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Thinking Politically with Luce Irigaray

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As editors of this special issue, we are especially grateful to Luce Irigaray for offering two contributions to this *Irigaray and Politics* special issue, as well as all the contributors who have written on Irigaray's political thought ranging from the notion of air democracy and an elemental politics to bringing Irigaray's work in conversation with Indigenous scholars to figuring a philosophy of the child. The wide-ranging themes included in this special issue are a testament to how important Irigaray's political thinking continues to be. There is no doubt, in our contemporary age, the multiple global political crises we face are rooted in violent possessive logics, both patriarchal and colonial (see Moreton-Robinson et al., 2007), and we urgently need to consider the work of political philosophers that challenge the structures and logics that enable such crises. As Lenart Škof clearly argues in his article for this issue, we must move away from dominant narratives in political western philosophy based on violent logics. We need new political philosophies that enable us to reimagine a politics attentive to the concrete community of citizens and the passage between singularity and community. We need a politics that nurtures an ethical co-existence based upon non-possessive, non-appropriative logics and respect for difference. These are all themes that are explored in Irigaray's work and by the commentators on this issue. It is clear to many of us that we urgently need a new frame for politics, and we believe Luce Irigaray's political philosophy offers a refiguring of democracy that gestures towards a hopeful future in which politics serves *all* persons in our ethical co-existence with one another and the natural world.

The contributions to this special issue from *Luce Irigaray* include the text of a newly translated speech in which Irigaray is addressing the Italian Communist Party which follows this introduction. This speech offers a clear insight into the founding concepts in Irigaray's political thinking. Irigaray reminds us that her politics and her calls for sexuate rights and a civil code for women are in response to her critique of Western philosophy and culture in which she argues that there is a

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lack of symbolic mediations in the feminine. Given this situation, women, according to Irigaray's analysis, do not have a 'civil representation of themselves'; however, aiming for formal equality is not the way forward. Irigaray notes: 'Equality to men does not correspond to this necessity'. In this speech, Irigaray explains 'that while women have learnt to say *I* a little more' they 'still do not know who *they* are'. This movement from singularity to community is an important theme in Irigaray's work and speaks to an important problem that remains in politics, how do we move from an *I* to a *they*? Irigaray's call for a civil code for women and for sexuate rights must be understood in this context and as a necessary alternative to the quest for formal equality with (White) men. This call complicates liberal feminist proposals for equal rights as well as offering an astute and necessary critique of democracy. Moreover, in Laura Roberts' paper in this special issue, we see how Irigaray's critique of equality can be productively read alongside decolonial critiques of democracy and calls for Indigenous sovereignty as outlined in the work of Indigenous scholar Irene Watson.

This special issue opens with the new work by *Luce Irigaray*, 'Dreaming of a Truly Democratic World'. In this new article, Irigaray offers some further proposals for a refiguring of democracy and we are pleased to read Irigaray's suggestions that include promoting politics on the scale of the city, and arguing that politics at the municipal level allows for a politics that arises 'from the needs and desires of the citizens, their coexistence, and their taking charge of them'. Irigaray's analysis here gestures towards the argument that Laura Roberts makes in chapter 6 of her book *Irigaray and Politics* (2019), 'A Politics of Proximity', where she brings Irigaray's writings on women's politics, a politics that will challenge the foundations of the social and cultural order, into conversation with some of the major themes concerning the international new municipalist movement, including the notion of feminising politics (Roberts, 2019: 134–5). The feminization of politics is a movement that advocates for a new way of doing and conceiving politics that aims to shatter 'masculine patterns that reward behaviours such as competition, urgency, hierarchy, and homogeneity' (Shea Baird and Roth, 2017). A feminized politics that shatters masculine patterns sounds similar to Irigaray's call for women's politics and a civil code for women that challenges the foundations of the social order, both articulate new ways of doing politics which recognise the importance of sexuate difference and ethical co-existence. Irigaray's new text highlights the consequences of the neutralisation and abstraction of individuals and reminds readers of the importance of understanding humanity is part of our natural belonging within the complex web of life. This is crucial as we modify our current language, understand desire as intimately connected with politics and refigure our understandings of the human as part of nature (and climate catastrophe) rather than the atomised isolated individual of liberalism/capitalism. In so doing, Irigaray argues that there is the potential of a happy ending to this dream of a truly democratic world.

In his contribution, Lenart Škof engages Irigaray's work on air/breath and fire and argues for a new political philosophy based on elemental politics which gestures towards a *quiet democracy*. This work follows his earlier engagements with Irigaray's elemental thought (Škof & Holmes, 2013 and Škof, 2015). Now, the role of the breath in this new political paradigm is made clear, Škof writes that when

considering the 'role of the breath in an ethical regrounding of the idea of democracy', we realise 'it's ability to reveal our common vulnerability which quietly links the community with a bond that anyone can understand'. An elemental politics offers the possibility of nourishing the reserve of the breath in each one of us, which then enables 'the arising of mild gestures of mindfulness, meditation, prayer, listening and silence—key elements of an Irigarayan-based quiet democracy'. Thinking sexuate difference with notions of breath and fire, Škof then explores the necessity of a flaming desire for a new culture of democracy through a return to ancient Indian religious and philosophical thinking. Škof's contribution ultimately gestures towards a peaceful future, *a quiet democracy*, which abandons the violence of old patriarchal political paradigms based on deathly competition, and argues for a culture of democracy based in flaming love.

Alex Kopka's article 'Air Democracy' follows nicely on from this theme. He argues that we must not forget the materiality of air, its connection with climate change and Irigaray's notion that 'We breathe poorly'. Asking us to consider air as a common good Kopka uses Irigaray's writing to remind us that the sharing of air is linked to the role of woman as 'original gift giver' of life and breath. Kopka conceives of this as a 'relational autonomy', a co-belonging and need for the other to 'elevate us to a transcendental level'. And, for Kopka, it is crucial to understand this argument for breath and relational autonomy in a political sense because thinking about breathing and air matters reminds us that we co-exist together. We cannot co-exist without 'respect for air as the matter that renders this "gathering-together" possible'. Kopka presents a timely argument that 'there is an essential political importance and urgency in Irigaray's philosophy of air and breathing that should inspire our reflection on the current state of democracy and its future'.

As mentioned above, *Laura Roberts'* contribution to this special issue explores Irigaray's critique of democracy and equality, and her call for sexuate rights, and places this in conversation with ideas of Indigenous sovereignty, sexual difference and Native Title in the Australian context. This article takes seriously Irene Watson's work on Indigenous women's law and unpacks the importance of acknowledging sexual difference as a response to the ongoing colonial practices of 'white male knowing' that continue to contribute to the erasure of Indigenous women's law and culture. Watson's work illustrates the importance of an Irigarayan critique of equality in these contexts and outlines the failures of a liberal feminist viewpoint, which when calling for equality, Watson asks, like Irigaray, who are we claiming to be equal to? Ultimately, Roberts reads these thinkers together illustrating the force and urgency of both projects that highlight the problematic notions of equality at the heart of liberal democracy and liberal feminism.

Ruthanne Crapo Kim's contribution to this special edition brings together Luce Irigaray's work with Gloria Anzaldua's to argue that both thinkers offer novel contributions that challenge binary thinking. Kim's article argues that, in reading these thinkers together, via what she terms a 'disidentificatory method' inspired by Muñoz (1999), we can move 'towards a non-romanticised political agency that engages an in-between space and bridging opportunity between false binary choices'. In her discussion of melancholia, Kim brings together Irigaray's work on the repressed feminine in the Western Symbolic order with Muñoz's account of melancholia

demonstrating how both thinkers reject Freud's melancholic conclusions. This discussion of melancholia enables a productive reading and linking with Anzaldúa's work on the displaced ego and the wounder knower. Kim then offers a detailed discussion of Anzaldúa's reconfiguring of subjectivity through the possibilities of the third liminal space of Conocimiento and in her discussion returns to the links she sees with Irigaray and Muñoz's articulations of melancholia. Ultimately, in bringing these thinkers together, through notions of disindentification and melancholia, Kim suggests that Anzaldúa's notion of nepantla 'enlivens Irigaray's third term'.

Michelle Boulous Walkers' article brings together Mary Graham's work on the law of obligation with the work of Luce Irigaray, in particular her argument for symbolic re-distribution of value through the notion of horizontal transcendence. Boulous Walker performs the conversation between Graham and Irigaray ethically through a notion of edifying conversations. In bringing Irigaray's work into conversation with Graham's, Boulous Walker recognises that both thinkers conceive of the self *as* nature and writes that we 'can think of our obligations to acknowledge ourselves *as* nature as the transcendent horizon that grounds our very being'. Ultimately, in her important contribution, Boulous Walker considers, and asks her readers to consider, what it means to read Irigaray's work in place, locally, 'in a *here* and *now* that differs from the European context of her writing'.

Sigridur Thorgeirsdottir's contribution to this issue engages with a philosophy of the child suggesting that, in Irigaray's work *To Be Born* (2017), we are presented with the child as a 'new metaphor of the human being which represents natural belonging'. This contribution goes on to explore this philosophy of the child in relation to embodied philosophical thinking and felt sense. Thorgeirsdottir thinks through these notions of childlike forms of knowing and wonder arguing that these open 'several new horizons at the same time within epistemology and phenomenology' and gestures towards the vast and important political implications of embodied thinking and embodied listening that the philosophy of the child offers us through Irigaray's work.

This special issue closes with Jennifer Carter's article which meditates on the idea of a peaceful political relations between the two. Carter's contribution takes the reader on a journey beginning with an overview of how various thinkers in the Western tradition conceive of conflictual political relations and illustrates Irigaray's interventions with these various figures. This paper carefully articulates how Irigaray's peaceful politics is grounded in relations with the other, refounding the family and the collective, and how these changes involve the creation of civil protections and rights 'and establishing the conditions nurturing to desire'.

In this collection of papers, we can trace a common aspiration towards a new postliberal and new ethical order in politics. The idea of democracy is an idea of a world, existing beyond arbitrary rules of domination and modes of machination. It was without any doubt invented to protect the lives of the vulnerable and to offer the space for the wounds to heal. But on the other hand, democracy was never free of various monologues of patriarchy, the related logic of the one in political, cultural and religious colonialisms, and actually all sorts of violence, accompanying them. The collection of this special issue is, we believe, a strong testimony for an alternative and counter movement to these misuses of the idea of democracy. The essays

are an affirmation of a possibility of self-affection for every citizen, of sexuate rights for women and rights for children, as well as of a law of obligation towards nature. From these essays, we can learn about new community practices, new ways of knowledge in politics and about the reordering of our societies towards non-hierarchical and relational terms of respect, care and mutual trust in political philosophy. We can also learn how vital it is to reincorporate land and nature into the logic of our socio-political and ethical lives and thus to arrive at the possibility of a new post-Anthropocene era.

We can see that the world we are living in, is ruled by too many political leaders acting like Creon—i.e. not acknowledging the rights of women and children, suppressing sexual difference, subverting the ethical order of community and thus feeding into existing violent modes of the political. Some of them even begin new wars—as nowadays in Ukraine. In this unfortunate constellation, as an idea of community, democracy is caught in the fringes of extremely strong anti-democratic tendencies and needs to become revived as a practice in elemental affectivity, cohabitation and achieving peace. Papers in this collection are a gesture, we hope, towards a new—affectionate, elemental, caring and mindful democracy-to-come.

Finally, we would like to thank *Sophia* editors for giving us the opportunity for this special issue. We wish to thank the editorial team and especially Jennyca Parcon and Sherah Bloor for all their work. Special thanks go to Luce Irigaray for her initiative to address the political part of her work as well as for the suggestions for some of our special issue contributors. We also wish to thank all our contributors for preparing new and original contributions for our 'Irigaray and Politics' issue as well as to our anonymous reviewers for their most valuable comments and suggestions. It is a privilege for us to be a part of this project on the future of political philosophy.

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