

Chapter 5

The Charisma of Theory

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Abstract

Against the background of the policing power of the university discourse, the paper discusses the prototypes and general roles of charismatic theorists from the 1960s to the present in the contexts of transformations of the university from its Humboldtian type based in the importance of national culture to its late-capitalist subjection to the neoliberal mercantilization and globalization of knowledge. Focused on a case study of Slovenian literary theorist Dušan Pirjevec (1921–77) and the conditions of the communist policing of the university, the charisma of theory is explained as the theorist's fascinating personal presence (working through the transference with the theorist as a "subject supposed to know") that imbues his/her texts with a quasi-metaphysical quality transgressing both the boundaries of any disciplinary knowledge and the "bureaucratized" position of average university teachers. In Pirjevec's case, the charisma of theory is patterned on the figure of critical intellectuals, whereas, in the neoliberal present, it is produced or reinforced within the global star system driven mostly by American universities and transnational scholarly publishing.

Keywords: charismatic authority; literary theory; discourse of university; disciplinarity; commodification of knowledge; Pirjevec, Dušan

1. Introduction: Policing and the Discourse of the University

The state exercises power, subjecting individuals through the dominant ideology and policing: while ideology instills an imaginary social bond through the subject's desire, policing enforces the conventions determining the boundaries of the subject's appropriate action or acceptable behavior. In Foucauldian parlance, the term 'policing' means a system of multiple practices of surveillance and repression that reproduce the liberal-democratic political order and the capitalist mode of production. Policing is characteristic of what Foucault calls "disciplinary societies" (Foucault 1977, 209-218) since the police figure here as the prototype and the institutionalized form of disciplining techniques. Such techniques are virtually omnipresent because they are disseminated through other social practices and bodies, such as the family, religion, the military, industrial production, the market, finance (e.g., debt as a means of subjection), medicine, education, the media, or fitness training and diet lists. As Andrew Johnson recently put it in his meticulous reconstruction of

Foucault's writings on the police: "The police cannot be reduced to the State institution we are familiar with. Rather, we are policed in all sorts of ways, in all sorts of places, by people and institutions that are not authorised to enforce the law ... policing is dispersed throughout the social field" (Johnson 23-24). In his *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault traces the history of the police. From a vast administrative, controlling, and repressive bureaucratic apparatus enabling the sovereign power of the *ancien régime* to contain all kinds of transgression, the police evolved into a specialized organization that the nineteenth-century bourgeois state, based on functionalist rationality and disciplined (self-)control, instituted for the purpose of law enforcement (see also Johnson 11-17). Foucault aligns this transformation of policing with "the gradual extension of the mechanisms of discipline throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, their spread throughout the whole social body, the formation of what might be called in general the disciplinary society" (Foucault 1977, 209).

In Foucault's understanding, disciplines figure in modern societies as specific conventions that mediate between the universality of egalitarian republican law and the variegated daily practices of individuals: disciplines are the methods that make possible "the meticulous control of the operations of the body" and assure "the constant subjection of its forces and imposed upon them a relation of docility-utility" (137). By inflicting patterns of spatial-temporal segmentation and hierarchical forms of interaction on individuals involved in a particular social practice, "discipline produces subjected and practised bodies, 'docile' bodies" (138). Disciplines, such as industrial labor, ground the triumph of the market economy by morphing an individual into "an efficient machine" (164), making capitalist exploitation socially acceptable, and effectuating the power of the ruling class in a manageable and economic way. To again quote Johnson's apt wording: "Society colludes, effectively policing itself. Police, lacking a single tower which can oversee everything, relies upon a self-disciplining society, a thousand dutiful eyes" (9). Psychoanalysis taught us that individuals interiorize the panoptic gaze of the other through establishing the unconscious Superego (the Other, the Law, the symbolic order), which enforces the subject's self-control, channeling both its desire and its sense of interpersonal, social, or transcendental obligations (see Evans 1996, 101-102, 135-136).¹

In his recent manual on policing, Michael Rowe distinguishes "between the narrow set of functions performed by the institution of the police service and the broader processes of social regulation and reproduction that govern everyday lives" (4). According to him, "many institutions that do not have any formal role in the regulation of social life in practice contribute to the development of social norms and standards of behaviour that underpin the ordinary social interaction of everyday activity" (4). Among the factors of policing, Rowe mentions schools and the education system (which also often figure as disciplining bodies in Foucault's narrative):² "Schools

¹ Granted, beyond Foucault's interpretation of Jeremy Bentham's 1787 architecture of *Panopticon* as the model of how the ruling power exerts (invisible) surveillance over the totality of subjected bodies (Foucault 1977, 195-228), there are many ideological forces that hold the socioeconomic order together, such as collective memory, imitation of desirable images circulating in the media, or the mechanisms of seduction. According to Zygmunt Bauman, "[t]he great majority of people – men as well as women – are today integrated through seduction rather than policing, advertising rather than indoctrinating, need-creation rather than normative regulation" (Bauman 1998, 23).

² For example: "The 'invention' of this new political anatomy [of disciplinary society, M. J.] must not be seen as a sudden discovery. It is rather a multiplicity of often minor processes, of different origin and scattered location, which overlap, repeat, or imitate one another, support one another, distinguish themselves from one another according to their domain of application, converge and gradually produce the blueprint of a general method. They were at work in *secondary education* at a very early date, later in *primary schools*; they slowly invested the space of

provide a good example of the broader process of social regulation as they play a central role in the socialization of young people ... it is readily apparent that the education system plays a central role in the policing of society" (4). The education system, including the university, does not merely police young people in terms of their socialization and disciplined behavior, as might be inferred from Rowe; it also disciplines them by impelling their cognitive capabilities to work within a certain discourse, that is, the regulated and pre-structured network of subjects, disciplines, and methods of study.

As is known, Foucault's notion of discourse is "irreducible to the language (langue) and to speech" (Foucault 1972, 49) because it transcends its sign composition and the function of semiotic designation through power relations that depend on how an individual utterance and speaker are situated in the existing field of other interconnected enunciations. By intertextually linking mutually relevant utterances, a particular discourse (e.g., the economic, scientific, educational, political, or erotic) forms its proper objects and concepts: "Such discourses as economics, medicine, grammar, the science of living beings give rise to certain organizations of concepts, certain regroupings of objects, certain types of enunciation, which form, according to their degree of coherence, rigour, and stability, themes or theories" (64). The "order of discourse," with its rules and procedures for making proper statements, exerts control over subjects involved in linguistic communication and limits the territory of the sayable (Foucault 1981, 56). Moreover, such discursive limitations are coextensive with what Foucault calls "disciplines" (in contradistinction to the sciences; Foucault 1981, 59 ff.). Disciplines, such as botany or linguistics, are in fact the means of policing: "It is always possible that one might speak the truth in the space of a wild exteriority, but one is 'in the true' only by obeying the rules of a discursive 'policing' which one has to reactivate in each of one's discourses. The discipline is the principle of control over the production of discourse. The discipline fixes limits for discourse by the action of an identity which takes the form of a permanent re-actuation of the rules" (61).

According to Gary Gutting's encyclopedic entry on Foucault, the rules that govern systems of thought (epistemes or discursive formations) "operate beneath the consciousness of individual subjects and define a system of conceptual possibilities that determines the boundaries of thought in a given domain and period." The emphasis on the subconscious level of discourse that grounds disciplinary power relations allows us to link Foucault with his great adversary, Jacques Lacan, and his notion of 'the discourse of the university.' In Lacanian vocabulary, this term refers to one of the four types of semiotic intercourse of the subject with the Other. As one of the intersubjective relations that found a social bond in language, the discourse of the university is the articulation of the symbolic network, in which "the dominant position is occupied by knowledge" and "the mastery of knowledge" implies "domination of the other to whom this knowledge is imparted" (Evans 1996, 45-47). Regardless of its Foucauldian or Lacanian interpretation, the discourse of university is of key importance to the ideology and policing within a nation-state because, until the triumph of neoliberal globalization, modern university functioned both as a sophisticated "ideological apparatus of the nation-state" (Readings 1996, 14) and an institution that polices teachers and students according to the conventions of scholarly disciplines. In his seminal diagnosis of the present-day "university in ruins," Bill Readings repeatedly underlines the fact that the modern bases

the hospital; and, in a few decades, they restructured the military organization" (Foucault 1977, 138; emphasis added).

of this centuries-old institution were laid by Kant's concept of critical rationality³ and Humboldt's notion that the university is entitled to study and develop culture as the spiritual center and unifying meaning of the nation-state. The main functions of the post-enlightenment Western university were thus "the national cultural mission" (3) and "its status as the site of critique" (6). British and American critics, struggling with the dominance of hard sciences and technology, reinterpreted the German notion of culture by foregrounding literature as its highest expression, thus installing literary studies (instead of philosophy) "as the central discipline of the University and hence also of national culture" (16).

From the perspective of Weberian sociology, the university is an institution in which the process of capitalist modernity has been accomplished, including progressive rationalization, specialization, and professionalization of knowledge. Contrary to expectations raised by the religious connotation of the title, Max Weber's 1919 essay "Science as a Vocation" describes the professional calling in the key of his general analyses of modern rationalization: "Science today is a 'vocation' organized in special disciplines in the service of self-clarification and knowledge of interrelated facts. It is not the gift of grace of seers and prophets dispensing sacred values and revelations, nor does it partake of the contemplation of sages and philosophers about the meaning of the universe" (Weber 1946, 152). To true scholars and university professors, the accumulation and production of knowledge represent a value *per se*, hence they need not search for any existential or metaphysical meaning of their discipline, nor should they bother about how to announce their scholarly achievements in terms of social relevance and utility. To Weber, a genuine scientist is someone who is completely devoted to the study of his/her research field, which has become specialized due to calculated intellectualization:

The individual can acquire the sure consciousness of achieving something truly perfect in the field of science only in case he is a strict specialist. ... And whoever lacks the capacity to put on blinders ... may as well stay away from science ... Without this strange intoxication, ridiculed by every outsider; without this passion ... according to whether or not you succeed in making this conjecture; without this, you have *no* calling for science. (Weber 1946, 134-135)

To sum up, while ideologically reproducing cultural nationalism to legitimize the nation-state, the modern university policed the community of professors and students by imposing on them the rational regimes, subjects, and methods of individual academic disciplines. The Humboldtian interdependence of scientific research and teaching relied on hierarchic relations between faculty members, who controlled the knowledge of their students, along with their command of appropriate methods and styles of scholarly arguing. The policing of literary studies is thus embedded in the university discourse through which students, under the supervision of specialized professionals, internalize the objects and methods of research pertaining to this scholarly discipline.

2. On Academic Charisma

In his essay, Weber cannot hide his critical envy of professors who try to attract masses of students with their personal charm and rhetoric, or of colleagues who, violating the "value-free"

³ Kant's critical reason is supposed to provide "the *ratio* for all the disciplines" (Readings 1996, 15) and organize the entire system of knowledge.

space of the classroom, preach their opinions, philosophical views, or political beliefs. His dry descriptions disenchant any charms of teaching by bluntly stating “that whether or not the students flock to a teacher is determined in large measure... by purely external things: temperament and even the inflection of his voice” (Weber 1946, 133). Moreover, he is convinced that “the prophet and the demagogue do not belong on the academic platform,” because “the task of the teacher is to serve the students with his knowledge and scientific experience and not to imprint upon them his personal political views” (146).

It is, however, precisely those academics who deviate from the principle of value neutrality and the restrained attitude of state employees in bureaucratized universities of nation-states who possess a different form of power, which Weber elsewhere (and without referring to them) defines as charismatic (Weber 1946, 245-252; *Wirtschaft* § 10). Charisma is to Weber a formless form of authority that exceeds both archaic patriarchy and modern bureaucracy. Its immense social power emerges from a person’s “specific gifts of the body and spirit; and these gifts have been believed to be supernatural, not accessible to everybody” (Weber 1946, 245). Charismatic authority is formless because it is exterior to the established conventions, procedures, or social contracts. It erupts into the traditional order through a series of extraordinary events emerging from the exceptional spiritual or corporeal presence of a person. Therefore, charisma is arbitrary, experiential, purely subject-based, and precarious. It fully depends on whether a given community recognizes — and on how long it is in the mood to admire — the seemingly transcendent powers of a leader, hero, saint, artist, or master. When the events emanating from charismatic presence turn into a predictable convention, the charisma fades. Or, in Weber’s formulation:

The charismatic structure knows nothing of a form or of an ordered procedure of appointment and dismissal. It knows no regulated ‘career,’ ‘advancement,’ ‘salary,’ or regulated and expert training of the holder of charisma or of his aids. It knows no agency of control or appeal ... Charisma knows only inner determination and inner restraint... ‘Pure’ charisma ... is the opposite of all ordered economy. It is the very force that disregards economy ... Charisma can do this because by its very nature it is not an ‘institutional’ and permanent structure. In order to do justice to their mission, the holders of charisma, the master as well as his disciples and followers, must stand outside the ties of this world, outside routine occupations, as well outside the routine obligations of family life ... Pure charisma does not know any ‘legitimacy’ other than flowing from personal strength, that is, one which is constantly being proved. (Weber 1946, 246, 248)

Weber’s qualifications of “pure charisma” quoted above seem to leave little room for university teachers; as a rule, their careers are regulated, they draw good salaries, and are controlled by deans or provosts — in short, their position is institutionalized. However, in the same context, Weber does mention “the holders of charisma, the master as well as his disciples and followers.” It is the pattern of the master and his/her disciples that characterizes the charismatic power on the scene of teaching, notwithstanding its institutional location. However, the modern university is not just a state apparatus that — ideologically and through policing — merely (re)produces national culture, since Kantian critical rationality makes of the university an institutional site of critique. Scholarly reason tends to go beyond questioning the accumulated disciplinary learning and intervene in the ideologies and practices of the society in which the university operates as intellectual service. This

opens the space for an attitude that Weber seems to reserve for prophets and heroes – an intellectual practice that is “revolutionary and transvalues everything” (250).

Weber’s essay on the three ideal types of legitimate rule contrasts charismatic authority with both traditional authority, compatible with the feudal *ancien régime*, and legal authority, which characterizes modern bourgeois societies. Weber nonetheless makes it clear that each of the ideal types appears in different mixtures with the two other types throughout the history of sociopolitical orders, from tribal patriarchy to present-day democracy: “Settled tradition and prestige (charisma) come together with the belief in the significance of formal legality, which finally comes to be based on habituation” (Weber 2004, 141). Thus, the seemingly archaic, pre-modern charismatic authority does also occur in the law-based, bureaucratic, disciplined, and policed legal rule of contemporary nation-states, but it appears as a disruption of the system. The existing order may either accommodate this challenge or – as in the case of twentieth-century fascism or present-day populism — bow to its transgressive power.

Among the typical bearers of charisma (Christian saints, war heroes, prophets, etc.), Weber mentions “demagogues” (Weber 2004, 140). Although in using this expression he refers primarily to politicians who attract masses of devoted adherents with their oratory, his notion of the charismatic (demagogic) force of rhetoric also applies to agencies other than politicians, such as university teachers and theorists. Theorists may be termed charismatic when, deviating from the policed disciplinary discourse, they interfere in the dominant ideologies with alternative concepts and interpretations. Regarding their teachers as Lacanian “subjects supposed to know,”⁴ their disciples embrace and recycle such disruptive conceptions in their discourse. With their presence and discourse, charismatic professors epitomize the truth procedure that is deemed capable of grasping the inconclusive totality of life in a universal metanarrative. Charismatic theorists, therefore, offer their followers the ultimate, quasi-metaphysical interpretation of the essence of being and disclose the reasons for major social problems. Their interpretation of particular issues is both topical and universal because they produce a transversal discourse, which connects, crosses, and surpasses disciplinary divisions. Prototypes of charismatic academic theorists can be found in the Sophists, Socrates and Plato (their universal wisdom, which attracted disciples, was inseparable from the qualities of their character), in the Enlightenment *philosophes*, the ideologists of the French Revolution, and finally, in modernist intellectuals who figure as public instances of socially critical self-conscience.

The charisma that erupts within the policed, disciplinary discourse of the modern university is a locus of a potential heterodoxy. With their influence on students and their appearances in public outside the university, theorists are in a position to articulate alternative interpretations and recruit their adherents to follow dissident political agendas. However, due to their affiliation with the university, where an intellectual critique of society is granted (at least in liberal-democratic societies), their locution is institutionally contained, however radical their statements may be. Bill Readings, for example, had no illusions about this: “[The] university as an institution can deal with all kinds of knowledges, even oppositional ones, so as to make them circulate to the benefit of the system as a whole. This is something we know very well: radicalism sells well in the University marketplace” (Readings 1996, 163). The paradox of institutionalized (and marketable) opposition within the discourse of university corresponds to the ambivalent role of intellectuals, which Karl

⁴ The “subject supposed to know” is the function the analyst knowingly takes vis-à-vis the patient through the relation of transference and the analytical treatment during which the analyst is supposed to know the ‘true’ meaning of the patient’s discourse (Evans 1996, 199-200).

Mannheim and Antonio Gramsci once analyzed in different terms. As Iris Mendel explains, Mannheim's ideal type of "free-floating intellectuals" refers to a "*relatively* classless stratum," that is, the intelligentsia, which is – in contradistinction to the classes of the bourgeoisie and the proletariat – detached from the capitalist mode of production. In the capitalist society, free-floating intellectuals supposedly establish their own community in between the classes. Although they have different social origins and adhere to opposing political options, intellectuals are able to form a volatile community thanks to universal humanist education. Enjoying the professional independence or economic security of their institutional affiliation, "free-floating intellectuals" do not have a direct class interest. Thus, they are able to form the only community that transcends the epistemic biases of other social actors. Capable of considering the conflicting perspectives and experiences of other agencies, intellectuals arrive at a scientific synthesis closest to the social totality. On the other hand, Gramsci laid bare the seemingly free-floating condition as supportive of the ruling class. He lists "traditional intellectuals" in the bourgeoisie and opposes them to "organic intellectuals," who speak for the oppressed and participate in their class struggle with the rulers (see Mendel 2006).⁵ As long as they act as university employees, even the most radical social critics among charismatic theorists cannot avoid the oscillation of their discourse, which is split between two opposing enunciative positions. In other words, they end up in the ambivalence of the organic-transformative and the traditional-interpretive types of intellectuals.

As mentioned above, Readings notes that, in Anglo-American universities, it was literary criticism – and not philosophy, as was the case in Western Europe – that represented the core discipline entitled to interpret the social totality. Thus, it comes as no surprise that literary and comparative literature chairs have often hosted the intellectual practice dubbed "theory" since the 1960s. Drawing on structural poetics, which represented the most up-to-date stage of literary theory, "theory" — first in advanced French circles (such as Tel Quel), and later in the US and elsewhere — established an inter- and transdisciplinary discourse composed of concepts borrowed from linguistics, philosophy, sociology, anthropology, psychoanalysis, history, and the hard sciences. Such a theory (variously baptized as French Theory, High Theory, or Theory) treats a variety of research subjects following post-Kantian or post-phenomenological linguistic models; it tends to radically question all of the established scientific truth or the apparently self-evident states of affairs (see, e.g., Rabaté 2002, 1-20, 46-92).

Since Althusser's writings of the 1960s, the term "theory" has largely conquered the semantic field of the word "philosophy." According to Peter Osborne, theory in France was originally the outcome of the structuralist, post-structuralist, and Marxist critique of philosophy: "Althusser famously briefly used the term *Théorie* with a capital 'T' to designate what he had previously referred to as 'Marxist philosophy' (namely, 'the theory of theoretical practice'), in order to 'reserve the term *philosophy* for *ideological* philosophies', in line with Marx and Engels's diagnosis of the ideological character of philosophy per se ('self-sufficient philosophy') in *The German Ideology*" (Osborne 2011, 21).⁶ As such, Theory established itself as the arch-form of knowledge, to the detriment of philosophy.

⁵ Iris Mendel points out that Mannheim considered intellectuals not only as experts in social engineering, but – in his earlier writings – also as ideal creators of utopia, who, through their vision, foster alternatives and provide the struggling class with a vision and program. Seen from this perspective, Mannheim's traditional intellectuals are reminiscent of Gramsci's organic intellectuals.

⁶ The Marxist historian E. P. Thompson, defending the empirical methods of his discipline and the role of historical experience and self-reflection, famously accused Althusserian post-Marxist Theory of idealism and a pseudo-revolutionary attitude typical of radical academics (*The Poverty of Theory*).

Or, to quote Laurent Dubreuil's succinct formulation: "'Theory' names a scholarly discourse that focuses on the constructible and on language, with recourse to a *philosophical syntax and vocabulary* ... The epistemic site of 'theory' is not only deduced from the practice called philosophy, it also justifies the latter as the necessary base for an arch-discourse" (Dubreuil 2011, 239). In the light of Fredric Jameson's rumination on "metacommentary," it appears that, among other modes of scholarly interpretation, Theory alone is capable of producing "a commentary on the very conditions of existence of the problem itself," and of directing "the attention back to the history itself, and to the historical situation of the commentator as well as of the work" (Jameson 2008, 7).

Charismatic theorists, such as Lacan, Foucault, Barthes, Deleuze, Derrida, and Kristeva, work at universities but oppose the rule of value neutrality, specialization, and the status of state employees. Engaged in sociopolitical issues, they profess their critique of the social and use comprehensive concepts that claim a status equivalent to that of metaphysical universals. Nevertheless, the charisma of their spiritual and bodily presence, as a rule, does not engender a dissenting, transformative social movement because they avoid taking the position of organic intellectuals. Instead of engaging in the class struggle, their charismatic energy recedes to interpretation and keeps circulating mostly within the channels of the institution (academia, the publishing industry). The charisma of the theorist thus transfigures into a charismatic discourse whose energetic concepts spread contagiously among followers across the country and the world, hardly making any difference to the social reality.

3. Dušan Pirjevec as a Charismatic Theorist

Dušan Pirjevec (1921—1977), one of the pillars of Slovenian comparative literature, started his career as a professor at the University of Ljubljana in 1963. Pirjevec's scholarly work and activities during the 1960s and 70s were not only contemporaneous with the rise of Theory in Paris and the rest of the West, but also responded to many of Theory's challenges in a singular way.⁷ At the beginning of his professional path, the University of Ljubljana had still managed to retain many of its bourgeois pre-war traditions. Founded by the post-Habsburg state of South Slavs in 1919,⁸ the University of Ljubljana did not lose its Humboldtian character in the aftermath of WW2, when Josip Broz Tito's Communists, the leading force of the war-winning anti-Nazi resistance, took power in Yugoslavia: its research and teaching were centered on national culture, which was still considered the historical and axiological fundament of the existing state. Nevertheless, the model of university autonomy was exposed to pressures from the ruling Communist Party. As documented by historian Aleš Gabrič, the regime made enduring efforts to impregnate the university's academic staff and administrative bodies with Party members. The authorities made use of ramified means of control over various kinds of intellectual dissidence in curricula and teaching. They kept pushing academics to give up their bourgeois autonomy and wholly amalgamate with the socialist society. Through a series of politically imposed "reforms," the university was expected to become more useful to the

⁷ On Dušan Pirjevec's charismatic professorship, see Dolgan 1998, Gabrič 2014, Hribar 1982, Kos 2011, Šeligo 1998, and Šuvaković 2011.

⁸ Based on the traditions of the Jesuit college, the Imperial Lyceum, and the long-lasting endeavors for a Slovenian university, the University of Ljubljana was finally founded only a year after the formation of the post-Habsburg State of Slovenes, Croats, and Serbs in 1918 (significantly, the opening lecture in December 1919 was on the history of the Slovene language). When the Serbian Karadjordjević dynasty took power, the state gained the name the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes (from 1929 to the Nazi-fascist occupation in 1941, the Kingdom of Yugoslavia).

needs of socialist industry, technology, and the economy.⁹ The communist power systematically policed the community of teachers and students, regardless of their discipline, trying to indoctrinate them with the official version of dialectical materialism. Despite this pressure and successive bans of several teachers, the University of Ljubljana retained some of its residual autonomy. Even the ideological deflection from Communist orthodoxy was tolerated, provided that university intellectuals did not group into what the *nomenklatura* called “cultural opposition”, and that their methods and ideas, stamped as “bourgeois,” did not pose a direct threat to the system and its doctrines (Gabrič 1995, 231-267; see also Vodopivec 2006, 437-440; 450-452). In its tendency to mold the free-floating intellectual “elite” into “intellectual workers” integrated in the allegedly ruling working class, the Party discriminated against the so-called “classical intelligentsia” – composed not only of humanists and social scientists, but also of naturalists pursuing fundamental research – in favor of the “technical intelligentsia” outside the academia, because the latter was held to be ideologically inert and, in actual practice, more closely connected with the working class, industry, and the economy (Gabrič 1995, 235-247).

The disciplines deemed capable of influencing how society and history were interpreted in schools and by the general public were required to show more consistency with the standards of official Marxist historicism, at the time figuring as the only “scientific” approach. Among Slovenian humanities and social sciences, literary criticism traditionally played a prominent role (Gabrič, 1995, 239-243). Its long-established task was to explore and narrate the linguistic and cultural history of the Slovenian nation, as well as to arbitrate about which authors deserve to be canonized as aesthetic-moral exempla ready to be applied to current ideologies. It is well documented how Yugoslav authorities, which – due to Tito’s 1948 break with Stalin and the Soviet bloc – appeared to be milder than their comrades in the East, persistently policed Slovenian literary history. The post-WWII regime in Slovenia was ready to adopt the liberal conventions of early twentieth-century national literary history, but attempted (albeit with meager success) to accommodate its nineteenth-century cultural nationalism to the new official narrative – that is, the history of the Slovenian nation had to be told in terms of the class struggle and the development of a socioeconomic base structure. In this context, literary historian Anton Slodnjak (1899–1983) was accused of being overly nationalist, imbued with outdated positivist empiricism and romantic idealism and, on the top of that, reluctant to embrace the only scientific method of Marxism-Leninism. Consequently, Slodnjak was forced out of the university in 1959 (Gabrič, 1995, 281-290; Kmecl 2000). Literary theory, on the other hand, was long considered unimportant because, mostly treated as scholastic *organon* aimed at text interpretation, it was scholarly less ambitious than its cousin discipline. The situation changed dramatically after Dušan Pirjevec took over the chair in comparative literature, and even more so as the Parisian theory of the 1960s offered Yugoslav academics and students an exciting example of how intellectual, poetic, and artistic revolutions can transform the political *status quo*.

⁹ Oddly enough, pressures to make the Humboldtian university more useful and fully integrated into systems of industrial production and the economy easily switched to the opposite political agenda after Slovenia became an independent, liberal democratic nation-state in 1991: invisibly colonized by Western powers through its transnational integration into the EU and NATO, Slovenia diligently adopted all sorts of neoliberal “reforms” of higher education (especially the Bologna reform). These reforms were, as a rule, based on the expectation that the university should deliver applicative and marketable competences to the global (instead of socialist) economy. Thus, Slovenian universities and research institutes have been suffering from economic racism for decades, under two opposing regimes.

Pirjevec stood out against the disciplinarity, professionalism, and political conformity of the silent academic majority. Notorious as a political commissar of the anti-Nazi resistance movement, an ardent collaborator of the post-war agitprop unit, and a morally transgressive bohemian who was demonstratively put to trial in 1948, Pirjevec had been involved in the Party's campaign against Slodnjak with his elaborate 1959 Marxist critique of Slodnjak's German edition of Slovenian literary history (Gabrič 1995, 285-289; 2011b; 2014; Kmecl 2000).¹⁰ Later, however, during the years of the profound ethical self-reflection that began with his teaching at the university, Pirjevec altered not only his personal approach to literature, but also the discourse of Slovenian literary studies at large. Turning from historical materialism to existentialism, Hegelianism, phenomenology, structuralism, and, finally, Heideggerianism, Pirjevec refashioned the methods of Slovenian literary studies, bringing them closer to philosophy, theory, and modernist developments in the West (see Kos 2011). In alliance with the imported contemporary and heterodox philosophies,¹¹ Pirjevec made literary theory a vibrant discipline, transfiguring it from self-sufficient academic pedantry into the existential self-questioning that grounds a radical sociopolitical critique (see Šuvaković 2011). Being a typically Yugoslav dissident (Gabrič 2011a), Pirjevec was thus the first in Slovenia to introduce a metacommentary that, in the discourse of academic Theory, threatened to present an alternative to the very fundamentals of the official ideology. With his personal presence and voice, perceptiveness, inspired intellect, elaborated critical reasoning, and suggestive rhetoric, Professor Pirjevec attracted hundreds of devoted students and was posthumously remembered in several literary texts (see Dolgan 1998). Marking the discourse and collective memory of his students, the traces of his presence transfigured his charismatic body into the body of charismatic theory.

Having mutated into the interpretive discourse of metacommentary, Pirjevec's academic charisma energizes the concepts of his theory of the European novel. In a series of extensive studies on Cervantes, Stendhal, Dostoevsky, Kafka, and Robbe-Grillet, Pirjevec elaborated his notions from Lukács, Bakhtin, Goldmann, and Heidegger (see Pirjevec 1979). Elevating disciplinary issues to the level of philosophizing about metaphysical and historical themes, he transcended the mere technicality of genre theory, morphing literary theory into an allegory of the development of Western metaphysics. According to Pirjevec's version of the history of being, metaphysics discloses its nihilistic kernel through the structure of novels that narrate the collapse of the protagonist whose actions are legitimized by an obsessive idea. In his theory, Pirjevec freely adapted Heidegger's history of being, misunderstanding his notion of the ontological difference and neglecting his opposition between poetry and metaphysical thinking (see Benčin 2011; Breclj 2011). He refashioned Heideggerianism into the master code with which he allegorically interpreted his conversion from a revolutionary activist into a pseudo-religious existentialist, arguing that we should all resign from any instrumental or transformative relation to the world and, embracing the principle of *agape*, just let the being be.

Pirjevec's charismatic thought corresponds to Ian Hunter's lucid characterization of Theory and "intellectual persona" as emanating from a phenomenology-based "philosophical self-culture":

This cultivated openness to being can appear as a state of rapt attentiveness to the self-manifestation of things. ... In any case, it seems clear that what is at stake here is

¹⁰ In his thoroughly argued review, published in the journal *Naši razgledi*, Pirjevec, in a rather threatening mode, warned other literary historians not to follow Slodnjak's example (Gabrič 1995, 288-289).

¹¹ Of key importance for Pirjevec was phenomenology, which also largely contributed to the contemporaneous formation of (post)structuralist High Theory (see Hunter 2008).

... a highly specific kind of spiritual exercise. This is one that performs the transcendent breakthrough in a kind of inner theater that must be staged by all those undergoing this particular form of philosophical self-cultivation. Above all, we can note the shaping of a certain kind of intellectual persona, characterized by the desire to interrupt ordinary life and knowledge in order to rise above it, to look down on it, to be someone for whom and to whom the world declares itself in all its purity. This persona, who critically subordinates all of the regions of knowledge to the contemplation of a single irruptive source of meaning and structure, may be regarded as an improvisation on the figure of the Christian university metaphysician; for that was always the role of this personage. (Hunter 2008, 87)

Transcending the theory of the novel in a self-reflective spiritual exercise, Pirjevec's metacommentary deconstructed the very principle of action in the name of idea. This applied not only to the official Marxist master narrative and its interpretation of the revolutionary history of Slovenians, but also to modernity at large and its 1968 transnational climax. From 1968 to 1972, when Pirjevec's intellectual influence was on the rise, transnational waves of student revolutionary movements, inspired by the French avant-garde of High Theory, were spreading from the capitalist West to the socialist East and swept into Slovenia and other Yugoslav republics. It was especially Pirjevec's students who became prominent among the intellectual leaders, rebellious writers, and protagonists of the Slovenian student movements (see Borak et al. 2005, 1061-1069). Their professor did not actively participate in the demonstrations and the occupation of the Faculty of Arts, but he did support his disciples and contributed significantly to the theoretical reflection on political events that disturbed the university and Yugoslav society. For example, commenting on the 1968 public manifesto "Yes to Democracy, No to Decadence," in which cultural conservatives loyal to the Party protested against the extravagancies of young poets and political avant-gardists, Pirjevec elaborated a historicizing theory about the typology of Slovenian literature from romanticism to the present. According to Pirjevec's extremely influential 1969 essay, it was always demanded that Slovenian literature suppress the individual expression and existential openness of singular writers for the sake of collective needs – those of the national movement in the nineteenth century and those of the working class and socialist ideas in the present (Pirjevec 1978; see Juvan 2008).

Pirjevec's theoretical charisma was thus in principle anti-systemic and potentially dangerous to the Communist power. Although partially protected by his former career in the Communist Party, he was under the control of the secret police and its informants. Using accusations that curiously echo those once raised against Socrates, the authorities even launched a campaign against Pirjevec's charismatic influence. Not only was gossip spread, but literary texts and TV-dramas were called to arms in the early 1970s to denounce Pirjevec's supposedly lethal influence on his students (Dolgan 1998, 322-329). According to these malevolent accusations, it was Pirjevec, with his nihilist Heideggerian theory of the novelistic hero, who enchanted some of his students to commit suicide. Notwithstanding the fact that Pirjevec is remembered in Slovenian culture as a critical, charismatic dissident, he could not escape the paradoxical condition of intellectuals that I have described above: the charisma of theory – erupting within the policed, disciplinary discourse of the university, and disseminating heterodoxy – is institutionally contained by the very discourse it is trying to surpass. Not only was Pirjevec, if he did not want to risk his job, forced to play the game of the university routine, with its curricula, re-elections, and administration; even his theory, however transgressive and inspiring, contradicted the utopian impulse of the student movements. Could it be that

Pirjevec's critical "university metaphysics," theorizing about how any action in the name of an idea is bound to fail and destroy its subject, inadvertently dissuaded his students from revolutionizing the political *status quo*?

4. Epilogue: What is Left of Theory's Charisma under Neoliberalism

Although, in the wake of revolutionary and utopian demands to radically transform the ossified university structures, a few alternative universities emerged (e.g., Paris Vincennes in 1968) and the existing curriculum was changed to some extent, the subsequent development turned in a completely different direction. Already on the horizon in 1919, when Weber wrote his "Science as a Vocation," the emerging type of university turned out to be that of a corporation whose standards are measurable and whose knowledge is marketable (Weber 1946, 131, 139). Bill Readings and Masao Miyoshi were among those who convincingly described the post-1968 transformation of the Humboldtian university, ideologically underpinned and policed in the name of the nation-state, into the "post-historical" and globalized "university of excellence," in which the principles of corporate business prevail, propelled by the worldwide domination of the neoliberal political paradigm and the concomitant mercantilization of knowledge. Miyoshi puts it in clear terms: "For a while after the 60s, the students and faculty believed that the university was traditionally an autonomous place where scholarship was freely and independently pursued. This faith did not last long. As the tide of the neoliberal economy rose, the original ideal was replaced by the idea of accountability and that, in turn was replaced by accounting" (Miyoshi 2005, 33). According to Miyoshi, globalization decentered the role of the nation-state, as the latter now serves (transnational) corporations (34). As a result, "the curriculum is dominated by the idea of utility," while research results and students are both treated as marketable commodities (34).

In Readings' view, in the corporate, consumer-oriented universities of today, ruled by bureaucratized administrators, "the professoriate is being proletarianized" (Readings 1996, 1), while students and their parents perceive themselves "as consumers" (11). Instead of devoting its research and teaching to the development of "national culture," university corporations – giving up their former role of the state ideological apparatus – develop "human resources" (and knowledge products) for the global marketplace (12). For decades now, the university has been policed by neoliberal economics destroying its traditional structure and deterring its social mission. As Readings repeatedly claims, "the modern University is a *ruined* institution" (129). Its discourse can no longer represent the humanist value of critical knowledge as a prerequisite for a cultivated, educated, professional, and active citizen-intellectual. University knowledge, produced and accumulated in research and disseminated in teaching, is being replaced by various economically applicable "competences." According to Readings, "excellence," the buzzword of the dominant neoliberal ideology of knowledge mercantilization, has no content and figures simply as a kind of measurable exchange value (13): "Excellence exposes the pre-modern traditions of the University to the force of market capitalism ... Excellence serves nothing other than itself, another corporation in a world of transnationally exchanged capital" (38, 43).

What is directly relevant to the problem of charismatic intellectuals is Readings' observation of a devastating consequence of ruining the university, that is, "the decline in the power of the University over the public sphere, with the concomitant elimination of the intellectual as a public figure" (91). Elimination may be too strong a word, but intellectuals today are speaking from a much more relative, unstable, contested, and media-dependent position than they used to, backed by the

cultural capital of the Humboldtian university, figuring as *the* institution of the nation-state's consciousness. In reaction to the conditions of the present-day "University in ruins" (Readings), appeals to recuperate the power Theory possessed in its golden age abound.

Following Jameson's imperative "to historicize theory" (Jameson 2008, 286-301), it makes sense to connect the post-university's sociopolitical and economic context outlined above with the current discourse on "theory after Theory." In his 2003 *After Theory*, Terry Eagleton, for example, "constructs an alternative kind of theory that addresses the important issues he believes are ignored by recent cultural theorists, i.e., truth, objectivity, morality, revolution, and fundamentalism" (Aoudjit 2004). In the echoing collective volume *Theory after Theory* (2011), Jane Elliott and Derek Attridge also support the reshaping of a purportedly self-sufficient, linguo-centric, and socioculturally constructivist High Theory into a more modest, philosophically and politically pronounced post-theory, which, on the one hand, revisits cognitive realism, foregrounding the political, physical, and biological, while, on the other hand, does not refrain from good old aesthetics or metaphysics, such as Badiou's or Meillassoux's (Elliott and Attridge 2011, 1-15).¹² The editors set the tone of the volume by stating the obvious, that is, by rehearsing the "funeral narrative" about how "the era of theory's dominance has passed" and how we are now witnessing "a kind of afterlife of the once vital object that was 'Theory', a diluted form lacking both intellectual substance and institutional prominence ... theory today ... no longer possesses the same significance it once did ... [it] is perceived as less intellectually rigorous, less politically radical or less epistemologically coherent" (1).¹³ Diagnosing changes on the postmodern, seemingly post-historical scene of post-theory, Elliott and Attridge call attention to what I am tempted to call – *pace* Nietzsche – the twilight of theoretical idols. If what the editors of *Theory after Theory* are stating is true, the charisma of theory has definitely vanished: "To the extent that 'Theory' was associated with a tendency to draw obsessively on the work of certain oracular figures, theory as it is manifested in this volume suggests ... a movement away from the perception that such figures are a necessary or consensual feature of the project of theory" (3). However, although it might be that such idols of theory no longer emerge so much from the ranks of (literary) theorists (but what about Bhabha, Spivak, or Butler, to mention just a few?), we are still fascinated by a refurbished pantheon of *auctoritates* such as Badiou, Agamben, Rancière, Hardt, and Negri.

All that being said, can we still speak of the charisma of theory today? As exemplified by Badiou's delayed canonization as one of the leading intellectuals of the day, the charisma of theory is now constructed otherwise, through a transnational "star system," established mainly by US-American corporate universities, promoted by the global industry of scholarly publishing, and almost daily consulted or referred to in the mass media. According to Osborne, since the 1980s, Theory has gradually become commodified, "branded by author's names" (Osborne 2011, 22). Hardly anybody outside Slovenia has ever heard of Pirjevec, while many are familiar with Slavoj Žižek, another charismatic Slovenian theorist. Žižek, whose metacommentaries on topical issues of our time are welcome in the media worldwide, enforced his charisma once he had been consecrated by the US Academe. In an epoch in which nation-states — albeit primary, if not exclusively, those that are

¹² The authors of the volume detect other schizoid tendencies of post-theory: its realism, neo-empiricism, and inter- and transdisciplinarity patterned on the hard sciences; its "ethical turn," revisiting aesthetics, and its participation in identity politics.

¹³ Claire Colebrook lucidly defines the lack of epistemological coherence: "'Theory' as it is now practiced – with its emphasis on the lived, bodies, multitudes, emotions, affects, the political, the ethical turn – is indeed *practiced*; it avoids the problem of theory" (Colebrook 2011, 63).

economically and politically peripheral – are hardly anything more than (semi-)colonial playgrounds for the power of globalized capital, the role of public intellectuals as the moral authorities of a nation is but a relic. The idea of a nation, based on culture, does not work anymore, although it is still often on the lips of politicians, mostly on the occasion of state rituals. Intellectuals, presenting their insights and judgments to a society fractured by divergent class interests, ideologies, and cultural identities, cannot be heard and acclaimed by everyone, although they do find followers and adherents among circles with similar orientations or backgrounds. For example, neoliberals, rightist populists, businessman, industrial workers, and the majority of anonymous commentators of daily news in today's Slovenia all share a disdain for intellectual professions and subscribe to the notion of (radical) intellectuals as social parasites whose knowledge is partisan, false, or meaningless. Bill Readings emphasized the structural homology between the university and the society in which it is embedded. Drawing on his reflection on how to reshape the scene of teaching, surrounded by the ruins of the traditional university, I would like to conclude by arguing that, in a "dissensual community" (marking not only the present university, but the nation-state at large; Readings 1996, 127), theory may regain its charisma only insofar as it proves to be cosmopolitan. Again, cosmopolitan charismatic theory is caught in the known paradox haunting public intellectuals: on the one hand, the influential power of their heterodoxy may significantly help to articulate the utopia, political program, and strategies of the transnational multitudes in their local struggles against the global Empire (for example, the "occupy" movement), but, on the other hand, their charisma emerges only through the globalized institutions and media of this very planetary regime — therefore it is always already exposed to policing.

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