Cairns, James and Alan Sears. 2012. *The democratic imagination: envisioning popular power in the twenty-first century*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press. ISBN: 9781442605282. Paperback: $24.95. Pages: 224.

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Democracy poses a challenge. At its most simple, it is an obstacle to those who are in power and wish to maintain their place. However, democracy also presents challenges for those engaged in radical politics as they struggle with both its complexity and its potential. Democracy, by its vastness and ramifications, poses a challenge to those who study it.

With *The Democratic Imagination*, authors Cairns and Sears compose a great introductory text, both accessible to a wide readership while demanding questions on the future of democracy in Western countries, all without giving easy answers. As such, those looking for a more in-depth analysis of democracy, whether from a historical, theoretical or technical perspective, might remain unsatisfied.

Contrary to most introductions, which tend to present democracy as a more or less continuous story from Ancient Athens to the contemporary world, the book presents two conceptions of democracy and then opposes these conceptions on a number of different subjects. The first concept is 'official democracy', the one taught in schools and by government agencies as 'a particular form of administration in which 'the people' elect representatives who have specific decision-making power' (7). In this view, democracy is mostly restricted to the affairs of the State, although the range of State powers varies depending on political context. Therefore, a social-democratic and a neoliberal government are necessarily involved in the same domains in society and with the same intensity.

The second concept outlined in the book is 'democracy from below'. Similar to direct democracy, this term refers here to 'processes of self-government that are based on the establishment of popular power in all areas of life' (13). Here, contrary to the official stance, democracy is something viewed as desirable beyond the State, in places such as the school, the workplace or the household. In this version of democracy, 'official democracy', while clearly a step forward, is not enough and needs to be either reformed or radically transformed, depending on which author is writing. While sketching these conceptions, the authors make clear that neither of them exists in a pure form and that current democracy is often in tension between those two conceptions.

Once this distinction is established, Cairns and Sears explore a series of topics (citizenship, representation, bureaucracy, education and body politics) in which they present the analysis and challenges of both democratic conceptions. While some of the themes are treated in a relatively classic manner (the discussion of democratizing the economy in the second chapter might be familiar to many readers), others are more original. For instance, in their chapter on body politics, Cairns and Sears skillfully present an overview of the complex relation between democracy and violence, especially in a revolutionary context. Afterwards, they present the ways the two perspectives on democracy studied in the book have dealt with body politics. While 'movements from below' such as second-wave feminism or LGBTQ liberation managed to reclaim their bodies from State and Capital appropriation and regulation, proponents of official democracy have pictured government expenses as a fat body (or as a 'gravy-train') that need to be cut off. By showing how body politics shift along different political lines, the authors allow us to look critically at democracy and its relation with ableism, patriarchy, racism, cissexism and heteronormativity.

Although interesting, at times the discussion of the topic might not go far enough for some of the readers. For example, the authors' analysis of the relation of democracy and knowledge offers a useful summary of the debates on the role of expertise in democracy while expanding the question by talking about pedagogical democracy. However, their proposition of 'problem-based learning' as an example of the fact that 'democracy goes together with an unleashing of learning powers' (128) can be seen as problematic. Indeed, considering how this approach has been successfully integrated in school curriculums without causing transformations to the structure of education, the potential for democratizing education seems rather limited. Therefore, a deeper analysis of radical pedagogy and its attention to the question of democratic education might have been beneficial to all.

One can also consider that the overall structure of the book, with its small thematic chapters, while great for course reading, might lack a more cohesive narrative. Although the authors try to mitigate this effect by drawing links between the chapters, it tends to feel a bit like overlapping (e.g., presenting the model of shop-steward unionism in both chapters four and five). Fortunately, these types of shortcomings are rare and will only bother the most demanding readers.

The Democratic Imagination is an accessible book on a topic that is too often cast either in an oversimplifying light or obscured by academic disputes. As mentioned at the beginning of this article, readers looking for an introduction to the importance of debating democracy will enjoy this well-written and well-documented presentation. Most of all, the openness of the authors in admitting their own biases and intentions will allow the reader to pursue their own questions and discussions, whether in books or on the streets.

This defence of the necessity of thinking imaginatively about democracy comes at the right time. Indeed, throughout the book Cairns and Sears put a much needed emphasis on creativity, imagination and criticism as a road towards self-governance. In her 2014 National Book Award acceptance speech, fiction writer Ursula K. Le Guin noted something similar, stating that, "we live in capitalism, its power seems inescapable – but then, so did the divine right of kings. Any human power can be resisted and changed by human beings" (2014). Be it from a literary or political perspective, our democratic imagination seems to have a crucial role to play in the years to come.

References Cited

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A timely book! With this past December's United Nations climate change summit held in Paris, a study headed by Nobel Laureate Jonathan Patz established a clear link between bad health and a warming planet. Harm from climate change includes spikes in the rates of respiratory diseases caused by fine particulate pollutants, infections transported by mosquitoes and polluted water, and food insecurity from reduced crop yields and an increase in plant diseases ("Climate change called public health threat," 22 September 2014). Natural disasters like the increasing power of hurricanes are related to climate change. The result is trauma, loss of housing, and loss of economic security.

The United States, accounting for five percent of the global population, emits around twenty-five percent of world greenhouse gases (Rashid 2007). Yet pollution's negative consequences disproportionately affect the poorest nations, pushing poorest of the poor in those societies to famine and epidemics. Dr. Patz suggests that United States energy policy is in effect exporting hunger and disease to the rest of the world. Does this