



Obrad Savic

Cosmopolitan friendship

In memoriam Jacques Derrida (1930–2004)

Obrad Savic expresses his respect for a cosmopolitan friend who never kept his political and moral passion separate from theoretical reflections.

While I was working on "Figures of a Stranger", a paper for a special volume of the review *Parallax*, entitled *Seeking Asylum*, we received the sad news of the death of our philosophical mentor and friend, Jacques Derrida. I feared this terrible moment for a long time, but when it came, I discovered, as did all our friends, that I was entirely unprepared. I simply was not ready to face the fact that Derrida was gone. Now that professor Derrida is no longer with us, now that he disappeared from the global philosophical scene, I feel the need to write in his honor with admiration and respect.

I first met professor Derrida, whose exemplary life deserves nothing but praise, in Belgrade (5–8 April, 1992). Derrida arrived in Belgrade to express his philosophical and, of course, political solidarity with people around the journal *Text* and the group of independent intellectuals gathered around the Belgrade Circle. During his stay, Derrida gave two significant lectures ("The Gift of Death: Secrets of European Responsibility" and "Politics of Friendship"), which helped us to permanently distance ourselves from the mutually conflicting ethnic nationalisms that caused the brutal break-up of the former Yugoslavia. On that occasion, Derrida came up with a strongly cosmopolitan belief that was in the very foundation of our far-reaching struggle against a ravaging populism and aggressive patriotism. It was in Belgrade that our personal and political friendship, if I may call it that, began.

In the preface to the Serbian edition of "Politics of Friendship", Derrida looked upon his Yugoslav friends with respect: "On the other hand, here I presuppose gesture to words. Instead of another discourse of the politics of friendship, I believe that it is more right to offer a *testimony* of political friendship. I send greetings to my friends in Belgrade, Serbian, Bosnian, Slovenian and Croatian friends, with whom I met in Belgrade in 1992, on the day the airport in Sarajevo was closed down. I send greetings to my friends from the Belgrade Circle, for instance, who took up a political and philosophical fight, for which they have always had my solidarity." These moving and binding words now have the value of exemplary political legacy. It is important, particularly today, to underline the fact that Derrida freed us from that familial, fraternalistic, nationalist, i.e. androcentric concept of friendship, which, as a rule, ends up in fratricide. He called upon us, he ordered us to firmly stand up against the senseless ethnic crimes. He requested that we should face, with utmost responsibility, the war in the territory of Yugoslavia, which the ravaging

nationalists waged against themselves, against each other, against our own European and world heritage. With unhidden sympathy, he supported our often clumsy efforts to become part of the European political space, even when he knew that, internally, we were not ready for it.

I had my last contact with professor Derrida while preparing the issue of *Parallax*. I knew that the unusually urgent problem of asylum ("Seeking Asylum") could not be competently addressed without a contribution from Derrida, without his inspired and noble articulation of an "unconditional hospitality". The last letter that I received from him (dated June 16, 2004) concerned his contribution and contained a dramatic message put in the elegant words of a righteous man: "Dear Obrad, thank you very much for your kind letter and the precious copy of the *Belgrade Circle Journal*. I am very pleased and honored to see that the chapter 'Sovereignty' contains an excerpt from my book *Voyous*. As you know, I have serious problems with my health and couldn't possibly offer any new articles, but you have my permission to reprint one of the two articles *On Hospitality* that you mention and, of course, I leave the choice to you. With loyal friendship and solidarity with your work and political struggle, yours Jacques Derrida."

Despite his calm words, I could feel that this letter was a moving friend's goodbye and, at the same time, with death approaching, a testamentary order of a future, eternal political friendship. Although I am neither natural let alone legal successor of Derrida's testamentary ideas, I am ready to accept his courageous and unselfish message: "For the love friendship, it is not enough to know how to bear the other in mourning; one must love the future."

Now, with Derrida no longer among us, it is our obligation to carry on his philosophical and political dream about the creation of a new, future, cosmopolitan friendship, a friendship perfectly free from fraternalistic closeness, familial, ethnic and national kinship, even collective solidarity. This means that in the very foundation of Derrida's teaching about the duties of an unconditional friendship is a request for the establishment of a unique political friendship, a friendship with the other, the distant, the unfamiliar – in short, with the stranger as such. The very essence of the quest for new forms of international solidarity, still to be created, is a unique and unrepeatably cosmopolitan belief which Derrida himself professed in an interview, almost as if making a last wish: "In principle, a philosopher should not have a passport, or any kind of identity documents, he should never be required to have a visa! He should not represent any nationality, not even a national language. The will to be a philosopher, in principle and in relation to the most firm of traditions, is the will to make a contribution to the universal community. Not just cosmopolitan, but universal; beyond citizenship, beyond state, even beyond the cosmopolitan." (Jacques Derrida, *Le Figaro Magazine*, October 16, 1999)

Let me take this opportunity to say something in Derrida's honor without making it sound like some inappropriate and necessary eulogy. We admired Derrida precisely because he never kept his political and moral passion separate from the uninterrupted theoretical reflections. We had – and will always have – great respect for Derrida's philosophical readiness to courageously turn against those who saw themselves as keepers of the academic canons, and who were, if you will, aggressive usurpers of a philosophical legacy. Who better than Derrida defended the indisputable "Right to Philosophy", the right to a unique *discursive field* (deconstruction) in which nothing was immune to the demand for unconditional questioning. Political and, if you will, moral loyalty to Derrida comes from the fact that he

audaciously fought against all forms of apartheid and exclusion, wherever they took place; that passionately and consistently he spoke and lived the global, cosmopolitan justice.

Finally, I deeply believe that he lived, and will continue to live in omnipresent hospitality, having loyal friends all over the world, people who loved him and stood by him, sharing his battles and his agonies, his dreams and his cosmopolitan hope.

Published 2004-11-10

Original in English

Contribution by Belgrade Circle Journal

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