ALESSANDRO FERRARA, *ROUSSEAU AND CRITICAL THEORY*, LEIDEN, BRILL, 2017.

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Alessandro Ferrara's *Rousseau and Critical Theory* can be considered a form of reconstruction with a systematic intent. Ferrara succinctly reconstructs the most important tenets of Rousseau's philosophy (Part 1), interrogates his reception within Critical Theory's three generations – the original Frankfurt School, Habermas and Honneth, followed by authors outside the "core" of the tradition such as Charles Taylor and Frederick Neuhouser (Part 2), demonstrating in the final part the enduring relevance of some of Rousseau's most valuable insights, not just for present-day Critical Theory, but for political philosophy and theories of the self in general. Engaging Ferrara's study, however, one realizes that the aims and contents overflow the boundaries of the above genre as the contours of an original "Rousseauian" Critical Theory gradually begin to take shape – let us first take a glance at the reconstructive edifice that supports Ferrara's critical-theoretic perspective.

Ferrara's reconstruction of Rousseau in this work draws heavily on his *Modernity and Authenticity*, but also on *Reflective Authenticity*, *The Force of the Example* and the more recent *The Democratic Horizon.* In a manner not dissimilar to Charles Taylor's reading of Rousseau (which figures in Section 2 of the study), Ferrara views the Enlightenment author as standing at the wellspring of not one, but two principal normative-theoretical traditions of modernity: the Kantian deontological universalism (the paradigm of "equal rights") and the "ethics of authenticity" tradition that spans the works of Herder, Schiller, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche and Heidegger. Arguing against the clichéd misinterpretations of Rousseau as "primitivist" or "totalitarian", Ferrara demonstrates that Rousseau's ideal of personal authenticity, as formulated in *Julie, or The New Heloise* is also at the foundation of his republican vision of the good society laid out in the *The Social Contract*.

In Ferrara's analysis, the two dimensions of the Swiss philosopher's thought are brought together by being refracted through both prisms of Ferrara's own synthetic perspective – the late-Rawlsianism and the paradigm of exemplarity. In other words, the "*The Social Contract* Rousseau" (the political philosopher) is read, not only through the late-Rawlsian optic as a reader might expect, but also through the lens of Ferrara's paradigm of exemplarity, while the "*Discourses* Rousseau" (the critic of modernity) is analyzed not only as a theorist of authenticity but as one that anticipates contemporary anti-authoritarian strands of political thought. Ferrara first shows us that Rousseau the critic of modernity is not epistemologically authoritarian – relying on Harry Frankfurt's influential conception of "orders of volition",

he demonstrates clearly that Rousseau's ideal of authenticity is not essentialist, but involves a reflective interplay between "first-", "second-" and "third-order" volitions. Ferrara then ventures to convince us that Rousseau the political theorist is not contextually insensitive (or, in Richard Rorty's words, violent towards the "final vocabularies" of historically situated actors and collectivities), in the sense that his vision of the good society, epitomized by the self-determining "general will", does not crush the historical lifeworlds under the weight of an abstract, context-insensitive blueprint for utopia.

Woven into this fabric of Ferrara's reconstruction is a complex and layered argument that revolves around the conception of the "normativity of identity" that Ferrara sees as central to Rousseau's perspective. This argument is gradually elaborated over the course of the three sections, but a reader unfamiliar with Ferrara's work might to some extent fail to take its full measure. In a nutshell, Ferrara argues that a tension that potentially arises in the process of identity formation (personal as well as collective) between our striving to order our conduct around abstract principles, on the one hand, and a fundamental need that we be able to experience our lives as coherent "narratives", on the other, can be the source of strong emancipatory impulses. Ferrara's paradigmatic example is the case of Rousseau's Julie, a case of "failed exemplarity" since Julie resolves the above tension - between her "Kantian" striving not to be happy at the cost of others' unhappiness and the need to actualize her love for Saint-Preux – in favour of the "principled" side. As result, Julie's self gradually disintegrates due to inauthenticity. But what is crucial here is that Ferrara's Rousseauianism does not merely point to a tension between "societal expectations" (the Meadean "generalized other") and our "innermost needs".

When Ferrara transposes the argument onto the level of collectivities (through the analysis of the "legislator" in Rousseau's *The Social Contract*), he demonstrates that the fundamental tension (let us call it the "Kantian-Romanticist" one for want of a better term) resurfaces even as we engage in revolutions, trying to overcome the existing world of "societal expectations". Rather than imposing a blueprint for utopia on the citizenry, the role of the legislator is to "gesture" towards a vision of the good society that's best for us *in light of what we are*. Those who might be tempted to read conservative overtones into Ferrara's argument would fail to appreciate the extent to which this "in light of what we are" is understood in terms of "singularity" rather than essence. Ferrara suggests that the Rousseauian "situated normativity" of political communities might nowadays be thought of along the lines of Rawlsian "political identity" (p. 54). But there is another possible toolkit for deciphering Ferrara's Rousseauianism – notwithstanding his reservations toward Adorno's facile dismissal of Rousseau as a "primitivist", Ferrara's perspective can indeed be read as an Adornian corrective to the progressism that still believes today it can overcome a world of alienation through "administering" the right dose of a trans-contextually valid utopia.