

# The Cause of Cosmopolitanism

Dispositions, Models, Transformations

Patrick O'Donovan and  
Laura Rascaroli (eds)

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PETER LANG

## Introduction: Cosmopolitanism between Spaces and Practices

### Cosmopolitan Spaces

You are standing in the Pantheon in Rome. As you walk from the porch into the rotunda, you suddenly realize that the building's dominant axis is vertical. You experience an atmospheric change, too: the shaft of sunlight that penetrates the building through the oculus, as it falls on and then gradually moves around the coffered dome, transforms your sense of space. As your eye is drawn upwards, you sense, through the void of the open oculus, a connection with 'another world.'<sup>1</sup> The building assumes a symbolic identity, in that the rotunda mirrors the dome of the heavens; by virtue of its dedication to all of the gods, it is elaborated as a space bearing complex meanings that are dynastic as well as religious. But, because light and air connect the inside and outside, its impact is more than abstract: the epiphanic realization of the temporal as well as the spatial significance of the light (your gaze must shift as the shaft of sunlight makes its ways around the dome) suddenly creates the sense of an existential bond with the vast and changing expanse of the cosmos itself. Through the passage of light,

1 On the cosmic aspects of the building and the complexity of the geometric and architectural features through which they are expressed, see William L. MacDonald: 'Rome was the temple of the whole world, and the Pantheon the temple of all that was Roman', in *The Pantheon: Design, Meaning, and Progeny* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1976), p. 24. The oculus is nine meters in diameter, and is open to the sky forty-five meters over the paving on which you stand (MacDonald, p. 33).

the cosmic sense induced by the building is intensified: the tangible space in which you find yourself connects with the imponderable forces which are active in the planetary sphere beyond. Here, the specific realization of a distinct, if complex, cosmopolitan disposition is harnessed in support of an outlook that is ultimately despotic: many peoples are governed by what is presented as a unified cosmic principle.<sup>2</sup> But, beyond the ideological project of which it is an expression, the connection between the dome and the limitless space you glimpse through the open oculus, and with which you can somehow assume a relation by observing the passage of the light coming through it, seems to convey something momentous: the possibility that you as subject can have almost a personal tie to the cosmos, even as its vastness and complexity puts your understanding of it and of the world you inhabit into doubt.<sup>3</sup>

What the Pantheon also reveals is that a symbol can give substance to a relationship that has an inescapably imaginary component.<sup>4</sup> It is one realization of what the cosmopolitan outlook might represent, both for the Romans who conceived and built it and for us today, as a cultural and historical artefact of seemingly limitless potential. At the same time, the

2 See again MacDonald, who observes that the dedication to all of the gods serves to fuse the religious with the identities of the ruler and the state (p. 84).

3 On such impacts of cosmic consciousness on the thinking subject, see Pierre Hadot, *Exercices spirituels et philosophie antique* (Paris: Albin Michel, 2002), pp. 301–2.

4 On the ways in which empire gave increased scope to an identification with cosmopolitanism in Rome, see Pauline Kleingeld and Eric Brown, 'Cosmopolitanism', in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. by Edward N. Zalta, <<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2009/entries/cosmopolitanism/>> (accessed 30 September 2009); and Charles S. Maier, who points out that empires do confer universal legal status, but in the context of a variety of citizenship that is somewhat conscriptive, in '“Being There”: Place, Territory, and Identity', in Seyla Benhabib, Ian Shapiro and Danilo Petranović, eds, *Identities, Affiliations, and Allegiances* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 67–84 (p. 82). See also Daniele Archibugi, who concludes that in any theory of cosmopolitanism the distinction between *demos* and *cosmos* in fact perdures, in 'Demos and Cosmopolis', in Daniele Archibugi, ed., *Debating Cosmopolitics* (London: Verso, 2003), pp. 257–72 (p. 258). In other words, their union here is imaginary.

cosmopolitan emerges from this space as a cause – an eminently political one. In brief, in contemplating such a space we can recognize something of the magnitude of a project, both ethical and political, which takes the cosmos as its object. And we can begin to discern some of the characteristic issues which cosmopolitanism brings in its train: the basis of allegiances where our place within the cosmos is in question; the legitimacy of discourses which claim to embody universal values, political or cultural; and how a relation to the cosmos affects self-understanding.

You are in the city, at street level, a space governed by the ‘polygamy of place’:<sup>5</sup> one city street, because it equates with innumerable others all over the globe, is borderless. The other world is simultaneously this world. The street confronts you with some at least of the effective conditions of cosmopolitanism today, and also with the factors that militate against it. Like the Pantheon, the street is emblematic: it captures the demands and the tensions that result from migrational and transnational movements; from the clash between local, national and cosmopolitan perspectives; from the interaction of different cultures, whether through mass media or through direct contact. What the street exposes you to is a diverse and diffuse set of interacting cosmopolitanisms, all of which can be aligned with a general, if precarious, model centred on the more or less pressing engagements they seem to solicit of you, the individual subject, citizen, migrant. And there is the further possibility that the city will emerge as a site of cosmopolitan struggle, one where a distinctive duty of hospitality will be asserted and which will, once again, help to mediate the demands which a sometimes unstable, sometimes fractious globalization will make of you as a citizen.<sup>6</sup> The street is increasingly transnational and so has a

5 Ulrich Beck, *Cosmopolitan Vision*, trans. by Ciaran Cronin (Cambridge: Polity, 2006), p. 43.

6 See Jacques Derrida on the scope of identifying a cosmopolitanism of *villes-refuges* with a commitment to demands of world citizenship that would extend beyond the framework of international law, in *Cosmopolites de tous les pays, encore un effort!* (Paris: Galilée, 1997). For some comments on the scope for mediation between ethical and juridico-political points of view, see Seyla Benhabib, with Jeremy Waldron, Bonnie Honig, Will Kymlicka and Robert Post, *Another Cosmopolitanism*, ed. by Robert Post

causal impact on cosmopolitan thinking all of its own – a decisively challenging one, as we shall see.

The street is a space of transformation both painful and exhilarating. In the street, you are witness to the proximity of many cultures in a space, which, though equally open to wind and rain, is anything but monumental. It is, in brief, the bearer of intimations to the effect that the space of the cosmopolitan has become more proximate, as well as more elusive, more ephemeral, more conflictual. So, its very diversity gives rise to specific challenges (interpretative ones, notably, precisely because its manifestations are diverse), which also make it a pressing intellectual concern.<sup>7</sup>

We argue that a central element of the cosmopolitan is access to spaces and experiences which are experienced as cosmic or universal in scope, but which leave us with a sense of the sheer difficulty of the self–world axis. These experiences have a political significance, in that the cosmopolitan today is a space where the interactions of embodied subjects are as fraught with potential conflicts as they are rich in possibilities of productive engagement.<sup>8</sup> These experiences have a precise and indispensable bearing on how globalized cultural and social relations can be felt, imagined, represented. Such imaginings and representations can, in turn, shape interventions,

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(Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. 155–8. Cf. Kwame Anthony Appiah on a cosmopolitanism which proceeds from a commitment to individuality, in *The Ethics of Identity* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005). On some of the spaces, physical and imaginative, of modern cosmopolitanism, see Vinay Dharwadker, ed., *Cosmopolitan Geographies: New Locations in Literature and Culture* (London: Routledge, 2000).

- 7 On the pervasive appeal to hybridity in the characterization of global cosmopolitanism today, and on the need to acknowledge the antagonistic and often asymmetrical political relations in which it is in fact rooted, see Timothy Brennan, *At Home in the World: Cosmopolitanism Now* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), pp. 13–14. Cf. Beck, on the scope to develop a horizontal cosmopolitan outlook on the basis of a comprehensive engagement with all aspects of everyday life, in *Cosmopolitan Vision*, pp. 163–77.
- 8 On the ways in which globalization inhibits such engagements, see David Singh Grewal, *Network Power: The Social Dynamics of Globalization* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008).

political or theoretical, which matter precisely because they bring 'local' and 'universal' frameworks and perspectives into contact.

There are very many other, quite specific, spaces which will feature in the essays collected here, both real and imagined. These include large-scale regions like Europe, seen both as a transnational space with its own long history of mobility and of cultural interactions and, of course, as a space of Europeanization;<sup>9</sup> multi-ethnic societies like the United States, with their characteristic social and cultural lines of tension; global cities like New York, Paris, London and Rome, whether viewed as types or countertypes of the cosmopolitan ideal; non-spaces, like virtual environments; migrational spaces where interactions are shaped by the experience of displacement and the symbolic spaces to which they give rise in turn; colonial and imperial spaces; precarious spaces poised between the public and the private where positive and negative features of the transnational experience interact. What these essays are generally concerned to do is to find ways of elaborating a critical reappraisal of the cosmopolitan stance and, more particularly, the continuities and the disjunctions which could be said to characterize the cosmopolitan itself considered as a space, social, institutional and cultural, one which gives rise to characteristic interactions between subject and cosmos, between the levels of the local, the national and the global. In brief, then, we are concerned with cosmopolitanism in its plurality and with the questions which define each of the postulations with which it can be identified – cosmopolitanism as a matter of allegiance, as response to the demands of right reason in shaping a political engagement which is universal in scope, as an element of philosophy as the pursuit of wisdom, as a principle of justice, as a commitment to cultural diversity within the

9 On the ways in which distinctive processes of Europeanization can be distinguished from globalization, see Vivien A. Schmidt, *The Futures of European Capitalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 303–9. On the impact on borders of an expanded and fluid sense of allegiance within a European framework, see Julie Mostov, 'Soft Borders and Transnational Citizens', in *Identities, Affiliations and Allegiances*, pp. 136–58.