

ELECTRONIC DEMOCRACY IN PRACTICE: ONE, TWO, THREE... COUNTLESS VARIANTS

Since the early nineties, electronic democracy started to occupy a not insignificant position in the political agenda of some political and social forces in both the USA and Europe. Referring to American political life, but also echoed in European societies and beyond, Alvin and Heidi Toffler (1995), have argued that representative institutions of liberal democracy, such as the US Congress have now become old-fashioned and are suffering a progressive erosion of relevance. They and their supporters claim that the crisis of representative democracy calls therefore for the wholesale rethinking of the US Constitution. These calls for a redrafting of the political arrangements upon which Western democracies have been premised in the modern era, did not fail to attract the attention of their political leaderships. Vociferous Republican critics of the increasingly intrusive and all-pervasive Washington bureaucracies embraced electronic democracy as the solution to the democratic deficit which, in their opinion, marks the American political process. Public awareness of the potential of CMC has been supported by the high profile embrace of the new technologies by political figures such as the former speaker of the House of Representatives, Newt Gingrich and American conservative Republican organizations such as the influential *Progress and Freedom Foundation* (1996). The Democratic party has also tried to offer its own, alternative vision of cyberdemocracy with high-level initiatives announced by Al Gore and Bill Clinton.

At about the same time, the *Commission of the European Union* also expressed its interest in the utilization of new technologies (cf. Bangemann Report, 1994 ; European Commission Action Plan, 1995), including initiatives to enhance the democratic process and service provision to European citizens at all levels of government.

In the US, partly in search of an inspiring vision for his party, his platform, and partly in response to criticisms against US representative institutions, the former speaker of the US House

of Representatives, Newt Gingrich, has often expressed his aim to transform Congress into a virtual forum: he has publicly stated that he envisions a House Committee holding a hearing in five cities by television while the actual committee is sitting in Washington while he has initiated THOMAS, a House of representatives programme, aiming to make eventually all house documents accessible to Internet users, a move which according to Gingrich will get legislative materials readily available to the American public and will spark debate that will lead to electronic town-hall meetings (Wright, 1995: 51).

Sharing the Republicans optimism regarding the democratizing potential of CMC and making clear its commitment to the *National Information Infrastructure (NII) initiative*, the Clinton Administration has introduced its own initiative, the *White House E-Mail System* and heralded it as an important step towards opening up the White House to US citizens. This is, in fact, mainly an electronic outlet of information like presidential or vice-presidential speeches, press releases and non-classified administration information (public documents, bills etc). This outlet is accessible via the Internet and a number of other networks. In addition, in a further attempt to demonstrate its commitment to open government and its determination to keep at the forefront of the developments in the utilisation of CMC for enhancing the democratic process, the White House introduced its World Wide Web page (autumn 1994), allowing the public to participate in virtual tours of the White House, and containing sound and video clips of the President and Vice-President. A possibly more meaningful feature in the White House Web page are the links to government agency sites or to documents and other government-related information it contains. This, rather limited, ambition to provide basic information and limited access and interactivity has also been shared by a substantial number of US local authorities and some of their counterparts in other parts of the world and, at the time of writing, this model of information provision and limited interactivity (mainly e-mail enquiries and comments) has been adopted by most governments throughout the world.

However, more serious attempts at the forefront of this shift in the envisaged uses of ICT have been the initiatives of a number of American local government authorities (Santa Monica, Glendale, Pasadena) which sought primarily to improve citizen/local authority contact, delivery of services and, in the longer term to encourage citizen participation in public affairs as early as in the mid 1980s (Dutton et al., 1991; Guthrie and Dutton, 1992, Docterand Dutton, 1998). Similarly, since the early 1990s, believing in the potential of CMC to bring about civic renewal and to restore some sense of unity of purpose and action in the hitherto fragmented civic movement of the United States a number civil society actors launched their own instruments of electronic democracy (cf. Friedland, 1996; Schwartz, 1998). The forms that these initiatives take vary significantly and range from civic education and training to documentation and resource accessonline networks.

At the same time, European local and regional authorities such as Amsterdam, Bologna, Manchester and Berlin have been engaged in experiments in electronic democracy, often arguing that their embracing of ICTs will resuscitate the declining citizen participation in

political life and will give new vigour to local politics, but also recognising the economic and administrative advantages that networks technologies could have in the processes of dissemination of public information and in service provision. A last electronic democracy initiative permutation is the maverick network *Pericles*, an initiative launched by a group of ICT researchers, which, in contrast to its other European and North American counterparts is designed to be primarily dedicated to the citizen deliberation and decision making process.

This paper constitutes an attempt to assess the correspondence between rhetoric and reality in the democratic promise embedded in diverse projects of electronic democracy ; such an enterprise is admittedly doomed to be a cursory one as developments in the area of CMC and their applications in government and the political process are so rapid that charting the terrain of electronic democracy becomes an almost impossible task. Nevertheless, the debate, academic and otherwise, on the matter needs to be informed by an awareness of the diversity of intentions, forms, promises and potentials of the multitude of electronic democracy projects.

Approaches to the democratic process

It is quite clear that the search for models of electronic democracy in the age of CMCs has already been in earnest with a multitude of distinct, in form and content, projects. Indeed, the diversity of approaches to electronic democracy reflects to a considerable extent the lack of clarity of not only the notion of electronic democracy in particular, but also, the notion of democracy in general.

Defining democracy, or providing a classification of models or dimensions of democracy are enormous tasks and cannot be accomplished within the confines of a single paper ; indeed it is not my intention to attempt such a task. For the purposes of this paper I will concentrate in the ensuing discussion on a number of claims of electronic democracy projects which relate to central processes in most notions of democracy, notably, getting information, engaging in deliberation and participating in decision-making.

Information provision: All the above notions or aspects of democratic politics are clearly premised on the idea of the informed citizen who deliberates and expresses political choice as a result of having all the necessary information at her or his disposal. Because of the information storage and processing capacity of the technology utilised in electronic democracy projects, it is no surprise that they, almost in their entirety, are enabling citizens to access information of different sorts. However, at this first stage, questions of access to and quality of information should be posed: who can access and who cannot? what are the conditions of overcoming exclusion from electronic access to information? Are citizens able to interact with the system or is the latter inflexible and therefore characterised by limited access and interactivity? These are some of the questions that will underlie the assessment of electronic democracy projects as far as their information provision capability is concerned.

Deliberation: Deliberation, and the locus of such activities, the public sphere, have been considered significant prerequisite for a genuinely democratic polity (cf. Habermas, 1989). Furthermore, Melucci (1989), in his rather prescriptive but insightful discussion of the characteristics of post-industrial democracy, emphasises the need for, not only one, but a multitude of public spaces for representation and negotiation. Reflecting in some ways arguments developed in debates on electronic democracy, Melucci has pointed out that these new public spaces would allow conflicts and demands to be expressed in ways that the inflexible representative democratic institutional framework cannot allow. The expression of collective action through these soft-institutional settings has the potential of rendering power visible and negotiable, and therefore of demystifying power relations. It follows that access to these public spaces should be open to social actors and unhindered. In addition, although these public spaces should retain some degree of autonomy from the more rigid state institutions, they should remain connected to the state serving as loci of hearing that increase the ability of post-industrial democracy to hear (p. 77). New technologies have clearly the potential to sustain such spaces as they can enable both deliberation (citizen to citizen communication) and hearing (citizen to authorities communication). The quality and degree of interactivity are once more a key factor in this respect.

Participation in decision-making : Moving from deliberation to citizen collective action, we can distinguish between two main dimensions of the latter: participation in decision-making through institutionalised channels (elections, referenda, consultation) or independent, extra institutional collective action. Undoubtedly, the existing technology can support activities such as elections, although as we shall see, the political will to move to an era of electronic voting is not really forthcoming. However, it is the second dimension, of autonomous collective action, as opposed to the fairly restricted options of the former, decisionist dimension, that might be more promising as far as the democratic potential of electronic democracy projects is concerned. Indeed, public spaces such as the ones referred to above, and the modes of interaction that they support might lead to the re-invigoration and democratization of contemporary democracies, by increasing the scope for autonomous public initiatives developing outside and independently of the state apparatus. Again, interactivity in the form of both citizen-to-state communication (decisionist dimension) and citizen-to-citizen communication (autonomous collective action) is a mostly important factor to be considered.

The diversity of approaches to electronic democracy, in general as well in the projects that will be examined in the rest of this paper, is rather revealing of the polyvalence of the notion of democracy in general, and electronic democracy in particular, the diversity of motivations behind the different projects and of the political cultures that underpin them in different societies and localities, and the different national policy frameworks within which these projects develop.

Interestingly, projects such as those of the US Congress and the White House, while stressing the element of contact between citizen and authorities, are oblivious of citizen-to-citizen interaction as an important element of the democratic process and as a necessary factor

in the formation and maintenance of a culture of citizenship. It is also quite interesting that the model of democracy these initiatives support is extremely limited and minimally interactive. Citizens can access public documents and can contact the Congress or the White house by e-mail, they can even have a virtual tour of the White House or hear their President's voice. Despite the rhetoric of technological and democratic revolution (Gore, 1992) to which the American Congress and the White House as well as some of their European counterparts often resort, their vision of electronic democracy is linked to a logic of democracy as spectacle, consisting in minimal but symbolic transparency (in the form of citizen access to administration documents) and openness (virtual access to the inner sanctum of the White House). As it has been pointed out, the underlying argument of the Congressional and Presidential electronic democracy initiatives and, generally, projects of this type, is that adding channels to the political communication system will empower American citizens....that more communication equals better communication (Hacker, 1986 : 214).

Local government-led initiatives like those of Santa Monica (Dutton et al., 1991 ; Guthrie and Dutton, 1992, Docter and Dutton, 1998), Manchester (Bryan, 1998) or Amsterdam (Francissen and Brants, 1998)¹ tend to be much more than glorified web pages as they are, in principle, related to territorially bounded urban communities and specific constituencies and the provision of services to them. Santa Monica's Public Electronic Network (PEN) objectives, for example, have been to facilitate access to public information and to city authorities and agencies by the city's residents and to sustain an electronic forum for public discussion. In other words, in addition to supporting information retrieval and e-mail transactions, PEN also supports computer conferencing among city residents and transactions through the availability of on-line forms for residents to complete (Dokter and Dutton, 1998). Similar are the capabilities of several other electronic democracy networks across North America and Europe. But even these, more ambitious projects, differ enormously from more spontaneous, civil society-led projects such as *Neighborhoods Online* (Schwartz, 1998), or *Civic Practices Network* (CPN) (Friedland, 1996) on the one hand², or initiatives pursued by a few committed activists and ICT experts despite the lack of political will from above or below as in the case of network *Pericles*, on the other (Tsagarousianou, 1998)³. In both top-down and bottom-up approaches, it is clear that specific objectives and aims have informed the projects and shaped them from early on, while in the latter case of Network *Pericles*, an electronic democracy project that was created in a virtual social and political vacuum, aims have been rather vague and more specific objectives have yet to be defined.

In addition, it is quite clear that there are different definitions of the meaning and scope of electronic democracy in each project. These range from mainly deliberative to more plebiscitary models, and from grassroots self-organization and empowerment (such as *Neighborhoods Online*) to merely public information provision-centred projects (such as the *Berlin City Information System* (Schmidtke, 1998))⁴. It should, however, be made clear that these distinctions between different conceptualisations of democracy are more heuristic than real as, in

practice, different projects combine different modes of citizen participation and service provision.

Amsterdam's Digital City (Francissen and Brants, 1998), for example, combines a number of different communicative and civic functions such as deliberation, public information, and some degree of support of grassroots groups by providing a forum for teleconferencing and exchange of views and information. The Santa Monica PEN project enables deliberation and public information provision. In contrast, the official city of Berlin project is geared towards the provision of local authority and local information, while network *Pericles* has plebiscitary and deliberative features, and allows for limited information provision mainly. A different approach to the democratic process is taken by *Neighborhoods Online*, an Internet resource centre assisting citizens groups working to improve conditions in communities and neighbourhoods, which therefore focuses on information provision and exchange, deliberation and civic networking.

It is striking that although the initial promise of most electronic democracy projects had been the development and implementation of interactive local democracy enabling the citizens to express their views, opinions and preferences in binding or consultative polls, this promise has not been fulfilled - at least to the extent initially anticipated by advocates of electronic democracy. This inability or unwillingness to explore the potential of interactivity inherent in new technologies to the full raises questions as to why these promises have not been honoured. There are several possible reasons such as technical limitations (which, however, are not unsurmountable), financial restrictions, the lack of citizen access to the necessary technology or their negative predisposition toward the technologies utilised, the lack of political will, and political culture-related factors.

In common with most advocates of electronic democracy, the majority of the initiators or participants of these projects make no significant effort to define democracy, and seem to be oblivious to conceptual complexities that such an endeavour entails. Consequently, in its most ambitious permutations, electronic democracy rhetoric treats 'democracy' as an unproblematic term vaguely referring to direct participation of all citizens' in the public domain. It is rather surprising that the notion of democracy is treated unproblematically given the fact that electronic democracy projects are supposed to promote and enhance it, and most activists and intellectuals associated with it have invested so much in the success of their projects. Generally, in most electronic democracy projects and, in particular, in those examined briefly in this article, democracy is conflated with more access to information, or increased opportunities to communicate. Indeed, a less restricted communication infrastructure is to be welcomed but is merely a necessary, and not sufficient precondition for the democratization of public life. Thus, the promises of empowerment and emancipation incorporated in the discourse of advocates of electronic democracy are often superficial, disimulating the lack of any coherent and comprehensive social and political theory, strategy or vision behind the projects concerned.

Access/extent of service provision

As Bowie (1990: 133) suggests, the terms and conditions for access to information technology increasingly define one's right of access to information per se... information that is particularly useful, relevant, timely information, is increasingly tied to complex electronic technology. Exploration of social access to telematics: telephones and telematics terminals are gateways into much more than interpersonal communications — they also support entrance into a rapidly growing world of information services, welfare services (Graham, 202).

The argument that the growth of a privatized information infrastructure will lead to growing disparity between information haves and have-nots has been quite potent in the context of the debate on electronic democracy: the fear that electronic democracy projects might be oblivious of the social and economic inequalities among the citizenry and, therefore, the differential distribution of the hardware and skills necessary to participate in them has led many participants in the debate to argue that only public provision in information infrastructure and public subsidy for information (and more generally, electronic democracy) services can ensure that the benefits of access to information will be distributed equitably and democratically (Schiller, 1984; Webster and Robins, 1986, Gillespie and Robbins, 1989, Garnham 1990a and 1990b). In addition, Garnham (1990b: 111-12) envisaging another potentially democratic use of CMC, proposes that, in order to prevent high quality information from turning into a private good, public and quasi-public bodies establish their own CMC-media of direct presentation of information. This is indeed a strategy used by voluntary associations and NGOs in order to provide their own — alternative to the established transnational news agencies — sources of news and information.

It should be pointed out that although recognition of access as a public good is present in different degrees in several city projects, local authorities and citizens networks have to operate within an economic culture and climate hostile to regulatory practices and to public authorities involvement in the market. Fears of inequitable distribution of the public good of electronic democracy access are by no means unfounded as electronic democratic initiatives are developing within the context of deregulation and privatization of the telecommunications industry at a global level.⁵

Although concerns regarding citizen access are shared among the majority of electronic democracy projects, each initiative is premised on different assumptions and has different aims regarding citizen access to the services provided or the new technology-mediated democratic process.

Neighborhoods Online for example, has not addressed issues of universal access in the same way as city projects, mainly as its main emphasis is not on individual citizen access to its resources and services but rather on group networking. Network *Pericles* is premised on the principle of universal access through public terminals and allows access from private terminals for some of its

communicative functions only, but not for voting which its creators considered a quintessentially public process.

Electronic Democracy: Social Actors and Political Culture

Both the definition of democracy and access issues are linked with the particular ways in which electronic democracy projects came into being and develop. In each case, different actors (such as local authorities, grassroots movements, software, hardware and telecommunications companies, central governments, and even transnational bodies) with different interests and aspirations have negotiated and confronted each other in order to inform and influence the projects. An analysis of these complex processes of negotiation, cooperation and competition among key actors in the process of shaping electronic democracy projects can be very fruitful as it illustrates how different social actors try to shape the projects in accordance with their particular interests and objectives. Yet, such an approach, however instructive, cannot account for deeper political cultural factors that influence individual projects. It is clear that different political cultures (local, regional and national) set the broad parameters within which political and social action (ecology of games) can take place and therefore, different social-political environments rationalise and use ICTs in their democratic projects in different ways.

Although we do not wish to suggest a rigid distinction between political culture and political action and practice, we would suggest that establishing an analytical distinction between the level of structure (including political culture) and the level of action⁶ might allow us to acknowledge the restrictive and enabling role that political culture plays in the political process of a society — and therefore to the process of development of electronic democracy projects — and, thus, to shed more light on the different ways in which similar technological infrastructures have given rise to electronic democracy projects.

In the case of *Neighborhoods Online*, for example, one can clearly see the influence of the American libertarian civic tradition even at a time when the civic networking movement is willing to enter into partnership with government (federal, state or local). One of the central aims of *Neighborhoods Online* is to empower citizens by encouraging the formation of citizens groups and the development of citizens initiatives. Thus, the organization of grassroots movements and their engagement in dialogue and exchange of information inspired by a political culture that has been premised on citizen self-help and organization, have given to *Neighborhoods Online* its distinctive character.

The Manchester *Information City initiative*, on the other hand, had initially been designed as a medium of economic regeneration, within the context of a culture of emphasis on economic (as opposed to civic) initiatives. In addition, the local political culture, shaped by a Labour Party and working class cooperative culture has given to the project its progressive character. In the

case of the Berlin *City Information System* (effectively a public information broadcasting site) its development has been influenced by the post-war German political culture which was shaped by the experience of the Weimar Republic and its demise in the hands of Nazism. Indeed the development of the Berlin 'city information system' project owes a lot to the post-war German mistrust towards populist strategies and an irrational decision making process (Schmidtke, 1998). The deeply embedded in German political culture fear of the democratic process getting out of control has reinforced a tutelary notion of democracy that has also influenced official electronic democracy projects. In the case of Santa Monica, it has been pointed out that the city has had a political culture supportive of participation in local politics (Docter and Dutton, 1998) which has provided the impetus for the development of PEN while, finally, in the case of network *Pericles*, a culture of citizen heteronomy has played a major role in the virtual lack of grass roots support for the implementation of electronic democracy. In addition, a long tradition of public political process (as opposed to the more inconspicuous and subtle approaches characteristic of other cultures) has found its way into the network design which emphasises publicness⁷.

Socializing democracy

In spite of the discourses of interactivity which underlie most electronic democracy initiatives, most of the latter have in practice been executive-initiated, top-down and mostly based on giving more access to information. As Hacker points out the forms of interactivity that characterise electronic democracy experiments such as the White House-citizen e-mail communication system or, more generally, the White House-sponsored National Information Infrastructure initiative, are akin to those characteristic of American colonial town meetings, which, despite, or possibly, alongside their democratic facade, were intended to assert the moral authority of the community (Nimmo, 1994 quoted by Hacker, 1996: 227). Politics in this form remains more of a model of convincing through the dissemination of information than of communication and discussion or even expression of conflict and dissent. In the USA, presidential candidates, the Congress and federal, state and local administrations have embraced the use of electronic systems to serve a variety of objectives (Dutton, 1992) equated in public discourse to electronic democracy but bearing no democratic content. Often, behind the rhetoric of electronic democracy, what is initiated is a very particular version of publicness, arranged around ordered forms of dissemination of information in which official political channels decide on the definition of the problem and the content of the message and thus strongly influence the direction of the outcome. Therefore, when assessing the impact of electronic democracy initiatives, one should examine the degree of socialization of the initiatives in question⁸.

The extent to which the particular applications of ICTs enlarged the participatory process, their success in introducing other, than top-down, ways of political participation and to deliver

their promise to promote community-oriented participatory democracy through two way communication between citizens and public officials are by no means easy to determine. The answers to these questions are by no means clear or simple. As the case of Berlin city information system shows CMC is not necessarily interactive. Some aspects of the WWW (and of applications of networks technology, in general) including information on civic issues are not engaging people in interactivity, indeed, despite the more or less common or similar rhetoric and official discourse of electronic democracy advocates, there is a considerable diversity of networks, from highly to minimally interactive ones.

To assess further the democratising potential and record of electronic democracy projects, the impact of the latter on the public sphere has to be assessed in order to determine to what extent the latter has been widened and opened-up. Indeed, democracy has very often been associated with the development of public spaces where the citizens can formulate their political identities and express their political will (Habermas, 1989 ; Melucci, 1989 and 1996 ; Murdock and Golding 1989, Garnham, 1990b, Dahlgren and Sparks, 1991); it is clear that the success of electronic democracy projects will depend on their capacity to support and enable the introduction of new forms of publicness within a public sphere partly dominated by privately owned and controlled media and the state.

The idea of modern representative democracy has been inextricably linked to the recognition of a living web of citizen-to-citizen communications (Rheingold, 1995: 13-4), a realm of public debate and information exchange, the public sphere. The largely commercial mass-media-dominated public sphere today is being challenged by the emergence of new forms of publicness created by social networks. Today, new technologies increasingly play a central role in the mediation of social networks. As a result, any socially grounded theory of the public sphere will have to take into account these social network structures and the communications systems that bind them (Friedland, 1996: 189). Dahlgren (1991) has argued that the availability of suitable computer and communication technology to citizens groups has started to give rise to dynamic alternative public spheres next to those of the corporate state and the existing mass media. Although this might be a very optimistic statement, it cannot be denied that several electronic democracy projects have established some degree of interactivity (and interaction), especially among citizens and citizens groups and have sustained a degree of deliberative process.

However, on the other hand, little has been done to broaden access to electronic democracy networks and therefore to extend democratic practices and lead to a broadened public sphere. Access to hardware and software remains a significant issue, while policies to overcome socially and culturally-conditioned technophobia (such as gender or class related) have not even been part of the agenda. What is more, in the case of local government-initiated projects, more often than not, it is the public information and local government transactions functions of the networks that take precedence over their interactive features.

One thing is quite clear however ; electronic democracy in its plebiscitary or deliberative permutations expressed in electronic democracy projects cannot by itself democratise the communities which it serves. The creation of public spaces, the articulation of views and demands, the formation of citizens requires much more energy and commitment and grassroots involvement in public debate. It would be very difficult to answer these questions in a positive or negative way, precisely because of the complexity of the processes under way. Electronic democracy projects are not merely tools devoid of any social content ; social struggle is inscribed into the very nature of the state and policy outcomes and electronic democracy is no exception to this.

NOTES

1. The scope of this paper and space restrictions do not allow for a more detailed and concrete description and discussion of these electronic democracy projects. For more detailed information and evaluation, see TSAGAROUSIANOU, TAMBINI and BRYAN, 1998.
2. These electronic democracy projects are mainly seen as empowerment instruments, providing resources, information and networking for civic organizations active in a variety of fields including local democracy, local economic development and education and training.
3. Network *Pericles* is a network conceived as an instrument of political debate and political action alone and is not envisaged to be a medium of delivery of any other municipal service. For more information, see TSAGAROUSIANOU, 1998.
4. The Berlin project is marked by its extremely limited scope for enhanced communication between citizens and local government. The city web page allows citizens and visitors to access general information about the city (tourism, basic infrastructure etc) and invites visitors to contact the local authority via email for issues of local concern. As Schmidtke points out presently there are no practical policy initiatives at the horizon which would pave the way for a democratic involvement of the citizens via the new communication technologies (1998: 80-81).
5. The emphasis on deregulation and private initiative is explicit in both the EU Bangemann Report (1994) and the Clinton administration National Information Infrastructure (NII) initiative. In the Principles of EU Policy for the Information Society section of The Action Plan (1995), the Commission states that market forces must drive progress to the Information Society.
6. Rather than seeing action and structure as the counteracting elements of a dualism, they should be regarded as the complementary elements of a duality. Social structures are both constituted by human agency, and yet at the same time are the very medium of its constitution (Giddens, 1976: 121).
7. It is quite interesting to note that the designers of network *Pericles* have attempted to mobilise aspects of the Greek political culture that might encourage deliberation and democratic participation: the very geography of Network *Pericles*, whereby electronic kiosks dedicated to deliberation and voting are situated as close as possible to their printed press era counterparts (news-stands), reflects the determination of the network team to seam practices and settings related to the actualization of electronic democracy into the fabric of everyday life.

Although, clearly, such decisions cannot guarantee the success of such a project, nevertheless, they indicate that careful thinking has taken place with regards to the socialization of the project, especially in view of the lack of any grassroots initiative.

8. Socialising Democracy is a prominent theme in a number of articles (BRANTS, HUIZENGA and van MEERTEN, 1996 ; FRANCISSEN and BRANTS, 1998) and refers to overcoming the predominant top-down character of electronic democracy projects. This in itself is undoubtedly a very important element of any attempt to render electronic democracy really democratic. However, I would argue that socialising democracy refers into the ways in which electronic democracy is articulated to the political sphere and everyday life of the societies which it seeks to serve. In other words, I suggest that a really socialised democracy would entail establishing links and, where possible, integrating electronic democracy to existing social and political practices. This suggested course should not be confused with cooptation or absorption of electronic democracy within the dominant institutions nor should it be seen as unrelated to processes of political innovation and creativity that renew and enhance democracy.

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