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Cosmopolitanism after Derrida: City, Signature and Sovereignty

Puspa Damai



Signatures of Cosmopolitanism

Cosmopolitanism in Derrida's works sounds like an afterthought in comparison to other more recurring themes of his texts, like 'writing', 'différance', 'supplement', 'metaphysics', or 'violence'. Cosmopolitanism seems to belong to deconstruction, which is often associated with decentring, fragmentation, and critique of totality and universality, only as an intimate other, a foreign element grafted in the body by force, or by miracle. That is the reason why, perhaps, hardly any cosmopolitanist refers to the issue of cosmopolitanism in Derrida or in deconstruction, so much so that even Derrida has written very sparsely on it as it belongs perhaps to the dormant, if not the repressed, other of deconstruction itself, and it surfaces in his thinking only as a surprise, an event, or a gift.¹ In this essay I argue that cosmopolitanism in Derrida is the signature, even the decision of the other as his cosmopolitics is predicated upon extending unconditional hospitality to the other, or upon the arrival of the other. Derrida, I contend, radicalises cosmopolitanism not only by rescuing it from both the Statist model that conceives of it as world government, and a utopian model that confines it to world citizenship, but also by critiquing and revising the traditional theological conceptualisation of sovereignty and by supplementing it with a new form of decisionism, which can be called the sovereignty of the other. His notion of the city of refuge represents the 'other heading' of that sovereignty, which, in contrast to the indivisible nature of traditional sovereignty, is shared and divided, and in which it is always the other who decides without exonerating me from being responsible for its decision.

Throughout this discussion I stress the fact that cosmopolitanism in Derrida converges with the figure of the other itself, hence his simultaneous reluctance and compulsion to address and approach it directly. On the one hand, he resorts to several discursive detours in order not to compromise the 'essential' singularity, autonomy and sovereignty of the other, and not to 'properize' or appropriate the other into 'my' homolingual address, but also to put the accent on 'my' inherently heteronomous nature and 'my' finitude. On the other hand, Derrida addresses the other as if it was he who was being exposed to the other's address. The compulsion to invent new idiom to speak to and about the other, to imagine a new site and politics of the other is already haunted by the uncanny address from the other. It is this event of the other's address or apparition that makes deconstruction aware of its own cosmopolitan unconscious, which can neither be completely ignored nor fully realised and made present. No wonder that Derrida's writing on cosmopolitanism is at best preliminary, schematic, tentative, and approximative; but at the same time it is, like all surprises and events, intrepid, provocative, suggestive, and even annunciatory. It owes its provisionality partly to the textual genre it is destined to take. Unlike voluminous discourses on 'pharmakon', and 'friendship', 'psyche' and 'spectrality', the text on cosmopolitanism is *just* an address to the Parliament of Writers of which Derrida was a founding member and vice-president.² 'On Cosmpollitanism' was published, together with 'On Forgiveness', another of Derrida's short addresses, in *On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness* (2001b) as if neither of the addresses were integer in and of themselves, and as if cosmopolitanism were integrally associated with some form of apologetics. 'On Cosmopolitanism', therefore, does not belong to the rest of his philosophical or theoretical writings in the same way as does, for instance, *Margins of Philosophy* (1982a). If this 'address' belongs, as it were to the margin of the margins, or to what Derrida in *Dissemination* (1981) calls the outwork 'that will not have been a book' (*ibid.*: 3), and if like all outworks that at once lie out of the work as well as occupy 'the entire location and duration of the book' (*ibid.*: 13), then this short and ubiquitous 'address' posits formidable difficulties for reading.³

Since it is, as Derrida writes somewhere else, the 'ear of the other that signs' and 'says me to me and constitutes the *autos* of my autobiography' (1985b: 51), the text on cosmopolitanism could be taken as the 'signature', rather than a minor text of deconstruction. Therefore, taking on the formidable task of reading

it could perhaps be the right and the just way to approach Derrida and deconstruction. However, as in every act of signature that for Derrida only reveals the condition of its possibility as the condition of its impossibility insofar as 'a signature must have a repeatable, iterable, imitable form' (1982a: 328), insofar as 'the signature has to remain and disappear at the same time' (1984: 56), or insofar as the signature belongs at once to the inside as well as the outside of the text (1986: 4), the signature in or as cosmopolitanism is not only dispersed, distributed, repeated, and reiterated all over Derrida's works, and is given to be traced only at the moments when it emerges to disappear, but it also marks the border between his oeuvre and the world of action or praxis.⁴ Thus, it cannot be read simply as overcoming of the binaries so as to reverse the order of the centre and the margin, the (global) South and the North, the East and the West, or nationalism or national citizenship, and internationalism or world citizenship. Nor can it be read as an act that leaves the relations between the binaries perpetually undecided. The condition of possibility as the condition of impossibility in Derrida is what opens the aporetic or differential space in which nothing takes place but a decision, an event. Derrida's cosmopolitanism reveals, instead of being marred by the commonly associated vice of undecidability, a vigorous and enabling decisionism that helps him bring into relief the gap between *theory* and *praxis*.

Seen from this perspective, Derrida's characterisation of *différance*, which for him is an assemblage of different ways, as 'neither a word nor a concept' (1973: 131) reveals a new meaning. By arguing that *différance* is neither just a term nor a concept, he neither implies that it is an airy nothing nor that it is a transcendental something. Nor does the letter *a* in *différance* simply imply 'spacing', as 'worlding', spatialising and temporalising; rather it is the inflection of theory by praxis. If cosmopolitanism is Derrida's call for the world of the other, which will also be a more hospitable and just world, the aporias and impossibilities of theory provide opportunities and generate possibilities for responsible decisions. The texts that bear on the issue of cosmopolitanism, therefore, are all the more crucial in understanding the states of theory in/after Derrida. At the same time these texts, as reiterations of the perennial themes of deconstruction, help us read his earlier texts in a novel way, thereby complicating the easy ways of dubbing his later writings as 'deconstruction getting serious' as if to imply that his earlier texts were just frivolous theoretical mind games.⁵

There is definitely some truth in Rorty's argument about the 'superiority of later to earlier Derrida' (Rorty 1989: 124); but not necessarily, as he thinks, because the later Derrida creates a way of writing or style as opposed to the earlier one who relied solely on neologism or word magic. James L. Marsh reveals the reason behind such readings that claim the superiority of later Derrida. He argues that there is a strong modernist tendency in later Derrida, which he distinguishes from the earlier, postmodernist Derrida. In 'Derrida II', as he puts it, Derrida became 'much more positive about certain aspect of Western tradition, especially in its attention to universal ethical rights, to justice, and to radical social critique indebted to the Marxist tradition' (Marsh 1999: 22). If we agree with Marsh, then, Derrida's cosmopolitanism will be just another version of Western, liberal universalism. Are there cues in Derrida that indicate otherwise? Or his project, if there is one, also betrays the same Eurocentric tendency to 'present' itself, in the name of democracy, critique, human rights, justice, as a modern, advanced, cosmopolitan spirit?

In reply, one can point to a number of his texts where he sounds quite different from what his critics make him to. In his numerous interviews, such as the ones compiled in *Positions* (1982b), Derrida clarifies that deconstruction traverses the interiority as well as the ex-teriority of Western philosophy, and he describes his method as a 'simultaneously faithful and violent circulation between inside and outside of philosophy' (*ibid.*: 6). To further elaborate his point, he argues that all the texts of Western cultures need to be read as kinds of symptoms 'of something that *could not be presented* in the history of philosophy, and which, moreover, is *nowhere present*' (*ibid.*: 7). And this search for the trace of the impresentable other is what informs Derrida's works on cosmopolitanism. In the very text in which Derrida is said to have gotten more serious, or with which, together with some other texts of the period, he is said to have entered the second phase, 'Derrida II', — 'Force of Law', Derrida begins by enumerating the ordeal of speaking in English and goes on to argue that to 'address oneself to the other in the language of the other' is 'the condition of all possible justice'; but at the same time, it is not only impossible to speak the other's language without, to some extent, appropriating and assimilating it to one's own, it is also impossible not to demote justice to (human) rights as an element of universality (1992a: 17).

To instantiate this aporia, Derrida turns to the limits of logocentric law that assumes that the other is capable of language, 'is capable of language in general, is man as a speaking animal'; and he reminds that not very long ago, 'man' meant 'adult white male Europeans, carnivorous and capable of sacrifice' (1992a: 18). While 'there are still, many "subjects" among mankind who are not recognised as subjects and who receive this animal treatment', what 'we confusedly call "animal", the living thing as living and nothing else, is not yet the subject of the law or of law [*droit*]' (*ibid.*: 18). The carno-phallogocentric or anthropocentric legal paradigm, for him, constitutes 'the legacy we have received under the name of justice' which comes 'in more than one language' (*ibid.*: 19). The Western tradition or heritage, therefore, is not only multiple, like the multiple languages in which 'justice' has been transferred, but it also expresses itself as an aporia or a contradiction, which in this case, Derrida illustrates with the contradiction between law or right on the one hand, and justice on the other, one inextricably associated with the other, but also radically different from the other. Derridean cosmopolitanism, thus, is not based on merely human rights or even on the (anthropocentric) law that has always sought to consolidate man's rights, or has attempted to extend conditional and calculated rights to certain others. Nor is it confined, as Marsh implies, just to Europe or to the Western tradition. Against precisely such readings, Derrida calls for the invention of 'another gesture', which neither seeks to repeat Europe nor to entirely break away from it. The other gesture that he invokes rather strives to 'assign identity from alterity, from the other heading and the other of the heading, from a completely different shore' (Derrida 1992b: 30). Derrida's heading towards alterity, towards the other shore outside of Europe involves a difficult and more complicated strategy of cosmopolitics than the one imposed on his texts by some of his readers. Thus, it is imperative to cut him, as he wishes 'but in more than two places' (1999b: 81), and it is equally important to show the transaction or the trace across multiple cuts.

Thus, by reading cosmopolitanism in Derrida as a trace that is at once dispersed all over his texts, yet that exceeds them all to head towards other shores, a trace that erases itself radically in the process of presenting itself, or as a signature that is at the same time in and out of the text, that 'remain(s) resides and falls' (1986: 5), one not only gains a vantage point to critique simplistic binaries of later and

earlier Derrida, theory and praxis, Eurocentrist and anti-Eurocentrist Derrida, but one also knows how to respond to charges by detractors who accuse Derrida of lapsing, to quote David Harvey (one of such detractors) 'into total political silence' (Harvey 1990: 117). This is as if, to take just one of many examples, *Of Grammatology's* rigorous and patient deconstruction of phonetic writing in which the West desires to hear itself speak, and which, coupled with anthropology, serves as 'the medium of the great metaphysical, scientific, technical, and economic adventure of the West' (Derrida 1976: 10) were not properly 'political'. If Harvey finds Derrida's critique of imperial Europe only quietly or improperly political, for Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, he is too metropolitan or cosmopolitan to be political. In her essay, 'Resident Alien', she hails him for his 'teleopoiesis', which she describes as a 'structure of touching the distant other that interrupts the past in the name of a future rupture that is already inscribed in it' (Spivak 2002: 47). Yet this poesis of the 'distant touching', falls short, for her, precisely because it still suffers from metropolitanism; as a result, for Spivak, Derrida's teleopoesis remains confined, as do all migratory models of metropolitan hospitality, to '*arrivant* or *revenant*, arriving or returning' (*ibid.*: 47). To redress this limitation, she proposes to add 'the coloniser as guest' to Derrida's list of the guests that include 'exiles, the deported, the expelled, the rootless, the stateless, lawless, nomads, absolute foreigners' (*ibid.*: 54). Spivak finds the example of this foreigner, whom she calls the resident alien, in Tagore's *Gora*.

What is curious here is not only how Spivak, perhaps unwittingly, succeeds in supplementing Derrida's cosmopolitanism by that of Tagore's, whose cosmopolitanism, according to Martha Nussbaum, succeeds in its very failure (Nussbaum 1996: 15). More curious is Spivak's misreading of hospitality in Derrida, which she relates to the arriving or returning of the immigrant in the metropolis. By proposing Tagore's *Gora* as the coloniser-guest, she indeed reverses the binary of the third world immigrant as the guest, and the former coloniser of the first world as the host, thereby attributing the role of the host to the native. But by restricting hospitality in Derrida to the arrival or return of the metropolitan migrant, she not only overlooks the complexity of the metropolis, to which we will return later, in Derrida, but she also ignores the intricacies of what Derrida calls the 'law of hospitality'. Isn't that sort of arrival and return what Derrida has always criticised as the conditional hospitality of the

State? Isn't that what he at all cost tries to distinguish his concept of hospitality from? Isn't that what he calls 'ill of all "rich", "neo-liberal" countries' that 'welcome or allow to arrive', according to the needs of their economies, workers from economically less privileged countries, especially ex-colonies, 'a work force that they exploit until the day when another set of circumstances, economic, political, ideological, electoral, requires another calculation' (Derrida 2002b: 140)? Doesn't he differentiate what he calls 'an *ethics* of hospitality (an *ethics as* hospitality) [or the unconditional hospitality] from a *law* or a *politics* of hospitality [conditional hospitality]' exemplified by the Kantian universal or cosmopolitan hospitality (Derrida 1999a: 19–20)? Wouldn't he rather start by interrogating the very distinction between the Gora-guest and the native-host, not only because hospitality involves language, the language of the *hôte*, *hôte* as both host and guest, but also because, for him 'the implacable law of hospitality' is: 'the *hôte* who receives (the host), the one who welcomes the invited or received *hôte* (the guest), the welcoming *hôte* who considers himself the owner of the place, is in truth a *hôte* received in his own home' (*ibid.*: 41).



Indifferent Hospitality

It is not that by deconstructing the binary between the host and the guest Derrida obfuscates the colonial politics of hospitality. In fact, the politics of hospitality is the question — the question as to who gets to ask the question — in all the texts revolving around cosmopolitanism and hospitality. Etymology and conceptual genealogy of *hôte* and *hosti-pet-s* (the guest-master), which form the chain of 'two sovereign powers' of traditional law of hospitality that brings it close to ipseity, to one's own (Derrida 1999a: 18), and the perversion or even crimes of hospitality that Derrida illustrates towards the end of his treatise on hospitality by recounting the story of Lot in Sodom in which, in order to save his guests, Lot offers his two virgin daughters as substitutes to the people of Sodom. All of them testify to Derrida's stringent politicisation of hospitality, in which he critiques the father, familial despot, 'the master of the house who lays down the laws of hospitality' (Derrida and Dufourmantelle 2000: 149).

Thus, in spite of some reservations about Levinas's concept of the absolute Other, about his 'feminism' that only disguises his masculinist anxieties, and his humanism that limits his concept of hospitality, Derrida nevertheless underscores in Levinas a certain feminist dimension of welcoming as he notes that Levinas defines the welcome, or the 'welcoming of absolute, absolutely originary, or even pre-originary hospitality' on the basis of femininity (Derrida 1999a: 44).⁶ Contrary to what Spivak implies about Derrida's casting of hospitality in the 'migrationary' mode, one finds him over-cautious about not compromising the absolute singularity of the newcomer. 'Pure hospitality consists in welcoming the new arrival' he clarifies, 'before imposing conditions on them', like asking for a name or identity paper; but on the other hand 'it also assumes that you address them, individually' for '[h]ospitality consists in doing everything possible to address the other' (Derrida 2005: 67). The absolute singularity of the *hôte* brings in the corruptible law of hospitality, and may imply that hospitality is being the master at home, and any encroachment 'on my "at home", on my ipseity, on my power of hospitality, on my sovereignty as host' would turn the guest into an enemy [*hostis*], and take me, the host, his hostage. Consequently classical hospitality of the sovereign host is possible only as finitude, that is to say, only by restricting, filtering, selecting, choosing, and electing the visitors or guests. Hospitality is coded into laws, rights, and in the name of protection, it is controlled and limited by the sovereign State. The conditional hospitality of the State is exactly what transgresses the imperative of hospitality as if 'the laws (plural) of hospitality, in marking limits, powers, rights, and duties, consisted in challenging and transgressing *the* law of hospitality', which commands unconditional hospitality to the *arrivant*. The unconditional hospitality in turn consists, he continues, in saying 'yes' to '*who or what turns up*' before any anticipation, determination, or identification of the *arrivant* as a 'foreigner, an immigrant, an invited guest, or an unexpected visitor'; it is to accede to the arrival itself 'whether or not the new arrival is the citizen of another country, a human, animal, or divine creature, a living or dead thing, male or female' (Derrida and Dufourmantelle 2000: 77). The law of hospitality is, therefore, the law of 'autoimmunity', a perversion of perversion, in which hospitality transgresses its own laws, its own threshold; it suspends itself in order to protect itself, it countersigns in order to effect its signature, and it cultivates an

event of indetermination and indifference, a culture of, to quote his *Politics of Friendship*, 'anonymous and irreducible singularities, infinitely different and indifferent to particular difference' (Derrida 1997b: 106).

To reduce Derrida's 'in-different' hospitality to the migration model of 'arrival and return' is to misinterpret what he means by '*arrivance*', which, for him, is an event that remains 'to come'. The *arrivant*, who may come or never come, but with whom is inextricably associated the event of welcome 'must be absolutely other, an other that I expect not to be expecting, that I'm not waiting for, whose expectation is made of a nonexpectation' even beyond philosophy's horizon of expectation that in advance anticipates, amortises, and calculates knowledge (Derrida and Stiegler 2002: 13). To eliminate all references to the *arrivant* in the name of calculable, determinable and identifiable others is to renounce the incalculable in all events, hence to renounce justice itself. The other arrival is not predicated on *invitation*; rather it is a *visitation* that exceeds the economy of expectation, and surpasses the ceremonies of reception. The *hôte* visits as if it were a surprise, and one receives him without being ready to welcome him, not in one's name or identity, or at least without resorting to the principle of sovereign hospitality; rather one receives as if the guest were the master of the house. Hospitality par excellence is the one 'in which the visitor radically overwhelms the self of the visited, and the *chez-soi* of the *hôte* [host]' (Derrida 2002a: 372).

The welcome of unconditional hospitality is, thus, heteronomous even to the binary of the host and the guest, to ontology itself. Derrida clarifies it further in *Aporias* by arguing that the *arrivants* (plural) need to be distinguished from 'the absolute *arrivant*, who is not even a guest, and with his arrival he surprises the host, who is not yet a host or an inviting power' (1993: 34). Insofar as the *arrivant* does not yet have a determined identity, it can neither be an occupier nor a migrant. 'The absolute *arrivant* as such', he continues, 'is not an intruder, an invader, or a colonizer because invasion presupposes some self-identity for the aggressor and the victim' (*ibid.*). That does not mean, however, that hospitality must remain merely an abstract and spectral notion. It must develop into a culture. No hospitality, Derrida reminds in *Acts of Religion*, is without a culture of hospitality, for hospitality is culture itself; therefore, hospitality should 'multiply the signs of anticipation, construct and institute

what one calls structures of welcoming [*les structures de l'accueil*], a welcoming apparatus [*les structures d'accueil*]' (Derrida 2002a: 361). These indifferent apparatuses or institutes of welcome that are also cognisant of infinite difference are called in 'On Cosmopolitanism' — 'the cities of refuge'.

Before we go on to dwell on the 'cities of refuge', what is important to note here is not just the inadequacy of approaches to Derrida that seek to divide his texts into later and earlier Derrida, or more or less political Derrida, Marxist or anti-Marxist, modernist or post-modernist, and Eurocentric or anti-Eurocentric Derrida. Certain Marxist and postcolonial theories, as we have seen, misread Derrida's cosmopolitical thinking precisely because it attempts to invent the other (of) politics, and imagine the other (of) Europe. Rather, we also need to note Derrida's own unwillingness to directly address cosmopolitanism, as if that would be tantamount to taking it as something that already exists, thus, to accede to what passes for cosmopolitanism, namely, to quote Walter Mignolo's terms, imperialism, Christianity, neo-liberal globalisation, and emancipatory cosmopolitanism of Vitoria, Kant, or Karl Marx (Mignolo 2002: 158). As Derrida reveals in his contribution to *Autodafe*, the journal of the International Parliament of Writers, 'a cosmopolitanism ordered by the traditional concept' of 'citizen of the State and the nation' is not sufficient at all to 'prepare new concept and new strategies for an international resistance' (2001a: 65). In other words, cosmopolitanism needs to be re-thought away from its traditional concept as world citizenship or world government, which dominates even very perspicacious critique of cosmopolitanism like Craig Calhoun's (to cite just one of numerous examples), which demystifies certain cosmopolitanism of the frequently travelling class. Yet, by subscribing to Charles Taylor's notion of 'cohesive and self-governing societies', it reverts to 'active [world] citizenship' for social solidarity (Calhoun 2002: 96). In their essay, 'Four Cosmopolitan Moments', Robert Fine and Robin Cohen (2002) identify in Zeno, Kant, Arendt and Nussbaum four major moments of cosmopolitanism: cosmopolitanism 'as a placeless meeting of minds, cosmopolitanism as perpetual peace, cosmopolitanism as justice, [and] cosmopolitanism as an answer to social fragmentation, extreme nationalism or ethnic hostility' (Fine and Cohen 2002: 162). Even in this fourfold approach Derrida would find varying degree of Statism or anti-Statism, from which he would detour towards a deconstructive or differential relation with the State.

He would even distance his position from isolating four individual moments as cosmopolitanism as for him cosmopolitanism seldom remains a subject to direct address.



Detours of Cosmopolitanism

At the same time, all Derrida's detours into cities, hospitality, into the critique of home and ontology, that is to say, the critique of 'one's own', and of the host-guest binary, and his foregrounding of the *arrivance*, are detours from only one point: the State, which, with its principle of indivisible sovereignty grounded in its theo-ontological foundations, its calculative and selective hospitality, and its legal paradigms that operate to uphold citizenship, rights, and the rule of law — all almost invariably exclusionary mechanisms — attempts to freeze all detours, thus reflection and theory, into one moment of presence or univocal political decision. Moreover, detours are not simply sites where Derrida indulges in his notorious play of language; rather, as he suggests in 'Des Tours de Babel', all detours are also strategic twists and turns, translations and transferences, or they are politics of speaking or listening to others, other languages; and above all, they represent sites for 'raising a tower, [or] constructing a city' (Derrida 2002a: 307). Detours of cosmopolitanism in Derrida are detours from the State to the city, from the indivisible and exceptionalist principles of sovereignty to the differential and dispersed moments of signature.

In *Politics of Friendship* (Derrida 1997b), he takes this detour in order to critique the construction of the political in Western philosophy around the terms 'the friend and the enemy'. He starts by quoting Montaigne quoting Aristotle: 'O my friends, there is no friend'; which for him 'displays the heritage of an immense rumour throughout an imposing corpus of Western philosophical literature: Aristotle to Kant, then to Blanchot; but also from Montaigne to Nietzsche', who parodies the quotation by reversing it into: 'O enemies, there is no enemy' (*ibid.*: 27). Derrida relates this dictum of the end of the enemy to the post-cold war rhetoric of the end of history, which, on the one hand, announces the victory of 'parliamentary democracies of the capitalist Western world'

that now find themselves 'without a principal enemy'; on the other hand, this deconstruction would give way to 'new constitutive enmities' that would 'multiply "little wars" between nation-states', and would seek to identify enemies like China and Islam (Derrida 1997b: 77). By relating this desperate search for an identifiable enemy to Carl Schmitt's notion of the declaration of the enemy as the foundation of the political, Derrida argues that a spectre of the enemy haunts Western political philosophy that is destined to reproduce and multiply the spectre, for the enemy's disappearance is made intimate to its own disappearance. The end of the enemy therefore is 'a crime *against the political itself*', and the retribution against this crime is 'unheard-of violence, the evil of a malice knowing neither measure nor ground, an unleashing incommensurable in its unprecedented — therefore monstrous — forms' (*ibid.*: 83). The reinvention of the enemy that not only eludes but also threatens, due to its public nature, to change place with the friend itself, and the subsequent inflicting of monstrous violence upon it is the only way to repoliticise the political. Against this tradition that cannot be 'thought without knowing *what* "enemy" means, nor a decision made without knowing *who* the enemy is' (*ibid.*: 106), against the Schmittian decisionism, which is not only nothing more than 'a theory of the enemy', (*ibid.*: 67), but also a theory of the sovereign subject that is free and willful, to whom nothing happens, not even the event, Derrida calls for a 'passive' decision without freedom that 'signifies in me the other who decides and renders' (*ibid.*: 68), or to be more precise, that bears the 'signature of the other' on me (*ibid.*: 32). The un-homely moment of the signature is not the disruption of home by the anonymous world, but by the absolute and singular other that however arrives to trouble identification itself, by the one that is the *arrivant* itself. Allowing the other to come by withdrawing oneself produces an event in which one sinks 'into the darkness of a friendship which is not yet' (*ibid.*: 43). One cannot be it, be there yet, or have it, but one must be its friend, and, for Derrida, this solitary friend of the other not only 'overpoliticises the space of the city' (*ibid.*: 43), but he also initiates democracy to come.

It is the figure of Theuth, the god of writing, who, Derrida says, is hardly a character in Plato's *Phaedrus* or *Philebus*, but who bears strong resemblance to other gods of writing, especially to Thoth, the Egyptian god of writing, that plays the role of the friend in *Dissemination*. Derrida argues that Plato's visit to the Egyptian

god is 'neither a partial or total borrowing, nor of chance or Plato's imagination', rather it reveals a structural necessity, which makes the Western logos and its philosophemes unthinkable without the incursion of the 'foreign' mythos. In *Phaedrus*, Plato presents Thoth as 'a subordinate character, a second, a technocrat, without power of decision', as he is just an engineer or clever servant admitted to the King's Counsel merely as a *techne* or a *pharmakon* (Derrida 1981: 86). But a second look at the figure of the god of writing or *pharmakon* in Egyptian mythology will reveal that Thoth is the pharaoh's top *vazir* or functionary, and the gods' secretary; and he is also the son of the Sun king. Thoth, as a divine scribe, therefore, is the master of the books, or the keeper of accounts; therefore he is also called the 'Master of divine words' (*ibid.*: 91). As he also presides over the organisation of death and he counts the weight of the dead souls and enumerates the days of life, thus history, he is as well called the strongest of the gods (*ibid.*: 92). The figure that Plato considered contagious and poisonous, a *pharmakon* because he dulls memory, turns out to be the scribe of time and history. In fact, Plato, who tries to comprehend, thereby dominating the god of writing on the basis of oppositions (good/evil, true/false, essence/appearance, inside/outside), tries to make each of the terms in the opposition external to the other, whereas in fact, it is writing as *pharmakon* that opens the possibility of opposition as such without letting itself be comprehended by it. Derrida argues that it is the *pharmakon* that brings the opposition of the inside and the outside into effect; and, therefore, cannot itself be assigned a site that it situates. It cannot be subsumed under concepts that it draws, it 'leaves only its ghosts to a logic that can only seek to govern it insofar as the logic arises from it'; one would then have to bend, Derrida concludes, 'into strange contortions what could no longer even simply be called logic or discourse' (*ibid.*: 103).

Even though Thoth, for Derrida, is the figure of dissemination that ghosts the binary of inside and outside in which Plato tries to apprehend him, cosmopolitanism is still foreign to the idiom that he deploys to ransack Plato's pharmacy. Same is the case in *Specters of Marx*, which intensifies Derrida's critique of all 'Platonic' attempts to salvage binaries by, as he says in *Dissemination*, leaving 'the ghost behind' (1981: 104). Yet, in this text too, cosmopolitanism never makes an appearance. Instead he depicts a world that is steadily wearing and tearing, a world festered with ten plagues he counts on its wounded body, a becoming worldwide of the world he calls

'mondialisation' in which '[e]ntire regiments of ghosts have returned' from the 'economic wars, national wars, wars among minorities, the unleashing of racisms and xenophobias, ethnic conflicts, conflicts of culture and religion that are tearing apart so-called democratic Europe and the world today' (Derrida 1994: 80). In order to justly respond to these ghosts, he proposes not only an alliance with a certain spirit of Marxism, but also a radicalisation of Marxist critique. Moreover, he puts forward a project of a 'New Internationalism' that seeks to profoundly transform international law beyond the sovereignty of the States by including 'the *worldwide* economic and social field' (*ibid.*: 84). Derrida clarifies that the invocation of the worldwide is neither an anti-Statist argument nor a simple affirmation of the withering away of the State. His 'New International' that denounces the *de facto* take over of international authorities, like United Nations, by powerful nation-states, the hypocrisy of human rights, the states of foreign debts, and the monstrous techno-military inequality, is 'a link of affinity, suffering, and hope', which is also an untimely link, 'without status, without title, and without name' (*ibid.*: 85). It must remain for him a link that is without country, without party, without contract, 'without national community, (International before, across, and beyond any national determination), without cocitizenship, without common belonging to a class' (*ibid.*). Thus, by articulating an International faithful to the Marxist tradition, but without a national community, or a party, or State citizenship, Derrida not only seeks to dehinge Marxism's ontological bind with the ghosts, 'with materialism, the party, the State, the becoming-totalitarian of the State', but by underscoring a 'certain emancipatory and *messianic* affirmation, a certain experience of the promise' (*ibid.*: 89), he also seems to invoke cosmopolitanism that involves the messianic arrival of the other.

Some detractors may wish to ignore Derrida's highly philosophical moves towards deconstructing ontology, messianism and the laws of hospitality, and ask rather bluntly how notions of friendship, pharmakon, dissemination or the New International (all derived from Derrida's reading of the canonical European texts, whether by Plato, Hegel, Marx, Heidegger, Freud or even Schmitt) relate to cosmopolitanism. They may argue that, in spite of its radical edge, Derrida's cosmopolitanism is one from above, in contrast to the one from below, which Pheng Cheah locates in the works of writers like Kwame Anthony Appiah, Bonnie Honig, Bruce Robbins, Scott

Malcomson, and Amanda Anderson (Cheah 1998: 21). There are a number of ways one can respond to these objections: one of them would be to bring into play Derrida's notion of 'elsewhere', or 'to come' that resists the dichotomy of the above and the below, without, however, failing to evoke a constituency that strongly resembles the 'below'.

In 'Taking a Stand for Algeria', his address to a public meeting organised by the International Committee in support of Algerian Intellectuals (ICSAI) and the League of Human Rights in 1994, Derrida talks about 'elsewhere' by which he means not only taking a stand for Algeria internationally, but also what he calls in the address, the 'Third Estate' that lies below the State politics. The time for democracy in Algeria, he writes, 'will be long, discontinuous, difficult to gather into the act of one single decision'; such a decision that should take more time may not 'even be able to gather in Algeria. Things will have to take place *elsewhere* too' (Derrida 2002a: 302). In a way, the other has to make decisions for democracy in Algeria, of course not to allow a 'right of intervention or of intrusion, granted to other states or to the citizens of other states' but to 'reaffirm the international aspect of the stakes and of certain solidarities that tie us all the more in that they do not only tie us as the citizen of determinate nation-states' (*ibid.*: 304). Derrida invokes this other, international solidarity, for he is aware of the limits of the rhetoric that chants: non-intervention and respect for self-determination, but not without running the risk of being 'at best the rhetorical concession of a bad conscience, at worst, an alibi' (*ibid.*). The 'future [*l'avenir*] of Algerian men and women of course belongs in the end to the Algerian people', he writes, but the Algerian future to come arrives neither from somewhere up high, nor from below, but from elsewhere — the Third Estate, which says 'no to death, to torture, to execution, to murder' (*ibid.*: 307). The only hope of democracy to come is carried by this Third Estate that in his or her country has 'no right to speak, is killed or risks his or her life because he or SHE speaks freely, he or SHE thinks freely, he or SHE associates freely' (*ibid.*).

Again the 'elsewhere' of the democracy to come is emphasised in 'Racism's Last Word' (1985a), Derrida's contribution to the catalogue of the Art exhibition against apartheid organised in Paris in 1983 by the Association of Artists of the World against apartheid. In this essay, Derrida likens apartheid's system of partition and barbed wire to a concentration camp and argues that apartheid remains — as unique manifestation of the lowest extreme of racism — a

'Western thing' (1985a: 293). This resolutely Western state-racism, however, demands or engenders worldwide response in the form of an 'untimely' and 'exilic' art exhibition by the artist. 'Artists from all over the world', he notes, 'are preparing to launch a new satellite, a vehicle whose dimensions can hardly be determined except as a satellite of humanity' (Derrida 1985a: 293). The satellite humanity is untimely and exilic in the sense that it yet does not have a fixed place, it does not yet take place, because its destination remains to come, 'which is South Africa beyond *apartheid*, South Africa in memory of *apartheid*' (*ibid.*). This does not at all compromise the importance of exhibition as the satellite of humanity, which is at once a 'mobile and stable habitat', and like all satellites, it guards, 'it keeps watch and gives warning: Do not forget *apartheid*, save humanity from this evil, an evil that cannot be summoned up in the principal and abstract inequality of a system' (*ibid.*). There would be no elsewhere to apartheid without the circumambulatory satellite of humanity, no democracy to come without certain levitating to some height that keeps watch and issues warning against forgetting the evil. But Derrida also distinguishes the satellite humanity from European 'reasons of the states' that keep on turning Africa into 'a giant tableau or painting, the screen for some geopolitical computer' upon which European states project the *bottom lines* of the profits and losses, yet pretend to denounce apartheid 'from the heights of international platforms' (*ibid.*: 298). Against the 'dialectics of denegation', the exhibition, for Derrida, 'signs with a single stroke' and appeals 'unconditionally to the future of another law another force lying beyond the totality of this present' (*ibid.*).

In 'Laws of Reflection: Nelson Mandela, in Admiration', Derrida speaks of another height and another superiority. He talks about Mandela's 'My people and I', which Mandela uses 'without talking like a king' (Derrida 1987: 13) or of Mandela's autobiographical 'I' that 'reasons and signs in the name of "we"' (*ibid.*: 26), and also of the *force* of admiration that affects both his admirers and enemies, even though the latter do not easily admit it. The force of admiration of Mandela, according to Derrida, comes not only from Mandela's admiration for, and reflection on, the Law, but also the 'law itself, the law above other laws' (*ibid.*: 15). It is this law superior to the law of the White man, who does not respect his own law in South Africa, that lies behind Mandela's defiance of the White supremacist law, and that is also the law before which he wishes to appear. Mandela's

evocation of the superior law is not mere reflection of what is called the Western legal deontology of the Magna Charta. Derrida plays on the notion of reflection, correspondence and inheritance and argues that Mandela reflects on, corresponds to, and inherits Western laws, which the White ruling minority of South Africa fails to do. But Mandela's reflection also responds to another height, another superiority and legacy, that of the structure and organisation of early African societies, that prefigure and 'make visible ahead of time, what still remains invisible in its historical phenomenon, that is to say, the "classless" society and the end of the exploitation of man by man' (Derrida 1987: 25). Thus, Derrida's reading of Mandela's *The Struggle is My Life* does not limit itself to reading Mandela as a 'simpler inheritor' (*ibid.*: 17) of the Western juridical tradition, nor does it confine itself to portraying him as someone who mastered the Western legal tradition in order to turn it against the masters themselves. By recognising in him a recognition of the superior law above all laws, the law before the arrival of the White man, Derrida identifies in him an 'authentic' inheritor, 'who conserves and reproduces', but at the same time, 'who respects the *logic* of the legacy enough to turn it upon occasion against those who claim to be its guardians, enough to reveal, despite and against the usurpers, what has never yet been seen in the inheritance' (*ibid.*).



Cities of Refuge

No legacy, nor any inheritance, it seems, is without doing some violence to the heritage one inherits; in the same way, there is no hospitality without first stepping out of one's house to meet the *hôte* on the threshold. It is precisely at this threshold between one's own and the other, or at the border between the above and the below, and at the limit between the two laws of hospitality — the conditional and the unconditional — that Derrida situates, what he in *On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness* (2001b) would call, 'the cities of refuge'. The cities of refuge or asylum, which materially manifest, what Derrida terms in *Acts of Religion* (2002a), the 'structures of welcome', are placed at the border he shores up from the distinction between two forms of the metropolis: the City and the State. The notion of the 'polis' needs to be ruptured into the

City and the State because for him the State including the non-State organisations, which are non-State in appellation only as they are often controlled by the powerful states, are the signatories of violence on a worldwide scale. Whenever the State is not the foremost author — it is also not the foremost guarantor against the violence that forces refugees or exiles to flee — Derrida writes, ‘it is often powerless to ensure the protection and the liberty of its own citizens before a terrorist menace’ (2001b: 6). He recalls Hannah Arendt’s ‘The Decline of the Nation-State and the End of the Rights of Man’ to argue that while between the two world wars the borders of the states are flooded with refugees and exiles, the homeless and the stateless [*Heimatlosen*], the right to asylum undergoes a progressive abolition; it is ‘felt to be an anachronism and a principle incompatible with the international law of the State’ (*ibid.*: 7). Whenever the European nation-states have bothered to think about the rights of asylum, they have done so by referring to it as ‘the control of immigration’, thereby conflating refugee status with the status of the immigrants. On the one hand, by conflating refugee and immigrant statuses, the State brings the rights to asylum back into its demographic-economic interests or into the rhetoric of its electoral programmes. On the other hand, by restricting the international law to the treaties between sovereign states, the State has a sovereign monopoly over asylum seekers. As a result, the asylum seekers are left to the indiscretion of the border police, or what Derrida echoing Walter Benjamin calls, ‘a police without borders’ (*ibid.*: 14).

This formless and faceless menace of the police without borders, aided by new technology, is nowhere more pervasive than in the so-called civilised states, where, the police, omnipresent and spectral, ‘undertake to *make the law*, instead of simply contenting themselves with applying it’ (Derrida 2001b: 14). It is imperative now to distinguish the ‘border’ cities, the cities of refuge, from this borderless spectrality of the police, already a formidable form of cosmopolitanism that has monopolised powers of legislation and decision over what or who arrives at its border without a border. Thus, for Derrida, cosmopolitanism is always one form of cosmopolitanism against the other, one form of spectrality against the other, one form of sovereignty against the other, or one form of the *polis* (City) against the other (State), hence the importance of inheritance and decision. ‘If we look to the city, rather than the state’, he clarifies, ‘it is because we have given up hope that the state

might create a new image for the city' (*ibid.*: 6). Creating the new image of the city is not only reaffirming rights to asylum and the laws of hospitality, but to even go beyond rights, deontology, and conditional laws of hospitality to 'open up new horizons of possibility previously undreamt of by international state law' (Derrida 2001b: 8). He therefore calls upon the Parliament of Writers not to hesitate to declare their ambition:

For let us not hesitate to declare our ultimate ambition, what gives meaning to our project: our plea is for what we have decided to call the 'city of refuge'. This is not to suggest that we ought to restore an essentially classical concept of the city by giving it new attributes and powers; neither would it be simply a matter of endowing the old subject we call the 'city' with new predicates. No, we are dreaming of another concept, of another set of rights for the city, of another politics of the city (*ibid.*).

Another politics of the city or in Derrida's word, 'cosmopolitics' does not imply the return to traditional concept of the city, rather it suggests a rigorous depoliticisation in which the city has to 'elevate itself *above* the nation-state' (2001b: 9). But elevating *au-dessus des Etats-nations* does not mean that the city of refuge becomes the legendary tower of Babel that attempts to touch the sky. The elevation or superiority of the city of refuge is its exceptionality as a space of immunity and exemption, so far enjoyed only by kings and their palaces, lords and their castles, and the priests and their churches. Therefore, by referring to urban immunity and exemption, for instance to the Book of Numbers where God ordered Moses to build six cities of refuge, to Levinas's exegesis of 'Les villes refuges' in his meditation on the Verses, and to the medieval tradition of sanctuary provided by the church, or *auctoritas* that allowed kings or nobles to shield their guests from pursuits, Derrida does not simply repeat or return to the historical and mythical accounts of such spaces. Rather, he is interrogating the sovereign monopoly on exception and immunity, and supplementing it with new, less theo-ontological and more reflective and divisive forms of sovereignty. He also critically examines these traditions for the limits and conditions they impose on the 'superiority' of the city. For instance, he acknowledges that the Enlightenment figures, especially Kant, inherit cosmopolitan tradition of Greek stoicism and Pauline Christianity, but he finds Kant's cosmopolitanism — in spite of the premium it puts on the law

of universal hospitality without limit, or on hospitality as a natural law, thus inalienable and imprescriptible — compromised by a conditioning logic of hospitality. On the one hand, Kant, for Derrida, thinks that all human creatures have received in equal proportion common possession of the surface of the earth; as a result no one can legitimately appropriate the *surface area* for himself or withhold access to another man. On the other hand, Kant painstakingly specifies that the common place covers the *surface* of the earth, that is the case, argues Derrida, not so much to exclude any point of the world or the finite globe (globalisation), but ‘to expel from it what is *erected, constructed, or what sets itself up above* the soil: habitat, culture, institution, State, etc.’ (2001b: 21).⁷ By keeping what is elevated above the surface as the space of exception, which is founded on the earth, but not unconditionally accessible, precisely due to its elevation and edification, to all *arrivants*, Kant succeeds in imposing, according to Derrida, two limits on his otherwise universal law of hospitality: the newcomer has the right of visitation rather than the right of residence; and for Kant hospitality should remain a law to be decided upon by the State police.

In contrast to Kantian hospitality that seeks to divide hospitality of the surface of the earth from which men ‘cannot scatter themselves infinitely’ (Kant 1983: 118) and the hospitality of what is *above* the earth, thus the capital or sovereign hospitality, hospitality of the State, of the capital city and its commerce and culture, from which Kant never rules out the possibility of infinite dispersion, exclusion, banishment, and expulsion, Derrida proposes the elevated city of refuge, which is a sovereign space, but unlike the State, it is left open for the other to arrive without any condition. It is this ‘free city’ constructed, but not in order to monumentalise the construction; elevated, but not as a sovereign head of the State; rather a city, which is based on the *axiome d’incomplétude*, that, in his view, should ‘reorient the politics of the state’ (Derrida 2001b: 4). What is important to note here is that Derrida does not say the new politics of the city dismantles the State, or makes it wither away. Nor does he say, as Foucault does, for example in *Society Must be Defended*, that ‘we have to bypass or get around the problem of sovereignty’ (Foucault 2003: 27). Cosmopolitics of the city of refuge reorients the politics of the State insofar as the unconditional hospitality that the city offers to the *arrivant* cannot be written into any law of any State; the unconditional hospitality thus remains above all states,

their appropriation and domestication; therefore it is cosmopolitan. At the same time, however, cosmopolitics seeks to transform and improve the existing law. The perfectability or deconstructibility of all State laws implies the possibility of the other of the laws, or justice in the same way as the city of refuge lies on the other side of the State — connected, but asymmetrical:

It is a question of knowing how to transform and improve the law, and of knowing if this improvement is possible within an historical space which takes place *between* the law of an unconditional hospitality, offered *a priori* to every other, to all new comers, *wherever they may be*, and *the* conditional laws of a right to hospitality, without which *The* unconditional Law of hospitality would be in danger of remaining a pious and irresponsible desire, without form and without potency, and of being perverted at any moment (Derrida 2001b: 22–23).

The city of refuge at once embodies in a quasi-normative fashion the unconditional law of hospitality and the perfectability of the conditional laws and rights of hospitality. It calls for a work of juridical transformation and calculation without becoming the Work of a sovereign head, or ontology. Through law, but also beyond law, it makes cosmopolitics, like justice, an impossible experience that cannot wait, or an urgency that calls for ‘a just response, more just in any case than the existing law’ (*ibid.*: 23). Cosmopolitanism after Derrida is an immediate response to crime, violence and persecution; and the city of refuge for him is the place of reflection in which ‘a new order of law, and a democracy to come’ is put to the experiment (*ibid.*). If Derrida’s conclusion in the address invokes a ‘cosmopolitanism to come’ that is not because it lies in an uncertain future, but because the cosmopolitanism of the other is as asymmetrical to the time of our living present as are cities of refuge to a ‘globalatinised’ world.



Notes

1. There is a glaring absence of reference to Derrida’s cosmopolitanism in major texts on the subject published around or after the publication of Derrida’s texts on cosmopolitanism. Neither *Conceiving Cosmopolitanism* edited by Steven Vertovec and Robin Cohen (2002) nor

Debating Cosmopolitics (Archibugi et al. 2003), to give just a few examples, mention Derrida's texts on cosmopolitanism. One also looks in vain for any references to Derrida's concept of cosmopolitanism in Breckenridge et al's *Cosmopolitanism* (2002).

2. As Christian Salmon, in the first issue of the Parliament of Writer's Journal, *Autodafe*, informs us, the Parliament convened in haste after the assassination of Tahar Djaout in Algeria in 1993, and Salman Rushdie and Wole Soyinka were its first two presidents. And from the moment of its creation, it has been involved in setting up network of Asylum Cities that offer refuge to writers and artists threatened by fundamentalist and totalitarian regimes. 'Five years after its creation', Salmon continues, 'there are thirty cities in this network' that include cities like Barcelona, Frankfurt, Salzburg, and Venice (2001: 13).
3. There is at least one more text by Derrida, 'Globalization, Peace, and Cosmopolitanism' (see 2002b), that directly bears cosmopolitanism in its title, and no surprise that this text is also his address to UNESCO. Yet, in this too, cosmopolitanism has been, as if by some internal constraints of the concept itself, addressed in the company of other associated concepts. It is addressed as one concept among others, as an other concept, as the concept of the other, or as the other's concept as if to imply that one cannot address cosmopolitanism directly, as if, to quote from the introduction of the collection of essays on the subject, 'specifying cosmopolitanism positively and definitely is an unc cosmopolitan thing to do' (Breckenridge et al. 2002: 1).
4. It is significant therefore that Derrida's essay, 'On Cosmopolitanism' appeared in Routledge's series called 'Thinking in Action' (see Derrida 2001b). Recalling this fact is not a lapse into the binary between thinking and action, but it is an act of underscoring the indissociability of theory and praxis in Derrida not only in the sense of a certain performative aspect of his texts, but in the sense of their evocation of the signature, event or agency which reside precisely at the borders of theory and praxis.
5. Even very insightful readings of Derrida's texts like John McCormick's 'Derrida on Law; or Poststructuralism gets Serious' (2001) are hostage to this hostility towards the early, more playful Derrida. That does not, however, mean that they approve of late style or 'more serious' Derrida. McCormick quickly adds to qualify his observation about seriousness in the title by arguing that 'Force of Law' reveals the decisionism and its bleak association with Heidegger and Carl Schmitt that Derrida harboured for decades (*ibid.*: 396).
6. Derrida's reservations about Levinas's philosophy in general, and his notions of hospitality, femininity and alterity in particular can be found in texts like *Writing and Difference* (1978), especially in the essay 'Violence and Metaphysics', in which Derrida not only detects in Levinas's thinking a necessity of 'lodging oneself within traditional conceptuality in order

to destroy it' (*ibid.*: 111), but also articulates a problem in Levinas's envisioning of positive infinity in the name of infinite alterity, which, for Derrida, is possible only when one renounces all languages (1978: 114), thus all differences or exteriority itself. These reservations become more incisive in a very illuminating and 'dialogic' essay 'At this Very Moment in This Work I Am', in which Derrida (1991) locates a tendency in Levinas to reduce sexual differences and otherness to the height and pre-eminence of man as a human being, to the sameness of the wholly Other. He argues that Levinas's interpretation of the feminine other as dependence or the 'initial afterwards' of Man conceives of a Work signed by the Pronoun He that in turn makes She secondary. 'She would then undersign the work from her place of derivable dependence', says one of the interlocutors in the dialogue, but only as the 'last or first "Hostage"' (1991: 434). In *Adieu* again, Derrida (1999a) recalls the same impulse to 'humanize' in Levinas, and argues that even though the feminine being has been made the condition of hospitable welcome par excellence, recollection, interiority of the Home and habitation, yet she lacks the height of the face, the absolute verticality of the Most-High. She can speak, but only a human language. 'There is nothing of the animal in her' because feminine alterity, Derrida mocks the title of one Levinas's essay and concludes, is 'the humanism of the other woman, of the other (as) woman' (*ibid.*: 37).

7. The word Derrida uses here for 'expel' is 'exclure' which becomes more pertinent here if translated as 'exclude' or 'keep out', rather than 'expel', which only confuses, because expelling the State (from guests?) does not make much sense, especially when Derrida is talking about Kant's condition on accessing what is elevated [*s'éleve*] over the surface (Derrida 1997a: 53).



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