ANTÍTESES

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Representative Democracy

Democracia Representativa

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ABSTRACT

The point of departure of this article is to affirm the obvious superiority of Representative Democracy in comparison with other political systems world-wide, but also to recognize another phenomena, which is the increasing lost of its appeal in that part of the world where its superiority had always been maintained. In order to obtain a clear grasp of the cause of our present discontent with representative democracy we should begin (1) with having a closer look at what kind of political system representative democracy actually is. Then (2) I give a quick approach on what is wrong with the resemblance theory and address the discussion about political representation; and finally, (3) the last topic is about the alternative of Direct Democracy upon Representative Democracy, especially thinking about the referred dissatisfaction with the second. I will defend, however, that the search for direct democracy has then, ironically, led us back to what it pretended to improve and to replace.

Keyword: Representative Democracy. Direct Democracy. Resemblance. Political Representation.

RESUMO

O ponto de partida deste artigo está em afirmar a superioridade óbvia da democracia representativa em comparação com outros sistemas políticos em todo o mundo, mas também para reconhecer outro fenômeno, que é a crescente perda de seu apelo em uma parte do mundo onde a sua superioridade sempre foi mantida. A fim de obter uma compreensão clara da causa do nosso descontentamento atual com a democracia representativa, devemos começar (1) com um olhar atento para o tipo de sistema política que a democracia representativa realmente é. Em seguida, (2) fazer uma abordagem rápida sobre o que há de errado com a teoria da semelhança e abordar a discussão sobre representação política e, finalmente, (3) o último ponto é sobre a democracia direta como possível alternativa em relação à democracia representativa especialmente pensando na referida insatisfação com a segunda. Defenderei, no entanto, que a busca pela democracia direta, ironicamente, nos levou de volta para o que com ela se pretendia melhorar e substituir.

Palavras-chave: Democracia Representativa. Democracia Direta. Semelhança. Representação Política.

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Introduction

Some twenty years ago Francis Fukuyama published his *The end of history and the last man*. In this book Fukuyama celebrated the world-wide triumph of representative democracy. Since then the facts have confirmed his view. Representative democracy has gloriously defeated all its rivals, and alternatives to it are nowhere seriously considered - even though authoritarian regimes hold their sway down to the present day in countries such as China or Cuba. But, strangely enough, at the same time representative democracy lost much of its appeal in that part of the world where its superiority to other political systems had always been maintained. For in most Western countries citizens nowadays tend to be dissatisfied with their governments, they distrust their representatives more than ever was the case in the last few decades, they easily shift from one political party to another without expecting any real benefit from this and they are almost unanimously far more intent upon what their governments do wrong than on what they do right.

Two theories of political representation

In order to obtain a clear grasp of the cause of our present discontent with representative democracy we should begin with having a closer look at what kind of political system representative democracy actually is. The first thing to be noted is, then, that there is something oddly incongruous about the very notion of 'representative democracy' itself, since the term 'democracy' belongs to the political vocabulary of classical Antiquity whereas 'representation' refers us to the representation of the estates in the Middle Ages. Now, it is an incontrovertible historical fact that the classical notion of democracy had nothing to do with representation and that the representation of the estates had nothing to do with democracy. So, in fact, the notion of representative democracy is no less of a monstruosity than that of a Gothic Greek temple. Moreover, democracy is primarily a political term whereas representation, originally had predominantly legal connotations. Consequently, many theorists in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries found it hard to fit 'representative democracy' into already existing political categories and – as Rosanvallon tells us – they sometimes even believed it to be a wholly new kind of government that could not be accounted for in terms of accepted political wisdom. Their discomfort with the notion may also explain why the notion 'elective aristocracy' was often preferred. For if 'democracy' is given its correct and quasi-technical meaning of *direct* democracy, then the phrase 'representative democracy' can even be said to be a contradiction in terms.

But even more difficult problems are occasioned by the adjective 'representative' in 'representative democracy' – and this brings me to the substance of my talk today. For what

do these terms 'representative' and 'representation' exactly mean? When trying to answer this question we should realize ourselves that the term 'representation' refers us to aesthetics, to the philosophical reflection on art and on representation in the arts.

In aesthetics we will encounter two theories of representation, the resemblance theory and the substitution theory of representation. According to the resemblance theory – whose origins go back to Plato's *Cratylus* and that we will all intuitively agree with – a representation should *resemble* what it represents. A picture or painting of a tree is a good representation of that tree if and only if it resembles the tree in question. Next there is the substitution theory – that was, as far as I know, first proposed by Edmund Burke in his book on the sublime and the beautiful. Contemporary adherents of the theory are, for example, Ernst Gombrich, Hans Georg Gadamer, Arthur Danto or Kendall Walton. This theory takes the etymological meaning of the term 'representation' as its point of departure: a 're-presentation' makes something 'present' (again) that is absent, or, put differently, it is a *substitute* (hence the theory's name) or a *replacement* of something that is absent. I emphasize that the substitution theory does not mention any criteria (resemblance or anything else) something has to satisfy in order to be the representation of a represented. Gombrich was already quite explicit about this with his famous example of the hobby horse. A table with four legs looks more like a real horse than the mere stick that a hobby horse is. The hobby horse is for the child a representation of a real horse, thus Gombrich, since it can function for him as a real horse. Not resemblance or form, but function is decisive.

Now, when translating these two theories to the domain of democratic politics we will all intuitively prefer the resemblance theory. For if we make up our mind about what politician shall represent us in our representative assemblies, should 'resemblance' then not be our highest aim and decisive criterion? Don't we always vote for the politician whose political views have the greatest most resemblance with our own? And do we reject politicians and political parties that have betrayed our mandate when realizing political aims different from, and not 'resembling' those that we had in mind in ourselves? In sum, do we not all immediately agree with what Brutus wrote in the Anti-Federalist Papers more then two-hundred years ago:

> [...] 'the very term representative, implies that the person or body chosen for this purpose, should *resemble* those who appoint them - a representation of the people of America, if it be a true one, must be *like* the people ... They are the sign - the people are the thing signified... It must then have been intended that those who are placed instead of the people, should possess their sentiments and feelings, and be governed by their interests, or in other words, should bear the strongest *resemblance* of those in whose room they are substituted'.

Or, put differently, is direct democracy not the standard we will all adopt when asking ourselves what our representatives did or failed to achieve for us in Parliament? Should representative democracy not always aim at approximating the, admittedly, utopian ideal of direct democracy as much as possible? It is true, we can no longer gather all together at the agora of our capitals – and this is why we have representative democracy as a second best. But direct democracy should be our ideal – and the resemblance theory of representation tells us how this ideal can best be approximated. So does this not mean that in politics we should prefer the resemblance theory to the all too obvious insufficiency of the substitution theory?

I shall be the first to admit that there is much truth in all this. And probably nowadays more than at any other time in the recent past. For think of the following two things. In the first place, the substitution theory grants to the representative a considerable amount of autonomy and independence with regard to whom he represents without suggesting any criteria for where this autonomy might exceed the limits of what is still acceptable and, hence, for how to distinguish between representation and the violation of the electorate's will. Put differently, in contrast to the resemblance theory, the substitution theory of representation is a standing invitation to oligarchy - if we define oligarchy as the political system where the interests of the representative prevail over those of whom he represents. In the second place, one might argue that precisely this is our main contemporary political evil. We only need to recall, in this context, that political scientists often characterize our time as that of the advent of the so-called cartel-party system. That is to say, existing political parties have monopolized for themselves the expression of the electorate's will and they will not tolerate any rivals in their midst. Not the political matrix of the electorate, but that of the party-system has now become the decisive political datum. The infusion of a large dose of direct democracy then seems an absolute necessity in order to prevent the premature death of democracy - and we will naturally appeal to the resemblance theory for both the diagnosis and the remedy of our contemporary political evils.

However, the remainder of my talk today will be a warning against an all too overhasty embrace of the resemblance theory and of the ideal of direct democracy. When expounding the dangers of the resemblance theory for politics I shall rely upon what one might call apriori argument. But when dealing with the ideal of direct democracy I shall take my point of departure in the writings by Rosanvallon[2]. And this is an obvious choice. Not only because we have the luck and the honor to have him with us today; but also since no historian has dealt more fruitfully and more profoundly with the interaction of political realities themselves with the theories of political representation developed since the French Revolution.

2 P. Rosanvallon, Le Sacre du Citoyen. Histoire du Suffrage Universel en France, Paris, 1992; Le Peuple Introuvable. Histoire de la Représentation Démocratique en France, Paris, 1998; La Démocratie Inachevée. Histoire de la Souveraineté du Peuple en France, Paris, 2000.

On what is wrong with the resemblance theory

In his *Languages of Art* of 1968 Nelson Goodman expounded the weaknesses of the resemblance theory. He points out that we cannot speak of resemblance *tout court* since resemblance always presupposes the existence of certain rules or of a certain system defining what is to count as resemblance. For example, we can say that a map 'resembles' part of the globe (i.e. offers a true representation of it) some part of the globe if and only if a *certain system of cartographical projection* has correctly been applied. Moreover, we should be clear about what projection-system we have in mind – for what may be a correct representation within one system could quite well be a faulty one within a different one.

Now, there are two facts about these rules for resemblance or projection systems that we should always bear in mind. Firstly, these systems may well be so natural and so obvious, and they may well be so widely shared by all of us, that we simply tend to forget about their existence. But nevertheless they will always be there, as we shall have to recognize after a moment's reflection. For example, we see a drawing or a painting of a city and will then all agree that the city has correctly been represented since the representation 'resembles' its represented. And we will then all be inclined to say so since we all have grown up with the kind of linear perspective that came *en vogue* in the West since Alberti and Masaccio. But there is also such a thing as 'Chinese perspective' and where parallel lines in reality are also depicted as parallel lines on the representation. And somebody educated in the tradition of Chinese perspective would say that this representation of the city mentioned just now had got it all wrong. A similar argument could be given for axonometric, oblique or for reverse perspective. So, again, there is no 'resemblance' and no 'true representation' without there also being certain 'notation systems', 'projection rules' etc. that define what is to *count* as resemblance.

Of course, this still is insufficient for discrediting the resemblance theory. For the advocate of the theory will now undoubtedly reply: 'OK, I admit having been a little careless when speaking about resemblance. You're right about this. But I am happy with your notion of these notation systems, projection rules or whatever. So I shall add them to my theory. And then you can no longer prevent me from speaking about resemblance'.

But there is worse to follow for the resemblance theory. And this brings me to a second consideration. For think of this. We must realize ourselves that these notation or projection systems could never have their source or justification in the world or in the represented itself. Cities themselves are wholly indifferent to whether they are represented with the help of either linear or Chinese perspective and they do not require us to opt for either of them. Nor does either of these perspectives give us an easier access to the nature of what is represented than the other: somebody who is used to Chinese perspective can just as easily correctly read off the properties of a city from a Chinese representation of it as *we* can do

the same from a painting by, say, Piero della Francesca. This is where these notation or projection rules can meaningfully be compared to the *styles* we know from the history of art. Reality itself cannot function as the neutral and objective arbiter in a debate about whether we should prefer the style of the impressionist to that of the expressionist, or that of the Renaissance or of the Baroque painter. The world itself is not essentially impressionist, expressionist, Renaissancistic or Baroque. There is nothing in reality itself that compels the artist to adopt a certain style and to reject others. In this way representation and style can be said to lack foundations, or to be 'anti-foundationalist' in the true sense of that word: for there is no real *fundamentum in re* for the kind of notation or projection system we adopt for representing the world. One cannot argue for, or against some such notation or projection system on the basis of what the world *is like*. In this way resemblance is shown to be founded on, or to presuppose something that cannot be reduced to resemblance itself. And this observation is, of course, fatal for the resemblance theory. For we must now recognize that the theory implicitly presupposes what it explicitly rejects.

And it is no different with political representation. The implication is that there may well be systems of political representation that you like better than others; and it may also be that you have good reasons for your preferences in the same way that any sensible person will prefer a portrait by Leonardo da Vinci ('paint the face in such a way that it will be easy to understand what is going on in the mind!') to one by his contemporary Antonio Pisanello, who had no such lofty pretensions. Not *all* is merely a matter of taste in representation. Even if reason and fact cannot be the *last* word about issues of styles of representation their *first* words can be helpful. Similarly, if nowadays somebody would prefer census-suffrage to proportional representation he is either joking or defending an elitist argument under the cloak of one about political representation. However, the truly interesting and really important discussions about (political) representation can not be settled in favor of a certain system of political representation with the argument that it will give us a representation resembling the electorate whereas another would fail to do so. For, again, this argument would immediately turn into a debate about representationalist rules or styles – and this debate cannot be decided by an appeal to the notion of resemblance. So, for better or for worse, and whether we like this or not, we shall have to be content with the substitution theory for political representation no less than for aesthetic representation in general. More specifically, we can only modestly ask ourselves - with Gombrich – what kind of political representation could best *function*, for us, as such. And we will have to acquiesce in the sobering fact that there is not an objectively given political reality that could function as the neutral arbiter between competing proposals for political representation. Empirical social or political reality will never oblige us to accept one such proposal for political representation with the exclusion of (all) others. Absolute certainty in this will never be given to us. In this sense 'le peuple' will always remain 'introuvable', and in this sense 'la démocratie' will always remain 'inachevée' - to refer to the metaphors Rosanvallon used in the titles of two of the books of his magisterial trilogy.

Direct democracy

In aesthetics and in the arts the superiority of the substitution theory to the resemblance theory will undoubtedly be welcomed. For whereas the resemblance theory suggests that the photograph is the ultimate perfection all representation should naturally aim for, the substitution theory grants to the representation the autonomy and independence of what is represented in which artistic genius can originate and blossom. Without this autonomy art would die. But the political theorist will be less pleased by this triumph of the substitution theory over its rival. For is granting to the representative an autonomy with regard to whom he represents in politics not a license for autocracy, oligarchy and the abuse of power? So it need not surprise us that all through the history of representative democracy in the West continuously efforts were made to keep the representative as close as possible to whom he represents. Nor that the ideal of direct democracy inspired most of these efforts. For in direct democracy the representative and whom he represents coincide in one and the same person , so to say. So direct democracy seemed to be the self-evident antitoxic against the toxin of representative democracy. And, indeed, the ideal of direct democracy is, in fact, the basso continuo in the powerful symphony of Rosanvallon's history of representative democracy in France since the Revolution of 1789.

Drawing on Rosanvallon, I shall discuss below two examples – both having their origin in the great Revolution itself. The first concerns what has come to be known since Carl Schmitt as 'identitary representation', i.e. a kind of political representation in which the represented and the representative are 'identical' in some way or other. This must seem at first sight a rather bizar ideal - and thus in need of further clarification. Now, to begin with, according to Leibniz's law of the identity of indiscernibles two things are 'identical' with each other if and only if each true description of one of them is also true of the other. Obviously, in such a situation no room is left anymore for the worries about representation as expounded above. The empirical gap between the representation and what it represents would then have been closed. So it is easy to understand the charms of the idea of 'identitary representation': for it seems to promise us what one might expect from direct democracy. Equally obviously, however, it is difficult to see how in actual political practice identitary representation can be realized. But it could be argued that it should nevertheless be our 'democratic' duty to approximate this unattainable ideal as closely as possible. For example, as Rosanvallon makes clear, this was large part of what Robespierre had expected from his regime of terror and virtue. For Robespierre and the Montagnards virtue was the key-stone of their conception of political representation. "'The evils of society' thus Robespierre, 'do not originate from the people, but from government'. And he continues: 'how could it be different? The interest of the people is the public interest; the interest of the politician is a private interest. So in order to be virtuous the people need only prefer itself to what is not itself'. To phrase it in the terms of this essay: indeed, a complete Leibnizian identity of indiscernibles is unattainable. Nevertheless, there is a 'notation or

projection system' that will bring us close to it; namely that of the political virtue. For virtue is what unites the people and its Robespierrist rulers – believing themselves to be the mere expression of this political virtue. And then the identity of the representation and its representation has been achieved insofar as this is humanly possible. By the way, if one replaces the term 'virtue' by 'patriotism' (and this certainly would not be wholly at odds with the Montagnard's ideology), one comes close to the ideology of the present Bush-administration. So George Bush could well be seen as Robespierre's equivalent in the contemporary USA. One may find there this same dangerous mix of an attack on government and of virtue or patriotism.

But the 'promises' of identitary representation would only be fully realized with the Second Empire. According to Rosanvallon this took three different forms: 1) the embrace of 'incarnate sovereignty', i.e. of the idea that the nation's sovereignty had been 'incarnated' in the person of the Emperor, 2) the replacement of the existing 'corps intermédiaires' by new and more appropriate ones and 3) the introduction of the plebiscite. Napoleon's program – and that of Émile Ollivier, the regime's shrewd ideologue – was to eliminate all that might stand in the way between the Emperor and the people. Hence the Emperor's many travels through France, his openness to anybody and his willingness to listen to what people told him about its wishes and worries. Hence the attack on the 'corps intermédaires' that might corrupt the communication between the Emperor and the people, and especially on the free press. Hence also the rejection of representative democracy since the aristocracy of elected representatives functions as an insurmountable barrier between the Emperor and the people. Hence, lastly, the embrace of the referendum and of the plebiscite, since political issues could then be submitted to the electorate without the static inevitably created by the machinery of political representation. In sum, much is surprisingly (and worryingly) modern in Napoleon's program.

It is not easy to pronounce on Napoleon's program from the perspective of political representation. More specifically, one may well wonder whether 'identitary representation' can still meaningfully be called 'representation'. All the more so since this would be squarely at odds with the substitution theory of representation. For something can only truly be said to be a substitute of something else, if it is *not identical* with what it is a substitute of. Things are not substitutes of themselves. In sum, in our time dominated by the media and their effort to effect a kind of fusion of the citizen and the domain of politics, we have every reason to be deeply interested in what was tried out for the first time in the Second Empire – but whatever we may discover there will neither depend our insight the nature of political representation nor add a new chapter to its history.

This brings us to a second attempt to circumvent the discomfitures of political representation. Which is to see in *public opinion* the direct, undiluted and undistorted expression of the electorate's will. The notion of public opinion came into use in the second half of the eighteenth century; and in the 1770s it was already described as 'la reine du monde'.

Even more so, one immediately recognized the *political* potential of public opinion. Illustrative is how the 'philosophe' Jean-Baptiste Antoine Suard (1733 – 1817) explicitly related public opinion and political representation: 'que signifie ce nom de représentation? *Qu'est-ce que des représentants peuvent représenter sinon l'opinion publique?*'(my italics). During the Revolution people like Bonneville, Condorcet, Brissot and Lanthenas would elaborate further these political uses of public opinion, the idea always being that public opinion will (or ought to be) both guide and surveyor of public decision-making. And, as a certain Nicholas Bergasse most ingeniously argued, public opinion is supremely capable of this august task since it is not institutionalized and thus not subject to the oligarchic temptation inherent in all the institutions of representative government. Rosanvallon insists, furthermore, that for both the 'philosophes' and the revolutionaries public opinion was anything but a merely passive registration of what people happen to think. On the contrary, public opinion was taken to be a supremely *critical* power and it is instructive, in this context, that it was often associated with Rousseau's 'volonté générale'.

Now, what should we say about public opinion from the perspective of representative democracy? The question is an urgent one, as Rosanvallon emphasizes, since what could never be more than an impractible utopia in the days of Suard, Condorcet, Bergasse is now within our reach. That is to say, we could now replace representative democracy by some sophisticated system for processing the data gathered by opinion polls, by an active interaction between government and the electorate in the public media or, perhaps, even by the introduction on a national scale of some system of so-called electronic voting. Indeed, we presently possess the technical means for exchanging a by now 'archaic' and 'superfluous' representative democracy for the blessings of a direct 'internet-democracy'. Direct democracy can now be realized. Our representatives – if we would still need them at all – could then no longer escape for a moment the inexorable dictates of the will of the people as expressed on the websites of our national governments.

Rosanvallon himself has his doubts about these prospects for the future of our Western democracies – but I doubt whether his arguments against these institutionalizations of public opinion will convince his opponents. His first argument is that a media- or internet-democracy would be 'reactionary' in the sense of being primarily intent upon some rancorous settlement with established powers (i.e. the kind of powers owing their political existence to representative democracy). And, secondly, Rosanvallon fears the populism that will inevitably result from 'l'avènement de ce peuple–opinion'; we would then have to expect nasty and unsavoury lunges at cosmopolitical elites, at mysterious powers allegedly threatening the people's integrity, at multinationals and, above all, at immigrants and what is associated with them – in sum, all that Le Pen's *Front National* stands for. Undoubtedly Rosanvallon's fears are wholly justified, but I don't think that advocates of the replacement of representative democracy by some variant of internet-democracy would admit defeat because of this. They

will now probably riposte that if this truly is what the people wants, we would have to go along with it, whether we like it or not. After all, we are living in a democracy, aren't we?

This is why I would like to add two more arguments to Rosanvallon's – one being of a theoretical nature whereas the other, though directly following from it, has a rather practical character. To start with, I'd like to recall to mind the argument expounded above that there is no represented without a representation, much in the way that there can only be a USA after people began to use that name (as Danto explained). This is one of the miracles wrought by representation: thanks to it things come into being, that would not have existed without it. Representation creates identities and, with this the 'things' to which these identities are attributed. So it is with political representation. The nation only comes into being thanks to its being represented *in one way or another*. A people can never be more than a mere aggregate of individuals, prior to its discovery of itself in the 'foundationalist' mirror of its self-representation. And, indeed, political representation is 'anti-foundationalist' in the sense that is has no foundations itself (as was explained in section 3); but it could nevertheless be said to be 'foundationalist', because it *founds* a political order. Political representation is the nation's foundation-act. It is thus far more than merely a convenient device for overcoming the practical problems of direct democracy: for even if direct democracy were possible (thanks to electronic voting, for example) it would still be far inferior to representative democracy.

Direct democracy could never *found* a nation. In order to see this, I'd like to focus on a aspect of political representation that has, until now, received too little attention. A citizen in a direct democracy can afford to remain an island to himself; it is not necessary for him to take into account the existence of his fellow-citizens, nor their needs or wishes. Above all, he has no real reason to be interested in the question of the legitimacy of these needs or wishes. It is sufficient, for him, to know about his own wishes and desires, and how to express them. In sum, the citizen in a direct democracy can remain a politically primitive. Being capable of love and hate and of expressing these feelings is enough. A citizen, in a representative democracy, however, will have to elect someone to represent him. And if it is, as it should be in a proper representative democracy, this will require him to consider a whole gamut of political options, all of them with their own pros and cons. He will therefore have to imagine himself on the theatre of political action. He will have to start thinking of how others might look at him, and at what they might take to be his needs and interests. In sum, he will have to divide himself into two persons, of which the former is the simple incarnation of his needs and interest; whereas the other is an objectification of these needs and interests – an objectification that he may expect to find in the mind of others, or, for that matter, in that of his representative and of the latter's presumable political rivals.

Or, to put it in the terminology appropriate here: to the political primitive he could afford to remain as the member of a direct democracy, he will now have to add a *second* and *other* self consisting of his *representations* of himself, of others and of the whole of the political order.

Only representative democracy obliges the citizen to look at himself from the perspective of others and to do all this in terms of *representations* of the social and political world he is living in. It is only this, I would suggest, that makes him into a true citizen. Political representation is, therefore, not only a matter of the representation of the electorate by its body of representatives; political representation is impossible unless the citizen 'represents' the social and political order. In this way an imaginary representational domain comes into being in which we all participate and this is the universe in which we define ourselves politically and how we relate to others. This political universe is like Leibniz's universe of monads in which each monad is a mirror - i.e. a representation – of all the other monads contained in the universe. In sum, in a direct democracy the citizen can remain a foreigner, alien to all that is at the heart of neighbours and fellow-citizens. He has no incentive to be ever more than a mere brute. Representative democracy, on the other hand, socializes, it educates, it requires of us the capacity and the willingness to see what the world might look like from the perspective of others, and it makes us search for a shared background against which we can negotiate our own needs and interests against those of others. It brings us, in one word, from a state of nature as conceived by the contract-theorists of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries to a civilized world inhabited by human beings capable and willing to see the world through the eyes of others.

From this a more practical argument can be derived against those variants of direct democracy that might now seem within the reach of what can practically be realized. Indeed, what *could* be done is a continuous monitoring of what the opinions of the electorate are about any set of issues. Indeed, opinion polls *could* be perfected in such a way that at each instant it will be possible to ascertain what percentage of the electorate is either for or against a certain policy with regard to a certain issue. And it might be inferred from this that then all the conditions have been satisfied for the realization of a direct (internet) democracy. This might well be true, if this is what direct democracy aims to do.

But, at the same time, against the background of what was said just now about the difference between the citizen of a direct and his counterpart living in a representative democracy, we can establish what would be lost with the transition and where illusions about direct democracy lead to political stultification. For it would eliminate the *moment of representation* taking place in the citizen's mind; i.e. the moment where the citizen is compelled to weigh all important political issues against each other in order to assign them their proper place in his representation of the political world. In a representative democracy, for example when making up his mind about for whom or for what party he shall cast his vote, the citizen will have to take together all political issues he considers important and take a decision about how to fit them into a representation of the political universe. *This moment of representation would be lost with direct democracy (in all its variants).* Admittedly, it may be of the greatest importance to know whether the majority of the electorate is either for or against a certain policy in a certain issue. Nevertheless, of far greater importance is what happens when

citizens transcend this level of individual opinions about individual topics and move on to a level where all these things are synthesized into their own representation of the political and social world they are living in. And precisely this is what we shall inevitably lose with direct democracy, since direct democracy *sui generis* can only deal with individual issues and not with how to fit them into a representational *whole*. This moment of the integration of all that we encounter in the political domain into a representation of the whole is inevitably eliminated by direct democracy – and in this way we amputate part of our political selves in the transition from representative to direct democracy.

The advocate of direct democracy will now perhaps object that this moment of a decision about the representation of the whole could quite well be imitated with the means of direct democracy. For is this not what is at stake in elections? Do elections not compel the citizen to bring together before his mind everything that he has heard, read and seen about politics during, let's say, the last four years? And is his decision in favor of a certain party or of a certain politician not the the political translation of his deliberations? So would it not be a tremendous gain for the cause of democracy if the electorate would be enabled to express each day, each week, or whatever, its political preferences by electronic voting? And would this then not be the best way of combining the merits of traditional representative democracy with the promises of direct democracy? Would this not guarantee that the voice of the voter could not possibly be overheard or ignored anymore by the politician?

Conclusion

All this may well be true. But even if it is, it would amount to even less than a Pyrrhic victory for the advocate of direct democracy. For what would be the use of all this? Citizens do not change daily, or even weekly their political preferences. So direct democracy – as proposed here - would only be a gain in comparison with representative democracy if it would reduce the gap between the tempo in which the citizen's political preferences may change and the tempo of elections. But even if there is such a gap - and one may well doubt this to be the case – bridging it will not make much of a difference. Having elections once in two years, or even each year, could hardly be characterized as a resounding triumph of direct over representative democracy. The search for direct democracy has then, ironically, led us back to what it pretended to improve and to replace.