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# EDITORIAL

# HABITABILITY IN THE NEW CLIMATIC REGIME\*

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The articles in this issue reflect the need to renew politics around the question of the habitability of the planet. Within a perspective in which the generality and particularity of interests are redefined in a way that is radically different from the past. Indeed, the need to consider the implications of every decision, for example on the temperature of the atmosphere, changes the idea and practice of what is “general interest” and “special interest”. The general interest can no longer be that of Rousseau, which is an interest that becomes general by disregarding particular constraints and entering into a perspective that is general insofar as it is free and abstract from any particularity. At most, nature could enter modern politics as “concern for the environment” and its specific problems - protection, emergencies - but it made no sense to address the conditions of existence of life forms - the highest degree of generality - as a political matter.

Although they are of such a magnitude as to go beyond the scope of politics, the conditions of existence of life forms were considered to be external to society and to the

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life forms themselves, indifferent to the decisions and conflicts of people in society. But today we see that this is not the case and that, as Michel Serres was one of the first to point out, nature reacts and responds to anthropic action. This fact has, like a domino effect, numerous and fundamental consequences on the composition of the modern political cosmology, which ordered dichotomously different realities and ontologies such as nature/society and human/non-human.

Having entered, *malgré nous*, the era of the inadequacy of the modern political cosmos, we could find in the rethinking of the concept of habitability a useful tool for guiding thought and action. Planetary habitability, as conceived by the moderns, had as its specific characteristic the becoming favourable to life of an environment other than life itself, as an external framework for life, as a preliminary and necessary balance of elements for the appearance and development of life. A balance that had to be maintained and, today, restored in order for life to continue. Habitability in the New Climatic Regime has profoundly different characteristics, beginning with the recent understanding that it is the activity of life forms themselves that creates their own environment. If living beings themselves make the world habitable, then the problem of the conditions of existence of life forms becomes the central political issue, regardless of the distinction between humans and non-humans, because the survival of the former cannot be at the expense of the latter.

## Meaningful dialogues

Over the last decade, Bruno Latour has worked intensively to outline conceptual lines and perspectives that can be useful in coping with the changes in political thought and action necessitated by the decline of modern cosmology. There are many authors with whom he has engaged in dialogue and from whom he has selectively collected ideas and stimuli for his own theoretical work. Among these, the works of Michel Serres, Isabelle Stengers, Donna Haraway and Peter Sloterdijk play an important role in the dialogue with Latourian ideas.

Translation is a key concept in Serres's thought. It is primarily an operational concept that Latour takes up and reinvents in Actor-Network Theory. But there are also several specific problems and themes that come from Serres and with which Latour has been confronted, especially in the last decade, which has been characterised by the persistent presence of ecological themes. First of all, the search for the conditions of possibility of a new contract, natural and therefore more than social, ecological,

we would say. This theme, so central for Serres and omnipresent in Latour has been developed in a perceptive context which guides their thinking: living in the awareness of an impending shipwreck and at the same time trying to rethink a contract, between us and the world, capable of mixing constraints and freedom in a new sense.

A passion for the materialist, non-dialectical, philosophical tradition unites Stengers and Latour. Whitehead, W. James, Bergson, Serres, Deleuze, to name but a few, are authors with whom both have engaged. Stengers and Latour have been in dialogue for decades, and in a game of references and differences, explored in this volume by Federica Giardini, they compose a canvas in which one is essential to the other. The passion for science, as an object of empirical and conceptual exploration, and cosmopolitics, as a new political ecology, seem to us to be two crucial vectors around which their intellectual complicity has condensed.

If Latour taught us that hybrid worlds have proliferated in modernity, Haraway reads in the implosion of modern binaries (human/machine, nature/culture, semiotic/material) a decisive feature of our contemporary era. Her research on technoscience, and thus along the lines of mutual involvement and co-articulation of science, technology and society, has been an essential reference for Science and Technology Studies, for philosophical research on new materialisms, for Environmental Humanities, and more generally for political thought and the social sciences. Latour was convinced that Actor Network Theory was a key for exploring ecologically critical zones, and at the same time we could add that Haraway's figuration of the cyborg is an integral part of the Chthulucene narrative. Both, albeit through partially divergent research paths, invite us to regenerate ecological politics from the question of the habitability of the planet, resisting any return to Nature.

Latour has drawn on Sloterdijk's work primarily in relation to his critique of the globe and his rethinking of the concept of space. Sphere and network, whose incompatibility Sloterdijk emphasises, are taken up by Latour as two different ways of pursuing the same goal: the overcoming of modern dichotomies of nature/culture, human/non-human. While Sloterdijk criticises Latour for absorbing into the socio-technical every mode of human relations with non-humans, emphasising, with Heidegger, that practices bring into presence something that always exceeds them and remains inappropriate, Latour emphasises the condition of being located as a more significant feature of being thrown into the world to capture the metamorphic nature of the living and their activity of generating their environment.

## Open issues

The exit from ordered and indifferent Nature is an entry into a multiple and heterarchic reality characterised by conflicts, both potential and actual. Conflict is central to the New Climatic Regime and will become even more so as the political dimension of habitability becomes more relevant. What will be the cleavages around which the political space will be defined? Who and what will divide it? These questions will occupy the work of political theory and practice, starting from a rethinking of the concepts of space, matter and materialism in forms different from their modern ontologies.

In a horizon of conflict, there is a need for a work that offers meanings and categories that can define what is happening and take a stand. The immense work of this kind carried out by socialisms and liberalisms in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries is now behind us. Socialisms and liberalisms, in their diversity, had a common basis in the recognition of the centrality of production (then called “modernisation”). Both ignored the fact that production does not take place in an abstract space but is embedded in the conditions of existence of the planet and is limited in its expansion by the limits of the planet. The pursuit of infinite growth is now criticised as irrational behaviour. The same irrationality that Norbert Elias showed was attributed to the aristocracy by the emerging bourgeoisie, because the aristocracy was locked into a narrow and circumscribed horizon of its own reproduction, while the bourgeoisie, with the discovery of the productive forces, claimed for itself a rational superiority in the ability to change and transcend limits.

In his latest book, co-authored with Schultz, Latour evokes a new ecological class as an actor capable of turning its gaze from production alone to its conditions of existence, showing the retreat of the bourgeoisie and outlining the ideas, concepts, and affections of a mobilisation oriented both to theoretical work on the political transformation of more than human worlds, and to the concrete action of institutional change. The question of institutions, which is central in contemporary theoretical-political debate, could be crossed from the need of a politics of ecological reparation. Latour’s figuration of the Terrestrial offers us many ideas for thinking about the conditions of possibility of a third political space, irreducible to both regressive nationalism and univocal globalism.

The New Climatic Regime presents us with a double challenge: on the one hand, to think about new or revised forms of organising material life (work and econo-

mies) that are aware of and respectful of the limits of the planet; on the other hand, to reflect on the institutional and political contexts that make them possible. Which new economic and political institutions are needed for a Terrestrial politics? This is a key question for the fate of democracy in the era of the New Climatic Regime.