



## A Note on the New International

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The Communist Internationals assumed an abstract collectivity of interest determined by the founding inequity of wage-labour. Good or bad, revolution or state capitalism, their interest was in the political as calculus. In *Specters* Derrida keeps his eye on the messianic, which is a mode – if one can call it that – that is discontinuous with the calculus (although it may entail one). Yet the New International in the *Specters of Marx* must necessarily withstand comparison with past Internationals.<sup>1</sup> In that context, it risks being assimilated, in *Specters*, to that self-styled ‘international civil society’, custodian of rights for the entire world by a species of manifest destiny, the political arm of international or global capitalism, that has been the object of a good deal of careful criticism.<sup>2</sup> In *Specters* Derrida is as critical of the nation-state form as any supporter of globalization (which he curiously does not see as ‘a . . . normative phase of development’).<sup>3</sup> But what does it look like from the point of view of the new or developing states, the newly decolonizing or the old decolonized nations – South Africa, say, or India? That it is impossible for these states to escape the orthodox constraints of a ‘neo-liberal’ world economic system which, in the name of Development, and now, ‘sustainable development’, removes all barriers between itself and fragile national economies, so that any possibility of social redistribution is severely damaged.

I will now argue that a powerful re-thinking of ‘an alliance without an institution’<sup>4</sup> is launched in *Politics of Friendship*.<sup>5</sup> In *Politics of Friendship*, Derrida calls by the name ‘Nietzsche’ – ‘the event of the text “Nietzsche” . . . a mutation in the field of the political and the community in general’.<sup>6</sup> It is in the name of that textual figure that Derrida writes of *teleopoiesis*. Teleopoiesis is indeed one of the shocks to the idea of belonging in a collectivity, for it makes a constant and risk-taking effort to affect the distant in a poiesis or imaginative remaking, without guarantees. This is a community that keeps silent together. Derrida makes no attempt to connect this to the quick fix of the Communist Internationals, not even as an ostensible revision. ‘The teleopoiesis we are speaking of is a messianic structure [. . .] We are not yet among these philosophers of the future, we who are calling them and calling them the philosophers of the future, but we are in advance their friends [. . .] This is perhaps the “community of those without community”’.<sup>7</sup> To buttress the earlier notion of the future anterior, where one promises no future present but attends upon what will have happened as a result of one’s work, Derrida now adds a new kind of ‘perhaps’, ‘the possibilization of [an] impossible possible [which] must remain at one and the

same time as undecidable – and therefore as decisive – as the future itself’.<sup>8</sup> Social contact is curved, for no one can be *directly* accessed. The political must therefore act in view of a ‘perhaps’. Because we cannot decide it, the undecidable future must be acknowledged as decisive, the unrestricted gamble of all claims to collectivity.

This critical way of thinking collectivity in the political sphere makes much more sense in today’s world. By the madness of politics, ‘fake’ collectivities are constructed by activist intellectuals at the grass roots, against a globalization about which the rank and file have little real intuition. These groups are the ad hoc ‘social movements’, outside of the abstract aggregations of state- or party-formations. They face the consensus, well-sculpted by all the politico-economic and ideological resources of dominant capital, of that international civil society which rests on the great miraculating aggregations of the Enlightenment. Because such madness does not know itself as such and ignores the originary law of curvature in the *socius* in their task of thinking, their staying power is uncertain. (Add to this the usual class-difference between activist leadership and the movement, disavowed in the political sphere, but quietly taken for granted in everyday life.)

In 1994, when the lectures that became *Specters of Marx* were given at the University of California at Riverside, Bernd Magnus brought together an awesome array of details to make us aware of the intensity and extension of Derrida’s worldwide audience. One knew, of course, but so much! There can be no doubt that Derrida knows more than most of us about teaching – from the intimacy of the small seminar in French to the long distance and remote spectrality of the Internet – from English to the many languages of the world. There is greater authority – what other word can we use? – in Derrida’s implicit model of the classroom as the workshop of the production of collectivity (‘How many are *we*,’ ever, in a classroom?) than the earlier invocation of the International.

At the very beginning of *Politics of Friendship*, Derrida tells us that the book is no more than: ‘the first session of a seminar conducted with th[e] title, “Politics of Friendship”, in 1988–89 [. . .] Week after week [. . .] each session . . . tried [. . .] to see if the scenography could be set in motion around itself. This text . . . *represents*, only the first session [. . .] less a first act than a sort of preview’.<sup>9</sup> *Politics of Friendship* is only a book, between covers. For the real text, you must enter the classroom, act it out in imagining, put yourself to school, *as* a preview of the formation of collectivities.

It is important that the Uruguay round of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade was winding up during these years. It is also important that the Soviet Union was getting dismantled. The analysis of collectivity in *Politics* holds out a lesson, a task of doing/knowing (*pouvoir/savoir*) rather than a catalogue, during and after 1988–89. A single ‘teacher’s’ ‘students’, flung out into the world and time, is a better real-world example of the precarious continuity of a Marxism ‘to come’, much more aligned to the lines of global activism today, in the aftermath of 1989, in the hot peace after the cold war.

Citation of citations, indefinitely. Teleopoietic reversals, in the interest of a community of the future anterior of the ‘perhaps’. A slow but tenacious change of

mind quickly dismissed as a-political in the quick fix of organizational thinking. The classroom, represented in the book, is a simulacrum of the possibility of this. I am suggesting that such indefinite citations of citations, altered by teleopoiesis until the ‘author’ is hardly recognizable, is the space of something that can be called non-European ‘Marxism’, somewhat in the way in which ‘Nietzsche’ serves as a name for a European shock, for Derrida. After the collapse of international communism as a structured state-system, in the field of *Realpolitik*; and after the freezing or loosening of left parties, in reaction or coalition, it is in that open space – that open form, that call – of indefinite, unrecognizable, yet active-in-silence collectivity, with no possibility of coming together across insuperable linguistic and spatial divides, that ‘Marx’ survives as at least the possibility of resistance in the far-flung global grassroots. Sometimes these collectivities oppose or are ravaged by those very forces of the ‘International Civil Society’ that resembles the New International of *Specters. Politics of Friendship* offers us a more powerful model.

Indeed, the classroom is irreducible. It is in the actual work of teaching in the rural literacy ‘classroom’, sometimes perforce under the sky, in the teleopoietic hope of building a collectivity, as opposed to the donation of buildings and teachers with the teaching taken for granted. There is now an increasing tendency to romanticize global social movements.<sup>10</sup> I was myself guilty of this at a certain point. Let me expand upon the importance of teaching in the context of counter-globalization. For subaltern orthodoxy to move from within, and form collectivities that are not necessarily led by counter-globalist activists, however publicly self-minimalizing, patient disinterested epistemic engagement on the part of such activists (irreducibly hegemonic) – imagining the procedures of other-directedness that stagnant orthodoxies still harbour, in a way that Melanie Klein would call ‘reparation’ – cannot be given up in the name of ‘revolution [freedom from . . .] first . . .’ Then, things tend to go wrong if and when the moment for ‘freedom to . . .’ arrives. One notices the desperate and hardly perceptible effort at faking subaltern collective initiative by the leaders of counter-globalist resistance.<sup>11</sup> It comes clear that this ‘speaking for’, accompanied by the decisive urgency of the ‘freedom from’, is much more likely to fail – perhaps in seventy years, as in the case of the Soviet Union – or be appropriated – perhaps in fifty years, as in the case of China – because the slow effort to change the subject – as undertaken in bourgeois Europe in the heritage of the Second International (a Eurocentric model of Marxism that could attend to the development of the welfare state in its own space) – will not have taken place. The ‘truth to come’ of this intuition is in the decisive undecidability of the future. The irony is that even the actually existing counterglobalist efforts, betrayed by that ruse at the bottom, cannot be recognized as anything but ‘disruptions’ by Western Marxists, so occupied are they in keeping the lines of their orthodoxy intact, within the outlines of their books.<sup>12</sup> Indeed, it is they who point at yet another historical irony; that even in the painstaking heritage of the Second International, the leftist conscience of bourgeois Europe, the achievement of ‘freedom to’ is identitarian: at least racist and sexist, and in the last analysis, perhaps classist as well. Its ‘real’ critique is the hands-on, skilled and labour-intensive, devising of educational practice and pedagogic techniques, accessible to unexceptional rural teachers. For this effort, unrelated to resistant/nationalist content or indoctrination, there are no takers. This is because it is much easier to fake collective will from below, by left and right alike.

The persuasive force of mere attention is disarming for the subaltern. It is an instrument of accelerated upward class-mobility for the exceptional subaltern. Add to this the fact that large-scale victories seem and are much more important in the short run. By contrast, the long-term production of democratic reflexes in the subaltern seems boringly minimalist and detail-oriented. It does not even resemble enthusiastic ‘culturally aware’ literacy work by funded NGOs!

‘The Left’ must of course still learn to acknowledge and support the actually existing efforts against exploitative globalization (the only variety that is consistent and sustained), situating the provincialism of its own nostalgic orthodoxy for a last hurrah for (British or anglomaniac) academic ‘amateurism’. What I am trying to come to grips with now is a much more serious problem, shared by old-style Marxist organization as well as these ‘anti-systemic’ imperatives, that real mind-changing formations of collectivity, that will withstand and survive victory, is incredibly slow and time-consuming work, with no guarantees.<sup>13</sup> The persuasiveness of capitalist enterprise remains much more effective, not only because it is self-focused, but because it spends much more time on the nature of education at all levels, and has appropriately trivialized the humanities so that the convictions of purchased virtue, as in corporate philanthropy, go quite unchallenged in the do-gooders, and they can produce a clearly untroubled conscience in the field in the benevolence of the meretriciously named ‘international civil society’. There is concerted primary training in exploitation. ‘Companies are even reaching out to pre-schoolers’, gushes CBS *Marketwatch* (August 26, 2000). ‘The hottest new demographic in town’ is the 8–10 year olds, 10% of whom own bonds (August 20, 2000).

In *Politics of Friendship*, Derrida makes a plea for slow reading, even at a time of political urgency, arguing carefully that it must remain always inadequate.<sup>14</sup> As so often, I echo him on another register, and make a plea for the patient work of learning to learn from below – a species of ‘reading’, perhaps – how to mend the torn fabric of subaltern ethics with the thread of the subject whose trace is in the madness of a universal declaration of human rights – necessarily bending curvature into *droiture* – straightness, rights, uprightness. If this interests you, I have not altogether misread Derrida.

#### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: the State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*, Peggy Kamuf (trans.) (New York: Routledge, 1994), pp.84–88. For a history of the four Internationals (first established by Marx and moved to the US, second, 1889–1914, which gave Northwestern Europe its welfare statist face, third the ComIntern, which broke in 1943 because of German opposition to Russia in World War II, and Fourth the ongoing Trotskyist movement), see Julius Braunthal, *History of the International* (London: Nelson, 1966) and Fernando Claudin, *The Communist Movement: From Comintern to Cominform* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1975).

<sup>2</sup> Farida Akhter, ‘Health Ignored and Environment Forgotten: Misleading Direction Toward Empowerment’, in *Depopulating Bangladesh* (Dhaka: Narigrantha Prabartana, first edition, 1991), n.p. This text is not included in the available edition of the book; for a comprehensive discussion we must look forward to Sonia E. Alvarez, *Contentious Trans/formations: Feminist Readings of Civil Society, Social Movements, and Transnational Organizing in Latin America* (forthcoming). See also Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward A History of the Vanishing Present* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1999), pp.374–421.

<sup>3</sup> Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, p.78.

<sup>4</sup> Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, p.86.

<sup>5</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Politics of Friendship*, George Collins (trans.) (New York: Verso, 1997). In quoting this text here I have often modified the translation.

<sup>6</sup> Derrida, *Politics of Friendship*, p.79.

<sup>7</sup> Derrida, *Politics of Friendship*, p.37. This part of the discussion is elaborated in Spivak, 'Schmitt and Poststructuralism: a Response', *Cardozo Law Review* 21.5-6 (May 2000), pp.1723–1737.

<sup>8</sup> Derrida, *Politics of Friendship*, p.29.

<sup>9</sup> Derrida, *Politics of Friendship*, pp.vii–viii; translation modified.

<sup>10</sup> To focus how the disruption of the World Trade Organization meeting in Seattle (1999) is making this romanticization available, let me cite Roger Cohen, 'Growing Up and Getting Practical Since Seattle', *New York Times* 'Week in Review', Sept 24, 2000, p.1, 16. Seven chunky white activists are featured. The decades-long struggle of the global social movements in the global South is ignored. The piece has the ominous lines: 'It might be argued that the lines are being drawn in the wrong place. The \$1.2 trillion traded daily on world money markets equals the entire lending of the World Bank over its 55 years of existence. But all that fast-moving money has no identifiable face. By contrast, the altar of market liberalization, privatization and public spending cuts is identifiable . . .'. The relationship between finance capital and world trade would take us beyond the scope of this

'Note'. It is, however, an issue that is of equal importance as the formation of collectivities, the matter of the New International. I direct the reader to current work: 'Globalizing Globalization', *Rethinking Marxism*, forthcoming, and 'Message to the 21st Century', Japan, Shueisha, forthcoming.

<sup>11</sup> 'Hardly perceptible' because the usual deliberately downwardly mobile bourgeois leadership looks more authentically grassroots than the innocently upwardly mobile subaltern. One must be intimately acquainted with social and verbal idiom to perceive activist leadership control in such situations. The latter are often empowered by the 'enabling violation' of colonial education in the production of their past.

<sup>12</sup> Leslie Sklair, 'Social Movements and Global Capitalism', in Fredric Jameson (ed.), *Cultures of Globalization* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998), p.305 and *passim*.

<sup>13</sup> In the long run, the 'elite' language of *Politics of Friendship* or the forbidding 'apoliticality' of J. M. Coetzee's *Disgrace* (New York: Viking, 2000), both attempting to question the faking of collectivities, but willy-nilly aimed at an academic elite readership, may bear as much fruit as these 'stupid' efforts, for the 'perhaps' works in indirect ways that cannot be planned for. Yet, and this is crucial, plans must be made, and mine are different in style.

<sup>14</sup> Derrida, *Politics of Friendship*, pp.78–9.

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