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Sharing (Out) Democracy. On the Democratic Injunction for Climate Justice

Abstract

In my paper, I offer a synthesis of several approaches to the question of democracy and interpretations of the notion of sharing (out). By gathering the voices of such thinkers as Luce Irigaray, Jacques Derrida, and Jean-Luc Nancy, I argue that truly democratic policies must be thought in terms of sharing (out) and inspired by an insatiable justice. However, as I evidence, democracy cannot be considered apart from the question of climate crisis or our relations to non-human others and the natural environment. Eventually, I come to the conclusion that what those vibrant voices have in common is an emphasis on the question of responsibility for other living beings, affirmation of the singularity of every living being, and deep distrust of capitalist imperialism.

Keywords

Environment, Democracy, Breathing, Climate Justice, Language

It is thus impossible to be simply “democratic” without asking what this means, for the sense of this term never stops posing difficulties, almost at every turn, indeed, every time we have recourse to it (Nancy 2010, 37).

In his book *The Experience of Freedom*, Jean-Luc Nancy calls attention to a certain lack in the philosophy of democracy. What is lacking is the thought of freedom which, contrary to freedom understood as sovereign power and autonomy of the subject over oneself, consists in introducing existence

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into the space of relations. As Nancy argues, freedom has to be therefore reinterpreted as the mode of both “the discrete and insistent existence of others in my existence, as originary for my existence” and “the other existence insisting in my identity and constituting (or deconstituting) it as *this* identity” (1993b, 69). According to this perspective, any singular being is from the outset thrown into the world of relations to the extent that the possibility of existing essentially coincides with the possibility of entering into relations. Consequently, freedom as interpreted by the Western Tradition, that is, as the faculty of absolute ontological independence, would amount to suffocation of existence from the lack of its exposure to others.

While this throwing of singularities into relation does not rely on any predetermined bond or their common being but rather happens in the place of withdrawal of any identity, it supposes an ontological openness through spatialization of every singular being by virtue of their constitutive sharing (out).¹ Thus, for Nancy, each existence cannot be brought into being otherwise than as sharing (out): “If being is sharing, *our* sharing, then ‘to be’ (to exist) is to share” (1993b, 72), or even, “to be abandoned in this sharing” (1990, 243). In sharing (out), therefore, one does not arrive as a pre-constituted subject but rather through partition and participation inscribes oneself in the free space of movements and meetings. Freedom in the mode of sharing (out) as an effective de-centering of the ontological dominance of subjective autonomy is thus “singular/common before being in any way individual or collective” (Nancy 1993b, 74). Furthermore, the free space of sharing (out) is “opened, freed, by the very fact that it is constituted or instituted as space by the trajectories and outward aspects of singularities that are thrown into existence” (*ibidem*).

¹ Usually, in Nancy’s texts, *partage* is translated as “sharing.” However, Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas propose to translate it as “sharing (out).” While I will not interfere with each translator’s decision in the cited passages, in my comments, I will use the phrase “sharing (out)” in reference to Nancy’s notion of *partage*.

As Todd May explains in *Reconsidering Difference*, sharing (out) clusters together two different meanings of partition and participation, dividing something and taking part in something undivided: “Taken together, sharing indicates a movement in which division and undivision are in an economic relation, an unstable mutual engendering in which neither shared nor participant retains its boundaries” (1997, 32-33). At the risk of making a mere rhetoric transformation of this quote, I would like to up the ante of this complication by bringing it to the following, presumably more radical conclusion: as the originary complication of these two movements, sharing (out), in its both foreignness and susceptibility to economic circumscription, must also involve affirmation of an economic, incalculable excess. Moreover, participation can only take place by means of division and differing which preclude any unity, i.e. a mere effect of sharing, from ontological completion.

By challenging the primacy of the metaphysics of the subject, this approach offers a complete, formal and practical, reorientation of our relations with the world and with other living beings. These relations are not something which furnishes our transcendental self-containment, but are constitutive of our living (on) (together) as sharing (out): “[W]e are brought into the world, each and every one of us, according to a dimension of ‘in-common’ that is in no way ‘added onto’ the dimension of ‘being-self,’ but that is rather co-originary and coextensive with it” (Nancy 1991, xxxvii).² However, what we as singularities have in common is otherness and not any determinable substance of our commonality. Hence, not only are we other for one another but also “infinitely other for the Subject of [our] fusion, which is engulfed in the sharing” (Nancy 1991, 25). We are together to the extent that togetherness is otherness. Moreover, we are not only exposed to one another but also to our and others’ mortality and fortuitousness: “The otherness of existence consists in its nonpresence to itself, which comes from its birth and death. We are others—each one for the other and each for him/herself through birth and death, which expose our finitude” (Nancy 1993a, 155). We are therefore situated in a perspective which emphasizes our constitutive vulnerability and dependency on the referral to the other. In this situation, we cannot rely on some organic or symbiotic sentiment, which could define our life as living together but rather we are destined to engage in incommensurable, to use Nancy’s vocabulary, responsibility, which, at the outset, consists in suspension of any ontological claim of predetermined relatedness (or, on the other hand, of transcendental non-accountability).

A similar suspicion of a fixed bond with the environment can be found in David Wood’s eco-phenomenological critique of deep ecology. As he argues, every relatedness which we try to ground in a governing synthesis with a living environment has to be incessantly interrupted.

If every living being does not merely have a relation to its outside, to what is other than itself, but is constantly managing that relationship economically (risking death for food, balancing individual advantage with collective prosperity, etc.), then however much it may be possible, for certain purposes, to treat such an environment collec-

² While I remain skeptical of Nancy’s choice of words in describing being together as “the proper mode of being of existence as such” (What this properness would consist in? Can we even speak about properness under such conditions?), he immediately adds to this claim that being as such is, from the outset, put into play, risked and exposed (1993a, 155). Furthermore, in *The Experience of Freedom* Nancy explicitly says that “freedom can in no way take the form of property” (1993b, 70).

tively, that treatment will be constantly open to disruption from the intransigence of its parts. Important as it is to see things in relation to one another, and tempting as it then is to see these spaces, fields, playgrounds of life, as wholes, that wholeness is dependent on the continuing coordination of parts that have, albeit residual, independent interests. At the same time these “things” we call environments, niches, and the like, are themselves subject to what we might, after Derrida, call the law of context. And context is an iterative and porous notion (Wood 2003, 226-227).

If every relation, as Woods suggests by adducing Jacques Derrida, is subjected to the law of iterability as “the nonpresent *remaining* of a differential mark” (Derrida 1984, 318), then our living together has to be devoid of “any center of absolute anchoring” (Derrida 1984, 320). From this point of view, politically speaking, one would be unable to “restore a transparency or immediacy of social relations” (Derrida 1984, 329), and by the same token, relations with the natural environment.

In a similar vein to Nancy, Derrida inscribes in his deliberations on the aporetic character of living together an ethico-political demand which pertains to the affirmation of “a fracturing openness in what one calls *un ensemble* [whole, gathering, ensemble]” involving the interruption of any ultimate or founding identity or totality: “The authority of the whole [*ensemble*] will always be the first threat for all ‘living together.’ And inversely, all ‘living together’ will be the first protestation or contestation, the first testimony against the whole [*ensemble*]” (Derrida 2013, 21). Derrida argues therefore that the first step of living together consists in rebellion and resistance against its totalization (2013, 35). It is our ethical obligation to contest completion and cohesion of togetherness in order, or at order’s verge, to leave the future of our living together opened, and consequently, to leave our living together opened to the coming of those unfamiliar living others. For one of the inevitable threats of an enclosed living together is to deem those living others unworthy of living and therefore to leave them outside the *ensemble* of the *semblables*. If we restrict ourselves to those who are familiar, then even such a straightforward command as “you shall not kill” will install a hierarchy or preference of our commitment to preservation and sustainability of life. Once established, hierarchy could be used for justification of exploitation and destruction of different forms of life and disregard for their rights (both existing and to come).

Thus, as unthinkable as it should be to renounce such a command, the latter at the same time cannot seek a complete justification with regard to the hyperbolic demand of justice. Every decision must pass through this aporetic experience of undecidability which cannot find comfort in estab-

lished rules and definitions of what constitutes a life worthy of protection and care. Derrida argues that this milieu or ether of aporetic undecidability is precisely where “responsibility must breathe” (2007a, 31).

To avow this aporia does not suffice, but it is the first condition of a responsible lucidity and a first gesture to open the best possible negotiation [...] all the way to the point where ‘living together’ commits life to all the living, to the gaze of all the living, to the gaze and even beyond the gaze, and even there where no sacrifice can leave my conscience at rest, as soon as one faults or assails the life of a living other, I mean of an animal, human or not (Derrida 2013, 38-39).

In *Rogues*, in his commentary on Nancy’s dislodgment of freedom as mastery in favor of pre-subjective freedom as sharing (out), Derrida broadens further the scope of living together when discussing the aporia of the political and democracy, namely, the irresolvable complication of the calculable and incalculable. While calculable measure as the “technical measure of equality” provides access to the incommensurability of singularity, the following question still stands: where does “this measure of the immeasurable, this democratic equality” (Derrida 2005b, 53) of those who are committed to living together end? Do nation-state or international laws leave a satisfactory answer to the questions of “what counts” and “how to count”? Or, as Derrida wonders, should we extend this democratic measure of equality

[...] to the whole world of singularities, to the whole world of humans assumed to be like me, my compeers [*mes semblables*]—or else even further, to all nonhuman living beings, or again, even beyond that, to all the nonliving to their memory, spectral or otherwise, to their to-come or to their indifference with regard to what we think we can identify, in an always precipitous, dogmatic, and obscure way, as the life or the living present of living [*la vivance*] in general? (2005b, 53)

Now, since the aporia of measurability of and accountability for the immeasurable is strictly tied to the reformulation or deconstruction of the concept of freedom which no longer, at least for Nancy (and for Derrida, who shares with Nancy “the same deconstructive questioning of the political ontology of freedom” [Derrida 2005b, 43]), applies for the countable and measurable subject as the faculty of free will and the power to act assumed by “the dominant discourse about democracy” (Derrida 2005b, 44), then

[...] freedom is extended to everything that appears in the open. It is extended to the event of everything in the world—and first of all in the “there is” [*le “il y a”*] of the world—that comes to presence, including whatever comes in the free form of

nonhuman living being and of the “thing” in general, whether living or not. [...] The whole question of “democracy” might be configured around this transcendental force: how far is democracy to be extended, the people of democracy, and the “each ‘one’” of democracy? To the dead, to animals, to trees and rocks? (Derrida 2005b, 54)

The extension of freedom would therefore bring an obligation to respond to the call which is coming from the outside, and as such, it would be integral to the task of democracy as thoughtful transcending beyond what is acknowledged. Consequently, if politics wants to stay true to the injunction of justice, the reinvention of democracy has to be inspired by what does not belong to the scope of the calculable, the conditional, and the possible. And even though the unconditionality “that the opening to the other brings” is heterogeneous to politics as the domain of what is possible, the former remains inextricable from the latter. In fact, it is the aporetic (and thus, hyperpolitical or hyperethical) imperative to take the unconditional each and every time into account, even if it “remains unrealizable” (Nancy 2010, 16) and ultimately impossible to be determined. Furthermore, since this opening to the other is connected to an impairment of the authority of the subject, “a certain unconditional renunciation of sovereignty [as, for example, man’s undisputed reign over “nature” or non-human living beings—AK] is required a priori” (Derrida 2005b, xiv).

Because of the paradox binding the necessity of political activity (and activism), which requires some kind of sovereign power in use, *and* the unconditional opening to the other, which requires renunciation of the sovereign power, the tension between conditional law and unconditional justice remains unsolvable and political activity can never reach, or even think, the limit of its satisfaction and saturation. Accordingly, our response to the other takes place through the complication of two contradictory movements. On the one hand, we should be committed to render a fair and reasonable account of what or who appears in the open. On the other, we should attest to the infinite alterity of the singular other, irreducibly distanced from us by “the space and the time of an infinite difference, an interruption that is incommensurable with all attempts to make a passage, a bridge, an isthmus [...]” (Derrida 2011, 9).

Derrida’s emphasis on sharing (out) [*partage*] as “coinscription in space, or with a view to space” (Derrida, Stiegler 2007, 66) of singularities, conditioned by the play of *différance*, and Nancy’s stress on “the first thrust of freedom,” which attests to “the common absence of measure of an incommensurable” (Nancy 1993b, 75), expose what in *The Politics of Friendship* Derrida calls “the heteronomic and dissymmetrical curving of a law of orig-

inary sociability" (2005c, 231). Such a shift in political thinking imposes on us the previously mentioned (aporetic) understanding of responsibility as "responsibility that assigns freedom to us without leaving it with us, as it were—we see it coming from the other" (Derrida 2005c, 231-232). What that means is that responsibility, just like freedom, comes neither from the place of autonomy nor concentration of sovereign power and execution of authority over others, but from the (non-)place of the other. According to Derrida, this infinite heterogeneity and dissymmetrical curving ought to inspire any attempt at social bonding, especially when we talk of unfettered democracy:

Such a dissymmetry and infinite alterity would [...] indeed be incompatible with all sociopolitical hierarchy as such. It would therefore be a matter of thinking an alterity without hierarchical difference at the root of democracy [...] this democracy would free a certain interpretation of equality by removing it from the phallogocentric schema of fraternity (PF 232).³

Fair Democracy

For Derrida, democracy, in order to defy hierarchical differences and not to yield to economic calculation, has to be thought in terms of an infinite promise: "the idea, of democracy to come, [...] is the opening of this gap between an infinite promise [...] and the determined, necessary, but also necessarily inadequate forms of what has to be measured against this promise" (Derrida 2006, 81). Therefore, in the pursuit of the democratic promise devoid of any anticipation, we are thrown into the opening in which any expectation of return (as a closure of the economic circle) is relinquished and any right (like that to property) is ultimately renounced (Derrida 2006, 82).

Analogically, for Nancy, this coinscription in the politically undeterminable and insaturable opening consists in sharing (out) of the incalculable. Obviously, sharing (out) does not come down to the order of exchangeable goods and measurable value, but rather the share of what is without value, which exceeds any calculation and politics (Nancy 2010, 17). While Nancy categorically states that "[t]here is here a share of the incalculable that is, no doubt, the share most resistant to appropriation by a culture of general calculation—the one named 'capital'" (Nancy 2010, 16)—the share which

³ With regard to the question of fraternocracy, Derrida expresses his suspicion over Nancy's use of the term "fraternity" on pages 56-62 of *Rogues*.

thus cannot be exhausted by the reign of capital, I argue that sharing (out) cannot also be immunized against the threat of (among others, capitalistic) appropriation and exploitation, as it does not install impermeable borders or put a limit on those threats.

Nevertheless, Nancy takes this stand when he brings a charge against capitalism as “the choice of a mode of evaluation” and “the result of a decision on the part of civilization: value *is* in equivalence” (Nancy 2010, 23). According to Nancy, the growth of capital as an economic, and consequently, political (for politics is currently motivated by the value of equivalence, and thus, instructed by market economy) paradigm surrenders us to the indifference of equivalence and the indefinite reproduction of the cycle of production and alienation. Therefore, what we call liberal or bourgeois democracy in capitalist society has remained complaisant to the real governing power of the economic forces of accumulation. That is why Nancy points out that we should not reduce our thinking of democracy to opposition to totalitarianisms because they, in fact, “stem from the failure of democracy to produce sense, and to be more than an administrative apparatus of capitalism” (Nancy, Engelman 2019, 100). We also should not ignore the fact that, in recent history, the diffusion of democracy has been closely associated with the expansion of capitalism. At the same time, we should not take this connection for granted. Since “[d]emocratic politics opens the space for multiple identities and for their sharing (out)” (Nancy 2010, 26), capitalism, with its ambiguous relation to democratic citizenship, may create an illusion of the possibility of social transformation through extension of citizenship rights without the necessity of abandoning the capitalistic paradigm. However, as Ellen Meiksins Wood argues, “capitalism, while in certain historical conditions conducive to ‘formal democracy’, can easily do without it—as it has done more than once in recent history” (2016, 248). Furthermore, because of its “indifference to the social identities of the people it exploits” (266) and its essential independence of extra-economic conditions, it gives us a false sense of equality between people while remaining very effective in exploiting any extra-economic oppression for its own gain. Going back to Nancy, we can argue that capitalism relies on equivalence which only creates an illusion of equality while remaining a basis for non-equivalence of economic domination (Nancy 2010, 24). As such, the capitalistic market, both in its economic and political sphere (if these two spheres can still be decoupled), rather than contributing to freedom, creates a space of exploitation and coercion. Nancy’s position is therefore consistent with Meiksins Wood’s diagnosis that the idea of progress and social transformation under

the aegis of capitalist economy “is just a sleight of hand which invites us to imagine, if not a smooth transition from capitalist democracy to socialist (or ‘radical’) democracy, then a substantial realization of democratic aspirations within the interstices of capitalism” (Meiksins Wood 2016, 271).

A similar accusation against the alliance of capitalist economy and liberal democracy can be found in Derrida’s *Specters of Marx*. Derrida objects there to the triumphant discourse on behalf of this alliance, which is considered if not political fulfillment, then, at least, the ideal orientation which marks out progress of the history of humanity. This triumphant position, as Derrida notices, plays down contemporary cataclysms, crises, catastrophes, and genocides by deeming them as a mere empirical phenomena, which in no way can impair the status of this ideal orientation of liberal democracy. Derrida argues that while democracy (as democracy to come) cannot be hopeless, it nevertheless has to remain foreign to any teleology (which include any display of neo-evangelization in the name of liberal democracy) and heterogeneous, or even rebellious, to law and power (Derrida 2005b, xv). Moreover, Derrida wonders how we can still ignore “this obvious macroscopic fact, made up of innumerable singular sites of suffering” (2006, 106): examples of unprecedented destruction of human and non-human lives and, although he does not mention this, the environment. This exploitative character of capitalist economy is emphasized once again by Meiksins Wood:

[...] the essential irrationality of the drive for capital accumulation, which subordinates everything to the requirements of the self-expansion of capital and so-called growth, is unavoidably hostile to ecological balance. If destruction of the environment in the Communist world resulted from gross neglect, massive inefficiency, and a reckless urge to catch up with Western industrial development in the shortest possible time, in the capitalist West a far more wide-ranging ecological vandalism is not an index of failure but a token of success, the inevitable by-product of a system whose constitutive principle is the subordination of all human values to the imperatives of accumulation and the requirements of profitability (2016, 265-266).

As a response to this destructive tendency, Meiksins Wood proposes a radical, democratic alternative to the imperatives of accumulation and market economy in general: “What I mean is not simply ‘economic democracy’ as a greater equality of distribution. I have in mind democracy as an economic regulator, the *driving mechanism* of the economy” (2016, 290), which would promote not only democratic organizing, but also emancipation from coercion characteristic to the market-based imperatives. However, as something which exceeds the economy for the purpose of inspir-

ing it, democracy would have to remain heterogeneous to the economic order. Otherwise, it would simply remain bound by the constraints imposed by this order. In that case, every democratic action would be justifiable only on condition that it was cost-effective. Similarly, every plan of protection of the environment or non-human lives (which, as I will show, can be seen as a democratic imperative) would have to be, first and foremost, justifiable economically to be considered applicable, practicable, or even reasonable.

In a similar vein, Nancy argues that to displace economic domination (Nancy 2010, 24), dislodge the very foundations of general equivalence, put into question its false infinity (Nancy 2010, 31),⁴ and by consequence, call in question the morality of liberal individualism, a new nonequivalence of the unique and singular which emerges out of the common should become the destiny of democratic politics. The latter, as politics which “withdraws from all assumptions” (Nancy 2010, 32) and support “the possibility of not being measured in advance by a given system” (Nancy 2010, 24), must be committed to justice as the excess of responsibility which goes beyond any ontological and economical determinations. For Nancy, it means that justice “can only reside in the renewed decision to challenge the validity of an established or prevailing ‘just measure’ in the name of the incommensurable” (Nancy 1993b, 75). For Derrida, in turn, this commitment would involve messianic eschatology as “a structure of existence” (Derrida 2008, 250) which opens the future for the coming of the incommensurable and unexpected. Only such a messianic structure would attest to the kind of kenosis to which democracy should aspire.

What has to be ‘saved’ by this kenosis, if it is the irruption of a future that is absolutely non-reappropriable, has to have the shape of the other, which is not simply the shape of something in space that cannot be reached. That which defies anticipation, reappropriation, calculation—any form of pre-determination—is *singularity*. There can be no future as such unless there is radical otherness, and respect for this radical otherness. It is here—in that which ties together as non-reappropriable the future and radical otherness—that justice, in a sense that is a little enigmatic, analytically participates in the future (Derrida, Ferraris 2001, 21).

What can such a perspective offer? It might seem a little disappointing not only because it does not prescribe any ready-made solutions just as it does not instruct us how to conduct ourselves during turbulent times, but also because our political efforts must always disappoint the democratic

⁴ That is, “the infinite of the interminable growth of accumulation, the cycle of investment, of exploitation and reinvestment” (Nancy 2007, 46).

exigency of justice. In other words, if there is one thing we are destined to, it is failure to fulfill our infinite obligation towards the other(s). On the other hand, we should *not* fail in accepting, welcoming or even being haunted by this democratic challenge, and if we are always failing in our actions, which are measured against this infinite (or should we say, incommensurable) promise of democracy, the challenge is to fail well.

Nevertheless, Nancy urges to put this obligation “into actuality, into work, into labor” (Nancy 2010, 25), even if this work remains devoid of any assured destination. What Nancy proposes is an inversion which would turn “the insignificant equivalence reversed into an egalitarian, singular, and common significance. The ‘production of value’ becomes the ‘creation of meaning.’ This hypothesis is fragile, but perhaps it is a matter of grasping it, not as an attempt at a description, but as a will to act” (Nancy 2007, 49). Consequently, and following in Derrida’s footsteps, Nancy argues for trying to make the impossible possible, which would require of us to take “a boundless leap outside of the calculable and controllable reality” (ibidem), but without giving up on the calculable, our day-to-day activism, institutions, political *praxis*. As Derrida avows, “the truth is that one must do the impossible, and the impossible would perhaps be the only measure of any ‘must’ [*il faut*]” (2013, 30), “a measureless measure [*mesure sans mesure*] of the impossible” (Derrida 1992, 29). However, rather than being a merely formal proposition, this exigency has to inform our experience and inspire our actions.

The aporetic injunction to make the impossible possible, to live together while remaining faithful to the obligation toward the singularity of the other, which each time interrupts the whole of living together, attests to the insatiability of the democratic cause, for, as Nancy contends, “[i]f democracy has a sense, it would be that of having available to it no identifiable authority proceeding from a place or impetus other than those of a desire—of a will, an awaiting, a thought—where what is expressed and recognized is a true possibility of being *all together, all and each one among all*” (2010, 14). That is why Nancy argues that democracy must in some way be communist, but this thinking would obviously necessitate to reimagine what the common might mean: to begin with, we cannot uphold the classical concepts of community and intersubjectivity. Another, explicitly non-totalitarian way of thinking of communism—and this is a postulate of both Derrida and Nancy—is necessary: “where the common is anything but the common” (Derrida, Ferraris 2001, 25), namely, where “we have community that does right by interruption” (25). If democracy is not aspiring to do the impossible,

to wit, to find out how to live together in respect of a singular interruption, then it is “but the management of necessities and expediencies, lacking in desire, that is, in spirit, in breath, in sense” (Nancy 2010, 15).⁵ As such, it remains restricted to calculation, and thus, devoid of its spirit. And yet, democracy has to be faithful to its spirit *qua* breath which must inspire our every postulation and political activity (30) without falling prey to idealism or spiritualism, namely, without being detached from the material, factual conditions of our dwelling. For the breath of democracy is anything but disaffection and cold sublimity.

Air Democracy

Democracy is therefore about breathing and being able to breathe. When Nancy at one point postulates that in looking for democracy one must learn how to listen (Nancy 2010, 28), we could also argue that one has to learn how to breathe and how to share air (if those two things are not the same).

In ancient Greek, the word *pneuma* means both breath and spirit. For Luce Irigaray those two spheres—material and spiritual—are inseparable: in order to flourish, in every sense, one has to breathe well: “Breathing is the first and the last gesture with regard to life” (Irigaray 2016, 21) and life cannot be reduced either to the idealist or the materialist perspective.

⁵ According to Nancy, this spiritual character of democracy, far from being idealistic, is “the breath of man, not the man of a humanism measured against the height of man as he is given [...] but man who infinitely transcends man” (2010, 15). However, could thinking of democracy overcome Nancy’s, if not humanistic, then at least seemingly anthropocentric and openly fraternalistic perspective? In *The Experience of Freedom*, Nancy states that what grants us humanity is not being human as a pre-constituted subject. For Nancy, the essence of humanity belongs to being-in-common which arises from sharing (out). At the same time, Nancy states that “[o]n the archi-originary register of sharing [...] there are no ‘human beings’” (1993b, 73). Thus, if humanity arises “from relation” (which is not already ontologically determined, and therefore, which does not belong to the order of presence-to-itself), then it can only arise from our relation (or perhaps, less ontologically determinable referral) to the other of whom we cannot tell yet (or at all) “human.” Therefore, our humanity can and should *also* (or—phenomenologically speaking—*first of all*) arise from our relations with non-humans or not-yet-humans. If these relations were exclusive to humans, they would have to presuppose some kind of understanding of what human *is*. Consequently, in our humanity, in our infinite task of transcending man, we rely on the other, and thus, inevitably, on non-human others, perhaps even on inanimate non-humans. It seems therefore necessary for democracy to account also for those relations. Consequently, democracy should also be committed to the exigency of justice which is not profoundly anthropocentric. Climate justice might be its example or its display.

Although its crucial function has been forgotten, and that forgetfulness has led to “a separation between body and soul (Irigaray 2015a, 254), “breathing is what allows for a passage from vegetative to spiritual life” (Irigaray 2016, 22), and as such, it is a condition *sine qua non* for both the preservation and transcending of biological life.

In Irigaray’s view, when addressing the question of life, we have to take into account both cultural and natural conditions of its sharing and its growth. Hence, Irigaray’s critique is aimed at the cultural constructs and values (“To claim one is environmentalist before questioning our cultural tradition does not really make sense” [Irigaray 2015b, 101]) which constrain our lives and pervert our relation with others, beginning with the relation between man and woman and ending with the relation between human and vegetal life: “our social rules and conventions are based on the neutralization of the living more than on its respect and its cultivation” (Irigaray 2016, 89).

It is by starting from *sexuate difference*⁶ that we recognize the other is different than me, which, in turn, “leads us to recognition of other forms of diversity” (Irigaray 2000, 12).⁷ Thus, the paradigm of subjectivity as a model for all living beings arranged according to a hierarchy as the model’s more or less imperfect copies, namely, the dominant paradigm of the Western Tradition, is replaced with the unconditional respect for *sexuate difference*. The latter must consequently be followed by the ethical realization that every other is infinitely different than ourselves and irreducible to any abstract construct. This realization, in Irigaray’s view, not only has an essential impact on our relations with others, but also results in our reconciliation with nature. Irigaray, therefore, just like Nancy, rejects social reality in which every member of a society is measured, in the name of individualism, against the same abstract model of civic subjectivity with disregard for singular differences.

Starting from the relation between man and woman, “the most basic and universal place where ethics must be exercised” (Irigaray 2015a, 253), the respect for *sexuate difference* offers a “new approach to democracy” (Irigaray 2000, 22). The latter relies from now on a dialogical bond between

⁶ Irigaray uses neologism “sexuate” [*sexué(e)*] instead of “sexual” [*sexuel(le)*] in order to emphasize the relational character of *sexuate difference*. As such, the latter cannot be viewed solely from the perspective of either cultural or biological sex. Also, *sexuate difference* should not be simply confined to sexual orientation or preference since it exceeds a mere sexual drive (cf. Szopa 2018, 176-189).

⁷ As Irigaray states elsewhere, “I have been searching for a possible way of safeguarding Being, without, for all that, contributing to the power of the one. I have therefore promoted Being two” (2004b, 233).

two equal but irreducibly different living beings, which becomes the first display of biodiversity (Irigaray 2015b, 103): “[t]he sharing out of political responsibility can only help to bring about some change here if it is founded on two different identities” (Irigaray 2000, 37), and furthermore, “[d]emocracy begins through a civil relationship, protected by rights, between a man and a woman, a male citizen and a female citizen, each and every citizen” (39). Such a perspective becomes a “basis for [a] ‘renewal of the moral and democratic foundations’” (22).⁸

Now, since *both* the domination and violence which we witness or experience in our human relations (especially in the case of the oppression of women) *and* the exploitation and mastering of nature find, according to Irigaray, the same root in our perverted culture, then we cannot simply tackle one issue and ignore the other. As she argues, “[t]he removing of woman from herself originates in a man’s domination over nature” (2004c, 167). Likewise, in a recently published discussion with Noam Chomsky, he emphasizes the importance of more comprehensive approach towards contemporary challenges. While the question of climate justice remains one of the most urgent issues for humanity, it cannot displace other struggles. We should therefore build a general awareness about those troubling and urgent issues in hope that it will contribute to our knowledge of interrelation between different forms of oppression and what causes them: “Such awareness and understanding presupposes a much broader sensitivity towards the tribulations and injustices that plague the world—a deeper consciousness that can inspire activism and dedication, deeper insight into their roots and linkages” (Chomsky 2020, 75). Thus, since the democratic injunction has as its aim universal happiness and well-being, which can be realized only by living together through respectful and responsible sharing of the world, then we must “build a new form of democratic civilization which is not solely or primarily concerned with the possession of good but rather, first and foremost, with respect for individual existence” (Irigaray 2000, 25). Hence, even though the democratic task cannot lose sight of the question of the human, it has to be extended beyond the circle of our species.

Now, while for Irigaray air is an elementary condition for biodiversity, it also provides us with a political perspective which encourages the dismantlement or transformation of oppressive and authoritarian structures and institutions resulting in the turn from totality to plurality and diversity.

⁸ Cf. Irigaray 2004b, 233.

If we were capable of forming every whole while taking air into account, our totalities would lose their systematic and authoritarian nature. They would also remain capable of transformation in order to enter into relations with an other, or to form a community with others, without each losing their singularity (Irigaray 2016, 24).

Breath and air thus play an integral part in this democratic critique ensued by the affirmation of the vegetal world—a world which does not comply to the economy of calculation (Irigaray 2000, 168) but rather, at the most basic level, realizes a universal and seemingly *aneconomic* vision of sharing: “the trees or other plants purified my breath without asking for anything in return” (Irigaray 2016, 21). There is however another, much more fragile kind of economy at stake—one which barely merits keeping its name, especially if we identify economy with calculability and measurability (just as is the case with market economy). Breathing exemplifies this vulnerable economy. In fact, breathing’s very nature is equated by Irigaray with this economy. It serves therefore as both an example and an exemplar insofar as it is not subjected to any rigid rules. Rather, it “varies depending on whatever and how we embody our existence” (Irigaray 2016, 97). That is why Irigaray uses such words as “gift” and “gratitude”, “sharing” and “celebration” when she talks about this “universal economy of living beings” (Irigaray 2017, 131). The contribution of the vegetal world (as an unselfish provider of air) to this universal economy, which is an economy of peaceful coexistence, sustainability and growth of life,⁹ must therefore be exemplary, and although our role in this economy is different than that of the vegetal world, the disinterest of the vegetal world, which is anything but indifference or apathy,

⁹ A similar point is raised by Vandana Shiva in her book *Earth Democracy*, where she speaks of democracy which restores sanctity of life in all beings (2015, 7) and recognizes diversity as something to be “celebrated as the essential condition of our existence” (55). Consequently, she proposes to replace market-based economies with living economies, which are non-violent, decentered, and oriented toward sustainability of life in its biodiversity. Living economies are based on ecologically conscious co-production, co-ownership, and responsible sharing. From this point of view, living economies coincide with a democratic paradigm in which rights and ownership are restored to local communities, and power, rather than being centralized, is dispersed and exercised mainly at the local level. As a result, the communities could take control over their livelihoods and access to natural resources. This approach would stand against “the dominant [capitalistic—AK] culture of death and destruction” and “abstract constructions created by the dominant powers in society” (99). Concurrently, it would allow people to create their own, more adequate response to the issues of environmental protection and survival. At the same time, this democratic paradigm would attest to a universal (global) idea “that we all share one common humanity and one commonality with all beings and life forms” (79).

gives us an idea about our attitude towards the environment: the vegetal world “says to us that it is not fitting to take advantage of the environment in which we live without making our contribution to it” (Irigaray 2017, 128).¹⁰

Hence, breathing provides access to this most originary and intimate, both spiritually and physically, experience of our interdependence with the natural world and other living beings. A form of communion, if not communism, a bond which cannot be subsumed under any rigid category of traditionally anthropo- and phallo-centric political ontology, but which is founded on always vulnerable principles of gratitude and responsibility, takes place. A new citizenship, not authorized by any political institution, is sensed¹¹ and finds its legitimacy in the experience of sharing.

¹⁰ Now, if we interpret ethics in the hyperbolic way Derrida does, namely, as the “essentially” non-metaphysical “obligation that engages my responsibility with respect to the most dissimilar [*le plus dissemblable, the least ‘fellow’-like*], the entirely other, precisely, the monstrously other, the unrecognizable other” (Derrida 2009, 108) and cannot be exercised simply in accordance with duty, then the task of contributing to the growth of the environment will exceed any prescribed measures, challenge the logic of “good conscience,” and transgress any ecological presuppositions. This approach is different from Irigaray’s who, despite her affirmation of radical difference, makes metaphysical gestures, that is, the gestures of a metaphysician of life. First of all, indeed in a metaphysical way, she announces that we have forgotten “of a word capable of saying life as such” (Irigaray 2017, 132), assuming later existence of the referent, that is, “life as such”: “We must start from life again as the only value that can be universally shareable [...] We must thus focus on what we have in common and the way of safeguarding this common good” (Irigaray 2016, 91). “Only life is universal, and starting from life we can build a human culture and accomplish humanity” (Irigaray 2016, 89). We also have to remember of her commitment to the notion of auto-affection and the possibility of the return to the self, which is strictly connected with the question of transcendental autonomy (which is established through the “return to the solitude and the silence of [one’s] own soul” [Irigaray 2004c, 167]). And finally, Irigaray assumes the presence of the other’s intimate self which is, however, “neither to be seen nor to be seized” (Irigaray 2015a, 265). We have to, nevertheless, keep in mind that, as opposed to the traditional metaphysics, for Irigaray every life is “sexuated,” and therefore, relational through and through. That is why this singular autonomy is paradoxical and very problematic, especially if we want to contain it within traditionally metaphysical language. The question remains if there is possibility to even think of a language capable of enacting such a description. Even Irigaray states that “[p]roducing a universalizing discourse, without being unjust or oppressive, is extremely difficult, perhaps impossible (2004a, 220).

¹¹ Irigaray talks here about “the sensibility toward coexisting with the other, thanks to a measure of respect, rationality and thought” (Irigaray 2000, 117). Therefore, no renunciation of intellect is prescribed and the incalculability of the other must be eventually mediated by the calculable (*logos*).

Air put us into living relations even if we did not assume the same role with respect to it. Through air, I participated in a universal exchange from which my tradition cut me off. Thus, I was alone and not alone. I took part in a universal sharing. Gradually, I experienced such an involvement, and this brought me comfort, gratitude, and also responsibility. I became a citizen of the world, first as an inhabitant of the earth who joined in a sharing of air (Irigaray 2016, 22).¹²

Breathing teaches us how to be autonomous singularities, for it allows us to dwell in the world on our own, that is, relying on our own breath.¹³ However, at the same time, breathing shows us that we cannot be fully detached from the world. Thereby, we have to think of autonomy in a different way (at least if we want to uphold the infinite difference between singularities instead of falling prey to symbiotism or reductionism): the myths of pure autarchy and neutralized individuality must remain but abstract ideas, which truly stand against the lessons we can draw from breathing: we rely on others just as we are responsible for them. That is why care for growth and cultivation of our own, both spiritual and physical, life is interrelated with care for the environment. And according to Irigaray's diagnosis, we have disregarded this simple fact because we have forgotten how to breathe, to wit, we have forgotten to take breathing seriously. We have therefore disregarded the injunction of justice which, according to Irigaray, can find its fulfillment in governing devoted to the development of all living beings (Irigaray 2016, 89).

Irigaray argues that this disregard stems from our crooked logic which we apply to the surrounding world and to our inner selves, and which may "result from a contempt for and finally a forgetting of a word capable of saying life as such" (Irigaray 2017, 132). Consequently, our world must remain

¹² Now, since for Irigaray, as she states in the introduction to the part IV of her *Key Writings*, working for the constitution of democratic societies is based on an active weaving of relations between citizens, then we have to ask what this new kind of citizenship based on a universal sharing with nature brings to the democratic project. If we are to be such citizens, then we have to be vested with both rights and duties with regard to the environment. So, if this citizenship takes into account, or rather consists in our sharing with the world, then not only are we responsible for cultivation of life and care for the natural environment but we also must be endowed with rights to live in a peaceful coexistence with the natural world. In other words, the fundamental issues of civil liberty or freedom could not be considered apart from rights like those to clean air or clean water. Consequently, destruction of biodiversity and devastation of the natural environment should be interpreted as both an assault on civil rights and a crime against humanity.

¹³ For Irigaray, cultivation of breath is crucial, above all, in the process of emancipation of women (Irigaray 2004c, 165-171).

impoverished as long as our language fails to address the question of sexuate difference and the infinite singularity of the other. Moreover, in her diagnosis, Irigaray welds these two issues, of natural exploitation and barrenness of language, together: “[t]here are two quite fundamental problems which we have to confront today: the exhaustion of natural reserves and the exhaustion of the reserves of meaning and truth in discourse” (2004a, 214). Therefore, it comes as no surprise that Irigaray attaches exceptional weight to the question of language, which she puts simultaneously in both *archeological* and *teleological* perspective: we have forgotten how to bond with nature and each other; our language has been used as a tool for appropriation of the other, and consequently, it has been incapable of expressing the universal sharing as dwelling in the world; ultimately, deep changes to our culture and language, which consist in disclosure of sharing and favoring communication over mastery, are necessary.

Our removal from the vegetal world has been accompanied by the loss of a language that serves the accomplishment and sharing of life [...] It is then the question of a language that lets, and even gives, each one its own being, and, in a way, entrusts to each one the responsibility for its destiny. Now, instead of a living being reaching its appearing only thanks to a human thinking, supported by a *logos*, it is its appearing as disclosure of life that sets us thinking (Irigaray 2017, 134).

All the living beings are more interrelated, whatever their difference(s), than our discourses let us assume, a deficiency which does not contribute toward the respect for our common belonging and for the environment that is necessary to it (Irigaray 2015b, 106).

In practical terms, we lack syntax and words which could express our interrelationship with nature or contribution of the vegetal world to the preservation of life (Irigaray 2017, 129). We are thus unable to speak of care for life and its growth in the way which could emulate the attitude of the vegetal world towards other living beings. Because our language increases our alienation from the world and each other, it is inefficient in addressing our differences and interests and in defining, in a comprehensive way, the aims and policies which should be set by ecological ethics and modern politics: “Our language is more and more coded, and the technical means we employ to express ourselves and communicate from a distance make it gradually weaker and dead” (Irigaray 2016, 90). Since “[t]he way we have to welcome the other, outside or inside of us, does not yet exist in discourse” (Irigaray 2015a, 260), language becomes thus a domain of both individual and common responsibility, and it is up to us to transform lan-

guage so we could mirror the ideas of sharing and cultivation of life in rights and policies. With that in mind, we have to reelaborate the existing laws and mobilize international institutions accordingly to the demands which are arising from the environmental crisis we are facing. Simultaneously, we have to reinvent our role in the living world to come. As Irigaray avows in her book on democracy, “I have tried to discover new words that preserve sensitive awareness in the working out of a civil and political relationship” (Irigaray 2000, 28).

Similarly, Franco Berardi, for whom breathlessness is tragically the sign of our times (Berardi 2018, 15),¹⁴ insists on an urgent necessity for a transformation of our language. As opposed to measured and conventional use of language, which is subjected to the capitalist logic of economic exchangeability, Berardi seeks for help in poetry. While language may be entrapped within the confines of social communication, which nowadays relies on market economy, it is nevertheless immeasurable and illimitable. In his view, it is up to poetry to bear witness, in its excessiveness, to the boundlessness of language and to allow us to abandon meanings which have been failing us, to open our world to the other and to step toward the yet unknown. In poetry, therefore, to use Nancy’s words, the incalculable can be—always inexhaustibly, imperfectly, and infinitely—shared (out) (Nancy 2010, 17).

What we are accustomed to call “the world” is an effect of a process of semiotic organization of prelinguistic matter. Language organizes time, space, and matter in such a way that they become recognizable to human consciousness. This process of semiotic emanation does not reveal a natural given; rather, it unfolds as a perpetual reshuffling of material contents, a continuous reframing of our environment. Poetry can be defined as the act of experimenting with the world by reshuffling semiotic patterns (Berardi 2018, 20).

¹⁴ While the statement “I can’t breathe” has emerged today in a certain context of state violence against the African-American community, it can pertain to so many forms of political and economic oppression. On so many levels, and across so many dividing lines, of which division by class, race or sex is perhaps the most incisive, this breathlessness, in its figurative and literal take, becomes an inevitable outcome of years of coercion, invigilation, exploitation, and negligence. How can one breathe if there is a cop’s knee on one’s neck? How can one breathe when air is so polluted? How can one breathe when one is being exploited in one’s workplace? How can one breathe when one is a prisoner of one’s own household? How can one breathe when the state apparatus is designed to spy on people and is so eager to criminalize investigative journalism? How can one breathe in African-American communities? How can one breathe in Gaza? How can one breathe in the Amazon Jungle in Brazil under Jair Bolsonaro? How can one breathe in Amazon’s warehouses?

Poetry, in its broad understanding as an unrestrained invention within the boundless realms of language, may thus be a tool of “semiotic insolvency” (32) and political defiance. The latter, as a response to a spasm of society (which Berardi defines as both physical and psychological corespiration of its singular members) afflicted by breathlessness, inevitably relies on invigoration of people by means of political imagination and nonconventional and daring solutions. Invention of new acts of language is therefore necessary to escape the totalitarianism of measurability and to “enable the imagination of new infinities” (31) in a response to the looming crises. In search for air, in our leap towards democracy and justice, we dream again of new forms of international solidarity, cooperation in our struggles, and resistance. As Chomsky points out, “the struggles against injustice and oppression must develop interactions and mutual support in their own ways” (Chomsky 2020, 85, cf. 81).

Heir Democracy (Conclusion)

While Berardi, in *Breathing. Chaos and Poetry*, adduces Hölderlin’s words about absence of any ultimate measures on earth, something Nancy would have certainly subscribed to, Derrida refers to Hölderlin’s belief that through language we are inheritors by virtue of our very existence.

We receive as our share the possibility of sharing, and that is none other than the possibility of inheriting [...] We inherit nothing, except the ability to inherit and to speak, to enter into a relation with a language, with a law, or with “something” that makes it possible for us to inherit, and by the same token, to bear witness to this fact by inheriting... (Derrida, Stiegler 2007, 132)

For Derrida, however, the fact that we are inheritors through and through coincides with the fact that our lives are structured by mourning and survival: “To survive in the usual sense of the term means to continue to live, but also to live *after* death” (Derrida 2007b, 26), which implies that our lives rely and are permeated by the possibility of death. However, we can never experience death as our own but only through others, which does not mean that we are not mortal and death is for us any less real, but on the contrary—every passing moment is marked by the imminence of death and the pressing necessity that one day we will die. Before that happens, however, we will survive people we love, and those whose deaths will remain anonymous to us. We will survive disappearing and perishing worlds of monstrous and *immontrable*, *méconnaissable* and non-human others. And at

some point, we will be survived by other inheritors who will then take responsibility for what will remain after us. Derrida refers to the knowledge that one must always go before the other in one of his elegiacal texts: "Friends know this, and friendship breathes this knowledge, breathes it right up to expiration, right up to the last breath" (Derrida 2003, 171). Living *on* is thus a question of breathing *on*, and it entails the insistent thought of respiration as expiration—something which Derrida encapsulates in an eerie phrase "I posthume as I breathe."¹⁵

Now, since this interruption of life by death is the very condition of living (on), it must imply that the alterity of past and future has its constitutive share in our lives to the point where no pure identity, totality or simple presence can ultimately be preserved. Consequently, "living together' no longer has the simplicity of a 'living' in the present pure and simple" (Derrida 2013, 20). And since "our" "living together" is permeated by mourning and structured by survival, it can never be exhausted or contained. Thereby, we are endowed with irreducible responsibility for something which was never in our possession or given as such, namely, responsibility for both the past and future. This demand implies that an unforeseeable future remains to be open.

This assignation of responsibility cannot therefore be thought otherwise than as inheritance. That is why Derrida states that "[i]t would be necessary to think life on the basis of heritage, and not the other way around" (Derrida, Roudinesco 2004, 4). As he explains, because of the irreducible tension between the passivity of heritage and affirmative decision, we are never in the position to choose an inheritance. Rather, we are "violently elected" to keep the inheritance alive (3), but without illusion of its final salvation. From this perspective—which radically repudiates any ethical dogma serving as a good conscience, and which emphasizes the need for vigilance, reinterpretation, and "active transformation" of existing conditions—responsibility based on the reaffirmation of the heritage incites us to refrain from injuring or putting to death (4).

¹⁵ As he later explains, "in saying 'I posthume as I breathe,' I thought I meant that nothing is, like breathing itself, as natural, spontaneous, habitual, unreflective, reflexive, indispensable to life as being obsessed with the postmortem, fascinated, worried and interpellated, and I thought I was playing in crossing the sense of what comes after death, the flair of breathing, and what comes after burial" (Derrida 2011, 173-174). Aside from the obvious existential anxiety, this phrase can also express more ethical concern about the fate of those already dead and those who are not yet born but who, in the ordinary dimension of survival, will come after us.

As Derrida argues in *Specters of Marx*, “without this responsibility and this respect for justice concerning those who are not there, of those who are no longer or who are not yet present and living, what sense would there be to ask the question ‘where?’ ‘where tomorrow?’ ‘whither?’ ” (2006, xviii). As such, justice carries life beyond present life toward living on (xx) and it cannot be conditioned by present existence or essence (220).

How could we thereby address those critical issues of climate justice, were we not concerned with ghosts of the past and the future: those numberless victims of exploitation and the degradation of the natural environment, those victims of what Derrida calls “capitalist imperialism”? As he points out, no ethics and politics is thinkable without taking this non-contemporariness as our point of departure, which always leaves the question of future open and unquelled. If there is any gist of democracy, perhaps it is this unquenchable desire for justice fueled by “the recognition that we never live in a (sufficiently) democratic society. This critical work is more than critical, this deconstructive task is indispensable for democratic breathing space, as for any idea of responsibility...” (Derrida 2005a, 140).

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