



The Other Heading: Memories, Responses, and Responsibilities

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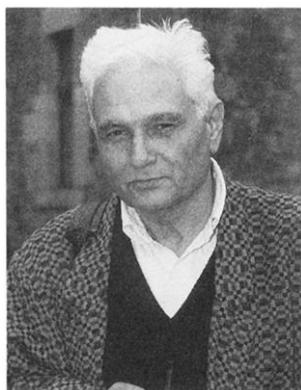
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The Other Heading: Memories, Responses, and Responsibilities



Archives de Pontigny-Cerisy

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TO BEGIN, I will confide in you a feeling. Already on the subject of headings [*caps*][—]and of the shores on which I intend to remain. It is the somewhat weary feeling of an old European. More precisely, of someone who, not quite European by birth, since I come from the southern coast of the Mediterranean, considers himself, and more and more so with age, to be a sort of overacculturated, overcolonized European hybrid. (The Latin words *culture* and *colonization* have a common root, there where it is precisely a question of what happens to roots.) In short, it is perhaps the feeling of someone who, as early as grade school in French Algeria, must have tried to capitalize, and capitalize upon, the old age of Europe, while at the same time keeping a little of the indifferent and impassive youth of the other shore. Keeping, in truth, all the marks of an ingenuity still incapable of this other old age from which French culture had, from very early on, separated him.

Out of this feeling of an old, anachronistic European, youthful and tired of his own age, I will make the *first axiom* of this little talk. And I will say “we” in place of “I,” another way of moving surreptitiously from the feeling to the axiom.

We are younger than ever, we Europeans, since a certain Europe does not yet exist. Has it ever existed? And yet we are like these young people who get up, at dawn, already old and tired. We are already exhausted. This *axiom of finitude* is a swarm or storm of questions. From what state of exhaustion must the young old Europeans who we are set out again, re-embark [*re-partir*]? Must they re-begin? or else, in a *departure* from Europe, separate themselves from an old Europe? or else reembark toward a Europe that does not yet exist?

This excerpt from an address given in May 1990 is adapted with permission of the publisher from The Other Heading: Reflections on Today's Europe, by Jacques Derrida, which was translated by Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael B. Naas (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1992). The first five paragraphs of Derrida's text have been omitted, and subsequent abridgments are marked with ellipsis points.

or else reembark in order to return to a Europe of origins that would then need to be restored, rediscovered, or reconstituted during a great celebration of "reunion" [*retrouvailles*]?

"Reunion" is today an official word. It belongs to the code of French cultural politics in Europe. Ministerial speeches and documents make great use of it; they help explain a remark of François Mitterrand, the president of the Republic, who said (perhaps while also presiding over the European Community) that Europe "is returning in its history and its geography like one who is returning home [*chez soi*]." What does this mean? Is it possible? desirable? Is it really this that announces itself *today*?

I will not even try, not yet, to answer or respond to these questions. But I will venture a *second axiom*. I believe it to be preliminary to the very possibility of giving a meaning to such assertions (for example, that of a "reunion") and such questions. In spite of the inclination and conviction that should lead me here to analyze genealogically the concepts of identity or culture—like the proper name of Europe—I must give this up, since the time and place do not lend themselves to it. I must nonetheless formulate in a somewhat dogmatic way, and this is my second axiom, a very dry necessity whose consequences could affect our entire problematic: *what is proper to a culture is to not be identical to itself*. Not to not have an identity, but not to be able to identify itself, to be able to say "me" or "we"; to be able to take the form of a subject only in the non-identity to itself or, if you prefer, only in the difference *with itself* [*avec soi*]. There is no culture or cultural identity without this difference *with itself*. . . .

This can be said, inversely or reciprocally, of all identity or all identification: there is no self-relation, no relation to oneself, no identification with oneself, without culture, but a culture of oneself *as a culture of the other*, a culture of the double genitive and of the *difference to oneself*. The grammar of the double genitive also signals that a culture never has a single origin. Monogenealogy would always be a mystification in the history of culture.

Will the Europe of yesterday, of tomorrow, or of today have been merely an example of this law? one example among others? Or will it have been the exemplary possibility of this law? Is one more faithful to the heritage of a culture by cultivating the difference-to-oneself (*with oneself*) that constitutes identity or by confining oneself to an identity wherein this difference remains *gathered*? This question can have the most disquieting effects on all discourses and politics of cultural identity.

In his "Notes on the Greatness and Decline of Europe," Valéry seems to provoke a familiar interlocutor, one at once close and still unknown. In a sort of apostrophe, like the first pitch of a question that would no longer leave him in peace, Valéry tosses out to his interlocutor the word "today." "TODAY," the word is written in *capital* letters; today heightened like the challenge itself. The great challenge, the capital challenge, is the day of *today*, the day of this day and age: "Well! What are you going to do? What are you going to do TODAY?" (228).¹

Why would the *day of today*, the day of this day and age, deserve these capital letters? Because what we find difficult to do and think today, for Europe, for a Europe torn away from self-identification as repetition of itself, is precisely the unicity of the "today," a certain event, a singular advent of Europe, here and now. Is there a completely new "today" of Europe, one whose novelty would especially not resemble what was called—another well-known program, and one of the most sinister—a "New Europe"? We come across traps of this sort at every step, and they are not merely traps of language; they are part of the program. Is there then a completely new "today" of Europe beyond all the exhausted programs of *Eurocentrism* and *anti-Eurocentrism*, these exhausting yet unforgettable programs? (We cannot and must not forget them since they do not forget us.) Am I taking advantage of the "we" when I begin saying that, knowing them now by heart, and to the point of exhaustion—since these unforgettable programs are exhausting and exhausted—we *today* no longer want either Eurocentrism or anti-Eurocentrism? Beyond these all too well-known programs, for what "cultural

identity” must we be responsible? and responsible before whom? before what memory? for what promise? And are “cultural identity” the right words for “today”?

A title is always a heading [*cap*]. A chapter heading, a headline, even a letterhead. By proposing the title “The Other Heading” for some brief, quasi-improvised reflections, I was thinking at first, while on board a plane, of the language of aerial or nautical navigation. On the sea or in the air, a vessel has a “heading”: it “heads off,” toward another continent, perhaps, toward a destination that is its own but that it can also change. One says in my language *faire cap* but also *changer de cap*—“to have a heading” but also “to change headings.” The word *cap* (*caput*, *capitis*) refers, as you well know, to the head or the extremity of the extreme, the aim and the end, the ultimate, the last, the final moment or last legs, the *eschaton* in general. It here assigns to navigation the pole, the end, the telos of an oriented, calculated, deliberate, voluntary, ordered movement—ordered most often by the *man* in charge. Not by a woman, for in general, and especially in wartime, it is a *man* who decides on the heading, from the advanced point that he himself is, the prow, at the head of the ship or plane that he pilots. Eschatology and teleology—that is man. It is *he* who gives orders to the crew, he who holds the helm or sits at the controls; he is the headman, there at the head of the crew and the machine. And oftentimes he is called the *captain*.

The expression “the other heading” can also suggest that another direction is in the offing, or that it is necessary to change destinations. To change direction can mean to change goals, to decide on another heading, or else to change captains, or even—why not?—the age or sex of the captain. Indeed, it can mean to recall that there is another heading, the heading being not only ours [*le nôtre*] but the other [*l'autre*], not only that which we identify, calculate, and decide on but the *heading of the other*, before which we must respond, and which we must *remember*, of which we must *remind ourselves*, the heading of the other being perhaps the first condition of an

identity or identification that is not an egocentrism destructive of oneself and the other.

But beyond *our heading*, it is necessary to recall ourselves not only to the *other heading*, and especially to the *heading of the other*, but also perhaps to the *other of the heading*, that is to say, to a relation of identity with the other that no longer obeys the form, the sign, or the logic of the heading, not even of the *antiheading*—of beheading, of decapitation. The true title of these reflections, even though a title is a heading or headline, would orient us rather toward the other *of the heading*. By selection, I will deduce the form of all my propositions from a grammar and syntax of the heading, of the *cap*, from a difference in kind and in gender [*genre*], that is, from *capital* and *capitale*.² How can a “European cultural identity” respond, and in a responsible way—responsible for itself, for the other, and before the other—to the double question of *le capital*, of capital, and of *la capitale*, of the capital?

Europe today, in the *today* that Valéry writes in capital letters, is at a moment in its history (*if* it has one, one that is *one*, identifiable), in the history of its culture (*if* it can ever identify itself as one, as the same, and can be responsible for itself, answer for itself, in a memory of itself), when the question of the heading seems unavoidable. Whatever the answer may be, the question remains. I would even say that this is necessary: the question should remain, even beyond all answers. No one today in fact thinks of avoiding such a question, and not only because of what has started, or rather has accelerated, these past few months in the east or at the center of Europe. This question is also very old, as old as the history of Europe, but the experience of the *other heading* or of the other *of the heading* presents itself in an absolutely new way, not new “as always” but newly new. And what if Europe were this: the opening onto a history for which the changing of the heading, the relation to the other heading or to the other of the heading, were experienced as always possible? an opening and a nonexclusion for which Europe would in some way be responsible? for which Europe would *be*, in a constitutive way, this very responsibility? as if the very concept of responsibility were respon-

sible, right up to its emancipation, for a European birth certificate?

Like every history, the history of a culture no doubt presupposes an identifiable heading, a telos toward which the movement, the memory and the promise, the identity—even if it be as difference to itself—dreams of gathering itself: *by taking the initiative, by going on ahead, in anticipation (anticipatio, anticipare, antecapere)*. But history also presupposes that the heading not be *given*, that it not be identifiable in advance and once and for all. The irruption of the new, the unicity of the other *today*, should be awaited *as such* (but is the *as such*, the phenomenon, the being *as such* of the unique and of the other, ever possible?); it should be anticipated *as* the unforeseeable, the *unanticipatable*, the unmasterable, the unidentifiable—in short, as that of which one does not yet have a memory. But our old memory tells us that it is *also* necessary to anticipate and to keep the heading, for under the banner—which can also become a slogan—of the unanticipatable or the absolutely new, we can fear seeing return the phantom of the worst, the one we have already identified. We know the “new” only too well, or in any case the old rhetoric, the demagoguery, the psychagogy of the “new”—and sometimes of the “new order”—of the surprising, the virginal, and the unanticipatable. We must thus be suspicious of *both* repetitive memory *and* the completely other of the absolutely new, of *both* anamnestic capitalization *and* amnesic exposure to what would no longer be identifiable at all. . . .

Europe is not only a geographic headland or heading that has always given itself the representation or figure of a spiritual heading, at once as project, task, or infinite—that is, universal—idea, as the memory of itself that gathers and accumulates itself, capitalizes upon itself, in and for itself. Europe has also confused its image, its face, its figure, and its very place, its taking place, with that of an advanced point, the point of a phallus if you will, and thus, once again, with a heading for world civilization or human culture in general. . . . Perhaps identification in general, the formation and affirmation of an identity, self-presentation, the self-presence of identity, . . .

always has a capital form, the figurehead of the advanced point and of capitalizing reserve. It is thus not only for lack of time that I will spare you the development of a counterprogram opposed to this archaeoteleological program of all European discourse about Europe. I note only that from Hegel to Valéry, from Husserl to Heidegger, in spite of all the differences that distinguish these great examples from each other—I tried to mark them elsewhere, in *Of Spirit*, for example—this *traditional* discourse is *already* a discourse of the *modern* Western world. It dates; it is dated. It is the most current, nothing is more current, but already it dates back. And this currentness reveals a familiarly disquieting wrinkle, discreet but merciless, the very stigmata of an anachrony that marks the day of all our days, of all our gestures, discourses, and affects, both public and private. . . .

Now, we must ourselves be responsible for this discourse of the modern tradition. We bear the responsibility for this heritage, right along with the capitalizing memory that we have of it. We did not choose this responsibility; it imposes itself upon us, and in an even more imperative way, in that it is, as other and from the other, the language of our language. How then does one assume this responsibility, this capital duty [*devoir*]? How does one respond? And above all, how does one assume a responsibility that announces itself as contradictory because it inscribes us from the very beginning of the game into a kind of necessarily double obligation, a *double bind*? The injunction in effect divides us; it puts us always at fault or in default since it doubles the *il faut*, the *it is necessary*: it is necessary to make ourselves the guardians of an idea of Europe, of a difference of Europe, *but* of a Europe that consists precisely in not closing itself off in its own identity and in advancing itself in an exemplary way toward what it is not, toward the other heading or the heading of the other, indeed—and this is perhaps something else altogether—toward the other *of* the heading, which would be the beyond of this modern tradition, another border structure, another shore.

To be faithfully responsible *for* this memory, and thus to respond rigorously to this double in-

junction: will this have to consist in repeating or in breaking with, in continuing or in opposing? or rather in attempting to *invent another gesture*, an epic gesture, in truth, that presupposes memory precisely in order to assign identity from alterity, from the other heading and the other of the heading, from a completely other shore?

This last hypothesis, the one toward which I will prefer to orient myself, is not only a hypothesis or a call, a call toward that which is given at the same time as contradictory or impossible. No, I believe that *this is taking place now*. (But it is also necessary, for this, to begin to think that this “now” be neither present, nor current, nor the present of some current event.) Not that it arrives, that it happens or has already happened, not that it is already *presently* given. I believe, rather, that this event takes place as that which comes, as that which seeks or promises itself *today*, in Europe, the today of a Europe whose borders are not given—no more than its name, Europe being here only a *paleonymic* appellation. I believe that if there is any event today, it is taking place here, in this act of memory that consists in betraying a certain order of capital in order to be faith-

ful to the other heading and to the other of the heading. . . .

Translated by
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Translators' Notes

¹The French passage occurs in “Grandeur” 931.

²Derrida plays on the relation between the feminine *la capitale* ‘the seat of government’ and the masculine *le capital* ‘the goods used to produce other goods.’

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