

Europe Endless: Crisis, Spirit and the End of Europe

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Abstract: 'Europe endless' is the endlessly deferred promise of Europe as a site of rationality and freedom. In the face of the collapse of this promise it seems most current orientations are trying to 'end Europe', either in actuality or at the level of the idea or concept. Here I want to reconstruct the discourse of the crisis of Europe and the conjoined discourse of the spirit of Europe. This begins with Nietzsche as the philosopher of Europe as the crisis of nihilism in which Europe must be traversed to find a new 'spirit'. This crisis of spirit is projected as a global crisis to produce a meta-imperial traversal of crisis for the sake of Europe. Then the analysis moves to Husserl and the phenomenological reading of European 'spirit', which treats Europe as a 'life world' encompassing all others. Here Europe 'endless' is expansive and yet delimited. Finally, I consider the contemporary 'global' discourse of accelerationism, another Nietzschean current that embraces the solvent forces of technology and abstraction. The 'spirit' of Europe is formed within the forgetting of Europe and, as a result, the turning of the global into Europe. These discourses of 'spirit' at once try to end and maintain 'Europe Endless'. Instead, perhaps posing issues and problems of the actualisation of rationality and freedom might start to grasp the potentialities of 'Europe endless' beyond this constantly deferred end.

Keywords: Europe; Crisis; Nietzsche; Husserl; Accelerationism

It seems ironic that at the moment the unifying concern of Europe is how to put an end to Europe. In very different ways, with vastly different political and social forms, emerging out of heterogeneous formations, a range of discourses want to end Europe: discourses of radical right populism, perhaps best symbolised by Brexit, left critiques of Europe as neo-liberal form, decolonial critiques of the colonial form of Europe, 'no borders' struggles against the European border security system, all want to put an end to 'Europe endless' – the vision of Europe as a now permanent feature of the global system, in the form of the European Union. To reiterate, and as I will unpack below, these are very different forms of Europe and very different forms of 'ending' Europe to very different ends. It does seem difficult, however, outside of the realm of European Union functionaries, to find many who want to maintain Europe endless.¹ Even amongst those who want Europe to continue the desire is for it to end as it currently is.

That said, this problem of 'Europe endless' and 'ending Europe' perhaps speaks to something of that repeating discourse of the crisis of Europe, a discourse that predates significantly the global financial crisis of 2008 and the resulting regimes of austerity. That global crisis does,

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¹Weber 2009, pp. 71-2

however significantly inflect the 'crisis of Europe'. In a telling moment, the British historian of art and former member of the Situationist International, T. J. Clark, justified his decision to vote to leave the European Union in these terms: 'I voted Leave, without enthusiasm, mainly because I had promised to do so in Greece last July.'²The financial waterboarding of Greece, which still continues, is not only a sign of the financial crisis but also a crisis of Europe that turns Greece into a sacrifice zone. This is particularly telling in this context due to the complex role of the 'inclusion' of Greece in Europe in the philosophical imaginary.³

If the crisis of Europe is a call to end Europe, it might also be a call to begin again. This, at least, is the claim of Franco 'Bifo' Berardi, who suggests that 'Europe is dead, because of the austeritarian rule. But we must build another Europe. Immediately and without delay, we must build a social Europe, a Europe of equality and freedom from wage-labour.'⁴ Europe must be brought to an end, but this time to the benefit of a *new* Europe. The desire to end Europe endless is also closely bound up with the desire to begin a new Europe. The crisis of Europe would force a passage to this rebirth. What is striking, both in these discourses and in actuality, is the difficulty in producing this ending. The delay in Brexit, I write in August 2019, at least seems an empirical symptom of the difficulty of ending Europe.⁵

Europe might even appear here as what Hegel called a 'bad infinity', in which the infinite is separated from and dominates the finite as an 'alien force'.⁶ The difficulty of realising Europe, of ending Europe endless, would speak to a conceptual failure in which infinite Europe is separated from actual Europe. The calls to re-invent Europe, of a 'Europe to come', to adapt Jacques Derrida,⁷ translate Europe into an infinite and endless task to achieve aims that constantly recede. In the words of Rodolphe Gasché, echoing Husserl, this is 'Europe' as 'the infinite task'.⁸ For Gasché, such an 'idea' of Europe can be rewritten beyond the Kantian regulative idea, but even this remains a Europe that always promises to live up to its 'openness' and 'self-criticism'.⁹ Despite the attempt to go beyond Kant this Europe seems to remain pre-Hegelian. Europe endless is valorised

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2 Clark 2016

3 Karatani 2017

4 Berardi 2017

5 On Brexit as a metaphysics of haste, see Finlayson 2018

6 Hegel 2010, p. 109

7 Derrida 1992

8 Gasché 2009.

9 Gasché 2017.

as the true state of Europe, which should never achieve the 'equality and freedom' that it always promises. The promise is even guarantee that we should not risk such a dangerous 'realisation', in a repeat of the trope of the various anti-totalitarianisms that were so crucial to post-war 'Western' Europe. In this case, endless Europe is the perpetually deferred but always possible promise of Europe. It might even be in response to such a Europe that we see the desire to end it, either to destroy any promise of equality and freedom or, finally, to bring it about.

What strikes me here also is a weariness with Europe, even a disgust, which again crosses the boundaries of various positions. Europe endless is a provoking prospect. Here I want to trace a philosophical discourse of Europe as a discourse of crisis and spirit. I begin with Nietzsche, as *the* European philosopher, with all the paradoxes, tensions, and violence, including colonial violence, which that entails. It is Nietzsche who exemplifies the notion of Europe as a site of crisis and tension that must be resolved in a 'new Europe'. Then I move on to consider discourses of the spirit of Europe and crisis from the inter-war period (1919-1939) in the figure of Edmund Husserl in particular. Here the 'spirit' of Europe is one that must be maintained against irrationality but, being formed through a discourse of the 'life-world' or 'community', always risks a particularism. Nietzsche is, again, in the background here. Finally, I consider a more 'minor' moment of Europe in more recent philosophical discourses associated with 'accelerationism' – the desire to embrace the solvent forces of technology and abstraction. Here Europe becomes a site to be broken open and dissolved into a new global space. In this rupture with Europe, however, we also find a global projection of Europe as the origin of accelerationism and what is to be dissolved by accelerationism. My aim is to sketch the relations of Europe 'endless' to crisis and so to consider the delimitation of the future through and by Europe.

Good Europeans

It should be no surprise that *the* philosopher of Europe is Nietzsche, who self-describes as one of the '*good Europeans*'.¹⁰ In a remarkable moment, Nietzsche would even proclaim 'the economic unification of Europe is coming of necessity'.¹¹ The 'good European' is, however, suspicious of a 'good Europe', or of how good Europe currently is. To be a good European is to aim for the target beyond what Europe *is* (a Europe of Jesuits, democrats, and Germans, in Nietzsche's words). Existing Europe, certainly in the notes collected as *The Will to Power*, is the Europe of European nihilism. Europe suffers from a sickness, a narcosis, which is seemingly without end except for an end in catastrophe. Nietzsche writes that:

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10 Nietzsche 1973, p. 14

11 Nietzsche 1968, p. 396; #748

For some time now, our whole European culture has been moving as toward a catastrophe, with a tortured tension that is growing from decade to decade: restlessly, violently, headlong, like a river that wants to reach the end, that no longer reflects, that is afraid to reflect.¹²

Europe wants to reach the end, but while doing so it is inhabiting a soporific state that is, in fact, a state of tension. Beneath the appearance of tranquillity, if not tranquilisation, lies a rushing to catastrophe. In common with much of Nietzsche's clinical diagnostics of culture, in which the worst sickness presents itself as the best of health, or the healthy are seemingly sick, we find a site of reversibility and confusion in which Nietzsche's 'superior' diagnostic skills are put to work. Certainly, Nietzsche belongs to the nineteenth-century discourse of decadence,¹³ which is the shadow of the dominance of the notion of progress. Nietzsche is not original in this respect, but does stress the necessity of a transition through this 'illness', a surpassing or overcoming of the catastrophe.

Of course, this diagnosis gains empirical traction as Europe entered its own thirty-year civil war (1914-1945). Also, of course, Nietzsche's diagnosis is not only empirical or not at all empirical but metaphysical. Finally, of course, the metaphysical and the empirical stand melded in this diagnosis, as the fate of Europe is a philosophical one. In all this Nietzsche stands as the good European. But not so good. Nietzsche describes how he is 'the first perfect nihilist of Europe who, however, has even now lived through the whole of nihilism, to the end, leaving it behind, outside himself.'¹⁴ Nietzsche's 'advantage' over Europe is to have lived its fate in advance. Whereas Europe is entering into nihilism, which is a spreading infection or drug, Nietzsche has already left it behind. The 'good European' might then be the one who has transcended the crisis of Europe, in which crisis takes on the older meaning of a significant moment in the progress of a disease, the moment at which the patient will either die or recover. Nietzsche has survived that crisis, the fever of nihilism has broken, but Europe still has to confront that moment of crisis. Nietzsche has experienced inoculation or recovered from the addiction that is nihilism. At least that is Nietzsche's claim. The discourse of the 'bridge' or the transition or overcoming speaks, however, to the difficulty of forcing this passage or break.

To refer back to *Beyond Good and Evil*, the moment of European nihilism is not only a moment of exhaustion but of supreme tension, 'a magnificent tension of the spirit such as has never existed on earth

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12 Nietzsche 1968, p. 3 Preface #2

13 Nordau 1993

14 Nietzsche 1973, p. 3

before: with so tense a bow one can now shoot for the most distant targets'.¹⁵ This might seem to be belied by the fact that Europe does not appear European, but as 'European Buddhism'. The Platonic and Christian legacy of Europe ends in a self-dissolving nihilism as it undermines its own premises.¹⁶ This is why we can speak of a developing European Buddhism, which has yet to match the 'Nothing' of original Buddhism.¹⁷ Instead we have: 'The European form of Buddhism: the energy of knowledge and strength compels this belief. It is the most *scientific* of all possible hypotheses. We deny end goals: if existence had one it would have to have been reached.'¹⁸ In this absence we confront 'the European form of Buddhism – *doing* No after all existence has lost its "meaning."¹⁹ This state is the condition for the rebirth of an active and strong Europe, but only once this state has been transcended by new 'free spirits'.

This diagnosis of European nihilism, of course, underpins Nietzsche's reactionary attacks on socialism, feminism, anarchism, and any other gesture of egalitarian dissent as 'nihilist'. In Europe life is declining and so also the norms it sets, which are reduced to the 'herd instinct'. This is evident in *Beyond Good and Evil*, in which the 'herd animal' is found in many forms, including 'anarchist dogs' and 'brotherhood fanatics who call themselves socialists' that usher in the 'new Buddhism'.²⁰ Here diagnosis reveals the virulence of its 'acceptance' of nihilism in the contrast between a Europe 'to come', a Europe of higher spirits and hierarchy, which will overturn the misery of existing European nihilism.²¹ The Europe endless of nihilism will be ended by a new Europe of a 'new caste' imposing hierarchy,²² the 'imprinting' of new forms and a new gestalt, to use the Nietzschean terms of Ernst Jünger.²³ It is only after 'tremendous socialist crises' that new barbarians will arise to impose form on chaos.²⁴

Of course, it is possible to see Nietzsche's 'Orientalism', as an act that de-centres Europe and destabilises the notions of Occident and

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15 Nietzsche 1973, p. 14

16 Nietzsche 1968, p. 16 #19

17 Nietzsche 1968, p. 21 #31

18 Nietzsche 1968, p. 36 #55

19 Nietzsche 1968, p. 37, #55

20 Nietzsche 1973, p.107

21 Martin 1995

22 On this 'caste' and Nietzsche's role in it, see Conway 2009, pp. 42-47

23 Jünger 2018

24 Nietzsche 1968, p. 465 #868

Orient.²⁵ Within Nietzsche's Orientalist use of concepts there lie moments of critique, such as the claim 'the Chinese is a more successful type, namely more durable, than the European'.²⁶ In this model, 'Orientalism' would serve the purpose of *disorienting* Europe. Yet, these valorisations of the 'Orient' are matched by Nietzsche's taste for scathing analogies, like 'the Buddhist type or the perfect cow'.²⁷ 'European Buddhism' might be the fate of Europe, but it is one that must be traversed and left behind. I do not think it is satisfactory to simply remark on Nietzsche's taste for paradox and provocation. Instead, Nietzsche's 'Orientalism' is similar to his anti- anti-Semitism.²⁸ Just as Nietzsche's opposition to anti-Semitism does not involve any real sympathy or engagement with Judaism, so Nietzsche's 'Orientalism' is not really the sign of any real sympathy with the 'Orient'.

In both cases, this seeming identification or valorisation is more at the service of disruption than any positive engagement. Nietzsche regards Europe's 'Others' as the means to disrupt or shock Europe into awakening to its own destiny, which involves transcending European Buddhism and the Judeo-Christian to attain its 'true' form. The Europe 'to come', for Nietzsche, is a martial and cultural power, triggered by 'Napoleon, by awakening again the man, the soldier, and the great fight for power – conceiving Europe as a political unit; Goethe, by imagining a European culture that would harvest the full inheritance of attained humanity'.²⁹ This is the 'new Europe' to come: hierarchical, violent, imposed from above, ordered, and 'Greek', in that inflection Nietzsche's gives. It is the rediscovery of Europe as 'Southern', as Dionysian, 'to rediscover the South in one and to spread out above one a bright, glittering, mysterious Southern sky'.³⁰ It is, ironically, the tourist Europe, although one, as with all reactionaries, that would have been lambasted by Nietzsche. So, Nietzsche's provocative remapping of Europe through its Others, the 'Orient', Judaism, the 'south', is one that absorbs and erases these 'sources' into a new European 'synthesis' of the 'free spirits'.

This new Europe is also a global form. While Nietzsche can be critical of the 'petty' imperialism of the late nineteenth-century, which

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25 Luisetti 2011

26 Nietzsche 1968, p. 55, #90

27 Nietzsche 1968, p. 188, #342

28 Martin 1995, p. 143

29 Nietzsche 1968, p. 66, #104. On Napoleon in Nietzsche's thought see Glenn, 2001 and Dombowsky, 2014

30 Nietzsche 1968, p. 542; #1051. On 'Mediterranean fascism', see Bull 2014

caused so much devastating suffering to colonised peoples,³¹ Nietzsche's vision is finally of a strong Europe imposing its goals on the world. 'Petty' imperialism would be replaced with 'Grand' imperialism, in the same way in which a 'great politics' would replace the trivial politics of democracy. This is evident in this quote, which forms a precursor to Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1899), if much less equivocal than Conrad:

What means one has to employ with rude peoples, and that "barbarous" means are not arbitrary and capricious, becomes palpable in practice as soon as one is placed, with all one's European pampering, in the necessity of keeping control over barbarians, in the Congo or elsewhere.³²

While Europeans are 'pampered', they must become powerful to impose control over 'barbarity', in a classical imperialist trope. Here, as in *Heart of Darkness*, the threat lies in the violent means required by colonialism, 'exterminate all the brutes!', which awakens Europeans to 'hardness' and threatens them with barbarity. For Nietzsche, this barbarity must be controlled and channelled so it can produce not only an imperial dominance but also dominance over the underprivileged internal to Europe as well. The workers, those other 'barbarians', must also be kept under control.

This discourse of European crisis and the traversal of Europe is another expansive vision of a Europe endless. As Timothy Brennan has detailed, and as we have traced, Nietzsche's apparent 'anti-European' image is in the service of a new 'European spirit' that is 'a mixed and stylistically novel fantasy of conquest and European triumphalism'.³³ While apparently lying in the 'self-critical' notion of European thought, Nietzsche in fact re-forges a European 'hammer' that will resolve the European crisis for Europe. The 'spirit' of Europe emerges from and through crisis and then resolves that crisis for Europe on a global scale. To repeat this argument, in a different form, while seeming to end Europe in a radical way Nietzsche re-births the most dubious forms of Europe endless. A hierarchical, violent, and 'barbaric' Europe is project onto the world, or the image of the reality of this imperial project is given metaphysical 'dignity' in Nietzsche's thought.³⁴ This violence is also endless because this vision can never be realised or achieved. Nietzsche remains a 'bridge' and the overcoming remains contaminated by what it overcomes. Finally, the world (or Europe) cannot be broken in two, but rather a repeated violence tries to constantly remake Europe to achieve its 'real' spirit. Spirit, in fact, is the word for this violent excess, this

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31 Davis 2000; Hochschild 1998

32 Nietzsche 1968, p. 487, #922

33 Brennan 2014, p.1 95

34 Lukács 2016

painful process of self-overcoming.³⁵ This difficulty of spirit is that this self-overcoming remains something to be overcome and spirit is the problem it purports to solve. In this way, Europe endless becomes endless violence and Nietzsche bequeaths this problem to the 'European spirit'.

'Europe-problem'

Jacques Derrida identifies a particular discourse of crisis and spirit that traces the outlines of Europe in the inter-war years: 'Here, too, one cannot overlook the common focus towards which, between 1919 and 1939, the discourses of worry gather or rush headlong: around the same words (Europe, Spirit), if not in the same language.'³⁶ In the middle of the European civil war, this discourse is particularly articulated, for Derrida, by Paul Valéry, in *The Crisis of Spirit* (1919), Edmund Husserl, in 'Philosophy and the Crisis of European Humanity' (1935), and by Heidegger, in the Rectoral Address (1933) and the *Introduction to Metaphysics* (1935). Derrida at once stresses the heterogeneity of these discourses and their disturbing congruences. While Derrida is locating 'spirit' within a particular form of Western metaphysics and as a particular metaphysical concession by Heidegger, in yet another attempt to deal with Heidegger's intimate involvement with Nazism,³⁷ here I am more interested in this general move of identification of Europe and Spirit. In particular, I want to focus on Husserl's essay, which is saturated with the discourse of spirit.

Husserl begins the essay and the discussion of European spirit, like Nietzsche, with the issue of sickness: 'The European nations are sick; Europe itself, they say, is in critical condition'.³⁸ In a curious parallel to Freud, who in *Civilization and Its Discontents* had inquired into the possibility of collective neurosis,³⁹ Husserl's argues for the possibility of an inquiry into collective spiritual illness. While Freud had doubted the possibility of a position from which to make the judgement of sickness, Husserl is much more cavalier. Husserl argues that 'our Europe-problem' has to be understood historically, out of the birth of the 'European spirit' and how that spirit has come into crisis.⁴⁰ The sickness of Europe is self-inflicted.

This is, unsurprisingly, a story of the origin of philosophy, and particularly the Greek origin of philosophy. It is the story of the birth of

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35 Conway 2009, p. 50

36 Derrida 1989, p. 61

37 For a critique of Derrida's inadequacies on this point, see Rose 1993

38 Husserl 1965, p. 150

39 Freud 2002, p. 80

40 Husserl 1965, p. 153

the attitude of *theoria* and how that creates a particular form of infinite rationality that is, according to Husserl, particular and peculiar to Europe as a 'community'. Husserl makes an explicitly racial discrimination of Europe as an 'enviroming world' (*umwelt*). This 'spiritual structure' of Europe to which 'belong the English dominions, the United States, etc.', i.e. white settler-colonial states, 'but not, however, the Eskimos or Indians of the country fairs, or the Gypsies, who are constantly wandering about Europe'.⁴¹ Derrida notes that this 'sinister passage' indicates how discourses of spirit and freedom can be close to the 'worst'.⁴² Derrida also suggests that Husserl's preservation of 'English dominions' implies the inclusion of Indians, which would not be strictly 'logical' in a racist logic. It does not seem difficult to suggest, however, that this is a typical colonial and racist settler-colonial logic of tutelage and administration. This is reinforced by Husserl's remark that the people of India wish to 'constantly Europeanize themselves', while Europeans 'will never, for example, Indianize ourselves'.⁴³ Again, while being forcibly brought to the 'European ideal' is acceptable, to depart from that is folly. It is not difficult to imagine what Husserl would have thought of hippies.

Husserl regards Europe as 'the unity of a spiritual life and a creative activity' that belongs to a *particular* community and life-world.⁴⁴ Despite recognising human history as a 'sea in which human beings, peoples, are waves constantly forming, changing, and disappearing',⁴⁵ Husserl stress the singularity of the 'Greeks' to a construction of Europe as 'the free fashioning of its being and its historical life out of rational ideas and infinite tasks'.⁴⁶ Europe finds its 'spiritual origin' in Greece, which Husserl treats as a unity, as a 'nation'.⁴⁷ What originates there is an attitude that forms science and philosophy as an attention to the world in its infinite forms. This is a disinterested attitude that also aims at the universal. It is 'a spirit of free criticism providing norms for infinite tasks, ..., creating new, infinite ideals'.⁴⁸ Husserl argues that this attitude is sustained and exercised through 'European man' who therefore has the 'role of leadership for the whole of mankind'.⁴⁹ While we might want to consider

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41 Husserl 1965, p. 155

42 Derrida 1989, p. 120-21

43 Husserl 1965, p. 157

44 Husserl 1965, p. 155

45 Husserl 1965, p. 156

46 Husserl 1965, p. 156

47 Husserl 1965, p. 158

48 Husserl 1965, p. 177

49 Husserl 1965, p. 178

the 'singularity' of philosophy and consider the historical conditions of its emergence (for example, Alfred Sohn-Rethel's suggestion philosophy as abstract universal emerges from the abstractions of money and trade⁵⁰), Husserl simply asserts the unity of Europe with Greece, as origin, and the unity of its spirit with a singular community.

What, then, is the source of the European crisis? Husserl argues that this is a crisis due to rationality, but not a crisis of rationality *in toto*. Philosophy is the 'idea of an infinite task', but the risk is falling into the claim we have realised philosophy or limit it into a one-sided form.⁵¹ In particular, the problem has been the domination of mathematical and objective knowledge of the world, which occludes spiritual knowledge. The result is that this objective and psychophysical notion of the human causes reason and the forms of spirit to fracture. Husserl's solution is that sciences of spirit must not mimic objective science, but return to themselves against 'naïve exteriorization'.⁵² The resolution is Husserlian phenomenology, which through attention to intentionality recovers an 'absolutely autonomous science of spirit'.⁵³ Spirit is not subject to nature, but nature belongs to spirit. The ego is also not isolated but intimately related to other beings.

The crisis of Europe can therefore be resolved by the turn to phenomenology, which would recover the spirit of Europe as an infinite task. In a very Nietzschean vein, Husserl declares that 'Europe's greatest danger is weariness'.⁵⁴ Husserl even cites Nietzsche's 'good Europeans'. Europe must overcome its alienation from the reason and take up again the vital task of reason. Europe must embrace the 'mission to humanity', in which spirit will be reborn.⁵⁵ Husserl's is perhaps the most explicit version of Europe endless, with Europe as the origin and bearer of philosophy as 'infinite task'. It is also similarly problematic to Nietzsche's in a global projection of Europe, specified in a limited and racialised fashion. What Husserl projects out from and in doing so constructs is a limited life-world that polices its own borders. Husserl also adds a fear of the determination and realisation of spirit, in which spirit remains mere 'regulative Idea' in the Kantian sense. In this way, spirit polices without ever really emerging or actualising itself.

This limitation of the life world is also evident in Husserl's *Cartesian Meditations*. In the famous fifth meditation, which considers

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50 Sohn-Rethel 1978, p. 67

51 Husserl 1965, p. 180

52 Husserl 1965, p. 189

53 Husserl 1965, p. 190

54 Husserl 1965, p. 192

55 Husserl 1965, p. 192

the 'other' and transcendental intersubjectivity, Husserl deduces the life world as the open and transcendental relation to others. Yet, while this would seem the most open and global form of relation, at the same time this is also delimited. Husserl declares that products of spirit, 'all cultural Objects', 'carry with them ... the experiential sense of thereness-for-everyone' but only 'everyone belonging to the corresponding cultural community, such as the European'.⁵⁶ So, while it seems we should belong to a universal cultural world, in fact we live in 'concrete life-worlds in which the relatively or absolutely separate communities live their passive and active lives'.⁵⁷ We are historically rooted in a community, according to Husserl, and so this community is 'barred to anyone from another community'. While Husserl continues by suggesting the possibility of opening out understanding through sympathy, we can see again, as with the European idea, how a transcendental 'openness' or 'relationality' is radically delimited into a community. While resisting realisation of the universal, what is preserved is the particular.

To return to Husserl's essay, we find its closing discourse of heroism and risk, in its closing words embracing that Nietzschean style, does not really embrace the 'danger' of the realisation of reason. Instead, the 'infinite task' of Europe and philosophy and reason is infinitely deferred. So, we have something infinite that is, at the same time, always preserved and limited. In this way it is available as a critical resource that can always find any realisation wanting, but at the same time therefore unable to function effectively as a criticism. Sickness is diagnosed and heroism called for, but the disease should remain so to constantly spur efforts to cure. The realisation of philosophy in a life-world is left vague and at the same time delimited to Europe. While Husserl cannot help but recognise the spread and displacement of this new 'attitude' of philosophy, at the same time this also becomes another 'infinite task', rather than a series of transformations and instantiations. In Husserl's proclamation of 'European spirit' we find the full vision of Europe as 'infinite task' and the foundering of that vision.

No Future (for Europe)

It is Nietzsche who lies at the origin of 'accelerationism', which has emerged as a contemporary current of thought dedicated to increasing the tempo of forms of abstraction and technology to produce new post-capitalist or hyper-capitalist political and social forms.⁵⁸ As Nietzsche aimed at the traversing of European nihilism so accelerationism aims at traversing or purifying capitalism. In the classic statement by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari in *Anti-Oedipus*:

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56 Husserl 1977, p. 92.

57 Husserl 1977, p. 133

58 Mackay and Avanesian (eds.) 2014

But which is the revolutionary path? Is there one? –To withdraw from the world market, as Samir Amin advises Third World countries to do, in a curious revival of the fascist “economic solution”? Or might it be to go in the opposite direction? To go still further, that is, in the movement of the market, of decoding and deterritorialization? For perhaps the flows are not yet deterritorialized enough, not decoded enough, from the viewpoint of a theory and a practice of a highly schizophrenic character. Not to withdraw from the process, but to go further, to “accelerate the process,” as Nietzsche put it: in this matter, the truth is that we haven’t seen anything yet.⁵⁹

The citation from Nietzsche, it turns out, is from *The Will to Power* and is a statement about Europe: ‘the levelling process of European man is the great process which should not be checked: one should even accelerate it...’⁶⁰ This is the translation found in Tracy Strong’s book, in the standard English translation it reads: ‘the homogenizing of European man is the great process that cannot be obstructed: one should even hasten it’.⁶¹

So, accelerationism owes a moment to the Nietzschean project of traversing Europe in which this ‘levelling’ is, as we have seen, the condition for a rebirth of rank. Thanks to the philological work of the collective *Obsolete Capitalism*, we have a full account of this ‘translation’ between Nietzsche and Deleuze and Guattari.⁶² The details are not necessary, however, to see how Europe is replaced here by a general global process of acceleration. Deleuze also cites this passage in his ‘Nomad Thought’, where again it is shifted from an application to Europe to ‘absolute’ decodification.⁶³ Europe is displaced by capitalism is displaced by decodification. There is a slippage here, which can be found in Nietzsche and his interpreters, for example in Heidegger on the *übermensch*: ‘this thinking that aims at the figure of a teacher who will teach the Superman concerns us, concerns Europe, concerns the whole earth’.⁶⁴ The movement is seamless, from ‘us’ to Europe to ‘the whole earth’ in a metaphysical version of the project of global dominance associated with hegemonic imperial powers. Repeating the Nietzschean vision, while claiming to displace it.

Accelerationism, to name those contemporary currents that adopt various forms of the desire to ‘accelerate the process’, whatever their

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59 Deleuze and Guattari 1983, pp. 239-40

60 Qtd. in Strong 1998, p. 211

61 Nietzsche 1968, p. 478

62 *Obsolete Capitalism*, 2015

63 Deleuze 1985, p. 143

64 Heidegger 1985, p. 67

intentions, stands in the lineage of this occlusion of Europe by the global that also incarnates Europe as the global.⁶⁵ Europe endless is ended in a becoming global. This is noticeable in the negative framing that the concept or ‘spirit’ of Europe receives in accelerationism. Accelerationism prides itself on a materialism, one of fluxes, flows, and forces, which is regarded as antithetical to spirit and the ideal. This fluid materiality is seen to escape spirit *and* Europe. While seemingly a highly ‘European’ discourse, accelerationism, in fact, works to displace Europe for the global and various zones that figure or embody the deterritorialized future that lies ‘beyond’ Europe. In this way it is often, especially in its reactionary forms, very close to Nietzsche. This is not surprising in that it emerges out of a mimicry of Nietzsche or a mimicry of those mimicking Nietzsche, especially Deleuze and Guattari. And yet, while Europe hovers in the background so to does the discourse of spirit, perhaps as a ghost. The spiritual, like Europe, is not so easily exorcised.

I have already detailed the anti-Europeanism that runs as a minor current through accelerationism.⁶⁶ In the 1990s work of Nick Land, Sadie Plant, and the Cybernetic Culture Research Unit (CCRU) at Warwick University, the explicit attempt was made to push deterritorialization further into a ‘meltdown’ of subjectivity and capitalism. Politically this was already equivocal, as the crisis of capitalism envisaged as much a purified capitalism as it did the rupture from capitalism. To quote the classic formulation by Nick Land:

Machinic revolution must therefore go in the opposite direction to socialistic regulation; pressing towards ever more uninhibited marketization of the processes that are tearing down the social field, ‘still further’ with ‘the movement of the market, of decoding and deterritorialization’ and ‘one can never go far enough in the direction of deterritorialization: you haven’t seen anything yet’.⁶⁷

The opposition of ‘socialistic regulation’ is explicit and prescient, considering how much the hostility to ‘socialism’ in Britain is figured as an opposition to ‘health and safety’ regulation and to European regulation. The pop Nietzschean embrace of danger and risk, perhaps best represented in the literally accelerating television programme *Top Gear*, is one that embraces the market as the site of self-realisation beyond ‘control’.

That a niche trend of metaphysical theory should prefigure the discourse of Brexit and contemporary anti-socialism is not so surprising when we consider how it reproduces a common current of anti-European sentiment. Europe is associated with regulation and inertia. While capitalism, and we could read America and China, are

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65 Noys, 2014a

66 Noys 2018

67 Land 2013, p. 340-41

associated with acceleration beyond regulation. In the case of America through the dissolving of regulation, while in the case of China through an authoritarian imposition of capitalism in certain zones. This latter development recalls the description of 'Night City' in William Gibson's *Neuromancer* (1984), the novel of cyberpunk and accelerationism, 'a deranged experiment in social Darwinism, designed by a bored researcher who kept one thumb permanently on the fast-forward button'.⁶⁸ Whether the 'bored researcher' is a cypher for the 'invisible hand' of the market or the authoritarian state matters less, for this discourse, than acceleration be pushed beyond regulation.

There are, of course, many forms of accelerationism and, of course, claims to have transcended or abandoned accelerationism. A movement formed through social media has, in some quarters, embraced a logic of obsolescence and transition.⁶⁹ What concerns me here is not to tease out the various strands of accelerationist thought but to mark how they inherit this discourse of Europe and crisis. Again, Europe is rendered as crisis and, in this case, as something that must be escaped or accelerated away from. We are accelerated towards the voyage beyond Europe, in the style of Rimbaud. This avant-garde escape, however, renders itself as a projection of Europe. It is an internal problem of Europe or, to be more specific, of the place of Britain within Europe, considering the fact that accelerationism is a very British phenomenon. The self-styled peripheral relation of Britain to Europe, the legacy of Britain's imperial identity, can be recast in the mode of a global acceleration.

This also takes on a peculiar punk inflection. Already present in Nick Land's provocations, we could also recall Franco 'Bifo' Berardi's reflections on the moment of 1977 as a moment of bifurcation between neoliberalism and new forms of global protest.⁷⁰ In the case of Berardi, we could wonder if this bifurcation is as clear as it would appear and rather a more messy state of affairs in which the politics of punk could find multiple alignments in the wake of the rupture of the post-war 'consensus', itself a highly-fragile construction. Punk hostility to social democracy, while cast as 'anarchist', could easily slide into capitalist libertarianism. This particular form of punk, the form that emerged in Britain in 1977, exemplified this political tension. While not dismissing all punk as proto-neoliberal, in fact punk liberated creative and social forms that took various political and social forms, we should not miss how punk rhetoric and practice chimes with certain forms of capitalist 'creative destruction'.

Accelerationism aims at a realisation of a certain transit through and out from forms of abstract and technology into a new global space.

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⁶⁸ Gibson 2016, p. 8

⁶⁹ On the logic of obsolescence and accelerationism, see Noys 2014b

⁷⁰ Berardi 2019, p. 14

In doing so it displays understandable impatience with the notion of the 'infinite task' and a phenomenological focus on meaning and intention that is limited to particular types of life-world. At the same time, however, this anti-humanist 'materialism' invokes a 'spirit' that offers little to grasping the problems of its emergence in a particular British inflection of post-imperial political identity, with its own claims on the 'global'. Europe is elided as a problem, while the standard forms of anti-European sentiment are repeated. At the same time, the peculiarities of British capitalism are not considered as the site from which accelerationism tries to accelerate away from. Europe is ended, but what Husserl called the 'Europe-problem' is reproduced.

Conclusion: Spirits of Crisis

Crisis now seems to have settled in to being a constant state, if that wasn't always the case. What Berardi calls 'austeritarian rule' has not only settled in across Europe, and globally, but also taken on aggressive populist and potentially proto-fascist forms. In this situation, Europe endless, Europe as the infinite task of rationality, as the spirit and promise of philosophical reason, seems both further away than ever (including the state of philosophy as an educational subject) and more desirable than ever (for some). In this situation 'ending Europe' also appears more urgent than ever, including if we are to realise 'another Europe' or a 'new Europe' than would resolve or mitigate the global capitalist and ecological crisis, which are interwoven together.⁷¹ We could add that philosophical considerations like this one might seem, precisely, luxuries we can no longer afford, in an austerity of thought that must engage the urgency and austerity of the moment.

While understanding all this, and agreeing with some if not all of these contentions, I have also made a claim to resist an austerity of thought. To collapse the problem of Europe endless, I have suggested, is to risk repeating it, rather than working it through, to use a convenient Freudian distinction. That said, it should be evident that I share a dissatisfaction with the Kantian form of the 'regulative idea' of Europe as 'infinite task', even when that is cast in its best form: one that strives towards the 'open' and the possibilities of transformation and displacement that have composed the history of philosophical rationality (this is the effort of Jacques Derrida, Rodolphe Gasché, and others). The difficulty I have identified with this conception of Europe is its fear of actualisation and realisation, which chimes with those reactionary critiques of reason and revolution that have always feared and resisted the re-ordering of existence that such a realisation would demand.

Therefore, my conclusion is that we consider a discourse of spirit that is devoted to grasping the various shapes of consciousness and

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⁷¹ Moore 2015; Malm 2015

materiality in which spirit forms and develops. In short, the Hegelian account.⁷² Spirit and the infinite do not 'stand above' a fallen world, as judge and executioner, but work and sacrifice themselves in that world. Europe endless would then be the realisation and displacement of Europe that does not require an alternative between the world 'Europeanizing itself' or the choice of some other 'alter-modernity', but 'Europe' as a 'realisation' that is reworked and developed 'elsewhere'. We can argue that is what happened with the Haitian revolution and the Russian revolution, which involves the transformation of the 'European' and the 'non-European'.⁷³ In that process what Europe could not realise is realised and actualised, but this is not any mere 'secondary' realisation in which Europe exports its own problems. Instead, this is a realisation that returns to the sender a message it could not recognise or realise. It is also a realisation that is dependent on what is *not* European, which draws on non-European social and political forms.⁷⁴ This is a 'retroactive effect' that leaves the 'second' event as the primary event, as it leaps back to Europe.

That such possibilities of realisation seem further away than ever, in Europe in particular, should be recognised. This might speak to one particular understanding of crisis, which involves a global dimension that cannot be 'resolved' at the level of Europe. The retreat from Europe to the nation state would be another ironic effect of this global dimension and its intractability. In the face of global crisis, the retreat is to 'defend' the nation-state against any 'opening'. This must be resisted, of course, but to simply claim to relaunch the 'infinite task' of European spirit, in whatever guise, is also inadequate. Instead, I suggest we recognise forms of the actualisation and realisation of rationality, collectivity, and freedom that could resolve the situation of crisis, in and beyond 'Europe'. These include those realisations and actualisations that are global and would, again, displace or transform Europe. My conclusion is cautious in only signalling these possibilities, and therefore both of our moment and perhaps inadequate to it.

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72 Hegel 1977, see also Rose 2009

73 On Haiti, see James 2001, Buck-Morss 2009, Nesbitt 2008, and Fick 1991; On the Russian Revolution, see Trotsky 2017

74 See the debate about the commune, from the late Marx (Shanin 1983) to Venezuela (Ciccariello-Maher 2016)

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