

EXAMINING THE POSSIBILITY OF A UNIVERSALISTIC FORM OF INCLUSION BEYOND EUROPEAN CULTURAL HEGEMONISM

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ABSTRACT The critique of universalism as a form of domination and subjugation of the variety of possible subject positions (identity configurations) that has been central to the contemporary cultural theory represents a form of methodological and ideological self-normalization. I will argue that the cancelling of the possibility of rethinking universalism in some radically novel way produces the perpetual instance of auto-cancelling of the possibility for radical innovativeness of the cultural-political theory and activism today. I am speaking in particular of those forms of theory and activism which deal more closely with the issues of integration of the cultural/ethnic, gendered, sexual and migrant minorities in the dominant society forms in Europe. We shall tackle the question of European cultural hegemony, its production of (Balkan) Otherness and the possibility of political universalism within Europe which would be beyond the logic of Euro-centrism or any other form of centrism.

Key words: universalism, cultural particularism, Euro-centrism, Balkans, non-standard philosophy, othering

1. METHODOLOGY AND IDEOLOGY INTER-MIRRORING

The hybridization of epistemology and ideology inaugurated by the so-called poststructuralist (or postmodernist) theory is the source of the ruling conceptual entropy in this strand of thought as far as the issues of

minority inclusion are concerned (in the ethnic, migrant/non-migrant, racial and gendered sense). The critique of universalism as a form of domination and subjugation of the variety of possible subject positions (identity configurations) that has been central to the contemporary cultural theory represents a form of methodological and ideological self-normalization. I will argue that the cancelling of the possibility of rethinking universalism in some radically novel way produces the perpetual instance of auto-cancelling of the possibility for radical innovativeness of the cultural-political theory and activism today. I am speaking in particular of those forms of theory and activism which deal more closely with the issues of integration of the cultural/ethnic, gendered, sexual and migrant minorities in the dominant society forms (in the so-called “Leitkultur”) including the grand question of multiculturalism (as a concept and as a European political project). Let us begin this discussion by proposing the contention that the postmodernist optimism of celebrating difference has been at the heart of the postmodern multiculturalist optimism. The latter, however, has produced a grave form of self-restriction – that of the possibility of analysis of the hierarchy established between the self-identical “I” affirming of the difference and “the Different” who is affirmed.

The poststructuralist epistemological framework has been based on the presupposition that the “production of the Other” is oppressive in itself, creating a hierarchy between the Other and the Subject (or the Self) that is always already identical to itself. Yet again, by way of an inversion – or perversion – of the postmodernist vocabulary the old reason of the hegemonic Self re-emerges together with the logic of hierarchy which is immanent to it. The Normative Subject which is in a ceaseless state of auto-correcting its tendency toward hegemony – that is to say, the Subject of hegemonic guilt – by way of adopting consciousness about the need of affirming otherness is but a different name for the old universalism usurped by a colonial subject, determined by race, class and gender. I will claim that the politics of affirming difference is inherently hierarchical and that there is intrinsic impossibility for any attempt to rethink the binary in a way that will be symmetrical, rendering the two components equal.

The grave epistemological deficiency of the notion of the “Other” consisting in its relational constitution – unlike the Self which is always already identical to itself and the recourse to the Other serves only to consolidate itself – shall inevitably represent an ideological – perhaps also ontological - origin of its unavoidable subjugation.

Therefore, I will argue that we are in need of a new form of universalism which will be emancipating, one that can be claimed also by the “Others” or by the subjugated. This should be a new, radically re-conceptualized universalism or rather one that has been invented anew. Such universalism can be but purely categorical or formal. Thus it is not – or rather it should not be – culturally reified. It should be neither Euro-Centric nor European.

2. THE PRESUPPOSITIONS OF THE UNIVERSALISM CLAIMED BY THE OPPRESSED

Speaking from a Balkan perspective (or from a “Western Balkan” perspective),¹ the normative Subject – the one who is never the Other, but rather the Subject which is always already identical to itself – is, of course, the European – the one in relation to which the Balkan Subject assumes its position of the “Other.” The Balkan “otherness” is affirmed by the liberal and the politically correct normative Gaze of the West. However, it is unimaginable that the Balkan Subject favorably affirms the Western – or the cultural paradigm it represents – as different and other (to itself). The hierarchical asymmetry is evident and it is due to the fact that the one who affirms represents the Norm which unavoidably aspires to a universal status (the affirmed one is, therefore, the particular one).

The phantasmatic and discursive impossibility of being the Subject that can reciprocally affirm the Other to itself is fundamentally – in a way, ontologically

1. It is interesting to note that in the term “Western Balkan” there is no geographical meaning entailed; many of the “Western Balkan” countries are in fact Eastern – evidently the notion of “Western” is understood in cultural and political sense (those who are potentially part of the “Western civilization”).

– subjugating since it implies a subject position (that of the Other) which is never a subject position in the proper sense of the word. It is not grounded in the necessary minimum of sovereignty that is the possibility itself of any subjectivity. The Balkan Subject is founded as the proxy subjectivity of the Western (European) normative Self. Moreover, the Subject that has agreed to its grounding otherness is constrained to always assume the perspective of the competent Subject that affirms it. One inevitably assumes the perspective for which one is declared to be *a priori* incompetent. This renders the position of otherness awkward, ill at ease and the image of it – grotesque. Clearly, one is incompetent vis-à-vis any perspective which is not one's own. What is expected of the Balkan Subject is to assume the perspective (presuppose and behave as if it belonged to it) of the competent Self and its gaze directed precisely toward itself, toward the Other. This circular gaze, refracted through the instance of the supposed and imagined proper Subjectivity (one that the “Other” would declare as universal or paradigmatic and attempt to mime), represents a self-mirroring which is inherently debilitating because of its tendency to auto-produce itself as the Other rather than a Subject. What should have been a process of the Subject's self-constitution (which is by definition an alienating process) ends as a double alienation, a duplication of the Subjectivity into the impossible status of a Self and the Other.

This circular trajectory is one of the vicious circle – while inhabiting the subject position of the Other, one also attempts to occupy the position of that Sameness which had constituted you as the Other, and “see” oneself (as the Other) from a subject position which is not one's own. This constitutive division within the Subject-named-the-Other does not belong to the order of the “split Subject” as a formal or as a metaphysical category. It is not the one produced by the binaries of metaphysical categories such as the Symbolic/the Real or the Mind/the Body. Rather, it is the result of the symbolic subjugation of one collective self by another. It is a subjugation belonging to the register of the Social. It is a political subjection – subjectivation – which operates on the level of an identitary constitution. This situation represents a form of violence, a production of trauma, since the political thrust works as an ontological destabilization, quite similar to the phenomenological malaise generated by the sense of alienation vis-à-vis one's own body, as described by Franz Fanon

(Fanon 1967), which is double since it entails the assumed annihilating gaze of the hegemonic Self. A fissure of foundational anxiety is introduced by the fact that the “Gaze of the Other” (even in relation to oneself) is conditioned by the impossible competence with regard to the “Gaze of the Same.” Uncertainty is the foundation of this ontology of otherness, uncertainty created by the submission (hence, dependency) in relation to the constitutive Gaze to which the Other had surrendered its sovereignty and control over itself. The normative Gaze of the Same had taken away from the Other the authority over the gesture of self-identification, a gesture upon which every Subject is founded. Due to the intrinsic hierarchy of the pair the Same/the Other, it is impossible to envision a dialectical reversal that will enable the emancipation of the subjugated term.²

At this point, we can infer that the Subject is never the “Other.” By its definition it is the *Identical-to-itself-the-Same*. This does not mean there is no formative conditioning of the Same by the Other. It only means that the Subject is not relationally defined. Or, rephrasing it in terms of the non-philosophy (of François Laruelle), it means that it is determined immanently rather than relationally. We can also choose a poststructuralist wording to explain that we admit that the position of the Other is formative, but also that every subject represents a solitary identity in its last instance. The process of subjection (or of the subject generation) represents a situation of radical solitude not only according to Lacan, but also to Foucault and to their sublimation in Judith Butler.

The Subject is necessarily universalistic by virtue of its radically solipsistic status, i.e., by virtue of its solitude in the last instance. Namely, it is radically solitary in producing the gesture of “establishing the World.” And by saying this we are not disputing the Foucauldian vision of the Subject’s constitutive affectedness by the “World,” of its being inevitably constituted by the dominant (normative) discourse and power. Our claim is that this givenness of the constitutive normativity is necessarily subjectivised, assumed and *realized*, rendered tangible and actual through the Subject, according to the Foucauldian vision, and that this is a radically solitary process.

2. The Same is a concept I borrow from Donna Haraway. Cf. Haraway 1995, xi-xx.

Understanding the Subject as inevitably universalistic is a theoretical position defended by Alain Badiou and François Laruelle. The inevitability of the universalistic character of any subjectivity is the product of the radically solitary character of the gesture of the Subject's auto-constitution – an auto-constitution which is endlessly repeated and does not have a history, except for the one that is cyclical; thus, it has a story, a cosmogony and a theogony, rather than a history. I would argue that the radical solitude of the Subject's auto-founding gesture and the pretension toward universalism it entails is also implied by the so-called poststructuralist theories of subjectivity. The constitution of the “worldview” – or, in Laruellian terms, of the World – is a process simultaneous to that of the constitution of the Subject in its purely formal sense. Or rather, temporally, the Subject is never purely formal and it is made of the discursive material at hand. By employing the poststructuralist conceptual apparatus indebted to the Foucauldian legacy, one also arrives to the conclusion about the radical solitude of the subject-position vis-à-vis the discursive universe and the fact that, in spite of its being conditioned by the “World,” it also must take an active role in the process of subjectivization of the Discursive. The process of subjectivization, in spite of its constitutive sociality, is nonetheless a solitary one since the Other is always already mediated (through Language). The radical solitude of subjectivization itself necessarily implies a universalistic stance – the Subject always “makes its best guess.” At the center of that lifeless universe the Language is, the Subject generates truths about the “World” and itself. The pretension to truth is never particularistic since it is an aspiration toward the Truth, the “right way” (of acting and thinking) and it is always in the singular. One rationally allows that he or she might be wrong, but one puts his or her stakes in the one truth he/she is “passionately attached” to. And one is alone in this and it is universal because it is the only possible truth in the only possible universe – that of the Subject or subjectivized Discourse/Power (or in Laruellian terminology – the “World”).

Understanding the Subject as universalistic in the way thus presented makes possible the creation of a form of universalism which is not totalizing, totalitarian and subjugating. Within such a vision, the constitutive universalism of the Subject originates from its fundamental solitude. This position draws on Alain Badiou's thesis about the Subject's essential singularity, which refers

simultaneously to its fundamental particularity as well as universality, in the sense of performing a universalistic gesture of auto-constitution (Hallward 2003, 250). It also draws on Laruelle's thesis about the unavoidable unilaterality of thought and subjectivity – the thinking Subject unilaterally attempts to either reflect (Philosophy) or correlate to (Non-Philosophy) the Real whereas the Real remains “indifferent” (exhaustively elaborated in *Philosophie et non-philosophie*, published in 1989).

The universalizing gesture of the Subject's auto-constitution is an unstoppable tendency – a *conatus* – to establish control over (i.e., knowledge of) reality. The result of this striving is always heterogeneous, born of the “World” (in the Laruellian sense)³ and of the solitary position of the gesture of the universalizing (and always already singular) Subject – the non-hegemonic universalistic Subject is aware of this double nature of the process of “truth generation.” The non-hegemonic universalistic Subject succumbs to the dictate of the Real rather than the Transcendental, to the Event rather than to a Doctrine (Philosophy) – the non-hegemonic Subject pursues a form of universalism and enables political unity that transcends the boundaries of different “world-views” (and I believe that the example of this was the 18 days revolution in Egypt).

The universalistic proclivity of the Subject originates not only from the radical solitude it dwells in, but also from the *conatus* to control the reality (in order not to be swallowed by the Real) which is a category of intensity. The latter, by its Spinozian definition, is a category of infinity. The intensity, that infinite striving is situated in the body which is, by definition, a category of extension and finitude; and this is something that creates a paradox producing a signifying surplus. This “noise,” this semiotic surplus is the referent of the crack, of that gaping lack in signification in both the universalistic and the particularistic enunciation. This noise, this surplus or redundancy is the symptom of the Real that is the impossibility to accomplish the fullness of significance of each statement (both universalistic and particularistic).

3. The Laruellian notion of the “World” corresponds with – or is analogous to – the Foucauldian “Discourse” and the Lacanian “Symbolic.”

The vision of the Subject's universality we have just presented enables us to imagine a universalistic speech in accordance with the political insistence to reject the language of hierarchy and subjection. According to this vision, each particular Subject is constitutively endowed with the pretension toward universality and each particular subject is possible (in its very particularity) by virtue of such a pretension.

Therefore, the right to be a subject – always already identical to itself rather than a mere agent of otherness – represents the right to a universalistic enunciation. The new claims of universality beyond hegemony should be those which aim to win anew the right to a universalistic discourse, to a subjectivity that affirms the universalistic gesture which has introduced it.

The non-Eurocentric and non-selfbalkanizing politics coming from the margins of Europe –the Balkans – should also be projects of claiming one's right to a universalistic enunciation, or rather – one's right to a discourse of universalistic claims (for and by the subjugated or the excluded).

Respecting diversity and difference would mean respecting the right of the others to produce universalistic enunciations, whereas the discursive and explanatory paradigm which the universalistic stance creates should be subject to anybody's pretension to inhabit it while affirming its heterogeneous nature of historicity and formal universalism. A multitude of universalistic enunciations will establish continuous interplay of acts and agents of the pretension to universality. Respecting each attempt, each striving to address the "World" coming from any corner of the world is the kind of respect for diversity and difference I am advocating here; it is such kind of politics from and of the Balkans I would like to argue for.

3. THE POSTSTRUCTURALIST ORTHODOXY VIS-À-VIS THE HERETIC FIDELITY TO THE THEORETICAL LEGACY OF POSTMODERN FEMINISM

In his book *Le Christ Futur: Une leçon d'hérésie* (2002), François Laruelle has developed his concept of the "heretic subject" as one which is always already

grounded in revolt (or in “rebellion”) and the constant struggle against the self-contained and self-content philosophy. According to the non-philosophical terminology of Laruelle, philosophy is synonymous with the “World.” Both notions refer to a discursivity which is ideologically and epistemologically foreclosed, circumscribed in a way that represents an entrapment into its own vicious circle of questions and responses that are ceaselessly mutually generated. There is no room for the noise produced by the redundant Real (which we all are in the last instance) within this circumscription the Philosophy/the World represents.

According to Laruelle, the pre-subjective instance, the one outside the World while amidst it, is always already heretic. The surplus of meaning (the experience or the Lived) that eludes any signification is precisely the Real of the “Human-without-protection, without consistency in the weakness and in strength.” The latter represents the instance of the immanent rebellion “against and for the World” (Laruelle 2002, 22).⁴

The surplus which always evades the “meaning,” the surplus for which it is impossible to absorb any sense, the surplus which is radically ignorant and rejects any philosophical definition which would form and place it in the “World” – it is this surplus, or rather remainder of the Real (in the “transcendental”) which is the source of the radical rebellion. It is the potentiality for resistance which will not stem from the foreclosed discourse, but from a heterogeneous source. The origin of this critical stance is that of heresy.

The critique of the current orthodoxy of the culturally inclusive and euro-integrative politics should consist of resisting its self-content self-circumscription, in refusing to be faithful to a school of thinking – to a doctrine. Our philosophical education (or discipline) does not permit us to critique one school of thinking by the means of another which is deemed incompatible

4. Cf. “Que cet homme soit inaliénable en-dernière-identité n'exclut pas, au contraire, qu'il mène une lutte 'éternelle et sans espoir' contre un mal philosophiquement non identifié et qu'il n'identifie que dans l'immanence de la lutte, que son existence se confonde strictement avec celle-ci, qu'il soit le seul vivant qui se définisse, comme sujet, par la lutte plutôt que par le discours de l'Être ou de l'Inconscient” (Laruelle 2002, 20).

- simply a different legacy. [Schools of thinking confront, of course, but as soon as the defining disagreement is reaffirmed, one resorts to one's one philosophical universe in a comfortable auto-referential musing.] It is this law of the contemporary theory which keeps us entrapped in the vicious circle of philosophical self-sufficiency. The heretic stance enables a blasphemous transformation of a teaching of a certain philosophical tradition into a mere "transcendental material," its transmutation from an organized philosophical *cosmos* into *chôra* (Laruelle 1989, *passim*).

This posture of thought or subject-situatedness makes a radical re-reading of the poststructuralist tradition possible – a re-reading in a way that allows its reconfiguration while affirming some of its epistemic fundamentals plausible. The aim of such reconfiguration would be to produce critique of the usurpation by a particular subject position of the normative universalizing stance while permitting conceptualization of a radically novel form of universalism – the one that provides the grounds for the "universal right to politics" (Balibar 1994, 51).

The two decades long domination of the poststructuralist paradigm in social theory has managed to institute itself as an orthodoxy based on the inter-mirroring of methodology and ideology that aspires to be total. Consequently, the purely formal category of universality, one that would be merely methodologically grounded, has been excluded as a possibility due to its ideological inadequacy.

I would argue that the formal universalism would enable an essentially methodologically formulated critique of the universalisms that are ideologically problematic. The universalism I am advocating is not a form of generalizing and totalizing as is the one which is subject to the poststructuralist critique (which I endorse). Neither is it a form of essentializing. Quite to the contrary, the form of universalism I am arguing for rejects any form of fixing the subject position to an essence. The latter is, by definition, a transcendental category – belonging to the register of concepts that are formative of the historical instance called "the World" – and can also be a merely epistemological tool that entails certain political implications. Thus, the concept of universalism

purported here is purely formal, categorical, reduced to the singularity of the Subject position and, let us underscore once again, entirely opposed to the idea of a fixed and inalterable identitary essence. It can be but anti-essentialist, since it does not believe in the Subject's consistency. It is radically conscious of the historicity of "the World" as well as of the exposedness of the Real (in which) we all are in relation to the future.⁵

This is the universal of the particular which stems from its radical singularity, fundamental solitude of each subject position. The radical solitude I am referring to is not anti-social, anti-communal or anti-political, since subject positions are occupied also by collective Selves. Regardless of whether collective or individual, the radically solitary Subject, inherently heretic and rebellious with respect to "the World," represents the potentially ceaseless resistance and revolutionary action.

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5. "La transcendance en *epekeina*, celle qui est pure ouverture presque sans terme ni clôture, intériorise celle en *meta* et resserre la Décision philosophique sur elle-même, la transformant en possibilité" (Laruelle 2002, 152).

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Ispitivanje mogućnosti univerzalističkog oblika uključivanja s one strane evropskog kulturnog hegemonizma

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Sažetak: Kritika univerzalizma kao jednog od oblika dominacije i potčinjavanja među brojnim mogućim pozicijama subjekta (identitetskih konfiguracija) koja je centralna u savremenoj teoriji kulture, predstavlja oblik metodološke i ideološke samonormalizacije. U ovom tekstu pokazujem da ukidanje mogućnosti ponovnog promišljanja univerzalizma na neki nov i radikalna način dovodi do samoukidanja mogućnosti radikalne inovacije u današnjoj kulturno-političkoj teoriji i aktivizmu. Tekst, pre svega, govori o onim specifičnim oblicima teorije i aktivizma koji se bliže odnose na probleme integracije kulturno/etničkih, rodnih, seksualnih i migrantskih manjina u dominantne evropske društvene oblike, i bavi se pitanjem evropske kulturne hegemonije, njenom proizvodnjom (balkanske) Drugosti i mogućnošću političkog univerzalizma unutar Evrope koji bi bio s one strane logike evropocentrizma ili bilo koje druge vrste centrizma.

Ključne reči: univerzalizam, kulturni partikularizam, evropocentrizam, Balkan, nestandardna filozofija, proizvodnja Drugosti