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“This Little Thing That Is Europe”

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THE QUESTION OF EUROPE IS NOT MERELY ONE QUESTION AMONG others. It is, rather, as Jacques Derrida remarks at the beginning of *The Other Heading: Reflections on Today's Europe*, “a question that will always be of current interest.” If this topical question is raised today in Europe in the face of, or under the pressure of, “some *imminence*” (that is, of something that is occurring now at this very moment), then it is because it is a question that poses itself now and is therefore of some urgency. But as Derrida’s reference to “some *imminence*” suggests, that which thus announces itself in Europe, and to which the question of Europe responds, is something that is approaching, and about to happen or to arrive. And yet it is also that which refuses “itself to anticipation as much as to analogy” and thus “seems to be without precedent.” Without yet having a face, resembling nothing, it is also something unique, and consequently, something of the order of an event whose promise is tinged with a certain degree of monstrosity. The impending event that triggers the question of Europe today is

also perhaps a threat. Whether what is imminent presents itself as a chance or as a danger, or even as “at once a chance and a danger,” the question that it raises is bound to be more demanding than a mere academic exercise or performance. The question of Europe draws its urgency and actuality from the threat or the chance—or from both—that “is afoot in Europe, in what is still called Europe even if we no longer know very well *what* or *who* goes by this name” (Derrida 1992b, 5–6).¹ If the question of Europe is always of topical interest, and if, moreover, the response to this question bears on present-day Europe and what it is to become; if this question is posed at a moment of threat to Europe or at a moment of the promise of something new—“a moment for which the word *crisis*, the crisis of Europe or the crisis of the spirit, is perhaps no longer appropriate”—then it follows that the question of Europe is for Europe always the question of the day—the most pressing, if not the ultimate, concern (1992b, 31).

The word “crisis,” which Edmund Husserl, like so many others between Word War I and II, used to justify his reflections on Europe, may no longer be appropriate to describe the impending imminence that besets Europe, since “crisis” suggests that, at one point, Europe or the European spirit was intact or whole and is only now suffering a crisis. Today the threat or chance that calls Europe into question and forces the question of Europe upon Europe is something unique, a matter of present interest, while at the same time remaining something that Europe qua “Europe” has always been exposed to: namely, the fact that what it represents is both a promise and a danger. Europe, if I may advance something like a definition, is the conception of a world or a life project which, at every moment—that is, every day—faces the imminence of being “at once a chance and a danger”; of a world, in short, that at every moment confronts the future as both a menace and a chance. If “today” is unique, it is precisely because today the pressure of what is approaching as a threat or a chance concerns this very conception of a world. What is imminent today in Europe is not only that Europe may be about to realize the promise of its “concept” (or on the contrary, to forego it altogether), but what is imminent is also the very existence of Europe as a conception that is “at once a chance and a danger.” Considering the nature of this question on Europe, it should therefore come as no

surprise that “this little thing that is Europe” has been a topic of constant interest to Derrida, from *Le problème de la genèse dans la philosophie de Husserl* (1953–54) to “A Europe of Hope,” the address given on the occasion of *Le Monde diplomatique*’s fiftieth anniversary celebration in May 2004, shortly before his death (2000a, 19).

In the concluding chapters of his 1953–54 dissertation (which he wrote in order to fulfill the requirements for a diploma of higher education), Derrida had already taken up Husserl’s definition of Europe as an idea. As an investigation into the difficulties caused by the introduction of the theme of genesis—that is, of time, becoming, and history—in Husserlian phenomenology (which, originally, had only been concerned with the static constitution of the ego), Derrida inquires both into the birth of the idea—the eidetic unity of Europe, in Europe itself—and, vice versa, into how Europe itself is born from this idea, the idea of philosophy. Based on a minute and careful analysis of some key passages from Husserl’s Vienna Lecture, as well as from the sections of *The Crisis of the European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology* available at that time, Derrida highlights a series of unresolved problems, contradictions, and aporias between, on the one hand, Husserl’s insistence that, as a transcendental idea, the idea of Europe is unrelated to Europe’s empirical history, and on the other, his contention that this transcendental idea is born in Europe itself, more precisely in seventh-century Greece, which is the one point in real history when the pure idea of philosophy came to be confused with the destiny and the existence of a particular people. However, as a pure idea, the idea of philosophy as an infinite task can, in principle, have no geographical and historical roots, and, as Derrida notes, “in this regard, one should be able to replace Europe by Asia or Africa.” And yet in spite of the refusal—particular to phenomenological idealism—to grant the European *eidōs* the status of an empirically datable and localized event, Europe in Husserl’s works is said to be “the spiritual place of birth of this idea, the mysterious and immaterial residence of philosophy,” the place where philosophy inhabits, in his words, “the soul of certain men.” Europe, consequently, is endowed with an *eidōs* that is also specifically European (1990, 250–51). A host of further questions and contradictions derive from this basic tension, demonstrating

that even the later Husserl had not yet completely clarified the problem of genesis. We do not need to thread out these additional questions and contradictions here, as they primarily concern the difficulties that the project of phenomenology undergoes once it opens itself to the question of history. The resolution of this question will lead Derrida to envision a “radical conversion” that, at the time, he conceived of in terms of a new ontology, one which, on the basis of a deepened phenomenology of temporality, was to demonstrate that “on the level of originary temporal existence, fact and essence, the empirical and the transcendental, are inseparable and in dialectical solidarity” (256–57).²

This early work by Derrida is also significant insofar as it had already problematized Husserl’s reference to the notion of “crisis,” an issue to which Derrida, in his later work, will repeatedly return.³ Although Husserl explains the crisis that the teleological idea of Europe undergoes in modernity as a result of the sciences’ naïve desire for formal objectivism (and hence of the prephilosophical naturalism that they embrace), Derrida remarks in *Le problème de la genèse* that “the origin of this crisis is not elaborated, precisely because on the one hand, there is no teleologic reason for this crisis, and on the other hand, because, by definition, the crisis itself cannot reveal anything originary to us” (258). The sole explanation that Husserl provides for the internal crisis or decomposition of the idea of Europe is the “forgetting” or “covering up” of its source in transcendental subjectivity, as a result of which the constituted idea in question becomes isolated and is made into something autonomous and absolute. “It is always because at a certain moment something, which is only a simple constituted product, has been taken as a pure, originary, and constituting absolute, that the movement of the idea becomes interrupted or corrupted by a crisis” (274). Yet, if the idea of philosophy—that is, of Europe—is a transcendental motif, and is as such “fully present to itself from the beginning . . . it is impossible that it becomes foreign to itself at a given moment of empirical becoming” (272). If, however, this is the case, then this idea can never be the idea *of* philosophy and *of* Europe (alone), that is, its animating *telos*. Understood as fully constituted from the beginning, the essential reasons (that is, the reasons why the idea necessarily undergoes an internal alienation and crisis) cannot

be addressed. By the same token it is also impossible to see how the idea of philosophy could be an infinite task, as well as that which necessarily guarantees the teleological progress of this idea in Europe. Indeed, if this idea undergoes a crisis, then it cannot be pure and originary, but instead “must from the beginning intermingle with what it is not” (272).⁴

Although the question of the idea of Europe as the idea of philosophy as an infinite task is raised only in the context of Derrida’s exploration of the unresolved problems that derive from the introduction of the theme of genesis in phenomenology, the intimate link that Derrida conceives between Europe and (phenomenological) philosophy sets the stage for his ongoing interest in the question, leading him to present himself, over time, as a philosopher *of* Europe. As a thinker of Europe, Derrida has broached the question of Europe on numerous occasions, but this does not mean that he is simply a European thinker. Let us recall what he says at the end of *The Other Heading*: “I am European . . . but I am not, nor do I feel, European *in every part*, that is, European through and through . . . I feel European *among other things*” (1992b, 82–83). What follows from such a position on Europe, which “beyond all Eurocentrism” is therefore neither Eurocentrist nor anti-Eurocentrist (the latter being just another form of Eurocentrism), is a critical interrogation of European identity understood in terms of what in the grand discourses on Europe is referred to as the “European spirit”—that is, the spiritual unity of Europe (2005, 158). Undoubtedly, similar to his predecessors in the history of phenomenological thought who have pondered over Europe, Europe for Derrida is not (or is not simply) a geographical or territorial entity. What Derrida clearly takes issue with, however, is the phenomenologists’ understanding of the eidetic unity of Europe in terms of a spiritual unity. Indeed, if the determination of Europe’s eidetic unity as a spiritual unity becomes problematic, it is primarily because the concept of spirit suggests a purity of essence that has originated in Europe alone, one that is immanent to Europe, exclusively its own and *of* its own. As Husserl’s exclusion of Eskimos, Indians, and Gypsies from European humanity demonstrates, the danger of understanding European identity from a purportedly spiritual unity is that such a conception of European identity risks foreclosing any openness to the other, to everything non-European (1989,

120). This longstanding determination of Europe’s identity as spiritual has its roots in the equally venerable assumption that Europe originates in one source alone, whether this source is held to be Greek philosophy or Medieval Christianity. Let us remind ourselves again of Husserl’s contention that Europe as the very idea of philosophy—of philosophy as an infinite task, or *telos*—from which Europe itself is born comes into existence in Greece, and that the birth certificate of Europe, and of its unity, is therefore essentially Greek. For Husserl, Heidegger, and even Patocka, this has been an unchallenged assumption. Yet in Derrida’s reflections on Europe, the continuity between Greece and Europe is not simply overcome. Rather, as we will see, it is complicated to the point of not only rendering all talk of a spiritual unity of Europe obsolete, but also of leading to a reconception of the very eidetic nature of what can and must be called “Europe,” a reconception that, considering what the term “idea” has always meant, can thus no longer be referred to as the “idea” of Europe.

Given that “the founding concepts of philosophy are primarily Greek, and [that] it would not be possible to philosophize, or to speak philosophically, outside this medium,” any hope for “something . . . still to transpire [*advenir*—that is, to happen] within the tradition by which all philosophers know themselves to be overtaken” requires, as Husserl and Heidegger have argued, each in his own way—a summoning forth of the origin of the tradition in Greece. As Derrida remarks, this appeal to the tradition—that is, Husserl’s and Heidegger’s conception of “the entirety of philosophy . . . on the basis of its Greek source”—amounts neither “to an occidentalism, nor to a historicism” (1979, 81). Such an appeal to the tradition does not entail any relativism, either, since “the truth of philosophy does not depend on its relation to the actuality of the Greek or European event” (311). Indeed, if for both Husserl and Heidegger the advent of philosophy is of the order of an irruption (*Aufbruch* or *Einbruch*), or the result of a call or claim of Being that occurs in Greece, then the Greek or European *eidōs* cannot be reduced to the factuality of this occurrence. Derrida, for his part, does not contest this phenomenological recourse to the origins of the philosophical tradition in the Greek event. Obviously, he does not intend to replace the Greek origins of Europe with another origin, such as Christianity. Even though, as we will

see, he multiplies the sources of what is European to a such degree that the originality of Greece as the unique foundation of Europe becomes questionable, I would argue that for Derrida, the primacy of the Greek moment for understanding Europe (in particular, a future Europe) remains valid, at least to a certain extent. But I would also immediately add that, notwithstanding Derrida's preservation of the Greek origin of the European *eidōs*, this affirmation of the Greek moment in the constitution of Europe also entails a novel interpretation of Greece. "Greece," or whatever deserves the name "Greek" is, as we will see from here on, that which actually makes it possible to envision another Europe, a Europe to come, a Europe that, in the words of the address "A Europe of Hope" (which speaks clearly to issues of topical concerns, that is, to pressing political concerns of the day) "remains irreplaceable for the world to come" insofar as it is to take on an "irreplaceable . . . responsibility in the anti-globalist (*alter-mondialiste*) movement between American hegemony, the rise in power of China, and the Arab and Muslim theocracies" (410).⁵

Before I broach Derrida's novel interpretation of the source of the philosophical, and hence of Europe, let me pause here long enough to emphasize that, as opposed to Husserl and Heidegger (and more emphatically than Patocka), Derrida highlights the multiplicity of the sources and identities that intersect in the European heritage. He writes, for example, that

if the heritage of thought (of truth and Being) in which we are inscribed is not solely, neither fundamentally nor originarily Greek, it is no doubt because of other intercrossing and heterogeneous affiliations, of other languages, and other identities which are not simply additions [to this heritage], or secondary accidents (Jewish, Arabic, Christian, Roman, Germanic, and so forth). This is certainly so because European history has not only unfolded a Greek deal (*une donne grecque*). (1992a, 267)

In his reflections on European identity, Derrida has consistently demanded that these other moments be taken into account. In *Rogues*, for instance, he contends that it is indispensable to examine "what gets passed on, transferred, translated from Europe by pre- and post-Koranic Arabic, as well as

by Rome” (2005, 31).⁶ But since the idea of Europe is generally understood to be the idea of philosophy and is therefore Greek in origin (although Jewish, Arabic, Christian, Roman, and Germanic moments have all played a decisive role in European identity, it is not the least, or rather precisely because, of their effective assimilation and mediation of what is Greek), it is highly significant that Derrida also raises the question of Chinese or African thought, and whether this thought bears on the claim that philosophy is by nature Greek. Here is what Derrida has to say:

Still today, but this is not new, we feel strongly the seriousness of the question of whether philosophy was born in Greece or not, whether it is European or not, whether one can speak of Chinese philosophy, whether one can speak of African philosophy, or whether the destination of philosophy is marked by a singular source, thus by a singular language or a network of singular languages. (1995, 377)

By evoking the question of whether something like a Chinese or African philosophy is conceivable, and whether philosophy is a function of one language—that is, the Greek idiom—the question becomes indeed that of the uniqueness and identity of the Greek source as the source of philosophy: the question, by extension, of Europe itself.

At this juncture a note of caution may be warranted. What is at stake in this interrogation of the uniqueness and originality of the Greek source of philosophy (and Europe) is not a desire to replace the Greek by the non-Greek. As Derrida has forcefully shown in the chapter “Violence and Metaphysics,” from *Writing and Difference*, any interpellation of the Greek by the non-Greek is possible only in the language of the Greeks. Only in this language is it possible to state that the question of the non-Greek is a question that is silenced and forgotten in the language of the Greeks (1979, 133). Likewise, to evoke the inner limits of the Greek paradigm by pointing to the Greek idiom, or more generally, to the Indo-European linguistic milieu in which its concept of Being (hence, the ontological question) has its roots, one must confront the fact that the meaning of such limits is intelligible only on the basis of the question concerning the meaning of Being (1982,

125). After having unmasked “the true name of the inclination of thought to the Other” as the empiricism that one finds in the thinking of Emmanuel Levinas (together with the renunciation of the concept on the basis of the violence it does to the Other), that is, nonphilosophy, which “contests the resolution and coherence of the logos (philosophy) at its root, instead of letting itself be questioned by the logos,” Derrida writes that

nothing can so profoundly *solicit* the Greek logos—philosophy—than this irruption of the totally-other; and nothing can to such an extent reawaken the logos to its origin as to its mortality, its other. But if one calls this experience of the infinitely other Judaism . . . , one must reflect upon the necessity in which this experience finds itself, the injunction by which it is ordered to occur as logos, and to reawaken the Greek in its autistic syntax of his own dream.

Any attempt to contest the Greek logos confronts “the necessity to borrow the ways of the unique philosophical logos, which can only invert the ‘curvature of space’ for the benefit of the same” (1979, 152). But, Derrida asks, if it is “necessary to lodge oneself within traditional conceptuality in order to destroy it,” is it not also because this necessity “hide[s] . . . some indestructible and unforeseeable resource of the Greek logos? Some unlimited power of envelopment, by which he who attempts to repel it would always already be *overtaken*” (111–12)? The question that had already animated Derrida’s early work on Husserl’s conception of the idea of philosophy as the *telos* of Europe—namely, whether its transcendental nature (and its content) does not from the start make it an idea that could have arisen elsewhere, and whether, as far as it is concerned with universality, it is not an idea that from the start is necessarily open to the non-Greek—points to this “indestructible and unforeseeable resource of the Greek logos” that prevents it from being unseated by calling upon the non-Greek, whatever the latter’s shape. Indeed, what makes philosophy in its Greek form unique is that it inscribes within itself the place of the other, including that of the totally other. According to Derrida, “In having proffered the *epekeina tes ousias*, in having recognized from its second word (for example, in the *Sophist*) that

alterity had to circulate at the origin of meaning, in welcoming alterity in general into the heart of the logos, the Greek thought of Being forever has protected itself against every absolutely *surprising* convocation” (153).

From here on I intend to argue that Greece is not only the origin of Europe because of this “indestructible and unforeseeable resource of the Greek logos,” but that the priority that Greece enjoys in determining Europe’s *arche* and *telos* derives precisely from its intrinsic nonidentity. (Needless to say, such priority can no longer be ontological.) First, however, I wish to return to Derrida’s statement about the seriousness of the question of whether philosophy as the source of Europe is solely Greek, and whether its destination is marked by one language alone, or at best, exclusively by the Indo-European languages as a whole. He writes:

This question always has serious consequences. And in a certain way, it is philosophy itself. Which means that, at the same time, one feels led to reaffirm that *philosophia* has a Greek or Greco-European source with all the consequences that that entails, and without that necessarily limiting thereby its universality; or, inversely, since philosophy is the question about its own source, and bears the question of its own limit within itself, then at that moment there is not only no reason why precisely the non-European would not accede to philosophy, but no reason either for the non-European not to be the place of the philosophical question about philosophy. (1995, 377)

If the question of the origin of philosophy (which, in a certain way, is philosophy itself) allows for this double possibility—namely, for being thoroughly Greek (yet universal) while being at the same time marked by extrapositionality and hence being non-European (though universal as well)—is it not precisely because the Greek logos *is* this relation to alterity, and is thus constituted by this very possibility of suspending its Greek origin in order to turn itself (or to let itself be turned) not simply into (its) other—that is, another self-identity—but into the passage into (the) other itself?

A moment ago I alluded to a novel interpretation of the source of what is European in Derrida. In order to reinforce this point I turn now to a

little-known text (which I have already cited), “‘Nous autres Grecs.’”⁷ In what amounts to a sweeping transformation of Heidegger’s conception of “beginning” (including “the other beginning” as a radically innovative repetition of the first beginning), according to which “Greece” and the Greek idiom is the one and only beginning of philosophy unifying the history of the West (even where the latter has become entirely oblivious to the question of Being that constitutes this beginning), Derrida, in this text, begins by pointing out that “rather than defining some essence or self-identity of what is ‘Greek,’” (1992a, 253), all his work on the Greeks has questioned “the identity of a properly so-called referent: ‘Greek,’ ‘the Greeks,’ or ‘Greece’” (252). All of his writings on the Greeks, he claims,

intersect in one place, one should say a non-space, in a process of *dislocation*, namely “there” where the *horizon* of the Greek thing is no longer assured, and where what gives rise (*lieu*) to it, and opens it, delimits it by the same token—that is, neither as a space or system of language, nor as a politico-geographical space; neither as a spiritual figure (“Husserl”), nor as a figure of historicity (“Heidegger”). (252)

In other words, in his work on the Greeks, Derrida has been interested in what, from the very beginning, has disowned the Greeks—that is, in “the disownment that from the start happened to them, before and independently of their originality of which some, such as Nietzsche and Heidegger, have dreamt” (262). What Derrida hints at is not only the “Egyptian other” in Greece to which he has repeatedly drawn attention, “but more generally the irruption of the other, of the wholly other [into what is Greek], which forces open the limits of identification and of the self-relation of language, of the corpus, and the system” (253). The *pharmakon*, *khora*, or *hymen* are examples of the traces of such an irruption of otherness in Greek thought, and Derrida remarks that, in his texts on Greek topics, “he has sought above all to read ‘Greek’ words” that could not close upon themselves, “and which consequently had already been marked by the irruption of the other (the non-discursive real, the non-Greek, and so forth)” (269). In short, then, rather than concerning himself with the “self-immanence of what

is Greek,” Derrida has been concerned with a double infraction of what is Greek by the other, the non-European. He notes:

It is not only the non-Greek which drew me towards (*chez*) the Greek (in sum, it is a question of finding out what *chez* means), not merely the other of the Greek (the Egyptian, the barbarian, or whoever is determined by the Greek as *his* other, thus excluded-included, and positioned as in opposition), but the wholly other of the Greek, of his language and the *logos*—that is, the figure of the wholly other which the latter cannot figure out, of which he cannot convey a figure (*infigurable*). (260)

If this other in all its forms irrupts into the Greek from the beginning (thus foreclosing any possibility of a Greek self-identity or self-immanence), the Greek, as the source of Europe, is precisely the figure of a nonclosure upon itself, allowing it to welcome alterity into the *logos*. As we have seen, if the tradition of thought characteristic of Europe is not fundamentally or originarily Greek, or Greek alone, according to Derrida this is undoubtedly because other groups have left their mark on Europe: the Jew, the Christian, the African, the non-Greek in general (“without, however, supposing some other assured identity” [276]); it is, he adds, “above all because what is Greek has never gathered itself or identified itself with itself” (267). If Derrida infers from this that

certainly, we [Europeans] are still Greeks, but perhaps other Greeks, since we are not only born from the sole *coup d’envoi grec* [that is, solely from the Greek *Schickung*, or sending on its way, as Heidegger would have said]; that certainly we are still *other* Greeks, having the memory of events that are irreducible to the Greek genealogy, but sufficiently other so as not only to have also altered what is Greek in us, but also so as to carry within us something wholly other *than* what is Greek, (263)

he can do so, above all, because “we others, we have also inherited that which rendered the Greeks other [different] than themselves” from the start (262).

“The other conception of Europe,” or the “new figure of Europe” that is invoked in *Fichus: Discours de Francfort* (2002) and in *Philosophy in a Time of Terror* (2003), concern a Europe that can understand itself as having its origin outside itself.⁸ Europe’s origin is nonidentical to itself; it would be a mistake to conceive of it as primarily Greek with additional Jewish, Christian, and Islamic elements. Rather, Europe’s origin is open to multiple origins from the beginning. However, this conception of Europe is made possible, specifically, by the West’s philosophical heritage—its Greek heritage—in that from the beginning, that which was Greek allowed alterity to circulate within the logos; Europe was able to make good on this heritage only by growing, as Friedrich Nietzsche once put it, “more Greek by the day” (1968, 225–26, n. 419). This conception of Europe is first of all the conception or the figure of a self-identity that is at home (*chez*) with itself, precisely to the extent that it is outside itself—decentered, as it were—and hence constituted by an openness and a hospitality that is not only extended to the non-European, but also to unpredictable, unforeseeable otherness. Europe names the possibility or the project of such an identity—or rather nonidentity—that is at home with itself precisely by letting itself be disowned by the other, the non-European, and the wholly other. What distinguishes this other conception of Europe, the one that Derrida is thinking about, is that it is the figure of an identity that has the capacity not only for opposition, but above all for relating to, and letting itself be claimed by, an other that is not the other of myself. As Karl Jaspers has argued, one of the two fundamental aspects that distinguishes Europe is its freedom (which, together with history and science, constitutes Europe’s peculiarity), a freedom that keeps it restless and in motion (the other aspect being “life in the face of extremity”), and which represents a conception of “life in polarities.” He writes: “Europe has itself developed counter-positions to every position. It is perhaps only properly what it is insofar as it is capable of the possibility of being everything (*der Möglichkeit nach alles ist*).” Europe is thus this freedom, or openness, that *from within* has developed all possible oppositions to everything that it posits, including itself. Because of this freedom vis-à-vis all dichotomous counterpositions, Europe is “open not only to conceive of that which comes from outside as being merely in opposition to it, but also

of taking it into itself as an element of its own essence.” The “dialectical way of being of Europe,” Jaspers continues, consists in its being itself by also being, at least potentially, its other, which it is capable of appropriating and folding into itself (1951, 240).⁹ This ability is so pronounced that the other of Europe even lets itself be conceived as the commencement of Europe, as is the case with Hölderlin, for example, for whom Greece is the Orient of the West. However, by conceiving of Europe as a figure that apart from relating to its non-European others is also open to an other that does not let itself be categorized in terms of self and other—an other to come—the dialectical conception of Europe is not overcome, but is inscribed in what it cannot ever hope to appropriate or master. This new figure of Europe is the figure of a certain conversion, passage, or translation, not merely into an other who (or which) bears immediately on my identity by being the commencement of my self (and whose foreignness is thus predetermined by the dialectical relation of self and other), but who (or which) is foreign in unpredictable and incalculable ways; an other, in short, who (or which) is significant in more ways than just being the commencement of my own self.

As a figure of such a conversion to or passage into the other, this new figure of Europe—distinct from Europe as a territory or even a nation-state—is unmistakably a conception whose thrust is universal. But whence the insistence, then, on continuing to call such a conception of unconditional openness and hospitality to the other by the name of “Europe”? If Derrida retains this name for such a conception and task, it is because of the memory of Europe. Europe’s own memory, that is, the memory of the idea of responsibility and universality, remains “an indispensable resource” for any attempt to conceive and realize a way of being and action: in short, a political space, beyond the authority of the particular in all its forms. This task, in Greece, has from the beginning been associated with the idea of the lights of logos and reason, as well as the Enlightenment, which is another name for “Europe.” In an interview with Giovanna Borradori in *Philosophy in a Time of Terror*, Derrida remarks:

I persist in using this name “Europe,” even if in quotation marks, because, in the long and patient deconstruction required for the transformation

to-come, the experience Europe inaugurated at the time of the Enlightenment (*Lumières, Aufklärung, Illuminismo*) in the relationship between the political and the theological or, rather, the religious, though still uneven, unfulfilled, relative, and complex, will have left in European political space absolutely original marks with regard to religious doctrine (notice I'm not saying with regard to religion or faith but with regard to the authority of religious doctrine over the political). Such marks can be found neither in the Arab world nor in the Muslim world, nor in the Far East, nor even, and here's the most sensitive point, in American democracy, in what *in fact* governs not the principles but the predominant reality of American political culture. (2003, 116–17)¹⁰

The name “Europe” imposes itself as a conception and as a task of universality, and that for Derrida means also the task of a public space (i.e., the political) that, by inscribing the relation to the other and especially to the other to come into the heart of the self, draws upon the resources of what promised itself with the irruption in Greece of the thought of a logos that allows alterity to circulate within it. Since there is no thinking without memory, without inherited concepts, the name “Europe,” used to designate a new figure of universality (and the political), not only draws upon the resources provided by its European heritage, but also remains faithful to Europe's own memory rather than forsaking it.

Now, since I have spoken of this other conception of Europe as a figure of conversion and passage into other(s), a cautionary remark is warranted. Such a figure does not entail reversibility of self and other, what is one's own and the foreign, the familiar and the alien. If it is true, as Hannah Arendt has noted in *The Human Condition*,

that the Platonic tradition of philosophical as well as political thought [that] started with a reversal [of the Homeric world order, by locating ordinary life, the life of the senses, in the underworld of the cave], and that this original reversal determined to a large extent the thought pattern into which Western philosophy almost automatically fell wherever it was not animated by a great and original philosophical impetus, (1958, 292–93)

with the result that “academic philosophy, as a matter of fact, has ever been dominated by . . . never-ending reversals,” then the new figure of Europe is not Greek in this latter sense. The reversibility of thought formations and systems of thought—the fact “that they can be turned ‘upside down’ or ‘downside up’ at any moment” that characterizes the Western tradition starting with the philosophical schools in late antiquity—a reversibility made possible “once Plato had succeeded in making the . . . structural elements and concepts [of thought] reversible,” does not occur as a result of an exposure of thought to otherness. It needs no more, Arendt remarks, “than purely intellectual experience, an experience within the framework of conceptual thinking itself.” Furthermore, “the concepts themselves [that are inverted] remain the same no matter where they are placed in the various systematic orders” (292–93). In other words, in reversibility, the sphere or realm of the same remains fully intact, no opening to otherness in all its unpredictability occurs there. The horizon is not even enlarged; it certainly is not pierced (as it must be if the openness is to be unconditional) by inverting self and other. Reversibility is a function of, and a way of securing, sameness: a celebration of sameness, as it were. By contrast, Europe as the figure of a logos within which alterity circulates from its inception (of a passage, or a certain conversion into the non-European and into an other that escapes the categorical distinction between European and non-European), rather than turning the self into the other (and hence the other into the self) implies a radical reinscription or reconception of what is European, given that from the start Europe has been dislocated from itself to such a degree that it is open and hospitable to what it does not, and cannot, determine. This very opening to an other to come—that is, to an other that is not only unpredictable, but also has no assured identity—prevents the passage into the other from becoming a passage into one’s own other, or more generally, into any other that is determined or determinable in advance. This opening to an unforeseeable other prevents the passage from being a passage into an identifiable and enduring sameness—in short, into another form of self-identity (one that would be the reverse, for example, of one’s original identity). Indeed, through the exposure, not only to identifiable others, but also to unforeseeable others—that is, wholly others—Europe as the figure

of passing, transition, or translation undoes both the specularity and the symmetrical imbrication of self and other. As a consequence, “Europe” as the figure of such a passage presupposes neither a prior identity to be overcome, nor a new one to be achieved. Rather, by opening itself to the undetermined and undeterminable other, it is nothing but an unconditional openness to otherness, nothing but the figure of a passage into an other itself. Europe as a figure of passage, transition, transformation into otherness suggests a conception of identity that is always already the occurrence of an exposure to what is non-European, not only in regards to what is other than Europe, but also to what is other than the non-European. As such an exposure, vulnerable to otherness and at the same time hospitable, Europe is also another term for—another figure of—deconstruction.

Reversibility is without risk, since the other, or the foreign to and into which the self reverts, is only the opposite of oneself (thus the self can always reassert itself in the other, or reappropriate it). At all moments, reversibility announces only the same. By contrast, that which makes the new figure of Europe the figure of a passage or conversion into the other, that is, a promise, is precisely the fact that such transition and transformation is also charged with danger. However, without the threat posed by its promise, Europe would not be a promise to begin with. Without its inherent danger, it would also lack all universal appeal.



NOTES

1. It is certainly appropriate here to recall the historical context that frames Derrida’s text, an abbreviated version of which was delivered during a colloquium on “European Cultural Identity” in Turin in 1990. On several occasions, Derrida refers, in the text, to the tremor that at the time (that is, also before the first Gulf War) shook central and Eastern Europe in particular. The following passage perhaps sums up the situation in the most succinct way: “With the destruction of the Berlin Wall and the unification of Germany in sight, with a *perestroika* that is still uncertain, with all the diverse movements of ‘democratizations,’ and with all the legitimate but sometimes ambiguous aspirations for national sovereignty, there is in *today’s* day and age the reopening and denaturalization of [the] monstrous partitions,” that resulted from World War II (1992b, 62–63).

2. Although in this early work the contradictions in Husserl’s reflection on Europe are believed to be resolvable through a new dialectical ontology, the notion of *aporia* present in this work already hints at Derrida’s later work, in which the failure to reconcile the aporetic tension is precisely the condition for a relation to what is to come. One could perhaps say that the new figure of Europe that Derrida envisions consists in its endurance of all the conflicting positions (and the demands that they imply) found in Husserl’s elaborations on Europe.
3. See Derrida (1992b, 31–34) and Derrida (1989, 120–22).
4. By suffering alienation as the result of confusing the constituted with that which constitutes, the crisis reveals itself to be of historical necessity rooted in the indefinitely synthetic character of the idea. It is in this synthetic nature of the idea that Derrida locates the possibility and necessity of the crisis (1990, 274).
5. Derrida eschews the English “globalization” and the German “Globalisierung,” keeping instead the French word “mondialisation”—which has no equivalent in English (although, on one occasion, he suggests “worldization,” as a possible translation)—to refer to the phenomenon in question, “so as to maintain a reference to the world—*monde*, *Welt*, *mundus*—which is neither the globe nor the cosmos” (Derrida 2000b, 203, 223). “Altermondialiste,” which is not the equivalent of “anti-globalization,” refers, therefore, to the demand for another world. For a fine discussion of the difference, according to Derrida, between the Anglo-American “globalization” and the Latinate French “mondialisation,” see “Elliptical Interruptions, or, Why Derrida Prefers *Mondialisation* to Globalization,” Victor Li’s essay in this issue of *CR*.
6. In this context, he raises the troubling question of the absence of Aristotle’s *Politics* in the Islamic translation, reception, and mediation of Greek philosophy (2005, 31–32).
7. This piece is a response to papers by Eric Alliez and Francis Wolff that were presented at a symposium organized by Barbara Cassin, at the Sorbonne in 1990, on the contemporary appropriation of antiquity. Derrida’s response was written for the publication of the proceedings.
8. See Derrida (2002, 51) and Borradori (2003, 116).
9. In this essay from 1946, which defines the specificity of Europe—in particular, the development of science and technology—as a result of the constitutive influence of antiquity and Christianity, such a life in polarities is traced back, above all, to the scriptures, which, “as the foundation of European life, contain in a unique fashion the polarities in itself” (Jaspers 1951, 240; see also 261).
10. In “A Europe of Hope,” Derrida adds: “I believe that, without Eurocentric illusions and pretensions, without the slightest pro-European nationalism, without even much trust in Europe as it is or in the direction it is taking, we must fight for what this name represents today, with the memory of the Enlightenment, of course, but also with a guilty conscience for a responsible awareness of the totalitarian, genocidal, and colonialist crimes of the past” (2006, 410).

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