UvA-DARE (Digital Academic Repository)

Kosmopolitieken van Kant, Levi-Strauss en Derrida. Deconstructies van het filosofische en antroplogische kosmopolitisme

van Keulen, S.

Publication date
2004

[Link to publication](#)

Citation for published version (APA):
van Keulen, S. (2004). *Kosmopolitieken van Kant, Levi-Strauss en Derrida. Deconstructies van het filosofische en antroplogische kosmopolitisme.*

SUMMARY

COSMOPOLITICS OF KANT, LÉVI-STRAUSS AND DERRIDA.
Deconstructions of philosophical and anthropological cosmopolitanism

The aim of my study of Kant, Lévi-Strauss and Derrida is to give an insight into the way their cosmopolitics are related. In his famous essay on cosmopolitanism, *Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose* (1784), Kant offers the reader a kind of Ariadne's thread along which he unrolls his critical point of view with regard to a European and global program of Enlightenment (Aufklärung, Lumières). The goal and the – supposedly peaceful - end of western politics, on behalf of mankind, is envisioned by Kant with the help of a certain providence: "a future in which *we are shown from afar* how the human race eventually works its way upward to a situation in which all the germs implanted by nature can be developed fully, and in which man's destiny can be fulfilled here on earth" (8: 30, my italics).

Lévi-Strauss's cosmopolitism can be understood as a continuation of Kant's view from afar. However, the structuralist vision also transforms in more than one sense, Kant's belief in the thread of pure reason. Structural anthropology decenters the transcendental mode of thought, thereby already deconstructing the rational foundation of Eurocentric cosmopolitism. In the twelfth chapter of *The View from Afar* (1985), which bears the significant title *Cosmopolitanism and Schizophrenia*, Lévi-Strauss argues convincingly, in reflection on the last volume of his masterpiece *Mythologics*, that the Indian way of thinking may appear from a western, clinical perspective as a mental disorder. In the eyes of the anthropologist however, this mythology "does not illustrate a case of schizophrenia or some morbid state", but a "cosmopolitanism" which "uses the notion of a split to create a philosophy" (184-5).

Derrida's early writings, *On grammatology, Writing and Difference, Margins of Philosophy* and *Given Time*, consist for a substantial part out of meticulous rereadings of structural linguistics, philosophies of structure (diltheyanism and gestaltism) and lévi-straussian structuralism. These deconstructions of logocentric thinking already have a significant political essence - and not only because philosophical writings always are essentially political. During the sixties and seventies of the last century, Derrida analysed the virulent conflicts between phenomenology and structuralism, and in the meantime he formulated quite distinctively a certain cosmopolitical program of deconstruction: "what is difficult to think today is an end (*une fin*) of man which would not be organized by a dialectics of truth and negativity, an end of man which would not be a teleology of the first person plural" (*Margins*, 121). The later Derrida focuses more and more on the kantian paradigm in books such as *On a Newly Arisen Apocalyptic Tone --- Philosophy, Du droit à la philosophie, On*

Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness and *The Right to Philosophy from a Cosmopolitical Perspective (Le droit à la philosophie du point de vue cosmopolitique*, éditions UNESCO, Verdier, 1997).

The first chapter focusses on "the decentering of the transcendental subject." In a letter Lévi-Strauss wrote me on 11 September 2001 where he gave me distinctive clues in regard to his reading of Kant, Lévi-Strauss answered a question in the following way: "Je détourne seulement à mon usage la notion kantienne de schématisme" (I simply turn about the kantian notion of schematism for my own use). In a survey of his autobiographical narrative (*Tristes tropiques*), and through his entire oeuvre as well as through some well known and lesser known interviews, I try to find out what he could have meant by this statement. Thus Lévi-Strauss's references to and criticism on Kant and (neo)kantianism are revaluated.

Having drawn the contours of a major structuralistic effect - that is, the decentering of the nucleus of kantian autonomy and apriorism - the second chapter consists out of a detailed examination of the possible practical (that is, aesthetical, ethical and political) consequences of structural anthropology with regard to Kant's *Critique of Practical Reason* and *Critique of Judgment*. The argument is that Lévi-Strauss, in his groundbreaking work, *The Elementary Structures of Kinship* (1969) offers an almost complete rephrasing of the transcendental ethical and aesthetical pillars of community. Lévi-Strauss transforms the liminal forces and feelings of fellowship and communal belonging (*Kinship* and *Gemeinsinn*).

On the condition that Lévi-Strauss has sufficiently filtered some dominant social principles out of the kantian paradigm, and subsequently formalized and transformed these principles into a cultural network determined by a so-called logic of reciprocity, the argument is allowed to be reversed. In the third chapter, "Practices of Reciprocity", it appears that the teleological dynamics on all levels of Kant's thinking (epistemological, ethical, aesthetical and political) can be regarded as vehemently determined by the logic of reciprocity. Thanks to Susan Shell, who already in *The Embodiment of Reason* has concluded that "the principle of relatedness *is* the essential form" of the transcendental subject, the key term with regard to the definition of communality of both Kant and Lévi-Strauss, can be established as *relationality*.

Making a transition to the later works of Lévi-Strauss in the fourth chapter - in particular *The Savage Mind* and *Mythologics* - under the title "Schematism and Deconstruction," the question is elaborated upon as to how Lévi-Strauss's "floating schematism" can already be regarded as deconstruction, that is, as deregulating trans-cendental deductive schematism. Speaking further in terms of schematism, Lévi-Strauss's deconstruction is also still under the spell of the metaphysical urge for closure and unity. Structuralism does deconstruct the foundations of the philosophy of

identity, but it is at the same time a strategy of re-establishing and remaking the gestalt of the former autonomous Self. More or less by necessity, Derrida's deconstruction must at least indicate the paradoxes and aporias of the closing forces of the structural and transcendental schematisms, and at the same time give some insight into absolute atopical remainders, which are conceived of as forces of aschematic resistance. In *Politics of Friendship*, Derrida, indeed, deconstructs and rephrases at length the logic of reciprocity, which appears to be the common ground not only of Kant but also Lévi-Strauss: "at stake would thus be a deconstruction *of the* genealogical schema, a paradoxical deconstruction - a deconstruction, at once genealogical and a-genealogical, *of the* genealogical" (105).

Considering Derrida's deconstructions as inventive acts of rephrasing and dislocating kantian and lévi-straussian schematisms, the conclusive outcome cannot simply be one thing next to the other. The fifth chapter, entitled "Circles of Thought, the Residue, and the Rest," is on the one hand, a detailed tour through the *Mythologics* where one finds out about the ontological remainders of the floating schematism in the mythologies of honey and tobacco, and on the other hand a first attempt to indicate the interruptive moments of deschematization as effects of "eventiveness" (*événementialité*). Thus the classic structural scheme of "structure and event" is deconstructed and this, in the phrasing of *Politics of Friendship*, "delivers up the truth of friendship in the eerie light of a *contre-jour*" (14).

The sixth chapter detours through and around mainly two works of Derrida, *Politics of Friendship* and *The Right to Philosophy from a Cosmopolitical Perspective* - the title is in this respect an amalgam: "Cosmopolitics of Friendship". In the partition of deconstructive effects, enlightened by an eerie light, the contours of another concept of friendship are discernable. A certain term could perhaps even be labeled as a catchword, "spectrality," indicating "respect for the spectre, as Mary Shelley would say," (*Politics of Friendship*, 73). This truthful counterview and feeling for another friendship, a desire of another freedom, scatters the transcendental and structural calculations, once formulated by Lévi-Strauss in *Race and History* as: "humanity is constantly struggling with two contradictory processes. One of these tends to promote unification, while the other aims at maintaining or re-establishing diversification. On both planes and at two opposing positions, we deal with two different manners of *making oneself*."

Taking into account that the basic forces of the kantian logic of reciprocity were founded on "love" and "respect," and considering, furthermore, the structural deconstruction of these aprioristic categories in terms of the mythologies of honey and tobacco, a cosmopolitics of friendship must be regarded as something very different. *Absolute alterity* should always be in play between true friends, that is, spectral

490

friendship does not close itself off and is "without common measure, reciprocity or equality" (*Politics of Friendship*, 35). Deconstruction of the cultural hegemony of the logic of reciprocity is thus understood as interceptive forces of alterity, deschematizing the coordinates that formerly defined cultural and national identities in terms of autonomy and relationality.

(english text corrections by Audrey Ng)