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The Other Heading of Europe:
From Miłosz to Derrida

Abstract:

The article explores a conceptualization of Eastern Europe at the intersection of literature and philosophy, focusing on two texts: *The Issa Valley* (1955) by Czesław Miłosz and *The Other Heading* (1991) by Jacques Derrida. In this context, Eastern Europe can be understood as a historical topos situated between Russian imperial violence concerning civil liberties and Western Enlightenment rationality, which can lead to the homogenization of cultural landscapes and the erasure of internal borders. These landscapes and borders are essential for the individual's search for identity and the formation of a dense network of mutual dependency and historically determined communities that culturally shape specific social subjects, thereby resisting any imperial influence.

Keywords:

Eastern Europe, identity, historical community, capital, borders

Over the past few decades, the concept of Eastern Europe has been widely debated from historical, economic, and political perspectives. The discussions focus on the qualitative differences between the European orientation of the region's countries and the Russian imperial paradigm, as well as the more quantitative differences between Eastern and Western Europe, such as the degree of democratization, civil society activity, and economic freedoms. The main goal of this article is to achieve a more dialectical understanding of Eastern Europe as a unique cultural identity, situated between the rationalistic traditions of the European Enlightenment and the Russian imperial homogenization of the occupied European territories. This understanding is facilitated, in particular, through the parallel reading of Miłosz and Derrida, through productive connections between literary and philosophical interpretations of the subject. Derrida deconstructs the *aporia* of European identity by addressing, on one hand, the establishing of a grid of intelligibility for capitalization – the pursuit of media ratings and business profits – rooted in the Enlightenment project, and on the other hand, the untranslatable local nationalisms. Through the lens of this deconstructivist self-criticism of the Western Enlightenment project, Miłosz can be interpreted as offering a positive resolution to this aporia, which is already evident in the experience of Eastern Europe. The space of Eastern Europe – described by Miłosz through the artistic representation of a specific *sensus communis*, the Issa Valley – is characterized by mobile boundaries that maintain the qualitative differences of diverse life worlds while allowing for continuous interchange and mutual translation among them. This communicative system fosters an alternative approach to capitalization, emphasizing impossible communion, transgressive encounters with the Other, and the acceptance of otherness as an intrinsic value around which the self is constructed.

To begin, let us explore the main parameters of conceptualizing Eastern and Central Europe, following the tradition largely established by Czesław Miłosz, one of the pioneers in the modern debate on Eastern European identity. In the 1950s, he "reopened the question of whether a supranational identity existed in this region, and, if so, who belonged to it."[1] In the era following the Soviet occupation of Eastern Europe, the issue of the identity of the "new" (post-socialist, Central, Eastern) Europe and its relationship with "old" Europe (the West) gained new significance. Prominent intel-

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1)   Neumann, "Central Europe's Constituting Other," 349.

lectuals from the region – such as Milan Kundera, Vaclav Havel, and Adam Michnik – shaped the philosophical framework for this debate, fostering a productive dialogue across various academic disciplines.

According to some researchers,[2] the countries in this region, while historically part of one of three major multinational empires (Austro-Hungarian, Prussian-German, or Russian), managed to retain significant elements of Western traditions. These include Western Christianity, the rule of law, a degree of separation of powers, some form of constitutional government, and aspects of civil society. Notably, Western Ukraine and the Baltic states are excluded from this classification based by the criterion of Western Christianity, while Bulgaria is excluded based by the criterion of the rule of law.[3]

Other researchers speak of a clear-cut difference in electoral behavior between Czech, Hungarian, Polish, Slovene, and Croatian lands and other parts of "Eastern Europe": "In these lands, non-communists were voted into power, and a régime change was initiated. Elsewhere, sections of the old ruling groups were voted in, and régime changes were much slower or failed to emerge altogether."[4]

Russia (the USSR) as the Other in relation to which regional specificity is constructed is generally one of the central points of the debate on Eastern European identity. A moderate thesis is that "one's identity is typically defined by the group or groups to which one belongs or aspires to belong. Cultural identity may be strengthened through the utilization of values and symbols deliberately designed to demarcate one's group or groups from all others."[5] Here, the Other serves more as an additional means of "reinforcing" the sense of similarity among group members, which fundamentally originates from within the group itself.

However, the specific situation in Eastern Europe brings forth a more radical thesis: that Russia, as a cultural Other, is a necessary condition for identification. This position was controversially articulated in Kundera's text "The Tragedy of Central Europe" and has remained central to the debate ever since. Kundera argues that the

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2)   Ash "Reform or Revolution?"; and Neumann, "Central Europe's Constituting Other."

3)   Ash, "Reform or Revolution?," 250.

4)   Neumann, "Central Europe's Constituting Other," 364.

5)   Croan, "Lands In-between," 178.

Other was not merely Russian communism or Soviet bureaucracy, but totalitarian Russia as a such: "Russia is not just power but as a singular civilization, an other civilization, … the radical negation of the modern West." [6] Kundera's position (rather simplistic in relation to the Eastern Europe, but relevant in some aspects, in particular, his emphasis on cultural aspects of anti-Soviet identity) is double-edged, with the other side addressing the issue of identification with Western Europe: "The problem for Kundera, however, was not Russia per se. The problem was that the West did not perceive Central Europe a European culture – and that is what he called the tragedy of Central Europe. To the West, Central Europe was the East because of its political system."[7] Different intellectuals particularly debated some of Kundera's theses, but the central thesis that "the Central European identity as an alternative to the Sovietized present" [8] was the common reference point.

At the same time, uncritical adherence to such a reference point can lead us to perceive Eastern Europe as fundamentally negative. In this context, as Bursztyka notes, Eastern Europe has been regarded for many centuries as "a worse Europe." Initially seen as an uncivilized fringe of Europe, it later came to be viewed as a region tarnished by Russian occupation, characterized by economic inefficiency, social atrophy, and political alienation. What remains "missing is a genuine, positive account of Eastern Europe." [9] Eastern Europe appears, so to speak, as the subject of a new Enlightenment: it is merely necessary to dispel the dark spell of Russian imperial irrationality, which has a firm grip on the region, and it will "automatically" transform into a normal, rational Europe.

The specificity of Eastern Europe is further obscured by the fact that its "non-Russianness" is often characterized by vague, somewhat quantitative criteria. For instance, according to Van den Eeden, Poland enjoyed "more freedom of thought and expression," and this made possible the emergence of such an original independent thinker as Bauman; or Yugoslavs experienced "relative freedom," what influenced figures like Žižek.[10]

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6)   Kundera, "Tragedy of Central Europe," 34.

7)   Van den Eeden, "Voices from Central Europe," 153.

8)   Rupnik, "Central Europe or Mitteleuropa?," 250.

9)   Bursztyka, "Reconceptualizing Eastern Europe," 68.

10)   Van den Eeden, "Voices from Central Europe," 155–57.

A more dialectical approach is evident in Bauman himself, who simultaneously considers two opposing dangers. Firstly, the totalitarian repression of individual freedom "flowing from concentrated and condensed social powers."[11] Secondly, it also involves the subversion of any social totality and the resulting privatization of the entire spectrum of human experience, reducing the individual to an irresponsible consumer. "An adventure called Europe," according to Bauman, is a constant search for effective resistance to both growing nationalism and the globalizing market, as well as to imperial totalitarianism and the corruption of communal bonds: "thanks to its unique history Europe … insists, convincingly and effectively, that when it comes to a mode of living together on a planet transformed into a dense network of mutual dependency there is indeed no viable nor plausible alternative."[12]

In this sense, Eastern Europe has a more complex, contradictory, and diverse experience of the European Adventure. Attempts to rigidly demarcate Eastern and Central Europe according to this criterion as "a project of protest against the Soviet rule over Eastern Europe and the American way of life in Western Europe" seem rather artificial. Instead, this is what unites non-Western Europe – namely "a moral criticism of Western Europe not to usurp the marker 'Europe,' and an appeal that it cannot do so without losing an 'organic' ingredient of itself."[13]

Kundera himself identifies this unique organicism. He presents an aphoristic perspective on the difference between Central Europe, characterized as "the greatest variety within the smallest space," and Russia, which he describes as a horrifying opposition of "the smallest variety within the greatest space": "Indeed, nothing could be more foreign to Central Europe and its passion for variety than Russia: uniform, standardizing, centralizing, determined to transform every nation of its empire."[14]

On the other hand, uniformity, standardization, and centralization are the basic principles of the rationalization of traditional society in general, which reached its apogee in industrial modernization. To define Central Europe, Kundera simultaneously introduces two oppositions. He contrasts imperial totalitarianism with political

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11) Bauman and Tester, *Conversations with Zygmunt Bauman*, 106.

12) Bauman, "An Adventure Called Europe," 42.

13) Neumann, "Central Europe's Constituting Other," 357.

14) Kundera, "Tragedy of Central Europe," 33.

freedom and sets up the opposition between baroque Central Europe (characterized by the predominance of the irrational and the dominant role of visual arts, particularly music) and the rational West, especially classical France (noted for the predominance of the rational and the dominant position of literature and philosophy). Modernization erases the old identifiers of Europe, such as Roman Christianity and classical culture. "What will be capable of uniting Europe? Technical feats? The marketplace? The mass media? – I know nothing about it. I think I know only that culture has bowed out" – Kundera states pessimistically.[15]

But it was the unity of culture and social life that defined the dramatic post-war identity of Central Europe. Literary weeklies such as Czech *Literární noviny* and Polish *Kultura*, along with reviews of cultural life by literary scholars, sociologists, and philosophers, served as the pillars of social life around which a broad platform for protest against the Soviet occupation was established. "In Paris, – says Kundera, – even in a completely cultivated milieu, during dinner parties people discuss television programs, not reviews. For culture has already bowed out. Its disappearance, which we experienced in Prague as a catastrophe, a shock, a tragedy, is perceived in Paris as something banal and insignificant, scarcely visible, a non-event."[16] The five-fold idiosyncratic repetition of the expression "bowed out" (*a cédé sa place*) forms the nostalgic core of Kundera's text. It is not the culture of Central Europe that is lost; rather, it remains alive, despite (and indeed thanks to) the tragic circumstances. It is European culture itself that is in danger of being lost. Kundera emphasizes that the crucial factor in the dynamics of Central European identification is that its "revolts were not nourished by either the newspapers, radio, or television – that is, by the 'media.' They were prepared, shaped, realized by novels, poetry, theater, cinema, historiography, literary reviews, popular comedy and cabaret, philosophical discussions – that is, by culture."[17]

This humanitarian perspective, in contrast to the various religious, political, and economic divisions within different parts of Europe, opens up the possibility of a more dialectical understanding of Eastern Europe's place in the European context.

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15) Ibid., 36.

16) Ibid., 37.

17) Ibid.

This is particularly illustrated by the productive encounter between literature and philosophy, as exemplified by Miłosz and Derrida, which offers new insights for a positive narrative regarding Eastern Europe.

The original title of Derrida's text, *The Other Heading: Reflections on Today's Europe*, is *L'Autre cap*. It is important to note that Derrida plays on the multiple meanings contained within the French word "cap." Firstly, he refers to terms associated with movement and travel: "heading" (the direction of a ship) and a "cape" (a headland from which a ship sets sail to another shore). Secondly, he alludes to "capitalization": the capital (la capitale) and capital (le capital). He also references letters of large size (capitals). This seemingly simple word evolves into a chorus of different voices (female and male, concrete and abstract, high and low). And the general sense of this semantic interplay reads as follows: "the other heading" is Europe itself. More precisely, Europe is in crisis. And this crisis is happening today. We are aware of different versions of this crisis, such as the notorious *The Decline of the West* by Spengler and *The Crisis of European Sciences* by Husserl, which presents a crisis of European humanity. However, Derrida primarily refers to "Notes on the Greatness and Decline of Europe" (a text published in 1927) by Paul Valery, who, following the First World War, proposed the idea of the "European spirit" as the core of plans for a politically united Europe (Pan-Europe). Because "TODAY" (in capital letters) Europe is in crisis – it faces a significant challenge, the fundamental challenge. Derrida believes we have been living in this "today" ever since.

This crisis is not experienced as a process, but rather as a singular event pointing toward a completely new Europe, beyond all the exhausted programs of Eurocentrism and anti-Eurocentrism. What are the characteristics of the future face of Europe? Will it escape monstrosity? Derrida posed these questions in 1991 during a time of the "end of history" and general optimism about the fate of the world (at least Europe). He asked from the perspective of "an over-acculturated, over-colonized European hybrid," who, after attending school in French Algeria, capitalized upon the old European culture while simultaneously maintaining a view of the other shore.

This context led to the consideration of identification not as a relationship with oneself, but rather as a culture of oneself viewed through the lens of the other. "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?" – Derrida asks rhetorically.[18]

What does it mean to seek neither old nor a new identity (European or post-European), but a culture of difference from oneself? It implies refusing the "old heading." The old heading is one, (our) heading, our privilege to "calculate and decide upon." This is the heading of "progress." Then we have to relate *ourselves* to other directions (different from ours) especially directions of others (employed by others). "Our" heading is technical manipulation: calculation and management. The other heading involves the ability to hear the external voice and respond to it as valuable in itself, irrespective of our position. However, one's own culture, as a hidden basis for legitimizing colonization (hegemony), returns like a boomerang.

Here, we can draw a parallel with the Issa Valley. Surkont, the grandfather of the lyrical hero of the novel, Thomas, represents the old Polish gentry. He exists in the transition from the first to the second heading. In his economic dealings, he does not distinguish between peasants and landowners, Lithuanians, Jews, and Poles (which causes misunderstanding among his own class).

He seats everyone at the same hospitable table and invariably arrives at agreements – about different issues and in various ways, but always through mutual consent. Although this appears to be a suspicious hybrid to both the old Polish metropolis and other local inhabitants, when land reform comes for a more equitable distribution of land, he reverts to the old approach. He individually calculates and decides on matters of vital significance for others. Miłosz describes in detail this mechanism of calculating one-sided benefits (simulating true public reform): what minimal part of the land will need to be "sacrificed" to the peasants, which part will be illegally retained, and so on.[19]

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18)   Derrida, *The Other Heading*, 11.

19)   Example from Miłosz, *The Issa Valley,* 157:
    The newly instituted Land Reform meant that all lands in excess of 200 acres were to be distributed among the landless peasants – at a rate of indemnity so low as to be almost negligible. Surkont … had found a loophole: under the law, farm properties could be divided among family members, up to 200 acres per household head, provided the estates were independently managed and supported structures. Surkont decided to pacify the government with the seventy-five acres of disputed land, dividing the remaining 395.9 acres between Helen and himself. But … the statute expressly prohibited any land divisions after the stipulated deadline. One need only solicit the cooperation of certain civil servants, not immune to blandishments of

Here the transition to the other heading is at risk of being incomplete. This danger can be mitigated by the additional dimension of identity politics, which Derrida refers to as "the other of the heading." The other of the heading no longer obeys the logic of the heading (nor even of the antiheading-of beheading, of decapitation – Derrida continues to play with words). In this case, we are addressing the otherness of direction in general, including negative logic: the absence of any direction, a guiding ideological signifier. For example, the key Soviet slogan states: "Our goal is communism." However, one would hardly say: "Our goal is capitalism." This is because if you are forcefully dragging the masses into communism, a significant effort is required. As soon as the tyrant's grip weakens, capitalism emerges like grass breaking through concrete. This is merely another illustration of the invisible hand of the market.

History presupposes an identifiable heading, a *telos* of the movement. However, European history also suggests that such a heading should not be predetermined or identifiable in advance and forever. "We must thus," argues Derrida, "be suspicious of both repetitive memory and the completely other of the absolutely new; of both anamnestic capitalization and the amnesic exposure to what would no longer be identifiable at all."[20] This "anamnestic" enhanced reaction of the body's immune system to an antigen previously encountered can be exemplified by the response to the already familiar totalitarian "virus," which allows for the accumulation of social "immunity" (such as awareness of "the return of the Soviet"). The other extreme is, for instance, technocratic optimism, which fosters a kind of amnesia regarding faith in a completely new world – a world of new communications in which totalitarianism is, by definition, impossible.

Symbolic decapitation should remove all old headlines and slogans that impose a future identity. More broadly, the concept of the "heading" can be approached through decapitalization. Where capitalization involves calculating the cost of anything and circulating it according to that cost (for profit), this leads to the establishment of a capital (a metropolis). Decapitalization, in particular, involves rethinking the logic of profits

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one sort or another, to have an older title "mistakenly" recorded in the books. And soliciting it he was… . Under the terms of the Reform, all timberland was to become state property. So what did Surkont do? He had the forest land recorded as grassland.

20)   Derrida, *The Other Heading*, 19.

away from a merely one-way (our way) mentality, and refusing to seek a new capital for the twenty first century (which, for example, Paris represented for the nineteenth century, according to Walter Benjamin). Derrida delineates a range of possible answers to how a European cultural identity can respond to the dual questions of capital and the capital. He draws on the idea of spiritual geography, with references to Husserl and Valéry. Europe has always recognized itself as a cape (headland), as the advanced extreme of a continent to the west and south: the point of departure for discovery (invention and colonization). The capital question here is: will Europe become what it actually is – a mere cap (appendix) on the Asian continent – or will it persist in its self-image as the cap, or even the "brain," of an imaginary community? This kind of community proves to be "the transcendental theme of philosophy since Descartes guided by the idea of a transcendental community, the subjectivity of a 'we' for which Europe would be at once the name and the exemplary figure":[21] the figure that differs from itself, that is the difference to itself that remains with itself, close to itself.

It is this dizzying deconstructive language of Derrida's that Miłosz helps to clarify. The protagonist of *The Issa Valley*, 12 year old Thomas, acts as a kind of anthropologist, studying the lives of others. He walks up and down the paths of different ways of life, revealing their whimsical bends and sudden intersections. Miłosz describes almost all local social groups – genders, ages, religions, nationalities, and classes. Forester Balthazar seeks the meaning of life from a rabbi. A Polish gentleman finds true love in the presence of a Lithuanian peasant woman. A Lithuanian teacher instructs Thomas, the child of a Polish gentleman. Grandma Misya, who considers herself 100 percent Polish, embodies the Lithuanian type, and so on. This is an instance of "difference to itself that remains with itself, close to itself." Yet the true existential depths of the radical philosophical discourse on the other are revealed in one of the most mysterious episodes of the Issa Valley – the incident with the squirrel. As Thomas walks in the forest with a gun, he suddenly sees something absolutely graceful:

> In the crown of a hazel he observed a shimmering, coil-like movement, half in green and half in light. It was a squirrel, the horizontal advance making it appear more elongated, more magically iridescent… . Unable

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21)   Derrida, *The Other Heading*, 33.

to restrain himself, driven by sheer love for the animal, he fired. It was a young one, so slender that what he had taken for a squirrel was not a squirrel but the shimmer of color deposited in its wake. Its body bending and unbending on the moss, it clutched its chest with its tiny paws, at the bloody patch on its little white vest… . Thomas, his face twisted with anguish, knelt beside it and wept. How to stop it, how to stop it. He would have given half a lifetime to save it, but he could only participate passively in the agony … and while he might otherwise have felt an urge to kiss and pet it, his lips were now clamped shut, because it was no longer the urge of possession that welled up in him but of self-sacrifice – for it, the squirrel – and that was clearly beyond his power… . And for a brief moment, so brief he immediately lost access to it, a mystery unfolded.[22]

And this mystery consists not so much in the transition between life and death as in the overturning of the entire perspective of the world. Thomas moves on with his heading, pursuing his goal (hunting), when he suddenly stops, captivated by an encounter with something entirely different, beautiful in its otherness: a magically iridescent, coil-like movement, shimmering in the green, like a gesture from a half-visible deity.

The shot serves, on the one hand, as a spontaneous photographic gesture, a desperate attempt to arrest the moment of unearthly beauty revealed to the boy. On the other hand, he himself, taken by surprise, opens himself to this experience of the other, unconditionally allowing it in. For the shot was taken out of "sheer love" as a sacrificial act of religious conversion, in which he gave himself to this other, feeling within him something wholly different from all that he could consider to be his path. In this moment of mystery, it was not he who was making his way in the world, but the world, through a pantheistic gesture, was marking its way in him. The squirrel revealed its secret to Thomas: it was an intimate part of himself that he sacrificed in the moment of obtaining it. The squirrel falls away as his own "heart," the core of his being, like *agalma*, a hidden and unknown treasure that he himself did not know.

This scene, rather inexplicable in the novel and completely meaningless in the film adaptation (because it is portrayed purely from the outside, without a voiceover),

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22)   Miłosz, *The Issa Valley*, 242.

can be understood as the ultimate (existential) depiction of "the other of heading." In the novel, Thomas does not strive to find another heading or to become something like a new landowner (perhaps, truly fair, sharing the land with peasants, and so on). But the course of life, in all its concreteness, finds him and takes him by surprise. He finds himself open to this collision. He himself becomes what unexpectedly strikes him with love in the very heart. Through the prism of this case, a series of similar attempts to "take on a different form" can be observed, ranging from animals to various social types:

> The truth was that Thomas hungered for a sort of impossible communion with living creatures. Why this barrier, and why become a hunter if one loved nature? It had been the same with the owl: he had secretly dreamed of the day when the owl, by some word or deed, would cease to be an owl, if only for an instant. But the dream never came true; hence what was to be gained by keeping it locked in a cage? Since it was not within his power to assume another form.[23]

Openness to other ways of life turns out to be a means of acquiring one's own subjectivity. This kind of clinamen of identity becomes possible only in that specific *sensus communis* ("impossible communion"), which, with artistic thoroughness and encyclopedic breadth, describes Miłosz as a true hero – the Issa Valley. The Valley is not just a small homeland, a microcosm of Eastern Europe, but a revelation of the essence of Europe through its specificity. This essence stands in opposition to the eternal present of crisis.

The most important characteristic of this Eastern European microcosm that Miłosz identifies is its internal boundaries. These borders form, as it were, a texture of local space and time. The space of the Valley is like the resonator of a musical instrument, amplifying voices and consonances (there was always an echo above the river: one voice responded from somewhere, as if there were an agreement that they should answer each other). Of course, there are emerging contradictions that explode homeostasis from within: class, national, religious, and gender contradic-

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23) Ibid.,176.

tions. But they are like waves on the surface of a river: the local medium of water (the flow of life), unites everyone and smooths everything out into one moving substance of local life as differentiated unity. In this space, individual manifestations of life merge into the hum of shared existence, which has endured for centuries. A pantheistic community is in the air. Heaven is a reflection of the earthly community, the essence of the mundane.

The time of the Issa Valley is concrete as well: "Thomas was born in the village of Gine at that time of year when a ripe apple thumps to the ground during the afternoon lull."[24] But, it is eternally lasting time as well, the past, present, and future simultaneously: "the marshlands abound in every species of waterfowl, and in spring the pale sky reverberates with the whir of snipe,"[25] the concrete time inscribed in the landscape. Thus, the very literary texture is born from local idioms, from the space and time of a particular way of life. This story of the small homeland and simultaneously of Miłosz's self-salvation at a moment when not only he, but Eastern Europe itself, seemed to be losing all identity under the pressure of totalitarian homogenization, becomes a part of European literary tradition and enters the European communicative flows of mutual translation.

After this close reading of Miłosz, we are better positioned to grasp Derrida's final antinomies of European identity. On the one hand, Europe cannot be dispersed into a multiplicity of self-enclosed idioms or petty nationalisms that are "jealous and untranslatable." There must be places of great circulation, translation, and communication – of mediatization. On the other hand, European identity cannot be centralized by means of "trans-European cultural mechanisms (publishing, journalistic, and academic concentrations) subjecting discourses and practices to a grid of intelligibility, to philosophical norms, to channels of immediate and efficient communication – to the pursuit of ratings and commercial profitability."[26] The media networks, according to Derrida, efface any borders and establish a ubiquitous cultural capital: a hegemonic center of quasi-immediate remote control, thus undermining the productivity of internal borders. In line with his critique of the

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24) Ibid., 8.

25) Ibid., 3.

26) Derrida, *The Other Heading*, 39.

power of media immediacy, Derrida discusses the necessity for another heading of Capital, one that avoids both the frightening totalitarian dogmatism (of the Soviet Marxism type) and the counter-dogmatism that bans the term "capital" and critiques certain effects of capital as remnants of old dogmatism. It requires courage to undertake a new critique of the contemporary effects of capital within unprecedented techno-social structures.

The second contradictory imperative lies in the necessity to ensure that a centralizing hegemony (capital) is not reconstituted, and that we do not cultivate minority differences, untranslatable idiolects, national antagonisms, or the chauvinisms of idiom for their own sake. We must strive to invent discourses and politico-institutional practices that inscribe the alliance of two imperatives: capital and the acapital, the other of capital. In terms of Valery, capital has defined European culture since the dawn of ancient navigation and exchange. Europe is like a ship that carried "merchandise and gods." The strategic positions of the European spirit are secured by the contradictory alliance of financial institutions and the arts. It is once again necessary to reflect on this alliance in new circumstances and to find new terrain for it. In short, the idea of Europe consists precisely in not closing itself off in its own identity but in advancing toward what it is not (the heading of the other) and in thinking beyond the modern tradition (to another border structure, another shore). This would allow us to avoid both the nationalistic tensions of linguistic difference and the violent homogenization of languages through the neutrality of a translating medium that claims to be transparent, metalinguistic, and universal.

"Any invention of the new that would not go through the endurance of the antinomy would be a dangerous mystification"[27] – this is a kind of methodological summary of Derrida's. Otherwise, we will be caught in simplistic schemes, such as: Europe is a representative democracy and a market economy, and the differences between its various parts are purely quantitative (for example, more or less democracy). Moreover, these differences are increasingly disappearing. Compared to the East, there is a great deal of democracy throughout Europe.

A more complicated understanding would involve conceptualizing different qualitative democratic idioms and viewing Europe as a non-identity: something that

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27)   Ibid., 72.

cannot be articulated in an idea. Europe is not a Platonic Idea – a universal one – which is embodied with varying degrees of imperfection in concrete matters. Rather, it represents the idealization (or narrativization) of local idioms, which create a communicative excess that triggers processes of mutual translation and organizes the spiritual geography of Europe – a differentiated unity. Europe, therefore, is not a deductive idea that provides the concrete and local with ontological status, but rather a mediative code of the particular.

The danger of capitalization lies in producing the immediacy of the universal. The classical critique of abstract labor demonstrates the nature and effects of a process whereby the individual's labor becomes immediately social (or of universal value) in the modern system of the division of labor. Heidegger, in his essay "The Thing" (1950), recognized the same logic at the level of a "telecommunication machine," which does not so much shorten distances as destroy them, creating the immediacy of otherness as such and erasing any borders: "What is happening here when, as a result of the abolition of great distances, everything is equally far and equally near? What is this uniformity in which everything is neither far nor near – is, as it were, without distance? Everything gets lumped together into uniform distancelessness. How? Is not this merging of everything into the distanceless more unearthly than everything bursting apart?"[28]

Europe comprises the cultural codes that mediate (or mediatize) what retroactively appears to be the same thing, namely identity. However, identity does not possess its own ontology. It is not a Platonic idea but rather an effect of various mediations. This implies that Eastern Europe is not a more or less accurate reflection of the existence of Europe as a whole. In terms of Ricoeur,[29] Europe could be described as a conflict of interpretations. The very imperfection (the local character) of these interpretations is the condition for the possibility of an ontology of Europe. In this sense, Eastern Europe is not merely the periphery of the old (authentic) Europe, but rather an integral interpretation of Europe itself.

From this perspective, two vectors of cultural policy can be identified. The first involves the restoration and strengthening of the eroded identity of Western

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28)   Heidegger, *Poetry Language, Thought,* 164.

29)   Ricoeur, *The Conflict of Interpretations.*

Europe through the reintegration of Eastern Europe, based on a consolidated military and political identity.[30] The second aspect is the acquisition of a new European identity, in which the borderline and often traumatic experience of Eastern Europe can play a significant role. In this context, Eastern Europe is not so much a precisely defined geographical region but rather a vantage point for gaining a new perspective on key social issues. For instance: "the grave and complex problem of immigration can be approached and understood in an entirely new light from a vantage point that I am calling Eastern Europe."[31] From this vantage point, the focus shifts from the external boundary to the internal borders. It moves from the static, impenetrable absolute boundary, which generates binarism, to the relative, mobile borders that deconstruct these binarisms (first and foremost, the self/other). The changing configuration of internal borders maintains the difference of potentials necessary for intercultural communication (the optimum of differences required for identity, in the terms of Claude Lévi-Strauss). A classic description of this kind of vantage point experience is found in Gloria Anzaldúa's text *Borderlands: La Frontera* (1987), where the borderland is conceived as the juxtapositions and superimpositions of different identities that transcend binary thinking (such as male/female, center/periphery, norm/anomaly, etc.). Anzaldúa illustrates the experience of borderland in the very form of her text, blending two English dialects with six Spanish dialects to create a singular poetic language.

Miłosz paints an epic picture of the frontier as a diffused unity (the many as a new one) three decades before Anzaldúa's pioneering work. The space of the valley is shaped by the whimsical wandering of the river. Likewise, the Issa Valley, as Miłosz's *oikoumene*, is formed by the movement of the inner border along with all the branches of its "tributaries." These inner borders can manifest themselves within any local topos of life. They, for example, traverse the house of the priest, where a relationship arises between a Polish man of high status and a Lithuanian peasant girl. This relationship tragically actualizes and simultaneously shifts social boundaries (gender, national, class). Balthasar, a forester, encounters a rabbi on the painful path of self-discovery.

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30) For example, like a federal state with "a sovereign power with the sword and the purse" (The Federalist, *The Decline of Europe*).

31) Sushytska, "What Is Eastern Europe?," 53.

A peasant youth, embarking on the path of radical nationalism and attempting to draw a new boundary between the world of landowners and peasants, finds a new point of contact with a representative of the Lithuanian intelligentsia. In principle, each character experiences a different outcome in their clash with the other within this configuration of boundaries.

The protagonist, Tomas, embodies a borderline hero, discovering himself through encounters with the diverse manifestations of others in the Valley. The remarkable fluidity of these inner borders extends further, giving rise to the effects of communication with the otherworld that are fundamental to Miłosz's magical realism. Along the inner border of the valley – on the banks of the Issa River – reside "devils" known as "Little Germans" (*Nemchiki*). These Little Germans, akin to the spirits of these inner borders, serve as a parodic deconstruction of Stalin's Other, which exists beyond the external boundary (fascists as *nemetzkie zahvatchiki*). They accompany the protagonist in his daily crossings of various borders, or they themselves are manifestations of these crossings. The novel concludes with the protagonist acquiring a specific ethos through his openness to the *topos*, representing an "impossible communion" with the Issa Valley: "The time has come, Thomas, to wish you luck. Your future can only be guessed, for no one can predict how you will be shaped by the world that awaits you. The devils along the Issa have fashioned you as best they could; the rest does not belong to them."[32]

Issa's devils here represent an imaginary horizon of "the terrible and marvelous – deinos – encounter with the other," which is not only exposing local characters to unpredictable and dramatic identity quests (and losses) but "acknowledging the power of Eastern Europe – the strength of its repeated failure – the West needs to open itself up to new formulations of the self, which includes rethinking its borders and policies around them."[33] Issa's devils are a materialization of "a sudden inflow or outflow of internal chaos"[34] (as seen in the case of forester Baltasar), but they are not merely an irrational fluctuation of local mentality stemming from medieval superstitions. In this way, Eastern Europe – in contrast with the a-historical rationality of the Enlightenment

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32)   Miłosz, *The Issa Valley*, 288.

33)   Sushytska, "What Is Eastern Europe?," 63.

34)   Miłosz, *Rodzinna Europa*, 80.

– "begins with sensus communis and arrive at reason. Therefore, it has tended to express itself in a kind of cultural polyphony – there are different rationalities equally legitimate, rooted in the facticity of historically determined communities."[35]

The preservation of this experience of historical communities and the utopian impulse of the impossible communion ("the other of heading") is what distinguishes Europe, first of all, from the Russian imperial suppression of individuals and civil society, but also from their dissolution in the movement of capital, which, generating increasingly radical effects of the dialectic of the Enlightenment,[36] leads to the media homogenization of cultural landscapes.

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35)   Bursztyka, "Reconceptualizing Eastern Europe," 96.

36)   Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment.*

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