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## Participatory Versus Radical Democracy in the 21st Century: Carole Pateman, Jacques Rancière, and Sheldon Wolin

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**Abstract** *What is the relationship between participatory and radical democracy and why are they relevant? This paper answers these questions by bringing into conversation the participatory theory of Pateman and the radical theories of Rancière and Wolin to see what they can learn from each other. I argue that participatory democracy demonstrates the value of attending to questions of institutional transformation, due to the ability of greater participation to both empower citizens and legitimize democratic authority structures. Radical democracy, on the other hand, calls attention to the ways in which the conditions of democratic possibility have changed in the past half century, thus making the dream of institutionalizing a participatory democracy much more difficult to realize. In doing so, I demonstrate that participatory and radical theories of democracy have much to offer to one another and to broader ongoing debates within democratic theory.*

### Introduction

What is the relationship between participatory democracy and radical democracy? What themes have these two theories tried to address and in what ways are they connected? What can we learn from a conversation between participatory democracy and radical democracy and what can these two theories teach each other? Beginning in the 1960s (and continuing into the 1980s), a number of democratic theorists sought to replace the minimalist, electoral conceptions of democracy that dominated the discipline at the time (and arguably still do). Inspired by the social movements of the preceding decades, these theorists stressed the importance of citizen participation and an expansive conception of the political. Scholars such as Carole Pateman, Sheldon Wolin and Jacques Rancière have advanced a set of arguments that draw on, but also expand upon, these “participatory” theories. In addition to participation, these theorists stress the importance of disagreement and the often-sporadic nature of politics. These theories center upon a strong criticism of existing minimalist democratic theories and practices. In what ways, then, are they related, and how do they differ? What, specifically, do these two theories say to one another and what might we learn from such a conversation?

I answer these questions first by reviewing the participatory theory of democracy as articulated in the work of Carole Pateman and the radical democratic theory of Jacques Rancière and Sheldon Wolin. I then bring these two bodies of theory into conversation with one another through consideration of

what they, respectively, can teach each other (and us) about democratic politics and theory. In particular, I argue that participatory democracy calls our attention to the manner in which the polity might be institutionally transformed so that it allows for greater democratic participation and, in turn, for more informed and empowered citizenship on the part of the participants. Radical democratic theory has turned away from questions of institutionalization, evincing a largely unjustified skepticism toward efforts to democratize formal political structures. Participatory democracy thus shows why efforts at institutional transformation are both beneficial and necessary for the goal of greater democracy. Radical democracy, however, has its own lessons to teach participatory democrats. I argue that the work of radical democrats such as Rancière and Wolin calls attention to the ways in which the conditions of democratic possibility have changed in the past fifty years. Radical democrats, mostly sympathetic to the ideals of participatory democracy, demonstrate how the institutional preconditions for greater democratization that appeared in the 1960s have given way to a polity that is more politically and economically unequal and dominated by corporations to an unprecedented degree.<sup>1</sup> Radical democracy shows the challenges that participatory democratic institutionalization will face in the twenty-first century and thus offers some justification for the institutional cautiousness of Rancière and Wolin.

In this sense, both participatory and radical democratic theories offer significant insights into the nature of contemporary democracy, insights not necessarily found in deliberative theories of democracy. Thus, while much democratic theory in recent years has worked within the realm of deliberative democracy,<sup>2</sup> I am going to focus on these less prominent, but still vitally important, strains of democratic thought. There are a number of interesting and important questions regarding deliberative democracy and how it relates to the themes discussed in this article, but I am going to bracket them in favor of considering participatory and radical democracy on their own terms. Given the breadth and depth of current scholarship on deliberative democracy, any attempt to seriously engage with it in this article would threaten to dominate the entire discussion and squeeze out the particular questions I want to engage with here, questions which have not been adequately attended to in the past two decades. Here the focus remains on how two smaller but deeply important theories of democracy can still teach us something significant, even unique, about democracy

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<sup>1</sup> Martin Gilens and Benjamin Page test several theories of power in America and find that while mobilized business interests and wealthy individuals tend to get the policy outcomes they want, the opinion of the average American has little relation to Congressional legislation. See "Testing Theories of American Politics: Elites, Interest Groups, and Average Citizens," *Perspectives on Politics* 12:3 (2014), pp. 564–581. Thomas Piketty and Emmanuel Saez document how the income share of the richest Americans has been returning to Great Depression levels due to massive increases in top incomes. "Income Inequality in the United States, 1913–1998," *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* 118:1 (2003), pp. 1–39.

<sup>2</sup> Representative works include Seyla Benhabib, "Toward a Deliberative Model of Democratic Legitimacy," in Seyla Benhabib (ed.), *Democracy and Difference* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), pp. 67–94; James Fishkin, *Democracy and Deliberation* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1991); Amy Gutmann and Dennis Thompson, *Democracy and Disagreement* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1996); and Jürgen Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1998).

today, and just what those lessons might be. Furthermore, while I recognize that participatory and radical democracy have important similarities, some of which I will call attention to below, I am not trying to synthesize them into one unified theory or to resolve their (perhaps irreconcilable) differences. Instead, this paper hopes to show precisely what we can learn from a conversation that engages those differences, particularly at the points where they seem most opposed.

To make this argument, the article will be broken into five parts. First, I briefly explain my use of the terms participatory and radical democracy. Second, I introduce Carole Pateman's work as an example of a participatory theory of democracy, briefly discussing the context in which it arose and elaborating on some of its key features. Third, I turn to the work of Jacques Rancière and Sheldon Wolin to illustrate the components of their radical theories of democracy. Although I focus on Wolin's radical democratic writings, I also explore (in sections three and four) the manner in which his theory blurs the admittedly fluid boundaries separating participatory and radical democracy. Fourth, I discuss the lessons that participatory democracy has to teach radical democracy, particularly the importance of substantial institutional change to facilitate greater citizen participation and its value for developing individual citizens. Fifth, I turn the tables, exploring the insights that recent radical democracy has for participatory democracy, particularly its focus on the moments of upsurge and protest in the street. I argue that a key lesson from radical democracy is its focus on the manner in which some of the preconditions for participatory democracy have weakened in recent decades, hence offering some justification for Wolin's fear that democracy may be confined to "fugitive" moments in the near future. In the conclusion I discuss future prospects for democratic theory, particularly the question of corporate power and growing economic inequality and the challenges these pose for proponents of a more strong and meaningful form of democracy, challenges thus far not successfully met by democratic theory. I conclude by suggesting that participatory democracy and radical democracy, with further development, could each offer valuable lessons for dealing with these concerns. In making this argument I suggest that participatory and radical theories of democracy share an important lineage and continuity of themes and arguments that distinguish them from other democratic theories and bring them together to form a body of literature that radically challenges existing democratic practices, discourses, and institutions. We need not resolve the differences between these theorists in order to mine these differences for new insights.

### **Participatory and Radical Democracy: A Note on the Terms**

Radical democracy is a term with a contested series of uses. At its broadest, it can refer to democratic theories that advocate the expansion of democratic processes and activities into more and more spheres of life while also pushing for more direct forms of participation in formal political institutions. These theories consider one of the biggest failings of modern democracies to be precisely that they do not have enough democracy. Agonistic, participatory, and deliberative theories of democracy, in various ways, could be grouped under this broad rubric. For the purposes of this article, participatory democracy will refer to those theories that advocate the radical transformation of political and economic institutions to further embody principles of directly democratic decision-making

and political equality. These ideas prospered in political theory in the 1970s and 1980s under the influence of Carole Pateman, C.B. Macpherson, and Benjamin Barber.

More specifically, radical democracy has come to refer to a number of approaches that are also termed agonistic democracy. Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe champion a “radical and plural” democracy that recognizes but is also keen to discard much of its Marxist legacy.<sup>3</sup> In subsequent work Mouffe has elaborated on the meaning of agonism and democracy. William Connolly, who like Laclau and Mouffe, is influenced by post-structuralism, has also developed an agonistic approach to democracy.<sup>4</sup> These approaches emerged in the 1980s but began to flower with the collapse of the Soviet Union and the discrediting of old left perspectives, particularly Marxist ones.<sup>5</sup> In addition, radical democracy has frequently looked to structuralist and post-structuralist thinkers such as Lacan, Foucault, Deleuze, and Derrida to develop new conceptions of agency, the subject, and political action.<sup>6</sup>

What these approaches have in common, amongst many other things, is the belief that “the defining feature of politics is struggle” and that contestation is not only unavoidable but also the sign of a healthy democratic practice.<sup>7</sup> They further involve a focus on social movements that attempt to disrupt ossified institutional practice, celebrating the democratic experience of such moments and exploring the identity of “different groups struggling for a radicalization of democracy.”<sup>8</sup> It is in this sense that I have included Rancière as a radical democrat, for his approach to democracy shares much with those just mentioned. Wolin’s inclusion may seem more curious. His intellectual lineage does not owe as much to continental philosophy and he is more a critic than a proponent of post-structuralist philosophy. I have categorized Wolin as a radical democrat because on one plausible reading that is what he is. In a series of essays published in the 1990s, Wolin articulates a vision of democratic politics that is anti-institutional and in celebration of those democratic moments of protest, disruption, and spontaneity.

Participatory and radical democracy should thus be understood as ideal types. The boundaries between the two can be made clear but the thinkers I discuss do not always conform to these distinctions. Thus, Pateman begins as a clear participatory democrat but her later work explores the exclusions and difficulties that stand in the way of further democratization.<sup>9</sup> Rancière’s work largely fits into

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<sup>3</sup> Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* (New York: Verso, 2001).

<sup>4</sup> See his classic *Identity/Difference: Democratic Negotiations of Political Paradox* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991).

<sup>5</sup> See David Trend, ed., *Radical Democracy: Identity, Citizenship, and the State* (New York: Routledge, 1996) for a discussion of radical democracy and left politics following the collapse of the Soviet Union.

<sup>6</sup> For a text that explicitly frames radical democracy as a post-structuralist democratic theory, see Lars Tønder and Lasse Thomassen, eds, *Radical Democracy: Politics Between Abundance and Lack* (New York: Manchester University Press, 2005) which focuses heavily on the role that Lacan and Deleuze play in informing much of radical democratic thinking.

<sup>7</sup> Chantal Mouffe, “Radical Democracy or Liberal Democracy,” in David Trend (ed.), *Radical Democracy: Identity, Citizenship, and the State* (New York: Routledge, 1996), p. 24

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> Most famously in the 1980s Pateman turns to questions of gender. However, in more recent work Pateman recognizes the difficulties facing the institutionalization of

the frame of radical democracy but, as mentioned above, Wolin resists any simple classifications. I initially present Wolin as a radical democrat but then complicate the picture by recognizing that he also has much in common with Pateman's participatory democracy. Indeed, Wolin is often read as having more of an affinity with communitarian thinkers such as Benjamin Barber and Charles Taylor than with agonistic democrats.<sup>10</sup> As the following sections suggest, the often-porous boundaries between the two bodies of theory contribute to a productive dialog rather than hinder it.

### Carole Pateman and the Participatory Theory of Democracy

Participatory democracy, emerging out of the civil rights and student movements of the 1960s, and practiced by groups such as Students for a Democratic Society and the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee, defined itself first and foremost as an alternative to a more minimal conception of democratic participation.<sup>11</sup> The minimalist theory of democracy is most clearly articulated in Joseph Schumpeter's *Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy* (1942), in which he defines democracy as the "free competition among would-be leaders for the vote of the electorate."<sup>12</sup> Carole Pateman's definitive *Participation and Democratic Theory* uses the work of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, John Stuart Mill, and G.D.H. Cole to construct an alternative, participatory theory of democracy to argue that national representative institutions are not sufficient to qualify a political system as democratic. For a "democratic polity to exist it is necessary for a participatory society to exist, i.e. a society where all political systems have been democratized," including but not limited to the economic sphere.<sup>13</sup> The primary justification for this theory is a structural–psychological claim, dating back to Rousseau, which states that institutional structures have an impact on individuals (and vice versa), and that increased space for citizen participation will empower and educate individuals to be effective, democratic citizens. In other words, a participatory

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*Footnote 9 continued*

participatory democracy today, particularly with regard to economic inequality and corporate power. See "Self-Ownership and Property in the Person: Democratization and a Tale of Two Concepts." *The Journal of Political Philosophy* 10:1 (2002), pp. 20–53 and "Participatory Democracy Revisited." *Perspectives on Politics* 10:1 (2012), pp. 7–19.

<sup>10</sup> For example, see George Kateb, *The Inner Ocean: Individualism and Democratic Culture* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1992), especially chapter 9; and Russell Arben Fox, "Confucianism and Communitarianism in a Liberal Democratic World," in Fred Dallmayr (ed.), *Border Crossings* (New York: Lexington Books, 1999), pp. 185–211.

<sup>11</sup> For information on some of the movements that informed the rise of participatory democracy, see the following: Tom Hayden, *The Port Huron Statement: The Visionary Call of the 1960s Revolution* (New York: Thunder's Mouth Press, 2005); Meta Mendel-Reyes, *Reclaiming Democracy: The Sixties in Politics and Memory* (New York: Routledge, 1995); James Miller, *Democracy Is in the Streets* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995); and Sheldon S. Wolin and John Schaar, *The Berkeley Rebellion and Beyond* (New York: A New York Review Book, date). For an assessment of the state of participatory democratic theory today, see Jeffrey D. Hilmer, "The State of Participatory Democratic Theory," *New Political Science*, 32:1 (2010), pp. 43–63.

<sup>12</sup> Joseph Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy* (New York: Harper & Row, 1975).

<sup>13</sup> Carole Pateman, *Participation and Democratic Theory* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1970), pp. 42–43.

society is necessary for an individual to be a thoughtful, public citizen, and not simply a private, self-interested individual.<sup>14</sup>

For Pateman, the shortcomings of today's democracies are numerous. To begin with, there are very few, if any, social arenas in which citizens can participate in the manner she advocates. Although formal equality has been institutionalized, the "civic culture is systematically divided along lines of class and sex."<sup>15</sup> Simply put, there is a problematic contradiction between the formal equality institutionalized into law in liberal democracy and the deep inequality experienced socially by women and the lower classes. Women are effectively subordinated at home through the marriage contract, in which a woman contracts to be a housewife (domestic laborer), a provider of sexual services, and generally subordinate to her husband.<sup>16</sup> The problem being diagnosed here is more than one of attitudes. The structural subordination of women is part of the history of liberal democracy and capitalism; certain vestiges of female legal subordination remain (or are just being removed today) and the pressures maintaining female subordination outside the formal political sphere are stronger than individual prejudice.

The issue of equality also clearly emerges in Pateman's writings. She is deeply concerned with economic inequality, patriarchy, and the other social inequalities that render hollow the formal institutions of governance. This egalitarian sensibility informs her criticism of contract, which is problematic precisely because it institutionalizes inegalitarian relations of domination and subordination. Pateman, in dialog with Charles Mills, expands these concerns to include race and class as key sites of inequality.<sup>17</sup> Given the expansive critique that emerges in her later works, what sorts of changes are needed to realize a more participatory society? Participatory democracy requires "radical changes in the institutional structure of liberal democracy" including the "democratization of everyday life."<sup>18</sup> To clarify, participatory democracy is more than the introduction of liberal democracy to every sphere of life; it must involve radical changes to gender relations, the "daily organization of work," the distribution of domestic labor, and the national distribution of power and decision-making.<sup>19</sup>

In addition, Pateman is attentive to a feature that gains prominence in later works of radical democracy. Both Jacques Rancière and Sheldon Wolin express a concern for the time and spacing necessary for participation in politics, and the manner in which these aspects can be used to include some and exclude others from such participation. Pateman, in *The Sexual Contract* and *The Disorder of Women*, is sensitive to this issue as well. Because humans are time-bound, the excessive demands of domestic labor placed upon women in patriarchal liberal societies make it almost impossible to realize parity in participation, either in the

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<sup>14</sup> See also Arnold Kaufman, "Participatory Democracy and Human Nature," in William Connolly (ed.), *The Bias of Pluralism* (New York: Atherton Press, 1969), pp. 178–200.

<sup>15</sup> Carole Pateman, *The Disorder of Women* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1989), Ch. 7 on civic culture, p. 143.

<sup>16</sup> This argument is developed in detail in *The Sexual Contract* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1988.)

<sup>17</sup> Carole Pateman and Charles Mills, *Contract and Domination* (Cambridge: Polity, 2007).

<sup>18</sup> Pateman, *Disorder of Women*, p. 166.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 169.

formal workplace or in political institutions. Therefore, for men and women to participate as equals, either in a minimal electoral system or in a participatory one, domestic work must cease to be women's work. This concern for leisure and time as a precondition for the practice of politics will find special resonance in the works of Rancière and Wolin, to be discussed below.

### Jacques Rancière, Sheldon Wolin, and Radical Theories of Democracy

While participatory and radical democracy share a critique of existing liberal democracies, there are a few crucial ways in which radical theories of democracy break with their participatory cousins. Contemporary radical theorists of democracy introduce a focus on agonism and a concern for difference, they are skeptical of efforts to formally institutionalize democratic practices, and they are particularly attentive to the surplus time, resources, and spacing that is necessary to partake in politics.<sup>20</sup> Both theories are constituted in part through their opposition to minimalist theories of democracy, which define democracy in terms of participation in the electoral process and tend to be skeptical of more substantive forms of citizen participation.<sup>21</sup> Radical and participatory democracy, however, stand apart from one another on a few key issues, particularly institutionalization. In this section I discuss the radical democratic theories of Jacques Rancière and Sheldon Wolin, illustrating the manner in which they offer a new series of insights into questions of democracy.

Jacques Rancière's work offers a clear case in which we can diagnose the shift from participatory to radical democracy, while at the same time identifying the continuities shared by these bodies of work. For Rancière, a discussion of politics begins with a reconceptualization of the political. Politics, on his account, occurs when a group that has been discounted or otherwise excluded asserts its equality, when "the natural order of domination is interrupted" by those who have no part in the current political order.<sup>22</sup> Politics, therefore, occurs through the assertion of a wrong, beginning when a party that does not exist politically identifies the wrong of its exclusion and declares its existence as an equal member of the community.<sup>23</sup> Politics is thus distinct from philosophy; it is premised upon disagreement between parties; it occurs through and because of the "rationality of disagreement."<sup>24</sup> While philosophy wants to eliminate disagreement, Rancière

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<sup>20</sup> In addition to Rancière, Bonnie Honig, Chantal Mouffe, and William Connolly have developed radical democratic theories defined by an emphasis on agonism. See Bonnie Honig, *Political Theory and the Displacement of Politics* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993); Chantal Mouffe, *The Return of the Political* (New York: Verso, 1993); and William E. Connolly, *Pluralism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005).

<sup>21</sup> Joseph Schumpeter's *Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy* is the most famous example of this perspective but William Riker's work, most notably *Liberalism Against Populism: A Confrontation Between the Theory of Democracy and the Theory of Social Choice* (Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press, 1982) has inspired considerable scholarship in defense of the proposition that democracy cannot offer more than limited electoral oversight of public officials.

<sup>22</sup> Jacques Rancière, *Disagreement* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999).

<sup>23</sup> In a similar (though distinct) vein, Ernesto Laclau conceptualizes populist politics as something that emerges out of a chain of particular demands made upon authority figures (or institutions). See Ernesto Laclau, *On Populist Reason* (New York: Verso, 2007).

<sup>24</sup> Rancière, *Disagreement*, p. XII.



argues, along with other radical democrats, that difference, or agonistic contestation, constitutes the heart of democratic politics. Politics thus involves a challenge to the unequal status quo by introducing “an assumption that, at the end of the day, itself demonstrates the sheer contingency of the order, the equality of any speaking being with any other speaking being.”<sup>25</sup>

If politics is premised upon the equality of speaking beings, then most of what are commonly termed “political activities” must be reconceptualized as something else.<sup>26</sup> Rancière uses the term “policing” to signify the administrative and distributive arrangements commonly seen as the realm of politics, which concern the inegalitarian “organization of powers” and the “distribution of places and roles.”<sup>27</sup> Whereas policing concerns the distribution of bodies to their various roles in the social order, and is thus ongoing and hierarchical, politics occurs when a radical assertion of equality breaks through this ossified institutional practice. On this account, politics can occur only because of the “equality of any speaking being with any other speaking being” and comes about when the poor, or those who have no part, assert in commonly understood language that they are equal speaking beings, and thus parties to a community of equals.<sup>28</sup> According to Rancière, it is only through the equality of all humans as speaking creatures that assertions of politics can break through the ongoing domination that is the inegalitarian distribution of social bodies.

Although Rancière comes out of a different political–philosophical tradition than the participatory democrats, one can begin to see the manner in which radical democracy draws from participatory democracy while at the same time pushing in new directions. The first element that the two theories share is their radical egalitarianism. For Rancière this comes in a different, perhaps even stronger form. The basis of politics is the radical equality of all speaking beings. The community of equals is “not a goal to be reached but a supposition to be posited from the outset and endlessly repositied.”<sup>29</sup> Rancière is more skeptical concerning the ability of the community of equals to be institutionalized in a social body, but he insists on the radical equality between all speaking beings. This has an interesting consequence for social relations, in that all relations of hierarchy are necessarily built on the shared equality of humans. To partake of inegalitarian social relations, to be a subordinate, requires an ability to comprehend one’s role and place; a comprehension that can only occur when one is, at least implicitly, of equal intelligence to his/her “superiors.” This in turn illustrates the surprising contingency of all social relationships, which are built not on a natural hierarchy but instead necessitate a certain equality as a starting point. To put it differently, social hierarchy cannot get off the ground without an implicit recognition that all are equal. The starting point, the definitive feature of Rancière’s radical democratic politics, is the assertion that “everyone is of equal intelligence.”<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

<sup>26</sup> Whereas Rancière premises democratic politics on the equality of speech, classic contract thinkers such as John Locke premise the foundation of political government on the equality of reason.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

<sup>29</sup> Jacques Rancière, *On the Shores of Politics* (New York: Verso, 2007).

<sup>30</sup> Jacques Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1991), in particular chapter 5 and p. 101.

An important element in radical democratic thought that breaks with participatory democracy is the emphasis on disagreement. Unlike the participatory democrats, radical democrats are careful to characterize politics as an agonistic relationship between different groups. Disagreement is not simply unavoidable; on Rancière's account, it is constitutive of politics.<sup>31</sup> Radical democrats also characterize politics as a sporadic, episodic encounter, something that is neither guaranteed nor easily institutionalized. Democratic politics breaks through the inegalitarian status quo. In Rancière's "10 Theses on Politics," he notes that politics "occurs as a provisional accident in the history of forms of domination."<sup>32</sup> Egalitarian politics is seen as an exception to the normal "rule of those qualified to rule."<sup>33</sup> Nothing guarantees its occurrence, let alone its success in introducing an element of equality into normally hierarchical social arrangements. This concern is also developed by the political theorist Sheldon Wolin, whose body of work I briefly discuss before turning more directly to the question of what participatory and radical democracy can teach one another.

Sheldon Wolin's work, particularly *The Presence of the Past, Democracy Incorporated*, and "Fugitive Democracy," offers an account of radical democracy that is uniquely attuned to the American development of state and economic power over the past century. First, I discuss his extensive criticism of American political-economic practice, before moving on to the other features of his radical democratic theory. To begin the argument, Wolin takes us back to a foundational moment in American politics.

The U.S. constitution was written with a particular conception of power in mind—namely, that those in government offices always quest for more power and, therefore, that the solution is a constitution that places limits on how much power government offices and their occupants can acquire. This conception of power, however, is inadequate in the light of twentieth-century developments. Over the past century new concentrations of power have developed, particularly corporate power, that have established a "consociated" power relationship with the federal government. This consociated power has been responsible for the transformation of the federal government into a mega-state, built upon imperial projections of military power and the governing drives of the international economy.<sup>34</sup>

Wolin, however, is doing more than simply criticizing the degeneration of American constitutional democracy. As a radical democratic theorist, Wolin operates with an expansive conception of democracy. What is required is an expansion of the "meaning of democracy so that it is not confined to political matters but applies as well to social, cultural, and economic relationships."<sup>35</sup> In the same vein, Wolin expresses the extensive focus on participation shared by all

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<sup>31</sup> It is not always clear what kind of disagreement Rancière is referring to; it involves more than just differences in opinion, for he often characterizes politics as a conflict between groups that are differentially empowered. For my purposes here it is enough to recognize the ambiguity with which Rancière employs the term.

<sup>32</sup> Jacques Rancière, "10 Theses on Politics", *Theory and Event*, 5:3 (2001), available online at: ([http://muse.jhu.edu/login?auth=0&type=summary&url=/journals/theory\\_and\\_event/v005/5.3ranciere.html](http://muse.jhu.edu/login?auth=0&type=summary&url=/journals/theory_and_event/v005/5.3ranciere.html)), quotes from Thesis 6.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Sheldon S. Wolin, *The Presence of the Past* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989).

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 212.

participatory and radical democrats. For Wolin, as for Rancière and Pateman, democratic politics “emphasizes cooperation, public deliberation, and diffused and shared power,” and is distrustful of “bureaucratic administration, centralization of power, the elevation of elites, the passivity of the citizenry, and the erosion of participatory politics.”<sup>36</sup> Reducing democracy to merely formal equality under the law eliminates the possibility of a genuinely “popular power” that would extend to all the major institutions of social life, including the economy.<sup>37</sup>

Although he does not conceptualize it in terms of disagreement, Wolin, like Rancière, stresses the importance of difference and contestation. His criticism of the totalizing features characteristic of modern consociated forms of power stresses the manner in which they eliminate difference, disagreement, and effective opposition, all of which are necessary for a genuine democracy. Wolin’s criticism of consensual democracy, which resembles Rancière’s, is directed toward the American founding. Wolin argues that the constitution is characterized not by its democratic character, but by the limited amount of democratic politics for which it allows, effectively eliminating the disagreement and contestation that constitutes the heart of democratic politics.<sup>38</sup>

Much like other radical democratic theorists, Wolin also characterizes democratic politics as momentary, a transgressing of the ordinary, “doomed to succeed only temporarily,” but always a possibility, in which the “citizen-as-actor” triumphs over the politics of centralized state management.<sup>39</sup> Thus he argues that democratic politics cannot be effectively institutionalized or reduced to a process. It is a moment, an “ephemeral phenomenon rather than a settled system,” a multiplicity of “small politics, small projects, small business” in which those who have “no means of redress” act and speak their grievances. The task proponents of a radical democratic politics face at this point is not reconciliation or consensus, but rather that of “nurturing a discordant democracy” that is “rooted in the ordinary” and capable of recognizing limits.<sup>40</sup> Wolin provides one of the most powerful critiques within democratic theory of the political-economic barriers that stand in the way of a radical, participatory democratic politics.

### **The Importance of Institutions: What Participatory Democracy Can Teach Radical Democracy (and Us)**

If radical democracy is, broadly speaking, more contemporary and more directly engaged with the problems of the post-Cold-War world, why discuss participatory democracy at all?

Should we just proclaim ourselves radical democrats and move from there? In this section I argue that participatory democracy still has much to teach us. First, participatory democracy should not simply be discarded in favor of more recent theories of radical democracy; its focus on institution building retains key insights

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<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 200–202.

<sup>37</sup> Sheldon S. Wolin, *Politics and Vision* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004), pp. 526–527.

<sup>38</sup> See Wolin, *Presence of the Past* and Sheldon S. Wolin, “Fugitive Democracy,” in Seyla Benhabib (ed.), *Democracy and Difference* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), pp. 31–45.

<sup>39</sup> Wolin, “Fugitive Democracy,” pp. 42–43.

<sup>40</sup> Wolin, *Politics and Vision*, pp. 601–606.

that later radical theorists such as Rancière have largely abandoned. These insights include consideration of how greater democracy might be institutionalized and the potential benefits it can have for legitimizing democratic authority structures, encouraging broader participation, and transforming individuals. Second, democratic theory, particularly its critically oriented, radical-participatory component, needs a reinvigoration of participatory democracy, particularly in light of the fact that there is some empirical evidence that participatory institutions are capable of being successfully realized.<sup>41</sup>

Theorists of radical democracy effectively draw our attention to the dangers of exclusion inherent in all forms of institutionalized politics, including participatory ones, but they fail to offer any satisfying reason for not making some attempts at institutionalizing more participatory mechanisms of governance, both in the formal political arena and in the workplace. Moreover, much of politics is defined precisely by formal decision-making and the distribution of resources, and it is a fundamental contribution of participatory theories of democracy to stress the need for further democratization of these political and economic institutions. As Benjamin Barber argues, democratic “politics is devoted to the legitimation of power and influence,” an accomplishment only realized when institutions of “power and influence” are organized along strongly democratic lines.<sup>42</sup>

The essential questions to ask of Rancière and Wolin (in his radical democratic mode) are: What do the brief assertions of equality or protest, valorized by these thinkers as democratic politics, actually accomplish in the long term? What happens after the moment of rupture? Are we as radical-participatory democrats really doomed to failure, as these two theorists at times suggest? If we abandon our hope for institutionalization of more participatory modes of decision-making, what goals should we have?

Jacques Rancière offers the example of the workers who rise up and in doing so show that they *can* operate the factory themselves, but do not actually need to, their *demonstration* of power being enough. But the power of this example is found precisely in the fact that the worker uprising either leads to tangible institutional change, such as greater worker management, or to some form of sustained, institutional pressure on the part of the workers against those above them, with less immediate but still real results. Without attention to the un-sexy question of institutionalization, radical democratic politics reduces itself to a form of public self-expression without the prospect of sustained success. While a key feature of politics, the democratic political experience is not reducible to symbolic demonstration and self-disclosure results be damned.<sup>43</sup> What is needed, and

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<sup>41</sup>I have in mind here particularly Participatory Budgeting, which Pateman calls attention to in her APSA presidential address. See Carole Pateman, “Participatory Democracy Revisited.” *Perspectives on Politics* 10:1 (2012), pp. 7–19.

<sup>42</sup>Benjamin Barber, *The Conquest of Politics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988), p. 107.

<sup>43</sup>For an articulation of some of the features of democratic politics, see Michael Walzer, “Deliberation, and What Else?” in Stephen Macedo (ed.), *Deliberative Politics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 58–69. See also Aletta J. Norval, “Writing a Name in the Sky”: Rancière, Cavell, and the Possibility of Egalitarian Inscription,” *American Political Science Review* 106:4 (2012), pp. 810–826, for an alternative argument that Rancière’s work provides the resources for an adequate attentiveness to the imperatives of institutionalization, or “inscription,” as Rancière terms it.

what is also the key contribution of participatory theorists of democracy, is the articulation of the prerequisites for institutionalizing a more participatory society and what such an institutionalization might look like.

I therefore draw on Pateman, Wolin, and, as an added perspective, Benjamin Barber, as leverage for my argument because they offer three key resources for understanding both what a participatory democracy requires and how to move in that direction, to be detailed below. Pateman stresses the importance of allowing for greater participation within the workplace and the society at large, which will serve as an educational experience, empowering the citizens involved to effectively participate in the institutions to which they belong. In this sense, more participation produces better participation, which in turn produces more participation, in what becomes a virtuous democratic circle. Second, Pateman attends to the class, gender, and racial hierarchies that currently inhibit the effective operation of this circle and which will need to be eliminated for a participatory society to flourish. Barber also offers an important contribution to this discussion given his stress on the inherently open-ended, conflictual, and incomplete nature of politics, which does not in any way preclude attempts at further democratization of political and economic institutions, as Rancière would at times appear to suggest. In fact, Barber, contra Rancière, is deeply concerned with democratizing key institutions, both domestically and globally, and is also attentive to the difficulties faced in doing so in an increasingly fast-paced, globalized world.

Finally, and most interestingly, Wolin himself offers a key point to stress when considering institutionalization of participatory mechanisms. Through his emphasis on the slow, deliberate pace and locality necessary to participate in politics, Wolin betrays a deep participatory concern for how to make such a local democratic politics enduring. These are necessary features not just of the protest politics that the radical theorists stress, but of *any* democratic politics, including formal processes at the local and national level. It is a key challenge for both participatory and radical theorists to consider how the prerequisites of democratic politics interact with, resist, and coincide with the increasingly fast and global economy and the increasingly centralized and bureaucratic state.<sup>44</sup> This particularly vexing question cannot be resolved here but is a key concern for future research.

Fortunately, theorists of participatory democracy have made some attempts to further sketch out this institutional vision. Benjamin Barber's *Strong Democracy* is exemplary in this regard. Barber suggests a series of practical steps toward increasing local and national participation, from regular neighborhood assemblies and election to local offices by lot to a national initiative and referendum process, each of which is designed to give citizens a meaningful form of self-governance (beyond voting and representation) in at least some areas of their lives, some of the time. Pateman, as discussed above, also goes into greater detail with regard to how these principles can be extended to, and institutionalized within, the workplace.<sup>45</sup> Democratic theorists of a more radical bent, going back to the 1960s

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<sup>44</sup>For an argument that stresses the positive democratic possibilities inherent in an increasingly fast-paced, globalized world, see William E. Connolly, *Neuropolitics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002).

<sup>45</sup>Proponents of participatory economics have also explored this issue. See Robin Hahnel and Michael Albert, *The Political Economy of Participatory Economics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991) and Michael Albert, *Parecon* (New York: Verso, 2004).

and continuing today, have effectively called attention to the significant political content and authenticity found in the politics of protest. There is no reason to think, however, that the institutional politics of formal decision-making is any less important. In so far as some manner of institutional vision is needed to give a democratic theory some weight, the recent radical democratic theorists neglect this issue to their own detriment. Participatory democratic theorists such as Barber and Pateman, as well as more leftist theorists such as Murray Bookchin, have given the ephemeral politics of self-government in the street its proper weight without neglecting the question of institutionalization. If participatory democratic theory is to be reinvigorated today, it needs to maintain this concern for institution building alongside the politics of protest and spontaneity.

A reinvigorated theory of participatory democracy, therefore, should retain the institutional concerns found in the works of many of its early proponents, while at the same time incorporating the insights of recent radical theories of democracy. In the work of Carole Pateman and Sheldon Wolin, we find the most effective tools for fashioning an updated theory of participatory democracy. I identify Pateman as a foundational participatory democrat, and Wolin as a radical democrat, but these classifications are simplifications used for illustrative purposes. Pateman's work contains not just the key features of the participatory tradition, but also the seeds for the later insights of radical democracy. Similarly, Wolin can be classified as a radical democrat, but his work blurs the (already fuzzy) lines between the two bodies of thought, and if he can be called a radical democrat, he arrived at that place by way of participatory democracy. We must therefore briefly revisit the works of these two thinkers to sketch out the beginnings of a new participatory democratic theory.

As discussed above, while Pateman can be considered a participatory democrat, her work is attentive to the free time and resources necessary to participate which radical democrats will call particular attention to.<sup>46</sup> Similarly, Pateman is deeply concerned with gendered differentials in access to political participation. In the last decade she has turned her attention to the economic resources necessary for full democratic citizenship, which can best be instituted through a guaranteed basic income. The basic income is of particular importance in guaranteeing women the economic independence to participate in political life on an equal footing with men. Pateman argues that a (essentially participatory) conception of freedom as self-government requires that not only must citizens live within democratic structures, but also that these citizens have the "standing, and are able (have the opportunities and the means) to enjoy and safeguard their freedom."<sup>47</sup> This concern for being physically, psychologically, and economically capable of participating in democratic institutions is a key point of stress in the later works of Rancière and Wolin, and it is one that must be developed further in any theory of participatory democracy. Pateman's work

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<sup>46</sup>Jane Mansbridge sums up this idea nicely: "the immediate costs and benefits of political participation usually vary considerably from one individual to the next, depending on the individual's other obligations, financial resources, verbal skills, social ties, and information about the problem at hand," from *Beyond Adversary Democracy* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1983), p. 249.

<sup>47</sup>Carole Pateman, "Democratizing Citizenship: Some Advantages of a Basic Income," *Politics and Society* 32:89 (2004), pp. 89–105.

shows a growing sensitivity to this concern and can serve as a crucial resource for constructing this theory.

In addition, Pateman calls attention to the transformative potential of participatory institutions, which can both empower and educate citizens, drawing them into the democratic process and teaching them how to participate more thoughtfully at the same time. The idea here is that individual psychology is impacted by the authority structures within which it operates and thus more democratic institutions can have liberating effects. There is at least some empirical evidence to corroborate this hope: participatory budgeting in Brazil, which Pateman discusses in her recent work, draws a disproportionate number of middle and lower income participants, produces redistributive outcomes, and appears to empower its participants.<sup>48</sup> Similarly, James Fishkin's deliberative opinion polls, which contain a participatory element, demonstrate that citizens both enjoy and are educated by face-to-face discussion of political issues.<sup>49</sup> This may sound less poetic than the celebratory rhetoric of individual transformation offered by Pateman and Barber, but it is no less meaningful for democratic possibilities.

Finally, we turn to Wolin's body of work. While I classify Wolin as a radical democrat in the schematization above, his work often defies the boundaries between the two bodies of thought. In the world we inhabit today, with totalizing forms of economic and political power combining to make meaningful democracy difficult, if not impossible, democracy must be reconceptualized as a "mode of being that is conditioned by bitter experience, doomed to succeed only temporarily," but still everywhere a recurring possibility.<sup>50</sup> The democratic politics of popular struggle and protest thus becomes the defining political moment, that which is constitutive of the political itself. Here we can see Wolin the radical democrat, using language that is striking in its resemblance to Rancière.<sup>51</sup>

At the same time, Wolin never abandons his hope that the political moment of democratic upsurge, of popular protest taken to the streets, might actually begin to take institutional form, even if its potentialities and power will always exceed and threaten to overflow any institutional arrangement. In *Democracy Incorporated*,

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<sup>48</sup> See Pateman, "Participatory Democracy Revisited," and Brian Wampler, *Participatory Budgeting in Brazil* (College Station, TX: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2007).

<sup>49</sup> See James Fishkin, *Democracy and Deliberation* and *When the People Speak* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009). Recent research also provides evidence that jury participation promotes political engagement. See John Gastil, E. Pierre Deess, Philip J. Weiser, and Cindy Simmons, *The Jury and Democracy: How Jury Deliberation Promotes Civic Engagement and Political Participation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

<sup>50</sup> See Emily Hauptmann, "A Local History of the Political," *Political Theory* 32:1 (2004), pp. 34–60. Hauptmann traces the evolution of Wolin's conception of the political, in which "the political" is reconceptualized as the non-institutional "mode of experience" whereby democratic politics becomes possible. Institutionalization, then, is to be avoided because it creates and solidifies hierarchies that make democratic action impossible. This is an important insight, but Wolin never entirely abandons his concern for the possible institutionalization of a radically democratic form of politics, as I argue below. See *Democracy Incorporated* for Wolin's most recent approach to democracy as a radical, protean mode of being, combined with his concern for potentially institutionalizing participatory mechanisms of democracy. See also Sheldon S. Wolin, "Political Theory as a Vocation," *The American Political Science Review* 63:4 (1969), pp. 1062–1082, for a discussion of his general approach to political theory.

<sup>51</sup> Wolin, "Fugitive Democracy," p. 43.

Wolin evokes the dream of a participatory democracy in which “elections would constitute but one element in a process of popular discussion, consultation, and involvement.”<sup>52</sup> Similarly, he celebrates the efforts of the New Deal to establish a functional social democracy with certain participatory elements, even as it also carried with it the prospect of new forms of power that pose a threat to local, democratic politics. Wolin, then, is in many ways the model figure for future research in democratic theory that productively combines both participatory and radical insights. Retaining his desire for a participatory politics of local democracy that might actually someday be realized, he has also incorporated over the past several decades the insights of radical democratic theorists, particularly Jacques Rancière, in which politics is seen as momentary, fleeting, and constituted through agonistic, popular challenges to the policies, institutions, and exclusions that often constitute the formal political sphere of legislation and governance. In the following section, I turn to the ways in which these new radical democratic emphases offer valuable insights for participatory democracy.

### **The Collapsing Conditions of Democratic Possibility: What Radical Democracy Can Teach Participatory Democracy (and Us)**

Given the insights one finds in participatory democracy with regard to the benefits of institutionalization, what does radical democracy have to offer? What can it teach participatory democracy that other democratic theories fail to provide? In this section I engage the work of Wolin and Rancière to demonstrate the central lesson of radical democracy, namely that the conditions of democratic possibility have changed. In particular, radical democrats such as Wolin call attention to the possibility that the political moment of the 1960s may have been just that—a moment in which space emerged for a particular kind of localized participatory democratic politics, but one that has since closed or been fundamentally altered. In his recent work *Politics Without Vision*, Tracy Strong notes how Wolin’s classic *Politics and Vision*, initially published in 1960, was concerned with the shrinking of the political realm, but that it still retained a small hope that a democratic political space might emerge in the future (a hope perhaps partly realized in the various social movements of the 1960s). In Wolin’s expanded edition, published forty-four years later, this slim hope has disappeared entirely. In Strong’s interpretation, “the message was now that the elimination of politics from Western experience was all but accomplished and had been replaced by what he called *inverted totalitarianism*.”<sup>53</sup> The recent work of radical democrats such as Wolin and Rancière illustrates why this pessimism might be justified.

Wolin’s reconceptualization of corporate-state power is central to his critique of existing democratic (and economic) practice and his radical democratic ideal. In recent years, he has advanced the notion that certain trends within American politics-economics are pushing the USA toward a form of “inverted totalitarianism.” What Wolin means by this term is that a form of politics is developing in the USA that is thoroughly distinct from classic totalitarianisms (Nazi Germany,

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<sup>52</sup> Sheldon S. Wolin, *Democracy Incorporated* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008), p. 147.

<sup>53</sup> Tracy B. Strong, *Politics Without Vision* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2012), p. 6.



Stalinist Russia) and yet still merits the name “totalitarian.” If totalitarianism refers to “an idealized conception of a society as a systematically ordered whole,” where the parts collectively further the purposes of the central government, then inverted totalitarianism is a distinctively new variant. Inverted totalitarianism is not built upon a single charismatic leader but is systemic; it involves a demobilized, apolitical citizenry rather than a constantly mobilized populace, can coexist with existing democratic institutions (rather than requiring their dismantling), and is decidedly economic in character as opposed to the political orientation of Nazi Germany.<sup>54</sup>

Wolin is also attentive to the gap between the kind of citizen that is produced through the dynamics of global superpower/domestic consociated power and the kind of citizen needed for a localized democratic politics. Because inverted totalitarianism requires some measure of citizen complicity, it must produce the sorts of citizens who will, in fact, be complicit with its dynamics. In the USA we thus find a “schizoid condition” in which citizens are alienated from the government, even fearful of it, while at the same time fiercely loyal and trusting of their leaders in the context of the war on terror. This scared but loyal citizenry allows for and even supports the policies of corporate-state power. It is a far cry from the democratic citizen who is “actively involved in the exercise of power.”<sup>55</sup> In fact, the ideal of the democratic public sphere itself, built around democratic citizens, has been called into question and seriously delegitimized. The triumph of neoliberalism has been to “hammer home the astounding principle that a democratically chosen government [is] the enemy of the people.”<sup>56</sup> This has further undermined the possibility of instituting a more participatory form of democracy.

Of concern as well is the fact that, much as Rancière has argued, the corporate economy has become something untouchable, beyond the wilful decision-making of the polity. People are so resigned, scared, and accepting of the economy as it stands that “no group, party, or political actors dare alter its fundamental structure.”<sup>57</sup> The economy that could be molded to fit social needs, as understood by New Deal and Great Society Democrats, has given way to an advanced economy that we dare not disturb beyond the most limited tinkering. In fact, an alternative to capitalism as it now operates has become virtually unthinkable, let alone something that might actually be constructed through popular pressure and organization.<sup>58</sup>

Similarly, Rancière diagnoses the post-Cold War moment as one in which the conditions of democratic politics are potentially being eroded. His concept of policing, discussed above, is used to distinguish the hierarchical operations of distribution that are normally assigned the name “politics” from those sporadic assertions of equality that for Rancière constitute democratic politics. Rancière in particular turns his critical attention to what he terms “consensual democracy,” which actually attempts to eliminate all forms of disagreement, and thus politics, from the social body. What is so troubling about the emergence of this “consensual

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<sup>54</sup> Wolin, *Democracy Incorporated*, p. 46.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 60, 110–11, 80–81.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 156.

<sup>57</sup> Wolin, *Politics and Vision*, pp. 578–79.

<sup>58</sup> Wolin, *Democracy Incorporated*.

democracy" is that while the democratic institutions remain in place, the room for disagreement, for the democratic assertion of equality on the part of those who do not count, has been eliminated. The desire for consensual democracy is the desire for a polity that has eliminated disruptive democratic politics, to be replaced with apolitical administration and private domination, a desire perhaps felt in Fukuyama's end of history thesis and profoundly connected to neoliberal ideology.

In other words, radical democrats effectively draw our attention to the changes of the past half-century, changes that may have crucial implications for the aspirations of participatory democrats. The rise of transnational corporate power, globalization, growing inequality, the left being put on the defensive for several decades, and what Wolin calls the "megastate" all indicate in various ways that the democratic hopes of earlier generations may need to be significantly revised, if indeed they are still realizable at all. On my reading, radical democracy argues that the "moments of rupture" when a "fugitive democracy" fleetingly takes hold may be the best that the current moment has to offer. As work is increasingly precarious, flexible, and part-time, and as private sector unions continue to be decimated, the hope of participatory democrats that the workplace could be democratized and made more egalitarian seem increasingly difficult to realize. This is in some sense a tragic reading that I am suggesting, particularly with regard to Wolin, who clearly espouses the ideals of participatory democracy in much of his work, but seems to lament the (apparent) loss of its possibility in recent years.

To restate the lesson slightly, radical democracy shows us the challenge that participatory democracy must meet if it is to be relevant for the twenty-first century, and just how enormous that challenge may be. It retains some of the radical aspirations of the 1960s while moving into the post-Cold-War world and confronting some of the unique difficulties that this world presents, including the (until recently) seemingly unchallenged hegemony of neoliberalism in policy as well as popular and academic discourse along with fragmentation on the left.<sup>59</sup> This is the manner in which participatory and radical democracy may not be quite so opposed to one another as is sometimes suggested. They have much to learn from one another not only because of their differences but also due to the fact that these are productive differences. Wolin's recent work takes the ideals of the 1960s and, rather than discard them, asks to what extent they are realizable today. The fact that the conditions of democratic possibility may be shrinking is not a rejection of participatory democracy per se but a crucial qualification, one that suggests that it must be (at the very least) reworked to a significant degree to meet the very challenges that radical democrats raise. In the conclusion I offer some suggestions for where democratic theory can go from here and why participatory democracy may still be a viable, indeed especially powerful, normative theory of democracy for the twenty-first century.

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<sup>59</sup> It is perhaps not surprising that one finds a certain amount of pessimism amongst many democratic theorists writing in the 1990s and early 2000s. For example, see Jeffrey Isaac, *Democracy In Dark Times* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998) and the essays in Wendy Brown's *Edgework Critical Essays on Knowledge and Politics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005). Similarly, and central to this article, is the profound pessimism found in Wolin's recent work.

## Conclusion

In this article, I argue that radical and participatory theories of democracy have much to say to one another and still have much to offer to contemporary democratic theory, especially as it has become increasingly dominated by deliberative theories of democracy. I conclude with a few thoughts on the future of democratic theory and some suggestions for its research agenda. A central development in American politics over the past half-century has been the growing rise in income inequality and the unchecked expansion of national and transnational corporate power. With the *Citizens United* Supreme Court ruling in 2010, the floodgates further opened for corporate power to openly purchase political power, and the ever-present threat of capital flight places limits on the ability of national governments to adequately tax and regulate the corporate world, let alone pursue a more radical economic agenda. Witness the recent Swiss referendum to limit CEO compensation to no more than twelve times that of the company's lowest paid employee, which failed after several major Swiss corporations threatened to leave the country should it pass.<sup>60</sup> Furthermore, income inequality has been dramatically increasing in the USA since the 1970s, a development that has undoubtedly impacted the realizability of the democratic ideal of political equality. By most estimates, the top one percent currently earns more than twenty percent of the national income, up considerably from its low point of nine percent in the 1970s, and the top ten percent earns roughly half of the nation's income.<sup>61</sup> What impact do these relatively recent developments have on the prospects for democracy in the twenty-first century?

This question, I argue, is essential to adequately theorize democracy and the political in the coming years. While radical democrats such as Wolin have suggested that some of these developments may be profoundly changing the nature of American politics, neither radical democracy nor participatory democracy has sufficiently dealt with these developments. I will thus finish as an engaged critic of these two bodies of theory, posing the challenge and suggesting some ways in which they might meet it. It is also important to note that certain competing theories of democracy, such as deliberative and republican theories, also must address these issues and have for the most part been no more successful in doing so than participatory and radical democracy.

To be fair to participatory democracy, its primary development and heyday was a roughly twenty-year period from the mid-1960s to the mid-1980s, and thus participatory theorists did not have a chance to reflect on the rise of corporate power and growing inequality because these developments had not yet fully unfolded. Much participatory democratic theory was written prior to the moment when income inequality began its steady growth and cannot be blamed for failing to articulate a response to this development. Furthermore, I will suggest that participatory democracy, though in certain respects dated, still offers some valuable tools for dealing with these pressing issues. Before doing so, however, we must briefly consider how radical democracy has addressed the issue of corporate power and economic inequality.

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<sup>60</sup> Anderson, S. and Pizzigati, S. (2013) "Swiss Activists: Let's Cap CEO Pay", *The Nation*, December 2. Available online at: <<http://www.thenation.com/article/177424/swiss-activists-lets-cap-ceo-pay>>.

<sup>61</sup> See Timothy Noah, *The Great Divergence* (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2012).

The radical democracy on which I have been focusing has largely drawn from the work of Sheldon Wolin and Jacques Rancière, whose writings since the 1980s take up some of these concerns. Radical democracy, as I suggest above, does give us some insight into how these changes have harmed democratic prospects but does not tell us how they can be dealt with. If meaningful forms of democracy today can only burst forth in fugitive moments, then corporate power may be beyond challenge. It is not clear exactly how Rancière's moments of rupture or Wolin's fugitive democracy can alter the course of corporate power, and neither theorist fully tackles the question. If Occupy Wall Street was an example of a radical democratic moment, what was its impact? Suppose we grant that it helped to change the national conversation (which I believe to be true), this still is not enough to structurally challenge and change the nature of corporate power and economic inequality. Such an enormous task would need a sustained, popular movement such as Occupy Wall Street to last for years, not a few months, with an impact not just on our discourse but with tangible electoral results as well, culminating over time in institutional change. This, I would argue, would be more involved and substantial than the short-lived moments of uprising suggested by radical democrats.

On the plus side, these problems are not unique to participatory and radical democrats but ought to be of concern for all democratic theorists. Furthermore, participatory democracy offers some insight into how we might tackle a few of these problems. The participatory democratic focus on workplace democracy<sup>62</sup> offers one avenue for challenging growing income inequality—worker-run factories frequently opt for relatively equal pay-scales, and thus greater workplace democracy offers the possibility of reducing income inequality within a given workplace or even across a broader industry.<sup>63</sup> Similarly, participatory budgeting in Brazilian cities has challenged clientelism, promoted transparency, and frequently produced redistributive outcomes with regard to city development projects. The radical-participatory tradition has shown itself able to respond to important changes in the political-economic realm, as evidenced by recent developments in radical democratic theory. Nevertheless, it remains a task for current proponents of participatory democracy to articulate how localized institutions such as municipal participatory budgeting and workplace democracy could effectively be combined with national (or even international) strategies to combat corporate power's corrosive effect on democratic equality. If participatory democracy can meet this (exceptionally difficult) challenge, it will prove not only its continued relevance but also its unique value to democratic theory.

### Notes on contributor

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<sup>62</sup> See Pateman, *Participation and Democratic Theory*; Peter Bachrach and Aryeh Botwinick *Power and Empowerment: A Radical Theory of Participatory Democracy* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1992) and Mansbridge, *Beyond Adversary Democracy*.

<sup>63</sup> For a sympathetic account of the Spanish worker-run cooperative Mondragon and the relative equality amongst its workers, see J.K. Gibson-Graham *A Postcapitalist Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), pp. 101–126.

theory, in particular participatory and radical-agonistic theories of democracy. His main areas of interest concern how to institutionalize participatory mechanisms of decision-making in government and the workplace, the tensions between unity and plurality found in participatory and radical theories of democracy, community, and citizenship, and the new left. He has also written on liberal penal reform and philosophies of punishment.