

Glimpses Of Cosmopolitanism In

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In a video by the artist's collective Stalker, a man points to a lake and claims it as his spiritual home. Following the man's gesture Stalker identified the lake as being in Macedonia. No one can deny this man his Macedonian identity. However, after the ruins of a grand but short-lived empire, where is Macedonia? Or, rather, which State can claim to be the inheritor of the Macedonian heritage? These questions unsettled the conventional categories for identifying the location of scenes in a video that was part of a trans-national project called *Via Egnatia*. The artists had travelled along and gathered stories from the ancient road linking Rome with Istanbul. The building in which the video was displayed was already bristling with contradictions. It was a former mosque built for Jews who had converted to Islam during the Ottoman rule of the Greek city of Thessaloniki. Designed by Vitaliano Poseli in 1902, it nevertheless retained much of the structural form and decorative symbolism of a synagogue. In response to the massive influx of Greek refugees in 1922 it was converted into a hostel. After the extermination of the Jewish population by the Nazis it was used as an archaeological museum. The municipality of Thessaloniki was keen for this building to be utilised in the *Via Egnatia* project, since they saw it as an opportunity to showcase the city's multicultural history and promote its self-image as a crucial juncture at the crossroads of East and West.¹

Marina Fokidis, curator of the *Via Egnatia* project in Thessaloniki and Lorenzo Romitto (one of the founders of Stalker) were keen to put this rhetoric to work in ways that also benefited the displaced people that also travel on such roads. Everyone was conscious of the pernicious way nationalist narratives tend to privilege one collective trauma over all others. And in the specific case of the video, there was still the dilemma of how to name the place of the lake. The members of Stalker were aware that either the act of legitimisation implicit in the acceptance of the words and gesture of the man, or the act of censorship implicit in the erasure of this geo-political reference, would only intensify rivalry. In order to avoid the project being hijacked by a nationalist agenda, it was necessary to find a more subtle interplay between the mediating role of artists and the voices of the storytellers.

The aim of the project was not to resolve geo-political border disputes, but rather, as argued by Marina Fokidis, "to create a mindscape unfolding between the memories and the actuality, the visitors and the locality, the politics and the sentiment, the producers and the public". To achieve this 'mindscape' it was necessary to utilise Yeni Tzami, as one among many sites, in which there was the freedom to listen to contradictory claims of belonging. Fokidis and Romitto could create a platform for each of the different stories being told in the building—Macedonian Greek, Turkish, Kurdish, Albanian—but it would not work if each identity was confined to a bounded space. The aim was not to hear all the stories in isolation from each other but to create a scheme of parallel events in which all the differences would not only come up against each other, but also produce their common space.²

As a participant in the *Via Egnatia* symposium and observer of Stalker's practice, I found myself entangled in this complex process of mediation. In particular I was engaged in the discussion of how to represent cultural longing in a context of geo-political conflict. We agreed that each voice should find its own space and authority, as well as being positioned in relation to its neighbour. This placed a new responsibility on the respondent to live with the difference in the other's claim, and an obligation on the artists and curators to occupy an intermediate role that enables new possibilities to emerge. This discussion occurred during a parallel performance by Stalker in a retired Jewish people's home. While discussing the legacy of the Ottoman Empire, I found myself staring around the room and noted that the honour boards that lined the walls included figures with Greek, Italian, Sephardim and Ashkenazi names.

Before we left the home, a woman named Victoria Benizelou approached Lorenzo Romitto and expressed her thanks for the work of the artist collective Stalker. As she was speaking artists from Italy, France and Greece were still dispersed in various huddles around the room. Pointing to this gathering, she noted: "What all humans have in common is their mixture." With emphatic and tender poignancy she then declared: "It is this mixture that precedes and outlives any narrow national identity." She farewelled Lorenzo Romitto with this, the most loving phrase you could offer to a stranger: "From the moment

I met you I recognised that you were seeking for community." With the help of my friend Paul Carter I have translated her phrase *psahnaistai via koinonia* as 'seeking for community'. But I am not sure that 'seeking' captures the radial resonance of the Greek verb that combines both an outer and inner journey for self-discovery, and aims towards a state that may never be found. *Psahnaistai* refers to both a bittersweet awareness of an endless quest and a restlessness that blows between being and belonging. Upon hearing her utter this poignant articulation of the necessary and impossible 'seeking' for community, I caught a glimpse of cosmopolitanism.

THE COSMOPOLITAN SCENE

Cosmopolitanism has been used as a concept to open the horizons for being in the world. The Western origin of cosmopolitanism is usually associated with the Stoic philosophers. This school emerged after the collapse of the classical Greek polis and in the wake of Alexander's imperial adventures.³ The nucleus of identity and governance was suddenly catapulted onto a scale that was previously inconceivable and interspersed with foreign cultures. The Alexandrian vision of a fusion between Greek and Barbarian was short lived. What was more enduring was the ideal of co-existence with other people. A recent definition touches upon the wide terrain that this ideal has inspired: "In general cosmopolitanism endorses reflective distance from one's cultural affiliations, a broad understanding of other cultures and customs, and a belief in universal humanity."⁴ Philosophers, political theorists and cultural critics have long pondered whether such a definition gives too much weighting towards elitism and not enough to egalitarianism; how it can reconcile the tensions between dwelling and mobility, and whether it implies a relativist or absolutist worldview. Cosmopolitanism is a concept whose genealogy is both complicit with what Pagden calls the "civilising mission" of various European imperial projects, and a philosophical ideal that has sought to achieve a universal politics on the basis of reason rather than the sentiments of patriotism.



The Hospitality Of Art

Cosmopolitanism has always presumed the existence of an ideal type of cosmopolitan agent. Contemporary views on cosmopolitanism are still heavily influenced by the qualities of 'worldliness' and mobility. These qualities are a legacy of the enlightenment values that sought to transform the way truth and beauty was found. In the eighteenth and nineteenth-centuries the education of the European elite included a 'cultured' attitude to the world that culminated with a grand tour of the ruins and palaces of Western civilisation. "Travel broadens the mind" was a slogan that even Nietzsche endorsed.⁵ The Stoics were quick to endorse travel and education as the means of gaining wisdom. Cosmopolitanism was seen as a means of elevating an individual's perspective above the provincial and nationalist views on world affairs. However, even though both classical and enlightenment versions of cosmopolitanism sought to embrace all of humanity as members of a common heritage, they did not extend the same rights and status to everyone.

In Kant's writing there is the most explicit articulation of this model of 'patrician cosmopolitanism'. Kant's conception of cosmopolitanism is by no means utopian. It is carefully checked by his negative view on human nature as bearing an innate propensity to evil, his belief that power corrupts those who are in a position to execute it, and his claim that the ideal scale of governance is a small independent State. Cosmopolitanism is thus not a virtue that is to be pursued for its own qualities, but a moral process that can control but not extinguish the destructive drives in human nature, as well as temper the tyrannical urges and totalitarian tendencies in politics. Kant argues in explicit terms that cosmopolitanism is not a moral claim for a borderless world. Cosmopolitanism is, in his writing, an invitation for the freer circulation and visitation of people across borders, but this access is differentiated from unlimited hospitality. He casts the political rights of cosmopolitanism as subordinate to the rights of sovereignty. He also maintains that a republican model of State power is necessary to preserve the rights of the public and, as one commentator observed, "with a mixture of dignified self-assertion and self-deprecating good humour", Kant proposes that political leaders would still require the advice of idealistic philosophical moralists like himself.⁶

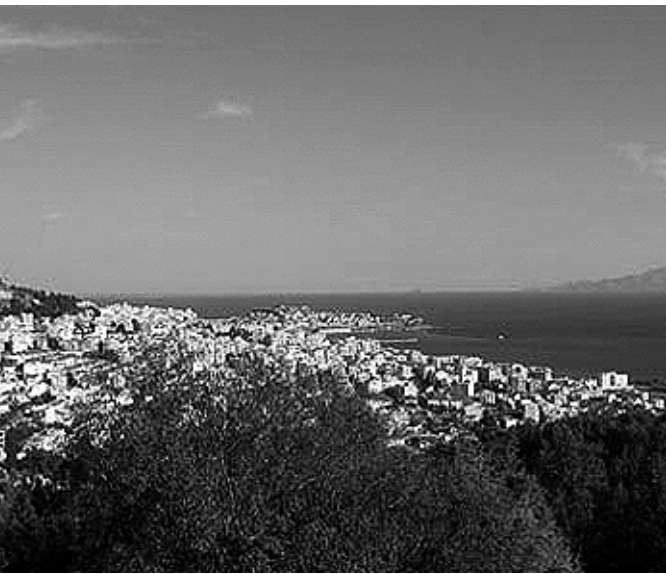
This top-down vision of cosmopolitanism has an intrinsic ambivalence towards the 'multitude'. The emphasis on a cosmopolitan education as a means to promote worldliness, and the development of civil institutions as mechanisms for not only ensuring public harmony but also controlling violence, presumes that the multitude has a singular propensity for self-destruction and parochialism. Patrician cosmopolitanism may appear as a benign model of governance, however it can only commence through an act of violence. Imagine a scene in which the cosmopolitan elites stand above the multitude and demand that they strip themselves of their primordial identities. The cosmopolitan elites pronounce the virtues of a new universal identity, but the multitude is also told that this will only come after the present one has been renounced. Such a scene can only provoke resentment because it presupposes a moral hierarchy, and in strategic terms, it is likely that a violent backlash would follow because an abstract identity offers little comfort for those who are facing specific threats. Patrician modes of cosmopolitanism have done little to develop new political structures that can secure the universal rights that they espouse and have tended to demean the moral capacity of the multitude.

There are no historical records that demonstrate the existence of an open city that has been built in pursuit of the virtues of universal rights or as a result of a tolerant educational system. However, there are numerous biographical narratives and travel stories that describe cosmopolitan experiences. In these stories the experience of traveling to foreign lands and encountering a mixture of people is central to the formation of a cosmopolitan consciousness. It is this gap between consciousness and conditions that has also perplexed writers. In 1939 H.G. Wells reflected on the persistence of the cosmopolitan ideal despite the absence of any record of its existence: "All history is against it. But all reality is for it."⁷ This paradoxical comment suggests that the survival of cosmopolitanism is itself a paradox. It exists but always in the form of a future-oriented nostalgia. Wells notes that the basic idea of human unity and a harmonious form of universal governance has been often expressed but never realised.

In more general terms historians have argued that cosmopolitan visions have been most vivid in times of systemic expansion and in the ruins of imperial adventures.⁸ When States break up or

new unions are formed and the intensity of living with difference reaches a critical level, then the ideals of cosmopolitanism provide a perspective for the entanglement of cultural differences. Cosmopolitan forms of consciousness are heightened by intensified flows or abrupt confrontations with cultural differences. This would suggest that amidst the turbulence of globalisation and unstable geo-political alignments there would be a strong demand for cosmopolitan thinking. However, there is little evidence to suggest that a form of patrician cosmopolitanism is likely to reshape the contemporary political arena. For not only are political leaders adopting populist positions, they are also proclaiming that their authority is enhanced in proportion to their hostility to other 'elitist' claims to a moral monopoly. This positions the Kantian idealistic philosophical moralist far from the centre of political governance. Leaders prefer to surround themselves with the calculators of media hits and forecasters of political mood. Similarly, if travel was central to the formation of an earlier form of cosmopolitan elites, then for the contemporary elite, travel is more likely to narrow the mind. Marc Auge's ethnography of the non-places of global culture—from business class flight service to standardised cash dispensing machines—is testament to the repetitive continuities that frame the experience of the elites who are constantly on the move.⁹ For travel to broaden the mind there must also be the shock and pain of difference. Today cosmopolitanism is more readily associated with the multitude. They are the ones who travel the jagged roads of exile, or the ones who must confront the turbulence of globalisation without leaving their homes.

It is therefore not surprising that the more recent accounts of cosmopolitanism have approached it from a totally different direction. They argue that a new form of worldliness and mobility can be traced if we look from the 'bottom-up'. From this angle the multitude is already cosmopolitan. This perspective, what Paul Gilroy refers to as a "vernacular cosmopolitanism", gives particular emphasis to the popular and hybrid practices of diasporic culture that have shaped metropolitan life.¹⁰ Manray Hsu also adopts a similar perspective but adds a further political dimension. He has proposed a concept of "decentralised cosmopolitanism" to address the complex network of cross-cultural and self-



organised collectives that are formed in specific localities. This network also offers an alternative to the centrality and dominance of Western cultural hierarchies.¹¹

My aim is not to question the efficacy of either the Eurocentric patrician or decentralised vernacular perspectives on cosmopolitanism. It is my belief that cosmopolitan ideals do not rest exclusively at either end of the spectrum. It is unlikely that the flow of cosmopolitanism is either top-down or bottom-up, and more likely that the two positions are dependent upon each other. There are no agents who can extinguish their own conflicted nature and therefore fully embody the ideals of cosmopolitanism. The reconciliation of the tension between evil and progress is always a social movement based on consensus not fiat. However, the consensus also requires arenas for rational debate. Thus the social movement is also a convergence of different forms of historical consciousness. This requires a different perspective. I would suggest that cosmopolitanism is an ideal that is articulated in moments of critical intervention. It does not emanate solely from above or below but from the middle of social consciousness. Felix Guattari also argued that “collective intellectuality” comes from the midst of cultural flows and social circumstances, rather than from the bottom-up. He stressed that creativity does not follow a straight line of historical progress or appear as a model that can be imposed from above.¹² If we accept the premise that cosmopolitanism emerges when the dominant order of things is unsettled, then we may find more traces of its existence by considering the little connections that slip between cultures, and the small degrees of overlap between different people that can produce a glimpse of cosmopolitan consciousness.

In the contemporary context, the rise of thinking on cosmopolitanism is directly linked to a loss of faith in the modernist conception of a secular national identity and the decline in the socio-economic autonomy of the nation state.¹³ The fragmentation of social structures and norms and the complex processes for realigning the self with the world have produced new conceptions of solidarity and trans-national forms of social consciousness. Amidst the turbulent patterns of global change the processes of adjustment have also been marked by dynamism and flux. Hence, while we can note the drive towards cosmopolitan thinking in new trans-national political, ecological and cultural movements, it is also worth noting the more subtle, ephemeral and fugitive expressions of cosmopolitan consciousness. At both ends, it can be observed that the conceptions of identity and difference have shifted away from the earlier essentialist and mechanistic models,

as they have adopted more complex and hybrid notions of subjectivity and affiliation. Therefore, the aim of this text is not to bear witness to new modes of global consensus, or to point to the structural shifts that have opened up cosmopolitan connections in the world, but to consider the possibility of gaining a glimpse of cosmopolitanism from small gestures in specific places.

My perspective is informed by the assumption that cosmopolitanism is not only pushed forward by the great transformations of globalisation, but also occurs in subtle ways during small moments of transition. If, as Ulrich Beck correctly noted, the new ‘earth politics’ needs television to be effective, the culture of cosmopolitanism also lives within specific transnational networks and on local streets.¹⁴ The attention that is given to this cultural domain may require a new perspective that combines a theoretical understanding of global change and a capacity to observe the micro-connections that occur in specific places. To grasp the dynamic of cultural cosmopolitanism we may need to not only consider the big shifts and wide networks of global change, but also ponder how little commonality is now necessary before people can find a connection with others. I will ask whether it is possible to draw any hope from the fragments of idealism and opportunism, absurdity and seriousness, confusion and cooperation that for good or bad, are creating links between different people. My aim is not to consider cosmopolitanism as an elusive ideal that may one day inform good governance and provide the touchstone of ethical conduct, but rather to consider whether in the complex process of dispersal and integration there is also an attendant cosmopolitan consciousness.

THE COSMOPOLITANISM OF ART

If cosmopolitanism only appears as a yearning, then is this not a sign of its conceptual failure, limitation and impossibility? Can the idea of cosmopolitanism ever serve as a complement or counterpoint to the established notions of community? Why do the meek and the artistic collectives hang onto an idea that has never materialised as a viable institution, let alone as a rival structure to the tribes, communities and states in which our allegiances have been confirmed? This line of questioning implies weakness because it assumes that the strength of an identity is in proportion to the scale of its footprint. To grasp the forms of cosmopolitan agency and community we need a different perspective on identity. One that is more attuned to subtlety. One that is more alert to the faintness of a form that comes and goes but barely registers its presence. Most important of all is the need for a perspective that can comprehend the fluidity of mixture.

When Victoria Benizelou recognised that Stalker were ‘seeking for community’, she was also touching on an attitude towards others that Norberto Bobbio has described as “meekness”. She offered thanks not only for the smiling generosity that was expressed by the artists, but also for the way in which their attention to the small details of everyday life created an atmosphere of surprising connection with the residents in the Jewish home. The meek, according to Bobbio, also find hope in the fragments of the past and in the fleeting hints of recognition with the other. Bobbio is clear that meekness must not be confused with the sadness of humility, or compared to other passive states such as modesty, submission or resignation. On the contrary, he asserts that meekness revels in its capacity to survive and remain calm in the face of adversity, and is untouched by the tendrils of vengeance and fury. Meekness, he

insists, is a unilateral social virtue: it does not expect reciprocity. A meek person does not brighten their kindness, curiosity and concern in proportion to the other’s power. Bobbio praises the meek not for their display of a superior form of good will, but for the way that they behave as if their generosity simply exists, like a constant pulse. It continues even when every gesture goes unnoticed. For, as Bobbio states: “The meek are cheerful because they are inwardly convinced that the world to which they aspire is better than the one they are forced to inhabit.”¹⁵

The world that the meek anticipate is a cosmopolitan one. Benizelou recognised that the gift offered by the members of Stalker was not in the service of a civic duty, but closer to what Derrida calls “the ethic of hospitality”.¹⁶ In the act of hospitality the guest and host are mutually entangled. It is not one party offering a service to the other, which in all its kindness would still imply an outstanding obligation for compensation, but rather an open gesture in which both find recognition. If we look at cosmopolitanism through the prism of small gestures made in specific places, then its general image takes a new form. Cosmopolitanism cannot be paraded in the rainbow colors of utopia, or excavated from beneath the rubble of nationalism; it is not summoned by superior knowledge or even achievable by benevolent fiat. It has no fixed state. It exists only in the act of relating to the other. Bobbio says that the interest displayed towards others can be the result of an instrumental calculation of the potentiality that they may know the truth. It may also be a sign of prudence in the face of greater power. These are self-interested and defensive reactions to threat and opportunity. However, in meekness Bobbio finds a more virtuous agency that is sustained by the anticipation of a cosmopolitan world, and undeterred by the realisation that it has never appeared in all its fullness.

THE HOSPITALITY OF ART

It would be a mistake to assume that art is a mere extension of politics and knowledge. Art seeks to offer a different kind of attention to pain and relief. The dispersal of art into the streets of everyday life is inspired by the desire to touch public consciousness. As suggested by the exhibition *The Interventionists*, at the Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art, artists are not always striving to create precious objects or simply enhance their access to a broader audience, but aiming to “scatter the experience of art” in the public sphere.¹⁷

Scattering is an unlikely strategy for redeeming lost stories and creating new social bonds. However, this strategy also invites its opposite—swarming. A common feature of collaborative practice is not just the distribution of art in ‘unlikely’ places but also the mass attraction of like-minded people. The turbulent gathering of information, insights and ideas, should at one level create more confusion and lead towards entropy. Yet, out of this chaos, lines of connection and fields of possibility are also heightened by a method that resembles a socialised version of what Rupert Sheldrake calls “morphic resonance”.¹⁸ In the manifesto by Stalker there is a similar suggestion that creative energy is generated by the oscillation between dispersal and gathering. They stress their implication in situations where they confront the limits of their own self-knowledge and the complexity of a territory:

Stalker is a collective subject that engages research and actions within the landscape with particular attention to the areas around the city’s margins and forgotten urban space, and abandoned areas or

regions under transformation. These investigations are conducted across several levels, around notions of practicality, representations and interventions on these spaces that are referred to here as 'Actual Territories'. Stalker is together custodian, guide and artist for these 'Actual Territories'. In the multiple roles we are disposed to confront at once the apparently unsolvable contradictions of salvaging through abandonment, of representation through sensorial perception, of intervening within the unstable and mutable conditions of these areas.¹⁹

In the *Via Egnatia* project Stalker set out to retrace the path of the ancient highway that linked Rome to Constantinople and to this day continues to serve as a major commercial axis and the road most travelled by refugees, gypsies and displaced people in the Balkans. Stalker work by gathering bits of information from historical texts, interviewing people and searching among the debris of abandoned spaces. In Thessaloniki they visited the Italian Consulate's archive in order to gain insight into the history of the Jewish community. On arrival, they also inquired about the adjacent building. The Director informed them it was merely the concrete shell of a building that previously housed a tobacco processing plant. Stalker were intrigued and pleaded to gain access. After some reluctance he authorised their entry and Stalker discovered, in this 'actual territory' a small archive from the years 1941–43. It contained student documents of the Jewish members of the Italian community and reports from the Italian ministry on how to develop a 'colonial man'. No scholar would dream of searching for records in the darkened spaces of a building that contained a decade of dampness and still smelt of stale tobacco, and where faint clouds of concrete dust puffed around one's every step.

This discovery was not an accident. It was directed by their own attunement towards the meanings that lurk within 'Actual Territories'. Their propensity to stalk, to strategically wander through spaces that others would ignore, but in which they believe that life mutates and continues to develop according to a different tempo, is similar to the figure of the guide in Tarkovsky's film *Stalker*. These discoveries and interventions will hardly change the world but they do provide important lessons. The members of the collective move throughout the city armed with mobile phones and video cameras. They constantly keep track of each other's movements through SMS. Their methodology is different to the flâneur who would go 'botanising on the asphalt' of the modern city. It is not individual epiphanies before the discovery of a hidden architectural gem, but rather a collective re-mapping of the urban margins. Like the flâneur they seek to awaken citizens from their blasé attitude towards the secret folds between the past and the novelty in the present, but as Nato Thompson observed about political artists in the 1990s, they are not content with representing politics, but desirous of entering the scene physically: "That is, they place their work into the heart of the political situation itself."²⁰

Stalker usually moves quickly between different sites within a city. On some occasions they may chose to camp in a specific location. However, spending time in one place is not designed as an opportunity for accumulative research. Rather than gathering data for subsequent processing, they focus their effort on determining what can be done in this specific place within the limited time and the available resources. Even in these situations where the focus is on understanding local

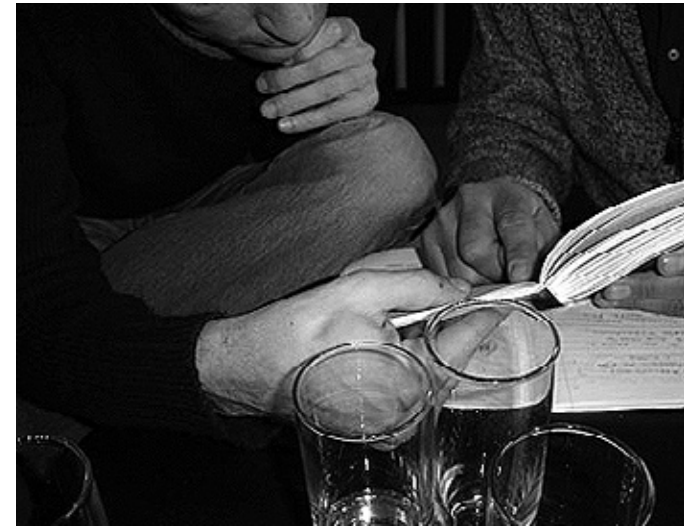
concerns, there is also a process of connecting with other communities and creating an inter-local network. The use of cameras, and in particular the video recorder is therefore both an archival tool and a performative device. They switch it on and become seriously playful—reporting their fleeting insights in the form of a 'breaking news flash', or posing for group shots in the form of the apostles portrayed by a Renaissance painter. Their discoveries are quickly posted on the web (www.egnatia.info). The effect is not to submerge art under a political agenda, or provide data for an eventual analysis. The camera is not a recorder of evidence, but a companion in the act of witnessing and a relay device in the interminable network of message making. The gaps in scholarship and the tensions caused by an activism that is here today and gone tomorrow are visible to all. However, to judge art from the perspective of these faults is to miss the point of hospitality.

THE COMING COMMUNITY

The contemporary conditions of conviviality have presented a profound challenge to artists. Stalker set out to explore the shifting form that conviviality takes in different contexts. They may seek alternative sites to produce art and create new kinds of social experience, but they are still, in part, dependent on the commodity fetishism of the capitalist art market and the ideological objectives of the institutions of culture.²¹ Stalker is not alone in this quest for new sites and new relationships. Artists and collectives throughout the world have been seeking to animate the interactions that can occur within an institution and extend the modes in which that can relate to their audience. However, while this form of cultural engagement moves towards opening dialogue and creating connections with other people, the dominant art discourse persists with a methodology that privileges the preciousness of the object and the uniqueness of the artist. The effect is to contain the more complex set of social relations within the accepted standards of art.²² It is for this reason that in recent times artists have sought to highlight the role of the network in their practice. This of course does not elevate them beyond the reach of the fetish. Even the network can become a corporate brand, and in some instances, art dealers have presented themselves as investors in the expansion of non-material artistic networks.²³ To escape the incontrovertible logic of commodity fetishism requires a radical shift in perspective on agency and community. The emphasis must not only shift from the production of an object or even a network that can be branded as an entity, but to the initiation of self-generating flows that create their own community.

Stalker stress that the collective and collaborative practice offers an intimation of community, but while being open to the needs of the other it does not propose a new structure that can accommodate difference:

It is a process where the producers and receivers play a common game; that's the reason why we have never conceived Stalker as a group but as an inter-related and open system that is growing and emerging through its actions and through all the individuals that operate with Stalker. A reality without one physical body, not even one of the persons who gave life to it. 'We' have always been an entity, comprised of others' who—without pretending to be us— participate in the activities of becoming us in their/our practice. This way Stalker could be anyone. Stalker is a desiring community, where no one belongs and where individuals encounter each other. It is an unstable entity, a temporary community, which is founded on possibilities,





*on desire, on intention, on promise and waiting.*²⁴

Stalker cannot offer itself as a model for community building. When Romitto describes the operation of their practice as an “inter-related and open system,” “a desiring community,” “a temporary community,” there are echoes of Giorgio’s Agamben’s concept of the “coming community.”²⁵ According to its own logic, such a community could not address the social needs for continuity and coherence that come with more stable forms of dwelling. When Stalker arrive in a specific location, and even when they have stayed long in one place, they do not present a new blueprint for community building. There is no pre-defined structure, with its own rules, explicit codes of conduct, set goals and mechanisms for regulating exclusion. There is simply the optimism that the communal system will emerge in the encounter with the other. For as Francesco Careri states, Stalker lacks any fixed form of identity: “Stalker is something that transpires, a moment that we share, it’s a situation.”²⁶ The emphasis is not on claiming the city in the name of cosmopolitanism, but in the co-production of perspectives and social relationships for a coming community. The function of their practice is neither the production of iconic objects, nor the construction of a new social hierarchy, but simply the art of mediation.

If Stalker does not offer an objective alternative, then we must look more closely at their faith that something else comes from the fleeting encounters between strangers. Their refusal to build a monument for the cosmopolitan city raises even more questions about the meekness of cosmopolitan agency. If the

work of art is not completed in the construction of an object, but only realised in the unending experience of a coming community, then is there nothing more than the savouring of exquisite moments of novelty or is this intimation also a form of nostalgia for a different future with others? Where can we find the traces of this elusive cosmopolitanism? In Stalker’s manifesto and to a certain extent in their practice, we can see that the juxtaposition of cultural differences, and the invitation for different people to come together, is driven by a desire to gain a glimpse at a cosmopolitan community that is always in the process of becoming. The glimpse that art offers is not stable; it is more like the flickering recognition of a potential for change that will never reveal itself if one code serves as the pervasive screen through which everything else must pass. Without hospitality, there is no hint of cosmopolitanism.

What is it that art does that is so exquisite in its execution of the political that differentiates it from politics? I have been arguing that artists do not deliver documents which reveal the condition of cosmopolitanism, but rather that they take an active role in the mediation of its emergence. This is not an exercise that can be conducted through solitary reflection and experimentation. Artists now seek to come closer to a community, not simply to reveal its secrets but to realise the inherent desire for conviviality. Mediation is the process of working out the next step for living together in times when the perplexity of difference is almost overwhelming. It is not just a revelation of the inner truth of a personal identity, or an outline of the broader social structure but the action of putting together different sets of interests so that they can work on each other simultaneously and thereby create what Lu Jie calls a “social montage.”²⁷

The solidarity that is promised by collectives like Stalker should not be confused with the utopian promises of universal equality and harmonious co-existence. To call for the end of borders will not ensure space for everyone. It may even expose more people to being hostage to even greater forms of promiscuous and lascivious force. There is no doubt that people are being flung around by global forms of turbulence that both lifts them out of their known boundaries and also drops them into unknown spaces. Turbulence also produces a surplus of opportunities for cosmopolitanism. If the potentiality for cosmopolitanism is so banal, then as Mika Hannula has already suggested the ‘tornado’ question for art is—what prevents its activation?²⁸

When H.G. Wells expressed both the absence of historical traces of a cosmopolitan civilisation, and the persistent desire for cosmopolitanism, he maintained the use of the present tense. To repeat his paradox: “All history is against it. But all reality is for it”. This conflicted state suggests that cosmopolitanism exists in us like the life force that seeks connection with other people. There is no shortage of examples and information about the peculiar dynamic that holds the self-other relationship in a twisted knot of ethical love and boundless violence; what is lacking is a framework that can combine a personal ethics with social action. Cosmopolitanism is not just a longing for a better life, or a moral benchmark against which all the shortfalls of cynical politicking can be measured. It already exists in the small gestures of meek agency. It always emerges in the fluid structures of the coming community. This form of agency and community may lack the stature of heroic absolutes and monumental forms but it does not preclude sociality.

I began this essay with the challenge at Yeni Tzami, where the documentation of a gesture that pointed towards cultural nationalism prompted a process of mediation over the forms

of a trans-national dialogue on cultural exchange. My journey through the practices of cosmopolitan dialogue has led me to observe that while artists do not have the answers to the issues that we face in the world, they have developed techniques for finding the questions, with which they can cross-examine the perplexity of our common condition. This collaborative methodology has shifted the emphasis of contemporary art practice from what Hsu called the “cultural representation” of difference to the mediation between the jostling differences that co-exist in our midst.²⁹ The aim of this kind of practice could be described in equal measure as both interventionist and meek. It does not point towards new transcendent categories or a new hierarchy that can be superimposed above all others. The only hope that it offers is to create a framework, in which we can engage with the plurality of differences without the violent annihilation of the other.

These artistic methodologies stand in stark relief to those executed in the mainstream debates on cultural identity. Social scientists and political commentators have failed to appreciate the cosmopolitanism that is always already in our midst, because the traditional language for social measurement is not fine enough. They assume that structures have to be fixed to be real. They do not count the ways in which mixture shapes our everyday life. There remains a preference for the hard and static. As a consequence they do not tell the whole story of who we are and increasingly, this way of seeing recognises less and less whom we are becoming. Seeing the reality of cosmopolitanism is difficult. The pathos of cosmopolitanism is often justified by the lack of place. Cosmopolitanism is reduced to a general dreaming, because it is somehow removed from the messy process of building a specific place in the world. It is often presented as being in opposition to any specific attachment to place, without sovereignty and therefore not part of reality. The etymological links between the real, the royal and the estate are not coincidental. They reflect the patterned association between power and place. However, this pathos is not confined to a lack of place, but also the ambiguity of its function. The place of cosmopolitanism may need to be addressed in a different way. Its location may best be determined by asking the question: Where is the gesture for including the other?

COSMOPOLITANISM AFTER THE WAR ON TERROR

This question is an increasingly pressing one—2001 was the year in which some of the humanitarian principles of liberal democracies were punctured and the complex issues arising from globalisation were tackled. After that year the flows of people and ideas were to be regulated by a new set of criteria. Three new trajectories have reshaped the cultural and political horizons of contemporary life. First, the war on terror was an extension of the war on refugees. This was not only a militarisation of the civil processes of border control, but an attempt to reclaim the markers of national sovereignty in a time of global flows. Second, the state has reversed post war processes of institution building and encouraged an expansion of the free market in the administration of welfare, security and cultural matters. This shift in public policy has resulted in a massive transfer of public wealth from state institutions to private companies. Third, the civil liberties and human rights that were slowly gained in the twentieth-century have now been qualified, restricted or suspended. In this new culture of ambient fear, not only was the agent of terror invisibly dispersed into society, the defensive attitudes of vigilance and suspicion were transformed as the highest civic duties.

All members in the community were asked to 'dob in' strangers, or as one community group suggested in their car bumper stickers: "Help the government. Honk if you are a terrorist!" The forms of mobility and complex cultural interactions that were facilitated by the processes of globalisation have now become the major issues that challenge liberal democracies. These issues have challenged the fundamental principles of social cohesion and political control. This is not a challenge that either the left or the right disputes. They may resent different aspects or resist different consequences, however, at present neither of the conventional political ideologies has developed a framework that can address the fullness of the issues that result from globalisation. It is as if a Pandora's box has been opened and rather than trying to put things back inside, there is now a desire to create a new diversion elsewhere. I would argue that the war on terror is inspired in large part by the anxiety over global mobility and complexity.

The appeal of the war in the contemporary political imaginary is paradoxically strengthened by the steady hollowing out of civic values that the politicians are claiming to defend. While the process of globalisation undermined and fragmented the structures for national cultural cohesion and economic coordination, this also had the effect of producing societies in which the forms of identification and affiliation were more diverse and widespread. This could be witnessed in the short term and instrumental relationship between global corporations and local communities, but also in the demise of traditional forms of political membership. Today, who feels at home in any of the mainstream political parties? Not even ex-Prime Ministers like Malcolm Fraser recognise the relationship between the founding philosophies of their parties and the current policies on such crucial matters as migration, refugees and the environment. The elevation of a new politics of ambient fear and random scapegoating has not only unhinged the possibilities of moral self-righteousness and economic opportunism but it has reduced philosophical principles to a state of ruin. The conventional categories by which people felt unity, the sources of collective hope and the bases upon which political conviction was made to have a higher purpose are now riddled with despair and cynicism.

Amongst the ruins and in the fragments of everyday life artists, such as the members of Stalker, have found new footholds for cultural renewal and political resistance. In the flows of globalisation they have seen not just the ruptures of traditional social structures but also the possibilities for cosmopolitan relations in the world. They look at the forces of social change, not as a one-way street that only leads towards destruction, but as an ambivalent and contradictory set of events. They resisted the aggressive assimilationist ideologies and noted that the problem with multiculturalism is not that it is too mushy, but rather that it is always served cold. They have turned against the politics of fear to demand a new political culture—a more hybrid and universal form of multiculturalism that revitalises the forms of hospitality and ethical relations with the other.

Notes

¹ *Via Egnatia—A Path of Displaced Memories*, is a project by Osservatorio Nomade, Stalker—Rome, Autogeree—Paris, Oxymoron—Athens. Marina Fokidis curated the conference and installation of works in the Yeni Tzami. The conference and exhibition were held between 3–17 February, 2005

² Personal correspondence with Marina Fokidis, 25 November 2005

³ Anthony Pagden, 'Cosmopolitanism as Imperialism', *Constellations* 7: 3–22,

2000: 6

⁴ Amanda Anderson, 'Cosmopolitanism, Universalism and the Divided Legacies of Modernity', in Pheng Cheah and Bruce Robbins (eds), *Cosmopolitics: Thinking and Feeling Beyond the Nation*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998: 267

⁵ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, trans. Walter Kaufmann, New York: Vintage, 1974: 342

⁶ Allen Wood, 'Kant's Project for Perpetual Peace', in Pheng Cheah and Bruce Robbins (eds), *Cosmopolitics: Thinking and Feeling Beyond the Nation*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998: 61

⁷ Quoted in Derek Heater, *World Citizenship and Government: Cosmopolitan Ideas in the History of Western Political Thought*, London: MacMillan, 1996: ix

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Marc Auge, *Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity*, London: Verso, 1995

¹⁰ Paul Gilroy, *After Empire: Melancholia or Convivial Culture*, Oxford: Routledge, 2004

¹¹ Manray Hsu, 'Networked Cosmopolitanism', in Nick Tsoutas (ed.), *Knowledge + Dialogue + Exchange*, Sydney: Artspace, 2005: 80

¹² Felix Guattari, *Chaosmosis: An Ethico-Aesthetic Paradigm*, trans. Paul Bains and Julian Pefanis, Sydney: Power Publications, 1995: 129

¹³ Ulrich Beck, *World Risk Society*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 1999

¹⁴ Ibid: 8

¹⁵ Roberto Bobbio, *In Praise of Meekness*, trans. Teresa Chataway, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000: 31

¹⁶ Jacques Derrida, *Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness*, trans. Mark Dooley, London: Routledge, 2002: 16

¹⁷ Nato Thompson and Gregory Sholette (eds), *The Interventionists: Users' Manual for the Creative Disruption of Everyday Life*, Cambridge: MIT Press; Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art, 2004

¹⁸ Rupert Sheldrake, *The Presence of the Past: Morphic Resonance and the Habits of Nature*, London: Collins, 1998

¹⁹ Source: <http://digilander.libero.it/stalkerlab/tarkowsky/manifesto/manifesting.htm>

²⁰ op cit: 13–14

²¹ See Okwui Enwezor, 'The Artist as Producer in Times of Crisis' and Nick Tsoutas, 'The Paradoxes of Space in Contemporary Art', in Scott McQuire and Nikos Papastergiadis (eds), *Empires, Ruins+Networks: The Transcultural Agenda in Art*, Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2005

²² Despite the influence in the critical circles of international art biennales and the art academy of Nicolas Bourriaud's *Relational Aesthetics*, on the rise of collaborative strategies by artists in the 1990s, there is an even stronger aversion to the uses of philosophical and political concepts to grasp the implications of contemporary art. See Nicolas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, Dijon: Les presses du reel, 2002. For a commentary on this theoretical backlash see: Thomas McEvelley, 'Documenta 11', *Frieze* 69, 2002: 82

²³ This is an observation expressed to me by the artist Pavel Buchler, 12 November 2005

²⁴ Marina Fokidis, 'The Site as Textile of Paths and Relations: Netting the Egnatia: A Dialogue between Marina Fokidis and Lorenzo Romitto', in Scott McQuire and Nikos Papastergiadis (eds), *Empires, Ruins+Networks: The Transcultural Agenda in Art*, Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2005: 282

²⁵ Giorgio Agamben, *The Coming Community*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993

²⁶ Francesco Careri, *Stalker* (catalogue), Bordeaux; Lyon: capcMuseum d'Art contemporain; Fage Editions, 2004: 82

²⁷ Lu Jie, 'Locale and Internationale—Resituating Global Networks', in Kim Hong-Hee (ed.), *World Contemporary Art in the Eyes of Asia*, Gwanju: 6th Gwanju Biennale Asian Art Forum, 2005: 125

²⁸ Mika Hannula, 'The Blind Leading the Naked—The Politics of Small Gestures', in Deniz Unsal (ed.), *Art, City and Politics in an Expanding World*, Istanbul: Istanbul Biennial, 2005: 185

²⁹ Manray Hsu, 'Networked Cosmopolitanism', in Nick Tsoutas (ed.), *Knowledge + Dialogue + Exchange*, Sydney: Artspace, 2005: 76





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