

Uppsala Rhetorical Studies **U R S**

S R U *Studia Rhetorica Upsaliensia*

ENGAGING  vulnerability

**CAN A PERSON BE
ILLEGAL?**

Refugees, Migrants
and Citizenship in Europe

On the contributions

Alexander Stagnell, Louise Schou
Therkildsen, Mats Rosengren [eds]

— On the contributions —

The fact that the problem of autonomy immediately refers to, is even identified with, the problem of the relation of one subject to another – or to others; the fact that the other or others do not appear there as external obstacles or as a malediction to be suffered, [...] but instead as constitutive of the subject, of the problem of the subject and of its possible solution; these facts recall what, after all, was certain from the start [...] namely, that human existence is multiple [a plusieurs] and that whatever is said neglecting this presupposition is sheer nonsense.

Cornelius Castoriadis, “Marxism and Revolutionary Theory” (first published in French, 1964-1965) in *The Castoriadis Reader*, Blackwell 1997, p. 183.

Recalling the French-Greek activist, psychoanalyst and political philosopher Cornelius Castoriadis’ words about other people as possible solutions rather than problems, and, at the same time, evoking both the name and the work of the network No one is illegal, the theme for the 2016 workshop *Can a Person be Illegal? Refugees, Migrants and Citizenship in Europe* centred on the recent and persistent unsettling events within and on the borders of Europe. In the presentation of the workshop, as in the call for papers and contributions, we asked questions such as: “Are we facing a European union showing itself to be but an association for the already wealthy, the ones who already are safely installed within their citizenship and passports? Or are the political events of recent months – and especially the reactions they have triggered in many different political camps, governmental as well as auto-organised – rather a sign that something fundamental is changing, or at least about to change? A change, perhaps, towards a more profound political and

human engagement with the major ideological issues surrounding migration, autonomy and human rights?”

Our idea in the organising committee was to stage a magmatic event, allowing for an explicit friction to occur between different strata of academia, art and activism. In this spirit, we engaged researchers from two international networks: *Imaginaires Sociale et Création/Social Imaginaries and Creation*, dealing primarily with the legacy and implications of the philosophy of Cornelius Castoriadis, and *Lesekreis Cassirers/The Ernst Cassirer reading group*, focusing on the philosophy of Ernst Cassirer and its possible developments today; we invited colleagues and friends from Uppsala University, and we asked artists and activists from Belgium, Germany, and Sweden to contribute with their respective takes on our topic.

The entire program, as well as some of the art presented can be seen here: <http://www.engagingvulnerability.se/urs>. We would like to thank the Engaging Vulnerability research program (www.engagingvulnerability.se) for generously co-funding this publication.

In what follows, we present contributions that all interact in surprising and rewarding ways. They can be approached as strata within an encompassing whole as well as unique and original works in their own right. So, rather than imposing a thematic structure and organisation we have chosen to present the contributions in authorial alphabetical order (with the exception of the introduction) and through representative and central quotations.

We trust you will find the contributions as thought-provoking, enticing and rewarding as we do.

Alexander, Louise and Mats

Mats Rosengren — *Introduction: On academic responsibility, chaos and borders*

“What I would like to highlight is that, in the wake of forceful condemnations and outrage, there is a palpable risk that such portrayals may obstruct the very possibilities of understanding the meaning of violent destructive events and transformations in and of the social. As a consequence, they may obstruct the view of how to deal with them in a grounded manner. We have seen where such counter-productive reactions lead; the aforementioned proclamation of the war against terrorism is but one example.

One way to assume academic responsibility in this situation is to take a step back, to refuse to spin along in this dance of death, to use the conceptual and historical tools for critical thinking that are the hallmark of our trade within the humanities, and to try to think and write clearly about the multi-layered complexity of it all. A first imperative for academics should thus be to refuse all simplification – and to lay upon ourselves the demand of communicating lucidly and efficiently about complexity. For this, we need first to better understand both the role and the complexities of the notions of chaos and borders in the contemporary mind-set.”

Philippe Caumières — *Closure of meaning: border of the political. Political borders entail the closure of meaning*

“It is surprising to realize that the notion of border, understood as ‘a dividing line between two countries, or States’ is still very often apprehended through the binary opposition nature / artifice.”

“The question is not so much to denounce such an approach, –

which considers geography as based on natural data only, as if there was no cultural or ideological dimension to it, reducing politics to geopolitics – as it is to try to understand why it is still upheld. Obviously, resorting to nature as the justification for a border tends to rule out conflict. As modern societies want to be democratic, they cannot make arbitrary decisions. Consensus is all the stronger when grounded on the recognition of a necessity.

Thus, the very notion of border becomes an institution – and this is the meaning which Castoriadis gives to the word – but a denied institution; one which, more than an ideology, reveals that modern societies tend to conceal some facts from public debate, thus breaking the rule of democracy. Referring to the notion of natural border and using the word geopolitics both lead to a reflection which, far from being confined to the disciplinary fields they usually concern, questions the very notion of society.”

Stahis Gourgouris — *Crisis and the Ill Logic of Fortress Europe*

“For this reason, the so-called economic crisis – whether the crisis in financial capitalism signalled by the banking collapse of 2008, or the crisis in sovereign debt that followed virtually everywhere in Europe – cannot be equated with the crisis in political institutions, national sovereignty, political legitimacy etc., which we are seeing virtually everywhere in so-called Western ‘democratic’ societies. Nor is it the same with another domain of identified crisis, which is becoming ever more prominently displayed: the crisis in the cultural sphere, as it is manifested through clichés such as “the resurgence of religion” or “the clash of civilizations”.”

“In light of this present critical condition, the need to reconsider the democratic politics necessary to encounter this condition, and particularly as far as the situation in the European Union is concerned, a radical democratic politics that will unmask the ill logic (or para-logic) of its foundation, has become paramount.”

Olof Heilo & Ingela Nilsson — *Back to Byzantium: Rethinking the Borders of Europe*

“For the various nationalist parties that made such considerable gains in the 2015 elections to the European parliament, it is easy to say what Europe is not. They may not agree among themselves about the nature of Europe, but in their common resistance to Islam – against immigration from the Middle East, against a possible Turkish EU-membership and against the planning and building of mosques on European soil – it might seem as if they have stumbled upon a European unity that they have otherwise denied or even derided. The following will show why it is not that simple, and why these nationalists, rather than the new narrators of a resurgent Europe, are likely to end up as the unwarranted ventriloquists of a very different narrative.”

“The simple fact is that neither the rise of Islam nor the emergence of Europe took place in a historical vacuum: they both articulated themselves against a political, cultural, and ideological nexus that encompassed much of the ancient world and its traditions, an empire whose existence we have become so used to ignoring that we persist calling it “Byzantine” despite the fact that the purported Byzantines never considered themselves as anything but Christian and possibly Greek-speaking Romans”.

Stine Marie Jacobsen, Mirella Galbiatti & Nastaran Tajeri-Foumani — *German for Newcomers*

“The traditional roles of student and teacher are shifted in *German for Newcomers*, where expats, immigrants, and refugees are invited to improve their basic German language skills by collectively writing useful teaching material for themselves and others. The teaching material is inspired by their experiences with German culture, bureaucracy, and language.

The language project offers a (literally) different and multilingual grammar perspective for people, who want to learn German.”

“Participatory art is an approach to making art in which the participant is engaged directly in the creative process and allows them to become co-authors and editors instead of merely observers of the work. In the field of informal education, participatory art has proven to be an excellent source of bottom-up, innovative methods for the empowerment of individuals in society. Some of the positive aspects of participatory art is that it generates dialogue, respect, mutual understanding, and idea confrontation.”

“No experts, none of us are language teachers in a traditional sense, and everybody has their own perception of the language. This resonates with an important theoretical source, Jacques Rancière’s book *Ignorant Schoolmaster*, which highlights and advocates the “equality of intelligences” of all human beings. Rancière takes as his example the French teacher Jacotot, who came to teach at a grammar school in Belgium. This was a special situation, since he could not speak their language (Flemish), and the pupils could not speak his (French). They found themselves in a situation of equal “ignorance”, which actually allowed for a true mutual learning process.”

Jean Lassègue — *The Daoud Affair: Politics, Literature, and Migration of Ideas in a Time of Crisis.*

“The two genres that will be studied are the political genre in a broad sense (press articles belong to this category) where a writer takes the floor in his or her name, and the literary genre, conceived as a form of imaginary and social endeavor where the writer is not supposed to be identified with his or her fictional characters. It is well known that the distinction between the political and the literary can become fuzzy in a time of crisis”

“It is maybe possible to criticize Daoud’s position about the Cologne events and the debate about what happened and what to do next is certainly still very much open for what triggered it in the first place, the migrant crisis, is still very much on its way. But one should first start by remembering the past if one wants to put moralism aside and stop seeing as a moral condemnation what Daoud says about those he considers his own people and who misbehaved so severely in Cologne.”

Anthony John Lappin — *Borders of the Self, Borders of the State: refugees and the projection of human rights*

“Yet the nature of human rights law, although it enshrines the individual as its subject, primarily governs the behaviour of the State, rather than lesser organizations or individuals. Both the State and the Individual — rather like Universal Human Rights — have their own pre-history; and the rise of the individual is one with the steady domination of the modern State; and the rise of the modern State

is really the rise of the Western modern State. I shall progress in my argument through consideration of a limited number of explanations for these developments, wherein I shall combine sociological description with metaphysical discursivity. Let us descend to the atomic level of our human rights, the Individual, the undivided one in whom rights are vested (and invested); but rather than turn the discussion into a breathless charabanc-tour of the Past, I wish to consider rather more closely what “the Individual” leaves behind when it begins to rise, what primaeval soup of indistinct and stagnant amino acids gurgles away, beneath our vision. I will then move on to “where we are now”, using Bourdieu’s work on the modern state as my means of focus; I intend to take the definition that Bourdieu formulated into an area in which he refused to tread, into the realms of post-colonialism and attempted Western hegemony, or, rather, Western hegemonizing.”

Cecilia Parsberg — *On the production of The Chorus of Begging and The Chorus of Giving*

”In the spring of 2014 I begin to prepare for the film shoot. The Chorus of Begging consists

of people who usually beg on the streets. The Chorus of Giving consists of people who

usually give to those who beg on the streets.”

”The choruses will be standing across from each other – about five meters apart –while singing and the setup will be the same when the films are screened as an installation. The viewer will stand between the images and the sound from The Chorus of Giving and the images and the sound from The Chorus of Begging. The production had an express purpose though we planned the days of the

shoot in terms of logistics there were many unpredictable human factors. The singers in the chorus were inexperienced, as was the production team in this situation, which meant that working on the production involved many aesthetic and ethical choices.”

Emanuele Profumi — *Philosophy facing the European crisis of migrants: When does violence become a rule of law?*

“The now widespread practice in Europe of rejecting migrants regarded as “irregular” seems to indicate that consideration for rights has been overridden by political needs that are mostly selfish and less than respectful of human rights. This double European crisis (both humanitarian and political) raises a general problem, and poses a basic question: how is it possible that International Law did not succeed in forcing the EU to act effectively and make the reception of refugees, and generally of migrants, easier so as to avoid the massive amount of deaths that still occur in the Mediterranean?”

The question entails yet another, deeper question: why is the EU acting so cruelly towards the refugees and, above all, towards the migrants?”

We can answer this question from many points of view, and also from a philosophical one, which will be adopted here. But if we assume such a point of view we have to put the matter on a more essential ground, as it were. The double European crisis proves that the political sphere is bending international law towards aims that seem to alter its very nature. Thus, the general question becomes to understand how the legal sphere can assimilate principles that are alien to it.”

Sharon Rider — “*Little Mr. Satisfaction*”
[*señorito satisfecho*]: *Ortega’s Challenge to European Man*

“What Mazower succeeds in doing, I think, is to help us see this recent history as “now”, not merely in the superficial sense of the building up to current events, but in the sense of utterly present, cotemporaneous, in the larger scheme of things. After reading his book, one is confronted with a now that includes Fascism and other forms of totalitarianism not simply as distant threats, but as still and always with us as a potentiality, as part and parcel, of modern Europe.

An important element in understanding this “protracted now”, I want to argue, is that industrialized nations seem to be putting all their hopes for democracy and the welfare of its citizens into a very confused notion of “education”. This idea as it comes to be formulated in policy documents and political declarations covers as diverse aims as economic growth, employability, technical innovation, integration of immigrants, the inculcation of democratic values and practices, gender equality, ethnic tolerance, and environmental sustainability. That’s quite a tall order for any educational system, but especially for Europe’s increasingly deregulated (or even fragmented) educational landscape. I’ve studied the economic and technical aims elsewhere, so here I want to focus on the notion that all of our ills as citizens and as a society can be addressed and handled with enough “education”.

“In reaction to the growing barbarism of totalitarian movements and regimes, Ortega posed three questions that are still salient: i) what, if anything, does it mean to be European?; ii) how, if at all, is

it possible to retrieve an idea of European civilization that is at once viable and valuable?; iii) what is involved in bringing “newcomers”, i.e. the young, and, by extension and following Arendt, “the recently arrived”, into active membership in a polity or community? If we cannot answer these questions, it is difficult to see how we will be able to perform the task.”

Schellekens, Peleman & Focquier — *Inflatable refugee and Moving stories*

“Art functions as a sensitive, visionary mirror of society, reflecting all levels of time and space in which a society exists. It dissects all things known, poses questions and presents alternative realities. It confronts us with beauty and ugliness. Art does not necessarily comforts us; it tears.”

“Coinciding with the current migration crisis from East to West, we created ‘The Inflatable Refugee’. A large inflatable adult male figure that represents a seated refugee. The ‘Inflatable Refugee’ gazes blankly into the distance. Has he arrived at a safe haven, or will he be refused and sent back to whence he came? His sheer size allows him to look over and beyond us and keep watch on the horizon, not limited by borders or documents. It makes him an inescapable, undeniable presence.”

“With the ‘Moving Stories’ project we invite newcomers (recent refugees/migrants) to write a letter to an anonymous fellow (native) citizen. We do not give directions concerning the content of these letters. The white pages serve as a neutral zone in which the person who is writing the letter can slowly form his/her thoughts and pass on the message he/she finds important to share.”