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After Cosmopolitanism

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Introduction

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Is the idea of cosmopolitanism still useful? The concept was the target of serious criticism already in the second half of the twentieth century, especially from progressive political movements such as post-colonialism, feminism and environmentalism. The radical epistemologies engendered by these political movements attacked the pretentious universalism and the violent applications of the classical notion of cosmopolitanism.

This critical approach intensified after the traumatising first decade of the twenty-first century. The rise of global terror, nationalism, populist politics and xenophobia rang the death knoll of ideas of productive global interdependence. More recently the shock of the financial crises and the ongoing austerity measures they entail also lent a second lease of life to the very neoliberal economic theses which many hold responsible for the financial crises in the first place. Both factors – populism and financial fear – combine in strengthening the principle of economic self-interest. They have rendered the ideal of belonging to a harmonious global community of cosmopolitan citizens naive at best, at worst simply futile.

Although the notion of cosmopolitanism nowadays enjoys great currency in both in the academy and in political discourse, it apparently has many different and often contradictory meanings and uses. Its intellectual value has become questionable and its political relevance dubious. This volume starts therefore from the assumption that, at this point in time, there is no political or intellectual consensus about the idea of cosmopolitanism. In a global context torn apart by the contradictory forces at work in the global economy, increased interdependence on the one hand, deepening fragmentation on the other, the ideal of cosmopolitanism is invoked by many as a corrective to the ruthless, greedy individualism and the constant state of belligerency our world is into. The volume consequently is structured around this double pull: at a time when social and political reality seems to move away from the practice of cosmopolitanism, while being in serious need of a new international framework to regulate global interaction, what are the new definitions and practices of cosmopolitanism?

The present volume takes up this question as its central challenge and play a number of variations round the theme. The title, *After Cosmopolitanism*, has

a twofold meaning: first, it reflects the idea that cosmopolitanism could be considered as an 'exploded' notion. It accordingly analyses and assesses the multiple meanings and uses of the notion in order to assess not only its renewed relevance, but also its practice and applications today. The 'explosion' of the notion of cosmopolitanism is explored through a number of different methods, for instance by deconstructing the very idea and laying bare its shortcomings and ambiguities, and working through its genealogy. These critical explorations indicate that we come after cosmopolitanism in the sense that we have already moved *beyond* the univocal meaning of the term and that the public and scholarly debate around this notion has evolved significantly. This raises the cartographic question, namely: what has come *after* cosmopolitanism? What notions or ideas have replaced it or supplemented it in the light of contemporary concerns?

The volume accordingly plays with innovative terminology – ranging from vernacular cosmopolitanism (Gunew) and the fantasmatic or imaginary aspects of the term (Moore) to demotic variations on the theme (Douzinas). Cosmopolitanism from below (Gilroy), affective cosmopolitanism (Chouliaraki) and a cosmopolitanism of singularities (Hanafin) are also proposed. Some authors replace the term altogether, preferring instead new forms of planetary interdependence (Holland), cosmos-politics (Colebrook) and nomadic 'becoming-world' (Braidotti).

Hence the second implication of the title *After Cosmopolitanism* – namely the *yearning for* or *longing after* a cosmopolitan ideal, one that takes into account the political and social reality of our world, so as to provide an intellectually robust and constructive new foundations. This volume therefore will also offer a pluralistic *re*construction of the notion of cosmopolitanism. This is an affirmative approach that aims to identify and re-appraise the elements of cosmopolitanism that are most likely to inform our understanding of ourselves in these globalised and conflict-ridden times and serve as guide to action in the present social and political reality.

These explorations are necessarily multidisciplinary, given cosmopolitanism's multiple meanings and applications. The chapters engage in inter- and intra-disciplinary conversations, drawing on insights from philosophy, history, postcolonial theory, social, legal and political theory, as well as anthropology and cultural and literary theory. The basic tension that all of these perspectives address is that between the universalistic, rationalist Neo-Kantian transcendental cosmopolitan models, on the one hand, and the multi-faceted, affective cosmopolitics of embodied subjectivities grounded in diversity and radical relationality, on the other. The volume's core argument, springing from the productive tension between these two models, is the idea that 'we are in this together', namely that we inhabit a trans-national community as our historical location. This globalised condition forms the heart of contemporary cosmopolitan claims which do not refer to a transcendental ideal, but are rather immanent to the material conditions of global interdependence. This

planetary dimension raises the obvious question of the extent to which the emerging definitions of cosmopolitanism can contribute to new representative democratic models of governance.

The volume's main counter-hypothesis about cosmopolitanism therefore is the idea of an *affective cosmopolitics of immanent embodied subjectivities*. This innovative approach alternatively criticises and complements Neo-Kantian perspectives on cosmopolitanism, without rejecting them altogether. Three aspects of the Kantian legacy are regarded as especially problematic. The first is the reference to a rationalist vision of the subject; the second is the universalistic assumption concerning reason, moral values and human rights; and the third is the promise of perpetual peace. All three premises have been challenged and at times contradicted by the events of contemporary history, the rise of warfare and by the glaring inequalities of the new world order especially after 1989. Critical theory in the last thirty years has addressed these problematic aspects of the idea of 'cosmopolitanism' from a number of productive perspectives. This can be seen in Marxist analyses of the role of economic factors in organizing 'humanity' in a hierarchical scale of class differences, in feminist critiques of the masculinist bias of the allegedly universalistic claims of 'human rights', and postcolonial analyses which critique the exclusion of groups from the Eurocentric category of full humanity and the role played by 'whiteness' as a term that indexes access to the privileges of being fully human. Such critiques share common ground with re-readings of cosmopolitanism as a grounded and internally differentiated notion by poststructuralist thinkers – notably Derrida's emphasis on hospitality and Deleuze's nomadism. Both these perspectives are explored extensively in the volume.

The concept of cosmopolitanism, by regarding the coexistence of human beings on this planet as one (whether or not ideal) community, inherently calls for pan-human – albeit non-universalistic perspectives. Universalistic Neo-Kantian perspectives continue to find support today, notably in the work of Jürgen Habermas, which is defended in this volume by David Held. The volume will perform a rigorous critical examination of the Neo-Kantian perspective and will search for creative and positive alternatives to this potentially hegemonic and conservative universalistic approach. Combining a grounded perspective of singular, situated locations with the ideal of a globally interdependent community is a genuine challenge. The present volume will attempt to persuade the readers that a radical transformation of cosmopolitanism is already ongoing and that more effort is needed to take stock of transformations which are both necessary and possible.

The volume calls for an understanding of cosmopolitanism that is more attentive to the material reality of our social and political situation and less focused on linguistic analyses of its metaphorical implications. In this view, cosmopolitanism should be concerned with specificity rather than generality, groundedness rather than abstractness, engagement rather than distance, and

interaction rather than reflection. It becomes a *cosmopolitics*, by adopting embedded and embodied perspectives that take our actual situated location as starting point, rather than a timeless and placeless perspective. We need to engage, both individually and collectively, with the real-life problems that the global world confronts us with.

The argument of the volume will be constructed as follows. Rosi Braidotti opens the book with an exposition of its core thesis and argument. She defends the thesis that cosmopolitanism as an economic and social notion can be regarded as the affirmative response to processes of planetary interrelation. The argument starts from the assumption of a non-unitary vision of the subject and explores its usefulness for notions and practices of planetary interrelation today. Braidotti argues that cosmopolitanism can only remain relevant by undergoing a radical mutation, which starts by severing its conceptual attachment to liberal individualism and by embracing diversity and the immanence of structural relationality. This process of developing an ethical-political relational model of planetary interaction is dubbed 'becoming-world'.

As a counterpoint to this opening statement, David Held provides an eloquent defence of an institutional understanding of cosmopolitanism. The empirical conditions of the world today, most importantly what he identifies as 'the paradox of our times', namely, the fact that that the collective issues we must deal with are of growing cross-borders extensity and intensity, yet the means for addressing these are local and national, call for solutions through institutional governance. The notion of moral cosmopolitanism inherited from the Kantian tradition is for Held the cornerstone of global governance. The principle that every human being has a global stature and must constitute the ultimate unit of moral and political consideration is foundational. According to Held, contradictory historical evidence does not refute the Kantian approach, but rather intensifies the urgency of a more rigorous application of its tenets. We should not throw out the language of equal moral worth and individual self-determination just because of their contingent associations with the historical configurations of Western power, argues Held. A universalistic cosmopolitan approach does not in Held's opinion deny the reality and ethical relevance of living in a world of diverse values and identities.

The next chapter strikes quite a different note: Patrick Hanafin identifies the institutional approach defended by Held as hegemonic. The declaratory character of cosmopolitanism as a tool for legal institution building, argues Hanafin, overlooks the fact that achieving freedom and self-determination is a continuous process which requires more than abstract and formulaic principles. Hanafin therefore proposes a critical practice of agonistic *cosmopolitics*, based on Hannah Arendt's idea of 'the right to have rights'. Next to building institutions and imposing legal frames of citizenship, we should be concerned with world-making in an open process of interaction and communication

between individuals. This can only be achieved from below as a collective practice that takes place locally and relationally, alongside but never fully contained by legal frames of reference.

In the fourth chapter, Costas Douzinas takes up a critical genealogy of the notion of cosmopolitanism. This genealogy lays bare the metaphysics of modern cosmopolitanism, which is in fact a secularized theological metaphysics that is the result of the displacement of the theology of history into a philosophy of history. By revealing these implicit premises of cosmopolitanism, Douzinas exposes it as an imperial exercise in domination. Modern thinkers, despite their attempt to do away with God, have implicitly inherited the Christian duality between the terrestrial and the heavenly, which is also inherent in Christian cosmopolitanism. Humanity, then, remains divided as creator and creation and its mission is to become whole again. Transcendence is placed *in* history; cosmopolitanism then means that the ideal, imaginary humanity of universal values (the cosmos), set against its fallen, uncivilised part (the polis), strives to achieve itself in history. Douzinas concludes from this deconstruction of cosmopolitanism that it is impossible to retain the methodological and ontological premises of cosmopolitan metaphysics in the contemporary world.

The fifth chapter takes a more cultural and ethical perspective. Lilie Chouliaraki critically analyses humanitarian discourse as a site for the articulation of cosmopolitan solidarity. Her main finding is that the two key paradigms of this discourse both fail to *humanise* the distant sufferer. The first one, solidarity as 'pity', is often articulated through celebrity advocacy. This representational strategy turns refugees into a vehicle for the celebrity's own professional narrative and thus denies them the legitimacy of their own voice. Solidarity, in this case, risks being reduced to narcissistic self-expression. The second paradigm, solidarity as 'irony', falls into another pitfall: it reduces solidarity to private choice and self-fulfilment, addressing us as sentimental publics with little capacity for judgement, whilst it reduces vulnerable others to voiceless figures without humanity. As both paradigms are therefore unproductive proposals for cosmopolitan solidarity, Chouliaraki argues for a reinvention of the imperative to act on vulnerable others through an agonistic recovery of the public world as a space wherein the radical plurality of standpoints becomes the object of politics.

Henrietta Moore, in the sixth chapter, takes on an anthropological perspective. She analyses cosmopolitanism as a descriptive notion and concludes that it is not very productive, as the cosmopolitan perspective is not in fact one that is accessible through perception, only through imagination, because we cannot see the whole of humanity. As imagination is always historically situated, cosmopolitanism is necessarily a project of *world-making* instead of a universally valid prescriptive ideal. There is a tension, Moore observes, between the abstract prescriptive demands of cosmopolitanism in its neo-Kantian form, and the descriptive given of nationalism and fear, anxiety and suspicion towards others. The Kantian approach sees cosmopolitanism as an

ideal that is meant to help us manage the passions that we have about otherness. Anthropological research, however, shows that cosmopolitanism 'on the ground' is far from a coherent philosophy and it is thus inadequate as a descriptive term for ordinary people's imaginative and discursive interactions. Moore argues that cosmopolitanism would better be understood as an open and ongoing process of building 'more and hopefully better social connections' based on the relationships we actually have with each other, rather than on an un-situated universalism.

Paul Gilroy argues next that there is need for a critical perspective that is both postcolonial and cosmopolitan. Reconnecting to race and postcolonial epistemologies, Gilroy reconstructs fascism's history on a world scale and argues that postcolonial Europe is in a crisis of identity as absolutist conceptions of civilization, culture and identity rooted in a largely unacknowledged imperial history are being revived by opportunistic governments as a bulwark against the cultural hybridity caused by globalization and the cultural anxieties that come with it. Any emergent cosmopolitan perspective should therefore accommodate and account for the violent colonial past and assess its lasting legacy. Gilroy puts forward the idea that the present circumstances sustain the longing for a postcolonial and cosmopolitan synthesis. This has both negative and positive aspects: historical developments like climate change, individualisation and financial insecurity can be seen as global phenomena, but so are more encouraging events, such as the dissemination of rights, transformed markets and new forms of kinship and households. These new social factors provide the basis for genuinely world-wide conversations about sociality and humanity. Cosmopolitan enquiry is now facilitated by technological resources that can offer glimpses of a process of mutual education. In this way, it is a hopeful process involved in making and sustaining an imagined cosmopolitan community.

In the following chapter, Sneja Gunew also emphasises the relevance of postcolonial theory as an analytical tool to understand the ways in which imperial cultures have claimed cosmopolitanism as intrinsic to their civilising missions. While the treatment of indigenous groups and the history of slavery have consistently critiqued such claims, Gunew argues that less attention has been paid to the ways in which other groups have been positioned in these dynamics, particularly in the settler colonies. For example, in Australian cultural debates, the cosmopolitanism linked to 'European' and 'modernity' is, on closer inspection, revealed to be peculiarly limited to the Anglo-Celtic vernacular. This perspective excludes the immigrant from non-English-speaking backgrounds and their descendants, who are often from Europe. At the same time, the assumed limitations associated with the vernacular in terms such as 'multicultural' or 'diasporic' writings are often subtended by wider global histories and value systems to which the national culture remains wilfully blind. This chapter examines such contradictory dynamics through recent works of literary fiction that mediate 'European cosmopolitanism' in multiple ways.

These include the central and eastern margins of Europe, as for instance, Christos Tsiolkas (*Dead Europe*), Dubravka Ugresic (*Nobody's Home*) and Rana Dasgupta (*Solo*).

Eugene Holland brings us back to social theory and explores the possibility of an *economic* cosmopolitanism which is based on the distributed sovereignty or collective decision making made possible by means of *markets*. Holland sees a possibility of a market economy in which the participating agents not act out of narrow self-interest, but also with regard to the well-being of others. He argues that righteous participation in social movements and institutions, rather than obedience to political entities such as states or super-states, is a preferable way to knit together a truly cosmopolitan human community. Consequently, citizenship should be seen as a mode of self-organisation or assemblage in which differences are neither cancelled out through unification nor ignored through massification, but instead brought into a complex of mutually reinforcing relations. A truly free market is not one that is designed by centralised, top-down planning, but one in which there is distributed decision making. Holland thus understands cosmopolitanism not as a declarative empirical statement, but as an act of social engagement and ethical commitment: a possibility. He concludes that it is up to us to make cosmopolitanism positive.

In the final chapter Claire Colebrook observes that one of the many ways with which Derrida and Deleuze have been contrasted concerns their theorised relations to the cosmos and more specifically the relation between the material planet and the infinite. Put at its simplest, Deleuze's transcendental empiricism and his attention to infinitesimal diminutions allow the infinite to be thought from within material, inhuman and largely inorganic life. Derrida by contrast placed much weight on the 'opening to the infinite' or the capacity of thinking, writing and other events to generate a radically uninscribed future. This essay explores Deleuze and Guattari's concept of the cosmos, as a material open whole already encompassing the infinite, with Derrida's events of cosmopolitanism that bear a promise of the infinite. The essay concludes by raising the issue of the relation between contemporary thought and the increasingly threatened status of all life, thinking or otherwise, enquiring whether Deleuze's transcendental empiricism and Derrida's radical cosmopolitanism can have anything to say in a world that is figurally retracting.

Through these multiple variations round the same theme, this volume opens up new paths of reflection in our thinking about inter-dependence and relationality in the contemporary global world. Planetary, situated and accountable being-together-in-the world is the productive starting point for a cosmo-politics of affective inter-dependence. More than ever before, today we all are in *this* together.