy studies, which Marta Wojciechowska has done so well to explain,[31] there will be outlier concepts, ones not cited by others, which may link to specific conceptions in the main taxonomy and can then, for example, be pinned near them in Cruz Ruiz's specimen drawer. Both André Bächtiger[32] and Sor-hoon Tan[33] would likely see the merit of Cruz Ruiz's instinct for the sort of genetic mapping that he proposes through the specimen drawer. And this is because detailing liberal democracy (or any other sort of democracy) in this way renders its evolutionary narrative in strikingly clear – truly, physically demonstrable – terms. What the specimen drawer can also succeed in is the development of a wiki (or informational network), as liberal

democracy often refers to other types of democracy in its literature. We will return to the wiki institution shortly.

Petra Guasti proposes a similar taxonomical approach to mapping out the connections between concepts and their evolution.[34] Her approach is inspired by the work of Carl Linnaeus and is not bound to a single type of democracy at a time, as is the case with Cruz Ruiz. Instead, Guasti proposes that *all* known concepts of democracy be organized by their bibliometric/graphic details (time of publication, place of publication, etc.), and that they be mapped across a variety of direct (citation) and indirect (concept-sharing) linkages, organized into families of meaning (nodding here to Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*), and thereafter given narrative. This form of taxonomical organization, and its resulting narrative, is encouraged in particular by John Keane (most obviously in his 2009 book *The Life and Death of Democracy*) because it has the capacity to make sense of how concepts of democracy have evolved over time, where, and possibly even why.

Cruz Ruiz and Guasti's focus on taxonomical products can guide present-day democratization efforts by reminding people how, under certain circumstances, conceptions of democracy have changed, evolved, mutated. In each is a lesson to be learned, an act to avoid, a story to be told, and possibly even an instruction to be replicated or built upon or one that may impart some inspiration to activists. Cruz Ruiz and Guasti's taxonomical products could offer, in short, excellent resources for both researchers and practitioners to draw from.

Museum curation

André Bächtiger proposes a modern museum,[35] which strives to 'engage visitors [in curations that are designed to] challenge and subvert' their predispositions to democracy. His proposition – one touchingly inspired by his father, who was a museum curator – is to thrillingly expose museum-goers to the genetic understandings of one or more concepts of democracy (think specimen drawer, but on a larger scale and presented through differently interactive media). Participation and direct experiences of sound, smell, vision, touch – even taste – can be used to engage museum-goers in the story of a democracy's 'evolution, transformation or resilience'. Inspired by Alice el-Wakil's PhD dissertation,[36] Bächtiger pushes this proposition further: curation can also be done to address problems affecting the museum's target audience – here, of course, echoing Mark Warren[37] – to show that multiple conceptions of democracy can be blended to generate a systemic response to the

problem, or problems, at hand with guidance, or encouragement, on how the audience can get involved, or take the mission up for themselves, if that is something they would like to do.

User-generated wiki

Luke Temple and Eva Krick have each proposed the creation of a democracies-centric wiki.[38] Critically following the examples of Wikipedia and the Urban Dictionary, respectively, they aver that anyone should have the capacity to generate entries on types of democracy, link them using hypertext markup language (HTML), and edit these efforts as a community. This offers a different reference work from DemThings as earlier proposed, as it would not be curated by a team of, say, professional researchers and editors, but rather by anyone interested in contributing their time and resources to developing such a wiki – indeed, Temple's proposal was specifically to work with and leverage the existing Wikipedia infrastructure to accomplish this aim. This may prove to be mutually beneficial in that the wiki could draw on DemThings and vice versa. This, in particular, could serve as a further instance of Hans Asenbaum's democratic theorizing, which requires the study of democracy to be done with members of marginalized communities.[39]

A *sylva sylvarum* of democracy

Sandra Leonie Field describes how Francis Bacon created a book of one thousand random facts in a bid to 'build a new adequate science',[40] one that was 'freed from habitual suppositions' and which was published post-humously in 1627 under the title *Sylva Sylvarum*. The same technique could be used to generate a book, or an interactive website for mobile devices especially, of several thousand facts of democracy, with the hope of capturing the imagination of the world's reading public. Learning from Ng, Ware, and Greenberg,[41] this contemporary reiteration of Bacon's *sylva sylvarum* could be curated to support 'anti-oppressive [education]' and the promotion of users' 'agency and representation'. This would mean not selecting democracy facts at random nor presuming to direct a one-size-fits-all presentation at an ill-defined audience, but rather trying to directly reach marginalized social groups with facts about the democracies which may resonate with them or which may be of the greatest utility for them. There is even an opportunity here to develop a *sylva sylvarum* in collaboration with members of one or more marginalized communities. This book could be marketed to a general audience

in the hope of getting the general reader to use, or spread word of, more emancipative democracy facts in their lives and networks. This could potentially support the abolitionist movements of our world and improve the quality of life for systemically marginalized collaborators.

Related to this book of facts is more of an ethnographic text in which the birthplaces, temples, and prizefighters of the democracies are presented to the public. In this work, models of democracy can be decoded and the cultural biases underscoring them identified. Examples include martyrs like Kurdish (anti-Ba'athist) activist Leyla Qasim or places like ancient Tlaxcallan – a multiethnic, multilingual republic in what is now contemporary Mexico which managed to withstand the might of the Aztec Triple Alliance (a theocratic monarchy) for centuries. This book of democracies through the ethnographic lens was inspired by Kathleen McCrudden Illert, Gergana Dimova, Agustín Goenaga, Luke Temple, and Andreas Avgousti, in particular: their encouragements to take seriously diverse peoples and their diverse artefacts, to treat them as equals to Western thinkers and artefacts, and to see them as just as important as Paine's *Rights of Man* or the *Federalist* and *Anti-Federalist Papers* are commendable.

Telling the stories of democracies

Agustín Goenaga[42] argues that in any of the shapes described above, a living archive of conceptions of democracy will be useful as a record of the cultural richness and diversity that surround democracy as an ideal. As with all archives, the ability to situate different ideas about things democratic in their cultural, spatial, and temporal contexts through the metadata that will accompany them will enable researchers to systematically study which factors tend to be associated with those subtle differences in the local textures of democracy. Goenaga also points to the immense, perhaps inexhaustible, service that these resources could provide to the narratives we tell about democracy and its origins. In each conception of democracy rests the story of who created it and what led them to do so. Each is potentially 'charged with meaning, dead-ends, mistakes, tragedies, hopes and ideals' – the very humanistic material that writers with different concerns use to create their tales and musicians their songs.

A storyteller can, for example, navigate the world model of democracy knowledge (DemEarth), the core reference (DemThings) or community wiki, or the *sylva sylvarum* of their choice and come away with a cornucopia of leads to explore in order to understand the

motivations, the human (or not) energy, behind the creation of a concept or the expression of a desire. They could also tell the story of democratic failure, as Marcin Kaim encourages us to do (as there are lessons in this), or tease out the story of one or more sites of intellectual dissatisfaction, as Andreas Avgousti advises, and as numerous 'highbrow' comedians/social commentators demonstrate in their shows. Imagine, for example, an evening event that comes about from a partnership between democracy researchers/practitioners, a catering business formed by a cooperative of refugees, and an elementary school which rents out its stage hall (with profits going to its student clubs). Imagine that advertising and invitations are prepared by students of the school and workers in the business, respective networks are tapped, funding collectively acquired, and tickets sold to any and all for a storytelling event in which raconteurs take to the stage to transport their audience to different democratic worlds, past, present, and future, using wit, humour, and guile in their delivery. This is a site of social learning which can – as much recent research has shown, especially in the case of participatory or legislative theatre[43] – lead to changes in cognition in audience members, perhaps even behavioural modification.

'Hoping with others'

Antonin Lacelle-Webster defines a collaborative,[44] inclusive, and diverse approach in which hope for a better future – however that is framed by participants – is embodied by a 'continuous activity of defining and re-defining possible collective futures'.[45] For Lacelle-Webster, conceptions of democracy are typically imbued by their makers with aspirations, desires, wants, and wishes: what he bundles together as hope. At the same time, individuals and groups bring their own hopes to bear on conceptions of democracy. It is here, in this mix of hope in the democracies and of hope directed at them, that aspirational, pro-democratic policies can be developed between diverse peoples and diverse experts, which is a key point that is typically missed in conventional democratic theory. As Ghassan Hage writes, 'one has to think about modes of imagining one's own hope with the hope of others and not at their expense'.[46] One should know how to co-hope. Pablo Ouziel supports Lacelle-Webster's direction in his call for greater imagination to be deployed by people who want to live in democracies or to have more democracy in their lives.[47] Ouziel's *imaginarium* is similar to creative futures think-tanks. It is a place for civic-minded people to slake their creative thirst by identifying problems in their lives and by coming up

with democratic solutions for them, together. There is something of an Ubuntu flavour to Ouziel's method, as it blends not only openness, kindness, and playfulness, but also interconnectedness and a sense of public-spiritedness.

It is worth pointing out that Lacelle-Webster's focus on hope or Ouziel's *imanariums* do not need to be run by political authorities – or indeed authorities of any kind. Hope for a better future can be found in a kitchen; an *imaginarium* in a teenager's favourite hangout. Both can, of course, be found in classrooms and in civic development sessions within workplaces, and, yes, both can involve sponsored sessions hosted by politicians in, for instance, a public library, university, college, or school. Hope and imagination are democratic goods – they are the intangible institutions of a people, and they cost nothing in terms of money. The purpose of pointing this out is to underscore that it is up to the democrat – whoever and wherever you are – to start, or join, a hope session and/or *imaginarium* in whatever place makes the greatest sense for you. That may even be in the few moments of rest one may have between chasing jobs and money in times of ever greater living expenses and inequalities. It is important to note that participating in some forms of democracy is a luxury, possible mainly for well-off people. These forms tend to be the dominant conceptions of democracy, especially ones promulgated by Western powers. Therefore, thinking of or doing democracy differently – in the manners that suit you, in the time that you have – is itself an act of democratization.

Taken together, the institutions discussed in this chapter are a means to present knowledge on the democracies to various publics. This, in line with the usual hope in public education, may lead to detectable behavioural change in the very people who take in such presentations. These institutions are also, however, an effective means for identifying research gaps. A user going through DemThings may, for instance, see that very few cities are given descriptions there and so they may take it upon themselves to be the ones to do the work of describing the perceptions of democracy in, for example, Asunción, Atlanta, or Aden.

Notes

1   Naess, 1956, p. 23.
2   Rosanvallon, 2011.
3   Fleuß, 2021a.
4   Fleuß, 2021a.

5   Fleuß, 2021a.

6   See Gagnon, 2013, for preliminary ideation; or see Chapter 2 in this book.

7   Smith and Martín, 2023.

8   Koster et al., 2022.

9   Saetra, 2024.

10 One outcome of this annual democracy studies stocktake could be the analysis of geographical referents (i.e. *topoi*) focused on in any given calendar year. Such an analysis may further prove the point made by Monique Deveaux, 2016, that focusing too much on real or proposed political institutions 'risks ignoring critical dimensions of women's disempowerment' (p. 7) and thus leads to recommendations to give other referents, such as spaces where women are empowered, their due.

11 Ramírez, 2000.

12 Asenbaum, 2022.

13 See, for example, André, 2023.

14 Landemore, 2020.

15 We acknowledge the improbability of working as such. The ideal here is to suppress or withhold one's judgements until the work is done: in short, to be a juror and work from the evidence, not one's preconceived notions. For more on this, see Theuns, 2021b.

16 e.g. Fiorespino, 2022; Valgardsson, 2022; Manriquez, 2022.

17 Drake, 2022.

18 Tully et al., 2022.

19 Whitehead, 2021.

20 Whitehead, 1997.

21 Stark, Osterberg-Kaufmann, and Mohamad-Klotzbach, 2022.

22 Emiljanowicz and Ibhawoh, 2021, and also Keane, 2020, and Ibhawoh and Akinosho, 2018, demonstrate that we are perhaps now long past the time of obvious despots. Non-democrats, authoritarians, autocrats, and so on are using different types of democracy – such as participatory democracy in the Ghana of the 1980s – to legitimize their regimes and democracy-wash the violent coercion they require to stay in power.

23 e.g. Tang, 2022.

24 e.g. He and Warren, 2020, who invoke 'democratic meritocracy'.

25 Chou, 2013. This use of the term 'democide' is a novel one, contrasting with its traditional use to refer to the killing of a country's people by its government.

26 Sadeqi, 2022.

27 Lafont, 2019; Estlund, 2008; Min and Wong, 2018.

28 e.g. Nishiyama, 2021b; Krick, 2022b; Marquardt, 2022; Khachaturian, 2022. Although, as Theuns, 2021a, 2021b, and others have noted, such a move raises the thorny question of who counts as 'the people'.

29 e.g. Bang, 2014.

30 Cruz Ruiz, 2022.

31 Wojciechowska, 2022.

32 Bächtiger, 2021.

33 Tan, 2022.

34 Guasti, 2021.

35 Bächtiger, 2021.

36 el-Wakil, 2020.

37 Warren, 2017.

38 See Temple, 2021, and Krick, 2022b.

39 Asenbaum, 2022.

40 Field, 2021.

41 Ng, Ware, and Greenberg, 2017.

42 Goenaga, 2021.

43 e.g. Singhal, 2003; Sonn et al., 2015; Hoff, Jalan, and Santra, 2021.

44 Lacelle-Webster, 2023, p. 477.

45 Lacelle-Webster, 2023, p. 478.

46 Hage, 2016, p. 466.

47 Ouziel, 2022.

5
Our public relations problem

No definition of democracy can adequately comprise the vast history which the concept connotes (Harold Laski, 1934).

Are we so uninteresting?

There is no better time than now to follow – or better yet, join forces with – democratic theorists; and that is because advances in thought, new innovations, and scientific findings keep revising what we know. Some claim that democracy is mutating faster than its theorists can keep up.[1] Indeed, 'democracy' – as John Capps writes – is one of those words that has always maintained an open texture and is, therefore, 'always open to new and unexpected interpretations'.[2] But democratic theorists in particular try to keep up and to pursue their respective research interests – these sciences of the democracies included – because they hope to share their love of democracy with the public; to romance them, to let them know what they are doing, why it is important but also fun, exciting, and fascinating. To participate in the study of democracy is to experience democracy's rapture for it is, as a field devoted to understanding a wildly diverse subject, an apogee example of transdisciplinarity, pluralism, and constant change.

If the reader feels differently, that studying democracy is staid or stunted, closed or limited, then, we authors of this book aver, they are missing the party or, worse, being misled by Empire's clowns. Democratic theorists are, consequently, always looking for new doors to open, so that other people can get involved. Yet, in spite of their hopes and efforts, and despite the appeal inherent in studying democracy, it appears that

most, perhaps all, of their – and by extension *our* – intellectual products, even deliberative democracy (the most successful democratic innovation to take root since representation),[3] are only known to a minority of people in the world. Given that our target audience *is* the people of this Earth, we cannot, in the embarrassing light of this fact, say that our work is well known or otherwise common to those we hope will use it or somehow, otherwise, benefit from it. As Matthew Flinders and Leslie Pal have recently confirmed, this matter is also a plague to the relevance of political science.[4]

This claim – that democratic theory and democracy studies have a public relations problem – is a hypothesis founded on our anecdotal experiences. One example stems from asking advanced undergraduate political science students to define what are arguably the 20 best-known types of democracy by matching terms like 'representative democracy' and 'deliberative democracy' with one of their conventional (that is, oft-repeated) definitions.[5] The students were, despite years of study in political science, only able to match a minority of terms with their conventional definitions. Then there are the moments in public when general pleasantries develop into conversations on democracy, or politics more broadly, and uses of terms such as 'deliberative mini-publics', 'mixed-member proportional representation', 'government by sortition',[6] and so on are met with quizzical looks, cocked eyebrows, and other invitations to provide explanation. And then there are those *other* moments with journalists, politicians, and protest leaders – the mainstay of conventional arena politics – who demonstrate total ignorance of, say, democratic innovations that are popular among researchers. This is a problem for us, at least, because we believe that our intellectual products may be of some use to, for example, pro-democracy actors in the aforesaid arena politics.

In all quarters of our quotidian experiences, there is the impression that most people have no idea about our works and many show little inclination to familiarize themselves with them. This can be due to a seemingly endless list of reasons. Our works may be inaccessible and impractical for most people – especially those marginalized by systemic oppression, those who are powerless outside of dominant systems, and those who bear no official country documentation and are designated stateless. There is, from this viewpoint, the impression that we are ill-suited to pursuing research into democracy that is not only designed to make life easier for certain people but also designed to be done *with and by* them. For example, a discussion took place between colleagues during a dinner after the first day of the 2022 Participedia Partners

conference at McMaster University in Hamilton, Ontario, about just who our target audience is. The verdict? Split. Some claimed it was the person across the table – our peers. It is not for us to write for non-experts.

However, as Debra Thompson recently stated at the 2022 Canadian Political Science Congress, 'we need to take care about how the things we value are themselves mechanisms for exclusion'. So, others at the dinner table said it was the people outside, on the street and in cafés. Our duty is to them but also to our neighbours seated at other tables or perched at the bar, and to the people serving us our food and those cooking it. Our duty is to reach them, build relationships with them, find out what they care about and how our research speaks to those concerns – and if it does not, we should have the courage and humility to adapt our course of study. One could carry this line of thought further by averring that democratic theorists should not fall foul of the principle that experience and lived wisdom is equal to academic knowledge, especially when it comes to the question of how to produce healthy democracies.

But what does this mean in practical terms? When directing our ideas towards our peers, we need do little more than publish in scholarly journals and talk to each other at conferences. Admittedly, an increasing number of these journals are engaging in open-access publishing with the hope of interesting readers who are not traditionally, or habitually, of the exclusionary, and well-financed, academic cloth. Yet if we wish to speak to a broader audience, we take on a much more difficult task. We cannot simply walk up to strangers to ask for their personal information and time. There are important ethical hurdles to clear and remunerations to offer. The likelihood is that we will be granted ethical clearance but that – constricted by funding shortages in our respective universities, academies, research institutions, and funding bodies – we will be unable to provide direct remuneration. That is, of course, presupposing that a modest amount of money, or the chance to win a modest prize, would in fact incentivize a busy stranger to talk to us. Usually, all we can offer is the distant and potential promise of a solution to a problem that we believe affects their lives. Yet even if we are lucky enough to find such a solution, we are rarely trained to communicate our ideas in an attractive and accessible manner. That is one reason why professional researchers should try to link with think-tanks, NGOs, citizen initiatives, and politicians who are interested in collaborating for the purpose of research transfer and debate. All too often, among the scholarly community, esotericism is seen as equalling intelligence, and convolution as signalling intellectual complexity. Whether for these reasons, or others we cannot

presently see, the vast majority of people simply do not want to engage with what we have to offer.

Given that our efforts in research are designed to improve the conditions of life for people, just as should be the case for doctors, dentists, lawyers, and so forth, it is a daily indictment, a veritable shame upon our field, that this state of affairs has been allowed to become the status quo. Our investigations into democracy would benefit from studying successful public outreach strategies used by other scientists. There are no equivalents of Stephen Hawking, Brian Cox, Neil deGrasse Tyson, or Bill Nye popularizing this or that form of democracy; perhaps Nicole Curato, Astra Taylor, Nikole Hannah-Jones, Zizi Papacharissi, Hélène Landemore, John Keane, and Cornell West come closest, but their concerns are different from what we propose in this book, as they tend to champion only a few, typically already dominant, conceptions of democracy. Perhaps, then, it is prominent figures in the arts such as Banksy, Public Enemy, and Earl Lovelace who are best at democracy outreach, but again they evoke only specific conceptions of the democratic form.

The measurement of what people know of democratic theory,[7] democratization, and democracy studies can help us gauge people's familiarity, or lack thereof, with our intellectual products. Such measurement is, therefore, worth pursuing collaboratively with non-academic practitioners of democracy in a bid to understand who knows what of what in the world of the democracies. This should be done collaboratively so that we can develop strategies for improving the public's understanding of the sciences of the democracies; perhaps this can be partly achieved through policy recommendations to respective governments on democracy education. We are likely faced with a situation that is similar to the paltry results on what people know of politics from regular batteries testing for this.[8] In fact, our results may be *worse* given the more niche concerns and jargon of democratic theory or democratization and democracy studies: for example, understanding how a deliberation day works and why it is important is arguably more difficult than remembering who the prime minister or president is or the name of one's currently serving representatives in national or regional parliaments or in town councils.

However, rather than giving up on public education and leaving matters of democracy in the hands of experts as the pro-epistocracy scholar Jason Brennan advocates,[9] our preference is instead to swim against the current. We seek to do all we can to build awareness of our intellectual offerings, to measure the effects of our efforts, and, crucially,

to hold ourselves accountable for all of the aforementioned and not – as has been a custom in academia more broadly – to dodge fair criticism for accidents and unforeseen blunders by blaming our instruments or technocratic university pressures.[10] Accomplishing this aim requires tactics to avoid what may be said to be the usual academic irrelevancy. This includes a robust schedule of speaking events at schools, prisons, aged-care facilities, and societies; the regular organization of public talks such as TEDx events and evenings at pubs; the creation of a creative news bureau to render ideas from, say, democracy studies into less textual and more understandable, approachable formats;[11] adding content from democracy studies into existing knowledge-sharing institutions like Wikipedia; writing informative reviews of books on democracy for Goodreads, Booktopia, Amazon, Google, and other common book-rating platforms; answering democracy questions on Quora and similar websites with links back to our open-access publications, services, or offerings; and establishing art partnerships with public services buildings, private businesses, and common spaces to present objects of curiosity to passersby which may lead them to investigate what these are about and thereafter stumble upon this or that portion of our work. This is reason enough to establish a Patreon or other crowd-sourcing platform to fund the advertising of our work through social media platforms and around relevant events. Establishing and expanding partnerships with think-tanks and civic organizations can further foster diversity in thinking and lead to debate and ultimately to the dissemination of democracy knowledge for all members in such partnerships.

We also recognize that this work need not be done alone. Simply speaking to each other across disciplinary silos will already force us to confront and perhaps discard some of our beloved jargon and name-dropping that makes our work so unappetizing to the general reader. (Despite our best efforts in this book, we remain charged with this guilt.) The field of democratic theory is, for example, deeply transdisciplinary,[12] and these proposed sciences of the democracies more so given their attention to five informational sources and the fact that many languages and methods are needed in pursuing an understanding of these sources. Collaborations between disciplinary experts, whilst difficult as our concerns and conventions are often foreign to one another, may lead to public education programmes that serve everyone's communication needs. Critical theories are also being developed outside of academia through collectives such as Radical X Change, a social movement for the next generation of political economies through mechanisms such as plural voting. Democracy Next is, as a further example, doing the

critical work of building new institutions for the next paradigm of citizen participation, representation, and deliberation. Their work is rooted in three principles: (1) giving people agency and dignity through participation, (2) distributing equal political power through representation by democratic lottery (i.e. sortition), and (3) channelling collective wisdom and enabling people to find common ground through deliberation. More hands, hearts, and minds, and the joining of respective networks and institutions, may lead to greater impact of our public education programmes through increased awareness, possibly even resourcing through pooled funds. There is a caveat to all of this: as Erik Liam Severson has mentioned, any public education efforts need to have strategies in place to criticize, contest, and even escape the interests of societal elites if these efforts are to succeed (they cannot, in other words, simply be programmes set up by elites).

With these recognitions in mind, we have generated several strategies for public outreach, which we communicate below, as it is our ambition to relate these sciences of the democracies – which have recently been described by peers as an 'urgent awakening of contemporary democratic theory' – to as many peoples as possible and to do so collaboratively.

Strategies for public outreach

Kei Nishiyama has developed a teaching technique based on his ethnographic experience.[13] He invites students to take a walk around campus and to take pictures of things they consider to be symbols of democracy. Some have, for example, photographed a garden (emancipated democracy, pluralism), an open door (transparency, participation, access to information), and their own shadow (representation, political parallelism). He then shares with students a list of thousands of different types of democracy[14] and invites them to think again of their conceptions in relation to the storehouse of knowledge he has just provided them with. This second invitation has led to students deepening their own conceptions by matching them with the same, or nearest, concepts in the literature (e.g. 'open door democracy' was matched with Landemore's book *Open Democracy*),[15] but has also led some to challenge their own thinking (e.g. is 'shadow democracy' as valid a conception as, say, 'radical democracy'?). This exercise can also be conducted by inviting participants to select a memory of democracy as opposed to taking a picture of it. The memory technique may be more inclusive as some

participants may not have a camera and/or may have special requirements concerning mobility or sight. Nishiyama's classroom technique for exploring conceptions of democracy can also create space for students and teachers to consider the *political* implications of the concepts they are working with. Weinberg and Flinders, for example, conducted a longitudinal study of civics educators in the United Kingdom and found that there is an overreliance on teaching a- or non-political responsibilities as opposed to exploring classically political subjects like the naming and contestation of power, challenging the legitimacy of power holders, or emancipation and rebellion.[16]

Relatedly, Norma Osterberg-Kaufmann and colleagues[17] have developed an elicitation technique for teasing out people's meanings of democracy using repertory grids. This methodological approach is based on the requirements of comparative political theory, which is to say that it is open to global understandings of democracy and research into how people view democracy. It takes a non-expert or specialist approach to defining democracy.[18] Repertory grid analysis (RGA) allows researchers to explore political attitudes and the meanings of democracy as may be defined by a study group by using a bottom-up approach (starting with people and how they experience their everyday or habitual lives). It combines a structured interview method with a multidimensional rating scale, thus amalgamating qualitative and quantitative approaches. Elements that adequately represent the studied topic, like things, people, and situations, are first identified. Respondents are free to match ideas to concepts according to their own preferences without having to refer to established definitions. That said, the design of the study does restrict participants to an extent as researchers typically select the ideas and concepts to be matched. Perhaps this can be avoided by first asking participants to submit all of their ideas, concepts, images, and so forth of democracy, with researchers then adding add their own to the study.

As a self-guided process, this step allows an organic mapping of different elements onto the concept of, in our case, democracy. That said, the Fabrics of Democracy Network – the network of scholars steering the RGA approach – makes clear the position that this research cannot be realized alone, but only in collaboration, and certainly not as a one-person show, as Petra Guasti[19] also notes. And certainly not with short-term publication results. This is because we need to collect enough data to gain insights into the overall fabric of democracy and generate tissues of democracy from those data and from the community of participants, one at a time. And that requires the collaboration of a variety of disciplines and subdisciplines with different methodological

competencies. As Michael Saward points out, we need 'a new, inter-disciplinary way of thinking about democracy'.[20] This also means that we need to bring more quality into quantity and more empiricism into theory.[21]

This work requires bringing together researchers from different disciplines and across disciplinary boundaries so that we may learn from each other's different expertises, competences, and research results. Lucy Parry, for example, experimented with an online 'Democracy Lab' with high school students where the students were asked to define what democracy and its values meant to them.[22] They then worked together to navigate their collective views and produced a short, collaboratively written text summarizing their definitions of democracy, its values, threats, and the role of participation in democracy. The aim of this workshop was to introduce students to the general idea of democratic theory *and* democratic theorizing, and also to foster the cocreation of plural understandings of democracy.

In a particularly vexing civic context, that of suburbs in the USA, Erica Dorn has pursued participatory action research both to address a better understanding of democracy in the suburbs and to build local capacity to participate in its making. Known for their exclusionary practices, suburbs were designed to produce little political conflict, which is one reason why many US suburbs continue to lack civic engagement. This is why more investigation and understanding of the specific contexts of participation are needed.[23] 'Aurora Civic Conversations' is a project whereby Erica and her team of six community facilitators conducted interviews in six different languages with diverse residents across the city of Aurora, Colorado. Aurora is a sprawling and highly multicultural suburb of 400,000 residents who speak over 160 languages, and where 20 per cent of the residents are foreign-born. The project allows everyday residents the opportunity to share their stories of civic life and the challenges they face in finding ways of participating in public affairs.

A clear outcome from this participatory action research is that democracy, for many voting and non-voting residents of Aurora, is almost synonymous with the term 'government'. There is a massive barrier to participation because there seems to be little opportunity, access, or incentive to do so. Solutions to the issue become most relevant and achievable when they are designed by those who are most impacted by lack of participation.[24] The lack of robust social safety nets, such as universal basic income and paid family leave, ensures that many residents have little scope to participate in public life beyond contributing their labour to the formal and informal economies that they can

access. Designing paid opportunities to learn about, participate in, and influence civic life is increasingly a requirement for disseminating democratic knowledge more widely.

Working with students and research subjects/collaborators in these ways – which can run concurrently with ongoing mini-publics, pro-democracy podcasts, short informative videos about different sorts of democracy, and social media informational campaigns – has the capacity to join the personal and prosaic understandings of democracy with expert literature and experiences on the democracies as known to democracy scholars (broadly conceived). Gergana Dimova has, for example, proposed that educative or learning interactions such as these could prove to be especially beneficial to politicians, helping them to become more versed in the arts of expressing their conceptions of democracy and understanding the conceptions of democracy held by their constituents, and also increasing their awareness of the vast literature on the democracies at their disposal.

This could be the primary purpose of a future small school of democracy studies. Such a small school is conceived of as a graduate-level training programme for politicians, party members, and independents alike; however, because the school draws its curriculum from the sciences approach to democracy studies, it also offers a broader array of professionals training in numerous arts of democratization. For example, psychologists, psychiatrists, therapists, pastors, and counsellors could undertake training in 'inner democracy', or 'psychogenic democracy' – a psychological, and personally reflective, approach to the democratization of oneself, of one's inner being or mind.[25] Social workers, couples/relationship therapists, full-time parents (it always bears reminding that staying at home to raise a family and maintain the home is full-time work), NGO practitioners specializing in reducing or otherwise addressing intimate partner violence, youth advocates, and so forth could undertake training in 'family democracy'. Recent studies have, for example, shown that a democratic home must be a less violent home.[26] Teachers, school administrators, and policy workers in education can undertake training in 'school/student democracy', as more democratic schools have been shown to produce better development for students and also greater job/role satisfaction for teachers and administrators.[27] Professionals specializing in leadership training, business development or architecture, start-up coaching, workplace culture, 'human resources',[28] or other approaches to business management can undertake training that is informed by the now vast seam of scholarship on 'workplace democracy'.[29] Crucial here is the recognition that small schools dedicated

to democracy studies – or non-university (i.e. community-run) variations thereof – are, we argue, needed in all countries or, at least, in each major multinational region. The potential of diverse professionals who have undertaken practical, profession-focused training is vast in terms of them driving forward democratization through their respective labours over time.

Techniques for public engagement

In what follows, we present six techniques for engaging the public with the intellectual products offered by these sciences of the democracies.

The Island Game

A technique for classrooms and research fora alike, the Island Game invites participants to think of a deserted island and to name which type of democracy could exist upon it or in relation to it. This would be the island at zero people. After answers are given, the conductor of the game adds a human to the island and repeats the question to participants: what types of democracy exist on the island now? The game proceeds like this, with a person being added until there are 3 and then a jump to 300 after a shipwreck dramatically adds to the population, then a jump to 30,000 after the passage of time and population growth, and so forth. The point of the game is to encourage participants to think of how the possibilities for democracy change with the number of people, or lack of people, in any particular place. The game can be played in reverse as well.

A University of Canberra student trained in the Island Game once recounted his experience running the game in his classroom (he graduated from the university to become a secondary school teacher). The students, with no prior formal training in democracy studies, relied on both the understandings of democracy that they each brought with them into the classroom and their own research which they conducted to complete the game (namely rapid online searches). At zero people, students applied creativity and research to establish the presence of 'non-human democracy'. At one person, the same approach was taken to establish the sorts of democracy that can be found in a solitary life, such as the aforementioned 'inner democracy'. At two persons on the island, students began to identify more familiar forms of democracy such as those based on interpersonal consensus seeking. At three and more, students began identifying forms of democracy that have more to do with

aggregating preferences, such as through voting and deliberation. Whilst the class's interest had more to do with debating the *effectiveness* of democracies on the island versus autocratic rule on the island (certainly a win for civics), there is further potential in the game to explore *where* and under *which condition(s)* types of democracy or autocracy can emerge.[30]

War Games

Suited to military education colleges, physical education classes, or community education/sports and recreation clubs (e.g. scouts, cadets, summer camps), the War Games technique pits a 'democratic platoon' (a small group of soldiers making all decisions together) against a traditional hierarchical 'commanded platoon' (all decisions made by one person for the small group of soldiers) in a capture-the-flag situation. Fittingly for both education and research, the result after each round can be used for reflection by the participants and organizers alike. For example, what led one group to prevail over the other? Was there a sense of preference amongst the participants for one style of governance for their platoon in particular? What type of democracy or autocracy can be said to have been used and is there scope to try other types? For researchers and officers-in-training at military colleges, this technique can be used to contribute to the movement for democratizing contemporary militaries or at least for soldiers to explore the merits and demerits of so doing.

This technique for public engagement is, admittedly, unusual as many approaches to democracy are pacifist or non-violent in their ethical orientations. The War Games (or 'Peace Games', should that appellation better appeal to the reader) technique stems from a small seam of scholarship on 'soldier democracy', 'battlefield democracy', and so on, which recognizes that militaries are inherently, even shockingly, hierarchical and deeply authoritarian professional regimes. Whilst civilian control of militaries[31] and keeping military leaders away from civilian public offices remains a key focus in the study of militaries within democracies, soldier/battlefield democracy instead focuses on democratizing the everyday work of peoples within said militaries. Some arguments for why this should be done include the potential to increase combat effectiveness,[32] improve workplace satisfaction,[33] reduce instances of arguments against leadership (indeed, reduce attempts to murder incompetent or unliked leaders in warzones),[34] and allow freedom to develop civic aptitudes that are of interest to different members of the military.[35]

Waystones for democracy

Inspired by the ancient Mayan reverence for stone (e.g. worship of stonework, cultural emphasis on excellence in masonry, ubiquitous use of grinding stones or directional stone markers in daily life), waystones can be created to assist people in identifying democracy. The waystone is a heptahedron (seven-sided stone) which bears the engraving of a different question on each side. These questions are the traditional ones asked in the mainstream canon of research into democracy when researchers are specifying the meaning of the democracy in their works. They are as follows: (1) which?, (2) where?, (3) what?, (4) who?, (5) why?, (6) how?, and (7) when? As a user holds the stone, they are asked to answer each question whenever they evoke or otherwise encounter the word 'democracy'. Take, for example, a person who sees the word 'democracy' spraypainted on the side of a wall in Huambo, Angola. It is clearly graffiti. Most of the questions from the stone are unanswerable, except for 'where?' for which the answer is the wall in that part of Huambo. After a moment, it turns out this was not mere graffiti but rather the beginning of a public intervention by a young artist who, as it happened, ended up standing next to the user. It is here, in the context of conversation, that the waystone fulfils its potential. The user is now able to ask the artist about which type of democracy they have in mind, where it is supposed to work (in the neighbourhood, Huambo, or Angola, perhaps the world?), when it is for (now or later?), what it is emphasizing (subject, process), who it is directed at (audience, boundary of participants), how it works (procedure), and why it matters (what is significant about the evocation of democracy by the artist)? This could yield a deep conversation about the democracy of this instance that may lead to the clarification of ideas by both discussants and the capacity to render the artist's intervention more intelligibly to others. It may even lead to the sharing of perspectives and rationales between the discussants and thus offer opportunity for pro-democracy change or challenge by either or both of them.

Democracy redux

Following the encouragements of John Keane,[36] Syrus Ware,[37] and Erica Dorn and Federico Vaz,[38] in particular, who advise democracy scholars to communicate beyond the academic text and to do so more evocatively, a digital and creative news bureau has been proposed. The idea of this bureau is to foster investigative and translatory collaborations between

researchers, activists, artists, writers, and journalists to produce engaging news outputs on things democratic in the world. One example could be a guerrilla documentary curated by academics and young activists, filmed on smartphones and edited using free software, on how certain homeless persons or 'street people' of cities like Toronto, Manchester, Vancouver, or Belo Horizonte have organized and empowered themselves. This production could be done with little capital; it could generate new relationships with marginalized people and in that way ease some of their burden; it could be submitted to art and film festivals; it could be used for teaching; and it would also translate well through short film clips and stills into sharing the message, the impetus, and the purpose of the documentary through social media.

The Collider

A classroom activity, research process, and even party game, 'The Collider' invites participants to select a type of democracy at random and to then develop the two (or more) types of democracy selected into a workable means for governing a country, province, city, workplace, family, and so on. A pair of participants may, for example, have selected 'representative democracy' and 'feminist democracy' and been asked to govern their fictive country through them. This may lead to some research by the duo to gain a quick grasp of the terms should they prove unfamiliar, a discussion by the duo on what the blend of these two types of democracy requires, and the identification of contemporary or historical examples or imaginings of them. The motivation behind The Collider is to introduce different sorts of democracy to people and to get them used to the practice of wielding them. One of the more interesting aspects of this activity stems from Guasti and Geissel's[39] study of how participants in different democratic activities (they refer to them as innovations) make claims *outside* of those made by elected representatives: to blend different types of democracies together is invariably to invite clashing chambers of influence, the conflict of values, the contestation of power and privilege, but also compromise, negotiation, and learning if participants (including elected representatives) are open to considering the claims made by others.

Collaborating on the preservation of languages and cultures

Michael Saward advises democracy scholars to get engaged with existing efforts aimed at the preservation and restoration of endangered

languages and cultures.[40] This is because human diversity is one of the richest resources we have for understanding the historical manifestations of the democracies and also their contemporary struggles, solutions, and future trajectories. Without these languages and cultures, should they diminish to the point of extinction, our capacity to learn about democratization cross-culturally and to dream of democratic possibilities will become permanently limited. As anthropologist Wade Davis[41] attests, humanity is presently facing a *best*-case scenario of losing half, fully 50 per cent, of its linguistic and ethnic diversity by the close of the twenty-first century. This is, tragically, far worse than some of the grimmest predictions of biologists for the loss of non-human diversity. In following Saward's advice, scholars of democracy can at least support the work of indigenous activists, ethnologists, anthropologists, international institutions like UNESCO, UNICEF, and UNHCR, and so forth, by increasing awareness of the cost of losing languages and cultures. There may be scope in such partnerships for the organic exchange of information – perhaps certain conceptions of democracy could be useful to the preservation of endangered languages, cultures, human geographies, and ethnicities.

Notes

1 e.g. Son, 2021; Lacelle-Webster and Warren, 2021.
2 Capps, 2022.
3 Evidence of deliberative democracy's success as a model of democracy can be seen in its uptake in conventional and social media as well as eminent scientific journals such as *Science* (e.g. Dryzek et al., 2019) and *Nature* (e.g. Dryzek and Niemeyer, 2019), and in the surge in citations of recently published articles and books. See, e.g., Curato et al., 2020; Bächtiger et al., 2018; Berg and Lidskog, 2017; Chambers, 2020; Farrell and Suiter, 2019; McKay and Tenove, 2020; Hammond, 2018; Curato, Hammond, and Min, 2019; Curato et al., 2017; and also Mendonça, Ercan, and Asenbaum, 2020: these are all much-cited, recently published texts.
4 Flinders and Pal, 2020.
5 This is a simpler rendition of the task described in Gagnon et al., 2021, pp. 8–10.
6 See Peonidis, 2016, for an explanation of the return of sortition to mainstream politics after being 'centuries in oblivion'.
7 Or should know, e.g. Rapeli, 2014.
8 e.g. Zuniga and Diehl, 2018.
9 Brennan, 2017.
10 e.g. Guasti, 2020b.
11 One programme could draw inspiration from the model wars in democratic theory. It could be a biographical interview platform to humanize professors and share their strong arguments about why their preferred form of democracy should be preferred, and here borrowing from Giovanni Sartori, the 'master of them all'. Stoking the fires of the friendly struggle between models of democracy in this way, perhaps through YouTube, could help popularize our work.
12 See, e.g., Dean, Gagnon, and Asenbaum, 2019.
13 Nishiyama, 2021b.
14 From the textual source or mountain; see Gagnon, 2021b.
15 Landemore, 2020.

16 Pausch, 2019.

17 Osterberg-Kaufmann and Stadelmaier, 2020; Osterberg-Kaufmann and Teo, 2022.

18 See, e.g., Alfred Moore, 2014, 2021.

19 Guasti, 2021.

20 Saward, 2021a.

21 Osterberg-Kaufmann, Stark, and Mohamad-Klotzbach, 2020, 2021.

22 See https://participedia.net/method/8250.

23 Dorn, 2022.

24 Dorn and Vaz, 2022.

25 For an example of inner democracy, see Hermans, 2020.

26 Read Mezey and Lezra, 2013–14, and Ahlberg, Roman, and Duncan, 2008, for a deeper appreciation of this point.

27 Gray and Chanoff, 1986; Angwaomaodoko, 2023.

28 We put scare quotes here as this term is genuinely terrifying: to view the human as a resource is to maintain logics of totalitarian regimes such as Stalin's.

29 See Foley and Polanyi's 2006 study, which outlines most of the principles and justifications for making workplaces more democratic. For further reading, see Frega, Herzog, and Neuhäuser, 2019.

30 The Island Game comes from a tradition of game playing, even island thinking, that has been used in political theory and philosophy education. See, e.g., Worley, 2019; Laver, 1979, 1997.

31 Ali, 2022.

32 See, e.g., Cutrer, 1987, especially p. 186, as the author offers the claim that it may have been the democratic quality of a particular cavalry regiment involved in the American Civil War that made it as effective as it was in battles. This claim has also been made about Ukrainian resistance fighters embattled in the ongoing invasion by Putin's Russia (by personal correspondence, Czech Academy of Sciences, Prague, November 2022).

33 Fowkes, 2014.

34 We draw this point from Bibby, 1993, which offers one of the best arguments *against* conscription or compulsory military service in that it can, at the least, worsen outcomes for marginalized peoples *and* lead sometimes to little choice but to seek freedom from ghastly oppression through 'fragging' or murdering one's commanding officer.

35 The Hollywoodized story of Sargeant Alvin York, a pacificist conscripted to fight in the Great War/World War I (1914–18), carries within it the idea of the military acting as a permissive, and humane, school or training ground for self-directed civic and ethical development. York's story, true or not, is of a person who draws strength from his religious upbringing in a remote Tennessee Valley which, eventually, leads him to act alone in combat so as to spare the lives of his fellow soldiers. Applying his marksmanship, which he honed through extensive hunting, York discovered that he could bear the sin of violence if it would spare others *and* allow him to act in relation to the 'enemy' in a way that would not compromise his ethics. It is said that this development during the war is what enabled him to be a community leader after the war concluded. Sargeant York's tale is also a story of a commanding officer who treated York as an equal, even granting him leave to return home from basic training to decide if he would serve the war effort at a desk or on the front – or so the story goes. For more, see Lee, 1985.

36 Personal correspondence.

37 Notes from a Keynote Lecture presented at McMaster University, 2022.

38 Dorn and Vaz, 2022.

39 Guasti and Geissel, 2021.

40 See Saward's essay in response to this book (Chapter 9).

41 Davis and Gagnon, 2021.

6
Methodological complexities

> I do not wish to suggest that we must look after things, and words will look after themselves. It is not as simple as that. We must always be interested in words; we must always look for definitions as precise as the state of our knowledge will allow. But we must not insist upon a greater precision. What we are trying to do is to define the senses in which a word is used; and if these senses are vague, so too must be our definitions.[1]

The methodological question before us

Imagine an ethno-quantic domain of research that is producing artefactual knowledge on democracy balanced across all five sources of information about it – from individuals, groups of people, texts, non-texts, and non-humans – through a plethora of public-facing institutions and public education efforts. Each year there is a report on research done that clarifies, that can empirically demonstrate, where further research should be focused and has the evidence-based capacity to argue *why* those underrepresented pathways should be pursued. There are annual reports on the efforts of individual institutions and reports from public events as they happen. In all this work is the wish for a broad uptake of democratization policies and practices wherever humans are to be found. And there is good, long-standing reason for doing this. Although there are numerous earlier passages to this effect (e.g. Thelwall, 1795;[2] Ingersoll, 1875),[3] it is Charles Austin Beard's 1944 assertion that, we think, sums it up best, in writing that he 'regards the minute exploration of the meanings of the primary words we use in

discussing public affairs as an intellectual operation absolutely necessary to any fruitful and effective consideration of vital issues … If there is not exactness in our terms, we talk *past* one another and up in the air, not *on* our subject' (emphasis in the original).[4]

This can take place in one's own mind, at home or in the family, in school, at work, during our gatherings in civic associations, but also in how governments and governing institutions, both large and small, go about their ruling work, at whatever scale (local through to global). But how, beyond simple metrics such as counting visitors to a museum exhibit, mentions in government texts or the media, or visits to a webpage, is it possible to detect whether any of this work is making the impact we desire in the so-called real world? How are we, in other words, to know if our shamelessly large target audience – the Anthropos, people of Earth – are using the information we provide for their benefit? That is the methodological question put before us.

Three questions that need answering

In order to understand whether our efforts in these sciences of the democracies are successful, we need to know the answers to three distinct questions: the first is whether people's knowledge of democratic theory, democratization, or democracy studies is increasing; the second is whether the number of democracies (of one or more forms) is increasing in the world and where this is happening; and the third is whether the quality of such democratic practices is increasing. In other words, we need to answer the following questions:

1. Is knowledge of democracy increasing?
2. Are people using (practising) democracy more in their lives, and where?
3. What is the quality of the democracies in use there?

The answers to such questions would give us the capacity to reflect on our efforts and shift tactics or approaches, as may be required, to achieve better outcomes, and to make improvements on our scores or performances. This is simple in theory but difficult methodologically, as the 'core meanings' of any one kind, type, or form of democracy (e.g. family democracy, school democracy, workplace democracy, party democracy) are usually contested and therefore vary from context to context, time to time, and person to person or persons to persons. This means that

the further the observer gets from a particular object of analysis, such as moving from studying one family to studying ten thousand families, the less specific and contextual the picture becomes of, in particular, the form and quality of the democracy or democracies deployed in those families as we move away from the particular to the aggregate. And some conceptions of democracy may even be at odds with one another – consider the trade-off between direct and representative democracy. It seems to us that the only way around this problem is to establish consensus about the 'core' of the democracy or democracies being measured amongst participants and researchers measuring or exploring them. This would likely necessitate a collaborative exploration of which data vectors should be used, how data will be collected, which analyses will be conducted, and what an increase or decrease in quality means after analysis.

Democracy as a latent construct is by nature not directly observable.[5] Therefore, empiricists link democracy to indicators and aspects that we can try to observe. This approach is found in standard definitions of democracy and consequently in indices measuring the quality of democracy or in surveys supporting democracy, which is usually minimally taken to require the holding of free and fair elections.[6] From a conceptual perspective, it is of particular importance for us to recognize that our current understanding of democracy, as shaped by key theorists of democracy in our discipline, is a partial and fragmentary concept based on an understanding of what some of us mean by democracy.[7] It is also important to emphasize the foundational inequalities built into democracies: ones that have not disappeared with simple laws and amendments undertaken in an (unsuccessful) effort to extend belonging in the demos.[8] We have ruled, and continue to rule, such determinations over others who are not members of our fold – even though it seems most are entirely unaware of our pronouncements. Therefore, many challenges to democracy arise from the recognition that democracy as such is an essentially contested concept. Significantly, the prevailing understanding of democracy has not developed in a political vacuum. Power imbalances, for example, strongly affect what people see as relevant to our understanding of democracy. In this context, knowledge production follows a Eurocentric hegemony that feeds into the classical canon of democratic theory. Consequently, it also influences the conceptualization and operation-alization of democracy as a latent construct in empirical studies on the understanding of democracy, support for democracy, and the quality of democracy.[9]

As formulated above, the normative theories of democracy on which every empirical survey is based (in terms of operationalization, item generation, choice of method) are already highly selective and value-laden. In addition, these theory-guided steps of item generation do not include the (future) respondents of the surveys being planned for. As a result, there is a danger that crucial aspects of the perception of the object of measurement will be lost. Exclusively theoretical top-down approaches to the quantitative measurement of the understanding of democracy, for example, obviously lack conceptual depth in generalizing the transfer of Western concepts to other cultures – or vice versa – and are also unable to map fundamental deviations or changes in the understanding of democracy within the West itself.

The literature also discusses the effects of social desirability and lip service as a cause for the reduced validity of survey research in relation to 'essentially contested concepts',[10] such as democracy.[11] These phenomena also occur more frequently in autocratic and closed societies than in liberal societies. In addition, the problems of cultural and linguistic equivalence limit the comparability of results in cross-cultural and cross-national studies. One can neither assume a comparable understanding of the questions, nor of the terms and associations used by the respondents, nor an identical use of the rating scales. It is, therefore, unclear how abstract[12] or latent[13] concepts or constructs such as democracy are interpreted, especially in different countries and cultures. Current empirical research on the understanding of democracy can perhaps approximate the normative understanding of democracy (deductive/top-down) from a Western perspective, but not the heterogeneous meaning of democracy worldwide.

Answering the three questions we posed earlier at a world level poses an additional challenge that is already well known in relation to democracy measurement indices, such as International IDEA and V-Dem. It is not possible to run a mass survey of each country, each year, due to the high cost and feasibility issues of such endeavours. Therefore, country experts are asked to participate in large (thousands strong) collegial networks, and data on dozens, sometimes hundreds, of indicators provided by statistical reports – usually issued by national and supranational institutions – are relied on to generate insights on the detectability and welfare of but a handful of democracies. Both of the indices mentioned above are attuned to the challenge of measuring *more* types of democracy at the country level and also to the necessity of *extending* their measurements to both subnational and supranational levels. To gain these details will require a methodological sophistication hitherto

unseen in democracy research, as data would need to be generated from experts and public statistics institutions on the sorts and qualities of democracy used in households/families, businesses/workplaces, schools, civic associations like hospitals, militaries and prisons, apartment/condo buildings, and also in huge institutions such as the United Nations, World Bank, International Monetary Fund, and Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). But such data would also need to address the complex question of how one or more forms of democracy may be used within the inner or psychogenic lives of individuals. This is an unprecedented amount of information to capture and measure, presenting grave, and probably insurmountable, feasibility and resourcing challenges.

We bring, to this already enormous work, the added requirement of somehow surveying people of the world on what they know of things democratic. This could, to improve feasibility, perhaps be done on a geographically rolling basis whereby certain public relations efforts are, for example, concentrated in the Pacific Islands region, then the Oceanic region, eastern South American region, and so on, and are then, after some predetermined period has lapsed, followed by mixed-methods survey techniques to detect the effect, if any, our efforts have had. This could, conceivably, take the form of interviews and/or surveys with participants in our public relations events and also with members of their networks. However, we can benefit from the many efforts to develop alternative and innovative methods to capture the meaning of democracy.[14] There is, in this, the potential to learn from methodologies used by other existing projects such as the Electoral Integrity Project or International IDEA's Perceptions of Democracy (PODS) survey.[15]

Looking for the core of democracy

Methodological inquiries, such as these, are influential. They generate types of knowledge that translate well into reports to governments, public officials, and governing organizations. The reason for this is that normally complex information from philosophers and theorists must be rendered into simple indicators, so that data can be collected and modelled within arguably reasonable and formal parameters. Complexity is whittled down into simpler renditions of itself, and it is these renditions that make it easier to provide one-pagers, snapshots, and bullet-pointed briefs to elected and non-elected persons of power and influence.

Importantly, democracy measurement institutions like International IDEA and V-Dem are not closed against meeting the problems

that, for example, philosophers and data ethicists place in their hands and, in fact, they do try to meet them. We, therefore, have much to hope for as democracy measurement continues to improve in terms of what it detects, where it detects it, and the quality of its detection methods overall. Our endeavours in measurement will contribute to furthering existing efforts to build universal indicators by throwing light, for example, on the multiplicity of cut-off points used by various institutions to separate free from partly free democracies and by putting in the spotlight the red line that separates democracies from non-democracies.[16] They will also critically contextualize the relativity of raw data used as input to indices of democracy, which often relies on the perceptions of a handful of experts per country. We hope for more discussion about determining the weights attributed to various indicators in the measurement of democracy.

To build universal indicators, we could, for example, follow Stark, Osterberg-Kaufmann, and Mohamad-Klotzbach[17] and their suggestion of how to get to the core of democracy. Their approach is to step behind the institutional perspective on features of democracy, like elections, and ask what purpose they serve. What is, for example, the underlying core principle of all democracies, regardless of their type and form, which is attempted to be realized with the most diverse institutions? Which ideas of democracy and institutions ultimately best do justice to this basic principle depends on the fundamental perspective and view on the organization of societal interests. If we explain the world with a republican, communitarian, or liberal logic, it will be different processes or institutions that help to realize the basic principle of democracy in the best possible way, and this will result in different conceptions of democracy, such as 'representative democracy', 'direct democracy', 'deliberative democracy', and so on. The core of democracy, or the search for it, must be expanded and ultimately permanently verified through a variety of methodological approaches. This is best pursued *abductively*, through the interplay of inductive and deductive methods, including non-Western perspectives. The inductive approach, which is understood as an open approach because it starts from a certain set of observable facts or ideas to form a general principle, aims at the genesis of different meanings of democracy. To this end, it makes use of methodologically diverse approaches with a focus on qualitative methods. By means of the deductive approach, existing understandings of democracy can – according to Stark, Osterberg-Kaufmann, and Mohamad-Klotzbach – be measured which, together with the inductive meanings approach, can draw the most valid picture of a singular core principle of democracy at

the time of this data capture. Moving through approaches (abductively, inductively, deductively) allows us to continually refine and adjust our working set of universal indicators, mirroring the natural evolution of democratic practices.

The 'AutoDem Field Score'

There are two central challenges to obtaining data on the democracies in the world that require us to, for example, collaboratively and openly build consensus on the core of democracy for x persons in x places in the world at any given time.[18] Again, this is done to provide momentary clarity on what 'is' or 'counts' as democracy and what is not democratic or does not count as such among the people in any given place and time. The first challenge is a sufficiently detailed theoretical framework and the second is the resourcing required to use the framework.

We therefore introduce the 'AutoDem Field Score', which, we believe, offers a utilizable theoretical framework for this purpose. In terms of resourcing, our only recourse is to turn to the readers of this book to join us in the work we are doing, to invest in us so that we can train greater numbers of future scientists of the democracies, and to share this book as widely as they can to increase awareness of what we are trying to do.

To understand the AutoDem Field Score, we first need to divide that term into its constituent parts. 'AutoDem' refers to autocracy and democracy or the rule of one versus the rule of none (or all). 'Field' refers to space: this can be given in microns or as the globe itself. And 'Score' refers, of course, to a measure where 0 is perfect democracy and 1 is perfect autocracy. Scores closer to 0 are better. What we hope to measure is the quantity and quality of democracies versus the quantity and quality of autocracies in any given field. Imagine that we have been invited to visit by the council of a small rural village tucked away in a valley among imposing Kashmiri mountains. They have asked us to provide their AutoDem score so that they can see where to place their democratization efforts (where and how to invest in their democratization). Our first task is to determine the field, or space, that we will be surveying. To keep it simple, the village defines itself as a 3-km square of territory. Our next step is to determine the number of people who live in that square, how they group socially, the types of institutions they have created, what their economy is, what bureaucracy serves them, how they are governed and by which government. This act fills the

square with possible collaborators, and, in reductionist or scientific and rather uncharitable terms, it also fills it with objects of analysis. From this point, our task is to meet with the people identified in the square who are interested in collaborating with us to determine which methods will be used to establish the democracies and autocracies that exist in their village. Crucially, the meanings of democracy and autocracy are cocreated, as are the rules and procedures for how the data generated by mixed-methods analyses should be analysed. Once more, this is to be done collaboratively with participants, and power disclosures need to be made regularly, even as reminders, to participants so that they can carry that awareness with them throughout the process.[19]

Let us say that our collaborative planning sessions with the participating villagers led to a method based on epistemic multiplicity. Some villagers wanted interviews to be conducted; others wanted researchers to follow them through their day; others favoured surveys and focus groups; and so forth. Let us say that we managed to organize these mixed methods into a staged approach in a logical format that everyone (meaning those villagers who wanted to work with us) understood and endorsed. We then set out to do the work over the course of several months and met again with our collaborators in the village to work through the data and figure out how it should be presented back to the village.

It turns out that the AutoDem Field Score for village x bodes well for their government, as it is participatory and highly responsive, but it falls short in terms of how the villagers live in families, schools, and workplaces, and also in their interactions with non-human others in their economy and private lives. Evidence also suggests that the villagers are not psychogenically democratic, and, because our collaborators were interested in this psychotherapeutic service, we have been invited back to collaboratively formulate practices for internal well-being with them at a later date. We also provided our colleagues in the village with information related to their democratization interests. What the score provides to fictional village x is an assurance that they are doing well democratically, that they have a strong democraticity in their government, but that they can direct their resources to the practice of family democracy, school democracy, workplace democracy, and interspecies democracy in particular. As we have developed a working relationship with the village, we can assist in providing advice on how democratization in these spaces could be conducted and to what ends, and in ascertaining how far the villagers wish to pursue such matters. Perhaps we, or a different group of scholars who know the AutoDem

Field Score method, will be back in 20 or 30 years' time, as per the village's invitation, for another round of collaborative measurement and the provision of an updated score.

Measuring implementation

Seema Shah, head of International IDEA's democracy assessment unit, raises a fundamental problem for all national and global democracy measurement indices. It is that any measurement of democracy based on the impression of experts does not suffice, as it risks attending only to what experts in a country consider to be the activities of democracy in their region. Understanding democracy to mean emancipation, or that it needs to be in the service of empowering marginalized communities to be said to exist, Shah argues that indices should add to their measures how well governments enforce or implement human, civic, political, religious, and other rights in their regulatory zones or territories. It does not suffice for experts to say that such laws exist or have been ratified by the governments concerned; evidence of the *enforcement* of those laws is required. The International Labour Organization (ILO) may offer insight into how such data can be collected. The ILO requires signatories to, for example, labour conventions to submit periodical reports, which they do through lawyers, on what efforts have been made by the signatories – member states – on the articles in this or that convention or ratification they have agreed to. Was, for instance, legislation, regulation, or advice issued by the government, about what, and to what effect? This information is then responded to, critically, by lawyers representing the ILO or, more specifically, its tripartite General Assembly, and advice is thereafter provided to the signatory in question. If it is seen to not be doing well against certain indicators, then remonstrations are, typically, publicly made with encouragement to do better, and advice is given on how this could be accomplished. But these are, in the end, still the tactics of a paper tiger, which, as the critics validly argue, tend towards the performance of symbolic behaviours to enforce, or reaffirm, the stability of the existing (and still progressive) world order. For the measurement of democracy in the world to improve, it must at least also capture the lived experiences of marginalized communities.

The marginalized communities approach presents a number of difficulties for democracy measurement researchers. Typically, surveys are done over the phone, by mail, or through the internet or, more recently, mobile phone applications. Many marginalized persons do not,

however, have one or more of the relevant devices or regular access to them. Furthermore, given their marginalized position in their society, there is often a greater degree of distrust when, for instance, a stranger with a survey request comes into contact with them. 'Could they make trouble for me or my concerns?' and 'Do I have time for this when both it, and money, are scarce?' are questions that the marginalized might ask. There is, as well, the language issue, as surveyors typically invite bids, through tender, for private companies to fulfil the survey work that needs to be done. These private companies habitually run surveys in the dominant language of a country, which would miss many marginalized persons who do not speak the dominant language of the country being surveyed. At every turn there are difficulties for the standard survey mechanism in quantitative democracy research, and this is exactly where the power of Shah's intervention rests: the issue is not with marginalized persons being difficult to reach. The issue is with the tool(s), and the approach(es), conventionally used by surveyors as they gather information from typically non-marginalized peoples. They gather a sample of opinion from people who are generally, and certainly when compared to marginalized communities, already having their concerns addressed by the state(s), institution(s), and process(es) they are being surveyed about. What we conventionally read from or hear about in democracy indices is, therefore, problematically biased, for they do not include the voices of the dispossessed, of those at the margins of any given society.

The tasks of establishing a core of democracy, or an AutoDem Field Score, or capturing data on the lived experiences of marginalized peoples to answer three simple questions – (1) what do people know of democracy?, (2) which types of democracy are being used and where?, and (3) how well are these democracies being used? – are exceedingly difficult ones. This is perhaps due to the novelty of what is being called for. We are not accustomed to doing this work, nor are we trained or otherwise prepared for it. It is inherently social, it is open in relation to the meaning of democracy, and it deals, by necessity, with much smaller geographical spaces – it would be challenging in the extreme for even a large research team to obtain the data required at the country level. Perhaps these challenges can be better understood through trial and error with, for example, villagers as partners at the local level, and perhaps they can even be overcome by a great deal more resourcing and investment into these methodological assays. But we will not know until we try and are given opportunities to do so by funders and collaborators (i.e., said villagers).

Critical questions for the sciences of the democracies today remain in the lack of scientific capacity to achieve broad participation in the production of knowledge. Essential to this is the limitation that nation-states place on the ability of vast numbers of people on the move, including people who are displaced, stateless, undocumented, asylees, and refugees. These are peoples without formal status in nation-states and, as such, the democratic experiment continues to erode for them. As Harsha Walia asserts in her book *Undoing Border Imperialism*, 'borders are the nexus of most systems of oppression'.[20] In their article 'Democracy: by design and on the move',[21] Dorn and Vaz highlight several movements that exemplify the ways in which the study and understanding of democracy must be broadened to invite much more radical participation. A key example is an organization called Statefree, founded by Christiana Bukalo, who identifies as and lives stateless in Germany, where she was born. Statefree reframes the notion that democratic participation should be bestowed by a carceral nation-state system. It should, rather, happen through an open-bordered transnational system that allows for the free movement of people. It is important to note that before Christiana founded Statefree and began to participate and advocate in critical academic and institutional conversations about her status, most of these formal stewards of democracy had never had a stateless person involved in creating policy that impacted their lived reality. Thanks to funders like the Alfred Landecker Foundation and Echoing Green, the Statefree movement has been able to gain power to advocate on behalf of people left out of formal democratic processes. This goes to show that funding activists and researchers can make a real difference.

Notes

1   McKeon and Rokkan, 1951, p. 302
2   Thelwall, 1795. e.g. 'And before you boast again of the mingled advantages of monarchy, aristocracy and democracy, redeem the democratic branch, the most valuable of the three, from the hands of the venal oligarchy, who have usurped it' (p. 44).
3   Ingersoll, 1875. e.g. 'Democracy has been sneeringly called zero; and it may, without a sneer, be called tabula rasa, for it is only what the people are pleased to write; and they write, it must be admitted, in very dissimilar ways. In France it is equality. In England it is wages. In Italy and Spain, where scepticism and democracy abound, it is priests and soldiers. In Germany it is lectures' (p. 18).
4   Beard, 1944, p. 28.
5   e.g. Morlino, 2021.
6   Hudson, 2021.
7   Gagnon, 2021c.
8   Mills, 1997; Pateman, 1988.
9   e.g. Osterberg-Kaufmann, Stark, and Mohamad-Klotzbach, 2021.
10 Gallie, 1956.

11   e.g. Braizat, 2010; Chu and Huang, 2010, p. 115.
12   Whitehead, 2021.
13   Van Deth, 2013.
14   Osterberg-Kaufmann, Stark, and Mohamad-Klotzbach, 2020.
15   Available online: see https://www.idea.int/data-tools/data/pods-v1.
16   See Fiorespino, 2025, for a discussion on the challenge of demarcating democracies and
     non-democracies.
17   Stark, Osterberg-Kaufmann, and Mohamad-Klotzbach, 2022.
18   Pausch, 2025, offers a Lasswellian (a more public policy) approach to how one might go about
     theorizing democracy with others – namely, persons who are not professional theorists.
19   Pausch, 2025.
20   Walia, 2013.
21   Dorn and Vaz, 2022.

7
Enter the dynamo

Democracy at once swirls in the stars above, rings in our chests and sits in our guts. It is a form of sustenance, a yearning to govern our own affairs and interact with others, an everyday need to shape tomorrow. When it is absent, we hunger for it. When it is rotten, it does not sit well with us.[1]

The sciences of the democracies are acts of discovery, renewal, and hope

The work of recording, describing, and organizing information – truly big artefactual data – on the democracies from five immense and inexhaustible informational sources is, in its barest character, an action of discovery and creation, of revealing/making information that has for too long been out of our gaze. But it is also an act that raises the uncomfortable question to privileged scholars (broadly conceived) of democracy about the cost of our inattention to the many thousands of ideas and practices of the democracies that we have neither studied nor, as far as we can tell, expressed the wish to engage with in any meaningful or actual sense. Some of us have been wed to an 'ignorance of the familiar' and a system of *erasure*,[2] as our unwilling-ness to look beyond what is conventional, prestigious, moneyed, or simply oft-repeated (that is to say popular) erases the majority of democratic experiences from the academic and thereby authoritative public record or, at least, closes that record to them. In the case of ethnicities and languages at risk, the stakes are particularly high: the longer we do nothing, the greater the chance we lose knowledge of democracy from them to the unrecoverable and total oblivion of extinction.

As expressed throughout this book on these sciences of the democracies, one of the hopes underscoring this work of discovery and creation is that it will yield better, less arbitrary theories of or for democracy that are based on the finest fundaments of descriptive, empirical knowledge that we can generate – knowledge of cultural artefacts that are, at first, treated equally lest we perpetuate the problem of advancing special interests in the scholarship of democracy.[3] Such next-generation theories can provide – to citizens/residents/visitors, governments and public officials, researchers and practitioners, philanthropists (big and small), and all sorts of non- or quasi-governmental associations – advice and guidance on how to democratize, where to democratize, what to democratize, and why democratization should be pursued beyond the usual limited notions of voting, consultation, participatory and deliberative innovations, or other path-dependent liberal democratic exercises that authoritarians and autocrats are cottoning onto and therefore coopting. But this also carries the imperative of sharing what makes these theories *interesting*, if not positively *enchanting* to the whole of our bodies,[4] to people-writ-large so that they do not feel excluded or *dis*enchanted[5] from the thoughts and processes that emanate from such next-generation theories of democracy.

We believe that one of the richest outcomes from these scientific undertakings is a seemingly never-ending source of inspirations and lessons for doing democracy or being democratic. From the careful study of *democracia* through the eyes and experience of a young woman in Montevideo by a Japanese researcher from Kyoto may come a story that will resonate with the hearts of *minshushugi* advocates or vice versa. A robust survey of what Torontonians want democracy to be may lead to much-needed democratic reforms for a city whose urban soul appears contorted by the bitter resignations of apathy and inaction or the effects of neoliberalism in eviscerating its public sphere. The analysis of ancient Roman public baths – such as those of Caracalla (vainly named by a vain emperor) – may reveal the necessity for the creation of public things/goods,[6] infrastructures, or experiences that no cabal of venal oligarchs or plutocrats could ever privatize, meaning, in situations such as these, that all are *truly* equal, and equally humbled, in the moment of their enjoyment. Tracking down the meaning of an unusual term, such as 'Waldorf democracy' (a term applied only a handful of times in the twentieth century), through a well-stocked national archive can lead to uncovering a forgotten instance of workplace democracy whose practices can be resumed by businesses and workers today. Lastly, the in-depth observation of

a non-human form of life, such as the western honeybee, can, when compared to the group decision-making habits of the very humans observing them, lead to the realization that bees are *better* than we are in independently verifying information espoused by their fellow citizens of the hive.[7] Unverified trust can be dangerous, disastrous even. *Scepticismus super omnia* ('scepticism above all else'), as the bees of ancient Rome might have said. Examples of artefacts such as these are legion in each of democracy's five informational sources.

But it is clear that this information, and the efforts given to gathering it and generating theory from it, will not live up to its promise without (a) the help of institutions that are designed to organize and present it and (b) the methodological capacity to measure what impact these efforts may be having in the world (through, say, detecting the growth, if any, of different sorts of democracies and the quality of their application in settings as diverse as families, civic associations, individual persons, and nation-states). The organization (e.g. keeping track of democracy research, digitally organizing its data in structured data sets) and presentation (e.g. accessibility and education) of knowledge on democracy is, therefore, of equal importance to generating that knowledge. A dedicated, and securely funded, global team of researchers is the only means to keep track of research outcomes on democracy, to organize that information (build mountains or other such metaphors of data), and to present that information back to our fellow members of the Anthropos through a variety of collaborative public education/relations institutions given in as many languages and communicative formats as possible.

This team can generate a yearly report on the nature of the democracy research conducted in the previous calendar year and offer recommendations on where focus could be directed to ensure a balance between the sources and why that should be done. The team's day-to-day work would be entering data generated by democracy researchers into accessible, structured digital databases. Their periodical work (quarterly, weekly, monthly, etc.) would be defined by presenting the information they are collecting through reference works, digital or physical art installations, museum exhibits, patching into existing services such as Wikipedia, presenting at schools or aged-care facilities or prisons, and so forth: whatever may be most relevant to the sort of knowledge on hand. Critical to the success of this team's efforts will be collaborations and partnerships with as broad, as diverse, a set of people and *other* institutions as possible, if only because this helps to expand the reach of the intellectual products of democracy that researchers/practitioners

produce and because this can expose such researchers/practitioners to new dynamics, perspectives, and imperatives.

Taken together, conducting research into the democracies across five inexhaustible sources of artefactual knowledge on them *and* keeping track of this research so that it can become more balanced and presented to publics through various institutions establishes a dynamo for democratic futures. The word 'dynamo' finds its root in the ancient Greek concept of δύναμις (*dunamis*; a word with many meanings itself), which some maintain means potentiality and others the capacity for conceptual change and then, later, for actual change through the material substantiation of conceptual or cognitive shifts. We see these sciences of the democracies as a *generator of ethical possibilities*, of morally justified changes in cognition, and, in the end, of modified human behaviour toward always more and always different invocations of democracy, however that may benefit the human, or humans, in question and the ecologies they live in. Note that we are not here advocating any one strong theory of democracy – rather, we are arguing for the performance of hitherto ignored but crucially important descriptive sciences of the democracies that exist in the world. And we propose to do this to provide a fairer, more balanced, more objective informational and advisory *service* to people, whoever they are. As Samuel Moyn[8] once wrote, 'the indeterminacy of "democracy" is not the indeterminacy of all concepts or it alone; instead, it flows from the determinable fact that it promises emancipatory self-rule, in a contestatory and unending process'. However, this generator does not yet exist; it has merely the theoretical capacity to fulfil its promise. We are conceptually, then, at a crossroads in the study of democracy and have, together, a decision to take: are we to continue with the status quo – of studying democracy in imbalanced, isolated, piecemeal ways to the great exclusion of most knowledge – or are we to enrich these efforts by seeing them as partly lit aspects of a mostly dark map, of a diverse terrain of democracy knowledge awaiting our delicate operations of illumination?

Perhaps the fairer question to ask at this juncture is: *can* we do this work? Ramon van der Does has,[9] for example, raised the issue of resourcing: there are presently too few democracy scholars – each with insufficient funds, time, and capacity – to pursue these sciences of the democracies. The pursuit of research into democracy that we propose in this book requires unprecedented organization between democracy researchers to organize data, track research currently being undertaken, and advise the field in annual reports; researchers are asked to form transdisciplinary networks, to work across languages, to draw

information on democracy out from five informational sources, and to create and support various institutions for researchers and strategies for public education/relations out of this work. This does not include the *volume* of researchers needed to undertake this work, the *cost* of doing so, nor the *time* this work will require away from, say, a professor's other duties to their students, universities, and other research networks. The only answer we have to this quandary is to urge governments and philanthropists in particular to invest in the people, the scholars (broadly conceived), who are needed to undertake this work, who are needed to fulfil the creation of a *terminus technicus* that Arne Næss and UNESCO once pleaded for shortly after the close of one of humanity's most violent calamities and, unbeknownst to Næss and UNESCO, during the acceleration of the Anthropocene.

What this support looks like for governments (local, state, and federal/national) is increasing the percentage in their budgets for base funding for their universities, but with strings attached: these added moneys can only be used to invest in researchers/practitioners and their capacity to do research. Philanthropists big and small[10] should approach individual researchers/practitioners to invest directly in their work through donations and, if they like, collaboration. Such support would enable us to increase the number of researchers/practitioners available to pursue these sciences of the democracies and enhance their capacities for doing so.

To borrow the words of the early twentieth-century journalist Lincoln Steffens: '[We] have seen the future, and it works.' All that remains is to build it.

Notes

1 Huynh, 2015, p. 72.
2 e.g. Joseph, 2022.
3 Marta Wojciechowska, 2022, for example, urges democratic theorists to be more self-reflective and critical of their work and their biases. And here, drawing inspiration from Leif Lewin, 2017, p. 62, we say that 'democracy within a new world order cannot be built on special interests' such as those espoused by scholars of democracy through their preferential treatment of certain conceptions to the ignorant exclusion of most others. This also brings attention to a point made by Benjamin Abrams, 2022b: that the defence of democracy is predicated on a person's ability to understand it. That work of understanding needs to be self-reflective, as experts do, for example, tend to espouse *their* preferred type of democracy over the type preferred by non-experts.
4 Ryan and Flinders, 2017, have recently advocated for sensory democracy: people (researchers especially) are encouraged to use their senses, beyond listening or reasoning, to engage with the meanings and practices of democracy. Achieving this will require an interdisciplinarity, once in vogue in the nineteenth century, that has since been lost to the hyper-specializations of the academy. Flinders follows this work in his 2020 study of the impact, or power, of feelings

in politics and decision-making. Relying on reason alone, or being a Vulcan as Jason Brennan might put it, is dangerous, as 'feelings [often] trump facts'.

5 e.g. Lacelle-Webster, 2019, or Anciano and Piper, 2019, for the importance of devolution and empowerment.
6 e.g. Honig, 2017.
7 Seeley and Gagnon, 2014.
8 Moyn and Gagnon, 2020, p. 99.
9 van der Does, 2022.
10 Murchie and Gagnon, 2019.

Essays in response

8

Democracy and the dangers of self-evident truths

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> The vast majority of the types of reasoning on which our beliefs rest, or by which we should seek to justify them …, are not reducible to formal deductive or inductive schemata, or combinations of them. … The web is too complex, the elements too many and not, to say the least, easily isolated and tested one by one; … we accept the total texture, compounded as it is out of literally countless strands … without the possibility, even in principle, of any test for it in its totality. For the total texture is what we begin and end with. There is no Archimedean point outside it whence we can survey the whole and pronounce upon it. … It is the sense of the general texture of experience … that constitutes the foundation of knowledge, that is itself not open to inductive or deductive reasoning: for both these methods rest upon it.[1]

In 1949 the American philosopher Sidney Hook remarked that 'one of the most curious phenomena of our time' was the manner in which totalitarian regimes sought to wrap themselves in the language of democracy.[2] Hook's focus on the democratically dubious 'holiday rhetoric' of certain countries was later developed at more length by Bernard Crick when he noted:

> Democracy is perhaps the most promiscuous word in the world of public affairs … She is everybody's mistress and yet somehow retains her magic even when a lover sees that her favours are being, in his light, illicitly shared by many others.[3]

'Indeed,' Crick went on to say, 'even amid our pain at being denied her exclusive fidelity, we are proud of her adaptability to all sorts of circumstances, to all sorts of company'.[4] Seventy-five years later and the mood music surrounding the nature and achievements of democracy (i.e. democracy 'as theory' and democracy 'as practice') seems to have changed; whether democracy 'retains her magic' and the concept's innate malleability – its 'adaptability to all sorts of circumstances' – are now questioned by a vast seam of scholarship which is united by a focus on democratic crisis.

If the twentieth century was 'the democratic century', then the twenty-first century appears one in which diagnoses of 'democratic backsliding' and prescriptions for 'mending democracy' appear ubiquitous.[5] For example, Ivan Krastev and Stephen Holmes's book *The Light that Failed* captures a worrying sense of foreboding and gloom.[6] That *something must be done* appears a self-evident truth within and beyond the social and political sciences; but *what should be done* remains non-evident. Robert Putnam's magisterial analysis of social and political change in the USA during the twentieth century, *The Upswing*, with its arc of positive human progress peaking in the 1960s only to fall back from a 'we' society to a highly individualized 'me' society at the Millennium, is indicative of the 'problem-rich, solution-poor' nature of modern scholarship.[7] Putnam's book is subtitled 'How America came together a century ago and how *we* can do it again' (emphasis in the original), but whereas historical insight provides the bulk of the book, the 'how *we* can do it again' element leaves the reader arguably *more* concerned about the future of democracy than contented.[8]

Put simply, everyone seems to know there is a problem but very few know exactly what the root problem is, or how to address it.

The problem is that there is not a problem.

This apparently tautological statement can be interpreted in at least two ways.

First, the problem is that there is not *a* problem. There are *multiple problems of democracy*, overlayed and overlapping, clashing and competing. This diagnosis tends to produce an almost endless list of explanatory variables (globalization, capitalism, technology, polarization, inequality, social media, surveillance, liquidity, etc.) and an emphasis on complexity and change[9] – complexity in relation to the dialectical and fluid nature of rapid social transformation, change in relation to the need to somehow close the gap that appears to have grown between the governors and the governed in many parts of the world.

Secondly, a more fundamental and far less conventional approach to 'the problem with democracy' might, however, attempt to challenge the basic premise (i.e. that a problem exists, that democracy is in crisis, etc.).

The 'danger of self-evident truths', as Elinor Ostrom once persuasively argued, is '[t]he fact that something is widely believed does not make it correct'.[10] The defining feature of a healthy and flourishing intellectual space is, from this perspective, tied to a willingness to challenge foundational assumptions, disciplinary mores, 'common-sense' beliefs, and accepted axioms.

In terms of contextualizing *the sciences of the democracies*, as this essay attempts to do, acknowledging 'the danger(s) of self-evident truths' is useful for at least three reasons. First and foremost, if democracy is in crisis, then it is possible to argue that the history of democracy is to some extent the history of perpetual crisis and challenge. Secondly, and very much in line with the subtlety of a 'total-texture' approach as advocated in this book, perception is not the same as reality. Different people hold very different perceptions as to whether there is a problem with democracy that needs to be or even can be solved. Thirdly, implicit within the project that is the sciences of the democracies is a 'self-evident truth' that needs to be exposed, challenged, possibly even viewed as in some ways dangerous.

These three themes – phrased in terms of (1) democracy constantly defined by crisis, (2) perception versus reali*ties*, and (3) the danger(s) of climbing mountains – provide a framework through which to introduce and explore the sciences of the democracies.

Constant crisis

Democratic politics exists in tension with a wide and arguably inevitable gap between its lofty ideals and the Procrustean reality of making such ideals work in practice. It is the management of this gap – or, more specifically, the gaps between political promises, governing capacity, and public expectations – that tends to create a perception of almost perpetual crisis. Looking at the doom-laden titles of recent books with their framing around the 'crisis', 'death', 'end', 'suicide', 'twilight', and so on of democracy, the storm that seems to be engulfing democratic politics shows little sign of abating. Or, to put the same point slightly differently, democracy in crisis appears to be a 'self-evident truth' within and beyond political science. Three sets of questions emerge from this observation.

The first are conceptual questions: What is meant by the term 'crisis'? Which 'democracy' is in crisis? How might such 'crises' be measured? 'Creeping' crisis or 'chronic' crisis? 'Systemic' or 'particularistic'? What role do contextual dimensions play in these interpretations? That these questions are very rarely asked highlights a weakness in the existing research base: the existence of a ubiquitous 'democratic crisis' taken as both an analytically foundational and 'common-sense' assumption that warrants no reflection and even less challenge.[11]

The second set of questions are more temporal in nature: What, if anything, is 'new' about the current crisis of democracy? How have the roots of democratic crises altered over time in different parts of the world or in relation to different levels of government and governance?

The third and final set of questions are more normative in the sense that they challenge the implicit value-inflection that crises are 'a bad thing' or 'a problem' or 'a threat'. What are the normative benchmarks against which crises constructions are made? Could there be a good 'democratic' crisis or legitimate act of democratic disruption? 'Simply put,' Selen Ercan and Jean-Paul Gagnon note, 'one person's idea of a democratic act might be viewed by another as counter-democratic or as a contributing factor to the crisis.'[12]

The reason for seeking to dissect interpretations of democratic crisis has nothing to do with seeking to falsify or verify existing crisis-claims but is simply to underline what might be termed the total texture of the *complexity surrounding interpretations* of crisis.

This matters because in accepting narratives of failure, crisis, and disaffection, there emerges a risk that the achievements of democratic politics are themselves denied and dismissed in ways that may create a vicious spiral of democratic decline. With this in mind, an interesting and highly relevant parallel seam of scholarship has emerged within the fields of governance, public policy, and public administration. Put very simply, a subfield of 'positive public administration' has developed which seeks to counter the historical emphasis of these disciplines on state failure by providing an explicit analysis of examples of success and high performance in public policy.[13]

The aim of studying success is not to deny the existence of problems and challenges but simply to provide a more rounded and balanced intellectual account of the art of government in ways that might allow examples of successful policy or innovations in administration to be extended in scope for the wider public benefit. 'Walking on the bright side', as attempts to analyse examples of successful policy have become known, tries to recognize and challenge crisis-laden assumptions about

contemporary public governance, or at the very least to offer a more balanced and evidence-based account of systemic challenges and opportunities.[14]

Where are the scholars walking on the bright side of democratic theory and practice? There are, of course, those students of deliberative democracy and related institutional innovations, but even their contributions seem very often framed within a crisis-laden 'through-a-glass-darkly' deficit model. More broadly, the rational-choice self-interested foundational assumptions of a great deal of political science may well have played some role in forging disaffected democrats instead of more engaged and enlightened critical citizens. This suggestion may well risk overstating the relevance and reach of political science, but, taking a more positive view, the great value of a more subtle, sophisticated, and self-reflective approach to the sciences of the democracies is that it might nurture an awareness of the need to question and tease apart oversimplistic narratives that tend to create far more heat than light. This is a point that takes the conversation from a focus on constant crises to a discussion on the politics of perception.

Perception politics

Democracy is in crisis. This is a 'self-evident truth'. From the elections of Donald Trump to the way in which the global Covid-19 pandemic was (mis)managed by a variety of governments, the crisis of democracy is reflected in both the 'populist signal' and the emergence of open debate and discussion about the benefits of authoritarian rule over democratic governance. The excessive use of emergency powers and the temporary de-parliamentarization of decision-making[15] during the Covid-19 pandemic has even led to the suggestion that the virus may have infected democracy itself.[16]

The aim of this commentary is simply to question the assumption that democracy is in crisis and that politics is necessarily failing, in order to contextualize the value of a renewed effort to map out the sciences of the democracies. This is not to suggest that specific problems do not exist or that democracy is not under threat in certain parts of the world, but it is to seek to tame universal narratives that seem to attach the word 'crisis' to 'democracy' as if an inevitable and automatic relationship exists. With this in mind, it is interesting that the great flurry of interest in 'democratic deconsolidation' which emerged in 2016 and 2017 has not only been rejected in numerous subsequent analyses but

has also not been supported within more recent analyses of 'democratic backsliding'.[17] 'In short, the phenomenon of backsliding is much more about a failure of new or emerging democracies to consolidate', as Thomas Carothers and Benjamin Press suggest, 'than it is about deconsolidation in long-standing democracies.'[18]

Possibly the most appropriate reference point to bridge this section's focus on the politics of perception with the previous section's emphasis on constant crisis is the Trilateral Commission's (in)famous book of 1975, *The Crisis of Democracy*.[19] With its emphasis on the existence of too much democracy rather than too little, this remains a highly contested and controversial book. It serves, however, as a useful reference point for this commentary for three reasons. First and foremost, it underlines the simple point about the link between democratic politics and the perception of constant crisis. In his afterword to Susan Pharr and Robert Putnam's 25-year anniversary analysis, Ralf Dahrendorf – who wrote an afterword for the original book – rather laconically notes, '[i]t appears that democracy is always in crisis'.[20] Secondly, democracy itself was not in crisis at the time the book was published. It is more accurate to suggest that a *specific model* of relatively 'thin' representative democracy was experiencing the pressures of consolidation as increasingly educated and active citizens demanded greater control over the decisions that would shape their lives. Thirdly and finally, and continuing the theme of 'what democracy? what crisis?' outlined earlier, what has arguably changed in recent years is *the politics of perception*.

The politics of perception is the sense that (1) media coverage of politics has been growing increasingly sensationalist, doom-laden, and aggressive;[21] (2) the emergence of increasing levels of affective polarization have contributed to a general state of 'fear and loathing' that risks locking in and amplifying negativity;[22] and (3) even those scholars who seek to identify positive elements of social progress, such as Steven Pinker and Hans Rosling, have been decried and denounced as little more than instrumental defenders of the status quo who serve the system by promoting liberal triumphalism.[23] The academic and/or intellectual debate has therefore become polarized in a way that very rarely acknowledges anything like the total texture of democratic life beyond a narrow (and Western) world view.

But there exists a deeper politics of perception that introduces the spectre of populism. To any question, populism provides a simple three-part solution: (1) believe in 'us', (2) get rid of those meddling politicians, and (3) put your trust in a strong leader. Populists have

an incentive to promote crisis narratives.[24] It is an explicitly divisive political strategy forged upon inflaming and then funnelling democratic disaffection. If there is a crisis of democracy, then what separates this crisis from those in the past is the existence of an almost post-political, post-democratic mode of populism that preys upon those who feel 'left behind', peripheral, or forgotten.

Criticizing and condemning democratic politics is, it is important to remember, inevitably easy. Democratic governance revolves around squeezing collective decisions, as Gerry Stoker has explained, out of multiple and competing interests and demands.[25] It is therefore forged upon the principle of constant compromise and self-correction. It cannot please everybody all of the time; it cannot make 'all sad hearts glad', as Crick wrote in his *Defence*.[26] Moreover, as society becomes increasingly fluid and diverse, so too does the policy 'bandwidth' that democratic politics must somehow mediate across become increasingly wide, often taut, and susceptible to serious fraying, if not ripping apart. But the politics of perception matters because there are now far more populist parties and politicians who have something to gain from promoting the view that democracy is in crisis. It could be argued that populism is simply part of the ongoing and organic process of self-correction; it might also be suggested that allowing levels of inequality and precarity to grow to such an extent that large sections of society feel they have nothing to lose from following populist promises is itself a self-inflicted crisis of a specific model of *liberal* democracy. This 'self-inflicted crisis' makes it easy for populists of all kinds to capitalize on citizens' disenchantment, disappointment, and sense of being disempowered.[27]

But the point being made here is that (1) interpretations of crisis are contestable; (2) crisis-inflation is a rational strategy for insurgent, outsider, or simply desperate political actors; and (3) an emphasis on the sciences of the democracies resonates with this section's emphasis on the need to adopt a more nuanced and multidimensional approach to crisis-claims and controversies. And yet, despite its huge potential for exposing, analysing, and possibly even resolving certain claims and controversies as to the 'what?', 'why?', 'when?', 'where?', 'so what?', and so on, the sciences of the democracies is itself built on an implicit 'self-evident truth' that demands exposure and discussion. This forms the focus of the next section.

Scaling summits, or, the danger(s) of climbing mountains

There is a very strange but relatively well-known malady within the mountaineering community that is known as climbers' depression. Years of striving to achieve a specific and particularly strenuous ascent are to some extent tarnished by the realization, once the peak has been crested, that either the promised views are shrouded in mist, or that other even higher peaks exist in the distance. Even when the view is good and no higher points can be seen, there is still an often deflating feeling of 'What next? Where next?' that seems strangely connected to this chapter's focus on 'What crisis? Which democracy?' This point of connection reflects the manner in which this book's focus on the sciences of the democracies is framed in a mountain-based metaphor. 'The analysis of each mountain, or of all mountains (the epistemic mountain range), such being the work of the still non-existent Fourth Theorists, may reduce or increase the complexity in the data that will hopefully one day lie before us' (p. 37), the authors note. But scaling summits can be a laborious, dangerous, and ultimately unrewarding endeavour, especially if the underlying logic or unspoken assumptions underlying such a venture remain hidden. The aim of this section is to expose the 'self-evident truth' – the core implicit assumption – that appears to inspire this expedition, so that any dangers, risks, and disappointments can be factored in from the outset.

Democracy is multifaceted. It is messy.[28] It is also, if the dominant line of argumentation in the current literature is to be believed, under threat and experiencing some form of crisis. It is in this context that the sciences of the democracies project attempts to capture the 'total texture' of democracy through an ambitious and interdisciplinary methodology that seeks to move well beyond the crude binary conceptualizations (democracy *or* authoritarianism, politicized *or* depoliticized, formal *or* informal, top-down *or* bottom-up, pro-democracy *or* anti-democracy, friend *or* enemy, public *or* private, people *or* elites, etc.) that too often form the focus of debates. '[O]ur aim is to first describe an ever-changing total texture of democracy with the aim of thereafter generating democratic theory from a hitherto unproduced, and therefore untapped, body of basic descriptive research' (p. 23). The intellectual terra incognita which the sciences of the democracies project seeks to map is concerned both with expanding the range of texts that are studied to harvest and understand the various meanings of democrac*ies* and with 'disciplining the discipline'[29] to forge connections and integrate the currently fragmented landscape of democratic knowledge that has been

developed over the centuries, if not millennia. The project therefore has both vertical and horizontal dimensions and seeks to nurture connective and catalysing capacities; hence its emphasis on revealing, or at the very least, better understanding the 'total texture' of democracy in multiple contexts and from a variety of perspectives.

The hypothesis held is that exposing the existence and achievements of democratic engagement in all its protean forms will in itself result 'in the growth of democracy and the contraction of non-democracy in the world, in, for example, families and local governments through to nation-states and multinational organizations whose aim it is to influence global order' (p. 27). This is a bold assumption that is itself reflected in the ambition of an almost boundless agenda for research based around a 'necessarily interwoven' programme of philosophical, institutional, educational, and methodological studies. The breadth of approaches and range of democratic interpretations (indicated by the plural forms in 'sciences of the democracies') are reflected in the acknowledgement (1) that knowledge on 'democracy' is to be found beyond established canons and even beyond written texts, and (2) that it is possible to 'know', 'do', or even study 'democracy' without even using the word, or connected symbols and signs. The authors write that 'knowledge on democracy can be coaxed from our selves through reflection or from others through interviews or different interventions; from groups of persons through surveys and interviews or interpretive observation; from art, architecture, semiotics, film, and sound (i.e. non-textual media); and from observing the behaviour of non-humans' (p. 28). The march of the mountaineers reaches an almost heroic peak when they announce:

> Thus, if the gathering of texts about/on/of/for democracy constitutes building a data mountain, then re-searching the knowledge about/on/of/for democracy from these other sources will constitute building yet more data mountains. Together they would form an 'epistemic mountain range' or an interwoven system, a fabric, of knowledge sources on democracy. (p. 29)

These scholars with the capacity to scale the 'epistemic mountain range' – these 'Fourth Theorists', as they are labelled, who are 'yet to exist' – will, the logic suggests, be able to observe the 'total texture' of democracy in all its forms. The existing but previously fragmented knowledge base of democracy will, for the first time, be fully integrated and then enhanced with the addition of freshly mined 'new knowledge' delivered

through a triangulated series of studies that look far beyond text-based sources. It is only after this point that the Fourth Theorists will be able to do their work: 'So here is an instance of discovery awaiting us – a hypothesized shore lying on the other side of our present ignorance' (p. 29).

What is it, then, that worries me about the sciences of the democracies? Why does it cultivate a sense of academic angst? How might Ostrom's concern about the dangers of 'self-evident truths' resonate with the risks of scaling summits?

The project is explicitly tied to a normative, practical, and real-world agenda. That is, by learning more about the nature and contribution of democracy in all its forms, in different contexts, and from a range of perspectives, the sciences of the democracies will by definition help to 'save', 'mend', 'defend', 'promote' (and so on) democracy. This is clearly a highly questionable assumption that depends not only on the scientific success and credibility of an incredibly ambitious project but also on the 'pathways to impact' utilized by its adherents to ensure that the relevance and social value of such a project reaches far beyond the seminar room and lecture theatre. There is, to put the same point slightly differently, *a politics of democracy* whereby exactly those forms of constitutional configurations, cultural habits, everyday practices, legal constructs, and so on that this project seeks to expose and tease apart are themselves embedded in and imbued with established structural conditions that exist within a specific bounded rationality. Quite how scaling the 'epistemic mountain range' might lead to basic, practical everyday change on the ground remains unclear. There is also a strong risk that if the project was to continue gaining momentum and attract further attention, it might itself be coopted into the services of the state. The need for significant funding is likely to ensure that the sciences of the democracies project exists, at least to some extent, within 'the shadow of the state'.[30] And yet the normative aspiration to gather knowledge and promote a richer understanding of democratic practice and engagement than has previously been amassed is not itself a source for concern. If anything, it adds to the richness and dynamism of the project.

The creation of what at times feels like a new super-caste of 'Fourth Theorists' is, however, possibly a little unsettling. It is difficult not to think about the role and positionality of these theorists without recourse to Karl Mannheim's sociology of knowledge and his conception of the 'free-floating intellectual'.[31] Situational relativity in the sciences of the democracies is to some extent escaped by reaching the 'epistemic mountain range' and, through this, by being able to assess the full

mountain range or the 'total texture' of democracy. This is demon-strated when the authors make reference to the role of 'historical wanderers', noting that 'with each journey, their senses would be filled with rich detail that would be added to their mental tapestries' (p. 44). The synergies between the avowed position and potentialities of the Fourth Theorists and Mannheim's more specific focus on relationism and particularism are, in fact, striking. Mannheim's image of the intellectual as 'watchman' arguably underplays their role, as Iris Mendel argues, as 'gatekeepers to the realm of truth';[32] 'mountaineers' is now deployed metaphorically to signify those with the capacity to survey the full terrain while mere mortals exist within the foothills and unable to see beyond the confines of their own valley or plateau.

At times there is something almost Nietzschean in the framing of the Fourth Theorists, a slight hint of the *Übermensch* (if not 'superman' then a clear emphasis towards 'beyond-man', 'above-man', or now artificial intelligence, etc.). This latent strand of strangely elitist democratic thinking emerges in relation to the collection of *sufficient* amounts of data on democracy. 'It is not yet clear what "sufficient" means,' the authors acknowledge before suggesting that '[t]his is likely to be determined and continually reappraised by a *commission of democracy experts* and/or *self-appointed* Fourth Theorists' (p. 58; emphasis added). The language of the sciences of the democracies has, at some points, an almost Orwellian inflection.

A more forgiving reading of the sciences of the democracies might simply suggest that the Fourth Theorist would have to possess at least some superhuman qualities in order to cope with the cognitive load produced by the interwoven sources of knowledge. The boundaries of the project are broad and, as yet, unmapped. The highest peaks identified thus far, as being philosophical, institutional, educational, and methodological in nature (hence the 'Fourth Theorist'), may well be joined, as the mist clears at altitude, by a series of as yet unknown summits or mountain ranges. The digital and post-human, the environ-mental and climatic, the emergent field of planetary politics … the list is endless, which raises questions about the scope of the project, the storage and synthesis of data, and the basic dangers of conceptual cartography. Is it possible that the essential and defining feature of an 'essentially contested concept' is that it is ultimately unmappable, uncontrollable, its 'total texture' never fixed and therefore beyond the control of conceptual mapmakers?

'We are far from succeeding in giving even a satisfactory minimal approximation of any single mountain of data on democracy, fragmentary

as research into any of these immense bodies has been,' Jean-Paul Gagnon and his colleagues acknowledge, 'so we do not yet know what will come from the efforts of the theorists who will have the capacity to produce or handle – as if in the palms of their hands and quite possibly so through computer-powered means – such mountains of data' (p. 29). It is at this point that a glimpse of the 'self-evident truth' that arguably powers this project is provided, with the reference to 'computer-powered means' possibly suggesting the existence of a technocratic and arguably even positivist tension that lies hidden between the lines and paragraphs on each and every page of this book.

The tension can be set out as follows. The sciences of the democracies is a project, or an aligned set of ambitions, based on the premise that too little is actually known about the day-to-day practice of democracy in all its artefactual forms. It therefore aims to harvest immutable material knowledge from at least five sources (individuals, groups, non-textual media, texts, non-humans) with an emphasis on at least four pillars or perspectives (the philosophical, institutional, educational, and methodological). 'The analysis of each mountain, or of all mountains (the epistemic mountain range), such being the work of the still non-existent Fourth Theorists,' its proponents suggest, '*may reduce* or increase the complexity in the data that will hopefully one day lie before us' (p. 37; emphasis added). As has already been suggested, this emphasis on 'may reduce' could prove to be overoptimistic when faced with the scale and complexity of the data mountains produced across at least five sources and four perspectives. But the real danger of the sciences of the democracies as currently constituted is that it appears to be constituted on the 'self-evident truth' that data mining *can*, *could*, and *will* produce foundational findings (i.e. that there are basic immutable findings, facts, and rules – a set of 'irreducible criteria') about the subject matter that can be discovered. Consider the following passage:

> From individuals, groups, non-textual media, textual media, and non-humans *may come the realization* that 'things democratic' have mainly to do with a set number of further irreducible criteria like material equality, participation, procedural fairness, peace, and so forth … From such increasingly balanced and well-founded arguments premised on the ever-better data we can generate and study in the world may come new strong theories for democratization and/or the revalorization of existing theories of democracy: theories that will bear upon the world and, through their ideals

and instructions, hopefully lead to mending and preventing hurt and diluting power, or to altogether other outcomes outside of our present cognition. (p. 37; emphasis added)

The positivist and technocratic inflection here is unmistakeable: data are to be collected, coded, categorized, and tested in a process analogous to the capturing and cataloguing of butterflies. 'Crucially,' the authors suggest, 'the data would be accessible through artificial-intelligence-assisted computational analytics, thus making it possible for a researcher, a Fourth Theorist in this instance, to manipulate the data with the turn and click of a mouse, twist of a hand and tap of a finger, tracked eye movements, and voice commands' (p. 59). Through this process, a set of core criteria *may* emerge that might provide a more inclusive and robust framework through which to engage with debates concerning the crisis of democracy (*which* crisis, *what* democracy, etc., as discussed above). It is not only the methodological pluralism initially placed at the core of the sciences of the democracies that appears to bump against the goal of producing 'increasingly balanced and well-founded arguments premised on the ever-better data we can generate', but also the initial rhetorical flair and intellectual inclusiveness which seemed to embrace contest-ability and challenge – democratic dialogue within the research process, possibly even informed through innovations in citizen science.

With citizen science, an increasingly powerful methodology within environmental projects, the notion of a butterfly collector – as adopted within the blog-chain conversation that inspired this book – takes on added emphasis.[33] There are about 180,000 species of Lepidoptera, the order in which butterflies and moths are included, divided into 126 families and 46 'superfamilies'. The varieties of democracy are likely to be similarly complex; democracy is undoubtedly 'a concept with adjectives', which Gagnon's words-of-democracy database shows as it already contains over 3,000 adjectival forms.[34] Arguably the key dimension in this discussion is that democracy is not a *thing* (i.e. a noun) but is in reality more aptly understood as signifying the existence of a relationship (or network of relationships). Unlike a butterfly, it cannot be pinned down and displayed in glass cases in all its forms, which brings the discussion back to a focus on the notion of 'total texture'. The sciences of the democracies is founded on a specific ontology, but, as Sir Isaiah Berlin suggests in the excerpt quoted at the opening of this chapter, the web of knowledge is too complex and composed of too many elements for us to isolate and test them all, and so we must accept 'the total texture, compounded … of literally countless strands', as the foundation

of our knowledge, prior to any inductive or deductive reasoning. And yet the sciences of the democracies believes that it is possible to 'parse knowledge of democracy out into evenly divided temporal, geographic, cultural, linguistic, and speciated sectors' (p. 45).

Thus, the sciences of the democracies believes that the web is not too complex, the elements not too many, and that it is possible to weave the almost 'countless strands' into a unified and broadly accepted body of knowledge, with computational analytics and digital databases providing the storage and synthesis capacity. The risk, however, is that such initial optimism is misplaced and that those who seek to become Fourth Theorists find that the peak is unreachable, as the data simply grow and accumulate faster than the mountain can ever be scaled. There is, then, a danger that the sciences of the democracies will become a Sisyphean project without end; or that when the summit is scaled, the mist does not clear: no essential or irreducible criteria emerge. The 'self-evident truth' that clarity will emerge upon the sunlit uplands of the 'epistemic mountain range', that it is possible to reveal and grasp the 'total texture' of democracy, creates an ontological risk of (democratic) disappointment which brings this section full circle and back to a focus on climbers' depression, or what mountaineers sometimes called falling into the post-expedition abyss.

Walking on the bright side

The 'danger of self-evident truths' for democratic theorists is the assumption that the praxis of democracy can somehow be tamed, catalogued, and studied as if part of a larger social experiment. The main aim of this chapter has been to welcome the sciences of the democracies as an audacious, timely, and much-needed intellectual endeavour – it most certainly is, as the authors name it at the end of this book, a democratic dynamo. Its emphasis on the need to broaden our under-standing of what democracy entails, to whom, and why is undoubtedly correct in a historical period that is almost defined by a nihilist politics of pessimism. The project's emphasis on engaged scholarship and the production of theoretically informed but policy-relevant research is celebrated; as is its focus on granularity, nuance, and context within a broader global framing. The analytical tools deployed to analyse and synthesize different forms of useful knowledge, this chapter suggests, may need further thought, as too might the assumption that core

and generally irreducible criteria may emerge from the application of orthodox scientific assumptions.

These thoughts are, of course, contestable, and the aim of this chapter has been to set up and develop a conversation that will continue beyond the publication of this book and within the subsequent discussions and publications it leads to. As a democratic project, the sciences of the democracies holds huge potential; its proponents should continue to 'walk on the bright side' of debates in terms of both intellectual ambition and underlining the contemporary relevance of the social and political sciences.[35]

In this regard, it is fitting that this book is being published when there are glimpses of global democratic renewal and the emergence of countercurrents to long-standing assumptions about the poor health of democracy. Autocratic regimes appear to be under increasing pressure: China's policy of 'zero Covid' has slowed economic growth and stimulated protests; the invasion of Ukraine by President Putin has led to global condemnation and an outflow of young Russians; in Iran the young women have protested against laws requiring them to wear headscarves, which has led to a broader rebellion against the Islamic regime, and the announcement by the Taliban in December 2022 that women would be banned from attending university sparked street protests and an international outcry. Extreme far-right parties lost ground in France and Germany, President Bolsonaro was defeated in Brazil, and the mid-term election in the USA saw the rejection of candidates who aligned with the politics of Donald Trump's first presidency. The argument being suggested is not that the global democratic recession is necessarily ending, given that Donald Trump is back in office and authoritarians have gained further ground in Europe over 2024, but simply that there are signs of renewal. During late 2022, for example, one poll in the USA – itself long used as the leading example of democratic crisis – found that 44 per cent of the public rated 'the future of democracy' as their primary concern.[36]

This book therefore comes at an incredibly important historical moment for the simple reason that *both* authoritarian and democratic regimes appear to be under pressure. History clearly did not end in 1989 (or 1991).[37] Whether the issues are framed in terms of the crisis of authoritarianism or the health of democracy is secondary to the existence of far-reaching questions concerning legitimacy, evolution, and social value. In this context and framed against John Keane's phase-based analysis of the 'life and death of democracy', the sciences of the democracies could play a key role in terms of democratic revival, renewal, and reinvigoration.[38]

Notes

1   Berlin, 1978, pp. 149–50.
2   Hook, 1949, p. 582.
3   Crick, 1962, p. 12.
4   Crick, 1962, p. 12.
5   See Carothers and Press, 2022; Hendriks, Ercan, and Boswell, 2020.
6   Krastev and Holmes, 2020.
7   Putnam, 2020.
8   Flinders, 2022.
9   See Ercan and Gagnon, 2014; Merkel, 2014.
10 Ostrom, 2000, p. 33.
11 For an exception, see Ercan and Gagnon, 2014.
12 Ercan and Gagnon, 2014, p. 3.
13 See Douglas et al., 2021.
14 See McConnell, 2010.
15 Fleuß, 2021b; Merkel, 2020; Marschall, 2020.
16 Maerz et al., 2020.
17 See, for example, Foa and Mounk, 2016, 2017; Mujani and Liddle, 2021; Zilinsky, 2019.
18 Carothers and Press, 2022, p. 6.
19 Crozier, Huntington, and Watanuki, 1975.
20 Dahrendorf, 2000, p. 311.
21 Leetaru, 2019.
22 Reiljan, 2020.
23 Pinker, 2018; Rösling, 2019; Gray, 2018; Mishra, 2021.
24 Moffitt, 2016; Stavrakakis, 2014.
25 Stoker, 2006.
26 Crick, 1962.
27 Fleuß, 2021c.
28 Meriluoto, 2021.
29 Asenbaum, 2021.
30 Eisfeld and Flinders, 2021; Bandola-Gill, Flinders, and Anderson, 2021.
31 Mannheim, 1991.
32 Mendel, 2006.
33 See, for example, England et al., 2019.
34 Gagnon, 2021b.
35 Flinders, 2023.
36 Boak and Fingerhut, 2022.
37 The 'end of history' thesis was first published in essay form in 1989 (in *The National Interest*) and then in full book-length format in 1992. See Fukuyama, 1992.
38 Keane, 2009.

A compelling but precarious way to study democracy

Michael Saward

The *Sciences of the Democracies* book captures a moment in the emerging project when the exchange and scrutiny of blog and counter-blog expand into something closer to a working vision for a new way to engage with democracy in theory and practice. Commendably, it has retained its ambition and scope in the process. Its ambition and scope create a kind of compelling precariousness; the project hovers knowingly around the edges of its own impossibility (the uncountable specimens of democracy, in uncountably diverse and perhaps incommensurable forms). But the book begins to confront and even embrace the precariousness, as questions of method, agency, and organization come into focus.

Much can be, and has been, questioned and debated as the project has evolved. Openness to the new, the unexpected, and the critical is at the heart of it, so questioning and debating is rightly welcomed. Here, I pick up selected characteristics and features in the book in brief comments that are friendly to the project's conception and trajectory.

There's scope to argue with 'the *sciences* of the democracies', though good use is made of the analogies to data sciences. But a standout feature of the project is its ethos. Work across the social sciences (at least) to decolonize or liberate the canon and its associated curricula is spreading and becoming more systematic. What those projects demand exactly – drop the canon as irredeemably biased, or recontextualize its emergence and prominence? – is open to contestation. Must Rhodes fall, or get a new plaque, or get put in a museum? But *this* project clearly embraces an ethos of plurality and radically questioning and decentring dominant Western models of democracy. It also conveys a strong suggestion that such moves may not initially involve moralized alternatives to the status quo, but something that is at once more modest

and more ambitious: *descriptions* of what is out there in the world in terms of 'democracy' and its equivalents and interpretations. Seeking descriptions in the first instance is a way of delaying the working up of overarching assumptions and evidence and of new first-order normative judgements.

For the most part, the project's decentring work revolves around language, and therefore langua*ges*. So the large number of endangered languages around the world must be a core concern. There are approximately 7,000 spoken and signed languages in the world, more than half of which are likely to become extinct without intervention.[1] Further, the importance of different ideas of things, concepts, or actions resonant with 'democracy' across languages could in principle *re*centre important threads in the study of democracy – in other, 'non-Western regions' – since (for example) Indonesia and its Asia-Pacific neighbour Papua New Guinea have (respectively and approximately) 700 and 820 living languages. That said, including symbols and actions along with words, and non-human nature as a source of specimens of democracy, suggests a more even and newer process of global attention, from Western-dominated to widely distributed.[2]

In terms of methods, at first glance the work of describing seems a poor cousin to other strategies of scholarly attention that sound more engaged or committed, such as evaluating or critically appraising. In fact, description as the primary goal when approaching invocations or specimens of democracy is extraordinarily demanding. Think of the complexities and requirements of two other calls for forms of description that may well be sources of inspiration for this project. Phenomenological description, among other things, demands a rigorous bracketing of presuppositions when focusing in on the object and ways of attending to it; 'thick description' demands immersive attention to object, practice, context, and perceptions.[3] There are many challenges, of course – to what extent does describing include describing the social imaginary of the democracy specimen, or its conditions of possibility? And, as Quentin Skinner once argued,[4] descriptive accounts of democracy are invariably 'evaluative descriptions'; if he's right, how is that ineradicable element of evaluation to be handled?

Despite such challenges, description gets to the heart of the project's ethos: radically open-minded attention to the unexplored complexities of a crucial word, idea, or phenomenon, and a determination to 'read off' multiple specimens as far as possible (knowing that some 'reading in' will be unavoidable). More work is needed on the subject, object, and boundaries of descriptions, for sure – a method's elements evolve and

coalesce with the effort to enact it. One neat part of the project's core method is that it throws important questions back to more conventional ways of doing the work of political theory, such as: what is really going on when someone uses a 'stipulative definition' of, say, democracy, as if common stipulations don't have their particular histories or rationales? Or when a political philosopher invokes 'intuition' as a key source of knowledge about political concepts or principles, as if our intuitions are not largely situated products of our cultures and upbringing?

The conception and approach of *Sciences* can unsettle a range of scholarly assumptions and strategies – in a good way. For example, it has made me rethink the approach articulated by ordinary language philosopher J. L. Austin in his essay 'A plea for excuses' (1956–7), which is especially relevant here because of its clear affinities with the *Sciences* project. Austin writes:

> [O]ur common stock of words embodies all the distinctions men have found worth drawing, and the connexions they have found worth marking, in the lifetimes of many generations: these surely are likely to be more numerous, more sound, since they have stood up to the long test of the survival of the fittest, and more subtle, at least in all ordinary and reasonably practical matters, than any that you or I are likely to think up in our armchairs of an afternoon – the most favoured alternative method.[5]

Fine, but who fits into the 'we' ('our') whose 'common stock of words' we should explore? Common to a language, or within hundreds – thousands – of languages? And 'survival of the fittest': therein lies a whole world of language imposition, suppression, extinction, and endangerment. (I won't start on men and their armchairs.)

The genuinely expansive search for specimens of democracy will demand long-term plans and accepting the work's open-endedness. The work of gathering will not finish (there are 'five inexhaustible sources of artefactual knowledge'; p. 114), and its ever-unfinished character needs to be a core assumption informing its methods and ambitions. Even if the specimen numbers start to look mountainous, any temptation to think that they can represent the world (of 'democracy') has to be resisted; Borges's short story 'The congress'[6] offers an engaging caution on that issue, as well as a reminder of the pitfalls of choosing 'councils of experts' and seeing how they might conceive of their work. Questions of 'sufficiency' (p. 58) will loom ever larger and be a constant source of debate, along with ways of approaching the question 'what is missing?' – a question

that seems simple enough but will involve much head-scratching around the 'known unknowns' and the 'unknown unknowns', and the difference between not having looked and not having seen. In all that, it is good to see acknowledgement of existing and developing archives, such as the excellent *Participedia.net*. How much, and of what exactly, is already there in terms of 'specimens' is well worth asking.

The extensive exchanges that gave rise to the *Sciences* book included various ideas for organizing principles for (what would become) a data mountain. Conceiving and organizing relations between specimens will throw up multiple potential approaches that juggle scale, era, and boundaries. Design-centred approaches hold out promise in that they share a decentred, participative, and strongly situated ethos in thinking about, and working on innovative ideas of, democracy. Ezio Manzini's ideas of 'distributed democracy' and 'project-centred democracy', for example, start with open-ended and locally generated notions of what democracy might be, or might become, and stress the use of collaborative methods.[7]

An organizer and interpreter is envisioned, of course: the enigmatic 'Fourth Theorist'. The book tells us that the Fourth Theorist does not yet exist. There are so many questions, so I will end with two more: Is the Fourth Theorist artificial intelligence? Is ChatGPT one of its grandparents?

Notes

1 Cummings, 2023.
2 Agné, 2022.
3 Geertz, 1973.
4 Skinner, 1973.
5 Austin, 1979, pp. 181–2.
6 Borges, 2001.
7 Manzini, 2019.

10

Between praiseworthy ambition and academic audacity

Michael Freeden

What is the scientific study of democracy designed to achieve? And what would its practitioners and theorists hope to achieve? This project, with its catch-all title simultaneously indicating comprehensiveness, confidence, and contingency, may be in its infancy but is already brewing in an enormous and constantly filling cauldron with ceaselessly accumulating ingredients. To say that it raises more questions than it could be hoped to resolve is in itself no criticism, depending on one's ultimate view of what constitutes inquiry in the domain of politics. But its scholarly and research expectations appear to bifurcate, or more accurately divaricate: it opens complex and tantalizing vistas of knowledge just as it hauls us up short in the face of the fundamental unattainability of some of them, torn as it is between praiseworthy ambition and academic audacity.

What do I like about this project? First, I like the notion of messiness (p. 126) applied to democracy – indeed, all political thinking and practices are endearingly and encouragingly messy, contrary to the desiccated approaches pursued by some analytical philosophers. Second, I applaud its removal of limitations on what counts as legitimate and worthy of inclusion in human (and to some extent) non-human voices: not only with whom we engage actively but, more crucially, who we listen to, read, or observe. This necessitates not only extending the range of democracy's intellectual products but also including its cultural, non-purist ones. And that is a good thing. In any empirically based examination of the expressions of human thinking, we need first and foremost to examine the properties of the raw material we study, moving away from exclusively focusing on the superior and the elitist, and partly shifting away from logocentrism. The challenge in the bold project

before us must be matched by the parallel determination to explore how the questions we ask can recentre our discipline.

That challenge is exacerbated because 'democracy' – and 'power' – are strikingly ambiguous words in our current sociopolitical vocabulary, both at a vernacular and at a professional level. Democracy is endowed with largely positive resonance; power, by contrast, is frequently the object of opprobrium. Freighting democracy as a desideratum shifts it into the ethical field, distinct from what a social science – in the sense of a body of knowledge, a *Wissenschaft* – is devised to do, which is to *understand*, or at least to make sense of. That is particularly true of those cultures where most academic discourse on democracy is engaged in advocacy, not in analysis – the USA is a striking example.

An inquiring social scientist would bring into their fold the good, the bad, and the ugly, because curiosity is the first requirement of the scholar, because the comparative advantage of such juxtaposition is immensely valuable, and, not least, because one person's 'ugly' may be another person's 'attractive'. I am reminded of the leading conceptual historian Reinhart Koselleck, who argued, against considerable resistance, that a history of German political concepts should include the terms and meanings employed between 1933 and 1945, irrespective of their distortions and repulsiveness. Hence (to refer to p. 32 of this book), illiberal and despotic democracy are not just instances of ideological dress-up, but legitimate subjects of our interests. There is always more than one reading to a text. The student of politics should be boundlessly curious about 'the political'.

A related issue is that the proliferation of social media is often celebrated as an instance of radically increased democratization, affording each (technologically savvy) person a voice. But what is mischaracterized as the *democratization* of voice is, rather, replacing it with *demotics*. As we constantly experience, a chaotic fragmentation removes the filters that protect the public domain from a cacophonic inundation through electronic channels. It considerably diminishes the discriminatory capacity to attach variable weight and judgement to the myriad voices now effortlessly securing a stage, making it difficult to judge messages on the basis of their quality, seriousness, or contribution to group dialogue. Reasoned and reflective public discourse, hitherto thought essential to the flourishing of democracy, is now operating against a noisy background clatter. Extreme individuation also entails extreme self-centredness, and, to the extent that political views are transmitted, they serve micro-political ends, with personalized, discon-nected, and thin ideological or normative ingredients. But will those be

included in the 'strategies for public outreach' (Chapter 5)? Once again, I hope so.

This brings me to a third feature of the project: its ambition and exhaustive striving for maximizing evidence. This I both like and worry about. I like its utopian spirit and its commitment to a voyage of discovery, but its view of information-gathering that contends 'the more the merrier' sails too close to the wind of methodological careless-ness. The outcome of that voyage depends largely on how we might process the navigational information. Unlike my preference for including the bad and the ugly in any remit of 'the political', here the danger is that of piling up a surplus of practices and opinions barely capable of being registered, let alone discriminated one from another. It becomes an unmeasurable quantity that cannot add up as an instrument of social decision-making. The metaphor that the project employs, no less than 104 times, is that of a mountain, a mountain of data, and even more enthusiastically, the 'total texture' or the 'epistemic mountain range'. My concern here is not so much falling off the mountain. It is the question of the indiscriminate amassing of facts, like a library that is devoid of a unified cataloguing system. The mountain analogy is misleading inasmuch as knowledge about democracy is not to be scaled, nor even dominated by rarer and more encompassing vistas.

Matthew Flinders has touched on some pertinent problematics of that analogy, but I wish to expand a bit. The project seems to me to be rooted in a positivist tradition, one that leans heavily towards description rather than interpretation. In the social sciences and the humanities, we never 'describe'. To understand in the Weberian sense of *Verstehen* always means to select and to interpret, not to describe. The *Oxford English Dictionary* notes the prime meaning of description as 'listing' features and details, but such listings pick out those features that the observer finds notable or striking, and that applies not least to social concepts. Even the minutiae of our 'descriptions' are (a) invariably context-laden and therefore prey to diverse framing perspectives, and (b) dependent on which 'descriptive' gambit, or opening observation, we deploy first. The fluid sequences in which we order and rank our observa-tions will create in each case rival patterns of 'description'.

So alongside amassing and totalizing evidence, there is also a need for guides to disaggregating and differentiating; deciding on which cross-references to pursue; dealing with fragmentation, silences, and absences; utilizing judgements about selective utility and significance, and furthermore exercising them as moving targets that constantly require reassessment over time and across space. We need the smell of

the streets as much as the view from the top – zooming in and zooming out constantly. I appreciate that each unit of information on democracy may open more human understanding. That is an empirical model borrowed from the 'hard' sciences, but it overlooks that developments in human understanding are modest: filtered, selective, and subtractive as well as additive. The daunting nature of information overload is not an unmitigated good: thus, for instance, the efficacy of magic, the worship of an uncompromising deity, or racial prejudices might be categorized as misleading beliefs.

Certainly, we should welcome a toolkit with immediate access to information; certainly, an organizing system with open-ended top-up potential. But we may need to cast aside information previously accrued that is now disruptive and blocking, in order to open new space. And we may need to ask, 'What is missing here?', in processing evidence. Not just what isn't momentarily there but what is invisible and inaudible. We cannot understand 'vast bodies of data' (Chapters 3 and 6) because those data will be thinned out and the gaps among them will require imaginative but empirically questionable leaps of faith.

It is a problem similar to that of the regulative principles beloved by some philosophers: in an attempt to lay down a rule, say of just distribution according to need, they elide the elaborate and complex individual circumstances where factors such as health, personal wealth, voluntary transfers, cultural expectations, intelligence, or criminal record are tossed into a bottomless pot, producing a frequently inadequate and truncated policy. For any such rule flounders against competing ideological preferences, pulling in opposite directions. Hence those zero-sum conundrums can only be overridden by abandoning any appeal to a single agreed principle. In effect, the paths through the mountain of knowledge may be limited, may clash with one another, may peter out, and may bring with them methodological biases. The so-called description of the UK electoral system as 'winner takes all' obscures an alternative mirror-image characterization as 'loser takes nothing'. But each 'description' will trigger hugely different consequences for the everyday or the professional logics of democracy. I am therefore reluctant to see this as 'the sciences of the democracies' rather than as some of their preconditions, absent a programme of analytical insights.

Herein also lies the problem of the Fourth Theorist, an imaginary figure, or perhaps a conceit, a device, optimistically referred to as '*still* non-existent' (p. 37; emphasis added), but more in the mould of Rousseau's lawgiver, characterized by him as 'a task which is beyond human powers and a non-existent authority for its execution'.[1]

The Fourth Theorists are sometimes identified as computational specialists (p. 50) – does computation provide mastery in comprehending the ins and outs of democracy? – or proposed as a council or network of experts (pp. 74–5), but in what are they experts beyond computation? Not in democratic values, not in conceptual analysis, not in patterns of discourse. Those would entail moving beyond classification, beyond gathering and overview, and towards inventive creativity and interpretation. The latter too is part of science: no feature can proceed without the others. Nor is there concern for plausible disagreement among 'Fourth Theorists': understanding is not unitary.

Democracy is indeed an 'essentially contested concept', but that is true of all political concepts. It does not make it 'beyond the control of conceptual mapmakers' (p. 129). Quite the reverse. Only those who approach scientific study as demanding accurate measurement and boundary formation will feel control slipping away. Those who accept indeterminacy as an ineliminable and normal feature of concepts will turn to identifying typical morphological patterns through which significance is produced, always accepting the fleeting nature of that significance. The crux of essential contestability is not the abandoning of analysis in the face of indefiniteness and inconclusiveness. Rather, it spurs on our appreciation of how such knowledge dilemmas can be managed: through realizing that a plethora of decontestations – some easily guessable, others unpredictable – are invariably in play.

Essential contestability means that there is a conceptual pile of spare parts that are standing at the ready, depending on which point of view is superimposed. They cannot all be used simultaneously; hence temporary fixity is imposed on a bed of plasticity. The democratic ethos has to be embraced as ephemeral and modifiable, though not infinitely so. Science is crying out for a vade mecum – not just the accumulation of facts, and not necessarily a set of common ethical values, but the capacity to apply credible points of view through which to decode the observables that have been stacked up, even if that credibility must be retested continuously as human time, social space, and epistemology encroach at different and irregular speeds.

Note

1   Rousseau, 1968, p. 86.

11
The power of a 1,000-word blog

Martin J. Bull and Johanne Døhlie Saltnes

As academic editors of *The Loop*, we were excited when Jean-Paul Gagnon originally approached us about writing a blog piece on the 'science of democracy' and, specifically, on its shortcomings to date, with the idea of formalizing an emerging debate among democratic theorists and others. *The Loop*, the blog of the European Consortium of Political Research (ECPR), had only started up nine months earlier. Now, Jean-Paul's proposal offered what we thought would be a small, steady stream of blog pieces on a theme to which we knew the ECPR always wanted to give greater prominence in its activities. It also offered up a new and innovative way to debate, and for scholars to have conversations in an open-access format available to everyone.

At the same time, we were somewhat sceptical about its likelihood of success as a series. Democratic theorists writing about … democratic theory? In the first place, we wondered if democratic theorists would be willing (even able) to encapsulate the richness and complexity of their views in 1,000-word chunks. A blog leaves no room for nuance, qualification, 'either/or', 'on the one hand/on the other', or even for fancy introductions and erudite conclusions. In a blog, you state your case from the outset, articulate it in the middle, and finish it with (ideally) a bit of provocation. Jean-Paul's assurance that there would be many authors who would be willing to write such blogs fell on the ears of sceptical non-theorists.

What occurred was altogether on a scale we could not have imagined. We have been subject to a veritable tidal wave of blogs (at the time of writing, more than a hundred) by authors who know what they mean to say and how to say it in a thousand words. As the editorial team, we have read, digested, understood, and lauded every single blog and

continue to do so even as this book goes to press. And, yes, we believe that this blog series has provided a new and innovative way of debating, of exchanging ideas. The authors take issue with Gagnon, they challenge each other, and sometimes they even agree with each other! They also prompt and stimulate others to write.

We have had authors approach us through Jean-Paul, authors who have come to us through other authors, and spontaneous submissions by authors who have read the series and are passionate about contributing. But our role in all of this has been a modest one. We have acted as a vehicle for this wonderful, rich feast of theoretical debate; it is the authors who have provided the substance.

If *The Loop* has provided the foundation for this exchange, this book takes the project another step forward. When we heard of the intention to produce a book, we were slightly concerned that it would look like an edited collection of blog pieces. Concerned only because, to our mind, chapters are one thing and blog pieces quite another – and the two should remain separate and separated. But we should have known that the authors would again pull off something far more formidable: a veritable synthesis of where we have been, where we are, and, perhaps most importantly, where we are going, or can go, in this most important of debates.

We have been honoured to have played a small role in the origins of this work, and we encourage all democratic, political, social, and economic theorists to engage with it, and to keep engaging with each other. And keep those blogs coming!

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Index

'*The Sciences of the Democracies* is a wonderful exploration of how we study democracy. Presented as an intervention and innovation in research design, the authors deliver a deep, timely, and inspiring reflection on democracy's past, present, and future.'
Simone Chambers, University of California, Irvine

'This collectively authored book is a manifesto for advancing the democratic project by studying the myriad ways in which people across time and space already know democracy-relevant practices and institutions. A timely and ambitious project aimed at forming and consolidating a new generation of democracy scholars.'

Mark E. Warren, University of British Columbia

The field of democracy studies is more constricted than it needs to be, as researchers, for all their insights, continue to study only fragments of democracy in isolation from each other. Seeking change, *The Sciences of the Democracies* proposes a groundbreaking means for holistic study, drawing on five sources of knowledge that will provide better understanding of democracy, or rather, of 'the democracies'. These are: individual people, groups of people, non-textual media, texts, and non-humans.

This book details how the inclusion of these five sources across temporal, spatial, cultural, linguistic, and species contexts leads to the discovery of democratic practices and institutions hitherto unknown or unfamiliar to the conventional 'Western' perception. It promises to generate a new class of democratic theorist – the 'Fourth Theorist', who theorizes from thousands of multimedial democracy concepts – and it has the potential for generating better-founded, less arbitrary, more inclusive democratic theories. In doing so, the book considers the philosophical, institutional, educational, and methodological difficulties of the scientific understandings and undertakings it proposes. The book is a choral work of many collaborating authors. Their ambition is to offer a touchstone text for government and public officials, citizens, residents and visitors, researchers, practitioners, and philanthropists (big and small) participating in what is a vibrant global discussion on how to study and practice democracy equitably.

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