

Europe of complexity: Another way of telling

Una Europa de complejidad: Otra manera de narrarlo

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ABSTRACT

This article explores issues relating to the new diversity and complexity within European culture, and seeks to do so with reference to contemporary debates on cosmopolitanism. A central argument is that the “mainstream” social science remains inadequate, in that it deals with the issues in an abstract and formulaic way – touching no-one. The article argues for a more concrete and substantive (and even poetic) approach to the cosmopolitan agenda, putting forward suggestions as to relevant alternative discourses –discourses that have been marginalised in and through the historical elaboration of what has become the hegemonic version of European culture and tradition. There is an exploration of such (seemingly obsolete, and maybe eccentric) terms as “wonder” and “metamorphosis”, and of the communicative significance of metaphorical thinking. The point in addressing the contemporary European cultural dilemma, it is argued, is to develop an evocative, and thereby more effectively meaningful and communicative discourse of cosmopolitanism –another way of telling.

Key words: Europe, cultural complexity, cultural encounter, cosmopolitanism, mental space, enlargement of meaning

RESUMEN

Este artículo explora cuestiones relacionadas con la nueva diversidad y complejidad de la cultura europea, y procura hacerlo con referencia a debates contemporáneos en torno al cosmopolitismo. Un argumento central es que las ciencias sociales “dominantes” permanecen inadecuadas, en tanto que tratan estas cuestiones de forma abstracta y de manera superficial –sin tocar a nadie. El artículo propone una aproximación más concreta y sustantiva a la agenda cosmopolita –incluso poética–, ofreciendo sugerencias en términos de discursos alternativos relevantes –aquellos que han sido marginados a través de la elaboración histórica de lo que ha devenido la versión hegemónica de la cultura y tradición europeas. Se presenta una exploración de términos como “asombro” y “metamorfosis” (aparentemente obsoletos y quizás excéntricos), así como de la importancia comunicativa del pensamiento metafórico. Se argumenta que, al abordar el dilema cultural europeo contemporáneo, la finalidad es desarrollar un evocativo, y por lo tanto significativo y comunicativo, discurso en torno al cosmopolitismo –en efecto, otra manera de narrarlo.

Palabras clave: Europa, diversidad, complejidad cultural, cosmopolitismo, encuentro cultural, espacio mental, ampliación del significado

COMPLEXITY

That was the starting point, complexity and the space of European interaction. That was how the issue of concern was set up –its nature, and the significance of complexity. The opening note of orientation would be thus:

“With the complexity of today’s society, new views are needed which are capable of incorporating all kinds of irregularities, exceptions and disagreement and to understand an endless number of events and unpredictable coincidences. How can the irreducible dynamics, flows and changes inherent in society be included with a view on active citizenship as an open and fluid form of the social, where individuals are part of society and at the same time, society is present in each individual?

The social complexity in which we live requires us to imagine scenarios for action capable of articulating a common sense of belonging. How do we solve the dilemma of static descriptions and fixed identities with the ever-changing nature of today’s society?

How can complexity theory be useful? Complexity theory allows us to work with an extreme quantity of interactions and interferences between a very large number of individuals, and to unite antagonistic notions to examine the processes, without isolating or reducing”.

Complexity. This note of orientation was directed towards the contemporary European agenda of social and cultural diversity, which may also be conceptualised in terms of the agenda of cosmopolitanism. But what is cosmopolitanism? It is this question that I want to briefly address in the following discussion. Complexity is surely at the heart of the matter. But I think that the issue is about more than just the ever-changing nature of today’s global or network society, and its extreme quantity of interactions and interferences between very large numbers of individuals. And I propose, therefore, that the issue is about far more than what complexity theory –with its highly technicist approach to the problems of today’s societies (or what it identifies as the core problems)– puts forward as its objective and programme of action. The real issue as far as contemporary social and cultural diversity is concerned –as far as the cosmopolitan project is concerned, that is to say– must also concern long-standing social complexities, and the recognition that societies have always been complex. But, of course, we shift the discourse then to a different sense and understanding of ‘complexity’. It is a sense –and also a value– that is easily repressed or disavowed. We may say that the history of nation-states has, for the most part, been about the denial, and often strategic

erasure, of this kind of complexity. And the new discourses of globalization, amongst which I include complexity theory, may well be equally resistant to it. But it is a sense of complexity that must surely be central to debates on cosmopolitanism. I would say that this understanding of, and approach to, complexity is essentially about encounter –the meaning of encounter, the point of encounter, and its consequences, actual and potential. The cosmopolitan agenda fundamentally challenges the taken-as-given idea of ‘a common sense of belonging’, with its generally unthought-through concern with the weightedness of cultural consensus and the familiarities of community and belonging understood as ‘togetherness’. Complexity in the context of encounter, however, is to do with quite other priorities, quite other values and possibilities, ones that address the cosmopolitan agenda.

TO STAY OPEN TO THE INCONCEIVABLE...

This seems a vital and a very consequential idea for a radical conception of cosmopolitanism. The complexity of encounter, in the sense that I am putting forward, surely has something to do with –some inescapable relationship to– the experience of the inconceivable. This, at least, will be my starting point. And cosmopolitanism, which must surely be a thinking of complexity, must also be about making a place in thought for the inconceivable. My proposal is that the inconceivable is intimately related to the experience of encounter. The complexity of encounter – of what encounter will bring, how it will change us, and whether we will be capable of accommodating and withstanding the demands of its call upon us. Withstanding – because the call will always involve the proposal for some kind of transformation in us. What is called cosmopolitanism? Cosmopolitanism is surely not a matter of a new kind of identity (‘identity’ has always been something fixed in the containing collective hold of the national mentality). What might be possible, then, if one were to determine to de-link the question concerning cosmopolitanism from the identitarian imagination? For my own part, I would relate the cosmopolitan agenda to the opening-up of a more expansive *mental space* – to the capacity and ability to think in an enlarging way – for what is surely imperative is the realisation of greater mobility of mind, thought and imagination. This is what is at issue if we are to address the matter of complexity and the space of European interaction. Mobility of thinking –which might also be understood as beholding the inconceivable– in and through the experience of cultural encounter.

TO CHANGE THE DIRECTION OF THINKING

There are certain by now well-established ways of thinking about European culture. For the most part, they draw upon the conceptual resources of the national imagination. The concepts may seem almost natural and self-evident to us now – ‘community’, ‘belonging’, ‘identity’, ‘heritage’, and so on – but they are of course heavily weighted. They are concepts fundamentally predicated on the ideals of cultural fixedness, coherence, integrity, continuity, confirmation, and the like. They are anti-cosmopolitan in their very ‘nature’. In the contemporary European context, we may say that they are concepts that stand in the way of cosmopolitan thought and thoughtfulness. They give us ‘European *union*’, ‘European *community*’, ‘European *heritage*’, and so on, and no more. In his book *Permanence and Change*, Kenneth Burke introduced the idea of ‘perspective by incongruity’, a way of transcending a ‘given order of weightedness’. We might consider it in terms of a modality of thinking by way of metaphorical perception and conception. It is about the ‘revealing of hitherto unsuspected connectives’; and it ‘appeals by exemplifying relationships between objects which our customary rational vocabulary has ignored’ (1984: liv, 90). I appropriate, and inflect, Burke’s notion to reflect on how we might think about contemporary European culture otherwise than along the channels that have by now become the established ones in social and cultural theory – to reflect, that is to say, on other cultural principles and values than the nationally-serving ones that I have signalled my aversion to in this paragraph. Another approach to the meaning of complexity in the European context, and to the potential resources it holds for a more cosmopolitan disposition.

Europe is rich in imaginative cultural resources. But let us not just state the plainly obvious. Rather, let us divert attention, first, to how so much of the vital store of significant European resources – thoughtful *historical* resources – has been denied proper accommodation in the mainstream of social theory. A fundamental cause of this has been the selective historical imagination of the national mentality, and its weighted categories of the national organization of social meaning, as touched on above (and see below). The dark side of the elaboration of national heritage and tradition in continuity has amounted to an extended act of imaginative disavowal and repression of other social and human possibilities of association. We should also be attentive to the complicity in this process of the modern social sciences, and of the narrowed options that have been chosen, with great consequence, by social scientists as to what should be allowed in to, and therefore what should be ruled out from, their own domain of apprehension (never more than a small domain in this world’s long history of knowledge). This has involved not just a denial of alternative histories, but also a privileging of a certain instrumental modality of thought operation and social intervention. As James C. Scott has argued, it has involved the mobilization of a mentality that plans for abstract citizens, at the cost

of stripping reality of its essentials: 'Designed or planned social order is necessarily schematic; it always ignores the essential features of any real, functioning social order' (1998: 6). Let us note, then, how other intellectual and imaginative modalities available for addressing the cultural issues that concern us have, thereby, been exiled from mainstream social thought. As Yves Bonnefoy has observed, 'conceptual thought, which decides the fate of the world today, is blind to what holds the speaking being in an intimate relationship to his life, and its destiny, in a particular place and through the duration of time' (2010: 27) We cannot do without analytical and conceptual thought, for sure, but let us not accept to live by concepts alone (without the supplement of poetic-cosmopolitan thinking, let us put it).

EUROPEAN IDENTITY, OR MIND?

What is at issue in this question? At the present time, there is considerable interest and emphasis on what is called 'cultural Europe'. The prevailing agenda has become that of European cultural identity: Who are 'we' in Europe? What is 'European'? What is it that we have culturally in common in what we have resolved to think of as our continent-wide 'union' or 'community'? What is the essence of our shared 'European' cultural heritage? (Kadelbach, 2010)? At the same time, there is now an ongoing debate in Europe concerning the question of cultural diversity, which can be understood as a debate concerning cultural complexity. In the immediate term, this debate has been precipitated by the arrival of large numbers of global migrants that have arrived in Europe. Generally, these migrants are seen as a problem for Europe and its cultural integrity and sovereignty –it is the perceived *problem of cultural complexity*. Can we integrate them? How? Why not try to expel them –the Roma in Italy and France right now, for example? Let us keep them out (Turks with respect to the European Union)? The issue is presented in political terms. But it is far more than that. At the heart of the matter is a basic fear, not only of these migrants who seem to threaten to contaminate 'our' essential Europeanness, but also a fear of complexity itself. It is a fear that has a long history in European culture (and not just in European culture, of course). In her book on ancient Greek political thought, Arlene Saxonhouse addresses what she sees as a fundamental 'fear of diversity –a fear that differences bring on chaos and thus demands that the world be put into an orderly pattern'. It imagines and demands unity. But the pursuit of unity only serves to create 'a world that tries to eliminate that which is not easily accommodated into this underlying unity; a world that finds diversity threatening

that it collapses all into one, avoids the multiplicity of human experience, and leaves us immobile and sterile' (Saxonhouse, 1992: x).

In the modern period, it was the nation-state that, pre-eminently, assumed the role of constructing cultural unity and oneness and defending against the perceived forces of disorder. The national imagination was informed by an essentially homogenizing discourse. A national imagined community is conceived as a bounded, integral whole, organized around a shared and stable collective identity, a culture in common. And, on the basis of this paradigm of collective life and culture, there must always exist –and there is absolutely no escape from– an anxiety about, those with whom the 'members' of the national community do not have this 'natural' common bond, those who do not, and cannot, 'belong'. Ultimately, at the deepest level, 'their' difference is resented and feared, because it has come to be associated with the fragmentation of what should be whole. The coherence and integrity of what is held in common have to be constantly conserved and defended in the face of what come to be represented as forces of disintegration and potential dissolution –and which are, in reality, no more than normal diversity and complexity. And the dilemma now is that the European imagination –that of a common European culture– is captured by precisely this national paradigm and *imaginaire*.

With respect to this unifying or homogenizing logic, the master concept of the national imagination was that of *identity* –ascribed, shared, collective identity. What I want to argue here is that it is this conception of 'identity' –forcefully instituted as a self-evident category– that is at the heart of the problem in Europe and its constituent nation-states. Identity is, quite fundamentally, unable to accommodate complexity, and is not really interested in complexity, anyway. Identity is, in itself, indivisible and, in the encounter with what is outside and beyond it, it shows itself to be solipsistic. It is essentially about closure. However much we try to deal with new issues of cultural diversity in Europe, then, the language of identity will stand in the way –this language that thinks of the individual as the nation writ small. To address cultural complexity, we have to shift to an entirely other realm of discourse, I suggest. My proposition is that we have to think in terms of *mind* –of the European mind or, better, the minds and mindfulness of people living in Europe. Only within the terms of such a radically changed frame of reference would it be possible to meaningfully and inventively engage with questions of diversity and complexity in Europe now. Mind –mental space, is maybe a better term– may be commodious. Where identity is essentially about conformity, mind is open to indeterminacy and, consequently, to possibility. The vitality of mind –through which energies are released– is how I would put it; as against the sterility of encapsulating identity. Above all, the mind operates in and through difference. Mental space, a space of cognitive and imaginative mobility, affords flexibility of perspective. Initiatives of mind depend upon the capacity to compare, to associate, to correlate, to translate, to distinguish, to discriminate. And, far from being taken as problematical, cultural multiplicity and complexity serve as an indispensable and productive resource.

TOWARDS THE ENLARGEMENT OF MEANING

Cosmopolitanism is about how we engage with the social and cultural complexities of the world –in the context of the present discussion, with the complexities that exist in and across the European space. Within a social science frame of reference, the mode of engagement is, for the most part, abstract, conceptual and generic. The issues are addressed from an aerial perspective in terms of concepts of world society, cosmopolitan modernity, citizenship, responsibility, the ‘Other’, dialogical imagination, and so on – through the mobilization of theories *about* the social world. At one level, we can, or have to, accept this –accept, that is to say, what has become the hegemonic form of socio-political discourse. But, as J.-B. Pontalis observes, there is a cost attached to this aerial view of the social world, and the cost is ‘a forgetting: a forgetting of property, of singularity, of difference’ (2003: 3). Another way of telling would involve an engagement with the world –it can be a supplementary engagement to that of the social sciences– through an acknowledgement of the social world’s wealth of concrete and singular properties and differences. By way of a perspective that thought to operate *in* and *through* the world’s concrete realities. Surely cosmopolitanism must involve a changed stance towards our being *in* the world? An enhanced awareness, for example, of the actual and lived presences of what the abstractive social sciences call the ‘Other’; a changed orientation towards cultural relatedness –how one culture participates in another (detours, as it were, through the foreign door); a commitment to change as an imperative existential principle (in place of a complacent leaning on familiarity and continuity, which has been the characteristic principle of operation of the national mentality). Something more radical is needed than just a theory of complexity or even of cosmopolitanism as it is now being politically mobilized within the mainstream social sciences –a more radical epistemological, communicative and existential leap.

But do we any longer have the intellectual and imaginative resources to achieve such a leap? Not from within the domains of the mainstream social sciences, I think. But certain resources do exist –precariously, in their bordering regions, and in what have now become residual mental spaces. There are certain themes, and dispositions, and also modalities of thought, telling and understanding that have been of great significance in European history, and yet which have, over time, been banished to the cultural margins and to cultural history –over the time of hegemony of the national imagination, we may say. I will suggest three candidate possibilities –by way of incongruity, and against the weighted order of the social sciences. Incongruity because the point is not to dismiss the social science concepts (nor, of course, would this be at all possible) and to offer some alternative, but rather to confront the concepts with what is absent from them: to explore possibilities of images and associated feelings whose

vitality and animation might make the inert concepts come alive. Images said to lie behind us, in the forgotten past, or beyond us, beyond the pale of serious social theory, but images and ways of thinking that might still summon us.

PERSPECTIVE BY INCONGRUITY

Three images, then, to suggest to that there may be other ways to think about encounter, complexity, cosmopolitanism. That there might be another way of telling. Seemingly eccentric... well, maybe. They are offered, as I have said, not as some kind of alternative, but as a supplement to thinking (and, of course, there could be many other possibilities of such indirection).

Wonder

One way to think of encounter might be in terms of what Hannah Arendt says of the transformative force of astonishment, puzzlement, perplexity, surprise, and, beyond that, of wonder. 'What sets men wondering,' says Arendt, 'is something familiar and yet normally invisible, and something men are forced to *admire*.' Arendt is asserting and affirming the vivacious human value of what she calls 'an *admiring* wonder' (1981: 143). It was on account of wonder, Aristotle claimed, that humans first began to philosophize (wonder should, then, be a category at the heart of the posited European legacy). The impulse to wonder, and the consequent impulse to thoughtfulness. Wonder is a category of the mind and of a particular modality through which mind apprehends the world. In later European cultures, as Caroline Walker Bynum puts it: '[W]onder was a recognition of the singularity and significance of the thing encountered. Only that which is really different from the knower can trigger wonder; yet wonder will always be in a context and from a particular point of view' (2001: 39). Wonder is, of course, an epistemological and interpretive category that has virtually disappeared from the contemporary, and highly diminished, lexicon of cultural encounter. But let us be aware of its significance as a modality of encounter, 'cognitive, perspectival, non-appropriative, and deeply respectful of the specificity of the world (Bynum, 2001: 73). Let us at least note a sophistication of perspective and engagement that has become almost incomprehensible in contemporary social sciences. It belongs to another age, it might be said, and its reality now lies behind us.

Metamorphosis

Metamorphosis is a theme that runs through the course of European cultural history, from Ovid onwards – a theme, however, that has been consigned to the very margins, regarded simply as a kind of literary conceit, its radical challenge contained. In the present context, I am concerned with metamorphosis as a category pertaining to mind, and as a category to be pitched against the imagined certainty and constancy of identity, as posited by the national imagination. The idea of metamorphosis introduces the idea of a narrative that is not constrained by the ideals –which have always been illusory ideals– of continuity and consistency, but which affords access to contingency, and, by way of contingency, to possibilities, even inevitability, of transformation. Metamorphosis is simply about the potential of something to become something else. And that generative potential is a very radical potential, and in the national context it is a potential that has had to be contained and disarmed. Contained because it is about the breaching of established categories, of accustomed categories of order and organization, thereby serving the cause of cultural destabilization and disordering. Familiar boundaries are transcended. Metamorphosis works against cultural encapsulation, and promotes the vital cause of cultural encounter and interaction. We may say that it is centrally concerned with the crucial act of cultural translation (Tomlinson, 2003). And, thereby, with the potential for emancipation from cultural containment and constraint: ‘[W]hat makes true transformation wonderful and invaluable for human beings is its freedom. Since it is possible to be transformed into anything, i.e., in all directions, it is impossible to predict where one will go’ (Canetti, 1991:119).

Metaphor

Metaphor, the close associate and ally of metamorphosis, is a distinctive thought form, a mode of evocative thinking (Zimmer, 2003), in which one idea or thought or image is made to participate in another, one thing made to be seen in and through another. To create a metaphor is to think of something by a consideration of, by way of the detour of, something else. Metaphor –as with metamorphosis– is about encounter, and particularly about the surprise of encounter. In some cases, the encounter may occur on the basis of perceived or felt similarity, but this is not at all essential, and the prismatic force of metaphor may enable it to render what is incomparable comparable. In the former case, relationships are identified on the basis of some kind of identifiable equivalence or similarity. In the latter case, which is the far more interesting case, ‘a resemblance suddenly becomes visible between two things that previously one had never dreamed of juxtaposing and comparing’ (Ricoeur, 2003: 226). We may say that the point of metaphor in this, its most radical form, is to set up resonances precisely on the basis of their heterogeneity and difference. It

is about 'saying something literally false which none the less inspires a revelation' (Cavell, 1986: 495). Donald Davidson develops this radical version in a very interesting way, with his argument that 'a metaphor doesn't say anything beyond its literal meaning.' Metaphor, he continues, 'makes us see one thing as another by making some literal statement that inspires or prompts the insight' (Davidson, 1979: 30, 45). As Adonis says, in a discussion of Arab poetics, metaphor is 'a begetter of questions, an agent of disruption, in contrast to the kind of knowledge which aspires to certainty' (1990: 71). In this radical variant, we can say, following Adonis, that 'metaphor releases reality from its familiar context...' That familiar context is one that looks to conceptually order reality, and that looks therefore for comparability and commonality as the basis for mapping and organizing social reality. According to the radical approach to metaphor, which is accommodating to literal realities, literal realities in their multitudes, their juxtaposition, even on the basis of their dissimilarity, can provoke thought. Indeed, that is the very objective: to see something in a new light, to effect shifts in perspective.

Wonder, metamorphosis, metaphor: the point is to open up other cognitive and discursive spaces. In addressing the agenda of cosmopolitanism, the point in cultural terms at least, is surely not simply to organize and manage complexity, but to contribute to its creative proliferation. *Cosmopolitanism must be about the enlargement of meaning.* About a 'gain in sense and a gain in reference,' as Paul Ricoeur (2003: 351) puts it. About a 'thinking more' which should be guided by what Ricoeur calls the 'vivifying principle'. The grip of conceptual reason and theory is all-powerful, and there can be no doubt that it will maintain its powerful hold. I am not naïve. I have been following this other line of thought because I believe that alternative ways of telling should at least be put into circulation at the present time – and I mean alternative discourses of all kinds. At least let us say that we should be aware of what is not there, of what is disavowed, in the hegemonic discourse, lacking as it is in wonder, complexity, reference, and in vivacity.

THE CONTEMPORARY DILEMMA OF COSMOPOLITANISM

European societies were always complex, always on the move, and always in encounter. Through the efforts of the modern nation-state, their vital complexity was demeaned and diminished. And in its place, states sought to institute a unitary culture across a sovereign territory, and to advance and sustain the illusion of cultural identity (Bayart, 2005). Now, in the 21st century, and to a large extent because of the new wave of glo-

bal migrations affecting the continent, the issue of complexity is back on the European agenda. National governments and European agencies alike are struggling to deal with the new forms of cultural diversity. ‘Cultural diversity’, ‘transcultural diversity’, ‘intercultural dialogue’: these are keywords of the new European cultural policy agenda –the keywords of the minority advocating more progressive and constructive ways to deal with the new cultural developments¹. The fundamental issue now concerns what is to be done in the face of the new, transnational complexities? ‘Cosmopolitanism’, particularly, seems to offer something to hold on to. Can there be a way forward, it is now being asked, on the basis of a reconstituted model and politics of (European) cosmopolitanism?

Consider something of the ‘old’ complexity and cosmopolitanism. Moritz Csáky has written about the plurality, as he sees it, that was a distinctive characteristic of the Habsburg space. It was a space of great ethnic, linguistic and cultural diversity. The cities, Vienna in particular, contained Germans, Magyars, Czechs, Poles, Ukrainians (Ruthenians), Romanians, Croats, Slovaks, Slovenes, Italians and Jews, all coexisting and mixing with each other. (In this extensive polyglot space, Csáky (1991: 31) notes, the mastery of languages was actively pursued by those who wanted to see, or to do business, in other provinces of the monarchy –‘In Hungary, for example, it was common to send children to families that spoke another language in order to gain perfect knowledge of a second language of the country’). Acculturation into such a dense world of cultural and linguistic multiplicity and exchange couldn’t help but play a role in the formation of some kind of pluralistic awareness and consciousness, both individual and collective. Csáky (p. 33-35) observes that populations living in the region entered into such processes of cultural exchange, mixing, and absorption that identical or similar underlying ‘codes’ became established and mobilized among the diverse ethnic constituencies, codes that could be interpreted and understood by all, across the spectrum of social diversity and difference. Thus, individuals from one province could readily find elements of their own local and distinctive ethno-culture in other places and amongst other groups, while still retaining, however, their awareness of difference and diversity. These available ‘codes’ –of everyday life, but also existing significantly in such elaborated forms as music, architecture or philosophy– established a field of cultural correspondences and of resonances across the space of the monarchy, allowing for a certain recognition and affinity through association and on the basis of complexity. This common basis of understanding was the underpinning to what François Fejtö has called the ‘nonchalant cosmopolitanism’ (1994: 377) that was peculiar to the Habsburg empire.

1. The conservative forces, who are the prevailing forces, driven by anxiety and resentment, continue to put their money on the nation-state, and its ways of dealing with complexity –the massive sales and coverage of Thilo Sarrazin’s book *Deutschland schafft sich ab* (2010) is evidence enough of the force of resentful and reactionary politics.

And what of the new context of European complexity, associated with the emergence of transnational migrations into the continent? Where do we stand now with respect to the elaboration of a responsive new cosmopolitanism? Well, the cosmopolitan idea is socially present –and that, at least, is good. But I would argue that, unfortunately, the idea is generally empty, void, and has no real hold on the world. Consider, for example, the following social scientific observations on cosmopolitanism by Gerard Delanty and Chris Rumford in their recent book *Rethinking Europe* (2005). ‘Cosmopolitanism,’ they maintain, ‘takes multiple belonging as the norm and does not seek to deny the plurality of selves to which this can give rise’; or, put more concisely (and topically), ‘we each contain a clash of cultures.’ The cosmopolitan project, they go on to say, ‘enables the expression of sympathies and emotions associated with close-knit communities while simultaneously promoting the cool distancing associated with encounters with strangers or action-at-a-distance.’ Being European now is said to be ‘about adopting a particular stance towards the world –one that involves embracing difference, embodying otherness, and existing in a state of becoming rather than being’. It is about an ‘engagement with difference’, which then encourages ‘an identification with the Other’ (2005: 194). So, according to this account, we learn that cosmopolitan encounter is about the encounter with ‘difference’, with ‘strangers’, with ‘the Other’ (and what a work this term ‘Other’ has been made to perform in contemporary social theory!). But what does all this really amount to? What is it that is actually being *said* here? It seems to me that this kind of cosmopolitan theory amounts to little more than the shuffling of concepts –and of concepts, moreover, that have become pretty much void of meaning by now. We are in the domain of abstraction combined with platitude, cosmopolitanism without content.

Cosmopolitanism in this version is not much more than an abstractly posited ideal. There is no sense of the human presence and reality of those who are supposed to become the cosmopolitan populations of a future Europe. No apparent awareness of the basic necessity of cultural resonance and vivacity of experience in a cosmopolitan culture – of the kind that Csáky observes to have existed in the central European space of the Habsburg monarchy. No sense of the need to make a bridge across from political cosmopolitan theory to the histories, narratives, stories, myths, and so on, that have, over time, arisen out of living and lived experience in Europe –a bridge, that is to say, to all that holds the individual in a meaningful (because meaning-filled) relation to his or her life and destiny. No recognition of the actual processes of human encounter, and, crucially, of what is at stake in and through them –the void idea of ‘identification with the Other’ is free of all content and substance and reality. The fundamental issue now concerning cosmopolitanism possibility is, I think, whether, in contemporary European societies, there exists anything comparable to the substantive kinds of communicative ‘codes’ that Csáky invokes in his discussion of ‘old’ European cosmopolitanism. It is actually doubtful whether they do exist in this rapidly emerging transnational space (which is, of course,

provides a far, far different cultural context to that of the embedded cultural pave of the Habsburg Empire). And there are clearly potent forces – nation-bound forces – presently campaigning to make sure that they should not be permitted to exist: to arrest the formation of new ‘codes’ of understanding, and to inhibit the possibilities of transcultural resonance, affinity and recognition among the diverse populations of Europe (Sarrazin is one very clear example). Against such forces, it is simply of no use to claim that a cosmopolitan future is about ‘embracing difference, embodying otherness, and existing in a state of becoming rather than being.’ Who can understand what this might even mean? It is a cosmopolitanism directed towards the academy. Surely the cosmopolitan project must, rather, be to engage with how new substantive ‘codes’ of interaction might be elaborated in the changed European context – codes that draw upon and address lived experience, across and through diversities and difference. This can only mean to bring into existence meaningful images and narratives that speak to transnational and transcultural cultural experience –working towards a gain in sense and a gain in meaning. Giving *substance* to the idea and ideal of cosmopolitanism, and opening up new and alternative paths for thought –new aspects and dimensions of mental space.

ANOTHER WAY OF TELLING

Yes, I do indeed recognise the fact that a discussion of terms like wonder or of metamorphosis can seem romantic or nostalgic. I am aware that what I am saying is entirely at odds with mainstream social science approaches to complexity and cosmopolitanism, and that it is unlikely that much of my argument will be taken at all seriously in those quarters (too idiosyncratic, courting the impossible, that’s how it appears). And let me say at this point that my discussion may also seem somewhat Eurocentric. This objection I would to some extent accept. Elsewhere (e.g. Robins, 2006) I have sought to emphasise the immense significance of transnational migration and migrants for the transformation of European life-experience. In the present argument, however, I have put greater emphasis on the ‘local’ European historical and cultural context – and on the resources for change that may be available from this side.

But actually, the point was never to offer some kind of ‘alternative’ to the mainstream social science agenda on complexity and cosmopolitanism. It was meant as a challenge, indeed. But a challenge in order to propose some elements of supplement to the abstract theories of the mainstream (and there could be many more propositions, from many other directions). A challenge in order to point to a very problematical, and

disabling, existential lack in the mainstream debates. Wonder: in order to draw attention to a fundamental human dimension of possibility in encounter (a potential richness far beyond 'identification with the other'). Metamorphosis: so as to emphasise the imperative to think in terms of the possibilities of change, and thereby of freedom. Metaphor: to invoke ways of thinking about connection and relatedness between discrete and dissimilar elements; about communicative resonances and affinities, that is to say, on the basis of incomparability – which may constitute a metaphorical image for conceiving the nature of a cosmopolitan public culture. The point, then, has been to open up an oblique perspective on the authority and the limitations of mainstream theory by way of indirection and incongruity. To see just what can happen when Ovid or the Habsburg Empire are pitched into the equation – what new insights might just be prompted.

CONCLUSION

In brief conclusion, what I am arguing for is an approach to the cosmopolitan agenda that goes beyond the ambition of exercising a conceptual and theoretical grip on it. I am advocating an engagement that is more committed to lived experience, and to creative exploration of the immensely commodious resource that is cultural complexity. In putting value on the creative force of metaphor, Paul Ricoeur writes: 'Lively expression is that which expresses existence as *alive*' (2003: 48). It is this vital matter of affording life to our engagement that I think is crucial – a 'vivifying principle'. This is about a 'thinking more' that is not reducible to more quantitatively, but amounts to more in dimensionality and tenor. I am minded of George Steiner's illuminating observations on the animating principle that informs art, music and literature: 'Aesthetic means embody-concentrated, selective interactions between the constraints of the observed and the boundless possibilities of the imagined. Such formed intensity of sight and of speculative ordering is, always, a critique. It says things that might be (have been, shall be) otherwise (1989: 11). This – this other modality and pitch of perception and knowing and of critique (involving 'a counter-statement to the world') – seems to me to be of profound importance. How might we relate it to our social and cultural concerns? This week, I by chance came across John Berger's new book, *Bento's Sketchbook* (2011) in my local bookshop, a book about Spinoza and about drawing, both. John Berger, I thought, is a figure who can maybe stand for what I am looking to, his work moving creatively between cosmopolitan political engagement (*A Seventh Man*, for example) and a cosmopolitan aesthetic sensibility. He has taught us much about another way of telling.

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