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European Borders: History Of Space/Space Of History

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History, Europe, European history

European history has never have been a simple history among others. Europe has never been just one historical object among others. It has never let itself be simply delimited, ordered, categorized, organized, analyzed, set in archives or *understood* ? and all of these things constitute not only the basic operations of history but also of language and of thinking itself ? simply unconscious of what it was, namely European history.

History has two sides. It is both a concept ? a way of looking, a way of deploying the tools and knowledge of science on a given object ? and it is the name of that object. It is that ensemble of events, places and people, of material, psychological and cultural particularities which, when taken together, submitted to the interpretation of the historian, produce meaning. The object of history is not in itself meaningful. It does not spontaneously generate sense.¹ History is thus double, now subject, now object. On the one hand, the gulf which lies between mere facts and the history which pretends to be their meaning is so vast that it can never be broached, even by the most rigorous historiographical operation. On the other hand, mere facts, by virtue of the (mere) fact that they are objects of history are, by their very being, are already historical. As Heidegger suggests in the opening pages of *Sein und Zeit*, every inquiry, by the very fact that it is an inquiry silently evokes the being of what it is seeking (*Gefragtes*).² In a sense, the interpretation will always have arrived too late. The sense of the historical object is already present in the form of its yet-to-be-revealed being. The historical object will have always furtively taken on meaning through its anticipation, through its being as a thing-to-be-acquired-about: an object of historical inquiry.

Something of the sense of history will have always circumvented interpretation, will have always already appeared meaningful.

Moreover, history itself is historical. That a historical fact is regarded as a historical fact, is itself a historical fact and cannot be *thought* otherwise, cannot be torn free from the fabric of history. History is this sense-producing activity, an activity which presupposes a certain set of material and scientific conditions, conditions which vary with history. The historical object has always and always already lost its "objectivity." "Mere facts" are thus already historical. The historian has never

known a purely objective fact. The pure object does not exist. Strangely, silently, every object assumes a meaning or an ideology. The historical object will always have quietly bypassed full interpretation, will always already appear meaningful and ? since meaning emerges only from interpretation ? already interpreted. In this sense, history is from its very origin ideological: independent of the historian and in spite of his/her good will, the sense of history must inevitably partially escape him/her. Immanent false consciousness. The historical object has always and always already lost its "objectivity." The essence of the historical objects precedes and thus eludes the historian. Mastery of the object can only be partial. Complete objectivity is impossible and yet it is a kind of necessary impossibility. Yet not only is absolute objectivity impossible, it is also unthinkable. Knowing, thinking, conceptualizing ? those activities which are most "properly" human ? are impossible without the otherness of the object, without non-objectivity, without the presence of the unknowable, the unthinkable, the unconceptualizable. A certain theoretical non-identity or even self-alienation is necessary if we are to know our own historical identity: who we are, who we are not.

European history is universal history. There will never have been history which was not European history. History, in that sense in which we speak of it in colloquiums and academic journals ? in other words *the discourse* of history ? is an invention of Western Civilization (and I use this expression with some reserve) or rather, it is the condition of Western Civilization, the fundamental concept of all Western concepts: Truth as narrative, discourse or *Logos*. Truth built upon concepts. What is a concept? It is a general or abstract idea which designates the group of objects and the particular properties which correspond to that particular idea. Concepts are thus both ideas and self-policing mechanisms. Concepts contain the law of their own limits, their own borders and imply the necessity of a kind of conceptual border police which throughout European history has taken the most sinister forms. Western Truth is universal because we are incapable of thinking non-universal truth. If there is truth in history, that truth is unitary and thus universal. And yet, as I will attempt to show, for this universality to be universally valid it too must be submitted to the tyranny of the concept, it too must have its limits, its borders. From the very beginning of Western Civilization, the concept in general ? including of course the concept of the concept ? has known no other means of defining itself than by marking the difference with what it is not, by setting a limit and by erecting a wall. The rule of any concept is a mechanism of borders and of border controls.

Thus European history is universal because anything else is unthinkable. Anything else is *excluded* by the sovereignty of the thinkable. The *Other* of European history can only be *thought* by being domesticated, by being transformed into a European concept, by being submitted to the tyranny of the European concept, shuffled within the walls of the European fortress, given new clothing and label which clearly identify it as *different*, as *other*, and *only then* by excluding it. This is the mechanism of "cultural identity": assimilate to exclude. Exclusion can never be realized purely. If we have understood the person or people we wish to exclude enough to understand them as different, enough to construct a concept of the them as other, then we have built our concept of self only with the help of the other. Our concept of ourselves will not have been possible without the other.

Through the process of exclusion we cannot help but be indebted to the other. We can only exclude by first assimilating, by first incorporating the other into the concept of who we are ? namely as a dialectical image of who we are not. The other becomes part of us. We become the other.³

The *Other* of European History

How then can we speak of non-European history? In other words, what is the other of European History. In principle, non-European history is historical discourse which is not built upon the Western metaphysics of the concept. And yet any history which is non-European can only be thought by European, that is, Western concepts. In thinking history, in thinking the historical object we submit it to the tyranny of the concept and transform it ? not, we must be careful to emphasize, without a trace of difference, because difference is the very substance of the Western concept ? into European history. Thus we can neither *speak* of non-European history nor *think* it before it is couched in the Western concept. In *being* an object, it is already *thought* in a concept, it is already caught in the gravity of this conceptual machinery, wandering about the European circus which opened long before the first visitor arrived. Thus to consider that the past has a coherent meaning and displays a simple continuity with the present constitutes an enormous and clumsy prejudice. What's more European history seems by nature obsessed with the sovereignty of its history, with its influences and confluences, its frontiers, with transit and exchange.

Europe is experiencing a crisis which takes the form of a radical questioning of ethnic and racial conventions, political affiliation, historical origins, linguistic norms, official jurisdiction concerning political borders, constitutional authority, representative capacity, general defense and law enforcement. And yet the question of Europe and its walls, of the concrete significance of its borders and of the new *Festung Europa* is new only in one sense: From another point of view, Europe's identity crisis is proper to the very concept of Europe. The crisis of Europe is the crisis of the concept of Europe. Although the concept of Europe, like European history, is not one simple concept among others, it obeys the law of the concept and in doing so enacts out its own territorial crisis. (This crisis of territory is also the crisis of "territoriality"). The crisis of European identity, its patterns and politics, cannot be simply reduced to any historical unity which might stabilize or ground the debate in a fixed origin or reference, a "true" or "original" European culture.

Like the very objects of Western History the concept itself has a history, has in fact undergone a progression in time, an epic which in the representations of mass culture, might have been reserved for some great historical figure, Caesar, Alexander or Napoleon, for example. The last great thinker of the history of the concept, or in his terms the history of "spirit" is Hegel. For him, the movement of the Universal Spirit (*Weltgeist*) is a labor whose result is the composite of all events and significations, thoughts, people, Reason, even being itself.⁴ It is perhaps no accident that Hegel was both a great thinker of the concept and a great thinker of history, the first and automatically the last to understand that the

concept of history is inseparable from the history of the concept. The collusion of the two and the very process which leads to their absolute unification is what I have been calling Western or European History. Hegel calls Universal History (*Weltgeschichte*). Hegel's famous formula that Reason rules in the world and thus in universal history (*Weltgeschichte*)⁵ signifies nothing less than that history itself is a progressive deployment of Reason. Every moment of Universal History, though not ideal in itself, though not a perfect enactment of reason, is nonetheless *necessary* for the *realization* of Reason, for the union of reality and idea. Reason, says Hegel, is immanent in historical human reality and realizes itself in and through that reality.⁶ Historical Reason must define itself through its concrete historical manifestations.

The Dialectic of Modernity

One of the fundamental consequences of modernity is globalization, the diffusion and heterogeneous development of European culture across the earth. It is an operation which at once alienates minor cultures from their like and unites them in the logic of a global totality.⁷ On a practical level, modernity's imposition of global universalization seems laudable: only such a unifying theoretical force would in effect permit the internal sundering of the spheres of modern society through the consequences of its specialization. A certain dialectic of modernity is fundamental. It is at once *necessary* for the restitution of social specialization and diversification into a totality and *contingent* upon the social cleavage which make it possible in the first place. And yet social totality is never implicitly absolute: it is always restitution of a temporarily lost totality. This emergence of organic individualism within the spiritual whole, which functions as a socially critical counter-part to the universalism of the Enlightenment was a fundamental element in the thought of the young Goethe (as well as the young Schiller), and first drew him to Diderot who, with Lessing, had a great influence on the young Hegel. Although the notion of a European geographical unity is at least twenty-five centuries old, Europe as a universal, self-conscious concept is the product of a tradition which dates less than three hundred years originating within the politico-theoretical movements of the Enlightenment. The universalizing machinery of the Enlightenment is based on ideologies of opposition, delimitation and exclusion: nature/culture, society/politics, human/institutional, public/private. These oppositions operate in a network of social-political-philosophical relations which as an ensemble form a conceptual totality, the "universal spirit". The structural logic of universality and diversity is particularly important to Hegel's system of thought: Conceptual knowledge, the self-constitution of concepts, is an instrumental operation which, precisely because it is instrumental, renders impossible absolute knowledge of its object. Anything, including the thing-in-itself, the thing as absolute, universal object, is accessible to knowledge only through its determinations, through the dispersion of its being into its particular manifestations in space and time. And yet this dispersion is precisely what precludes its universality. For Hegel, this operation of eternal manifestation of the determinations of a universal which continually reassemble themselves forming a superior universal, constitutes the dialectic of culture (*Bildung*). It is at once the constitution and the realization of the universal in its diversity.⁸

Even though the concept of European culture is supposed as universal, it has never had an absolute and universal form, has never been detached or indifferent with respect to its own meaning, it has never been *in-itself*. It has always only been able to recognize itself in its instrumentality, in the moment when it applies itself to the task of discovering what it is. It has never been able to remain closed, frozen in an abstract totality. Thus the concept "European identity" has sense only at the moment when it breaks off from itself and self-consciously sees itself as an object. It has sense only at the moment of its own introspective decomposition, of the rupture of its integrity, at the moment of its own crisis. And yet this is also the moment which signals the impossibility of a fixed concept. Thus the *double bind* of culture as thing-in-itself, as unitary concept: The axiom of universality is the rule of diversity: Cultural identity has always taken the form of the crisis of cultural identity. But like any crisis, the crisis of cultural identity marks a rupture ? a broken or flawed identity ? only by preserving the components of bygone identity. Crisis both unifies and disperses. It links the fragments of a culture which bear the trace of their own integrity. Self-conscious knowledge shatters the edifice of oneness, posits the self ? culture ? as other. The cultural history of Europe is the history of crisis.

Cultural identity cannot recall a time when it wasn't a *question* of cultural identity, when cultural identity was not in question, when some form of disequilibrium, dispersion, rupture was not present, sounding the alarm and the call to redefining, reestablishing the identity presumed lost or threatened. There was never not crisis. The crisis has no time. At all moments of the history of European culture it is already present, already determining its identity through the diversity of its universality.

The Proper of Culture

European identity presents a double problem: on the one hand, a notion of immanence is present today in the European spirit, a supposition of universality. On the other hand, the nature of European consciousness permits a reflection of this immanence, a sort of cultural self-consciousness.⁹ European culture is thus at one with itself and beside itself, sovereign within its borders and outside of them. European identity has at once a *declaratory* function, pronouncing what *is* its status, and a *prescriptive* function: European identity as an unfulfilled promise. The fact that Europe asks itself the question of its cultural identity is at once a sign of its fissure and of the impossibility of reestablishing its totality *now* and *as it is*. European self-reflection is already the index of its non-self-identity. It constitutes a self-knowledge, yes, but also a sign of a Europe *to come*, a Europe which must be chosen by the societies which belong to it, societies which nonetheless do not have the benefit of absolute self-knowledge. The Europe-to-come is unknown and yet completely determined by Europeans. In this sense, the Europe-to-come has already arrived, it is here with us as the trace of its presence. This trace is called, according to Derrida, responsibility.

We have already emphasized the impossibility of fixing European identity from an "objective" point of reference which lies beyond it. The Europe which must serve

as a reference for knowledge and action cannot be immediately and unquestionably present. Its identity is already disrupted by the fact that we ask after its identity. Either we are not Europeans or Europe has no identity. Identity cannot be determined from the outside. If we pose the question, we are outside. Although this aporia is particularly occidental, it is not specific to European culture. Derrida thus formulates the indissoluble paradox of culture itself: "The proper of a culture is to not be identical with itself."¹⁰ In Hegel's *Logik* we read that the concept of unity (of being) is "the identity of identity and non-identity."¹¹ In the context of European cultural identity, Derrida simply draws the consequences of Hegel's theorem: a culture can only be perceived in its integrity, that is, as completely unified (identical with itself) from a point of view which is different beyond it, foreign to it (not identical). Yet from this position of foreignness and of difference its identity is compromised; it cannot be known absolutely, in its absoluteness. This aporia not only constitutes the field in which much of Derrida's thought has always operated, it is indeed the founding moment of occidental civilization. "Pure difference," he writes in *Glas*, "self-different (*différente de soi*), ceases to be what it is in order to remain what it is. It is the origin of history, the beginning of the decline, the sunset, the passage to Western subjectivity."¹² Thus Derrida's axiom: the only universal property of culture is its non-identity with itself.

The Geographical Basis of Universal History

According to Hegel, Universal History itself consists of the progressive exteriorization of the Universal Spirit. Universal Spirit traverses at one moment or another every individual in history. The events of human history are the embodiments of Spirit necessary for the realization of Historical Reason. At the origin of history, Universal Spirit is *in-itself*, completely abstract prior to any concrete manifestation. Like a newborn infant it has no consciousness of itself as History. It must discover itself, become *for-itself*, by projecting itself into the world, and regarding itself, in the world, as an object. Spirit manifests itself in the actions of individuals, thus becoming object. At that moment it is subject and object, abstract spiritual substance and concrete reality. Spirit thus sees itself reflected in the world, sees itself as real and, through this reflection, knows itself. However Spirit ? which in itself is Absolute Spirit in an unrealized or unfulfilled form ? is eternally restless and dissatisfied. It seeks ever new objective knowledge of itself and more rational embodiments of the perfection which it is but which it knows only through dissatisfaction. Universal History is the process by which Spirit reveals itself to itself by expressing itself in the people and peoples of the world. It is a progressive becoming for-itself. At the end of History, Spirit will have become in-itself *and* for-itself. In other words, it will have become the Absolute which has absolute knowledge of itself: Reason.

Universal Spirit thus projects itself in the world. It begins as a perfect and abstract unity which knows neither time nor space and, in becoming real, enters into the temporal, spatial world. The events of human history constitute so many forms of the Universal Spirit which appear as concrete determinations of Reason in history. It is natural, says Hegel, that these concrete determinations have not only a necessary temporal order but also a necessary spatial order.¹³ The space which

is to embody Universal Spirit in the progress of history is heterogeneous. The differences in the spatial characteristics of Nature which permit Universal Spirit must be seen as particular possibilities for that realization which are proper to the different peoples of the earth. These differences constitute what Hegel calls the "geographical basis" of Universal History.

Human destiny for Hegel in the beginning of the 19th Century is to liberate itself to Reason, to live in such a way as to meet the test of reality and to realize its imminent rationality. Nature is the first standpoint from which man can attain freedom.¹⁴ Given the natural disposition of human beings, this is possible only in certain geographical areas, firstly because of climate, secondly because of terrain. In the most extreme zones of the planet, insists Hegel man has no freedom of movement. The extreme temperature differences are too great to permit him to make any progress in the development of his world. In such extremes, simple human need is never completely set aside. The demands of nature have priority over all other. "The true showplace" for Universal History are the mild zones, above all their northern part. In the southern parts of the hemisphere where the natural geography is fragmented and multiple, the living forms of nature, animal and plant life are more individualized opposed to one another. In the northern part of the hemisphere the different species of plants and animals are far more harmonized.¹⁵

Hegel creates a geo-spiritual of the entire globe in such a way as to explain, the movement of Universal History, from its beginnings in Asia, to its fulfillment in the Europe of the beginning of the 19th Century. Since the exterior, physical sun rises in the East and sets in the West, explains Hegel, the inner sun of self-consciousness must rise in the West and casts its light much farther than the physical sun.¹⁶ Universal Spirit traverses four periods or four "worlds." The Oriental, the Greek, the Roman, and the Germanic.¹⁷ The geographical disposition of what Hegel calls the "Old World" ? Europe, Africa and Asia¹⁸ ? is divided into three parts. Their relation constitutes an organic and historically necessary totality. For this reason the Mediterranean is the key to Universal History, a unifying, communicating medium, for the development of Universal Spirit. The exclusivity of the Mediterranean explains, according to Hegel, why Asia remains removed from the process of Universal History, why Northern Europe entered so late and thus knows no ancientry. Caesar's crossing of the Alps and the rapport by which the first Germans came into contact with the Romans were thus the epoch-making events for Universal History. Eastern Asia and the area beyond the Alps are thus the extremes of the center of Universal History, the beginning and end, the rise and the decline.¹⁹

European Space, European History

But Universal History has never been simply the history of this place, this geographic singularity which we call Europe. Universal History is not only the history of this space, it is also the history of Space itself. Western metaphysics has always naturally furnished European consciousness with the concepts and the conceptuality of European identity but also with principles of space and time, in

other words, with the basic principles of geographical history. For in our conceptual tradition they are the very principles which permit science to question principles. Like Western History, Western Space is a very special space, not simply one space among others. For as long as Western thought has been alive it has provided the terms of a metaphysical background for time and space, a horizon of possibility which has always projected itself, transferred itself, transmitted itself across this planet, determining not only the Western concept of space but also the space of Western concepts. Thus the history of Europe, of this place is intimately bound to the history of place in general, of place as place, place as a determination of space, of a certain space.

From one point of view, space is historically determined as the history of physics. In the most concrete sense it is the product of the development of both scientific methods and tools and of the techniques whose emergence accompany the development of knowledge. This development is far from continuous.²⁰ Scientific knowledge and the philosophical insights which necessarily accompany them emerge in a discontinuous fashion in such a way that knowledge of the world remain a heterogeneous totality. The history of the West is also the history of a certain interiorization of the external world and the spatial evolution of the philosophical world. The metaphysical "beyond" which regulates Western thought corresponds to or is perhaps even the result of a notion of the spatial "beyond," that is of an absolute exteriority, an "outside" or "outsideness" which itself has no outside. The history of our culture is marked by the conceptual necessity of absolute exteriority, of a sur-reality, of the existence of an *other* which is irreducible to anything which is found within reality.

A fundamental characteristic of modernity itself is a certain formalization of time. Although pre-modern cultures possess means of calculating time, the nature of time itself is fundamentally different than our own. Whereas time in modern civilizations is strictly formal or "empty," a completely instrumental means of organizing life, pre-modern time is "full," that is, it is measured by activity, material or natural events. Time for the pre-moderns is thus closely linked to place, to "socio-spatial markers," to natural occurrences or to a social organization which have a proper fixed place.²¹ The Industrial Revolution begins not with the invention of the steam engine but with that of the mechanical clock.²² The introduction of the notion of time as temporal uniformity, as pure form, is, for better or worse, the most important innovation of modernity. It is the key to the modern dissociation of *space* and *place*, what I will discuss in a moment as de-territorialization. Where once spatial dimensions of life were dominated by the presence of others and of things, by localized activity, our modernity permits the determination of space by the absence of the other. Space becomes "empty." The absent other becomes present only by invisible means.²³ Thus the subjective nature of space, like human subjectivity in general, is not ahistorical. Our subjective character is inextricably related not only to its material history but also to what Foucault calls the history of the epistem, of the ensemble of knowledge and theory proper to a particular epoch or to a particular time.²⁴ Lyotard has underscored a related phenomenon concerning knowledge in general: completely independent of its form or its content, the *status* of knowledge is subject to change.²⁵

And yet space and subjectivity must be seen as codeterminant. Space is phenomenal. It is based on a rapport objects and our perception of objects. The histories of space and of subjectivity are thus *both* codependent, and historically determined. Put more concretely, our sense of the European space, of the relation between, here and there, between us and them, city and country, continent and world, planet and universe has a clear history. The particularities of our global situation, at once a compression of the global scale and a kind of de-territorialization, that is a kind of rupture in our relation to the earth itself seem to reflect a historical necessity. At the same time, this sort of spatial collapse carries an effect on the human body and on our sense of the body. It effects the relation of the body ? as our material and thus spatial being ? to space, to the world around us. This relation between the body and subjectivity is in some sense the border, the wall, if you will, between subject and matter, body and mind, etc.

Just as the world and space itself has seen a progressive historical interiorization, so has the crisis of our space, of the European Space also been interiorized. It touches not only our political borders, but also the borders of our body, the borders which presume to isolate our spirit, we Europeans, and external world. Europe's crisis is a crisis of the European subject in relation to this material, geographic object called Europe.

Nuclear Cosmopolitanism: Information as Poison

The necessity of an assimilation of these two domains ? the body-human and the body-Europe ? is poignantly illustrated in Christa Wolf's 1987 novel, *Störfall: Nachrichten eines Tages*.²⁶ The manifest object of the novel is the Chernobyl nuclear catastrophe of 1986. A parallel narrative follows the progress of the brain surgery of the narrators brother on the very same day. Both experiences are completely "indirect." (Setting aside for the moment the very question of "directness" which is one of the stakes of the novel) The narratives of experience, simple reports, *Nachrichten*. "Störfall" is the word commonly used to describe an interruption of power from a generating station. It carries more general connotations of "disruption" or "disturbance." What was interrupted, disrupted or disturbed on that Spring day in 1986? Certainly the power. Yet the narrator's experience of the accident, which she doesn't come to understand as an accident until well after she herself and her children have been mildly contaminated, is disruption of the fabric of subjectivity, of the mind, spirit and emotions in relation to the world.

Nuclear radiation is a poison like no other: it disrupts the very conventions of what we hold poison to be. It obeys the material laws neither of disease nor of chemical poison's which we are accustomed to combatting. The garments, the walls, the mechanical extensions with which we shelter ourselves from conventional threats are not appropriate. Its movement cannot be hindered by ordinary or conventional means of mechanical protection since it is constituted by processes which take place on an atomic ? sub-mechanical ? scale. Some forms of radiation, for example, penetrate walls and other mechanically "protective" measures. The poison does not dissipate but remains in a state of decay well beyond any scale of

human mortality. Nuclear processes simply take place on a scale which is incongruous with our traditional material conceptual framework. The effects of nuclear poison also exceed our conventional conceptual scope. Poison enters the body through the skin, violating the conceptual boundary of the body, in effect the ultimate wall. Moreover, the poison's "infection" is the disruption of the organic mechanism of the individual cell, the building block of our body as well as of its walls. Thus, having heard rumors about nuclear poison the narrator of *Störfall* thinks of precautions to take against contamination. She does so without knowing to what extent the degree of contamination is knowable? without knowing the limits or frontiers of the poison. Thinking of her grandchildren, for example, she suggests to herself that after playing outside, in irradiated dust, they should shower; yet a shower would permit poisonous water to seep into their bodies. Or, under the recommendation to throw contaminated milk out by the liter because of the contaminated grass which cows have ingested, she thinks of starvation, of children elsewhere, fellow humans, who perish for lack of milk.

Nuclear poison cannot be conceptually exteriorized. The laws which govern it are more fundamental with respect to matter itself than those which govern the human body: It disrupts the material sovereignty of the human body. No technological response to it can undermine it at a more rational level since it consists of a corruption of the basic building blocks of matter.

The Body as Border

Parallel to this questioning of the material sovereignty of the human body is a narrative questioning of the subjective sovereignty of the human mind. The traditional mind-body problem is forced into the nuclear age. Nuclear physics, frustrated and fascinated by its inability to isolate the basic building block of reality, finds an analogy in the quest for the indivisible kernel of subjectivity. Where the physical origins of personality traits, senses, or capacities of imagination may be mapped out in the material of the brain itself has been to a great extent solved by medical science. Certain parts of the memory and experience can actually be isolated in the matter of the brain, stimulated or, with frightening ease and precision, annihilated.

Thus as the narrator's brother undergoes major brain surgery, to remove a tumor, there lies a clear threat that particular elements of his subjective character might be inadvertently damaged. The subjective experience of one's own personality takes shape from inside that personality and thus the possibility of a change in personality cannot be understood from any standpoint other than the "new" personality. No external measure is possible. The violation of the body is the mark of the failure of traditional concepts of human space, of inside and outside. That medical technology has the capacity to "safely" enter the brain itself (as though the entry itself were not a kind of irreparable transgression) and correct other "unrelated" disfunctions is the very "disruption" of *Störfall*.

The fragments of the narrative which deal with the brother's surgery are remarkably graphic in their description of the operation. Holes are bored in the

skull, a portion of the skullcap removed, certain lobes of the brain gently pushed aside ? all this brings to a very effective peak the notion that processes which are entirely material, physical, even mechanical, have precise effects on the subject, pushing the boundary between the material and the subjective to a high precision, ever receding. As the brain's functions reveal themselves as progressively localizable, the frontier of subjectivity is again and again, displaced, pressed into recession. The body can be exposed, exteriorized in the extreme, the personality geographically plotted, revealing the horizon of a kind of pure-instrumentality of the body.[27](#)

What's more, technology has reached a point where machinery can perform mechanical tasks with more precision and efficiency than humans. The ultimate advance in this direction would naturally be surgery by computer. The precision of such a computer could naturally push further back the boundary between subjective and material, well beyond the point, it would seem, of human detection. Computers establish the frontiers, build the walls and develop themselves the technology necessary to franchise them. And so the process continues. In a system that has been socially developed, our bodies will have become merely text of the instruments, noise in the machine.[28](#)

Technology offers the means to an endless differentiation of the *mind* through the mechanical *manipulation* of the brain, giving rise to a regressive kind of division of labor, diversification instead of intensification. Wolf detected, already in her 1968 essay "Lesen und Schreiben," the tendency toward "surface" models of reality and called for a deepening of individual experience in lieu of moving from one surface experience to another: "Our brain is sufficiently differentiated to deepen almost endlessly the linear expansion of time ? let's call it surface ? through memory and looking ahead. Depth: if it's not a quality of the material world, it must be an experience, a capacity which in the social coexistence of people over long spaces of time was acquired and not only maintained itself because it was useful, developed."[29](#)

The Politics of Information

Radioactivity, as suggested above, is a very particular kind of "medium": It is invisible, its movement is undetectable except by highly technical means, it is indistinguishable from any element of the human organism to which it attaches itself. Moreover its effects are less noticeable and far more long-standing than other agents of sickness such as disease or infection: damage begins at the level of the cells and remains unnoticeable, in some cases, for many years. The circumstances of nuclear fallout thus result in a near total dependency on information, both technological and logistical. Thus nuclear poison manifests itself in the short run as information about the nature and movement of the fallout: Conceptually speaking, the information *is* the poison.

Mysteries and gaps in information about what is happening set the tone of Wolf's narrative. It is haunted by questions which are insistently pertinent because they address the conditions of survival itself. Any information at all passes initially only

by hearsay. When news reports finally begin to be provided, details are sporadic and inconsistent. Information during the Chernobyl disaster was in fact extremely slow in reaching those affected by it. It was only after Swedish officials inquired urgently about radioactivity levels 100 times higher than normal in Scandinavia, that the Soviet Union responded with a terse statement to the International Atomic Energy Agency, a full two days after the accident, and that after Scandinavian officials believed that the radiation had originated in Sweden.³⁰ Residents of the Ukraine itself were among the last to be informed, many hearing the news on Polish radio.

The political use of information has seldom had higher stakes. First the Soviet Union, then East Bloc governments, and finally West European officials wielded and manipulated the information in order to best influence the agricultural complex, agencies of resource allocation, or simply mass emotions. Information in such a situation resembles more and more an instrument of political power and a suspicion becomes prevalent that government spokesmen and "experts" are to be as little trusted as the fresh vegetables which hide the menacing poison. The seemingly endless capacity to manipulate information, to exchange it for purposes largely unrelated to its content is a mark of the information age in which we seem to be entering. Global networks of information give rise to exchange systems based on knowledge as purely instrumental. Lyotard analyzes this phenomenon as a characteristic of the global networks of late capitalist society. He suggests that the status of scientific knowledge risks becoming the new stake of international conflicts. Knowledge and power become two sides of the same question.³¹

But global interactions in our age are not only facilitated and accelerated by the information society, they are also imposed to some degree by the economic and environmental pressures of resource allocation which occur on a global scale.³² The question is, of course, to what degree, if at all, such "computerization" of society takes place in the political, economic context of the East Bloc. The diplomatic "friction" of the original exchange between the Swedish and Soviet governments over the Chernobyl disaster immediately transformed information into political fodder. The particularly abstract nature of initial contact with nuclear fallout ? the legitimation of the presence of danger, almost completely concurrent with the political legitimation ? lends the sense that elements of what Lyotard calls the Postmodern Condition are globally present as a result of the global economic and political dominance which the U.S. enjoys, even if this hegemony itself will be progressively weakened by the globalization of information technology.³³ By any measure, neither the movement of information about the Chernobyl disaster nor its effects respected national boundaries and the structure of political demarcations; in *Störfall* both suffer a kind of conceptual distortion.

The De-territorialization of the Earth

Modern technologies thus contribute to a kind of alienation from the material foundation which is the earth itself as an absolute point of reference for all material value. Where once the earth itself provided the most tangible and fundamental

point of reference for human activity and human meaning, the rise of information technology and the change in the status of information itself as a completely dominant commodity, detaches inherent value from the earth. Once the chain of production of any commodity ultimately extended across material/physical connexions back to the raw materials or energy derived from the earth itself. Information technologies create and introduce into exchange commodities which are *de-materialized*, which receive their value not with reference to any material chain of production or linked to any concrete use value. Information itself is the dominant value. In contemporary consciousness, it has in itself no use value. It exists to be exchanged, to change form. Where Baudrillard considers the failure in the opposition exchange-value/use-value as immanent in Marxian theory and thus in the ideologies of production,³⁴ it is, according to Lyotard, the natural destiny of industrialized knowledge. The value of such knowledge *exists* only in being consumed and transformed.³⁵ Lyotard sees the phenomenon as inseparable from global political relations. As information merchandise becomes indispensable to productive power, it passes naturally into the global competition for power. Just as nation-states in the past have fought to acquire and master territories in order to dominate the means of production associated with those territories it is today imaginable that they will fight to dominate information.³⁶ And yet the war for information will be a war without territory, without space, what Virilio has called "pure war."³⁷

This "de-territorialization," as it is called by Deleuze and Guattari, traverses not only the material world but also human subjectivity. Where Christa Wolf seems to assert a *parallel* between the receding borders of subjectivity and ever more ambiguous political borders, Deleuze and Guattari, radicalize disappearance of borders, assimilating the material bond to the earth and the subjective bond to a kind of subjective anchor or center. The territorial schizophrenia which we experience is the same as a kind of individual schizophrenic condition. The lost subjective center of the schizophrenic is the very same as the lost territorial center of the capitalist era. Three stages of civilization correspond to three levels of "territoriality," of relation to the earth as a geographically organized context: the primitive, the despotic and the capitalist. The fundamental unity of the primitive civilization is the earth. Where the "sol" (Boden, bunne) can be a productive element or the object of production the "Terre" (Erde, jord) is a kind of superior or transcendental element. It is the surface on which all human activities are inscribed, the cause of production and thus the object of desire. The "territorial machine" is the first form of the "socius."³⁸ Its function is to "encode" the symbolic, economic and political activities of human beings in relation to the earth. In the despotic stage of civilization, the centering function of territoriality is displaced on the despot who preserves territorial communities only in as far as he is permitted to "sur-code" them. That is insofar as he redirects economic wealth and political power to enrich and empower himself, but also in so far as he can redirect their symbolic quality, the social codes which guarantee symbolic meaning for social relations. In the modern stage of civilization, the earth as center of gravity for political, economic and socio-symbolic relations is displaced completely by money-capital. The "modern machine" renders the concrete abstract, naturalizes the artificial and replaces territorial codes and despotic codes with an "axiomatic of un-coded fluxes."³⁹

Thus if there is to be re-territorialization, a re-anchoring of knowledge, meaning, and institutional legitimacy in a fixed point of reference, it will not take place in the context of global capitalization. "Europeanization does not constitute a process of development, it constitutes merely the history of capitalism which itself hinders the development of subjugated peoples."⁴⁰ The flux of global capital, like Universal History, represents only what already belongs to it, represents only itself, which is the same as saying: it does not represent anything at all. Asking the question of European space, of the autochthone, of the "natural" history of its borders only repeats the error of thinking that Europe is knowable by Europeans and that the non-European can be swallowed only by first being domesticated. Riding the resistance-free flux of global capital, the European concept fails to take hold. Thought no longer knows the resistance which once guided it toward identity. "The autochthon and the foreigner are no longer distinguishable: the foreigner becomes the autochthon in the *other* which it is not at the same time as the autochthon becomes foreign to itself, to its own class, to its own nation, to its own language: we speak the same language, and yet I don't understand you...."⁴¹

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1. Cf. Geoff Bennington, "Demanding History" in *Post-structuralism and the Question of History*, ed. Derek Attridge, Geoff Bennington and Robert Young. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987, p. 14f.
2. Martin Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1986), p. 5.
3. Cf. Thomas Hylland Erikson, "Enzensberger m̄ter fremmede," *Klassekampen*, 14, April, 1993.
4. G.W.F. Hegel, *Phänomenologie des Geistes* (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1970), pp. 33-34.
5. G.W.F. Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Geschichte* (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1970), p. 23.
6. Hegel, *Philosophie der Geschichte*, p. 40.
7. Anthony Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity*, Stanford: University of California Press, 1990, p. 174.
8. Hegel, *Phänomenologie*, p. 364.
9. Jacques Derrida, *L'autre cap (suivi de 'La Démocratie ajournée')*, Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1991, p. 12.
10. Derrida, *L'autre cap*, p. 16.
11. G.W.F. Hegel, *Wissenschaft der Logik I*, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag,

1969, p. 74

[12.](#) Derrida, *Glas* (Paris: Editions Galilée, 1974), p. 268a.

[13.](#) Hegel, *Philosophie der Geschichte*, p. 136.

[14.](#) Hegel, *Philosophie der Geschichte*, pp. 106-107.

[15.](#) Hegel, *Philosophie der Geschichte*, p. 107.

[16.](#) Hegel, *Philosophie der Geschichte*, pp. 133-134.

[17.](#) Hegel, *Philosophie der Geschichte*, p. 134.

[18.](#) Hegel, *Philosophie der Geschichte*, p.107.

[19.](#) Hegel, *Philosophie der Geschichte*, pp. 115-116.

[20.](#) Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolution*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1970.

[21.](#) Giddens, p. 17.

[22.](#) Jacques Atalli, *Histoires du temps*, Paris: Fayard, 1982, pp. 171-174.

[23.](#) Giddens, pp. 18-19.

[24.](#) Michel Foucault, *Les mots et les choses. Une archéologie des sciences humaines*, Paris: Éditions de Gallimard, 1966, p. 356.

[25.](#) Jean-François Lyotard, *La condition postmoderne*, Paris, Éditions de Minuit, 1979, p. 11.

[26.](#) Christa Wolf, *Störfall: Nachrichten eines Tages*, (Darmstadt: Luchterhand Verlag, 1987).

[27.](#) Cf. Arthur and Marilouise Kroker: "Theses on the Disappearing Body in the Hyper-Modern Condition," in Arthur and Marilouise Kroker, eds., *Body Invaders: Panic Sex in America* (Montréal: New World Perspectives, 1986), p. 21.

[28.](#) Jacques Atalli, *Bruits: essai sur l'économie politique de la musique*, Paris: P.U.F., 1977.

[29.](#) Christa Wolf, "Lesen und Schreiben" in *Lesen und Schreiben*, Darmstadt: Luchterhand Verlag, 1972, p. 185

[30.](#) *New York Times*, April 29, 1986.

[31.](#) Lyotard, pp. 17-20.

[32.](#) Nora Simon and Alain Minc, *L'informatisation de la société*, Paris: La Documentation Française, 1978). Alain Touraine, *La société postindustrielle*, Paris,

Deno?, 1969. Anthony Smith, *The Geopolitics of Information* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980). Michael A. Arbib, *Computers and the Cybernetic Society* (Orlando: Academic Press Inc., 1984).

[33.](#) Lyotard, p. 16.

[34.](#) According to Baudrillard, the Marxian opposition use-value/exchange-value is a false one marked by a certain "merchandise fetichisme" which idealizes use-value in an irreducible, untransformable form. Jean Baudrillard, *Pour une critique de l'économie politique du signe*, Paris, Éditions Gallimard, 1972, p. 155. Despite Marx's claim that different use-values are irreducible, that they are linked to a value which cannot be exchanged, Baudrillard considers that all use-value is already exchange-value. P. 160. Use-value is thus merely the "effect" of exchange value. Baudrillard, *Le miroir de la production*, Paris, Édition Galilée, 1985, p. 22.

[35.](#) Lyotard, p. 14.

[36.](#) Lyotard, p. 15.

[37.](#) Paul Virilio, "La guerre pure" in *Défense populaire et luttes écologiques*, Paris, Éditions Galilée, 1978, pp. 13-37. Cf. also, Virilio, *L'insécurité du territoire*, Paris, Stock, 1976 and *Vitesse et politique*, Paris, Editions Galilée, 1977. Also, Jean Duvignaud, *Lieux et non lieux*, Paris, Editions Galilée and Tewfik Allal, Jean-Pierre Buffard, Michel Marié, Tomaso Regazzola, *Situations migratoires*, Paris, Éditions Galilée.

[38.](#) Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Capitalisme et schizophrénie. 1. L'anti-œdipe*, Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1972, pp. 164-165.

[39.](#) Deleuze and Guattari, *Capitalisme*, pp. 311-312.

[40.](#) Deleuze and Guattari, "Géophilosophie" in *Qu'est-ce que la philosophie* (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1992), p. 104.

[41.](#) Deleuze and Guattari, "Géophilosophie," p. 105.