The Boratization Revisited: Thinking the “South” in European Cultural Studies

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Abstract
The intention of the essay is to try to understand the broader cultural conditions that surround the articulations of cultural studies in South-European Academia, but also to address the apparent ethical and political irrelevance of those articulations. A catalyst of this discussion is the author’s ongoing dissatisfaction with the widespread cultural studies activities in the South being mostly part of the corporatization and westernization of Southern universities, which are increasingly distant from their much needed ethico-political public mission in times of struggling democracies and crumbling welfare states. In the attempt to propose a viable framework for the necessary future reform of the anti-discipline, three different aspects are discussed as both indicative and instrumental: the ambivalent notion and destiny of Southern "citizenship" (as the politically and legally articulated aspect of a daily performed subjectivity and belonging), the phenomenon of the eliteless transitions (including the shifts in the Southern critical public), and the role of the academic and political Marxism (including its gradual dissolution or suppression).

Keywords: Cultural studies, South Europe, politicality, citizenship, transition, marxism.
A Prologue to Bordering

In July of 2007, during a memorable “Cultural Studies Now” conference at the University of East London, “You are the Borat of this conference!” was a written note pushed into my hand by one of the participants, a man that I superficially knew, seconds after one of my ridiculously passionate discussions that revealed both my strong accent and lack of articles (the lack of). He was from Manchester, if I remember well, whereas I came from Rijeka, Croatia, a city on the border, called Fiume in the Italian language, a river. Instinctively liking his peppery sarcasm, I decided to use his message as the epigraph or motto to my conference paper on the condition of cultural studies in Croatia (Pužar 2007). When I was asked in 2011 to participate in the Norrköping conference that specifically addressed those inter-European conditions and differences, the same message came handy once again, entailing a specific imagery of spatial differences and the adjacent academic cartographies of power and affects.

Truth be told, I have never seen in its entirety any of the character-based comedies of the English Cambridge-graduated comedian Sacha Baron Cohen, and have never taken upon myself to understand the fine balance between his Jewishness, his Englishness and his political incorrectness, including the anti-Semitic outbursts of the quasi-Kazakhstani Borat. Being called a Borat of the conference, on the other hand, seemed distressingly familiar.

If I think about it, my portion of “Mitteleurope meeting the Mediterranean” (i.e. the exact paradoxical geographic and cultural crossroads of two ancient “middle earths”) was for decades or maybe even centuries perceived as the geopolitical “East”; my personal Italian-Croatian mixture of roots and lived formations could be at times seen as something of an odd match, even an idiosyncratic pose. In the mind of the “real West” (but also among the filtrated images in the Far East and elsewhere), not only Croatia and Italy could be relatively far, but even my town could be far from itself, as far as Kazakhstan is from Baron Cohen's Hammersmith, West London, and it was that same pattern of imagined (mostly political and economic) distances that worked so well even for the Italians and Croatians living in it and around it, in their struggling to prevail in the glocal confrontations of the 20th century. As in the world of the re-imagined places that form dynamically compressed/expanded cartographies of power, the Italian writers from the sister-city of Trieste across the border, and now in Italy, have been writing for centuries already about those tricky desires of the Slavic neighborhood,
situating the reachable otherness as the ganz andere, envisioning wild explorations, deep muds, smoke-imbued forest edges, a Siberian tundra removed only few miles from the Mediterranean city center.  

The evermore convenient bashing of the good old “cosmopolitan-imperial” Englishness aside, the problem of “hazy roots” is always there: from an USA customs officer at Kennedy airport in 1988 looking at my red Yugoslav passport, enunciating slowly, syllable per syllable, and carefully fine-tuning the sarcasm: “Well, well, how’s the life in Czechoslovakia these days?” to my Korean colleague kindly asking about the situation back home in Belarus, probably envisioning my frozen childhood winters, and some oversized fur hats that would go all-too-well with some sort of the Žižekian accent, conveniently emptied of French “theory.” A problem here ranges from a simple lack of geographical knowledge to the rudeness, or even the colonial gesture. Once you could be the Borat, constructed, annoying and annoyed, you have half of this world in your portfolio. A very specific half, that is.  

Encompassing a legacy of the Cold War, the rhetoric of the Iron Curtain, and tangible geopolitical divisions after Yalta, the Boratization is an old game, producing not only divisions and distances, but also a specific bordering – the already autopoietic process of Border-building, sometimes perceived as a self-standing ethical remedy via the acknowledged and celebrated “hybridity.” (Pužar 2013) This essay will think about the deeper reasons for the cultural studies’ politicality that aporetically hesitates around those fuzzy borders towards other Europes, those same unspoken borders that, in the mind of a cheerful colleague, moved my place right to his (and everybody’s) imaginary Kazakhstan.

Europe’s Europes and the Southern “Not Yet”

If Europe, The Europe, is, as Étienne Balibar reminds us, a “traditional configuration” (Balibar 2004, 2004a), then our argument about the mutual uneasiness of the Southern academia and the intellectual project of cultural studies could be developed also as an argument dependent on the proliferation of specific elusive borders of that configuration, and on the necessary production of Balibar’s European “peripheries”—zones that will articulate both myths and historical events of the convenient otherness in conjunction with the traditional configuration of the core-Europe.  

Balibar is, of course, right in his view that borders are not to be described as the mere outer limits of territories, but dynamically. There is a specific dispersion of borderworks, following the postindustrial movement of objects, subjects, memes and affects. It seems that, all of a sudden, borderlines seem folded back to the very illusion of the core, a vision akin to the post-structuralist epistemological dualism and nihilism, and, truth be told, dependent on its theoretical tastes. But the broader historicization of such a “new” movement of borders needs to be pre-
cise too: the Mediterranean cosmopolitan towns, and some of the Northern counterparts, such as Hanzeatic cities, knew for centuries what the monological metropolitan city of the West learned only as its own modernity, with either the imperialistic rise or the post-imperial melt-down. For many people of the South, only the very late modernity carried the novelty of the broader monological forms (such as nationalist and, subsequently, post-nationalist), that can, then, be subverted by the heterotopic idea of constant and inherent bordering (not to say simply: the adding and removing of the contingent identitarian labels to the normal and never-ending articulating and becoming). That specific dissociation in what is imagined as the European temporality (i.e. "the time of Europe") is to be understood as crucial in our assessments of either methodological or organizational models coming from the North-West and being implemented in the apparently dormant Southern academia.

This new and uneasy bordering in between various Europes, based on the specific uneven temporality of the bourgeois nationalist modernity, and the geo-strategic legacy of the Cold-War-becoming-War-on-Terror, once interiorized, can be celebrated and conceptualized lucratively as the ethical faculty to embrace the otherness, as the normalized Levinasian \textit{vis-à-vis}. Still, that celebration always entails the silent and sickening re-confirming of what was abandoned, a melancholic turning back to this or that national matrix spurring and overshadowing the \textit{borderworks}, and never comes without a disruption of the transnational continuum of intellectual elites and subaltern workforce. After all, whenever those promisingly movable and pointillist new European borders materialize in the South, they usually seem to entail the most detestable ethical and political consequences:}

The proposal to establish extraterritorial processing centres and the construction of Italy-funded detention centres on Libyan territory, deportations to and from Libya, and joint Italian–Libyan police patrolling of Libyan coastline are all instances that de-localize the EU’s external border from South Italy beyond the Libyan coastline into its territory. They consequently challenge the idea of the EU’s external border as a firm border between Italy and Libya and show that southern EU border rather than being a linear and stable geographical demarcation is a discontinuous and porous space encompassing the area between southern Italy and Sub-Saharan Africa. (Andrijasevic 2005: 123)

Even if new borders (Berlin walls turned into apparently soft demarcations of “novelty” and “nostalgia”) sometimes produce new multicultural forms and the new hybridity of the pan-European lives (youngsters studying under the Erasmus scheme happily coupling around the continent, forming new intimate trajectories of being European), I wonder if embodying that new kind of hybridity could entail also a certain ethical demand, possibly even some specific ethical faculty.

If one reads what our “grands,” names connecting European East and European South with the core Europe, people like Gianni Vattimo and Tzvetan Todorov wrote about the differences in between being American and being European during or immediately after the dark years of the Bush Jr. administration (Todorov
2005), one can find the fiction of *Europeanness* presented as an ethical choice, but also almost essentialized into an ethical faculty. Following that logic, one could also ponder over the ethical faculties of the hazy articulation/formation of the European South, seen both as a cradle of Europe, and as the eternal crossroads, a space that is sometimes said to imply certain specific and ancient forms of hybridity and celebrated borderline ethical expectations and potentialities (including “openness,” “warmth,” “passion,” but also “instability,” “chaos” or “slowness”). Even without such an unpleasant essentialism and hasty generalizations, one would surely expect from that imagined articulation of the South to be, in Balibar’s language, a both tangible and discursively-productive locus of dialectic movements – a place that entails both the problematic encounter with the “stranger” and the communication between “civilizations” (or, for the sake of our argument: a meeting of the different structures of knowledge, different methodologies and pedagogies).

Yet, the problem here is that the historical hybridity of the South was sometimes more a hybridity of attraction and influx, of the old metropolitanism, of De Landa’s whirlpool cities (De Landa 1997), and not a hybridity of difficult modernist juxtapositions emanating from the metropolitan attractors operating elsewhere. Our slowness would occur at the magnetic core, as the slowness of the attractor, and not as a premeditated halt of human movements, not as a manipulation of the split lives vacillating around the new borders. The South was attractive and permissive, one could say, not “tolerant.” Due to that often overlooked difference in between what was, and what is now supposed to be that openness and “porous” existence of ours, it is only reasonable for the Southern popular sentiment to remain forever suspicious of the newer forms of the broad imagined and invented articulations of horizontal belonging, forms questioning the old communality, differently hybrid. Those forms (such as national or supernational), even if accepted and performed, are usually perceived as coming from elsewhere.

The old Southerner knows what the new bordering hides: a border is always also preserving the sovereignty of a system, since central powers dissipate their forces in order to maintain the systemic edges, to prevent turbulence stemming from the imminent and inevitable encounters. Therefore, a border as the celebrated hybridity (either in life or in methodology) remains haunted by the spectral manifestations of what a Southerner readily despises – the bureaucratic reasons of the State that from the Norman Sicily to the European Montenegro always brings the (un)wanted second emanation of the Northern/Western “order.” The new hybridity is not only superficially celebrated, but also, and that is a novum, calibrated.

With that historical shift in mind, with “protestant” forms of rationality marching south, it is intellectually legitimate to ponder over the Said-esque moment when the Northern desire of the South as the place of warmth (where lemons are blooming, *wo die Zitronen blühn*) turns into a methodological and organizational
Drang nach Süd, while the impoverished working force migrates towards the West). What was once the multiplicity and malleability of life-forms, becomes, therefore, a multicultural stasis; the open-minded warmth of the lived vis-à-vis turns now into a carefully and painstakingly crafted “multicultural competence” operating, primarily, as a systemic provision.

The problematic metaphors and realities of “New Europe” (mostly meant as a post-communist one), juxta posed against the Europe sensu stricto, operate politically and geostrategically for almost three decades already, and normally also contain large territories of the South. Moreover, with re-articulations of the core, related to the recent discursive management of the crisis within the EURO zone, the South reemerged as a “lazy” counterpart to the northern (Weberian) “spirit of capitalism.” A history of the EU enlargement and a history of the recent financial meltdown (followed by the austerity fascism imposed to the citizens in the South) played along those same or at least similar boundaries as the previously discussed forms of belonging and of the “multicultural” juxtaposition opposed to the old hybridity.

It is not surprising to see the South effectively removed from the vocabulary of the European Union for the countries oddly pushed to the core, and officially reserved for the otherness that still stands beyond it: the South still plays prominently in the discursive articulations of “South-Eastern” (i.e. standing for the alterity of Balkans) and of “South-Mediterranean” (i.e. standing for the alterity of the Arabic/Muslim). The united Europe rhetorically lost the traditional South only to constantly reinvent it in various moves of internal political divisions and economic pressures. The loss of the South as a concept is not, therefore, stemming from recognizing the complexity and heterogeneity of Southern Europe, but is the expression of the very ambivalent ideological stance, the one that used to effectively divide my Croatianness (from Rijeka/Fiume) from my Italianness (from Fiume/Rijeka), and is now moving the lines of tension more to the south.

The inherent problem of the academic cartographies in the South, either concerning cultural studies or any other imported intellectual articulation, is not in the physical or even the political dimension, but is mostly in the specific temporal dimension, a temporal disjunction in what appears like a unified “European” structure of feeling. A European South is kept in the state of “not yet, still not there” for all intents and purposes, and the cultural studies practitioners are in no way exempted.

In the light of all those problems it is safe to say that the South now is hardly the new promised land of the celebrated global “flows,” of the hybridity-in-motion (such as in multicultural melting pots and/or salad bowls of the postindustrial metropolis), and therefore is not the promised land for the spread of the metropolitan cultural studies as their gepflegt academic self-reflection. Still, cultural studies (mostly in politically relatively deflated forms) seem to resist such an inhospitable climate, stemming from the most unexpected places, from the State
institute of national language and literature in the Republic of Macedonia to traditional English departments of Spain.

**Capitalist Citizenship and Southern Cultural Studies**

In the European South, a large region encompassing all the ethical paradoxes of difficult modernity, engaging with cultural studies must still entail the ongoing quest for alliances, a search for those modes and articulations of life that congenially share and inform our political phantasies, and, in the constant autopoietic loop, allow those productive phantasies to stem in the first place. That quest is, then, undeniably related to those realms of the relational social that could find themselves more productively and more progressively articulated, spurred by the intellectual project of cultural studies. In spite of many defeats so far, I claim that these quests must still extend way beyond the world of intramural education and not just in regards to the range of topics analyzed. Cultural studies must engage with real politics, albeit subtly and in the broader sense, preferably beyond any partisanship, and contribute, in the so-called real world, to the desirable defetishizing of the notion of European (neoliberal) citizenship, to help freeing the subject (agent) of cultural studies (as a practitioner and as an interlocutor and ally) from the various “not yet” and “to a point.”

The added intensity of “the political” that cultural studies promise must therefore come from the interstitial movement, from a dynamic threshold dividing/uniting/dividing/uniting (etc.) systems (for example those formed in between academia and the “street”), and I continue to consider cultural studies to be such an interstitial articulation, not as much in between disciplines and departments as in between the politically vested tension fields of the relational social. Jokingly combining derridaean and deleuzean vocabularies one asks oneself: If something is about to fold, turning from the flow in some contingent and temporary fixity, would that something decide (!) to fold differently if we are to have our say?

To make things more clear, it is not about being inspired and/or recruited by this or that theoretical and political label. As Lawrence Grossberg points out, cultural studies are inherently political simply because it is articulated around the necessity of tackling the power relations and because it wants to change the world:

> In fact, one cannot choose not to change the world, for that choice is actually a choice to leave unexamined and unchallenged the existing relations of power—certainly a political choice. The only choices are how self-consciously one approaches this work, and to what end. So, somewhat inevitably, cultural studies does see itself as intervening into the real world of political struggle, but its intervention is defined by its effort to produce knowledge that may help change the world. (Grossberg 2010: 97)

Still, all this doesn’t come without a warning:
There has to be a difference between scholarship (telling a better story)—analyzing particular formations and mechanisms of power and subjecting them to the challenge of contingency and possibility—and the statement of political values and enactment of political action, where the latter refers, rather naively for the moment, to collective action aiming to transform the institutions and operations of power and the political. (Grossberg 2010: 97)

The example of the paradoxical Southern citizen, seen as the subject resisting his/her “citizenship” (both a partner in our intervention, and the elusive object of our analysis), should prove that this Grossberg’s point of distinction should first be accepted, especially in terms of a much needed defense of academic humanities and social studies from the flattening of those complex relations into some kind of an unhappy and intellectually deflated continuum of the capitalist “post-public sphere.” Upon the initial acceptance, that distinction must be complemented with addressing that very element that Grossberg finds inherently problematic: the naive versions of collective action. The main problem, therefore, might not be in the superficial political rhetoric that occasionally blurs the intellectual achievements of cultural studies, even if that problem remains visible and is not to be neglected. In fact, the more pressing problem to tackle is the very nature of the political, not in its label/school/orientation or in its spacio-temporal location.

If our politicality is the politiciality of “better knowledge production,” it is certainly true that it is impossible to envision any useful knowledge production happening in vitro, or as some self-denying relation of unrelatedness. Therefore, while cultural studies practitioners need to maintain the distinction of analytical politicality vs. other forms, and remove the “anything goes” label (all-too-easily attached to our efforts), we must be careful to take into consideration also a necessity of our discovering of those other forms, and of our learning from them but also, and that is crucial, with them. My modest but ongoing advocacy of the theoretically-informed and performative ethnographic work is exactly about the continued envisioning of uneasy and new politicalities, such as ones that are personal, individual, situational, interstitial, eventual, dialogical, protean, queer, transgressive, piratic, able to fill a gap in between academic politicality and the heterogeneous politicalities of the street/network/community, the gap that appears to be the unwanted consequence of our need to maintain the necessary distinctions described by Grossberg.

The simple fact that there cannot be the “right story” out there for the post-structuralist narrator, just a “better one,” might also imply that we didn’t think low enough or high enough: warm in winter better than cold, alive better than dead, freedom better than oppression, all that better if for all, and not just for some. In the first world troubles (including such an all-embracing one like a mode of production itself) no right story is possible, since they are all humanly and humanistically impossible. Decidability is a shameful intellectual betrayal, but only in theory: it still needs to be promoted, if and when it is situationally necessary.
All these dilemmas are directly invoking another crucial distinction Grossberg proposes. Talking about the notion of everyday life and taking a stance in regards to some of the older conceptualizations (such as Lefebvre’s) Grossberg writes about everyday life as the other side in the binary distinction between the institutional space vs. the space of everyday life. For Grossberg, everyday life is uncatalogued, habitual, often routinized, unpredictable and banal (Grossberg: 2010: 278), an unredeemable excess or residue (beyond the structural and organizational), that cannot be described with certainty:

And despite the fact that it functions as the common ground of all human thoughts and activities, it has as well a certain mysteriousness, since it always remains outside of science and social theory. In fact, it is opposed to abstract thought, which is incapable of ever understanding the dense particularity of daily life. (Grossberg 2010: 278)

These two crucial binary divisions/distinctions (first one regarding different realms of the political and the second one regarding the institutions vs. the everyday life) seem to invoke two mutually familiar but different takes on European citizenship, both of which relevant for our understanding of who we are addressing in the South, who is the subject of our anti-disciplinary politics and the possible pirate we need to stimulate (Pužar 2010).

In Balibar’s account, the peripheral zone, a zone of conflict of cultures and of differences in economic prosperity, is exactly where “demos” is formed, people ready to stand united under banners and rituals of πολιτεία/ politeía, in-vested as citizens proper (Balibar 2004b). The marginal, therefore, stands at the very core; the border is not only infested by the spectral manifestations of the Kingdom (or better: Δεσποτεία, Despoteía, the rule of the lord(s) over slaves, based on tradition beyond the legality of the arrangement), but also seems to fold right back to the heart of the imagined/intended “becoming democracy.”

While generally quite hopeful, Balibar is careful in his analysis of the ever-moving dynamism of inclusion and exclusion, reminding us of the stigmatization and repression, going as far as to juxtapose the notion of “Europe as a democratic laboratory” to that of the “European apartheid” (Balibar 2004b: x). A democratic citizen, for Balibar, is formed as the uneasy vacillation between a “sovereign subject” (a subject member to the sovereign) and a “self-owning individual” (owning the faculty to develop his/her own capacities in the “commerce” with others) (Balibar 2004b: 198).

I would like to discuss the subject of cultural studies (both a practitioner and his/her interlocutor(s)) exactly in the light of this inherently paradoxical articulation of citizenship, of its equalities, its freedoms and its responsibilities, and more so if those articulations constantly collapse into subalternity, oppression, and corruption, revealing the imaginary nature of the concept, or its fetish-like dimension. For the Southern resisting/chaotic/insurrectional subject, trapped in his/her own problematic and frustrating temporality of “not yet,” all these paradoxes are
strongly felt and more alive than ever. (S)he is “promoted” to the guardianship of
the outer borders, including those of cultural studies, while remaining the one that
knocks at the doors of the core-Europe.

Sandro Mezzadra adds to this, in his roughly Althusserian move, the epistemic
dimension that extends the specific dualism of the citizenship into a sort-of-
gnosological dualism. He describes the complication of being a European citizen
by reintroducing the old motif of externality, a constitutive outside, so dear to
post-structuralist theory:

If you take a concept such as the modern European notion of citizenship in its claim
to be valid beyond and against all “particular” belongings and loyalties, you can eas-
ily see that (...) a specific form of interpellation is constitutive of it – and that the
modern concept of citizenship (let me add: as all modern political concepts) has a
constitutive outside, the heterogeneity of the “forms of life,” of the “habitations of
the world,” that define its addressees. This is what I have in mind when I talk about
the strategic role of “encounters” and “heterogeneity” in the fabric of modernity.
(Mezzadra 2011: 158)

In Grossberg’s initial definition of everyday life as the (roughly) uncatalogued
excess of life opposed to the institutional space, in some of the Balibar’s depic-
tions of pre-democratic insurrectional modes, and those uneasy ones as the modes
of exteriority, of the popular sovereignty and such, and certainly in Mezzadra’s
notion of life-forms standing as the “constitutive outside,” one could detect a pe-
culiar epistemic positionality: in spite of the full acknowledgment of dynamism
and vacillating of and around the borders, and in spite of the fairly sophisticated
vocabularies, the precedence seem to be tacitly given to the structural dimension
of life, with various anti-structural forms considered either external to the life of
politeia, or at least largely elusive. There is a traditional modernist impetus to ra-
tionalize here, that might require a proper response from the researchers inclined
more towards vitalist and radically empiricist inspirations, not to mention from
humble deconstructionists, or from those engaged with performative qualitative
methodologies.

It is also possible to think of the occasional dualistic epistemic positionality of
cultural studies as asking for different interventions, such as those regarding the
chaotic nature of the structural, the inherently erratic nature of the institutional
realm. I am thinking of interventions such as the one of Chantal Mouffe’s “ago-
nistic pluralism”:

No doubt, by stating that democracy cannot be reduced to a question of procedures
to mediate among conflicting interests, deliberative democrats defend a conception
democracy that presents a richer conception of politics. But, albeit in a different
way than the view they criticize, their vision is also a rationalist one which leaves
aside the crucial role played by ‘passions’ and collective forms of identifications in
the field of politics. (...) (Mouffe 2000: 0)

It is not that cultural studies haven’t been working with theories of the anti-
structural and with the elusive emotionality and passions of social life for some
time now, Grossberg himself being a careful observer and an important contribu-
tor to the “affective turn,” but the cripto-structuralist post-structuralism posed some definite methodological limits to such a work for a long time, in many cultural studies departments, and around the globe. Of course, a response to such a problem cannot exactly be (only) in the counter-moves towards an old-fashioned materialism. The sheer fact of various post-structuralist conceptualizations of small freedoms (such as Foucault’s stylizations and heterotopias or De Certeau’s tactical moves of resistance) being both insufficient (for the creatures tragically “not yet there”) and conceptually tired, doesn’t really mean we can simply re-install hope in the large historical blocks of the early modernism “behaving” in a Hegelian progression. Much less so could we trust the promises of the early post-modernist constructivism, and its *fragmentophilia* and *iconophilia*, not to mention a techno-utopian optimism.

The ontological and not only chronological primacy of complexity and chaos over the secondary crystallizations of historical and institutional contingencies, the much needed questioning of the pretended rationality of taxonomies, all that needs to be reflected in the new positionality of cultural studies, but not as a diluting of the ethical stance and political agency into some boring postmodern relativism. On the contrary, the full acknowledgment of the primary chaos that constantly and daily *anti-catalogues* our contingent catalogues might be more productive for the anti-discipline seeking at least some specific demarcations towards various “orderly” disciplines based on the traditional quantifications and taxonomies.

Luckily for the outcome of all this, all three authors whose writings inspired this chapter, the cultural studies classic, the political philosopher and the flexible sociologist, offer enough *exits* through notions such as multiple, the anti-strategic, the transnational, the heterogeneous, the affective etc. addressing the uneasy dissipation at the edge of the rational scholarly ideation, of borders towards the outside, and all three, in different ways, maintain the promise of progress and social justice.

Yet, when I think of cultural studies in the South, I feel they are more than the sum of their paradoxes, and the Derridaean *cadrage* of moving borders. There is an excess, yes, but neither inside nor outside, neither (only) within the institutional realm, nor (only) in some blurry street-wise banality of the everyday. Every honest practitioner I know of is a creature of the border, in the border, dwelling not just in the overlap, or in the vacillation in between externality and internality, but in the fullness of what only appears to be interstitial, in the “natural” simultaneity and eternity of complex forms. Chunks of the chaos are conveniently named (folded, sedimented), yes, but never abandoned, and most people I talk with don’t have properly *dialectical* lives. As important as it is to put two or more types of orders together, in the analytical and political framework, and to confront them in order to assure a proper ground for our analytical work, it might be equally important to deal with the complexity of “outstanding” forms, but also with the inherent complexity of what is mainstreamed, institutional and systemic.
Eliteless Transitions and the Post-Marxist Structure of Feeling

In my occasional ethnography of roots, of my own previous academic belonging, I am collecting the voices of the Southern (and South-Eastern) cultural studies students and practitioners, the main link versus “other knowledges” and “other politicalities.” Each voice collected testifies for the complexity of “becoming citizens” and the troubles of becoming subjects and agents of cultural studies, seen here as a force of stimulation, a production of added intensities.

Some of it is a typical student rant over the higher education that fails to deliver the higher promises, that also, in the case of the “progressive cross-disciplinary humanities,” entail a visible political disillusion:

I am thinking how much more brave we were as freshmen. The university is maybe teaching us to see things differently, it emancipates us...but not much...I remember how self-aware and confident I was before the system “put me in place.” I am not beaten down or anything...just not so brave, and not mesmerized. And we were supposed to flourish, to learn, to enjoy. I did, at first, but after that...shit...shock...I cannot even talk about others, but the situation is the same or even worse. We doubt our future...disappointed. Blocked. I want to leave, to go somewhere where things function at least a bit, and where I’ll have at least three mental orgasms per day. That’s it. (…) (Tina, 26, /real name withheld/, personal communication, 2012)

I am not saying that the same tone could not be heard from a student of any other major forced to study within the underfunded and under-resourced departments of the South (including the South-East), but I claim that the initial hope entails a different political dimension and a distinct tone for the intellectual project of cultural studies.

A graduate student and the young independent scholar responded to my private lamentation about the situation on the ground, in somewhat more analytic terms:

I don't really know anything about today's global positioning of cultural studies, but I see what's happening in Croatia. That concerns me, actually. First they started to imitate, but even that failed because not many wanted to tackle the wide list of “criteria” of how cultural studies research should look like. Others flirted with performance studies and have produced the nastiest drag-queen of critique, third where inclined towards plenums [a recently popularized form of direct democracy in some Southern universities, A.P.], subversive film festivals, and similar “political” events and were picking up on the cheapish ideological catchphrases. I can't see that any among us who are in this or that way connected with “academic field” [of cultural studies, A.P.] is really dedicated to the in-depth analysis of what cultural studies really is, nor we try to implement any of the research designs. (Benny, 25, /real name withheld/, personal communication, 2012)

Between the lost purpose and failed methodologies, what concerns me most is the familiar picture: a widespread existence of cultural studies’ political gestures and the “brand,” unsupported by proper analytical work, and, on the other hand, the superficial acceptance of the models of cultural analysis, sadly devoid of the crucial political dimension.

Presenting, for the Italian public, a new translation of a book by Paul Bowman, a mainstream representative of the new(er) British cultural studies (Bowman
an editorial statement introduces the readers to cultural studies as a “new line of research” which explores essentially “political” (using also the quotation marks) issues, such as the relation between culture and power, between culture and change, and also the relations between high and low culture, revealing the deeply-rooted prejudices either in the institutions of the real world, such as the media, the family or the State, or those pertaining to the world of academia. The editorial intention is clear, yet implicitly pessimistic:

The intention is to spur in Italy a development of this line of research, which counts among its real precursors both Antonio Gramsci and Ernesto De Martino. In our country, the literary studies, English studies and sociosemiotics, did in part explore the legacy of the British cultural studies, although its ethico-political vocation and the charge of the intellectual militancy were mostly betrayed and debased for various reasons.5

In thinking about those “various reasons,” I want to briefly discuss only two that I consider fundamental. These two dimensions of the sociopolitical and intellectual life in the European South (and South-East), along with the broader logic of the capital and the fragile articulations of citizenship, continue to influence a destiny of regional versions of cultural studies. I am talking here about the partially imaginary process of “transition” from a “totalitarianism” towards a “democracy” (in Croatia, Italy, Spain and Portugal, and in a way also Greece and Turkey), and, in close connection to that process, about a position of Marxist thought in Southern academia and intellectual public. A latter dimension, the position of Marxism, seems particularly important in the countries of ex-Yugoslavia (Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Serbia, Macedonia and Kosovo), and in Italy.

A notion of transition, as promoted by those trying to describe a historic shift between the State ideologies and the State-promoted modes of production, doesn’t really work very well for the researcher that understands the articulations of the relational social as fundamentally pervaded by an ongoing and eternal transitoriness. It takes quite an undertaking in modernist rationalism and traditional historiography to even begin to trust the roughness of the “transitional” taxonomies as the intellectually viable way to describe the complexities of life, especially at the level of the individual experience. Still, the changes that enveloped most of the countries in the South and South-East at the end of the twentieth century (either similar or different from the changes that happened in the East and in the North,) supported a very specific type of temporality. I explained before that in my opinion the main trait of the Southern temporality is always a sort of “not yet there.” Yet, there was obviously a much earlier historical moment of moving centers towards the North and the West that probably organized that discursive game of “eternal catching up” on one’s own ideal-type citizenship that emanates from elsewhere.
Nonetheless, within a specific framework of recent European views on the post-communist “New Europe,” there seems to be only one transition worthy of interest: the one from the post-Stalinist socialism dreaming of communism sprinkled with capitalism (in Yugoslavia) and the post-Stalinism dreaming of communism (in the East and South-East) to the neoliberal capitalism acting-out its type of democracy. Of course, there is a never-ending transitional narrative of Turkish (non)-secularism, used for the homogenization of the “core-Europe,” plus two “happy transitions” from fascism (in the Spain and Portugal), featuring democratic savior monarchs or such, neglecting and suppressing important aspects of the historic trauma. The most interesting might be the Italian case of transitioning from the Marxist-Catholic “democracy” into a post-Marxist-post-Catholic “democracy.”

When Hungarian-Irish scholar Arpad Szakolczai wrote at the beginning of our millennium about the “East-European condition” he argued that the communist regimes not only were established under conditions of heightened liminality, but could only function in the liminal regime. Communism, according to Szakolcai, was a unique political system that kept the entire society stuck in a permanent state of confusion, uncertainty and transitoriness. Communism in his account crushed the existing social elites and succeeded to maintain the inherently eliteless state by introducing a “counter-selection” and preventing the formation of elites. I argue that the countries of the region are caught in a maelstrom from which they are not able to get out on their own. This is because the events of the century further and further magnified their precarious, liminal condition into which they became permanently stuck; and because, as its single most important legacy, the communist experiment fatally damaged the only segment of society that could have provided leadership out of this maelstrom, its elite. (...) The main tasks are to end this permanent state of transitoriness of the region and to build elites. This makes the joining of the European Union an imperative, and also calls for specific, concentrated efforts and political will, again on the part of all sides, but especially from the part of the EU, to engage in major long-term programmes of elite-building.” (Szakolczai 2001: 1)

There are many obvious flaws and imprecisions in Szakolcai’s argument, but his vision introduces several interesting points for future critical analysts. Firstly, one needs to acknowledge the structural similarities in transitions from right-wing dictatorial regimes, such as Spanish or Portuguese. Secondly, a distribution of “democracy” is more complex, especially among the lower strata. To give an example, the shift from the late-Yugoslavian self-managing proletariat towards the raw precariat of the neo-liberal era is certainly a shift between two types of democratic deficit, two types of “becoming democracy,” and not exactly between a totalitarianism and a democracy. Democratic impact on what we call human life, so central to the efforts of cultural studies, remains in a fragile relation with the State-propelled or EU-propelled fictions of democracy, human rights and civil participation, and that relation is never devoid of paradoxes, problems and gray zones; its reach within a population is hardly sufficient in the best of cases. Third,
the communist regimes produced new elites, an entirely new ruling class, famously described by Milovan Dílas (Dílas 1957) a class that entered into various strategic alliances with the remaining fractions of the old bourgeois elites. Fourth, they maintained forms of cultural state and its rituals, as conceptualized by Marc Fumaroli (Fumaroli 1991), including the academic forms of intellectual elitism, and all that regardless of the broader access to higher education, and in spite of the widely-spread ideological oversight.

Still, one thing is certain: any crumbling set of social relations produces the appearance of sways between always coexisting structuration and chaos, a “tangible fiction” of historical shifts within the simultaneity of stasis and movement. One neither needs to go back to Thomas Khun to understand that a necessarily liminal state precedes a new contingent dominant articulation, the one that gets normalized, for the time being, into a “paradigm,” nor to re-visit the Foucauldian motifs operating within cultural studies. Liminality could be seen here, in strictly Turnerian terms, not as a whirlpool, but as a naked temporality of the postponed. Such a temporal modus of suspension never operates without the set of orientational metaphors and ideologemes. One wonders if the Southern dismissal of the institutional order and putting trust in various local sheriffs and tribal/national leaders could be compared with the lack of viable research designs in critical cultural analysis, usually coexisting with the fetishistic adoration of individual theoretical “leaders.”

It is not that communism (or whatever existed under that aegis) didn't dispose of the traditional elites, in some cases as late as in the post-1968 reactionary backlash of various petrified regimes in the European East and South-East, but the more pressing question is of the neo-liberal capitalist subversion of the public sphere that happened at the very core of this imagined transitional "path to democracy." It was not communism that restructured the Humboldtian universities in the South, but the recent "Bologna reform," bringing stronger connections with a world of globalized capital and a certain suspect Americanization of European higher education. Sadly, these external pressures came only after the internal methodological and ethical implosion of the progressive humanities from the mid-1980-ies. No wonder, then, that Renate Holub in her famous chapter on Italian post-war intellectual life writes about the “exodus from the public to the private sphere, and its concomitant abdication of moral leadership on the part of the intellectuals, as symbolised by the crisis of reason.” Holub describes a shift “from a position of cultural critique to that of cultural studies,” equaled with “losing a good deal of its critical edge.” (Holub 2001: 11-12)

Only when the ritualistic cultural state started to fall prey to the forces of Spectacle, and the welfare state to the world of precarious labor and forced austerity, in that very moment of the imaginary “democratic hopes,” cultural studies entered the Southern universities and started to flourish in places such as Italian Catholic universities or Croatian nationalist public universities. But while the bourgeois
public sphere remained a respected if increasingly obsolete ex-enemy, a kind of spectral cloud, and while the anti-structural movement “occupies” the public zones in new gestures of anarchic insurrectionism, cultural studies still fight the old battles invented as a soft-leftist refreshment for traditional British academia, and not as a viable way to preserve the critical edge of Southern Marxist cultural critique. Because, and that opens a next step in my argument, exactly the weakening of the Marxist influences allowed cultural studies to gain institutional footholds and the general prominence in the South.

In the words of a Croatian graduate student:

And then this hip idea gets imported to spaces that show an intellectual ambivalence towards their own Marxist background, and the whole thing turns posh. If we would be mean, we could say that somebody finally listened to Rorty and directed cultural studies towards the benefits of clientelism. (Benny, 25, /real name withheld/, personal communication, 2012)

Both a Boratization (a difficult and twisted othering) and a destiny of cultural studies in “other Europes” depend, in several aspects, on the position of Marxist or quasi-Marxist philosophy and dogma. In 1963 Fernand Braudel wrote:

Whether or not Marxist philosophy is that of the rising working classes and of Socialist society, or industrial society, it has clearly played a dominant role in the West and in the world, which it divided as, until only very recently, it divided Europe.”

(Braudel 1995: 404)

The fragile and ambivalent relations between cultural studies and Marxism are often discussed and debated in cultural studies (for example: Harris 1992; Hutnyk 2004; Bowman 2007) but the challenge in the South is to recognize a specificity that is both quantitative and structural. I am thinking here primarily of Croatia (and other similar South-Eastern countries) and of Italy, for decades probably the most Marxist country of capitalist Europe. Both in the South-East and in Italy (possibly in a way also in France and some other limited political and academic circles elsewhere in Europe), Marxism gained a huge influence at the end of the Second World War and fueled the renewal of the critical public sphere, socially sensitive media, huge parts of new humanities, and also helped the liberal, Demo-Christian, and other centrist governments to “balance the books,” in moral sense, of the European welfare state. With the real-life help of the syndicalist forces, it rose to enough power to dictate various intellectual processes, and then, after 1968, started to “inform” various forms of Post-ism that brought the internal divisions and branching.

When the events of the mid-eighties lifted the proverbial iron curtain that separated “the core” from the huge realms of what is now a “New Europe,” the leftist scene in Italy and elsewhere was already disorientated enough to start to reinstall forms of diluted Marxism taken from the countries of the liberal-democratic tradition, countries in love with institutions, and to “democratically” allow various unpleasant right-wing revisionisms and nationalistic rituals. Cultural studies, then,
without its inherent “guilt” finished not being localized as some sort of Bhabha’s “Third space” of semantic negotiation and counter-hegemonic subversion, but in fact turned for the Southern leftist academia into its own indirect post-socialist “Third way.”

So, when cultural studies flourish “after Marxism,” that doesn’t mean they are openly against Marxism, and that also almost never implies that cultural studies in the South take a “differently revolutionary” stance, let’s say anarchist, inspired by the contemporary social movements. Inspired by various combinations of the French post-Marxist (and therefore partially Marxist) theories with the syncretistic legacy of Birmingham, Stuart Hall and the moment of the British “even newer” left, these studies still sell the dilution of Gramsci in places that once knew of Lenin.

Using a tongue-in-cheek analogy with Vattimo’s “pensiero debole” (weak thought), a regional version of sort-of-deconstruction, we could say that cultural studies promote a “better capitalism” and a “cleaner spectacle” under the aegis of “marxismo debole.”

In Italy, cultural studies has often been associated with those media studies departments examining “audience studies”. These departments have tended to be situated within Catholic institutions or universities influenced by church teachings. (...) Cultural studies in Italy has been shaped by its British counterpart, allowing Italian academics, predominantly within Catholic institutions, to reintroduce ideas associated with the key Italian Communist theorist of the 20th Century. (De Blasio & Sorice 2007: 2)

Of course, such a reintroduction, if properly historicized, must be read as a regrettable reduction. The reason for such a harsh diagnosis is simple: if anything, at least in terms of the revolutionary and insurrectionist impetus, Southern subjectivity and citizenship didn’t need to live in the suspension of “not yet.” The South has showed in the past various forms of piratery, brigandism, carbonarism and subversion of the institutional frameworks, a range of leftist guerillas and of workers’ movements, and a notable presence of critical academia, and there is no acceptable reason to avoiding building upon such a rich tradition of the anarchic flux, co-existing with “Catholic” rituals.

**Conclusion: For the New Direction**

In this essay, I was trying to describe what the European South as a spatio-temporal and ideological articulation could be in the first place, and how it is working tacitly, as a set of specific relations that co-organize Europe and its cultural studies. The most important lesson coming from this analysis, inevitably partial (both as a bias and as an incompleteness), is the expected one: my pondering over the broader conditions of emergence for cultural studies in the European South shows that a destiny of the anti-discipline might not be inherently different
from both a destiny of Southern capitalism and of the Southern “democracy.” Even more so, those destinies seem to form a strong analogy or even a structural homology. But, if those processes are structurally similar or akin, is it because any cultural studies methodological, ideological and institutional localization so far, anywhere in the world, assumed a natural link between the capitalist mode of production in its post-fordist version and capitalism’s own academic brand of the post-Marxist critique? Or, is it that in this particular spatio-temporal localization of the intellectual project called cultural studies one needs to test the possibility that the import of cultural studies to the South is nothing but a form of late-capitalist colonizing of the Southern humanities and social studies, supporting a shift from the models dedicated to the participation in the forms and rituals of (cultural) State (including the falsely post-national communist one), towards the various neo-liberal mode(l)s of knowledge-production?

The old and tired Southern university, which once entailed the knowledge of the western world, is now exposed to the neoliberal attack under the aegis of “Bologna reform” that started as a self-professed tool of liberation only to finish in the oppressive bureaucratic schemata of the imposed “accountability” and “competitiveness.” It is clear that the cultural studies in the South benefited from that wave, and therefore stay in an uneasy proximity to the dangerous dissolution of the important (academic) politicality of better knowledge production described by Grossberg. Additionally, the institutional forms and rhythms of cultural studies are still akin to the odd transplant, a colonial effort, methodologically maladjusted for the insurrectional and liberatory articulations on the ground, at least if the useful politicality is “at stake.” Of course, the other transnational examples of slow localizations, such as East-Asian and South-East Asian cultural studies, encourage some optimism in regards to the flexibility of the project and the adjustability of its inherent politicality.

Certainly, in concrete terms, there are visible differences within the South itself, in between the old and new capitalists, in between those Southern countries emancipating from the right-wing and those emerging from the left-wing forms of totalitarianism (and dealing with the revisionist agenda related to the totalitarian history). The South is Catholic and Orthodox, Muslim and Jewish, and heterogeneous in terms of different branches of the Indo-European linguistic families (and occasionally linguistically living beyond them), and includes the obvious divisions in the modern imagined communities and networks of belonging. The South is, therefore, divided and complicated, and its self-understanding Southerness can only be envisioned as the elusive shadow of the equally complicated North.

Yet, in spite of those many colors and the internal heterogeneity of local cultural formations, the destiny of the intellectual project of cultural studies in the South seems to be similar regardless of country (with the possible exception of Turkey). It is the history of slowness, of obstacles and failed ethical promises. That is not to say that such a destiny might be inherently different from how cul-
tural studies play(ed) in some other academic constellations, but it is to say that the academic articulations of the anti-discipline didn’t achieve much in terms of tapping the rich vein of the Southern potentiality for the subversive.

When I concretely helped the processes of establishing the anti-discipline at an undergraduate and graduate level in Croatia, in what is now my personal distant academic past, I inadvertently helped their fragmentation, filled with jargon, guided by the tricky “Bologna” style of the new humanities. Some autonomy within the system was envisioned but soon dissolved into “rules.” Ethnography was not excluded, but it never gained importance, and most of the courses were either heavily theoretical or simply utilitarian. Elements of progressive thought traditional to the area were never systematically studied, and the link with the new social movements remained rhetorically important, but mostly private, random and increasingly sporadic. If some pragmatism was there, it was clearly of the capitalist and market-oriented, and not of the revolutionary kind. The employability of graduates, within the existing crumbling markets, was our first consideration. In the meantime, those programs intellectually deflated into a gray normalcy, operating at the general level of the local academia and no “piracy” is visible. Still, some of the best and the loudest voices of the regional student movement, of the “occupy” movement, movement of the direct democracy etc. came from those academic environments, and that fact was never accidental.

The paradoxical nature of those processes and events entails both the failed promises and the ongoing hope for the organic work of the intermediary “agents” using academia in the heavy task of social change. After all, there is a happy chance of positive radicalization of social life in the South. In order to use that chance as a real academic opportunity one needs the radicalization of the methodological apparatus. For me, that remains a theoretically informed performative ethnographic encounter, emulating the fluctuations in/of the field and resonating with our specific politicality, but also the old idea of bold, theoretically informed descriptions, publicly posed as interventions. A strong utopian element of those methodologies is the anti-structural constitutive of any academic endeavor in the humanities and of the dynamic public sphere, and our real critical vocation, and it is not to be disposed of as “intangible” and obsolete for the sake of any rational “reconciliation.” Its ethical and developmental role in antagonistic democracy remains crucial.

The Southern cultural studies need to allow the spirit of disorderliness to contribute to the general effort of "staying clean," either methodologically or politically. The action plan for the progressive cross-disciplinary humanities can be, in my opinion, still rationally formed around two main issues which are both ethical and political, but with very direct implications to the anti-disciplinary destiny of cultural studies: around the subversion of commodity production and around the self-management and radicalized quest for autonomy. (Pužar 2007) One doesn’t need to burn any roofs, though: as with any existing middleclass radicalism, most
interestingly described by Stephen Cotgrove and Andrew Duff, cultural studies can simply engage with small-scale instead of the large-scale agendas, with the communal and fluctuating instead of the associational and ordered, with public interest instead of market forces, and with self-actualization instead of the economic growth. (Cotgrove & Duff 1980) In terms of the methodologies (described formally, but enacted in many different concrete forms), such a middle-class radicalism, as ironic and self-ironic as it might be, necessarily implies a much needed increase in the “action research” type of qualitative projects, the proper training in critical ethnography and auto-ethnography for every single cultural studies student or practitioner (even one inclined to study gender politics in the Shakespearean problem plays or such).

A theoretically informed turn towards “life,” towards a directness of encounters, implies a more traditional reading of Gramsci (and even Williams) in the matters of the role of “organic” intelligentsia, the exercise in old and new materialism that corrects the cripto-structuralist inclinations visible in how cultural studies sometimes misused the valuable philosophical legacy of the constructivist post-Marxism only to produce something that can be called a politically irrelevant disciplinary politics, missing on the “better knowledge production,” especially when and where that better knowledge must meet its extramural life. Cultural studies in the European South must, not without some “historical urgency,” find a methodologically and theoretically better way to dispose of Boratization, either the external or the interiorized one. In fact, only the methodological maturation and the political relevance of the Southern cultural studies can replace the models based in the suffocation by the anti-utopian and orderly “not yet” of the “New Europe.”

In the words of a graduate student: “In spite of everything, I see our Balkans, South America is interesting too, as a space capable of offering a new direction, maybe exactly due to the ambivalent view of the past, or thanks to the boldness of us, the young ones...” (Benny, 25, /real name withheld/, personal communication, 2012)

The Boratization, in its role of organizing and coding the borders of European cultural studies, must be replaced with that new direction, promising new forms of critical and creative localizations, working with and within social movements coming from the South(s), in America, in Asia and, finally, in the very cradle of old arrogance.

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Notes
1 Current Issues in European Cultural Studies, ACSIS conference 2011.
2 A mockumentary “Borat: Cultural Learnings of America for Make Benefit Glorious Nation of Kazakhstan”, directed by Larry Charles, written and produced by Sacha Baron Cohen, was released for 20th Century Fox in 2006.
3 The classical example remains: Slataper, Scipio (1912) Il mio Carso, Firenze: Libreria della Voce.
4 Braudel's classical studies showed when and how that central “elsewhere”, i.e. the geographical shift of the economic and cultural powers, came to be: “Freed from the spell of the Mediterranean, the active life of the seventeenth century developed in the vast reaches of the Atlantic Ocean.” (Braudel 1977: 25)
5 http://www.progedit.com/libro-301.html

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