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Construing Identity Under the Role of Difference: Some Philosophical Elements of the Actual Problems of Identity

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ABSTRACT By 1989, the neo-liberal logics of identity and difference took over the Socialist, as well as the Christian basic notions of identity and difference. This means, neither Socialist solidarity nor Christian love for brethren eases the power of difference. In such cases, difference is not a simple difference, value, or ideology any more, but ontology, moreover, it acquires logical character. While in the divided world difference was based on hidden identity, now neo-liberal - human-rights identity is being filled with concrete contents by an unreconcilable difference. The power of difference is the final state of being different. In the relations of the present, the logic of identity doesn't simply dominate, but it seems to be a higher, maybe straight unexceedably final variant of identity - we are not simply identical with one another, but as a result of the grounding on human rights we are identical in our most dignified nature. But in actual fact, political and social spaces show a row of mutations differing from this. This doesn't mean the ideology of identity would have got unveiled, but that identity - logic has become selective in a new way.

While the identity - logic is working in the foreground, in the background, a difference - logic stronger than ever before, is operating ruthlessly.

The concept of *the Other*, of *the Otherness*, and of *Interculturality* appears in a definitely new context in recent years. This change is apparently neither problem-free nor safe. The term “change” namely often evokes the idea as if raising the *same* question in a *different* context could possess a meaning of its own.

Up to this time, the perpetually broadening discourse about the Other, Otherness, and Interculturality was considered as “open way”, i.e. as part of an *extension of emancipation*. This orientation of the discourse prevailed with the overwhelming power of self-evidence, thus it became part of the international discussion right in this self-evident and self-fulfilling manner.

In our present time, the same discourse acquires *new accents*, while the former ones are still present to some extent as well. Beyond this former approach stood a *fully emancipated logic of identity* in a generalized form, which interpreted the Other and Otherness in a double manner of *inclusion*. Firstly, this approach wholly accepted the different character of the Other and the Otherness. And secondly, at the same time, it saw in them an entity genuinely identical with its original, “identical” entity. It does it in a programmatically emancipative sense.

The tendency we are trying to hint at marks out an essentially opposite approach of the Other and Otherness. This interpretation of the Other and Otherness leaves the logic of identity outlined above. This also means that instead of the *logic of identity*, an interpretation of the Other and Otherness necessarily defines both the Other and the Otherness along the concept of *difference*.

This turn *from a logic of identity to a logic of difference* is anchored in the modification of background dimensions. The approach of identity, which opens itself and sublates (*aufheben*) the Other and the Otherness

is not founded by any kind of *particular* identity. The fact that this logic of identity had been based upon *all-human (and not particular) values*, which had been interpreted as the values of a *civilization*, has obviously disappeared from the consciousness of historical actors. The attitude towards the Other in the light of identity therefore grounded the *universality* of the matter of civilizatory values, in which the particularity closed up in itself had not yet wholly taken part.

This is the context, in which the shift from the logic of identity to the logic of difference took place. To call the present change its proper name, it is to say that the shift took place from a logic of identity *to a logic of difference, which was no more built upon all-human i.e. civilizatory values.*

The original relation has been extended, as this issue of the Other, the Otherness, and Interculturality is not *generally* about the *general* variables “identity” and “difference”, but now it is about the variables “identity” and “difference” depending on *concrete* civilizatory values.

In the case of a classical logic of identity, there is a *common platform* assumed in the communication of Otherness, which serves as a basis for the intercultural process. It mostly gets realized through values, which are though never conceived as particular values, but every time as a hint on a civilizatory continuum. The most emblematic example for this might be the Austrian writer Joseph Roth's fine remark on the emancipation of Jews, as he didn't define this process as emancipation *to a nation*, but emancipation *to a civilization*. By this we don't want to homogenize intercultural processes by their civilizatory components, but we definitely emphasize that *there must be a civilizatory dimension behind interculturality in all its forms.*

This – real or virtual – civilizatory relation makes up the real framework of intercultural communication. This is so because the identity, which consequently realizes itself on the basis of difference, can only be interpreted before this horizon. Only that's where the most important definition of *identity* lies.

The identity that prevails in the intercultural process can never be one of the one side only. And it's right the civilizatory all-human component that hinders the improper approach of identity. The classical basic model of interculturality defined this way is therefore built upon difference, and arrives to an idea of identity, which is built upon civilizatory values, as the founding forces of identity.

Through this description, we have already hinted at the process, which has become crucial for the interculturality of our time.

And that is a *transfiguration* of the whole discourse on interculturality, which ended up in a logic of difference. This logic – and it is an essential part of the transfiguration itself – was unexpectedly no more grounded by value options. A logic of difference is being actually realized, which apparently embodies the result of the whole process.

Seemingly, that kind of the logic of difference is quite ideal for the Other, Otherness, and Interculturality. *But a logic of difference, which cannot be derived to an option of some common all-human values, necessarily constructs a new reality of a new and different kind. The supposed triumph is unmasked as a huge and very critical challenge. A logic of difference, which is not rooted in any possible logic of identity possesses a peculiar quality. It has not yet been completely examined so far. However, it is for sure that we cannot define the difference realized this way as an ideal goal. It is also for sure that here is no way from this difference to the more or less serious idea of identity.*

What makes the situation even more confused is the fact that difference – and the logic of difference even more – has been evolving for a long time in the same direction with emancipation. In other words, up to this time, the semantics of difference has been an excellent positive one. Long decades have passed in terms of difference with a perpetually extending meaning of liberalization and emancipation, while identity, especially in context of interculturality, acquired homogenizing, if not straight

totalitarian traits. In the century of totalitarian dictatorships, the logic of identity got consequently corrupted, because the decisive difference between a logic of identity with civilizatory and all-human foundation and the same logic without civilizatory and all-human foundation has not been materialized. This provides an illuminating example of how the shadows of totalitarianism can eliminate real all-human values when the political community lacks a sufficient reflective basis.

Today, when searching for the actually relevant characteristics of the logic of difference, we find not just singular and particular phenomena of this logic to describe. The logic of difference is actually fully represented by both the leading and the all-round philosophical tendencies of our time. *The logic of difference becomes the instructive idea of both ruling philosophical approaches of our global world.* For today, we have two all-round tendencies, and both of them manifest exclusively the logic of difference. But how is the logic of difference, generated by these two all-round tendencies, connected to the questions of the Other, Otherness, and Interculturality?

In the last thirty years, two great philosophical streams have risen to the power position of multiple social influence. One of these all-round great schools is the *revived philosophical neo-liberalism*, which is essentially identical with philosophical neo-positivism. This characteristic was shown in the most spectacular manner in the neo-positivism/neo-liberalism that took shape at the Vienna Circle, as an alternative in the 20's and the 70's as well, for those who were disappointed in and frustrated by the political shadows of Marxist-utopian concepts. The constellation of the 20's repeated itself namely in the 70's. This return of neo-positivism/neo-liberalism in economy, as well as in politics and epistemology, succeeded exactly after the quick, unexpected, and decisive fall of neo-Marxism in the mid-seventies.

The other all-round, great philosophical tendency is that of *postmodernism*. Its decisive position is a result (although evidently to a

smaller extent) of the abrupt fall of neo-Marxism, but also to the resignation of structuralism. In spite of the decisive fact that neo-liberalism/neo-positivism and postmodernism have been dominating the scene of philosophy for three decades, they seldom got into any open communicative contact with one another.

It's quite amazing that these clearly different all-round tendencies share a row of common features, which we are right to be described as symmetry-relations.

One of these relations is *hindering the evolving of a logic of identity*. And in this definition, every word is equally of a great importance : hindering, if not eliminating the evolving of the logic of identity in every of its possible manner.

Both great tendencies represent one *complex*, a *structure*, like a remarkable *imperium* of intellectual, but also institutional and administrative character.

The phenomena of this hybrid character become more specific in specific contexts later in our train of thought. We explain these new structure-forms (and the singular possible synergies bound to them) by the fact we already mentioned, i.e. by the genesis of these formations from the fall of neo-Marxism.

Both great streams declare in the context of the logic of identity/difference the common idea of the end of philosophy. None of these schools declare the end of philosophy directly. The concrete argumentation for an end of philosophy marks the each time different ways of transition from a logic of identity to a logic of difference.

The neopositivism/neoliberalism works with a categorization (categorization) of a physicalistic type. This decision marks already a version of the end of philosophy, even if it can't be taken in the closest sense. This statement should be interpreted as the end of all kinds of (other) philosophy, which don't fit the hard and sharply articulated standards of this categorization. But "the end of all other philosophy"

obviously also means that the mere existence of the one and only “right” philosophy means a natural end of philosophy, in a positive sense.

Postmodernism comes to its idea of the end of philosophy through the *regulation of legitimate categorization as well*. However, it also goes along with neoliberalism/neopositivism in a way that by the successful declaration of the end of all other philosophy, postmodernism – as the only one standing on the scene – is successful at shaping the end of philosophy in a positive sense.

Postmodernism regulates the philosophical categorization with a definitely negative character. It goes on two ways, which at first sight seem to be incommensurably different from each other (they are related to the names of *Derrida* and *Foucault*). This fundamental negative character of the specifically postmodern regulation of philosophical categorization is in itself a signal for the transformation of a *logic of identity* into a new *logic of difference*.

For our narrow subject, the consequence is that the problem of *Interculturality*, *Otherness*, the *strange*, or *strangeness* – because of this common transformation of both different philosophical schools – *can only be realized in the medium and new holistic approach of the logic of difference*.

As we have seen, both hegemonous philosophical “imperia” have tried to re-shape thinking by their new regulation of philosophical categorization. This new regulation defines the forms of legitimate thinking, but it’s also important to point out that the options for legitimate categorization the same time also define the rules of legitimate *constitution of philosophical objects*. The re-shaping of philosophical categorization does not only rearrange abstract logical figures, but it also prescribes *about what, i.e. on which object a legitimate discourse might be possible in its context*.

The switch from the logic of identity to the logic of difference (which have already taken enormous extents in both great philosophical

complexes) means that there are certain philosophical objects, about which there is either no discourse possible, or *there are certain philosophical objects, about which the discourse is only possible according to the rules of the logic of difference.*

And exactly the activity and effectiveness of these great philosophical schools are the reason why the logic of difference acquired such a hegemonous position. The universe of all-human values and civilizatory components *disappear* from the context of the logic of difference. *While in the beginning we had an allusion to the possibility of a logic of identity without all-human background, actually it becomes inevitable to talk about a logic of difference without the background of all-human values.* And it's right this logic of difference that manifests itself in the numerous phenomena of modern *individualization*. But it's also this logic of difference that determines the discussion of the Other, Otherness, and interculturality.

Modern individualization is evidently an all-round real process, and as such, a primary object of sociology. *Yet its rise is unthinkable without the power of the logic of difference.*

In neo-positivism/neo-liberalism, this tendency prevails directly in economy and political philosophy. On the field of epistemology, this trend towards difference in the legitimation of terminology prevails more indirectly. Concerning postmodernism, we would directly consider eliminating any logic of identity for an all-round logic of difference, as the *all-round achievement*.

The decisive process of individuation, which itself is a moment and result of the transformation of the logic of identity into a logic of difference, is an *invisible, but not less all-round requirement*. It changes every basic relation between society and community, between communities, between communities and individuals, or between individuals. These all-round transformations inescapably *deconstruct the whole problem of the Other, Otherness, and Interculturality*. The new

concept of individuation we might call *global individualism*, is the perfect manifestation of a logic of difference, which lacks any foundation by all-human values.

This new individuation is the manifestation of a logic of difference. *It acts as a historical triumph over a logic of identity perverted by the suspicion of totalitarianism.* But this difference-logic of global individualism lacks the all-human dimension. A logic of difference, which lacks all-human values, must definitely appear as a multiply problematic phenomenon of the newest history.

The way of the *neo-liberal* component of the new global individualism is also characteristic. The neo-liberal individualism in economy, politics, and in keeping the right epistemological rules, appears to be a springboard to the global individualism of our time. Meanwhile, the *postmodern* components of global individualism do not consist in the direct construction of logical and non-logical difference, but *in the radical elimination of the logic of identity.*

The specifically postmodern absolutization of the logic of difference is a significant obstacle of the conceptualization of the problem of the Other, Otherness, and Interculturality by starting out from any logic of identity. The logic of difference is *only seemingly a victory.* It provides equal chances and ranks for the sides involved in it, but actually it is a contra-productive dead end. It is so because this logic justifies the other and Otherness without setting a differentiated identity from both poles of the Otherness and on the basis of common value priorities.

The logic of difference without all-human values is a verbal solution, not an organon for overcoming conflict-ridden real processes. This kind of solution embodies the fundamental attitude of the whole postmodern epistemology. *A criticism of logo-centrism might be correct, but this criticism is unable to carry out any significant epistemological or heuristical activity!*

Beside the logic of difference and global individualism - it's globalization itself that re-shapes the relations to the Other and the Otherness dramatically. It triggers huge new migration processes, ensures the necessity of this migration, and transforms the problem of the Other and Otherness into a new historical quality.

It's evident that globalization can be described the best in the form of a *macro-theory*. This leads to one of the most important characteristics of the basic definition itself : *globalization is therefore the process, in which a critical proportion of huge functional systems becomes global.* This description shows that although it's "the" economy or "the" capital that becomes global, the "reality of globalization" today can no more be reduced to these phenomena. It is being constituted by qualitative leaps, which are made up by the globalization of other huge functional systems. A *critical extent* of all-round functional systems must become global. While a statement on global functioning or the globality of functions undeniably sounds abstract, the Tshernobyl nuclear disaster, the process of the Perestroika, or the financial crisis of Mexico or Argentina (two times) could become the everyday experiences of billions. Not everything that is international is also global ; not even if this international character is being spread all over the world. *An internationally equally distributed activity or an international institution becomes "global" only if it's structured on a global level and therefore it can optimally operate in a system-theoretical sense.* Globalization interpreted this way has a real history of its own, which is by no means simple, nor modest. Nevertheless, it doesn't mean that it could have been seen as the realization of a consequent metaphysical or quasi-metaphysical process.

Today, the micro-level of globalization can be reconstructed without mentionable difficulties. But the special problem of the research and interpretation of the micro-level is the following : some phenomena, evolved in fact from these micro-dimensions, overlapped with the field

of non-globalized phenomena. So even the research and interpretation of the micro-level cannot present any real new insight or information. Globalization doubtlessly possesses micro-dimensions, but for the actors these phenomena appear to be *trivial*, as if they had nothing to do with the new phenomena like globalization. There has been unemployment in every historical age, and - often with the help of the language of normality - it is quite possible to speak of globalization-induced unemployment as if it weren't in fact depending on the qualitatively new situation, but on the ever-changing actual conjunctural situation. But the actors generally lack deeper interest for reflection, there was practically no relevant heuristic interest in a consequent and consistent understanding the new world of the phenomena as the genuine moments of globalization.

In contrast to the macro- and the micro-level, it seems quite evident why the *medium-* or *meso-sphere* of new globalized structures are of the greatest importance for all social relations. This privileged position is obviously *not* a result of a special theoretical approach. This is so because globalization can theoretically only be described in the context of *macro-dimensions*. The importance of the meso-sphere lies in the constellation that *it is not just a new face of globalization, but it is a real place for social life*. On this level, the globalization does confront with human and social dimensions. This is where it turns out to be the new *condition humaine* of social existence. This meeting is not trivial at all. The globalization exceeds the anti-anthropomorphic, non-human dimensions of social life ever known before. It has rules of its own, which though may not be totally antagonistic, but they confront the deals, traditions, and human values of society in a definitely hostile manner. Social life has namely never been "anthropomorphic" (human); not even before the time of globalization.

The importance of the meso-level is therefore not primarily theoretical, because a normal theory of globalization can be made only

about the phenomena of its macro-level. The importance of the meso-level lies in the fact that *all social conflicts, cultural changes, and human consequences proceed on this level*. The new world of globalization has to confront the "human" world of societies on the meso-level.

The meso-level is also the platform where the process of *global individualization* takes place. Global individualism and the hegemony of the logic of difference create a row of *new anthropological aspects*, which inevitably and fundamentally change the problem of the Other, Otherness and Interculturality. The "Other" shall not be taken and interpreted as a community made up by individual persons. The "Other" appears in a society, which consists of representatives of the logic of difference. A society of global individuals interprets the Other as individuals and non-individuals at the same time. *Global individuals identify the Other as individuals as far as they have the secretly prescribed properties, which make them global individuals. Global individuals don't identify the Other as individuals as far as they cannot have the secretly prescribed properties, which make them global individuals.* This is the concrete and living coexistence of identity and difference. Not the real Other is identical, but – as a tautology – the *ab ovo* Identical is Identical. So, we can be delighted at the sight of this harmonious coexistence of Identity and Difference. Identical is what we are (and all the others, who have the secretly prescribed properties, which make them like us). Different are the Others (because they cannot have the secretly prescribed properties, which make them like us).

It's time to make our fundamental statement about the most decisive interdependence between the meso-level of globalization and the new hegemonous logic of difference. *The logic of difference is only possible under the circumstances of globalization.* It doesn't mean that this logic would be the very ground of the logic of difference. But globalization, mainly on its meso-level, shapes the structure and system of the circumstances, in which a logic of difference is thinkable.

Notions like "*progress*", "*development*", "*developing country*", "*reflex-modernization*", "*backwardness*" keep their common sociological, economical, or historical meaning of course, *without being able to offer the individuals a proper frame of social practice*. The "Other" or "Otherness" gets anchored and even all-sidedly acknowledged by the logic of difference, but the Other and the Otherness shall *no more function as a basis for constructive dynamical processes by generating positive and all-human values*. The Other and the Otherness can be broadly and internationally accepted, nevertheless they have neither the power nor the legitimacy any more, to articulate open pretensions to catch up with inherited and unquestioned civilizatory advantages.

The developed party in the logic of difference does not consciously emphasize its civilizatory advance any more. It beholds the Other with respect. The undeveloped party (the Other or the Different) does not intend to catch up with the civilizatory advance, while it is happy about this respectful attitude. *The logic of difference doesn't exclude mutual respect, but it excludes real historical progression.*

The individual of the undeveloped universe has a hard time renouncing an all-human leap of his backward society, while the same individual as a "global" individual - through the logic of difference and global individualization - as a concrete particular person - has good chances to be admitted to the desired society. *What he cannot achieve any more as an all-human being with all-human values and all-human norms, he can but easily achieve as an individual.*

During this transfiguration of the problem of the Other, Otherness and Interculturality, tribalism, magic residues, or other archaisms of pre-individual attitudes still remain active.