The Vicissitudes of 'Democracy to Come': Political Community, *Khôra*, the Human

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Abstract

After beginning by situating the author's (possible) relation to Derrida's expression, 'democracy to come', the article proceeds from the position that Derrida's phrase is to be understood as part of a political intervention. Indeed, the inseparability of democracy and deconstruction confirms this. After setting out some of the pertinent features of 'democracy to come' – seen, in part, in the General Will – the notion of political community in the thought of Hannah Arendt is brought into question, if not deconstructed. Political community as presented by Arendt is seen to limit the inclusiveness of democracy. In the final section, the article suggests that Agamben's critique of the very structure of the nation-state opens the way for a renewal of the notion of the human in the 'community to come'.

Keywords. democracy, political community, public sphere, *khôra*, the human, General Will

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> 'Democracy is comin'
> to the USA...'
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> – Leonard Cohen (1997)
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> 'No deconstruction without democracy, no democracy without deconstruction.'
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> – Jacques Derrida (1997, 105)

> 'The expression "democracy to come" translates . . . or
> calls for a militant and interminable political critique. A weapon
> aimed at the enemies of democracy, it protests against all naiveté
> and every political abuse.'
>
> – Jacques Derrida (2005, 86)

Introduction

When it is said that the 'expression "democracy to come" translates . . . or calls for a militant and interminable political critique. A weapon aimed at the enemies [mark this term!] of democracy' (Derrida 2005, 86), I am all ears – I'm prepared to become a believer! – but I remain unsure as to how this can be so. But then, I am possibly experiencing one of the aporias of democracy, where universal inclusion[1] and the necessary transparency of communication that this entails comes up against the equally necessary secret and esoteric knowledge only available to the select few – aspects of science and philosophy no doubt being the main exemplars, but also private thoughts and feelings. The very meaning of 'democracy to come' straddles this aporia.[2] Is 'democracy to come' communicable to a wide audience, or is it only transparent to a select number of Derridean scholars? Possibly both. However, to invoke belief, as I did above, is to believe in the broad communicability of 'democracy to come'. This is where I start from. This is why I think that Derrida's reference to 'a militant and interminable political critique' is so important. I believe very firmly that 'democracy to come' is part of a profound political intervention that is driven by democracy as deconstruction and deconstruction as the basis of democracy.

The Importance of 'Democracy to Come'

From the thoughts it inspires and provokes – thoughts in the 'here and now' – 'democracy to come' becomes more than a quest to arrive at a correct understanding, but, more importantly, becomes a way of being motivated to tune into the thoughts thus generated. These thoughts which motivate me (thus connecting to the performative aspect of Derrida's discourse), I hope might, in their turn, motivate the reader.

'Democracy to come', as I shall invoke it, participates in a critique of the currently used notion of political community, most forcefully

advocated by Hannah Arendt, as it also participates in a re-valuation of the meaning of the human, a process begun in the work of Giorgio Agamben. That there are 'enemies of democracy' serves to highlight the importance of engaging in a critique of the European heritage of political theory. It is thus a matter of deconstructing 'political community' and the 'human'.

I offer my approach, then, to 'democracy to come' as an expression evoking democracy as such. When viewed as a space, the public sphere offers a way into an analysis of *khôra* as exemplary of the non-foundational and non-determinable nature of democracy (implied in the term, 'deconstruction'), a non-foundational nature embedded, as I see it, in Rousseau's General Will. Ultimately, *thinking* democracy can extend the scope of democracy as a political form. My general argument is that the existing structures of what is called democracy – based in political community and the nation state – militate against a 'democracy to come'.

'Democracy to Come'

I take heed, now, of the fact that in Derrida's terms, we are, in the 'here and now', already within 'democracy to come'; for the latter is not an ideal to be pursued (although Derrida is ambiguous here); it is not a regulative idea in Kant's sense, as Derrida never tires of saying. We are dealing with the 'here and now' because democracy is what the people, at any given moment, decide that it is. Democracy is thus the bane of every idealism in being radically contingent. If there is an 'is' of democracy as such, it is in the status of the 'to-come' itself. But we know that in one of Derrida's formulations, democracy neither 'is' nor 'is not', neither exists nor does not exist. Indeed, no existing form of democracy is equivalent to democracy as such. Democracy, we could say, is indeed the loosening of the rigidity of the bonds of all those regimes which imply that the quest for democracy has come to an end with them. Thus, democracy 'does not constitute the modification of an "is," of an ontological copula marking the present of essence or existence, indeed of substantial or subjective substance' (Derrida 2005, 91). Democracy neither is, nor is not; it neither exists, nor does not exist because democracy – for essential reasons – is not the kind of thing that can be fully realized in a specific incarnation, just as the General Will has no specific incarnation, but does not cease to be the General Will for all that. Any manifestation of a political form which claims the name, democracy, will fail; for something more will always be needed. Thus, as a result, a battle is constantly being

fought around democracy: a battle for more and better democracy. It is democracy as a promise, as the following passage says: "'Not something that is certain to happen tomorrow, not the democracy (national or international, state or trans-state) of the future, but a democracy that must have the structure of a promise – and thus the memory of that which carries the future, the to-come, here and now".' (Derrida 1992, 78; Cited in Derrida 2005, 85–86).

The Democratic Promise in Relation to Heritage and Inheritance

Heritage is crucial to 'democracy to come'. Like any heritage, the democratic heritage, or what we inherit from the past – what comes *to* us (cf. the Greek heritage) – as is argued in *Échographies* (1996), is about choices as to the material that will be conserved. Selecting in the spirit of critique is what distinguishes heritage today from traditionalism, or conserving simply on the basis of being 'past', historical. A heritage is not just what falls into one's hands, willy nilly, even in the form of a '*patrimoine*' (Derrida in Derrida and Stiegler 1996, 80).[3] The effective politicisation of 'heritage' would make it part of the process of expropriation going on elsewhere, if not everywhere. This implies that a certain violence is implicit in the constitution of a heritage, if we accept that expropriation is itself a potentially violent process. Heritage comes to us from the past, thus giving us another meaning of the 'to-come' of 'democracy to come' meaning 'coming to us' and calling on us to choose what part of the inheritance we will accept. This heritage, in other words, does not have to be reduced to a specific voting system, or form of representation. The heritage of 'political community' and the 'human' call for critical scrutiny in this sense.

But, there is no heritage without repetition and therefore without technology (for example, writing). And this technology (as the means of transmission) risks distorting heritage. Technology even risks destroying heritage; but without it, there can be no heritage. There is also the issue of responsibility and fidelity to a democratic heritage, which would seem to have an aspect of appropriation about it. Yet, Derrida argues the opposite: 'Heritage is what I cannot appropriate, what comes to me and for which I have responsibility . . . I inherit what I must transmit . . . there is no property right over heritage. This is the paradox. I am always the tenant of a heritage' (Derrida in Derrida and Stiegler 1996, 124). Democracy is a heritage in this sense. It is what has been inherited, whether we like it not.

Democracy as Enactment

Democracy, too, is always being enacted and is what is being enacted. In this sense the 'to-come' is not entirely removed from what might be anticipated by everyday parlance, as is suggested by the following passage that recognizes the importance of the fight for justice, as the latter is currently understood, and which we have already invoked above:

> The expression "democracy to come" translates, to be sure, or calls for a militant and interminable political critique. A weapon aimed at the enemies of democracy, it protests against all naiveté and every political abuse every rhetoric that would present as a present or existing democracy, as a de facto democracy, what remains inadequate to the democratic demand, whether nearby or far away, at home or somewhere else in the world, anywherethat a discourse on the rights of man and on democracy remains little more than an obscene alibi so long as it tolerates the terrible plight of so many millions of human beings suffering from malnutrition, disease, and humiliation, grossly deprived not only of bread and water but of equality or freedom, dispossessed of the rights of all, of everyone, of anyone. (Derrrida 2005, 86)

In short, democracy can be a form of militancy that aims to truly instantiate democratic practices by overcoming the political inadequacies evident throughout the world, and in demonstrating the fallacy of certain acts claimed to be done in the name of democracy. Although it is not a matter of following a rule or of trying to realize a model, where there is no justice or sense of responsibility, there is no democracy either.

Even though there is no ideal, democracy, as enacted, aspires to be all-inclusive and universal. However, as all-inclusive, as universal, aporias emerge. For instance, if democracy is 'government by the people', does this mean that anti-democratic forces (recall the 'enemies' of democracy) can be included in the notion of 'the people'? Often, it has been part of the people itself which has borne the brunt of the institutions of democracy – a recent example being a law recently debated in the French parliament (September 2010) that would allow the government to revoke citizenship from those naturalised within the last 10 years if convicted of certain crimes such as attacking police and other public authorities.

To work towards modifying democracy's autoimmune aspect – and thus to work towards making every democracy more inclusive, if not more democratic – another form of totality needs to be enacted, one based to the greatest extent possible on those excluded – unjustly – from

every totality. Another form of community, in other words, might be required. Perhaps 'a community of those without community', as Bataille put it (cited in Blanchot 1983, 9), or Blanchot's 'negative' or 'uavovable' community' (1983, 9–39), or again what Roberto Esposito (2010) would call a community freeing itself from immunity, or from the negative aspect of exclusion. I would say that it is almost certain that the issue of community as raised by Jean-Luc Nancy (1990), Bataille and Blanchot underlies Derrida's thought on the 'democracy to come', if it is agreed that, like the negative community, democracy to come is not a work to be realised, nor a discrete entity or identity turned in upon itself, but rather an entity essentially open to otherness and not identical to itself.

'Rogues'

Derrida's treatment of the rogue element in society – what in French is called a '*voyou*' – raises a key issue that will subsequently lead into an analysis of *khôra*. We take Derrida's definition of 'rogue' as our starting point:

> If the expression *rogue state* appears rather recent, the word *rogue*, as an adjective or substantive, has inhabited the English language and haunted its literature longer than the word *voyou* has the French language and literature. In use since the middle of the sixteenth century, it refers in everyday language, in the language of the law and in great works of literature, already in Spenser and often in Shakespeare, to beggars and homeless vagabonds of various kinds, but also, and for this same reason, to all sorts of riffraff, villains, and unprincipled outlaws ('a dishonest, unprincipled person,' says the *Oxford English Dictionary*, 'a rascal'). From there the meaning gets extended, in Shakespeare as well as in Darwin, to all nonhuman living beings, that is, to plants and animals whose behaviour appears deviant or perverse. Any wild animal can be called *rogue*, but especially those, such as *rogue elephants*, that behave like ravaging outlaws, violating the customs and conventions, the customary practices, of *their own* community. (Derrida 2005, 93; emphasis in original)

The question arising is: can a 'rogue' (as individual or state), in all justice, be included in the democratic community? Or is there an automatic response to exclude the rogue? The further question – in light of what has been said above – is: what is a democratic *community*? In what sense must a true 'democracy to come' also include those who (such as the 'enemy'), or that which, would threaten the inclusiveness of the community? Similarly, must we not recognize that those who commit crimes against humanity are also human – that they cannot be

excluded from humanity. Humanity, indeed, must come to terms with itself. As regards democracy's 'autoimmune' response, democracy must think twice before seeking to protect itself from anti-democratic forces, lest it attacks itself by becoming exclusive – lest it becomes a positive community based on the exclusion of the other (the 'rogue', in this instance). The 'war on terror' has run this risk, to the detriment of democracy.

But no doubt the real issue to be resolved hangs on whether democracy is being protected in a just way. Is it just, for example, to exclude stateless people from membership of, or presence in, a *polity*? We are thus now in the realm of actual politics. Could an existing *polity*, or civil society, ever really include those who are stateless *qua* stateless, that is, without turning them into refugees, residents, criminals or citizens? This is almost certainly impossible because the system is set up against statelessness – against those who would be members of a negative community. The nation-state is entirely dominant and perceives itself as having successfully formalised the positive community which it aims to be – a community claimed as a work that has already been realised and is not to be outdone.

What of borderline cases? Should a 'dishonest, unprincipled person' – a 'rogue' – be included or excluded from the democratic community? Convicted criminals in prison do not, in many states, have voting rights and are to that extent excluded from the democratic community. There is, though, a far broader, historical aspect attaching to the notion of political community, one inherited from the Enlightenment, and which perhaps finds its clearest expression in the thought of Hannah Arendt. The question is whether or not we should accept or reject this inheritance – the inheritance of the Enlightenment version of political community. Here, without doubt, we are dealing with a positive community based on exclusion.

Political Community and the Public Sphere as Exemplified by Hannah Arendt

A detour via the work of Arendt is justified because her idea of political community[4] (or, indeed, any notion of community) cannot be fully appreciated outside the question of inclusion and exclusion. The latter is crucial, I argue, for grasping the full implications of the 'democracy to come'. 'Political community' is part of the heritage that it is necessary to work with, but also against. For there is no political community – and especially in the version Arendt presents – without exclusion.[5]

In the *The Human Condition (1958)*, Arendt, following the Ancient Greeks, famously defines the political community, or *polis*, as the space of freedom and action and she contrasts this with the private realm of the household, or the realm of necessity.[6] There can be no true freedom, action or work as a created product in the household:

> What all Greek philosophers, no matter how opposed to *polis* life took for granted is that freedom is exclusively located in the political realm, that necessity is primarily a prepolitical phenomenon, characteristic of the private household organization, and that force and violence are justified in this sphere because they are the only means to master necessity – for instance, by ruling over slaves – and to become free. Because all human beings are subject to necessity, they are entitled to violence toward others; violence is the prepolitical act of liberating oneself from the necessity of life for the freedom of the world. (Arendt 1958, 31)

Arendt here says that 'all human beings are subject to necessity' as a natural state, which includes natural differences. And yet we also know that for Arendt to be truly human is to be part of the political community, where, alone, freedom and equality can be realised. This community itself derives from a prior act of violence (which, strictly speaking, is not an act in the fullest sense, as this is only possible in the *polis*), an act that separates necessity from freedom. Somehow, necessity itself, paradoxically, gives rise to freedom. The violence that is characteristic of so called animal existence yet liberates human beings from pure animality. Violence, essentially deriving from the realm of necessity, is where biological needs are satisfied. In it, too, the body is dominant over the mind and evocative of man's stupid, natural existence. The latter is not a fully human existence. Only a life that participates in human artifice is human in the fullest sense. Indeed, Arendt's explication of the Greek situation, we can now see, is an elaboration of the remark made at the end of *Imperialism*, Part 2 of *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1968 [1951]), to the effect that political life occurs against the 'dark background of mere givenness' (Arendt 1968, 181), the background, too, of necessity and natural difference. When such conditions are found in a more or less pure form as in 'savage tribes', or in those 'who have been forced out of all political communities' it means that people end up like 'savages'. For they

> have lost all those parts of the world and all those aspects of human existence which are the result of our common labour, the outcome of human artifice. If the tragedy of savage tribes is that they inhabit an unchanged nature which they cannot master, yet upon whose abundance or frugality they depend for

their livelihood, that they live and die without leaving any trace, without having contributed anything to a common world, then these rightless people are indeed thrown back into a peculiar state of nature. (Arendt 1968, 181)

Equally pointedly, Arendt says: 'Since the Greeks, we have known that highly developed political life breeds a deep-rooted suspicion of [the] private sphere' (1968, 181). The private sphere (necessity) is indeed a 'permanent threat to the public sphere, because the public sphere is as consistently based on the law of equality as the private sphere is based on the law of universal difference and differentiation' (181).[7]

Arendt proposes – at least in this phase of her intellectual trajectory – that cultures without a public sphere, without (apparently) the capacity to transcend necessity because they are stuck in subsistence existence, cannot be brought into the political community proper unless they engage in a radical and presumably violent break with a past that is inured in necessity and nature. Even though Arendt raises questions about the humanity of so-called subsistence cultures, it seems that the only possible way of bringing them into the sphere of civilization and freedom would be via an external agency: Would this be the European Enlightenment? Or again: can freedom, equality, and the 'democracy to come' find any form of realisation outside a European version of civil society? Whatever the response to this question, it is entirely in keeping with the spirit of deconstruction to find freedom *in* necessity, in the sense that every life is a way of life. In other words, life is never simply the satisfaction of 'basic' needs.

Furthermore, it is well-known that the public sphere is the sphere of the brother – fraternity (cf. Derrida 1997, 238–40 and Pateman 1989, 33–57) – to the exclusion of women. It is only by questioning, if not opposing the structural importance of the public sphere that democracy can be expanded.

The Secret and 'Belonging'

If, then, we take Arendt as a representative inheritor of the Enlightenment as far as a theory of the political is concerned, democracy, *qua* political form, can only be played out in the public sphere as the sphere of freedom and equality. It implies that, historically, a fundamentally unjust exclusion is at the heart of the proclaimed inclusiveness of democracy. Put another way: democracy is essentially Western in orientation to the extent that the West is the inventor of the public sphere. Consequently, let us recall and repeat Derrida's point that

(note the pragmatic tone of this statement): 'democracy remains little more than an obscene alibi so long as it tolerates the terrible plight of so many millions of human beings suffering from malnutrition, disease, and humiliation, grossly deprived not only of bread and water but of equality or freedom, dispossessed of the rights of all, of everyone, of anyone.' (Derrida 2005, 86) This statement evokes the Western orientation of democracy in the 'here and now', an orientation which implies that a political community based on freedom and equality presupposes a public sphere separated from *a* private sphere of necessity – the sphere which cultures of the 'Third' and 'Fourth' worlds are said – or certainly were said – to find it impossible to transcend. Such peoples are thought to belong to communities, not by choice, but through necessity. Only a public sphere allows a belonging based on choice.

Here, we recall that, for Derrida, 'belonging – the fact of avowing one's belonging, of putting in common – be it family, nation, tongue – spells the loss of the secret' (Derrida in Derrida and Ferraris 2001, 59). The loss of the secret found in 'the demand that everything be paraded in the public square and that there be no internal forum is a glaring sign of the totalitarianization of democracy' (Derrida in Derrida and Ferraris 2001, 59). This is a space, too, which according to Derrida puts pressure on members not to remain silent. The 'public square' becomes a space of absolute transparency. Is this public space the same as the political community of which Arendt speaks? Does it imply a public/private divide?

My view is that there can never be – in all justice – an entirely public sphere – a pure political community where freedom is realized; nor should there be, as it implies the denigration of what passes for the private domain, often including religion. For the human, however, there can never be a purely private sphere of necessity and the satisfaction of 'natural' needs. To exist in solitude, to refuse to participate in a specific form of the public sphere is obviously not to enter anything like a so called 'dark background of mere givenness' (Arendt 1968, 181). The human cannot be divided so easily according to such categories.[8] Although Derrida does not clearly acknowledge this and although his language is an echo of Arendt's in places (cf. 'public space') the notion of the 'secret' refuses the simple dichotomy of public/private. One clearly does not revert to some kind of natural existence in engaging in the secret. The secret is the refusal of total exposure. It can thus be a way of keeping the other guessing – perhaps of engaging in public in all the strategies elaborated by Erving Goffman (front stage/back stage). But it

is also a way of recognising the play of the unconscious – that which can never be totally exposed but which has significant effects.

'Democracy to Come' and the Challenge of *Khôra*

Let us recall here, that, in attempting to get to grips with 'democracy to come' Derrida makes reference to 'a *khôra* or a spacing before any determination and any possible reappropriation' (Derrida 2004, 327), so that the, 'democracy to come would be like the *khôra* of the political' (Derrida 2004, 327) in so far as it has no foundation that can be made into a model, as the classical attitude of Western democracy has tended to do. Indeed, now 'democracy to come' must be seen to be all the ways the hegemony of the Western tradition is challenged. It must be seen as an on-going fight for a just inclusion – particularly for the inclusion of those who are stateless. This is a fight that goes beyond any notion of democracy as trans-national, as the latter risks being constructed in terms of the same ideas which have given rise to the exclusion inherent in the public sphere. It is in these terms that we now turn to the notion of *khôra* as a space which precedes any division into public and private, freedom and necessity. To turn to *khôra* is to turn to a foundation that also problematises the very notion of foundation. It thus problematises a metaphysical notion of foundation.

As Julia Kristeva has shown, *khôra* is a rhythmical space that is always already there, but has no determinate existence. It is a form of ordering but itself has no specific order. Kristeva says that she borrows the term from Plato 'to denote an essentially mobile and extremely provisional articulation' (Kristeva 1984, 25).

In his later work, *Timaeus*, Plato proposes a name that is both enigmatic and necessary: *khôra*. Because it is neither sensible nor intelligible, is neither present nor absent, is both amorphous and eternally virgin, yet is an infinitely receptive receptacle – so that Plato famously hints that it is like a mother or wet nurse. It is not, strictly speaking a place; for it is prior to all spatiality. Or rather, it is a place without an essential existence, so that Derrida refers to it as '*khôra*' without a definite article (see Derrida 2003). As Plato himself puts it in the *Timaeus*:

> And we may liken the receiving principle to a mother, and the source spring to a father, and the intermediate nature to a child, and may remark further that if the model is to take every variety of form, then the matter in which the model

is fashioned will not be duly prepared unless it is formless and free from the impress of any of those shapes which it is hereafter to receive from without. For if the matter were like any of the supervening forms, then whenever any opposite or entirely different nature was stamped upon its surface, it would take the impression badly, because it would intrude its own shape. Wherefore that which is to receive all forms should have no forms. (Plato 1980, 50 d-e)

Then, Plato seemingly offers another image – that of making perfumes – by way of illustration and explanation and he says that the liquid within which the perfume is held or contained must be totally neutral, 'inodorous' and virtually inexistent lest it contaminate the scent of the perfume itself. Thus, the vehicle through which the perfume is made available to the senses must itself be utterly odourless. Plato elaborates as follows:

In the same way, that which is to receive perpetually and through its whole extent the resemblances of all eternal beings ought to be devoid of any particular form. Wherefore the mother and receptacle of all created and visible and in any way sensible things is not to be termed earth or air or fire or water, or any of their compounds, or any of the elements from which these are derived, but is an invisible and formless being which receives all things and in some mysterious way partakes of the intelligible, and is most incomprehensible. (51 a-b)[9]

Strictly speaking, there cannot be, as John Sallis affirms (2007), any image, or representation, of what is called *khôra*. In this sense, it is not an entity and has the very structure of being itself. In fact, attempting to grasp what *khôra* is – if it is (if it is part of existence) – evokes the struggle in the metaphor of the cave in *The Republic*. We recall that those in the cave – in the world of images – are cut off from the sun as the origin of truth as the realm of forms. Similarly, just as it is impossible to grasp the forms in themselves so it seems impossible to grasp the nature of *khôra*. For, it is as impossible to grasp the forms in themselves as it is to grasp the nature of *khôra*. No image (this means: no material object) can capture the form as such; the best that can be achieved is an image (εἰκών = eikon) such that the table produced by the craftsman is evocative of the form as such, but can never be identical to it. Even though *khôra* is effectively towards the other, more material end of the ideal continuum – a fact which would seem to allow a true representation to be effected – *khôra*, too, cannot be represented. For there to be an image of *khôra*, an object adequate to the task would have to be created or found. And this, as we have said, is impossible. What is possible, perhaps, is that in Plato's frame of reference, *khôra* is truly the basis of

all images, to the extent that the entirety of the material world itself is nothing if not a conglomeration of images (= eikons). There is, in short, no image available for the condition of possibility of all images – *khôra*.

Thus, even if *khôra* can never be an image in itself, it calls for an image that can do it justice, much in the same way Judaeo/Christian thought has struggled with the issue of finding an image for God. In this sense *khôra* in Plato is the term which throws open the whole gamut of things that are enigmatic with regard to the image. *Khôra*, indeed, is what – to evoke Heidegger – calls on us to think as far as the image is concerned.

To the extent that *khôra* is absolutely transparent and is the condition of possibility of the object itself, it also sets the scene for an understanding of the image as the vehicle enabling access to the thing imaged. *Khôra* would thereby set up a mode of thinking which can accommodate the image as transparent, as opposed to it being a simulacrum.

Whatever the case, *khôra* would be emblematic of all foundations – including the foundation of 'democracy to come' as based in the General Will – in its not being present as an entity, in its not having an incarnation.

The Khôra of the Political – of 'Democracy to Come'

What is called *'khôra*, then, can never be captured in an image or representation. It has a spatial aspect, yet is rhythmical and constantly changing. It is difficult to analyse because analysis both depends upon and resists *khôra*. Similarly, democracy both depends upon and resists its open-ended, constantly changing articulation. Democracy is singular and has, historically, been claimed as a unity. Yet there are undoubtedly multiple forms of democracy. There is no absolute model, no incontrovertible origin.

Moreover, though, *khôra*, as gestured towards in the figures of original 'container', as the 'mother' or 'nurse', as a formlessness giving rise to all forms, as the receiver of all impressions in a rhythmical space – this figure is the confirmation of an absolute inclusiveness – both because it has no externality and because it has no identity in its own right. *Khôra* itself is not a space – or a place – because it is the condition of possibility of all spatiality. It thus transcends the boundary between necessity and freedom, public and private, equality and difference, inclusion and exclusion. To speak about democracy in relation to *khôra*, then, is to render problematic any reliance for illumination on a notion in

Arendt's sense of a 'public sphere' or political community in contrast to a private or natural domain. Even though Plato would not have agreed, democracy becomes the indestructible 'container' – the *khôra* – of every inclusive politics-to-come.

The General Will and 'Democracy to Come'

The General Will, as proposed by Rousseau, perhaps comes closest to embodying the *khôratic* aspect of democracy as 'democracy to come', as a promise and thus as a performative. For as each is inscribed in the democracy to come, each is inscribed in the space, or milieu, of the General Will, to be roughly equated with the general interest. Like 'democracy to come', the General Will is always 'to come' (both to us as an inheritance, and from us as an enactment) because it is not the will of all (of particular wills) and even less is it the will of a majority. The General Will is inscribed in each, as each is the outcome of the same will. Or, as Rousseau puts it, the General Will 'must derive from everyone in order to be applicable to everyone' (Rousseau 1964, 373). Like the unconscious, it is possible to deny the General Will, but not to annihilate it. Not being reducible to private interest, it is nevertheless the condition of possibility of private pursuits. Nevertheless, private interests themselves can be blind to the fact of the General Will and can engage in activities that run counter to the General Will, activities actually limiting freedom and equality, without this being recognised. Crucially, no particular will (whether of an individual, group or institution) can legitimately lay claim to be the incarnation of the General Will.[10] This implies, moreover, that the General Will is founded in difference and otherness, to the extent that difference, otherness and the general interest are one.

The limit of Rousseau's approach, though, is that he talks about freedom and equality as being the freedom and equality uniquely of citizens – of those who are already members of an established polity or political community, of those who have made a conscious decision to be members of this community. As becoming a citizen is a way of escaping the insecurity of the state of nature, those who are not citizens are relatively unprotected. This evokes the distinction between man and the citizen made in the French 'Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen'. What status, what protection, what precise identity does the human being have outside the political community? Such a question is all the more pressing when, as Rousseau admits, the actual reality of a state of nature is open to doubt. Humans can thus live outside the *polity*,

indeed, may well be excluded from it, but they do not abide outside culture, outside all community (outside language and symbolic forms, in a word) in a state of nature, the state Hannah Arendt identifies with birth or animality.

Agamben and the Quest for Humanity

The overcoming of the nature-polity division is well expressed in Agamben's chapter on Tiananmen, when he says that '*The novelty of the coming politics is that it will no longer be a struggle for the conquest of the control of the State, but a struggle between the State and the non-State (humanity), an insurmountable disjunction between whatever singularity and the State organisation*' (Agamben 2005, 85. Agamben's emphasis.).

Several important points are evoked here, all of them having relevance for the 'democracy to come'. In the first place, it is implied that political struggles and being human will no longer be limited to belonging to a political community – or, indeed in belonging to any consciously constituted community – founded on a public sphere and managed by the institution of the state. Rather, in Agamben's terms, the very notion of 'belonging' is highly problematic (as it is for Derrida). 'Whatever singularity' which appropriates belonging as 'its own being-in-language, and thus rejects all identity and every condition of belonging, is the principal enemy of the State' (Agamben 2005, 87). Most importantly, such singularities 'demonstrate their being in common' (Agamben 2005, 87). Secondly, 'democracy to come' might well be premised on a 'community to come' – a notion of community inherited through language as an act of discourse in Benveniste's sense (Benveniste 1966, 252) and one that emerges through a continual challenge to existing forms of community. Democracy, in short, would be the continual enactment of a community that never ceases to problematise belonging to the extent that belonging creates a zone of those who do not belong – who are other. It is no doubt also a matter of creating a community – in all justice – of those who do not belong. That community, I suggest, is humanity, in all its difference and otherness. Although Agamben is hostile to any notion of humanity which evokes the sacred because the latter, in its turn, evokes the Roman *homo sacer* as bare life, as the one who can be killed without this being homicide – a fact, as Agamben sees it, which modern versions of the sacred attempt to hide – a true 'community to come' would demonstrate the fundamental injustice of the political strategy of *homo sacer*, even if it found it

impossible to deny its reality. Indeed, biopolitics would ultimately be the reduction of the human to *homo sacer*, and thus to bare life.

Finally, though, the key point is that those who are rendered 'other', who are excluded from whatever form of political arrangements are in vogue (as are stateless people), can invoke their humanity in a fundamental challenge to every unjust exclusion. For this challenge can take place through language (infinitely translatable because impossible to translate), the symbolic, and even through certain types of warfare – those types which are more than pure terror and violence, and which are founded in the symbolic itself, containing as they do, an element of play. Pre-contact Polynesian warfare would have been of this sort. At all times it is a matter of language – the symbolic – signifying humanity *ad infinitum* – language and signification *as* thinking, as revolution: the revolution to come? Like democracy to come, which is no longer bound to an Enlightenment public sphere, like the community-to-come, which is the 'community of those who have no community' (Bataille), the revolution-to-come would also be irreducible to a set of empirical conditions, but would be an event that arrives (comes to us) before this event can become an object or an entity. Like 'democracy to come', many events will lay claim to being the incarnation of the revolution, or of a new humanity, but the democracy still to come will come – for those who believe (this is the promise); it is never equivalent to any given present: an event is never present. Consequently, the revolution does not exist; the human as such does not exist. Long live the revolution! Long live the human!

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Notes

1. What Derrida would also call 'hospitality without reserve' (Derrida 1993, 111)
2. The aporia is intensified by Derrida, who plays on the evocation of advent (*avènement*, or the coming to pass – accession – of something) and event (*événement*) in the French, *à venir* (to come). A true event is unpredictable, unknowable in advance. It is what happens to one, what arrives without warning. The advent of something is partially knowable in advance. Democracy, then, is partially here, as a spectre, here in an ideal sense. But its full arrival is yet to come, and to this extent is not yet.
3. It is perhaps useful to re-emphasise here that the values of 'democracy to come' are not necessarily those of Derrida himself. Indeed, it is possible to oppose Derrida's notion that restricting the free market might at the same time limit the right to engage in public debate (see Derrida and Stiegler 1996, 54) without thereby opposing 'democracy to come'. Opposition to existing views is part of the promise of democracy.
4. For a commentator such as Serena Parekh, the recognition of the importance of political community is Arendt's 'biggest contribution to the philosophy of human rights'. (Parekh 2008, 148).
5. It is possible, of course, that despite Arendt's intensions, the opposition between freedom and necessity, public and private becomes unstable, as it may also

do in the work of other thinkers, like Hegel, and that life becomes a form of life – that *zoē* and *bios* cannot be readily separated, however hard one tries (as Derrida shows in his reading of Aristotle in the context of Agamben's thesis (Derrida 2009, 431–43)). My response is to acknowledge that a deconstructive approach can indeed show these things, but that, politically, the opposition is dominant – that in this context deconstruction is on the back foot in fighting against the dominance of this opposition as bequeathed by a certain inheritance, an inheritance embodied in the citizen.

The same point pertains in relation to the opposition between inclusion and exclusion. While it can be shown that in fact these are never absolute, politically, exclusion is a force to be reckoned with that harbours – in the case of the stateless person – no element of inclusion other than an inclusion (in humanity) that can be used to combat exclusion.

6. It must not be thought that necessity pertains simply to the personal, emotional or religious sphere. Rather, necessity is of fundamental import in the Western philosophical tradition, where it implies the satisfaction of basic needs before freedom (= philosophizing) can take place. Thus in invoking Aristotle, Hegel says, in explaining why certain 'extreme' climatic conditions do not provide the 'basis for human freedom' that: '*Aristotle* has since observed that man turns to universal and more exalted things only after his basic needs have been satisfied' (Hegel 1993, 155, Hegels's emphasis). By 'basic needs' here, we should understand, 'necessity'. Freedom in this sense is freedom from necessity.

7. For her part, Julia Kristeva says in commenting on Arendt's notion of the political that: 'Political space, the only noble space there is, is it not to be conquered against biological life, against women and slaves?' (Kristeva 1999, 290).

8. Even though it could be argued that to focus on these categories in Arendt and in current politics generally is a banality because of the crude way in which Arendt seems to accept what has now become a 'received idea' concerning the private and the public spheres, I believe that it will, firstly, be news to many that Arendt actually proceeds in this way, and secondly, the very fact that such oppositions (freedom/necessity, public/private, human/animal) are ripe for deconstruction but have rarely been deconstructed is another sign of their continuing influence on the European democratic inheritance.

9. The key terms in Plato's lexicon with regard to the image are: *eikon* (image); *eidolon* (simulacrum as non-being); *einai* (Being); *eidos* (form); *alētheia* (truth); *logos* (the word, discourse).

10. As Rousseau famously says: 'Ainsi de même qu'une volonté particulière ne peut réprésenter la volonté générale, la volonté générale à son tour change de nature ayant un objet particulier, et ne peut comme générale prononcer ni sur un homme ni sur un fait' (1964:374). [Thus, as a particular will cannot represent the general will, the general will, in its turn changes nature in having a particular object and, as general, can pronounce neither on a man nor on a fact.]

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