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2016 URBAN GEOGRAPHY PLENARY LECTURE

On poetry, pragmatism and the urban possibility of creative democracy

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ABSTRACT

Democracy everywhere is under siege, overwhelmed by oligarchy, apathy, bureaucracy, and spectacle, at best an ideal that has never been achieved. Yet against the dystopian vision of post-democracy and the post-political is what John Dewey, more than a half-century ago, called “creative democracy,” a moral practice of radical equality in the pragmatic, collective project of hammering out answers to the question of how we should live. This article explores Dewey’s concept of creative democracy as a moral idea, a personal ethic, a collective commitment, and a precondition for political practice. Establishing the conditions for creative democracy requires a significant reconsideration of the education of democratically competent citizens and of the democratic practice of research and knowledge production. Creative democracy is a poetic project, an imaginative opening, an ethical possibility, a shared responsibility, and a practice of hope that opens a path to achieving a better kind of life to be lived.

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Democrats themselves have always remained suspicious of democracy.
(Rancière, 1999, p. 96)

The account with democratic ideals is still far from being settled.
(Dewey, 1929/1984a, p. 135)

Democracy everywhere seems to be in retreat. Nativism, revanchism, animosity, and fear are in the ascendancy around the globe. Developments that only a few years ago made it reasonable to declare that “democracy ... is back on the agenda” (Purcell, 2013, p. 29) have failed to deliver on their optimistic promise. Hopeful glimmers of emerging democracy have been violently suppressed in the authoritarian winter overshadowing the promise of the Arab Spring. Even where democracy once seemed to flourish, it has been usurped by oligarchs, distracted by spectacle, weakened by apathy, overshadowed by demagoguery, stifled by bureaucracy, and ruthlessly eviscerated by a tyrannical State. In the era of the post-political, “nothing is missing from the census of evils that, at the dawn of the third millennium, the triumph of democratic equality has brought us” (Rancière, 2014a, p. 36).

Viewed from an equally dispiriting perspective, it may simply be the case that, from ancient Athens to Tahrir Square, democracy remains an ideal that has never been

achieved. The history of democracy reveals a persistent skepticism regarding the public's capacity for political engagement and a deep-rooted preference for elite, aristocratic decision-making (Bernstein, 2000, 2010). In the Platonic ideal, the *aristoi*—the best, the wise, and the good—rule over the *demos*—the ill-informed and incompetent masses of common people. Fear of “democratic excess” swayed by the “impulse of passion,” as stated by Madison in *Federalist Papers* No. 10, led the framers of the US Constitution (themselves an aristocratic elite) to insulate the election of presidents and senators from the popular vote, exemplifying Rancière's observation that “‘representative democracy’ ... was initially an oxymoron” (Rancière, 2014a, p. 53). Reflecting the widespread fear of “the revolt of the masses” amidst the economic and political dislocation in Europe in 1929, the Spanish liberal philosopher Ortega y Gasset considered “the accession of the masses to complete social power” to be “the greatest crisis that can afflict peoples, nations, and civilization” (Ortega Y Gasset, 1932/1994, p. 5). The social commentator Walter Lippmann, writing during the same period in the United States, derided “the mystical fallacy of democracy, that the people, all of them, are competent” (Lippmann, 1927/1993, p. 28) and concluded that “the problems that vex democracy seem to be unmanageable by democratic methods” (1927/1993, p. 179). Even the conservative libertarian US presidential candidate Barry Goldwater, in 1964, called for “*Freedom—made orderly ... balanced* so that liberty, lacking order, will not become the license of the mob and of the jungle” (quoted in Rodgers, 2011, p. 16). A generation later, Wendy Brown called democracy today “an empty signifier” that “has never been more conceptually footloose or substantively hollow” (Brown, 2011, p. 44). For Rancière, the “scandal of democracy” (2014a, p. 47) reveals consensus politics as nothing more than “the law of domination” (2014a, p. 96) exercised through a “totalitarian form of democracy” (Kamat, 2015, p. 79) in which equality yields anarchy and post-democracy denotes “the paradox that, in the name of democracy, emphasizes the consensual practice of effacing the forms of democratic action” (Rancière, 2014a, p. 101). The litany of voices proclaiming the era of post-democracy denigrates democracy as depoliticization, the end of history, and the guarantor of repression (Rancière, 2014a, 2014b; Swyngedouw, 2011; Wilson & Swyngedouw, 2015).

Yet against this wholly dystopian, debilitating, and disempowering vision of the post-political is what Dewey (1939/2008), more than a half-century earlier, called “creative democracy.” Dewey presented creative democracy as a moral practice of openness to others in the collective project of hammering out answers to the question of how we should live. For both Rancière and Dewey, democracy is not a matter of institutional arrangements, legislative enactments, the aggregation of preferences, or “merely a form of government” (Dewey, 1888/1997). Dewey and Rancière share an abiding commitment to radical equality as a precondition for political praxis (Davidson & Iveson, 2015). But there the similarity between Dewey, the lifelong staunch advocate of democracy, and Rancière, the herald of the post-political, ends. Whereas Rancière seeks to blame democracy for eviscerating the political, Dewey's purpose is to offer democracy as a mode of taking political responsibility (compare Young, 2011). Post-democratic theory represents the inevitable culmination of atomistic, liberal individualism in a splintered and fragmented society, while Deweyan democracy, in contrast, is a collaborative project aimed at molding a collective life and enabling individuals to participate in the realization of common goals. While the post-political equates democracy with consensus and the

eradication of difference, Dewey embraces political differences as an indispensable resource enriching agonistic democracy. Democracy from a post-political perspective is a mode of subjectification and discipline that reduces individuals to those who are governed, whereas Dewey links democracy to education aimed at expanding the capability of individuals to govern, by which he meant collaboratively creating the world we collectively choose to inhabit. If the depoliticization of democracy yields social paralysis and reproduces the status quo, Dewey's creative democracy seeks to "open the road and point the way to new and better experiences" (Dewey, 1939/2008, p. 229). The post-political message of societal breakdown contrasts strikingly with Dewey's message of social hope.

This paper explores Dewey's concept of creative democracy as a moral idea, a personal ethic, a collective commitment, a political practice, a method of inquiry, and a way of life. I summarize Dewey's understanding of democracy as a practice of "moral and spiritual association" in which the integrity of equal personhood is a precondition for political engagement. Creative democracy, for Dewey, entails the application of this moral ideal in establishing the conditions through which political engagement can flourish, conditions that are most fully realized in the context of urban life. I then consider the implications of creative democracy in provoking significant change within two domains of particular salience to the academic community: the education of democratically competent citizens and the democratic practice of research and knowledge production. As a mode of being together in the world, creative democracy is equally applicable as a political relation in the demos, a relation between educator and student, and an ethical relation between researcher and research subject in the practice of inquiry and the production of knowledge. The concluding section comments on creative democracy as a poetic project, an imaginative challenge, and an epistemology of hope.

My justification for focusing on creative democracy rests on pragmatic grounds, or on what the neo-pragmatist philosopher Hilary Putnam (1990) called an epistemological and cognitive justification. This pragmatic, epistemological justification relies on two premises: first, that creative democracy, in the broadest ontological sense, is a way of life based on equal political participation by inherently equal participants; and second, that this understanding is a form of praxis that offers the best promise of achieving "a sense for the better kind of life to be led" (Dewey, 1919/1993, p. 39). From the perspective of pragmatism, creative democracy as relational praxis offers a way of life—of being human together—that is superior *in its effects* to the alternatives of elite, aristocratic rule or the tyranny of anarchy. Creative democracy can be held to be epistemologically and cognitively preferable, as compared with its alternatives, only as demonstrated in its results as a process for producing solutions for the problems of the day. Embracing creative democracy is not merely grasping for a more uplifting, if illusory and self-deceptive, alternative to post-political nihilism; nor is it an indulgent turn to sentimental romanticism; nor does it reflect a descent into moralizing or unfettered idealism. Creative democracy as praxis is not merely a theoretical ideal applied to objectified subjects floating everywhere or nowhere in a theorized world. It is worth considering because of its practical effects when practiced across a variety of relational domains. As democrats, educators, researchers, and human beings, we are, all of us, already inside the project.

Democracy as “moral and spiritual association”

Democracy was a central and recurrent theme in Dewey's thought throughout his long and productive lifetime (Bernstein, 2010; Putnam, 1990; Westbrook, 1991, 2005). In an essay on “The Ethics of Democracy,” written in 1888 when he was just 29 years old and already 4 years into a professorship at the University of Michigan, Dewey articulated his understanding of democracy as “an ethical conception” and “a form of moral and spiritual association” (Dewey, 1888/1997, p. 196). Dewey critiqued the view, prevalent at the time and since, that equated democracy with the anarchy of atomistic liberal individualism, a rule by the masses in which power “is minced into morsels and each man's portion is almost infinitesimally small” (Maine, H. 1885. *Popular Government*; quoted in Westbrook, 1991, p. 38). Dewey rejected the Rousseauian idea of pre-social, atomistic individuals “without any social relations *until* they form a contract ... a heap of grains of sand needing some factitious mortar to put them into a semblance of order” (Dewey, 1888/1997, p. 186). This, Dewey forcefully argued, was merely a “numerical individualism” based on the liberal assumption of atomistic individualism in which “equality means numerical equality” that can be counted, quantified, classified, and categorized based on “ideas which conceive of it after the type of individualism of a numerical character” (1888/1997, p. 200).

Democracy, Dewey insisted, “is anything but a numerical notion” (Dewey, 1888/1997, p. 202) because “equality is not an arithmetical but an ethical conception” (Dewey, 1888/1997, p. 201). Dewey's ethical conception drew a sharp distinction between atomistic liberal individualism of a “numerical” character and the inherent moral integrity of personhood. “From the democratic standpoint,” he claimed, “it must be remembered that the individual is something more than the individual, namely a personality. His freedom is not mere self-assertion, nor unregulated desire Liberty is not a numerical notion of isolation; it is the ethical idea that personality is the supreme and only law, that every man (*sic*) is an absolute end in himself” (Dewey, 1888/1997, p. 200). By personality, Dewey meant personhood, the inherent capacity for self-realization and self-actualization that “indwells in every individual” (Dewey, 1888/1997, p. 199). This idea was so central to Dewey's belief that he returned to it three decades later in an address on “Philosophy and Democracy” presented to the Philosophical Union of the University of California in 1919, which deserves to be quoted at length:

Whatever the idea of equality means for democracy, it ... denies the basic principle of atomistic individualism For the individualism traditionally associated with democracy makes equality quantitative, and hence individuality something external and mechanical rather than qualitative and unique. In social and moral matters, equality does not mean mathematical equivalence It means that no matter how great the quantitative differences of ability, strength, position, wealth, such differences are negligible in comparison with something else—the fact of individuality, the manifestation of something irreplaceable. It means, in short, a world in which an existence must be reckoned with on its own account, not as something capable of equation with and transformation into something else. It implies, so to speak, a metaphysical mathematics of the incommensurable in which each speaks for itself and demands consideration on its own behalf. (Dewey, 1919/1993, p. 46)

The moral proposition of Deweyan democracy entails recognition of the inherent personhood of every individual. “Democracy, in a word, is a social, that is to say, an ethical conception,” Dewey held, “and ... a form of government only because it is a

form of moral and spiritual association” (Dewey, 1888/1997, p. 196). In place of an atomistic individualism of self-assertion, autonomy as isolation, and solitary preference-seeking, Dewey envisioned a relational individualism of recognition and mutuality realized through collective respect for the inherent personhood of each individual. As Tan (2004) convincingly explains, Dewey’s concept of individualism and personhood was social rather than atomistic, a celebration of uniqueness rather than of isolated autonomy. “In every individual there lives an infinite and universal possibility,” Dewey insisted, and democracy is a moral practice of recognizing, valuing, and nurturing that possibility and providing the conditions for its flourishing. And he repeated the point at every opportunity: “I have tried to suggest,” he wrote in 1888, “that democracy is an ethical idea, the idea of a personality, with truly infinite capacities, incorporate with every man. Democracy and the one, the ultimate, ethical idea of humanity are to my mind synonyms” (1888/1997, p. 204). It is in this sense that Dewey rejected the idea of democracy as merely an institutional arrangement, a process of deliberation, or an apparatus of government: “To get rid of the habit of thinking of democracy as something institutional and external and to acquire the habit of treating it as a way of personal life is to realize that democracy is a moral ideal and so far as it becomes a fact is a moral fact” (Dewey, 1939/2008, p. 228).

As Hilary Putnam observes, Deweyan “democracy is not just a form of social life among other workable forms of social life; it is the *precondition* for the full application of intelligence to the solution of social problems” (Putnam, 1990, p. 1671, emphasis added). Democracy understood as a “moral fact” is not simply a deliberative process embodying Habermasian communicative rationality; it is, rather, a deliberative process that *presupposes* a moral commitment to the ontological priority of the “personality” or personhood of all those engaged in the deliberation. Viewed as a practice of moral association, therefore, democracy is a collective, relational, and constitutive project. It is *collective*, first, because individual freedom and autonomy are far more than the ability to act unfettered by external constraints (“... doing as one likes ... ordering life as one pleases ... thinking and acting as one has a mind to ...” (Dewey, 1888/1997, p. 200)). Autonomy, instead, is realized through participation in the collective project of constructing the world within which individuality is achieved (Putnam, 1990). In an insightful analysis of Deweyan democracy, Matthew Festenstein explains that individual autonomy requires social and collective engagement: “An aspect of my freedom is my having a share in molding the terms of collective life of the social groups of which I am a part ... self-government through the shaping of the contexts which in turn shape individuality” (Festenstein, 1995, pp. 716–717). Second, democracy is *relational* because it extends beyond the model of communicative or discursive deliberation to what Axel Honeth (1998) calls the practice of social or reflexive cooperation. Honeth interprets Dewey to hold that the political sphere is not merely “the place for a communicative exercise of freedom but the *cognitive medium* with whose help society attempts, experimentally, to explore, process, and solve its own problems with the coordination of social action” (Honeth, 1998, p. 775, emphasis added). Democracy on this account moves from the narrowly deliberative to the broader social arena, incorporating a morality of social interaction and relationality that is more extensive than the rules of discursive, communicative practice. And, third, democracy is *constitutive* because the political interaction among diverse individuals with multiple perspectives produces

solutions that are greater than the sum of the parts. This is the epistemological justification for creative democracy: that the juxtaposition and interaction of diverse perspectives produce better solutions because, as Dewey observed, “intercourse with others somehow makes the life of each more distinctive” (Dewey, 1919/1993, p. 46). Dewey’s democracy is insistently agonistic rather than consensual, enrolling disagreement as a source of collective enrichment rather than seeking consensus as a means of eliding and reducing difference to a common denominator. In Dewey’s view, “to take as far as possible every conflict which arises—and they are bound to arise—is to treat those who disagree—even profoundly—with us as those from whom we may learn, and in so far, as friends” (Dewey, 1939/2008, p. 228).

Creative democracy

Dewey returned to democracy in an address prepared for a dinner honoring the occasion of his eightieth birthday in 1939, 50 years after publication of “The Ethics of Democracy” in 1888. The title of his essay, “Creative Democracy—The Task Before Us,” signaled that democracy is an unfolding practice rather than an end-state and that creating democracy is a task that is continuous and open-ended (Harney, McCurry, Scott, & Wills, 2016). Writing at the onset of a worldwide conflagration in 1939, Dewey asserted that “the depth of the present crisis is due in considerable part to the fact that for a long period we acted as if our democracy were something that perpetuated itself automatically; as if our ancestors had succeeded in setting up a machine that solved the problem of perpetual motion in politics ... a kind of political mechanism that will work as long as citizens were reasonably faithful in performing political duties” (Dewey, 1939/2008, p. 225).

Against this static view, Dewey called “the creation of democracy ... an issue which is now as urgent as it was a hundred and fifty years ago” at the nation’s founding (Dewey, 1939/2008, p. 224). Repeatedly insisting that “democracy is a way of life” and “a *personal* way of individual life” (p. 226, emphasis in original), he situated the creation of democracy in “the creation of personal attitudes in individual human beings” (p. 227) rather than in the design of external institutional arrangements. He reiterated that the personal attitudes to which he referred and on which democracy relies involve a willingness to treat others as fully human within the collective process of democratic governance. But while this premise enunciates a moral principle, Dewey was scornful of moralizing and he repudiated the idea that creating democracy could be advanced through a project of moral reform (Bernstein, 2000, p. 219).

Creative democracy is a *creative* project pursued through purposeful—that is, pragmatic—practice situated along at least three distinct yet interrelated dimensions. First, and as a precondition for all that would follow, the task of creative democracy is to foster the development of creative individuals embodying what Richard Bernstein (2000, p. 226) calls “the democratic personality” and what Mouffe (1996, p. 4) characterizes as an attitude of “radical opening to the other.” As Bernstein explains, “this type of creativity involves a number of virtues: the courage to experiment, to change opinions in the light of experience ... a genuine respect for one’s fellow citizens, a respect and openness that is not simply professed but concretely exemplified in one’s practices” (Bernstein, 2000, p. 226). Dewey was uninterested in the formulaic recitation of moral sentiments: what matters—the only thing that matters—is the “attitudes which human beings display to

one another in all the incidents and relations of daily life” (Dewey, 1939/2008: 226). Writing, it must be remembered, in 1939, Dewey declared that

“to denounce Nazism for intolerance, cruelty and stimulation of hatred amounts to fostering insincerity if, in our personal relations to other persons, if, in our daily walk and conversation, we are moved by racial, color or other class prejudice; indeed, by anything save a generous belief in their possibilities as human beings” (Dewey, 1939/2008, p. 226).

The second and commensurate task of creative democracy is to apply the democratic personality to the creation of democracy itself (Bernstein, 2000). This, again, is not simply a matter of designing institutional arrangements for democratic practice, for the institution cannot compel the practice. It is, rather, a matter of modeling and performing the practice of the democratic personality from and through which democratic institutions can emerge. And, third, it is democratic individuals (as Dewey defined them) engaged in democratic praxis who can devise solutions to current problems so as to create “the better kind of life to be lived” (Dewey, 1919/1993, p. 39).

Perhaps more than anything else, Dewey’s views on creative democracy expressed a statement of faith. His faith was twofold: first, a faith in the generosity of the human spirit, reflected in a willingness to extend to others the possibility of personhood and to recognize in others the possibility of achieving their own redemption; and second, faith that people will act in the face of that generosity to realize their own possibility and will have—or will be willing to develop—the capability and capacity to engage in collective deliberation toward collective goals (Bernstein, 2000). “Democracy,” Dewey asserted, “is a way of life controlled by a working faith in the possibilities of human nature” (Dewey, 1939/2008, p. 226). He called upon “faith in the potentialities of human nature ... exhibited in every human being” (p. 226). He evoked “the democratic faith in human equality” (p. 226); “faith in the capacity of human beings for intelligent judgment and action” (p. 227); and “faith in the possibilities of intelligence and in education as a correlate of intelligence” (p. 227). “For what is the faith in democracy,” he asked, “except faith in the capacity of the intelligence of the common man to respond with commonsense to the free play of facts and ideas” (p. 227). Creative democracy, furthermore, “as a way of life is controlled by personal faith in personal day-by-day working together with others” and “faith in the possibility of conducting disputes, controversies and conflicts as cooperative undertakings” (p. 228). Positing his faith “in the formal terms of a philosophic position,” he averred that “democracy is belief in the ability of human experience to generate the aims and methods by which further experience will grow in ordered richness” (p. 229). He expressed the pragmatist’s conviction that “democracy is the faith that the process of experience is more important than any special result attained” (p. 229) and that “since the process of experience is capable of being educative, faith in democracy is all one with faith in experience and education” (p. 229).

Dewey readily acknowledged that his statement of faith left him open to charges of utopianism and naiveté and he was not averse to invoking strong language in his defense:

I am willing to leave to upholders of totalitarian states of the right and the left the view that faith in the capacities of intelligence is utopia. For the faith is so deeply embedded in the

methods which are intrinsic to democracy that when a professed democrat denies the faith he convicts himself of treachery to his profession. (Dewey, 1939/2008, p. 226)

While Bernstein, among others, considers Dewey's commitment to the democratic potential of every individual to be "a radical idea," (Bernstein, 2000, p. 218), Dewey himself, as a committed pragmatist, considered his views to be neither radical nor utopian nor naïve nor grounded in unsubstantiated belief. Rather than expressing utopian idealism or irresponsible naiveté, his faith in the human capacity for collaborative engagement was grounded in empirical observation and, as examples of intense cooperative intelligence in the real world, he cited the division of labor, the organization of work in the industrial factory, and the intricate human interactions performed in navigating everyday life.

The urban condition of multiplicity, simultaneity, performativity, and juxtaposition constitutes the ideal possibility for creative democracy. The encounter among multiple publics within which Dewey (1927/1954) located the origins of governance finds its most fertile ground in the cosmopolitan multiculturalism (Sandercock, 2003) of urban life and in the urban public spaces (Staeheli, 2010) that tolerate and nurture interconnections among differentially situated groups (Watson, 2006). This is the urban that Doreen Massey (2005) described in terms of contemporaneous plurality and coexisting heterogeneity and that Young (1990, p. 227) characterized as "openness to unassimilated otherness." When Farias (2011, p. 372) describes urban assemblages as "new forms of collective experimentation and learning in which multiple forms of knowledge are brought together in new ways," he is echoing (as he acknowledges) Dewey's concept of creative democracy. The performative and continuously unfolding character of urban space, furthermore, directly corresponds to Dewey's (and pragmatism's) emphasis on process, anticipation, emergence, contingency, and becoming (Harney et al., 2016; Lake, 2010; Massey, 2005).

Education for democracy

For Dewey, the pragmatist, his faith in creative democracy laid down a challenge to provide the conditions for its realization. Democracy, he held, is a way of personal life premised on the capacity of human beings to embody the democratic personality "if proper conditions are furnished" (Dewey, 1939/2008, p. 227, emphasis added). If the available evidence reveals a failure of democracy to achieve its potential, the fault is not in the democratic vision but in the failure to provide the conditions necessary for realizing its possibility. Dewey harbored no illusions concerning the strength and depth of the barriers preventing the public from approaching the democratic ideal, as he outlined in his detailed response, in *The Public and Its Problems* (Dewey, 1927/1954), to Lippmann's (1927/1993) denunciation of the democratic incompetence of mass society. His solution was not, as Lippmann and many others proposed, to install an aristocracy of experts at the helm of government but, rather, to furnish the conditions under which democracy might flourish. Foremost among those conditions, for Dewey, is the education of democratically competent citizens as the essential precondition for creative democracy (Dewey, 1916/2012). If actually existing democracy has failed to realize its ideal potential, the fault, he said, is not in the public's democratic incompetence but in the failure of educators to produce a democratically competent public.

Education as preparation for democracy, Dewey believed, seeks to expand the public's capacity for reasoned and reasonable political engagement rather than inculcating a particular point of view. It thus both avoids the political project of indoctrination to a particular point of view and contrasts sharply with Foucauldian subject formation as a technique of governance. Subject formation enrolls citizens as participants in politics, and thus in the discipline and control that politics entails (Cruikshank, 1999; Rasmussen, 2011; Rose & Miller, 1992; Wilson and Swyngedouw, 2015). Education, in contrast, constitutes subjects as democratically competent political agents empowered to engage in the collective performance of what Dewey (1935/2000, p. 53) called "cooperative experimental intelligence" aimed at creating a desired world. As the pragmatic preparation for democracy, education substitutes for ineffectual moralizing about democratic failure and provides the essential precondition for moral action. Education also forestalls the futility of establishing institutional frameworks for democracy only to complain that participants lack the capacity for their effective deployment. "It is useless," Dewey said, "to talk about the failure of democracy until the source of its failure has been grasped and steps are taken to bring about that type of social organization that will encourage the socialized extension of intelligence" (Dewey, 1935/2000, p. 58).

The "socialized extension of intelligence" is what Dewey understood as the meaning and purpose of education applied to preparing children to become democratically competent citizens. As Robert Westbrook explains in his comprehensive biography of Dewey, "the formation of democratic character remained very much at the heart of Dewey's philosophy of education" (Westbrook, 1991, p. 171). Dewey was at the forefront of debates in progressive education at the time that held that memorizing facts and accumulating information were merely the background for developing habits of thought rather than ends in themselves, and "his call for the teaching of scientific thinking in the schools was directed, above all, at cultivating the capacity of children for the exercise of deliberative, practical reason in moral situations" (Westbrook, 1991, p. 170). This also meant that the classroom itself, and the mode of interaction between teachers and students, should model practices of openness, generosity, and respect that characterize the democratic personality. According to Westbrook,

"the best way to do this was to initiate school children from the beginning in the form of social life, the 'mode of associated living' characteristic of a democracy: a community of full participation and 'conjoint communicated experience' in which social sympathy and deliberative moral reason would develop. Thus, classrooms in a democracy had to be not only communities of inquiry but *democratic* communities of inquiry" (Westbrook, 1991, p. 172).

Education as preparation for participation in democratic reasoning represented a radical departure from the prevailing focus of education as preparation for participation in the industrial labor force. Dewey's views on education in this regard encountered vigorous opposition from corporate and governmental interests that sought to align the purpose of public education with the needs of a rapidly expanding industrial economy. From Dewey's day to this (including the contemporary academic disciplines of geography and planning), preparation of a skilled workforce has taken precedence over preparation of a democratically competent public. Dewey argued in response that devoting the educational system to preparing the next generation for labor simply slotted bodies into the existing class structure and "was a form of class education

which would make the schools a more efficient agency for the reproduction of an undemocratic society” (Westbrook, 1991, p. 175). Preparing children for democracy, in contrast, not only refuses to reproduce existing class divisions, but also provides democratic citizens with the capacity to both challenge prevailing structures and devise an alternative mode of social organization that more closely corresponds to the collective “sense for the better kind of life to be led.” Rather than aligning education to the needs of industrial capital, Dewey called for democratizing the workplace and socializing the forces of production (Dewey, 1888/1997, 1929/1984b; 1935/2000). He repeatedly advocated for the subordination of economic relations to social needs, presaging a theme that Karl Polanyi (1944) was to develop half a century later:

What is meant in detail by a democracy of wealth (is) that all industrial relations are to be regarded as subordinate to human relations, to the law of personality It is absolutely required that industrial organization shall be made a *social* function (and that) society as a whole ... is to take charge of all those undertakings which we call economic And this ... is precisely what is meant when we speak of industrial relations as being necessarily social; we mean that they are to become the material of an ethical realization; the form and substance of a community of good (though not necessarily of goods) wider than any now known. (Dewey, 1888/1997, p. 64)

Dewey characteristically posed the question in terms of liberating the inherent potential of the democratic personality:

The question, then, is not merely a quantitative one. It is not a matter of an increased number of persons who will take part in the creation and enjoyment of art and science. It is a qualitative question. Can a material, industrial civilization be converted into a distinctive agency for liberating the minds and refining the emotions of all who take part in it? (Dewey, 1929/1960, p. 100)

Research and the creative democracy of knowledge production

Creative democracy mobilizes the “socialized extension of intelligence” on behalf of producing an adequate response to Dewey’s question. Dewey did not entirely disparage the application of expertise—he readily acknowledged that one did not want an auto mechanic to fix the economy or an economist to fix one’s car—but he warned that highly specialized expertise distances elites from “knowledge of the needs which they are supposed to serve” (Dewey, 1927/1954, p. 206). And technical expertise in one area, he argued, provides no special qualification for expertise where it is really needed: “While the artisan is expert as long as purely limited technical questions arise, he (*sic*) is helpless when it comes to the only really important questions, the moral questions as to values” (Dewey, 1920/2004, p. 9). Dewey strenuously advocated the socialization of the industrial class-based economy and he held that conversion of the workplace into a democratic community required worker ownership of the forces of production (Dewey, 1888/1997). But he also insisted that it is the collective task of creative democracy to discern what form this would take and how it would be achieved, and he rejected complaints that he himself had failed to articulate what a radically reconstructed social formation would look like. Finding adequate solutions to the challenge of imagining and creating a social formation conducive to a better kind of life to be lived depends on the mobilization of democratically competent citizens, drawing in an ever-wider range of perspectives, experiences, and social positions, and deploying “cooperative experimental intelligence”

in a continuous process of knowledge formation, testing, reflection, and reassessment. And every “solution” is tentative and subject to constant review, continuous reflection, and further experimentation, for the world is never constituted once and for all and the results of inquiry are always provisional (Bridge, 2014; Harney et al., 2016; Lake, 2016).

Reimagining the practice of research as a project of creative democracy instigates a radical reconsideration of the purpose and process of inquiry; the role and status of the researcher; the standard or justification by which knowledge is certified or validated; and the relationship between researchers and the subjects and objects of research (Lake, 2014, 2016; Lake & Zitcer, 2012). The creatively democratic practice of “cooperative experimental intelligence” becomes cooperative by replacing the expert researcher with a nonhierarchical community of democratically competent inquirers; it is experimental in seeking and testing solutions rather than definitively describing or representing a preexisting reality; and its pragmatic intelligence adopts, as the standard for validating “truth,” the usefulness of knowledge for achieving desired ends.

The affinity of this perspective to participatory action research (PAR) is evident (Harney et al., 2016; Kindon, Pain, & Kesby, 2008; Lake, 2013). Both share an orientation to problem-solving, with identification of the research problem collaboratively worked out among all participants. Both creative democracy and participatory research embrace the value of multiply situated perspectives in contributing to the production of knowledge. Yet PAR retains the epistemological perspective of a research project, often maintains a hierarchical distinction between “researcher” and “participants,” and preserves an orientation toward the representation of reality, albeit from the multiple perspectives of research participants.

The practice of creative democracy, in contrast, seeks to move beyond research to conversation as an approach to knowledge production. Creative democracy pursues the production of knowledge through conversation among a democratic community of inquirers that the neo-pragmatist philosopher Richard Rorty describes as “persons whose paths through life have fallen together, united by civility rather than by a common goal, much less by a common ground” (Rorty, 1979, p. 318). “The democratic community of Dewey’s dreams,” Rorty explains, “is a community ... in which everybody thinks that it is human solidarity, rather than knowledge of something ... that really matters” (Rorty, 1999, p. 20). The point of inquiry in the mode of creative democracy, Rorty reminds us, “is to keep the conversation going rather than to find objective truth” (Rorty, 1979, p. 377). What constitutes objectivity, in this approach, switches from the unsupportable claim of impartiality—the perspective from nowhere—to the suturing of multiple perspectives so that no ideologically dominant perspective can (mis)represent itself as the general will (Harding, 2015; Massumi, 2015). Creative democracy succeeds by enrolling ever-larger numbers (and perspectives) into the conversational community of inquirers rather than by expanding the size of the audience for the dissemination of findings. As Rorty explains:

Pragmatists see scientific progress not as the gradual attenuation of a veil of appearances which hides the intrinsic nature of reality from us, but as the increasing ability to respond to the concerns of ever larger groups of people Pragmatists (like) the idea of getting more and more human beings into our community—of taking the needs and interests and views of more and more diverse human beings into account Pragmatists think of moral progress as more like sewing together a very large, elaborate, polychrome quilt The hope is to sew such groups together with a thousand little stitches—to invoke a thousand little commonalities between their members. (Rorty, 1999, pp. 82–87)

Inquiry within the democratic community replaces confrontation between competing representations of reality with conversation aimed at creating solutions to pressing social problems (Rorty, 1979, p. 163). In *The Public and Its Problems*, Dewey (1927/1954) described the public (what he elsewhere called the democratic community) as finding and constituting itself when a growing awareness of a shared problem generates a need for a collective solution. Under these circumstances, the purpose of inquiry shifts from seeking the accurate representation of an already existing reality to producing knowledge that is useful in addressing the problem at hand. As Rorty explains, “Dewey wanted to get rid of what he called ‘the notion, which has ruled philosophy ever since the time of the Greeks, that the office of knowledge is to uncover the antecedently real, rather than, as is the case with our practical judgments, to gain the kind of understanding which is necessary to deal with problems as they arise’” (Dewey, 1929/1960, p. 14; quoted in Rorty, 1999, p. 29). “Pragmatists,” Rorty continued, “want to replace the appearance-reality distinction by that between descriptions of the world and of ourselves which are less useful and those which are more useful. When the question ‘useful for what?’ is pressed, they have nothing to say except ‘useful to create a better future’” (Rorty, 1999, p. 27).

Once the Enlightenment ideal of validating truth as accurate representation is replaced by the pragmatic criterion of efficacy in practice—once the question changes from “Is it true?” to “Does it work and is it useful?”—the verification of knowledge claims “reverts to the community as (the) source of epistemic authority” or, put simply, “what our peers will, *ceteris paribus*, let us get away with saying” (Rorty, 1979, pp. 176, 188). To the frequent charge of relativism that this view provokes, pragmatists respond that this simply echoes the principle of peer review and Kuhnian normal science in which knowledge claims correspond to the ontological and epistemological presuppositions of prevailing paradigms. And because pragmatists maintain the provisionality of all knowledge claims, persistent reflexivity provides a bulwark against relativism by exposing all knowledge claims to the bright light of continuous democratic scrutiny.

Adopting creative democracy as an epistemology of knowledge production significantly restructures the traditional relationship between researcher and research subject. In Rorty’s words, “to see keeping a conversation going as a sufficient aim ... is to see human beings as generators of new descriptions rather than beings one hopes to describe accurately” (Rorty, 1979, p. 378). The role of researcher within this framework devolves to that of one among many participants in a nonhierarchical community of inquirers within which the academic researcher contributes technical knowledge as one form of expertise among many within the conversation. Rorty quotes Dewey as saying that “man should not dispute or assert, but whisper results to his neighbor” (Dewey, 1934, p. 347; quoted in Rorty, 1999, p. 97).

Reconsidering the project of research in this way, of course, runs counter to the institutional arrangements and reward structures of the knowledge production industry and it would be irresponsible to ignore or trivialize those constraints. While advocating the shift from confrontation to conversation, Rorty readily acknowledges the difficulty of relinquishing authority within the democratization of knowledge production. “This stage is pretty hard to reach,” he says, “for one is always being distracted by daydreams: daydreams in which the heroic pragmatist plays a Walter-Mitty-like role in the immanent teleology of world history” (Rorty, 1999, p. 133). Radical change in institutional

practices conducive to the adoption of creative democracy in academic inquiry is a project for the very long term. But not initiating what Rorty calls the “shy crablike sideways movement” toward creative democracy is to reproduce and reinforce existing practices of knowledge production and the power relations from which they emanate, and is to subvert the possibility of realizing the goals we profess to espouse—that of devising a path toward achieving the better kind of life to be led.

Conclusions

Creative democracy is a practice of hope. The faith that Dewey expressed in the possibility inherent in the democratic personality propels hope that creative democracy can produce useful knowledge *if proper conditions are furnished*. That is our responsibility and our opportunity. It is an opportunity, first of all, to reject the descent into nihilism of much contemporary critique. Rorty presents the choice in fairly stark terms:

One can emphasize, as Dewey did, the moral importance of the social sciences—their role in widening and deepening our sense of community and of the possibilities open to this community. Or one can emphasize, as Michel Foucault does, the way in which the social sciences have served as instruments of the “disciplinary society,” the connection between knowledge and power rather than between knowledge and human solidarity. (Rorty, 1982, p. 204)

This choice closely aligns with the distinction that Eve Sedgwick describes between paranoid and reparative forms of thinking as ways of being in the world (Sedgwick, 2003). On Sedgwick’s account, reflecting Paul Ricoeur’s hermeneutics of suspicion, paranoid thinking anticipates the worst. Paranoia employs an epistemology of exposure that reveals the antecedently real, which, as universal, reductive, and deterministic, leaves no avenue of escape. Imitation of the past and its replication in the future are the only and inevitable possibilities. A reparative reading, in contrast, offers a different course. “Among (the) names for the reparative process,” Sedgwick says, “is love” (Sedgwick, 2003, p. 128). She writes that reparative thinking “inaugurates ethical possibility—in the form of (an) empathetic view of the other as at once good, damaged, integral, and requiring and eliciting love and care” (Sedgwick, 2003, p. 137). That ethical possibility opens up the opportunity for surprise—the realization that the future may be different from the present and that a better world is possible—if proper conditions are furnished.

Being open to surprise is the motivation and the justification for creative democracy. It is what Rorty has in mind when he implores us “to keep space open for the sense of wonder which poets can sometimes cause—wonder that there is something new under the sun, something which is *not* an accurate representation of what was already there, something which (at least for the moment) cannot be explained and can barely be described” (Rorty, 1979, p. 370). It is what Lefebvre means when he writes, in *The Urban Revolution*, that, in the imagination needed to escape the blind field obscuring our vision beyond the next horizon, “the scholar’s path is the same as the poet’s” (Lefebvre, 2003, p. 109). It is what Jane Bennett means by the enchantment of modern life: “a state of wonder,” “a surprising encounter,” “a mood of ethical potential,” and the “urge to exercise one’s capacity to see things as otherwise than they are” (Bennett, 2001, p. 76). And it is what Woodyer and Geoghegan (2012, p. 196) call for in a re-enchantment of geography that “offers a way of knowing that seeks nourishment

through a multiplicity of experiences, welcoming surprise.” Pragmatists from Dewey to Rorty wish to “see both intellectual and moral progress ... as an increase in imaginative power. We see imagination as the cutting edge of cultural evolution, the power which—given peace and prosperity—constantly operates so as to make the human future richer than the human past” (Rorty, 1999, p. 87).

Creative democracy is a shared responsibility in which we all can play a part. In assessing our willingness to participate, we might consider the choice with which we are presented about how we would wish to be known. Would we wish to be known, Rorty asks, “as the sort of person envisioned by decision theory, someone whose identity is constituted by ‘preference rankings’” or as one whose identity is constituted by “fellow feeling?” (Rorty, 1999, p. 78). Once we have answered that question, we might apply the same standard to the question of how we wish to know others with whom we engage in our daily and professional lives, as students and teachers, as research participants, and as collaborators in creative democracy seeking to achieve a better kind of life to be lived.

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