THE PEOPLE AS "PRESUPPOSITION" OF REPRESENTATIVE DEMOCRACY — AN ESSAY ON THE POLITICAL THEORY OF PIERRE ROSANVALLON

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If you took Hannah Arendt seriously, you wouldn't think that contemporary theories of representative democracy have anything to learn from France. She is a classic example of a political theorist for whom "the violence of the events that followed [the French Revolution] eclipsed its meaning."[1] For Arendt, writing in Cold War America, altogether too many 20th-century revolutions and *theories* of revolution had taken France as their model and, so, put "social" concerns where political action ought to be. Arendt regarded it as a "sad truth…that the French Revolution, which ended in disaster, has made world history, while the American Revolution, so triumphantly successful, has remained an event of little more than local importance."[2] She argued that to understand revolution properly, as a political event, theorists should reclaim the American legacy.

Historian of ideas Pierre Rosanvallon offers a powerful counterargument to this still-influential assessment of the two revolutions. He contends that in Spring 1793, there was "an extraordinary flourishing of constitutional projects" that resulted from an "intense movement of political and intellectual reflection that has been unjustly neglected."[3] These experiments had in common an effort to break with the unitary, univocal conception of sovereignty that made it impossible to conceive of representative government as anything other than a betrayal

of popular power. Rosanvallon makes a strong claim for the French as pioneers of representative democracy which he contends should be understood to have originated in 1793. He does not aim to simply recover the constitutional models that emerged during this remarkable period of "political inventiveness."[4] He understands these thinkers to have been engaged in a significant reframing of popular sovereignty that resulted in a powerfully original understanding of representative democracy.

This argument makes a significant contribution to debates in contemporary US political theory, where theorists of democracy have also undertaken what Nadia Urbinati characterizes as a "democratic *rediscovery* of representation."[5] This essay aims to advance that rediscovery by putting these two bodies of work in conversation with each other. I synthesize the theoretical advances that can be drawn from Rosanvallon's work on representation, drawing principally from two books of his remarkable trilogy, *Le Peuple Introuvable* (The People Which Cannot Be Found) and *La Démocratie Inachevée* (Unfinished Democracy), only bits of which have been translated into English. I join this to the main arguments of the leading new works on political representation to be published recently in the US. I demonstrate that both put forward an antifoundationalist conception of popular sovereignty that precipitates a crisis for typical ways of thinking about democratic legitimacy, the idea that representation is democratic only when legislators and other public spokespersons keep the promises they make to their constituencies, and respond to their already-formed preferences.

A central tenet of the "rediscovery" of representation on both sides of the Atlantic holds that "the people" is an effect of democratic representation, not the ground of democratic legitimacy. As it does not pre-exist the processes by which it is represented, it cannot fully govern them. In Rosanvallon's words, the "*people as concrete*…remains indeterminate."[6] This raises a pressing question: how can an indeterminate people exercise sovereignty? And it stirs a suspicion: If this is what it means to "rediscover" representation, does it not rather indict the possibility of representative democracy than redeem it? These are the central dilemmas of this new wave of scholarship on representation. I hope to show that Rosanvallon's work offers a promising way to answer them.

What The French Case Has To Teach

French political thinkers and actors during the Revolution and after struggled to render political representation a *mode* of democratic governance. In contrast to the Americans, they did not conceive of political representation as an approximation for "direct" democracy on the one hand, or an antidote to "mob" rule on the other hand. Theirs was a commitment to democracy as the "power of the people," a conception that renders democracy "indissociably political and sociological; it implies in the same movement the definition of a regime of authority and of a subject that exercises it."[7] But even as these political and sociological aspects are indissociable, Rosanvallon is careful to underscore that there is a "gap that separates, in an almost constitutive manner, the people as title-holder of sovereignty from the people as society in its real complexity.[8] Whereas democracy's "political principle" presupposes a unified subject that wills itself free from the "order of nature or of history" by an act of will, this "sacralization" of "the will against the order of nature or history" turns out to "entrust power to the people at the moment when the [modern political] project of emancipation leads at the same time to abstracting the social."[9]

Of course, the reification of social relationships is characteristic of modern politics generally, not just of those in France. Nonetheless, Rosanvallon emphasizes that it poses a political problem much more explicitly in the French context than it did in the American, where the political revolution did not have to remake its social context. For the French, who had to break with feudal social identities and privileges, the qualitative difference between modern politics, which represents a mobile and indeterminate "society of individuals," and that of the Old Regime, which represented fixed and legally circumscribed orders, was especially evident.[10] To effect that break, French Revolutionaries insistently adopted a rhetoric of formalism. They vehemently maintained that "in democracy, the people no longer has form: it loses all corporeal density to become positively number, that is to say, a force composed of equals, of individualities purely equivalent under the reign of the law."[11] For the French, by virtue of the formalism that they adopted in the name of equality, this "gap" between the "political principle" of a willing subject and the "sociological reality" of number with its radical "desubstantialisation" was especially stark.[12]

Much has been made of this French formalism. Typically framed as an antipathy to both social groups and mediating institutions, it is often thought to make the difference between what Arendt so stunningly chronicled as French terrorism and American pluralism. Thus understood, the American Revolution becomes a model for something that the French ought to emulate and the French for something that every revolution ought to avoid. This is precisely what Rosanvallon challenges. He contends that the French insistence on formalism brought into sharp relief a complexity of political representation that the Americans managed to evade.

Rosanvallon provocatively names this complexity the "originary deficit of *figuration* of modern politics."[13] This deficit results from "the contradiction between the nature of democratic society (disembodied) and the presuppositions of democratic politics ("the constitution of a fictive representative person"), from, that is, the contradiction between the abstraction necessary for democratic equality before the law and the substantive organization necessary for a people to exercise sovereignty.[14] This is a bit more than a question of "an enduring and unavoidable duality between the politically unified 'one' and the social 'many,'" as two insightful readers of Rosanvallon have characterized it.[15] It is more fundamentally a problem of the manifest complexity of popular sovereignty which involves "the difficulty of giving form to the idea of reprsesentative democracy" in the face of the indeterminacy of the "general will."[16]

Rosanvallon emphasizes that democratic representation involves embodying a "people" that neither exists in itself nor can be made to exist fully and without remainder by "any one of its manifestations," whether in the streets, in the National Assembly, or as public opinion.[17] The people is indeterminate at both ends of the representative process: it neither pre-exists the act of being represented nor is knit together as a whole at its conclusion. Thus, the practice of democratic representation cannot be made more accurate by a better census or more responsive political system, and cannot be "confounded with a simple enterprise in bringing to light what had been forgotten or denied."[18] He calls the gap between democratic society (abstract) and democratic sovereignty (personified as a will) a "constitutive aporia": it is "a tension between a juridical and a sociological principle and at the same time *the necessary distance between the figuration of reality and reality itself*".[19] With Lefort, Rosanvallon maintains that this distance

neither can nor should be closed by political representation. It is the very motor of democracy, setting in motion "a permanent quest for identity that cannot be satisfied."[20] Thus for Rosanvallon, "the people does not preexist the fact of invoking and seeking it out: it is to be constructed."[21]

Although he puts forward a constructivist conception of political representation, this is not to say that Rosanvallon embraces the vision of a Sieyès, "for whom the will of the collectivity cannot exist except through an organ that gives it form (the people being constituted as political subject only through representation."[22] He is as concerned to steer clear of radical constructivism as he is to debunk the romantic fantasy of "what one might call the savage sovereignty of the people, expressed in the spontaneity of rioting or in the diffuse expression of opinion."[23] Rosanvallon breaks out of the opposition between organicism and constructivism to characterize political representation as being necessarily *figurative*, a process in which "fiction and reality are continuously confronted."[24] He elaborates that the crisis of representation must be understood to result "neither from dysfunction nor betrayal: it is consubstantial with its very object".[25] Drawing a citation from Robert Musil via a 1982 essay by Jacques Bouveresse, Rosanvallon affirms: "'Our 'we' is one to which reality does not respond.'"[26]

The original French text discloses a misquote that is instructive for revealing Rosanvallon's refusal to either posit or glorify a real or authentic people. In the text by Bouveresse, the Musil quote is: "'Notre "nous" est,' comme l'écrit Musil, 'un nous auquel la réalité ne *correspond* pas.'" Bouveresse continues: it is "the fiction of community among individuals who cultivate essentially private interests and who, by virtue of the weakening of traditions, share practically nothing among themselves beyond hedonistic motivations that create no type of cohesion and engender no common will."[27] Bouveresse uses Musil to lament the fiction of community when society is actually composed of competitive, self-interested individuals. He marks not a constitutive gap in representing but a pathological distance between communitarian ideals and individualistic practices.

Rosanvallon makes two alterations. First, he misquotes Bouveresse, writing "'Notre "nous" est un nous auquel la réalité ne *répond* pas.'"[28] The change of "*correspond*" to "*répond*" makes the statement attributed to Musil far less banal. Rather than affirm the (wholly conventional) notion that a "We" ought to *correspond* to a referent or con-

stituency in "reality," the use of "respond" in this context suggests an altogether different ontology, one in which political entities are not mirrored but, rather, hailed by the claims that are made in their name. Second, he displaces the phrase from its context in the communitarian complaint of Bouveresse. For Rosanvallon, this gap between the political and sociological "we" is not to be lamented but celebrated as, in Lefort's terms, the "empty place" of power that is the distinguishing characteristic of modern democracy.[29]

The distinctive innovation of modern democracy is, for Rosanvallon (as for Lefort), that it brings this "problem" of "figuration" to the fore. The idea is both that the people *can* only be figured because there is no sociological original underlying a political claim, and that it *must* be figured, because it is only as it is represented that a people exists as a unified political agent. This essentially representative aspect of democracy holds democratic political power permanently open to contest. It ensures that no representative of the people can be taken for its actual and total embodiment and, so, that accuracy cannot guarantee the legitimacy of a democratic representation. On the contrary, any claim to "truly" or "finally" embody the people must be suspect for it shuts down the competition for power, the perpetual questioning of legitimacy that, paradoxically, is democratic legitimacy's only guarantee. Contra Hannah Arendt, Rosanvallon and Lefort regard this preoccupation with figuration as proof that French democratic theorists and activists possessed a stronger and much subtler grasp of the dynamics of modern democracy than did the US founders and thinkers.

Why did the problem of figuration emerge so much more sharply from the French context than it did from the American? The French, unlike the Americans, had to make the "transition from a corporatist to an individualist society."[30] In a corporatist society, the "system of difference is in part something already given."[31] By contrast, "modern society is characterized by a revolution of equality that spells the end of all attempts to legitimate differences by an appeal to a natural order of any kind." Once society is understood to be composed of abstract individuals rather than specific social groups, "the political is called upon to be the agent that 'represents' a society to which nature no longer gives immediate form."[32] The loss of corporate certainties opens an "enormous deficit" where the sociological grounds of representation were once believed to be.

The forces that prevailed at the American founding did not imagine theirs to be or have been a corporate society. It was the Anti-Federalist Brutus who put forward a corporate imaginary, conceiving of a society composed of relatively fixed occupational groups that should be "descriptively" represented, with each group able to elect one of its own. That Brutus' scheme was "clearly defeated" at the American founding not only "brings into sharp relief what representative government was *not* intended to be" in America, as Bernard Manin has argued.[33] It also reveals what those Americans took for granted about their society. They simply assumed that theirs was *already* a society of "individuals purely equivalent under the reign of the law." There is this subtle but important difference between the French and American Revolutions. Whereas the French began with the need for a forceful assertion of formalism to make an explicit, even defensive break with organicism, the US colonists already imagined themselves as formally equal individuals. Furthermore, whereas the French break with organicism precipitated a crisis for their feudal models of representation (Rosanvallon's "originary deficit"), the US colonists experienced no such crisis. They had inherited from Britain a conception of representation that functioned quite well *without* corporate certainties.

This inheritance was, as colonial historian Gordon Wood has argued, the British conception of "virtual representation," which the US constitution-makers "never decisively repudiated."[34] Certainly the colonists rejected the "British claim that Americans were virtually represented in the English House of Commons"; they protested that the colonies did not share interests with the mother country.[35] But this protest left intact the fundamental principle of virtual representation, which holds that "certain people from the society, if their interests were identical with the rest, could justly speak for the whole, and…that electors could comprehend nonelectors."[36] Within this framework, there could be no tension between the juridical and sociological principles of representation as emerged in France. What is right (juridical representation) and real (sociological representation) simply operated on different registers. Legislators were charged to represent a public good that was expected to be qualitatively different from whatever demands might emerge from factional conflict. Thus, as Bernard Manin has demonstrated, the American founders built a gap into their system of representation that was not a contradiction. They designed their constitution to implement a republican scheme

in which "representatives were to be different from those they represented and to stand above them with respect to talent, virtue, and wealth."[37] Figuration—appearing as the people, picturing them to themselves, was *not* the task of representation in the US. It was, rather, to distill a public good from the conflict among social factions.

In short, the American founders explicitly conceived representation to operate at one remove from "the people." They did not need to confront the "originary deficit of figuration" because they did not aim to embody the people in the first place. The "government would be republican (or popular)" not because the people *identified* with its representatives but "because representatives would be chosen by the people, and above all because repeated elections would oblige representatives to be answerable to the people."[38] As the American founders were not aiming to figure the people, they did not need to be plagued by the indeterminacy at either end of the representative process. To be sure, American political thinkers no longer adhere to what Manin calls the Federalist "principle of distinction," the idea that representatives ought to be different and distant from those whom they represent. Nonetheless, they have inherited one belief from the founders: idea that politically active groups (what Madison termed "faction") form of their own accord.[39] In other words, American thinkers have understood the sociological subject of representation—though plural—to be "pre-existing political activity."[40]

With the gradual democratization of America's republican political ideals, American theorists of democracy have rejected the principle of distinction to embrace its opposite: the idea that representative government must be *closer* to the people to be truly democratic. In effect, they call for a rapprochement between the sociological and juridical aspects of representation, thus taking up the organicist model that was lacking at the nation's start. In turn, theorists concerned to promote justice have begun to conceive the process of democratizing representation as just the enterprise that, as I have noted, Rosanvallon insists it cannot be: "a simple enterprise in bringing to light what had been forgotten or denied."[41] This is to say that contemporary US political thinkers have begun to regard the aporias of US democracy as pathological rather than (in Rosanvallon's terms) constitutive. The idea is that any gap between representation and the "people" is not an inevitable failure written into representation itself, but is a result of irrational and transient prejudices that can be corrected by extending

the franchise and developing ever more deliberative models of politics.[42] They conceive of the deficit that Rosanvallon understands to be constitutive as a purely *empirical* matter, as if it were possible to close the "distance between the figuration of reality and reality itself."[43]

On the other side of the Atlantic, there was a need to make a revolutionary break with both the organicism of feudal society and with the photographic conception of representation that went along with it. This meant that the French were confronted with something that the Americans did not have to see: that modern politics is *constituted* by the contradiction between the move to abstraction that renders society egalitarian and the democratic political principle of "the people" as subject that wills its own emancipation. Rosanvallon contends that the French ran up against the "originary deficit" of modern politics just as soon as they tried to imagine how representation would operate in a post-revolutionary society. The debate began in January 1789 with Mirabeau's insistence (reminiscent of the American Anti-Federalist Brutus) that a well-composed assembly serves the nation as a map serves its territory "'the copy must always have the same proportions as the original.'"[44] Rosanvallon observes that at the outset of the Revolution, the appropriateness of such a "microcosmic" approach to representation seemed self-evident. It would even have been simple to pull off if society were "understood organically."[45] Yet it was precisely this organic understanding of the social to which revolutionary formalism was opposed and, indeed, to which it had to be opposed if the naturalistic world view that sustained the inequalities of the Old Regime were to be dismantled.

The commitment to formalism which defined society as a "a simple collection of equal individuals" clashed with "microcosmic" representation. This latter depended for its practice on a corporatist society, one composed of fixed groups whose privileges and responsibilities are juridically specified.[46] Rosanvallon asks:

> But how to represent a society of individuals? Does not the subject of representation become problematic? If the citizen is the abstract individual, understood apart from all its economic and social determinations, can one still speak at all of representation in the sense of producing an image? In such a case, is representation not reduced mechanically to a procedure of election and authorisation, no longer filling any function of identification?[47]

These last two questions mark the significant difference between the French and American positions on representative government. To the first—can one hold onto "photographic" representation?—both happily answer: No! As for the second, the question itself betrays its distinctively French perspective by denigrating "election" and "authorization" (which the Americans had no problem with), and calling for "identification" (which the Americans did not seek to elicit). To the American, it would seem neither "reductive" nor "mechanical" for representation to function as "a procedure of election and authorization." From their perspective, then, the problem of "figuration" does not exist.

Yet, this is precisely what American theorists of democracy have to learn from the French struggle for representative democracy, specifically from their struggles over the question that the Americans took for granted: how to represent "a society of individuals." As I have argued, this question was lost on the Federalists who, by virtue of their unquestioning adherence to virtual representation, aimed to represent a public interest that they understood to transcend factional conflict. They had no need to figure individuals as a people (because they did not aim to represent the people as a body), and simply did not conceive of the 'public interest' being anything less than real. In this respect they were legatees of Edmund Burke who, as Hanna Pitkin has perceptively noted, saw "interest very much as we today see scientific fact: it is completely independent of wishes or opinion, of whether we like it or not it is just so."[48] It was beyond them to recognize how "fiction and reality" necessarily confront themselves in the practice of representation.[49]

Even the mid-twentieth century theorists of interest group pluralism, who explicitly posited a society composed of abstract, interchangeable individuals with newly mobile interests, never asked how representing "a society of individuals" was possible. In the name of "empirical" democratic theory, they championed "*minorities* rule": the idea that the American system provided a competitive field that allowed a wide range of interests to organize themselves and gain influence in the policy-making process.[50] They imagined groups to organize spontaneously whenever they had interests to defend, and maintained that the US political system was open to *any* "active and legitimate group."[51] On this view, political representation is not *constitutive* but rather *reflective* of the perpetually shifting outcomes of

interest group competition; the political system is understood to function democratically when it is responsive to the changing terrain of pluralist politics. With this optimistic portrait in mind, Rosanvallon rightly observes that whereas "historical conditions in the United States modulated and diffracted the constitutive tensions of modern democracy, France radicalized the aporias."[52] This radicalization is what makes the history of the French struggles so instructive.

A "Rediscovery" Of Representation Among US Political Thinkers

Late twentieth-century US political theorists of representative democracy would agree with Rosanvallon that the aporetic structure of political representation has gone largely unrecognized in the American context. Rather than confront the tensions endemic to representative democracy, debates about the identity of the American political system have been structured by a dichotomous opposition that took hold at the founding. The Federalists advocated representative government as a means to shield their republican experiment from the disastrous influence of democracy. Their victory over the Anti-Federalists, who urged that representative government rather approximate democracy than annihilate it, ensured that political representation in America would be regarded as an antidote to and antithesis of democracy. This Federalist legacy left its mark on the way that subsequent normative theorists of democracy have conceived of the relationship between political representation and democratic practice: there is a deep-seated prejudice against political representation as that which saps democracy of its vital *participatory* force. In such a context, representative democracy becomes a contradiction in terms, and the problem of figuration becomes unthinkable. Either the people acts immediately and on its own behalf, or it is inactive by virtue of being represented by an alien body.

Recent theorists have sought to break out of this dichotomy by beginning to assess representation as *democratic* "on its own terms."[53] Their starting assumption is well put by Urbinati, who asserts that "representative democracy is neither an oxymoron nor merely a pragmatic alternative for something we, modern citizens, can no longer have, namely direct democracy."[54] However obvious this may seem from a French perspective, it cannot go without saying in an Ameri-

can context where representation has been seen as both an alienated form of politics and an aristocratic one. Rosanvallon's project in the context of the French Revolution has been to chronicle the "exhaustion" of "the 'metaphysics of the general will'" with its mythology of a unified people as a transcendent sovereign.[55] Theorists working in the US context have framed their project largely as debunking the preference for "direct" democracy that the "participatory" democrats of the late 1970s and 1980s claimed as the academic inheritance of the Civil Rights, Free Speech and Anti-War movements that rocked US politics from the mid-1950s to early 1970s.[56] Of those working in this vein, the work of Iris MarionYoung, David Plotke, and Nadia Urbinati has been most influential.

As a political theorist who takes her bearings from continental political philosophy, Young characterized the preoccupation with "direct" rather than representative forms of politics as symptomatic of US democratic theory's "metaphysics of presence."[57] Young takes inspiration for this diagnosis from Derrida who used the term "presence" to identify the fantasy of a reality that is unmediated, self-evident, and sovereign: a "primordial" experience or "voice" that serves as a normative point of reference for assessing the accuracy and faithfulness of anything that purports to stand for it or speak for it.[58] Young argues that proponents of participatory democratic theory were captive of presence. Taking their theoretical bearings from J-J Rousseau and, later, Hannah Arendt, they tended to set representation up as the antithesis of democracy. They denounced the "empirical" democracy of the post-war period as individualist, rejected its liberal pluralist politics of interests in competition, and, above all, criticized its failure to promote citizen participation in politics or to foster commitment to public goods. Dismissing political parties and castigating voting, they proposed to return to Jeffersonian institutions of local self-government, and embraced internet technologies as a means to adapt the New England town meeting to a 20th-century scale.

As Young perceptively observes, these arguments by participatory theorists made democracy virtually synonymous with presence. They imagined "the whole polity…present to itself as a single public discussing its problems and coming to decisions," while denigrating political representation as "derivative, secondary, distanced, ambiguous, and suspect."[59] Young counters that "no person can be present at all the decisions or in all the decision-making bodies whose actions af-

fect her life."[60] She supports this claim with two different arguments, one sociological and the other ontological.

As to the first, she observes that the "web of modern social life often ties the action of some people and institutions in one place to consequences in many other places and institutions."[61] This dispersion over space means that a democratic decision-maker cannot be present to itself and, moreover, that its decisions cannot be instantaneous, as no one can assess the complex social processes of modern mass society at a glance. As to the second, Young moves toward an antifoundationalist position on constituency, arguing that "there is no constituency prior to the process of representation, no people who form an original unity they then delegate onto the derivative representative."[62] Like Rosanvallon, Young denies that political constituencies are given prior to politics, yet she is no radical constructivist. For Young, political struggles "define" groups who will be affected by them. This is how she explains the formation of a constituency. Once the terms of a struggle come into focus, these groups effectively construct themselves: "Anticipating the moment when representatives will claim to act at their behest and on their behalf, individuals in the *defined* constituency go looking for each other. They organize and discuss the issues that are important to them, and *call on* candidates to respond to their interests."[63] Again taking inspiration from Derrida, but this time from his concept *différance*, Young sums up her position by proposing to conceive representation in terms of "deferral." This entails a shift from a static, identity-oriented understanding of representation to a process-oriented one in which constituency preferences emerge only over time and by the mediation of deliberative political institutions.

It is noteworthy that despite her critique of foundationalism, Young preserves a vestige of liberal pluralism with its typically American blind spot to the problem of figuration. For even though she acknowledges that groups are not determined prior to the representation process, and that they do not emerge spontaneously by the promptings of interest, she nonetheless falls back on what Rosanvallon would term a "sociological reality" in explaining how they form.[64] Individuals are "defined" as a potential constituency by the issues that they take to be important. Representatives do not mobilize constituencies by figuring them. On the contrary, Young seems to assume that for political representation to function democratically, communication must primar-

ily flow one way (from citizenry to the representative) with citizens being "willing and able to mobilize one another actively to participate in processes of both authorizing and holding [representatives] to account."[65] In short, for Young, by contrast to Rosanvallon, the people are not "unable to be found": they find each other.

David Plotke, a political theorist in the Critical Theory tradition at the New School for Social Research, takes a historical and contextual approach to explaining US theorists' predilection for direct democracy, situating it in the intellectual and political context of the 1960s. He contends that the "participatory left" carried with it into the academy not only the legacies of movement politics but also the Cold War dichotomy between citizen action and "minimal" representative democracy.[66] He explains that during the Cold War, "the participatory left rejected and often tended to invert the positions taken by minimal democrats," underlining the "*lack of power* of those who were only represented," and also "stress[ing] the *deprivation* suffered by those who did not spend their time exercising public freedom."[67] The trouble was that this vision of an American citizenry bursting to devote itself to public life was easily depicted as naïve. Its utopianism actually made it easier for the pluralists to sell theirs as an "empirical" theory of democracy—one based on what citizens were actually capable of and inclined toward. The hegemony of empirical democracy during the Cold War, with its elitist conception of representation (one decidedly antagonistic to citizen action), helps explain why a "democratic rediscovery" of political representation is necessary today: the empirical democrats so "dominated [the] field of argument" that "their thin notions of representation became political common sense."[68]

Taking aim, like Young, at the association of democracy with "directness," Plotke makes a simple but counterintuitive point: "the opposite of representation is not participation: the opposite of representation is exclusion."[69] Plotke observed that movements that extend the vote, secure workers' right to organize, or combat segregation do not necessarily succeed in making politics more direct. On the contrary, participatory political processes are frequently "more complex and *less* direct" as "direct personal domination is replaced by procedures that rely on more general and abstract relations among political agents."[70] But Plotke (and Young) continue that the association of democracy with directness is a misnomer, even when participatory democratic decision-making is practiced on a relatively small scale.

Plotke observes that even for those who show up to a public forum (let alone for the majority who will not), direct democracy becomes "*de facto*" representative government.[71] As Young explains, "in assemblies of a few hundred people, most people will be more passive participants who listen to a few people speak for a few positions, then think and vote."[72] Thus, Plotke contends that the "critique of representation" is equally a critique of so-called direct democracy in practice: it applies "to the relation between the 4% of the room with a voice and the 96% with eyes and ears only."[73] Young has added that the "*de facto* representation" that crops up in venues that aim to be participatory is much worse that representative government *tout court* because it "is arbitrary; in fact direct democracies often cede political power to arrogant loudmouths whom no one *chose* to represent them."[74] For both Young and Plotke, representative democratic institutions are *more* democratic that those which purport to be "direct" or "participatory" because the "rules concerning who is authorized to speak for whom are public and there are some norms of accountability."[75]

Nadia Urbinati, who has written the only book-length study of political representation since Hanna Pitkin's classic *The Concept of Representation,* carries this line of argument to a simple conclusion that is devastating to the participatory democratic ideal. She contends that citizens' "direct presence" is "much less representative of their ideas than their indirect presence in a representative democracy."[76] Urbinati develops this claim by a critique of foundationalism. Like Young, she affirms that there is nothing "pre-existing" the democratic process that "seeks *pictorial* representation through election," and, so, that representation cannot be "descriptive and mimetic of social segmentations and identities."[77] For Urbinati, as for Rosanvallon, representation inevitably puts a tension between fiction and reality in play; consequently, its legitimacy cannot be judged by its fidelity or accuracy to the interests of a constituency. She calls representation a "constitutive process," meaning not principally (as Young sees it) that citizens constitute groups and group identities but that *representatives* do.[78]

Urbinati's recognition of the agency of representatives with respect to their constituencies is the most disturbing aspect of her argument precisely because it brings what Rosanvallon would call the figurative aspects of representation to the foreground. Writing against the tide that has resurrected "descriptive" representation as a remedy for

the persistent political marginalization of women and Blacks, Urbinati insists that the bond between representative and constituency "is an idealized and artificial construction, meaning that a representative "belongs" to a constituency not by virtue of who or what he or she is but by virtue of what he or she speaks for and fights for.[79] As she forcefully puts it, "electors do not seek an existential identification with their representatives; they seek an identity of ideas and projects."[80] Because such an identity is politically forged, it cannot ground democratic legitimacy in the traditional senses of either "promissory" representation or "responsiveness". These hold legislators accountable to the promises they make at election time and to the (presumably) independently-formed preferences of their constituencies. Even proponents of these two traditional models of accountability acknowledge that citizens are enmeshed in the political process by the spectacle of campaigns—whether electoral and government sponsored or issue-focused and mounted by organized interests. Thus, a tension runs through their work: while positing citizen preferences as a *ground* of the democratic process they cannot deny what Urbinati relentlessly terms the "idealized and artificial" aspects of the relationship between representative and constituency. This tension brings them up against an issue that, Urbinati rightly contends, contemporary theorists of democracy seem hesitant to face: the realignment of the deliberative theory of democracy with the ideological as rhetorical characteristic of the language of politics in the constitutive process of representation."[81]

Given the rationalist orientation of both traditional and even deliberative models of political representation, how is this "realignment" possible? Does the "ideological as rhetorical" characteristic of political language not speak against the possibility of firmly differentiating between authoritarian manipulation and genuinely democratic leadership? Urbinati is bold enough to pose this question. Rosanvallon, with his provocative notion of the "general economy of representation," takes a step toward responding to it.

Rosanvallon In Dialogue With The American "Rediscovery" Of Representation

An insistence that the "active and constructive dimension" of political representation is not to be evaded and, yet, that it is not to be understood to create a people out of whole cloth is a unifying theme of Rosanvallon's trilogy on representative democracy. It is noteworthy that he, too, like the American democratic theorists of the 1970s, targets this argument against the "'empirical theorists' of democracy" whom he criticizes for having "too rapidly conflate[d] the justified denunciation of 'social constructivism' with the illegitimacy of *any positive collective project*."[82] Democracy is, he insists, the "attempt to *institute* an ensemble of individuals in a community."[83] But just how is this explicitly anti-essentialist, anti-organicist project to be achieved without passing over into the manifestly elitist extreme of radical constructivism à la Sièyes?

Temporality is the key to Rosanvallon's unique answer to this question. He elaborates it by means of what he calls a "discovery a *contrario*" from the premise that "immediate democracy" is a logical impossibility.[84] If we accept this premise, then we can derive from it the contrary proposition that "democracy takes on meaning and form only as a construction in history."[85] He explains,

> The people, as a collective political subject, is in effect itself a figure of time. Its content is a history. Democracy is thus not only a system that allows a collective to govern itself, but is also a regime under which a communal identity is constructed.[86]

Such an understanding of democracy calls for an attention to the "duration of institutions" and the "rhythm of democracy."[87] In short, it is not enough to conceive of political representation as a process (as opposed to a static relation to an identity); it must be understood and instituted as "a conjunction of temporalities."[88] Rosanvallon moves beyond Young's reconceptualization with this formulation.

Rosanvallon singles out the French revolutionary thinker Brissot for making a distinctive contribution to theorizing representative democracy along precisely these lines. A member of the Girondins who were architects of the failed French constitution, Brissot (and, later, Condorcet) called for pluralizing sovereignty. Yet he understood

this not as the American founders did, to involve separation over the various "levels" of the federal system, but, rather, as calling for differentiation of its multiple temporalities with their distinct functions. Most fundamentally, Brissot distinguished between "a delegated power" and "another that exercises surveillance and control over it."[89] Whereas the power of surveillance would be urgent and immediate and would rest in popular conventions (the institution that keeps alive "constituent power"), delegated power would be entrusted to the legislature and executive, which were charged with overseeing "ordinary politics."[90]

If Brissot created the scaffolding for "a *complex sovereignty*," he left it to his fellow Girondin Condorcet to spell out the institutional details.[91] As Urbinati has argued (taking Rosanvallon's lead), Condorcet is an overlooked theorist of representative democracy.[92] His genius was to elaborate a network of assemblies enacted by a petition mechanism that would enable any citizen to initiate a nation-wide review or censure of a legislative act. The process would begin with a petition that had to be supported by fifty signatories in order to be submitted to the local assembly for deliberation. Should that body judge it worthy, the petition would then be forwarded to all the assemblies of the commune for further and, ultimately, a vote. Receiving a positive vote, it would pass upward to the departmental level. Receiving approval here, it would occasion a referendum of the people as a whole.[93]

Condorcet shows Rosanvallon the way beyond organicism and radical constructivism insofar as it is from Condorcet that he derives the notion of popular sovereignty as "a historical construction." Rosanvallon explains that Condorcet's conception of sovereignty "articulates several temporalities: the short time of referendum or censure; the institutional rhythm of elections; and the long duration of the constitution."[94] The idea that a people exists in time, that its sovereignty, because it is not spontaneous, must be variously framed, is the advance that refuses the opposition between the pure constructivism of a Sieyès and the radical immediacy of Robespierre's Jacobins (and, later, the Bonapartists). What these two positions share is a belief that popular sovereignty is immediate and spontaneous. They make their antithetical arguments about representation—Sieyès urging its necessity and Robespierre its abolition—from that shared premise. Whereas Sieyès justified representation as the antidote to the impulsive popular will, Robepierre glorified that will and claimed to embody

it. Condorcet departs from both in arguing that popular sovereignty is a historical construction, not a will, and, hence, that it is *constituted* through representation, not opposed to it.

Although Condorcet was brutally defeated in his own epoch, Rosanvallon credits his notion of popular sovereignty as "a historical construction" with anticipating what would ultimately emerge in late 19th century France as a "general economy of representation."[95] Rosanvallon uses this phrase to capture the explosion of "unprecedented modes of knowledge and social expression" by means of which this historical construction of a people could take place.[96] With the emergence of electoral committees, unions, statistical surveys, and even politically-oriented literary forms, there had finally arrived a reorganization of the social commensurate with the goals of revolutionary politics, one that proceeded "through opinions and interests" as opposed to fixed social categories.[97]

Among the most important of these were the "electoral committees."[98] Precursors to political parties, these could be just a handful or journalists and publicists or they could be mass meetings. Their role was to select candidates and, more importantly, to facilitate what Jane Mansbridge terms "promissory representation" by giving meaning to "the idea of a contract-program [i.e. a platform] between a candidate and his electors."[99] This program or contract is no simple matter of transmission. Rosanvallon emphasizes that the electoral committees serve a twofold function. They "articulate functional control of the elected representative and *framing* of the voter," so that electoral accountability is dynamic: it is connected to the constitution of the constituency.[100]

Rosanvallon observes that if one took the organicist (and romantic) view of democracy as a people speaking for itself, it might be tempting to denounce the committees as evidence that democracy's means (i.e. representation) "conspire" against "its ends."[101] Yet he resists this view, countering that the committees bring a profound insight to light: that "for a will to be expressed, it is always necessary that there exist a *third*, an event that breaks a history or organized initiative."[102] He emphasizes that "there is no such thing as a 'pure will,' as if it had to do with a social fact whose problematic character resided solely in its *conditions* of expression and not in the object."[103] To believe otherwise is to mistake the will for "an ontological or historical attribute of the individual" when it cannot but be "dialogical": it "always appears as a response, a subscription or a refusal."[104]

The most important aspect of this economy occurred beyond the apparatus of government, through the various means of deciphering and interpreting society that emerged during this period to inscribe representation "into a vast enterprise of social knowledge."[105] He includes not only the rise of statistics, but also the worker-poets, ethnographers and novelists who emerged to slake the hunger for self-understanding that overcame France during this period of transition and upheaval. This period saw a proliferation of portraits of men of various professions and also an "extraordinary flourishing of manuals, of codes and guides to comportment" written in the style of the "famous Roret technical manuals."[106] This brought into politics a new mode of representation as storytelling, an ideal that made a "total" rupture with the "idea of the blank check entrusted to a third party." At this time, "to be represented" was "indissociable from presenting oneself, which is to say to speak of oneself" and, also, to speak about one's world.[107]

This idea of a "general economy of representation" is a centerpiece of *Le Peuple Introuvable*. Rosanvallon celebrates it for transforming "the question of social identities" in a way that "turns completely upside down the terms in which the question of representation is formulated."[108] By reconceiving the social from something to be read to something that must be narrated, those emergent forms of representation effected a significant reframing of popular sovereignty. They redefined collective identities as enmeshed in politics without conceding that they can be invented at will. Rosanvallon explains that such identities can no longer be "conceived as positions" based on "stable common qualities" but must be understood as "historical trajectories" whose construction as identities becomes "inseparable from political activity."[109]

This is where Rosanvallon breaks out of the impasse between organicism and constructivism. Emphasizing the break with organicism, he writes: "if the social tie is understood as an experimentation with common histories, there is nothing left to 'represent,' in the sense that there is nothing left to photograph."[110] Yet, rejecting constructivism in turn, Rosanvallon affirms that it is, nonetheless, the people as "presupposition" that is "taken into account as political subject."[111] What does it mean to take the people as "presupposition"? For Rosanvallon, it is "at the same time the manifestation of a power and the principle that calls for limiting all claims to speak in the name of society as a

whole."[112] I regard this as an advance over the tension I identified earlier in the work of those who simultaneously posit a relatively independent constituency and concede that preferences are inextricable from the political process. Rosanvallon no longer needs to posit citizen preferences as a measure of the accuracy and, hence, democratic legitimacy of political representation. For him, democracy's trademark is the positive affirmation that it is impossible to embody, actualize, and totally represent the people. The people as "presupposition" opens up the field of contest in which democratic constituencies are mobilized.

This is Rosanvallon's contribution to the new turn in studies of representation: to regard the indeterminacy of the people as a source of democracy rather than its downfall. The US, with its tradition of both practicing representation as a check on popular sovereignty and implementing "direct" democratic strategies such as referendum and recall as an antidote to its elitist representative system, has a blind spot for the problem of figuration. US political thinkers posit a people that can act for itself as the foundation of democratic politics. Whereas the architects of the US Constitution feared that people as all too palpable and sought to insulate republican freedoms against it, participatory democrats have periodically sought out popular power as a remedy for the corruptions of parties and career politicians. From this perspective, the indeterminacy of the people can only threaten the legitimacy of representative government.

For Rosanvallon, the indeterminacy of the people links representation to democratic contest. Spokespersons of all kinds (artists, statisticians, politicians, and more) compete not to transmit the preferences of constituencies but to mobilize new political actors. This mobilizing and figurative dimension of representation is a significant contribution to democratic politics. Representation can no longer be understood, as theorists schooled in the metaphysics of presence have done, as a threat to the spontaneous expression of an authentic popular will, or even to the non-spontaneous formulation of a deliberative consensus. Rosanvallon's work points critics of contemporary democracy toward a critical assessment of the general economy of representation. In its wake, we should ask how that economy functions in a contemporary context where representational media are diffused largely through television and (increasingly) the internet? To pose this question is to shift our attention from the fantasy of the people as presence to the media within which democratic agents are mobilized.

NOTES

1. Pierre Rosanvallon, *La Démocratie Inachevée: Histoire de la souveraineté du peuple en France* (Paris : Gallimard, 2000), p. 63.
2. Arendt, *On Revolution* (New York: Penguin Books, 1984), p. 56.
3. Rosanvallon, *La Démocratie Inachevée*, pp. 62-63.
4. Ibid., p. 63.
5. Nadia Urbinati, *Representative Democracy: Principles and Genealogy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), p. 5.
6. Pierre Rosanvallon, *Le Peuple Introuvable* (Paris: Gallimard, 1998), p. 23.
7. Rosanvallon, *Le Peuple Introuvable*, p. 13.
8. Ibid., p. 52.
9. Ibid., p. 15.
10. Ibid., p. 22.
11. Ibid., p. 18.
12. Ibid., p. 19.
13. Ibid., p. 227, emphasis added.
14. Ibid., p. 23.
15. Andrew Jainchill and Samuel Moyn, "French Democracy between Totalitarianism and Solidarity: Pierre Rosanvallon and Revisionist Historiography," *The Journal of Modern History* vol. 76 (March 2004), p. 127.
16. Rosanvallon, *La Démocratie Inachevée*, p. 67.
17. Ibid., p. 62.
18. Rosanvallon, *Peuple Introuvable*, p. 24.
19. Ibid., 21. Pierre Rosanvallon, *Democracy Past and Future*, trans. Samuel Moyn (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), p. 91.
20. Rosanvallon, *Peuple Introuvable*, p. 23. Sofia Näsström lays out a distinctive contribution of Lefort's thought in such a way that the connection is evident: for Lefort, the "gap in the constitution of the people is therefore not a problem. It is *productive*, a generative device that helps to foster new claims to legitimacy." See Näsström, "The Legitimacy of the People," *Political Theory* vol. 35, no. 5 (2007), p. 626.
21. Ibid., p. 24.
22. Rosanvallon, *La Démocratie Inachevée*, p. 62.
23. Ibid., p. 73.
24. Rosanvallon, *Democracy Past and Fugure*, p. 9.
25. Ibid., 91.
26. Rosanvallon, *Le Peuple Introuvable*, p. 52.
27. See Jacques Bouveresse, "De la société ouverte à la société concrète," *Pouvoirs Locaux* 25 (juin), p. 99 (originally appeared in 1982 in *L'Annuaire du Gral*).
28. In the English translation, *Democracy Past and Future*, p. 91, the translator has under-

standably corrected Rosanvallon's "répond" to "correspond" as it stands in the original of Bouveresse. Neither Bouveresse (a Musil scholar) nor Rosanvallon (who cites Bouveresse as his source for the Musil quote) provides a citation to the German original.

29. Claude Lefort, *Democracy and Political Theory*, trans. David Macey (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), p. 13.

30. *Democracy Past and Future*, p. 61.

31. Ibid., p. 62. Here I think Rosanvallon exaggerates the power and instantaneous effects of the "revolution of equality." It is not as if the appeal to "nature" to legitimate social differences disappears all at once with the advent of the modern individual. There are some differences—race, for example, and sex—that are so thoroughly naturalized that it requires significant political struggle to have them seen as *social* differences that have been *illegitimately* cast as natural.

32. Ibid., p. 61.

33. Bernard Manin, *The Principles of Representative Government* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 129.

34. Gordon Wood, *The Creation of the American Republic*, 1776-89 (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 1969), p. 176.

35. Ibid.

36. Ibid.

37. Manin, *Principles*, p. 130.

38. Ibid., p. 13.

39. Manin, *Principles of Representative Government*, p. 94.

40. Rosanvallon, *La Démocratie Inachevée*, p. 62.

41. Rosanvallon, *Le Peuple Introuvable*, p. 24.

42. For an important critique of the inclusion paradigm and argument that "whiteness" has been constitutive of US democracy, not just accidentally privileged, see Joel Olson, *The Abolition of White Democracy* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2004).

43. Rosanvallon, *Democracy Past and Future*, p. 91.

44. Rosanvallon, *Le Peuple Introuvable*, p. 22.

45. Ibid.

46. Ibid., p. 46.

47. Ibid., p. 22.

48. Hanna Pitkin, *The Concept of Representation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972), p. 180.

49. Rosanvallon, *Democracy Past and Future*, p. 91.

50. Robert Dahl, *A Preface to Democratic Theory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1956), p. 128.

51. Ibid. p. 137.

52. Rosanvallon, *La Démocratie Inachevée*, p. 32.

53. Sofia Näsström, "Representative Democracy as Tautology: Ankersmit and Lefort on Representation," *European Journal of Political Theory* Volume 5, No.3 (2006), p. 322.
54. Urbinati, *Representative Democracy*, p. 10.
55. Rosanvallon, *Democracy Past and Future*, p. 197.
56. Two exemplary texts in this tradition are Carole Pateman, *Participation and Democratic Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), and Benjamin R. Barber, *Strong Democracy: Participatory Politics for a New Age* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984). Two early critical responses to this current include Jane J. Mansbridge, *Beyond Adversary Democracy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983) whose empirical study of a New England town meeting shows that it may have been participatory but it was not democratic, and Jeffrey Isaac, *Democracy in Dark Times* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998) who provocatively re-casts the "empirical" democrats as utopians whose vision of interest group competition was not a reality (as they proclaimed and the participatory democrats accepted) but an ideal to be achieved in post-War United States.
57. Iris Marion Young, *Inclusion and Democracy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 126.
58. Jacques Derrida, *Speech and Phenomena*, trans. David B. Allison (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973), pp. 53, 16.
59. Young, *Inclusion and Democracy*, p. 69. Iris Marion Young, "Deferring Group Representation," in NOMOS XXXIX, *Ethnicity and Group Rights*, ed. Ian Shapiro and Will Kymlicka (NY: NYU Press, 1997), p. 357.
60. Young, *Inclusion and Democracy*, p. 124.
61. Ibid.
62. Young, "Deferring Group Representation," p. 359.
63. Young, *Inclusion and Democracy*, p. 130, italics added.
64. Rosanvallon, *Le Peuple Introuvable*, p. 15.
65. Young, *Inclusion and Democracy*, p. 131.
66. David Plotke, "Representation is Democracy," *Constellations* vol. 4, no. 1 (1997), p. 21.
67. Ibid., pp. 21-22.
68. Ibid., p. 23.
69. Ibid., p. 24.
70. Ibid., emphasis added.
71. Ibid., p. 26.
72. Young, *Inclusion and Democracy*, p. 125.
73. Plotke, "Representation is Democracy," pp. 26-27.
74. Young, *Inclusion and Democracy*, p.125, emphasis added.
75. Ibid.

76. Urbinati, *Representative Democracy*, p. 113, emphasis added.
77. Ibid., pp. 32-33, 46, emphasis added.
78. Ibid., p. 118.
79. Ibid.
80. Ibid., p. 46.
81. Ibid., pp. 118-19.
82. Rosanvallon, *Democracy Past and Future*, p. 197.
83. Ibid., emphasis added.
84. Ibid., p. 206.
85. Ibid., p. 205.
86. Ibid., p. 206.
87. Ibid., p. 204.
88. Ibid., p. 29.
89. Rosanvallon, *La Démocratie Inachevée*, p. 60.
90. Ibid., p. 48.
91. Ibid., p. 60.
92. Nadia Urbinati, "Condorcet's Democratic Theory of Representative Government," *European Journal of Political Theory*, vol. 3, no. 1 (2004), pp. 53-75.
93. Rosanvallon, *La Démocratie Inachevée*, p. 61.
94. Rosanvallon, *La Démocratie Inachevée*, p. 62.
95. Rosanvallon, *Le Peuple Introuvable*, p. 219.
96. Ibid., p. 222.
97. Ibid., p. 243.
98. Rosanvallon, *La Démocratie Inachevée*, p. 271.
99. Jane Mansbridge, "Rethinking Representation," *American Political Science Review*, vol. 97, no. 4, p. 516. Rosanvallon, *La Démocratie Inachevée*, p. 272.
100. Ibid., p. 273.
101. Ibid., p. 274.
102. Ibid., p. 275.
103. Ibid., emphasis added.
104. Ibid., n. 2.
105. Rosanvallon, *Le Peuple Introuvable*, p. 369.
106. Ibid., p. 337.
107. Ibid., p. 369.
108. Ibid., p. 461.
109. Ibid., p. 461, 463.
110. Ibid., p. 461.
111. Ibid., p. 464.
112. Rosanvallon, *La Démocratie Inachevée*, p. 234.