

Defending Democracy to Come

Democracies around the world are under pressure today. Democracies such as those defined by Jacques Derrida as democracy to come are particularly under attack. The four contributions take Derrida's understanding of democracy (introduced in particular in "Specters of Marx"; "The Politics of Friendship"; "Rogues: Two Essays on Reason") as the starting point for their reflections and, based on this, ask what "defense" can mean. The focus is hereby on the question of the role, function, and purpose of violence. Four perspectives explore 1) the question of how democracy to come can be defended democratically and what role violence plays in resistance to totalitarianism, 2) how violence is framed, justified, or rendered intelligible within political orders, 3) how politics and ethics can be kept in relation, and 4) what role the theater plays in this.

- **Christine Abbt:** Defending Democracies Democratically. On the Topicality of the Concept of Violence in the Works of Camus and Derrida
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Abstracts

Christine Abbt (University of St. Gallen)

Defending Democracies Democratically. On the Topicality of the Concept of Violence in the Works of Camus and Derrida

What does "defending democracies" mean today? In three steps, I develop, with Camus and Derrida, an anti-totalitarian stance between warmongering and pacifism, which combines politics and ethics and defines violence in its connection to law and justice. My contribution is structured around the following three questions: Which democracies? What defense? What violence to defend democracies to come? In my input, I first define democracies with Derrida as "democracies to come"; I then explain what defense means in this context and what specific problems democratic resistance faces; thirdly, I show with reference to Camus and Derrida what it can mean to understand violence as both necessary and illegitimate. On this basis, I conclude by explaining the extent to which the concept of violence is embedded differently in Camus and Derrida, but can nevertheless be systematically linked, and I argue that Camus and Derrida provide relevant and important answers for us today to the question of how to combat totalitarianism democratically.

Leire Urricelqui (University of St. Gallen)

Who Can Be Killed in the Name of Humanity? Derrida, Schmitt, and the Autochthonous Logic of Hyperpoliticized Violence

This paper argues that contemporary forms of eradictory state violence should not be understood as a depoliticization of sovereignty, but as its intensification. Rather than marking the collapse of the political, such violence signals a condition of *hyperpoliticization*: a saturation of the political by anthropological and moral determinations, in which destruction appears as protection and extermination as duty. I contend that this saturation is made possible by *autochthony*, the fiction through which a political community presents itself as belonging properly to a place, and grounds its legitimacy in origin, descent, and soil.

Drawing on Jacques Derrida's critique of political discourses of birth, fraternity, and nation, I reconstruct autochthony as an ontological grammar of the *chez-soi*. Autochthony names the schema through which the "proper" secures the authority of the *logos* and transforms exclusion into the defense of what is one's own. It is this grammar that allows political belonging to appear self-evident, and violence to be articulated as preservation.

From within this Derridean problematic, the paper rereads Carl Schmitt's theory of political enmity. Schmitt famously warns against wars waged "in the name of humanity", arguing that the figure of the absolute enemy emerges when powers appropriate universal concepts and moralize conflict. Yet this critique sits uneasily within his own account of the political. The friend-enemy distinction, grounded in the existential possibility of killing, already presupposes a normative anthropology of belonging: an implicit homogeneity of the political community and a territorialized understanding of a shared way of life.

I argue that this tension is not a contingent inconsistency in Schmitt's thought, but a structural aporia. I show that Schmitt's attempt to purify the political of moralization depends on the very autochthonous logic that renders moral absolutization possible. The "enemy of humanity" does not arrive from outside the political; it emerges as the immanent fulfillment of an autochthonous logic in which the other is figured as contamination, and its destruction becomes a condition of communal self-preservation. Hyperpoliticized violence thus marks the foreclosure of what Derrida calls *democracy to come*, the exposure of the political to indeterminacy, contestation, and irreducible heterogeneity.

Oliver Marchart (University of Vienna)

The Democratic Horizon: Ethics and Politics of a Coming Democracy

Derrida's idea of a democracy to come has been influential for many years in radical democratic theory. One of its virtues is that it allows to counter the liberal democratic claim that democracy has already been realized. Instead, it allows to understand democracy as a horizon rather than a particular regime. The talk will first discuss the „horizontal“ nature of democracy and associate the motive of the „to come“ with what can be called an ethics of democracy. By revisiting Ernesto Laclau's critique of Derrida's *Spectres of Marx*, a plea will be made to supplement democratic ethics with a democratic politics in the realist tradition of political thought that leads from Machiavelli via Gramsci to the so-called Essex School of political thought. The talk will, thus, focus on the constitutive antinomy between an ethics of the unconditional and a politics of the always conditioned.

Anna Wieder (University of Vienna)

Staging Democracy to Come: Derrida, Theatre, and the Politics of Representation

This paper reconsiders Jacques Derrida's notion of democracy to come through the lens of his reflections on theatrical representation. Building on Derrida's diagnosis of a shared mal de représentation in both theatre and politics, the paper situates theatre as a critical model for understanding the limitations and possibilities of democratic representation. With and against Lyotard, Derrida suggests that theatre should not simply portray political content but should restructure its own representational protocols so that the unrepresented—singular voices, marginalized perspectives, and undecidable events—may emerge. This conception resists both the didactic political theatre of Brechtian tradition and the totalizing reforms of Artaud; instead it foregrounds theatre's constitutive indeterminacy as a model for democratic praxis that remains receptive to the unforeseeable. In this framework, defending democracy does not primarily mean safeguarding institutional mechanisms, but rather sustaining openness to interruption and cultivate what Derrida calls an art of disruption that is at once political and theatrical, giving the floor, at the most inconvenient of moments, to those who, within the prevailing order of representation, have no recognized right to speak.

CV

Anna Wieder is postdoctoral assistant at the Department of Political Science (research area Political Theory) at the University of Vienna. She studied Philosophy and Journalism in Vienna, Graz and Paris and later worked as a university assistant at the Department of Philosophy at the University of Vienna. In her dissertation *Demokratischer Widerstand. Figuren und Praktiken politischer Kontestation* (2024) she investigated the relevance of contestatory political practices for democracy. Her current research interests are in radical democratic theory, political protest and resistance, and the intersection of political thought and aesthetics. She is co-editor of the peer-review journal *Genealogy+Critique*.

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Leire Urricelqui is a postdoctoral researcher and lecturer at the Chair of Philosophy, at the School of Humanities and Social Sciences at the University of St. Gallen. Her PhD dissertation was titled *The Antitype: On Producing the (In)Human and Legitimizing Violence* and was written between the University of Lucerne, CNRS Paris, and the University of Amsterdam. Before her current position, she worked as a university assistant to the chair of social and political philosophy at the University of Graz. Her research focuses on questions of political violence, dehumanization, sovereignty, anti-colonialism, and radical democratic theory. She co-edited the book: *Los discursos sobre el Otro: Cambios y continuidades en las retóricas de la dominación*, and recently published: “Can the Terrorist Be Grieved?”, in *Critical Times* (2025) 8(1).

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