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FACELESS COSMOPOLITANISM: A REPLY TO ULF HANNERZ

Recent ethnocentric statements of prominent politicians (Theresa May, Donald Trump, Beata Szydło, Viktor Orbán, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan etc.) and trans-geographic revival of xenophobic attitudes may indicate that if there is any spectre haunting the contemporary world, it is not the spectre of cosmopolitanism. Neoliberal times of “anxious geopolitics”¹ seem to be better fitted for other “-isms”, to name just racism, nationalism, orientalism or imperialism which gradually form the shameful fundaments for dystopian world of anti-immigrant “bloody legislation”² and violent erasure of trouble-causing, i.e. Real differences.³ The history of social thought, however, clearly indicates that the most interesting cosmopolitan projects appear when the “cosmopolitan perspective”⁴ seems to be in retreat. Cosmopolitanism should be treated therefore not only as a concept describing an already existing political position or ethical attitude towards the cultural otherness, but above all as an epistemological tool challenging the status quo by the performative construction of the cosmos – in the sense of the democratically inhabited world. Much of the credit for it goes to such researchers as Martha Nussbaum, Kwame Anthony Appiah, Ulrich Beck, Jacques Derrida, and, last but not least, Ulf Hannerz⁵ who struggle „for a mixture of research and normative intervention” entering the “new *diplomatic* role of social scientist.”⁶

¹ S. Springer, *The Discourse of Neoliberalism: An Anatomy of a Powerful Idea*, Rowman & Littlefield, London–New York 2016.

² K. Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy. Volume 1*, transl. B. Fowkes, Penguin Books, London–New York 1990, p. 896.

³ S. Žižek, *Revolution at the Gates: A Selection of Writings of Lenin from February to October 1917*, Verso, London–New York 2002.

⁴ U. Hannerz, *Transnational Connections: Culture, People, Places*, Routledge, London–New York 1996.

⁵ M. Nussbaum, *Patriotism and Cosmopolitanism*, “Boston Review” 1994, vol. 19, no. 5, pp. 3–16; K.A. Appiah, *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers*, Penguin Books, London 2006; U. Beck, *The Cosmopolitan Vision*, transl. C. Cronin, Polity Press, Cambridge–Malden, MA 2006; J. Derrida, *On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness*, transl. M. Dooley, M. Hughes, Routledge, London–New York 2000; U. Hannerz, *Transnational Connections...*, *op. cit.*; U. Hannerz, *Writing Future Worlds: An Anthropologist Explores Global Scenarios*, Palgrave Macmillan, Houndmills–New York 2016.

⁶ B. Latour, *Whose Cosmos, Which Cosmopolitics: Comments on the Peace Terms of Ulrich Beck*, “Common Knowledge” 2004, vol. 10, no. 3, p. 451.

Borrowing from Bruno Latour⁷ and Isabelle Stengers⁸, we may say that the primary task of the cosmopolitan diplomat is to reveal the contingent character of the “arrangements sustaining the common world”⁹ and to widen our thinking about political subjectivity. Both dimensions are present in Ulf Hannerz’s thought which, from more than 30 years, continues to examine different types of cosmopolitanism particularly rejecting these visions of the concept which equate it solely with the position of the new economic-political elite.¹⁰ The Janus face of Hannerzian concept allows one to deal with much broader spectrum of cosmopolitan subjects: the beneficiaries of globalization (“happy-face cosmopolitanism”), people concerned with the dangerous course of current global politics (“somber-face cosmopolitanism”), and those who as urban migrants tend to cope with the “cultural diversity as a fact of life”, i.e. obvious part of their everyday experience (“straight-face cosmopolitanism”).¹¹ All of them are part of the same “global ecumene”¹² responsible for co-production of its inevitable tensions (as a result of conflicting logics of different cosmopolitanisms) and immense cultural diversity examined with great attention by anthropologists and cultural theorists.

As an urban scholar I especially appreciate the metropolitan context of Hannerz’s research with the examples from such various environments as Stockholm, Amsterdam, London, Lagos, Johannesburg or New York. Given the Greek, Christian, and even Kantian roots of the concept, it is hard to conceive cosmopolitanism otherwise than in connection to urban question. Leaving aside the related contradiction between the universal and the particular¹³, we may think of cities as exceptionally fruitful areas for theory and practice of common life¹⁴, ethics based upon of the recognition

⁷ B. Latour, *The Politics of Nature: How to Bring Sciences into Democracy*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA 2004.

⁸ I. Stengers, *The Cosmopolitical Proposal*, transl. L. Carey-Libbrecht, in: B. Latour, P. Weibel (eds.), *Making Things Public: Atmospheres of Democracy*, The MIT Press, Cambridge, MA 2005.

⁹ I. Fariás, A. Blok, *Introducing Urban Cosmopolitics: Multiplicity and the Search for a Common World*, in: A. Blok, I. Fariás (eds.), *Urban Cosmopolitics: Agencements, Assemblies, Atmospheres*, Routledge, London–New York 2016, p. 15.

¹⁰ See for example: J. Friedman, *Indigenous Struggles and the Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie*, “The Australian Journal of Anthropology” 1999, vol. 10, no. 1, pp. 1–14; D. DeLillo, *Cosmopolis*, Scribner, New York 2003.

¹¹ U. Hannerz, *Writing Future Worlds...*, *op. cit.*, p. 175.

¹² U. Hannerz, *Transnational Connections...*, *op. cit.*

¹³ See: D. Harvey, *Cosmopolitanism and the Geographies of Freedom*, Columbia University Press, New York 2009.

¹⁴ D. McLaren, J. Agyeman, *Sharing Cities: A Case of Truly Smart and Sustainable Cities*, The MIT Press, Cambridge, MA–London 2015; S. Stavrides, *Common Space: The City as Commons*, Zed Books, London 2016.

of uncanny strangeness¹⁵ or unconditional hospitality.¹⁶ This urban potential was explicitly pointed out by Jacques Derrida who more than 20 years ago sought for the revival of ancient (“Book of Numbers”) and medieval (“Stadtluft macht frei”) tradition of open cities, which should function nowadays as autonomous centers of cosmopolitanism, above and beyond “implacable juridical restrictions” of nation state.¹⁷ Today these “spaces of hope”¹⁸ for migrants and asylum-seekers find their imperfect materialization in so-called „sanctuary cities”, openly cosmopolitan areas, from Los Angeles to New York, protesting against anti-social and anti-immigrant policies of US government.¹⁹ This seems to be another proof for democratic power of the urban which in the influential interpretation of Henri Lefebvre consists of transformative encounters, creative organization of difference, and practical abolition of many anti-cosmopolitan divisions (urban-rural, central-peripheral or sameness-otherness).²⁰

Looking at the same problem from a slightly different, political-ecological perspective, cities turn out to be, however, the least hospitable places on Earth. Not only they are traversed by the new forms of enclosures, violent bordering or military urbanism²¹ but also share the responsibility for Anthropocene phenomena, i.e. new geological epoch in which a human impact on Earth is comparable to the great forces of nature. There are more and more signs that we are dealing here with an almost entirely urban affair with a strong emphasis put on capitalist reality (which may lead us to question the very notion of Anthropocene in favor of Urbanocene or, better yet, Capitalocene²²). According to Ricky Burdett and Philipp Rode, although cities occupy “less than 2 percent of the earth’s surface, urban areas concentrate ... between 60 and 80 percent of global energy consumption, and approximately 75 percent of CO₂ emissions.”²³ This means that none of the major transformations associated with a new geological epoch could be understood apart from the processes of (planetary)

¹⁵ J. Kristeva, *Strangers to Ourselves*, transl. L.S. Roudiez, Columbia University Press, New York 1991.

¹⁶ J. Derrida, A. Dufourmantelle, *Of Hospitality*, transl. R. Bowlby, Stanford University Press, Stanford, CA 2000.

¹⁷ J. Derrida, *On Cosmopolitanism...*, *op. cit.*, p. 11.

¹⁸ D. Harvey, *Spaces of Hope*, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh 2000.

¹⁹ T. Hunt, *Cities Can Provide a Sanctuary Against Trump – and Brexit*, “The Guardian”, 11.12.2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/dec/11/trump-brexit-cities-sanctuary-chicago-mayor> (access: 27.06.2018).

²⁰ H. Lefebvre, *The Urban Revolution*, transl. R. Bononno, University of Minnesota Press, London–Minneapolis, MN 2003; see: A. Merrifield, *The New Urban Question*, Pluto Press, London 2014.

²¹ See: S. Graham, *Cities Under Siege: The New Military Urbanism*, Verso, London–New York 2010; S. Mezzadra, B. Neilson, *Border as Method, or, the Multiplication of Labor*, Duke University Press, Durham, NC–London 2013.

²² See: J.W. Moore, *Capitalism in the Web of Life: Ecology and the Accumulation of Capital*, Verso, London–New York 2015.

²³ Cited in: A. Amin, N. Thrift, *Seeing Like a City*, Polity Press, Cambridge–Malden, MA 2016, p. 13.

urbanization²⁴: be it climate change, degradation of the biosphere or anthropization of land.²⁵ Cities as instances of second nature and “true planetary citizens”²⁶ are therefore profoundly responsible for degradation of so-called first nature and extinction of species potentially triggering the fulfillment of basic cosmopolitan nightmare – the destruction of the common world.

Such position forces us to think differently about the object and stakes of global politics. After focusing on “adjectival cosmopolitanisms” interested mainly, as David Harvey put it²⁷, in reconciliation between local differences and universal principles (e.g. “rooted”, “discrepant”, “rhizomatic” cosmopolitanism etc.) perhaps we should “simply” change the scale and ontological background of our investigation to conceive of the cosmos as more-than-human, deeply fragile, and to a large extent unknown reality. This is precisely the challenge posed by proponents of cosmopolitics (e.g. Bruno Latour, Isabelle Stengers)²⁸ towards the hegemonic (post-stoic and post-Kantian) versions of cosmopolitanism. The former invites us to radicalize our understanding of both cosmos and politics by associating them with multiplicity, dissensus, and uncertainty against post-political maladies intensified by the latter: superficial tolerance, consensus-driven politics, and unified, unquestionable vision of the common world. As Latour put it in his response to Ulrich Beck:

The presence of *cosmos* in *cosmopolitics* resists the tendency of *politics* to mean the give-and-take in an exclusive human club. The presence of *politics* in *cosmopolitics* resists the tendency of *cosmos* to mean a finite list of entities that must be taken into account. *Cosmos* protects against the premature closure of *politics*, and *politics* against the premature closure of *cosmos*.²⁹

Although this stands in stark contrast to the Greek notion of *oikouménē* (“known world”, “inhabited world”) and anthropocentric understanding of “citizen of the world”, which are the basis of many contemporary cosmopolitanisms, I believe that there is still some room for a fruitful encounter between both cosmopolitan approaches. What we need in this context is perhaps some version of “faceless cosmopolitanism” where the “lacking a face” stands both for non-human subjects entering the field of politics, as well as for unidentified character of the cosmos, referring to “the unknown constituted by... multiple divergent worlds”³⁰, and continuously overlooked threats of Capitalocene.

²⁴ N. Brenner, C. Schmid, *The 'Urban Age' in Question*, “International Journal of Urban and Regional Research” 2013, vol. 38, no. 3, pp. 731–755.

²⁵ See: C. Bonneuil, J.B. Fressoz, *The Shock of the Anthropocene: The Earth, History and Us*, transl. D. Fernbach, Verso, London 2017.

²⁶ A. Amin, N. Thrift, *op. cit.*, p. 34.

²⁷ D. Harvey, *Cosmopolitanism...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 98–114.

²⁸ I. Stengers, *op. cit.*; B. Latour, *Whose Cosmos...*, *op. cit.*

²⁹ B. Latour, “Whose Cosmos...” , *op. cit.*, p. 454.

³⁰ I. Stengers, *op. cit.*, p. 995.

The problem I raise here refers evidently to the question of precariousness and vulnerability of life which has much in common with at least two faces of Hannerzian cosmopolitanism (“somber-face” and “straight-face”), and whose protection seems as a normative principle of his entire *oeuvre*. I am advocating therefore only for an extension of multifaceted cosmopolitanism to cover other, non-human forms of life, somehow neglected by the face-centric projects of Western ethics³¹, as well as for increased sensitivity to always possible threat of destruction of more-than-human cosmos. This might contribute to further development of the cosmopolitan perspective and even stronger involvement of its proponents in an endless process of construction of common, democratically established world. That said, I would like to finish my postulative response with the famous words of Jacques Derrida: „cosmopolitans of all lands, yet another effort!”³²

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³¹ See: E. Lévinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, transl. A. Lingis, Duquesne University Press, Pittsburgh 1969; J. Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence*, Verso, London–New York 2004.

³² J. Derrida, *On Cosmopolitanism...*, *op. cit.*

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