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The Third Democratic Transformation: From European to Planetary Politics

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Abstract

This contribution to the symposium explores one aspect of the arrival of planetary politics under the broad label of the third democratic transformation, a transformation unfolding now at all levels of governance, from the local to the global through the regional, in spite of the anti-democratic forces at play around the world. This article starts by exploring the new frontier of normative power Europe in a post-colonial key, arguing that the European Union can serve as a laboratory for such a democratic transformation, around four interrogations related to claims of decentring, doubting, experimenting and decolonising. It then offers a descriptive-normative typology of the core attributes of the third democratic transformation observable in numerous signs and practices both in Europe and around the world through a sixfold evolution, namely, trans-temporal, transnational, trans-modal, trans-local, trans-scalar and, across all these, translational. It concludes on the conditions of possibility for this transformation.

Keywords: normative power; planetary politics; post-colonial; transnational democracy

Introduction

The Anthropocene, we know, is not about today's Anthropos, us, but about the fate of our others – others from our past who have brought us here, other species and kinds of lives and other future humans – all other worlds that today's humans have relentlessly colonised. 'Planetary politics' denotes the arrival of all these others onto a worldwide political stage where the whole earth no longer features as a passive *décor* but has become the main character of the play, a character whose fate depends on and determines that of all these others. As Gardels (2023) aptly puts it, 'the central problem of contemporary planetary politics is the internalization of the world'.

Today, scholars are increasingly aware of how the Anthropocene presents new and parallel challenges to the natural and social sciences by claiming that humanity is 'entangled' with a myriad of scales, spaces, being(s) and temporalities, which emanate most fundamentally from the need to secure ourselves from ourselves, humanity from humanity (Hamilton, 2017). And so we ask in earnest: how reflexive are we, humans, about the transformation of the story we tell about our collective agency? Are we capable of taking in *together* the planetary reality in its multiplicity, in its animate and inanimate forms (Mbembe, 2022)? Or do we remain locked in our atavistic urge to slice it, fight over its bits and pieces and ignore the wounds we inflict on its crust?

An international relations (IR) agenda that seeks to grapple with these questions and scan the new theoretical and prescriptive horizons opened up by planetary politics has emerged (Burke et al., 2016; Dryzek and Pickering, 2018). Accordingly, the current transformation of politics beyond the state is brought about not only by intersecting and

mutually reinforcing global challenges but also by our evolving inter-subjective constructs to deal with them.

Applying the insights of the 'normative power' approach to planetary politics, as we do in this symposium, expands this IR agenda to the interdisciplinary and post-colonial critique of European powerhood, putting into question the Eurocentrism of contemporary IR notions of 'normativity', 'power' or 'borders', as well as the units to which they may apply, for example, 'nation', 'regions' or 'empires', and the languages used to analyse them (Manners, 2002, 2023).

In my contribution to the symposium, I reflect on one aspect of this agenda, namely, the place of democracy in planetary politics. I will not rehearse here the many faces of democratic erosion, grievance populism and societal trust collapse affecting the immune systems of democracies – however weak they may have been in the first place. Echoing Mbembe's (2022) conviction that democracy will have to be reinvented in the age of planetary crises, I take the paradoxical stance that precisely in this epochal moment of ascendancy of ruthless authoritarian regimes and of shrinking civil space everywhere [as documented most recently by the office of the United Nations (UN) Special Rapporteur on the rights of freedom of peaceful assembly and of association and the World Movement for Democracy], we are witnessing a fascinating countervailing phenomenon: the advent of a 'third democratic transformation'.

Of what do we speak? In *Democracy and Its Critics* (1989), Robert A. Dahl, one of the foremost analysts of democracy after World War II, traces the genealogy of democracy's previous 'arrivals' born from radical acts of imagination through two great historical transformations in human history, each stretching human possibilities to their limits and perhaps beyond. Yet,

> because the democratic vision is so daring in its promise, it forever invites us to look beyond, and to break through, the existing limits of structures and consciousness. The first democratic transformation broke through the previous limits of traditional government by the few, whether in the form of monarchy, aristocracy, oligarchy or tyranny, and created new structures and beliefs that supported government by the many in democratic or republican city-states. Two millennia later the second democratic transformation broke through the limits of all previous structures and beliefs by deliberately applying the idea of democracy to the large domain of the national state.

There have been many problematisations with this schema, both because of its Eurocentric character and because of the characterisation it offers of these two past transformations (see, inter alia, the work of Archibugi et al., 2011). For our purpose here, however, I concentrate on the ensuing question: is a third transformation of 'democratic limits and possibilities' now on the horizon? Dahl's (2005) answer was equivocal at best. For him, whilst the history of democratic development offers us encouragement, it also posts a warning, one with which it would be hard to disagree:

> For the story of democracy is as much a record of failures as of successes: of failures to transcend existing limits, of momentary breakthroughs followed by massive defeats, and sometimes of utopian ambitions followed by disillusionment and despair (…) feasible solutions often prove elusive, and those who so easily construct an ideal democracy in their imaginations soon discover that it is far harder, or even impossible, to construct that ideal in the real world.

On what grounds are we to decree that democracy today is 'transcending existing limits' and that the discrepancy between ideal and reality is narrowing? How do we know in particular that democracy both within and beyond the state is capable of accommodating the various exigencies of our new planetary politics, including a deep engagement with shared existential threats [nuclear, climate and artificial intelligence (AI)] in a post-colonial key?

In tackling these questions, the third democratic transformation transcends the mainstream agenda to 'democratise global governance' in at least three ways.

First, planetary democracy changes our gaze on the global. For if there is no physical outside to the globalisation story, the planetary story is its metaphysical alternative. Whilst with global governance as a diplomatic exercise, democratising emerges as an afterthought, planetary politics *is* a politics, a cosmopolitics of ubiquitous *local* demand for *global* agency in the face of existential threats to all, including crucially non-humans. The idea of transformation implies that planetary and democratic questions are co-constitutive.

Second, old ideological conflicts are becoming secondary if not obsolete. Liberalism, socialism, patriotism or conservatism no longer constitutes the primary prisms through which especially the younger generations argue over alternative solutions to given problems. The inverse obtains. The 'planetary' itself, alongside notions such as 'deep ecology', stands as the primary prism through which one may gauge the helpfulness of alternative ideologies to orient our gaze towards all these others whose fate the Anthropocene has made our shared problem. As such, the planetary gaze helps recast the potential of IR as a discipline able to identify and interpret 'the international of everything' in a world best characterised by its 'societal multiplicity' (Kurki and Rosenberg, 2020).

Third, planetary politics is anchored in everyday practices and augments our focus from economic to democratic interdependence, for example, the reciprocal vulnerabilities between public spheres at all levels of governance, from the local to the global through the regional – the horizontal that we find nested in the so-called multilevel governance. In this sense, the 2020–2022 COVID pandemic may one day be remembered as the moment that opened up our collective democratic imagination to a world of overlapping circles of autonomy and mutuality (Nicolaidis, 2020a).

The term *transformation* is particularly important here not only because it draws on Dahl's typology but also because it helps us navigate the space between, on the one hand, 'revolution' or radical abrupt change and, on the other hand, the mainstream concept of 'transition', which seems to elude the conflictual and deep fractures that underpin the current crisis facing the democratic ideal, as apparent in citizens' disenchantment with mainstream electoral democracy.

I argue here that we stand indeed at the dawn of a third democratic transformation, but a much more complex and multifaceted transformation than that dismissed by Dahl when he last contemplated it at the end of his life – an ideationally, sociologically and technology-driven transformation. Although patchy and with fits and starts, such third democratic transformation is observable in numerous signs and practices around the world. Thus I define the third democratic transformation as "an incipient sixfold evolution of planetary politics, namely, towards a trans-temporal, transnational, trans-modal, trans-local, trans-scalar and, across all these, translational transformation".

I further argue, supplementing the reflections offered by Ian Manners, Michelle Pace, Maxine David, Roberta Guerrina and Katharine Wright, that the European Union (EU) is well placed to ask how the arrival of more democratic planetary politics may be enacted. Through new acts of imagination translated into language (Cochran, 1999) and by adequately resourcing the myriad concrete ideas and practices that already exist, it can scale up and institutionalise a theory of change combining bottom-up and top-down developments. To speak of a 'third democratic transformation' brings the European experiment back to the fore as a very approximative laboratory for planetary politics and democracy, whereby, as with any laboratory, reflexivity is served by repeated trials and errors, half successes and failures, which themselves become relevant to the rest of the world. As a post-colonial scholar interrogating such an idea, I continue to recast a critical light on the normative power agenda, wary of the irony of calling for European 'humility' whilst implying that an example here there may be.

As a disclaimer, although grounded in empirical observations, this contribution does not offer empirical generalisations. As a horizon-scanning exercise, it offers instead a critical description on the actual democracy dimension of evolving planetary politics, whilst mostly overlooking for now the vast relevant philosophical scholarship on the topic. Under the remit of critical social theory (CST), I continue to embrace immanent critique, looking to the seeds of progress in the here and now without necessarily engaging into a conversation as to how realistic their projection in the future might be. Immanence is about our power to imagine what we already see. The forecaster's notion of 'weak signals' hardly does justice to this phenomenon. Think ubiquitous even if tiny democratic disturbances. When observing immanent trends, it is useful to compare the fears, desires and biases of the younger generation with the realities of power politics, which in turn calls for bringing into our sight the long arch of history and imaginary alternatives that connect long-term futures with a palimpsest of past struggles that have traced humanity's democratic journey. Importantly, I do not claim that trends highlighted here are irreversible or strong enough to overcome the counter-currents of democratic erosion that are today amongst us. One may even imagine ways in which citizens could use their newfound 'cockiness' or daring experimentalism against established hierarchies, to reverse the trends described here, owing to the fragility of democracy and the constant element of becoming in it (Connolly, 2002).

In the first part, I revisit the broader agenda that occupies us here, namely, the new planetary frontier of normative power Europe in a post-colonial key. In the second part, and against this decolonising backdrop, I offer a sixfold typology of the core attributes of the third democratic transformation. To conclude, I raise questions associated with the conditions of possibility for this transformation.

I. A Post-colonial Europe as a Laboratory for Planetary Politics

There has long been a story of Europe as a vanguard Kantian cosmopolitan project, the first appropriation of Kant's mantle by an existing political construct, even whilst his thinking evolved over his lifetime towards an increasingly loose *foedus pacificum* against the danger of a despotic universal monarchy (Nicolaidis, 2020b). At least until the crisis years, our ideal EU sought to translate the Kantian commitment to the horizontal sharing of sovereignty into a 21st-century democratic vernacular with the hope that this vision

would prove globally contagious. Indeed, planetary politics suggests that the more grassroot democratic practices ground global co-operation, the more they may moderate the conflictual nature of 'multiplicity as anarchy'.

If normative power was simply such a narrative of projection, feeding on a self-aggrandising EU exceptionalism aspiring to the universal, it would have been bound to fail. But we must contend with the story's self-reflexive nature. Twenty years ago, I noted that what was projected as the EU relevance to the global was not the EU as is, not the EU as the norm, but an EUtopia, that which the EU was aspiring to become in the eyes of others, which precisely in truth it was not (Nicolaïdis and Howse, 2002). But what if in the intervening years, it had come to better approximate the role of a laboratory for world politics?

As with the other contributions to this symposium, I try to reconcile two takes on this question. The first is that although only a minority of EU member states were once colonial powers, the EU remains incapable of slaughtering its demons of self-congratulatory civilising mission. It has not become the pluralist utopia that would inspire democratic transformation in the rest of the world. The second is that the EU is emerging from its many years of crisis as a laboratory for a third democratic transformation.

Between the two, we can acknowledge the schizophrenic character of a post-imperial EU, which both *reproduces* and desperately seeks to *transcend* the old trope of standards of civilisation (Fisher-Onar and Nicolaïdis, 2015). Whether seeds of change from one to the other are actualised remains a test for the plausibility of the laboratory narrative, around four interrogations related to claims of decentring, doubting, experimenting and decolonising.

Decentring? Europe's Narcissistic Wounds and Epistemological Transformations

Freud once described three great narcissistic wounds that forced humans to question their central place in the universe and give up the soothing fantasy of human exceptionalism. The Copernican wound decentred man's home world from the centre of the cosmos. The Darwinian wound did away with the notion of a progressive creation of life forms culminating in man. And the third, the Freudian wound, meant that he was not even the master of his own individual conduct. Humanity would have to give up its narcissistic illusions.

Arguably, Europe is today the victim of narcissistic wounds inflicted by the great eruptions of our time, each deep and existential (De France, 2021) – but also each holding a promise of giving up on narcissistic illusions. (1) Brexit put into question the inevitability of the EU as the incarnation of the European project – but at the same time it demonstrated that the EU was a construct that could be freely left and therefore embraced by choice (Nicolaidis, 2019). (2) The continent went through its long decade of intertwined polycrisis, financial meltdown, border closings and populist anger in the face of elite capture – but arguably emerging from this moment with the beginning of a plan around the Green Deal and the NextGenerationEU fund embedded in an admittedly stuttering global agenda. (3) The long inter-regnum of this early millennium culminating in the war in Ukraine and the ensuing assertion of both the Global South and the Global East has dethroned the West as the centre of gravity of geopolitics – but the EU has engaged in reinventing its geopolitical relevance as a result.

As the EU bandages its narcissistic wounds in the wake of such humbling experiences, can we detect a 'decentring turn'?

The task of scholarship is vast in providing decision-makers and the public at large with ammunition to decentre eurocentrism. It starts with critically engaging with non-Western viewpoints and analytical mindsets, contesting the prevailing 'liberal script' and recasting the relationship between the social sciences and area studies (Acharya, 2014; Chakrabarty, 2008; Fawcett et al., 2020; Fisher Onar and Nicolaïdis, 2013; Fisher-Onar and Nicolaïdis, 2015; Nicolaidis and Youngs, 2023; Spivak, 2002; Young, 2012). As argued by de Sousa Santos in *The End of the Cognitive Empire* (2018), this requires engaging with 'epistemologies of the south' in order to counter the Global North's 'hegemonic way of representing the world as one's own and of transforming it according to one's own needs and aspirations'.

In many parts of the world, however, the emancipatory rhetoric of modernity escapes the simple binary of coloniality versus post-coloniality. As Ballestrin (2014) argues, the coexistence of coloniality and democracy in post-colonial societies 'gives rise to a set of "missing" issues at the heart of the geopolitics of knowledge production', which informs the task of decentring.

One such missing issue has to do with how mainstream thinkers on global or 'cosmopolitan' democracy often sidestep broader structural realities. As Bhambra and Narayan (2017) argue, political subjects do not become citizens in neutral political contexts nor simply as a consequence of their own agency. Rather, we must recognise the ways political and economic space comes to be configured to enable citizenship claims to be made in the first place and the huge gaps in what such citizenship 'buys you' on the local and global stages.

In this vein, academic activists from the Global South, like Spivak, de Sousa Santos, Roy or Rey, argue that the way transnational power centres continue to exercise their dominance matters, not just for the formerly colonised but in different ways for varieties of subalterns *across worlds*, women in various patriarchal contexts, those in lower social classes or those otherwise located in subordinate positions (as highlighted by the critique of the formal egalitarian nature of deliberative processes). If all aspects of modernity have been formed simultaneously with coloniality, locating the 'margins of the modern world' is an imperative for *all* our worlds (Mignolo and Escobar, 2013).

A connected missing issue has to do with engaging with the many appropriation strategies of the word democracy: children in Africa or Latin America continue to learn that democracy was 'born' under the shadow of the Parthenon, the Bastille or Westminster, Dahl's first two transformations. Of course, it was 're-born' there too, but we need to unlearn these unilateral universalisms that took place in specific places, times and sets of material circumstances that encouraged the emergence of a Eurocentric epistemic order, privileging European interpretations of democracy as absolute and therefore 'universal' (Chakrabarty, 2008). By provincialising Europe, we can embrace alternative histories and epistemological traditions and the practices they give rise to.

As both practitioners and scholars, should we fail to look beyond the horizon of such pervasive Eurocentric 'universalisms' manifest in 'EUniversalism' (Nicolaïdis, 2015), we risk reaffirming what de Sousa Santos terms the 'abyssal line'. More pernicious even than the conscious choice to ignore alternative epistemic traditions, this line separates our biased a priori assumptions from pure *unknowns* that are never even considered because

they were never deemed worthy of learning in the first place, the 'unsaids of those unsaid' (de Sousa Santos, 2018). Planetary politics then starts with connecting rather than globalising local histories through productive mutual engagement.

Doubting? EUtopia's Reflexivity

It would be disingenuous to remark without irony that Europeans like to claim for themselves what is probably the most precious legacy of the enlightenment: the virtue of doubt – a virtue all too often conspicuous by its absence in Europe as elsewhere, but nevertheless, one inherent in a certain take on the EUtopia referred to above.

We should not shy away from embracing utopia, Ricoeur argued, once we take in the distinction between that which is claimed as an inspiration for a better life by powerless groups and that which is denounced by the privileged few who feel threatened by it and prefer to defend the status quo. In this spirit, we could allow ourselves to invoke an EUtopia if the EU could prove to be the vessel that allows democrats to push back against state capture by powerful narrow interests, admittedly the most universal marker of ademocratic erosion (Bagg, 2024).

Whilst it is not clear that the existence of the EU actually strengthens those who resist state capture, a fortiori those who seek to do so from an under-privileged position, the EU is arguably more prone than most polities to doubt and self-reflexivity, which in turn has made this utopian role more likely. This is due in no small part to the practice of 'institutional and legal empathy', whereby lawmakers engage in a continuous dialogue across borders about whether the differences between their systems are legitimate or need to be bridged. By embedding such practices of reflexivity within the state, the EU opens up a space for democratic contestation about the value choices made in the construction of its regional order. If deeper democracy of the deliberative and agonistic kind is inseparable from the idea that politics involves some kind of justification to all those affected, this EU practice creates democratic spaces for systematically doubting the reasons offered by the powers that be.

But not all such spaces offer the same kind of democratic respect to all. The commendable efforts to offer public goods as part of a future-oriented, inclusive and fair recovery from COVID were not the result of an inclusive democratic debate (Nicolaïdis, 2023). If societies become sustainable by transforming potential threats into economic opportunities, the democratic question remains 'who decides' on who is afforded such opportunity.

Experimenting? A 'Laboratory' Is Not a 'Model'

Western critical scholars must surely set foot on the road to post-colonial decentring with great humility and vigilance. For much too long has the EU assumed that Europe's own democratic recipes were aspirational models for the rest of the world to emulate (Youngs, 2021). Instead, a reinterpretation of normative power through the lenses of post-colonial powerhood calls for a systematic critique of Europe as a model (Lenz and Nicolaïdis, 2019). We must eschew no doubt the idea that an EU model could be replicated through mimicry whilst changing scale or context – as implied by terms like 'prototype', 'template', 'blueprint' or 'copy' – or the whiggish connotation that the EU sets an advanced standards for history – as implied by words like 'beacon', 'vanguard', 'pioneer' or 'trailblazer'. In contrast, we might take something from the painter's 'model' as an

object of inspiration that is meant to be reinterpreted through her gaze, thus transforming and subverting the original features Picasso like. Here, the EU, like any other regional organisation, is simply an 'exemplar', a 'quarry', a 'toolbox', a 'menu' or a set of practices available for local choice, appropriation and reinterpretation, selective borrowing and tinkering.

The idea of a 'laboratory' emerges from this semantic brouhaha with all its glorious ambiguity, starting with how war-torn Europeans experimented on themselves and the world, conjuring utter barbarity from – and I quote from a non-European – 'the most sublime ideal that Europe, for all the dark side of her imperial aggression, had gifted to humanity – the idea of a civilised modern collective existence based on the exercise of reason in the public sphere' (Chakrabarty, 2018). You may find this formulation over the top. But as a laboratory, the EU can be thought of as atonement for Europe's past sins, a collaboratory, as my friend Istvan suggests, evoking the sense that this is an experiment, evolving through trials and mega "errors", whereby others can learn more from its failures than from its successes.

The 'EU as laboratory' also stems from the acknowledgement that the EU stands as a microcosmos, a micro-planet, with its north–south and east–west cleavages, its centre and periphery, its vast wealth differentials and its cultural, ethnic, linguistic and sociological diversity – a microcosmos also, for the extensive presence of migrants, especially from former colonies, in its midst.

It is worth pausing on the inversion implied by the idea of laboratory, lest we forget that in the past it is always the colony that serves as a 'laboratory' for European modernity, experiments imposed on colonial bodies, lands and behaviour (from fingerprinting in Calcutta to cadastral mapping in French Africa). It may be fitting, therefore, for Europe to offer itself as a laboratory for a post-imperial order, entangled as it is with the rest of the world.

But of course, the EU cannot and should not hold a monopoly on laboratory status. There is no 'controlled conditions' in this metaphorical story. Many more political laboratories exist and will be built around the world that will reflect different understandings of democratic best practices. All need to be embraced, with equi-distance.

Decolonising? Reversing the Democratic Gaze Through Localised Universals

Such sharing in turn leads many to ask most directly: what will it take for Europeans genuinely to decolonise, or as my students say decolonise 2.0? One pathway is for the EU to 'reverse the democratic gaze' (Nicolaidis and Youngs, 2023).

Reversing the gaze is not only about the willingness to learn from the myriad of other democratic practices but also about expecting, or better yet, asking others to pass judgement on the EU. It starts with drawing lessons from how countries have negotiated and adapted their social contracts through constitution-writing and other power-sharing arrangements. Lessons can also be drawn from participatory practices around the world and methods of protest movements, including how young people and civil society use tools like social media for engagement. And there are lessons in how other regional organisations, themselves facing legitimation challenges, deal with the democratic pathologies of their member states, leveraging their increased authority to do so.

When reversing the gaze, we also recognise that much work remains on the home front, which others might help us critically examine. Beyond the very real challenge of democratic regression in Europe, a critical approach calls for unpacking the very roots of Europe's democratic vulnerability around notions of conflict, diversity, pluralism and liberalism, including in stressing the historical links between hubristic notions of human freedom and Western conceptions of human domination over nature (Connolly, 2002, 2017). In the post-colonial vein, scholars like Bahar Rumelili (2004) argue that the European notion of liberal toleration at the heart of its democratic identity stands in tension with effective pluralism, for it is based on a presupposition of superiority of one epistemology, a base orthodoxy that is preferable to whatever is being tolerated, thus creating an inherently unequal structure. This is in contrast with genuine pluralism in the international plane, seen through the prism of the 'multiplicity school' and Williams' (2015) ethical pluralism, concerned with a diversity of ethical codes, rules, goals and ends, reflecting the conviction that there are many different (often incommensurable) goods required for human flourishing (Reus Smit, 2018).

Were we to fall short of genuine pluralism by unreflexively anointing and promoting contested democratic practices, we too would be accountable for the harm caused by simplistically contrasting '…European humanism, committed to the protection of rights, namely those of gender equality and sexual freedom, and a hostile, intolerant, foreign culture' (El-Tayeb, 2011). It would be a normative horizon of planetary politics therefore that rather than fearing that an 'other' will dislodge a group from its position in the world order, a world of differentiated polities but free of differentiated status must be created – a world beyond abstract universalism, made up of localised universals embodied in particular communities. No one is so different that their very difference makes them unknowable.

II. The Third Democratic Transformation in a Planetary Key

How then can we characterise the emergent third democratic transformation whilst still owing up to a Eurocentric bias, concerned as we are with the possibility of a post-colonial articulation of Europe's normative power?

In the brief overview below, I lay out what I consider to be the six main attributes of this transformation as observable from rapidly evolving democratic practices both in Europe and in the rest of the world – including in response to democratic regression. To be sure, these are fluid and interconnected. But some main common threads emerge: (i) scale: transformation is the product of citizens' rapidly growing expectations about democratic inclusion and new ways of expanding the franchise that has characterised democratic progress to this day, being instantiated in a different guise by the staging of absentees in space and time; (ii) structures: old and new socio-economic cleavages characterise each attribute; and (iii) practices: each attribute is affected differently by increasingly sophisticated technologies.

In each of these dimensions, I connect the attributes of democratic transformation with the features of planetary politics offered in the introduction by Ian Manners (e.g., 'simultaneous modes of awareness'). The transformation is captured through the synergy between changes in scale, structures and practices (Table 1).

Table 1: The Third Democratic Transformation.

	(1) Trans-temporal	*(2) Transnational*	*(3) Trans-modal*	*(4) Trans-local*	*(5) Trans-scalar*
Scale: radical expansion of the franchise	To future beings and generations	To non-nationals and nomads	To collectives across modes of participation	To each other	To different circles of autonomy
Structures: cleavages and conflicts	Winners versus losers of transitions	Self-centric versus other-regarding	Plato's guardians versus change makers	Sovereignists versus connectors	Unicentric versus polycentric
Practices: new democratic techne	Democratised strategic foresight	Inclusive citizenship and new tech	Deliberative, direct, radical innovations	Network tech for cities and regions	AI-enhanced aggregators across scales
(6) Translational	Between timescales	Between socio-linguistic contexts	Between access keys, including non-humans	Between local vernaculars	Between scales and spheres

Trans-temporal ('Simultaneous Mode of Awareness')

Probably the most fundamental expression of the third democratic transformation has to do with the timescale of democracy. It is a cliché to point to democratic myopia. Tocqueville, in his time, was already bemoaning the popular obsession with the present. He saw how the longue durée stood as a luxury, a pastime for those who do not have to worry about basic needs. Traditional politics, with electoral rhythms and opinion polls in between, remains a relentlessly short-term affair. Whilst professional politicians and market mechanisms reinforce their respective propensity for short-termism, the advent of planetary politics has been characterised by a progressive but notable lengthening of democratic time beyond today's distributional conflicts, what we may call 'democracy with foresight' (Azmanova and Nicolaidis, 2023). We start therefore with the first, *trans-temporal* shift, the redrawing of the temporal boundaries of democracy.

The third democratic transformation implies that the motives and calculations of citizens across generations better match the needs we are facing in the era of the Anthropocene. Citizens' fears are not – or not only – that their state politicians or corporations will act against their present but rather that they are losing control over their own future(s) and colonising the next generation's future unwittingly.

This symposium's idea of 'simultaneous modes of awareness' turns arguments over short-termism on their head. We are starting to do so through many different paths.

Aspiring to be 'good ancestors', we are inventing mechanisms to involve the next generations in the process of democratic decision-making, starting with lowering the voting age and beyond, turning various institutions into 'guardians of the long-term', as pioneered by Wales' Future Generations Commissioner.

We are starting to democratise future imagining and scenario planning as well as the science–politics interface, to use discount avatars acting as probes for citizens to engage in making trade-offs over time, and to engage in interactive storytelling about alternative futures. Future literacy also means experimenting with backward engineering as to what this may mean for remedies in the present.

As simulations and predictions point to a chaotic or at least highly unsettling future, nature is filled with examples of resilience that should help inspire us and our capacity to conjoin 'urgency' with 'agency', to either avoid the tipping points of no return in despoiling our only liveable biosphere, or figure out how to survive after the fact (Hanson, 2021). Democratic transformation means that people are starting to debate the trade-offs between mitigation and adaptation. The existential character of planetary politics as staging multifaceted extinctions conjures up the importance of deep time history, à la Hutton, and within our own slice of time, the potentialities of 'slow governance', whilst today's global governance tends to pertain to the instantaneous, the here and now, crises and reactions. The point here is not to choose between the speed of action and the slow pace of deliberation but to narrow the gap between the slowest and fastest subjects in our societies (Connolly, 2002).

All timescales are relevant in planetary politics as collective behaviours continue to deeply embed destructive behaviour in the global economy. But it is clear that the complex social and political implications of the transition, with its gross inequities in cause and consequence, will not adequately be tackled top-down. Sometimes in concert and sometimes in tension, democracy and technocracy will need to reign in short-term forces.

The EU is currently engaged in a pivot from the politics of space – a space made single by markets, regulators and judges, a space where free movement reigns supreme, and a space from which we can choose who and how to exclude – to the politics of time.

On the one hand, European citizens may not be the most suited population on the planet to navigate this shift. They have witnessed the rise of emergency politics as the new normal, with states desperately trying to match the pace of markets. On the other hand, the idea of a laboratory offers a sense that, for its relative prosperity and stability, the EU can afford to experiment where other parts cannot. In particular, the EU is particularly well disposed to act as a guardian for the long term, especially given Europeans' acute historical responsibility in mortgaging humanity's future. After all, because the EU as a transnational construct cannot be a classic majoritarian democracy where you can throw the rascals out, it is not, as a whole, a classic democracy driven by short-term political concern for re-election. This 'unresponsiveness' in turn offers a silver lining to the EU's so-called democratic deficit, a path towards what is called 'sustainable integration' (Nicolaïdis, 2010).

As the slow-burning crisis that is the climate crisis erupts as a hot crisis through energy dependency or water shortages, slow governance means transforming *now* how we consume and not just where we produce; how we redistribute work, value and risk; and how we reward the burden of sacrifice. None of these choices, however, can be imposed top-down. They must be owned by societies where difficult trade-offs are debated democratically, all the more to enforce them effectively. This is why radical democratic innovation in the EU is a geopolitical necessity, not only an anti-populist strategy. If mistrust in the people was part of the EU's original DNA, the long term can be its democratic redemption. An EU that is democratically challenged for short-term accountability can be democratically enhanced for long-term responsibility. That can be its contribution to planetary politics.

But, of course, other realms and cultures have been there for a long time, including, as we somehow keep on rediscovering, indigenous ontologies. As EU politicians argue over calendars with a one- or two-decade horizon, they would be helped by learning from

those who exchange whispers with seven future generations. The third democratic transformation starts with indigenous people across the globe, whose voices are increasingly being heard across time.

Transnational ('Non-adversarial Relationships')

The idea of transformation implies that different expressions of change are deployed simultaneously, even if according to different trajectories. Hence, change in timescale is not deployed in a vacuum but in a world where the core historic definition of democratic progress – the widening of representation towards increased inclusiveness within a state – may have reached its limits and where we have long interrogated the character of democracy beyond national borders. Capturing this change under the label 'transnational' may still reflect methodological nationalism, which is fair enough as democracy *beyond* the state does not mean *without* the state. But planetary politics invites us to radically enrich our understanding of 'transnationalism' itself.

For one, the idea of transnationality modifies the understanding prevalent in most international organisations, including the EU, that some sort of right balance between supranational and intergovernmental authority can buy us democratic legitimacy. To be sure, the third democratic transformation is having a bearing on what happens *at the centre*, be it in the UN, Mercosur or the EU, where the democratic legitimacy of states' governments and of citizens are combined, represented respectively in the Council and in the European Parliament in the case of the EU (notwithstanding the fact that a commitment to some degree of democratic legitimacy is only an assumption here). Transnational lenses invite us to add to, rather than supersede, these two sources of legitimacy by stressing that the direction of travel for planetary politics is clearly towards a more holistic ecosystem, where we consider as equally important the horizontal relationships between democracies at the national and subnational levels, as well as the management of the political externalities they produce on each other (Nicolaïdis, 2021b).

The transnational includes but is not reducible to acts of vertical delegation. Instead, it arises as immanent to networks of relations, commitment and solidarities, a realm fraught with conflict and contestation, but where increasingly, even states and non-state actors embroiled in geopolitical rivalries carve out spaces for 'non-adversarial relationships' as per Manners' introduction. Here, non-domination, which connects the democratic core with planetary politics, means recasting political power as action in concert *as per* Arendt's sense of the political, away from centre–periphery schemas and towards universal differentiation best understood through a relational lens inspired by the Chinese idea of Guanxi (Kavalski, 2017; Nicolaïdis, 2021b). Such a non-hierarchical differentiated system of concerted action includes not only the post-colonial standpoint *stricto sensu* but also that of people not of the West who were not colonised, such as Japan or Thailand, who have long been seen to be peripheral to the 'modern world' and are becoming nodes in their own right (Fisher-Onar, 2022).

In this sense of 'in concert', the modus operandi of 'scaling up' that drove the second democratic transformation no longer applies, which would simply consider transnational democracy as heralding ever larger aggregations. There is no denying the hold of traditional ideas of democracy, which connect directly a group of voters, their representatives and decisions that translate majoritarian preferences into policies. But even this

empoverished view of democracy cannot be obtained beyond the state unless majorities of smaller states' populations become permanent minorities in larger political constructs.

This is where we may consider the import of the EU experiment as a laboratory. As a demoicratic experiment, this is a polity ruled by a plurality of peoples – peoples who govern together but not as one, a demoicracy in the making (see Cheneval and Nicolaidis, 2017; Nicolaïdis and Liebert, 2023). Such an immanent essence of the EU, already there and yet constantly betrayed, has implied from the beginning granting disproportional influence to smaller, peripheral and weaker states, a move utterly relevant to planetary politics (Bunse et al., 2005). When untainted by its teleological and messianic demons of 'oneness', the EU posits, or shall we say intuits, radical pluralism as its condition of possibility as a laboratory. In a decolonial key, it is not enough to say that diversity per se matters - we need to agree on how we disagree about our differences.

With the arrival of planetary politics, we raise the question of whether this understanding of transnationalism translates from the regional to the global. If the ideal of demoicracy is to be applied to planetary politics, we start from the Janus-faced meaning of 'peoples' both as part of states (for most) and as citizens more or less identified with or alienated from these states. We then ask whether the popular authorship of laws or self-government that defines democracy can be imagined in transnational regions or unions of peoples around the world, which may eventually interact to create functional, or even general-purpose, global associations, the democratic version of today's international institutions. In short, 'transnationalism', as opposed to nationalism and supranationalism, elevates 'horizontality' from a descriptive concept, describing the nature of international or European co-operation, to a normative status, shifting the spotlight from the vertical focus on domestic accountability of liberal theories to horizontal accountability amongst demoi through the mutual opening up of democracies and transnational networks at all levels (Slaughter, 2017), thus bringing the transnational *all the way down* and democratising the exercise of differentiated responsibilities.

In this view, the transformation we are witnessing is a turn away from the late-20th-century attempt to transform closed and self-centred democracies exclusively through vertical restructuring above the state. Instead, horizontal ways are explored for outsiders' influence, including through the role of transnational diasporas, migrants' and third-country residents' political rights, and foreign regulators and civil society actors who can be considered proxies of others in each other's sites – Kant's cosmopolitanism amongst peoples, not only states.

Trans-modal ('Collective Intelligence')

These two macro shifts, however, will not be navigated without a third underlying change currently unfolding worldwide, namely, the multiplication and diversification of modes of participation by citizens and civil society, with many variations across political and social contexts, integrating a vast range of elements from new ways of voting, to deliberative and participatory experiments, to protest movements across borders and technology-enhanced democratic innovations (Berggruen and Gardels, 2019).

The common denominator between these modes is that they concern the adjective, not the noun, *democratic* practices, instruments or 'innovations' rather than grand designs for *democracy* per se, practices that explore the space beyond mere voting and other

traditional rights associated with citizenship. Here, planetary politics pushes back against the majoritarian logic of mainstream electoral representation combined with technocratic monopoly of power (Plato's guardians) along at least two lines: first, as a counter to the *behavioural* pathologies associated with the oligopolistic power structures it has come to legitimise (sociological homogeneity, risks of capture of the state, privatisation of public goods, etc.). And second, as a counter to its contemporary *structural* pathology, namely, a neoliberal drift towards irreversibility. In contrast, *reversibility* is at the very heart of the planetary politics of 'transition'.

Accordingly, the third democratic transformation scans the limits of mediated democracy, heralding instead the capacity for citizens to translate their collective intelligence into collective action.

At the global level, these practices can be found in the multiple modes of civil society incursions into a space reserved for diplomats and civil servants as stakeholders in the dynamics of 'catalytic cooperation' (Hale, 2020). But given the many challenges involved in 'scaling up', these would not be plausible without a grounding in (trans)national ecosystems of practices – ranging from participatory budgeting to citizen audits, wealth-building communities or commons–public partnerships involved in housing, food, energy or other organised communities, working in partnership with relevant public bodies, to gain ownership and control over the assets and resources (buildings, enterprises and farms) that impact their lives.

Crucially, what the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) has termed the 'deliberative wave' of the last two decades has seen the rebirth of the power of assembly in the digital age to what Hardt and Negri (2017) call 'cooperation in social production'. In particular, democracy is being transformed by the growing movement for 'citizens' assemblies', grounded on democracy through sortition (Batalla et al., 2023; Landemore, 2020; Sintomer, 2023; Van Reybrouck, 2018), where ordinary people decide what is best for the community. Notably, such deliberative settings allow us to tap into people's deep ambivalence about the issues of our time and thus push back against polarised politics (Nicolaidis, 2020b). Indeed, we are increasingly noting the *affinités électives* between climate issues and citizens' assemblies as the latter better engage with the long term than traditional politics (MacKenzie, 2021).

All these modes of engagement and others escape the election of delegates coupled with state action which has been synonymous with democracy for the last two centuries. Whilst they often unfold to express democratic disaffection, they can be used by the state to counter it, thus belonging both to the toolbox of governments and to the grassroots outside extant political institutions. They can serve to mediate political contestation in different political and social fields or for civil society autonomously to supply new forms of public goods away from the exclusive prior focus on struggles for rights (Youngs et al., 2022). Either way, they help multiply what John Dewey saw as the constitution of multiple overlapping publics, or what Nancy Frazer saw as 'counterpublics', in the spirit of Spinoza's version of the multitude, structured by political institutions rather than seeking to supersede them à la Negri.

In all cases, democratic innovations in the 21st century are often intimately connected with new technologies, which can both enhance and threaten them. We are witnessing the emergence of many kinds of virtual spaces that might evolve over time into virtual communities (Orgad, 2018). New powerful computational tools, ultimately powered by

quantum technology could make it possible to create social platforms from the bottom up, through the mere connection of mobile phones. Above all, AI will help transform the landscape in this realm in many ways, be it through personal avatars, preference aggregators, storytellers, democratic landscapers, monitoring tools and much more. AI has the potential to radically change the way we see, situate and aggregate our interests and positions, as demonstrated, for instance, in vTaiwan's venture into digital democracy powered by Polis, emulated by the EU through the 'have your say' digital platform.

To be sure, the relationship between electoral democracy and democratic innovations is a complex one at the heart of the third transformation. Democratic innovations can counter the widespread loss of support for elections, not only by providing alternatives but also by strengthening electoral legitimacy (e.g., deliberation to inform parliamentarians and abrogative referenda). Either way, the third democratic transformation can be thought of as a corrective to the second democratic transformation. As Annelien De Dijn (2020) reminds us, it is in fact the twin liberal revolutions of the late 18th century in Europe and America where the idea of political freedom and 'democracy' was attached to the mediation of voting combined with securing private rights, in contrast with the participatory practices developed by 'the ancients'. It is no wonder that Europeans have been laggards in rediscovering modes of citizen empowerment explored for the last two decades in the rest of the world, making the imperative of 'reversing the gaze' all the more relevant.

Nonetheless, democratic life in the EU has increasingly been enhanced by formal and informal mechanisms that allow citizens to borrow more effectively from one another and interconnect their different parliamentary, party political and electoral systems. Most recently, the European Parliament has required member states to publish the first 100 biggest recipients of NextGenerationEU funds, betting that such a 'democratic panopticon' will check the drift to corruption, centralisation and nepotism prevalent in a number of member states by leveraging the counter-surveillance potential of the internet (Berggruen and Gardels, 2019; Nicolaïdis, 2021a, 2023).

Moreover, throughout the continent, deliberative panels, juries and assemblies made up of randomly selected citizens have been set up with increased frequency at the local and national levels in various configurations and on various topics. In the past 5 years, 10 national assemblies and around 70 local assemblies have taken place in Europe on the topic of climate change alone. The EU itself has sought to deepen its democratic appeal, in particular through the innovative experiments of the Conference on the Future of Europe (CoFoE) and its follow-up panels, which integrate transnational, multilingual, sortition-based deliberation into the policy-making process, opening a window of opportunity for reflection on new kinds of political agency and interaction between citizens, political elites and bureaucracies to bring the deliberative wave to the next level as a crucial way of managing democratic interdependence. In her 2022 State of the Union address, Commission President von der Leyen referred to the panels as destined to be a regular feature of the EU's democratic life – but they remain for now part of a technocratic toolbox. If joined up with the legitimacy of intermediary bodies such as trade unions, parties and civil society organisations, they have the potential to empower citizens through a mix of deliberative, monitoring and mobilising functions. Indeed, whilst still in the experimental stage in the EU context, we are starting to see a partial convergence between a top-down technocratic approach to democratisation and bottom-up initiatives, taking

transnationalism all the way down to the citizens to make good on the Treaty of Lisbon's provision on participatory democracy (Article 11 TEU).[1] It remains to be seen whether EU institutions are sociologically ready to embrace such a right to participate and deliberate as an exercise in joint sovereignty across borders (Cheneval and Nicolaidis, 2017).

Ultimately, these new ways of linking representation and participatory processes interrogate the meaning of democratic 'representation' itself. They allow us to explore the frontiers of inclusiveness, from 'residents' instead of 'nationals' to all silent actors, whom anthropologist Maria de la Cadena calls the 'antropo-not-seen' and Rosanvallon the 'parliament of the invisibles'. The growing nexus between organised civil action and the courts through a litigation route that increasingly expands the franchise to some form of rights for nature can also be seen as part of the changing expression of 'representation', making the judge an arbiter between citizens, the state, official texts signed by governments and those who cannot speak our democratic language.

None of these unfolding developments are preordained. The third democratic transformation is ultimately about the unpredictable and fluid nature of democracy. Witness the vast repertoire of contentious action on display in the last decade in the form of leaderless spontaneous mass protests or small-group activist disruption. In short, whatever the rise of democratic innovations, they have not stemmed the resurgence of civil disobedience as more desperate democratic expressions, especially as part of climate movements. The move to occupy roads and high art spaces, and not only squares and graffiti walls, has used the oldest canvass of humanhood, namely, our own bodies – bodies put in harm's way, simply standing, or exposed virtually. Practitioners of grassroots democracy find that the 'word' is losing its pedestal as the master tool of electoral and deliberative practices alike, and that different spaces need to be reinvested between debate and violence. Organising transnational planetary politics and solidarity is a craft in itself, increasingly invested by new forms of art, music and culture of the more or less disruptive kind. How they will affect our core elective and state institutions, and thus mainstream politics, remains to be seen.

Trans-local ('Co-constitution of Local Struggles')

In addition to these three macro-trends, I suggest three others to characterise the third democratic transformation. Trans-localism starts with the increasingly widespread emergence of local deliberative communities of citizens reacting against the fate of the place where they live, thus becoming the engine for the reconstruction of democracy from the bottom up (Taylor, Nanz, Taylor., 2020). As the phenomenon spreads and as experiments become contagious, trans-localism magnifies the pre-conditions for its own expansion.

The idea of trans-localism, widely used in sociology, politics, urbanism or environmental science, and IR, refers descriptively to the interconnectedness between particular initiatives, movements or networks centred in specific places. It suggests that transnational governance can be reinvested from below as it were through inter-societal interactions stressed by the multiplicity school.

[1]As an experiment putting into practice this theory of change, see 'The Democratic Odyssey Project' at EUI (https://democraticodyssey.eui.eu/home).

Taking a cue from 'quantum consciousness' (Der Derian and Wendt, 2022), it can also refer to entanglements at a distance between centres, margins and in-betweens. It also admittedly touches on the utopian character of planetary politics, often resting with the presumption that horizontal ties can help compensate for the relocation of authority upwards. Subsidiarity and polycentricity are key here, an insight central to the EU to refrain from centralising what can be done at lower levels (Van Zeben and Bobić, 2019). Indeed, networks of cities have proliferated in the last few years and have become the locus of planetary politics.

In this story, Manners' 'historical awareness' defines how the peoples imagine themselves: democracy is the sum of all the struggles that have come before us, more often than not local struggles. The political geography of planetary politics therefore involves the connections, interactions or mutual influence between points in time and space rather than a particular *territorial scale* at which politics happens. If contributive democracy models connect the dots between the issues people care about and democracy, such connections themselves and the solidarity webs that they create become part of what people care about.

Importantly, trans-localism brings the margins of planetary politics back in, as localities are most attuned to the material implications of justice concerns across locales of everyday life. In many repressive regimes, democratic seeds can be planted in local spaces that escape central control. And albeit non-local 'nomads', people on the move, be they migrants, refugees, cross-border workers or even tourists – as well as diasporas and expats – are a core engine of such trans-localism. They are the connectors and translators between worlds for whom the tenets of democracy that are the mutual granting of dignity and respect can become a matter of survival.

But such trans-localism would not easily be instantiated without the last two attributes discussed below.

Trans-scalar ('Material Polycentricity')

Combining geographical attributes (transnational and trans-local) with functional attributes (trans-temporal and trans-modal), we start to question the paralizing belief that upgrading democratic participation to ever greater scale is a fundamental obstacle to planetary democracy, as Robert Dahl and his contemporaries feared. Planetary politics is polycentric, not only as we imagine nodes in horizontal planes à la Ostrom (2005), but as unfolding across different scales, yet exhibiting similar variations around trans-modality on each of these scales – think fractal theory of democracy.

This fifth shift therefore concerns our increased capacity to mix and match various modes of democratic representation, participation and reinvention in different spaces and sizes of polity, ranging from municipal or corporate to regional or transnational, across the various 'circles of autonomy' that define our lives. Indeed, people can argue about planetary politics anywhere from the local pub to the school or village hall, the city square or their place of work, as well as in national parliaments, the UN assembly or summits. And they will increasingly do so in cloud communities (Orgad, 2018).

Translational ('Normative Polycentricity')

Last but not least, and across all other attributes, the third democratic transformation is in part about the mutual engagement between different types of normativity or ways to think

about politics, power and participation across space and time. This attribute ought to play a key role in the 'multiplicity school' of IR, as it is concerned not only with the coexistence and interaction of multiple social formations evolving in different ways but also with how they interact with each other in real time (Kurki and Rosenberg, 2020). If planetary democracy is about giving voice to others, others not in our midst or not yet present, it requires vastly ambitious technologies of translation to encompass the whole gamut of expression that can turn the world into a shared stage, as it was all too fleetingly during the COVID pandemic (Nicolaidis, 2020a).

A translational democracy rests in turn on a sociological imagination that can take in the relationships between the many decentred trajectories that constitute our modernity (Bhambra, 2007; Fisher-Onar, 2022). If paradigm change is anchored in social learning, an incipient pluralist planetary politics will accommodate a diverse range of social imaginaries that can only follow from democratic praxis within and amongst societies (Přibáň, 2021), contrary to the calls for a global people.

A democratic ethics of translation also relates to linguistic and ethnic relativity – the idea that language use can change the way people think (Manners, 2023). This is a message familiar to feminist decolonial theory that foregrounds the importance of the relationship between knowers rather than what is known, and of the conditions for tackling 'epistemic injustice' (Allen, 2015). And this in turn chimes with highlighting the risks of truncated recognition of indigenous people, the indigenous regard for the mystery of translation between different modes of being, even whilst the very logic of indigeneity eschews universalisation (Anzaldúa, 2021; Lugones, 2011).

As we probe the advent of planetary democracy, we ask: what is the ethical or normative glue that connects these democratic times, scales and centres? A possible next frontier of our democratic transformation leads us to envisage the co-constitution of conversations in a universal often non-Western vernacular, as stressed by Manners, spanning the Indian notion of Swaraj as local self-rule, the southern African concept of Ubuntu as sharing humanity, the South American idea of Buen Vivir (Gudynas, 2011), the Rwandan concept of Agacio as self-worth (Rutazibwa and Ndushabandi, 2019) and, the Chinese idea of tianxia (Zhao, 2021): a trans-local and trans-scale language linking individual and collective transformation, models of social relations and development.

Ultimately, if planetary politics rests on claims of universal inclusion, we also ask: inclusion of whom, by whom, how and across what kind of boundaries?

We need wholly new kinds of translation amongst the world of all living creatures to overcome our anthropocentric, narcissistic wound. The third democratic transformation is starting to magnify citizens' capacity to translate their experiences across domains whilst imagining how other beings might be imagining them. For instance, Ireland's recent citizens' assembly on biodiversity loss has called for granting nature rights comparable to people, echoing New Zealand's granting of rights to Mount Taranaki and the Whanganui River in 2017. Such adaptation of legal systems can be seen as exercises in translation that might empower challenges to governments and businesses but also change our gaze on the subject or 'we' of the polity, therefore the frontier of our democratic imagination and what Latour (2018) used to call 'the geopolitics of nature'.

One day, we may even imagine direct 'negotiations' with various other species – octopus, mice and rhinos – without mediation through a human 'representation' in court. At stake here is the displacement of narrow anthropocentrism that currently guides

democratic theory and practice and its repositioning into 'the nonhuman condition' (Asenbaum et al., 2023). In doing so, Europeans and northern capitalist states will realise that the ontological underpinnings of the third democratic transformation, or what Connolly calls 'entangled humanism', have been present for centuries in non-Western traditions of ecological thought in India, Indonesia, the Amazon or West Africa that reject a world divided into human subjects and non-human objects (Connolly, 2017).

Conclusion: Conditions of Possibility

The starting point of this inquiry has been to note the widespread diagnosis that the goals and methods of democracy are changing, changes wrongly read as signs of its demise, whilst if there is demise, it is only of democracy as we know it. With the advent of planetary politics, democracy is undergoing its third transformation in fits and starts in many different variants instantiated differently in many parts of the world. And it is doing so whilst all the counter-currents are themselves gathering pace: increasing parochialism, the dominance of nimbyism in many local settings, the turn to nationalism and the protection of borders, the preference for short-term interest maximisation rather than long-term designs and the ominous rise of authoritarian attraction. In this universe, migrants are no longer welcome, wind turbines are not built and the yearning for self-sovereignty withers away in a whimper.

I have not offered here an assessment of which side will win, so to say, or a rigorous causal story. Instead, I have argued that the EU has a role to play in this epic story as a laboratory for planetary politics, in spite of the many flaws and blind spots in its incipient democratic transformation. The ideal of a 'Citizen Power Europe' (Alemanno and Nicolaidis, 2022) ought to be, and can be, at the heart of the EU's geopolitical identity and, dare we say, strength. The EU can support resilient democracies elsewhere only by leading (or following) by example, thanks to its own democratic resilience at all levels of governance. Democratic collective intelligence means better managing the tensions between representative, deliberative and direct democracy, turning the EU into a place of experimentation in democracy by lottery which blends the insights of the ancients with the technologies of the moderns, and conceiving it as a space to negotiate the hard trade-offs involved in providing the public goods underpinning our transitions.

This argument opens up a vast agenda for future investigation into the core conditions of possibility for the practical emergence of planetary politics to be grounded on anything akin to a third democratic transformation. I suggest three categories. First, the *Tocquevillian-Mohanty question* has to do with the character of civil society and state–society relations, or what we could think of today as the global infrastructure of freedom necessary to underpin democratic progress, from material conditions of equality to social imaginaries. Second, the *Weberian-Strange question*, has to do with structural realities that determine the power configurations within which Dahl's 'limits of democracy' can be pushed back: the question of the future of the state given the great unfolding antagonism between public and private power in the 21st century, the nexus of new technologies and global citizenship and the climate impact of extractive capitalism. Last but not least, the *Schmittean-Ostrom question* relates to the fate of democratic politics in a neo-imperial geopolitics of systems competition, or what I call democratic geopolitics.

If planetary politics refers to cosmopolitan regard for the welfare and autonomy of interdependent others, the democratic challenge is to turn our public spaces into time vessels anchored nevertheless in the human foibles of the here and now. Only because it is fragile is our universe creative. The Anthropocene will last (at least for a while) only if we recover our humility in a world formed and reformed gloriously in our absence by comets and bacteria. How will this happen on a planet of predatory super-states and supermen? Can we still affect today the mind-boggling technologies and man-made life forms that may one day erase this very particular stardust aggregate that is humans? How trivial it will seem hundreds of years from now to have focused so passionately on our human entanglements, still blind to the deeper life-world entanglements that were to determine our survival. The stakes of a new planetary politics could not be higher. Tackling them with passion and creativity is a challenge that can be addressed only by fully embracing the third democratic transformation.

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