The Greeks invented the word democracy, if not democracy itself, but it is we who must now use the word for our time. Democracy quite literally means popular government, rule by the démos, the people. Democracy came to mean rule by a people, or démos, rather than by peoples, or démoi. In the singular, démos originally signified a specific territorial space and meant “district, country, or land,” and thus by extension its inhabitants or peoples. Along with its varied institutional forms, the concept of democracy has had a long history, often discussed in terms of the differences between its ancient and its modern form. Yet throughout it has retained its singular noun and its territorial connotation. The main concern of this book is to rethink the deep assumptions this conceptual archeology covers. In the age of globalization and significant authority delegated beyond the nation state, I contend that democracy needs to be rethought in the plural, as the rule of démoi. This small change of one letter has enormous normative, political, and institutional significance and permits us to better understand how it is that citizenship and membership need to be transformed. Much as a cubist painting alters the given world of objects through the use of multiple perspectives, transnational democracy challenges single perspective politics and fixed jurisdictions.

The transformation of democracy in the current era is a topic of much debate in social science, economics, international law, and political theory. I will refer to this literature, as well as to current discussions of the impact of globalization. However, my main purpose
here is philosophical. I want to show that many of the basic categories of democracy need to be rethought, including the very basic conceptions of the people, the public, citizenship, human rights, and federalism. Given my emphasis on the potential for a transnational polity, many of the examples in this book are taken from the European Union—even if it now falls short of a deliberative democracy across borders.

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