

Remappings

The Making of European Narratives

How narratives emerge, unfold and impact across Europe today, and how they contribute to redrawing our maps of Europe.

Edited by Odile Chenal and Bas Snelders

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First edition

Published by ECF, Amsterdam 2012

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Odile Chenal and Bas Snelders

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Published by ECF, Amsterdam 2012

First edition

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ISBN 978-90-6282-058-0

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Once upon a time there was... Europe

*So how far are we in the story? Are
we dangling close to the cliffhanger?
Are we Icarus or are we Don Quixote?
Are we as desperate and heartbroken
as Hamlet or are we more like a Dante
shuffling through the underworld
towards the light?*

Abdelkader Benali

Once upon a time there was... Europe

Once upon a time there was... Europe, but not as we had dreamt it. A Europe not of the massive cathedrals whose spires reach to the heavens. Nor the Europe of the sleeping Vesuvius who looks out across the Via Dante in Naples, that long, winding street which disappears deep into the body of the city like a gut. Nor the Europe of the searing heat in Seville, where in the Library of the New World the descriptions of Ibero-American cultures lie waiting for readers. This is not the Europe I find in the Saturday supplements of the newspapers, where it is chiefly about the money and seldom about the choice bits. To complement the lack of orientation there is old-fashioned mud-slinging: the North has haughtiness hurled at it; the South is accused of suicidal insouciance. With a sigh I shove the newspapers away from me. Where is that wonder of the Romantic poets for the miracle from beyond the Alps. *Kennst du das Land, wo die Zitronen blühen?* – “Knowest thou the land where the lemon blossom grows?” And where are the southerners who want to leap over the barricades of the temperament?

The dizzying European cultural mosaic is probably overly complex, too profuse in impressions and too manifold to serve as a blueprint for the political Europe that seems to be searching for an unambiguous, straightforward story. Haste is of the essence, because people feel that Europe will be a dead letter without a grand narrative. Europe, continent of Houdinis. So how far are we in the story? Are we dangling close to the cliffhanger? Are we Icarus or are we Don Quixote? Are we as desperate and heartbroken as Hamlet or are we more like a Dante shuffling through the underworld towards the light? Or, like Madame Bovary, are we dreaming of real life while not daring to put anything into it. Europe, tell me!

It is strange, however, that not so long ago the European states were

holding one another in a suffocating stranglehold that cost the lives of tens of millions of citizens. Having been so cruelly awoken from their perverse power trips, these same countries displayed a remarkably idealistic sense of reality to ensure that this total meltdown would never happen again. What we are now experiencing at the European level is an unflagging spin-off of that utopian thinking immediately after the Second World War. We are the children of a dream. When I learnt about Schuman and Monnet, it was from the economic perspective. Their European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) was focused on making the joint economies dependent on one another by way of cooperation rather than conflict and it simultaneously promoted the establishment of a new order, in which values and norms as well as culture and nature were shared. Here, albeit in a highly bureaucratic manner, the challenge was taken up in order to see how boundlessly people could think within the boundaries of the bounded. And only because this occurred on the smouldering ruins of the great war and people were too busy with their own lives to focus on the big story, the radicalism of this new thinking was hidden from view. Moreover, did anyone still have an appetite for a grand narrative after the two world wars? After a millennium and a half of European history during which identity was defined by strife and conflict, it marked a complete change of course: in Europe shared values had to be rendered so robust that they could withstand war and any other crisis.

This idea is currently being put to the test in Athens, in Rome, in Madrid, in Paris, Berlin, Brussels and Amsterdam. What we are currently witnessing is the litmus test to see whether this narrative can bear it, to determine whether the story can be continued.

And because it is all so young and fresh, it is impossible to say where this story will end; it is a story not yet finished.

Is it not true that every narrative is the accumulation of past events and only comes into being when we can articulate what we are dealing with, namely the story, that actually comprises a well-rounded whole? And at this juncture, in a Europe that is blossoming, is growing, weakens

here and there, catches its breath and pushes onward, is it simply too early to determine what kind of story it is because we are still in the middle of that tumultuous tale? All that we can say is that there were founding fathers who saw Europe as an autonomous union interconnected by all kinds of little micro-stories, rather than as a collection of entities. I think it all boils down to telling those micro-stories large, like Scheherazade expanding lavishly upon a little story every evening in the hope that in a thousand and one nights, when she has nothing more to tell, her life might be spared.

Would you ask Alice whether she already knows what kind of story she is figuring in as she wanders through Wonderland in the midst of that story? That is what it is like with Europe now: its narrative is still a great unknown, because it is taking shape right under our noses. At best we can say that the story is unfinished so it cannot be written down yet, however masterly the master-hand that dares to venture such a task. So exercise patience and curiosity, let the imagination do the work. Don't despair and keep on scratching where it itches.

Abdelkader Benali is one of the most prominent writers of the Netherlands. His debut novel *Bruiloft aan zee* ('Wedding at Sea', 1996) has been translated into many languages. He received the prestigious Libris prize for literature for his second novel, *De Langverwachte* ('The Long-Awaited', 2002). As well as writing novels and plays, Benali publishes regularly in Dutch and international newspapers and magazines. He has been contributing to ECF's *Narratives for Europe* since the beginning.



Setting the Context



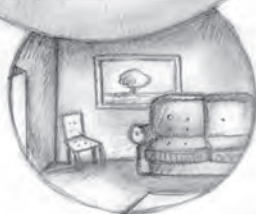
Osvald

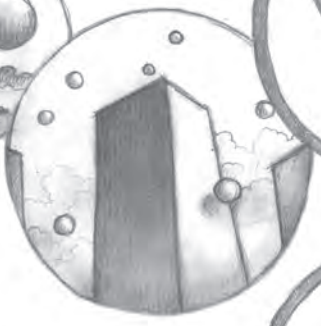
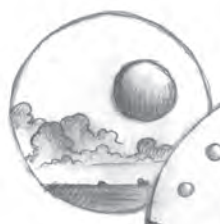
Ovarian Lottery (Birth of Osvald)

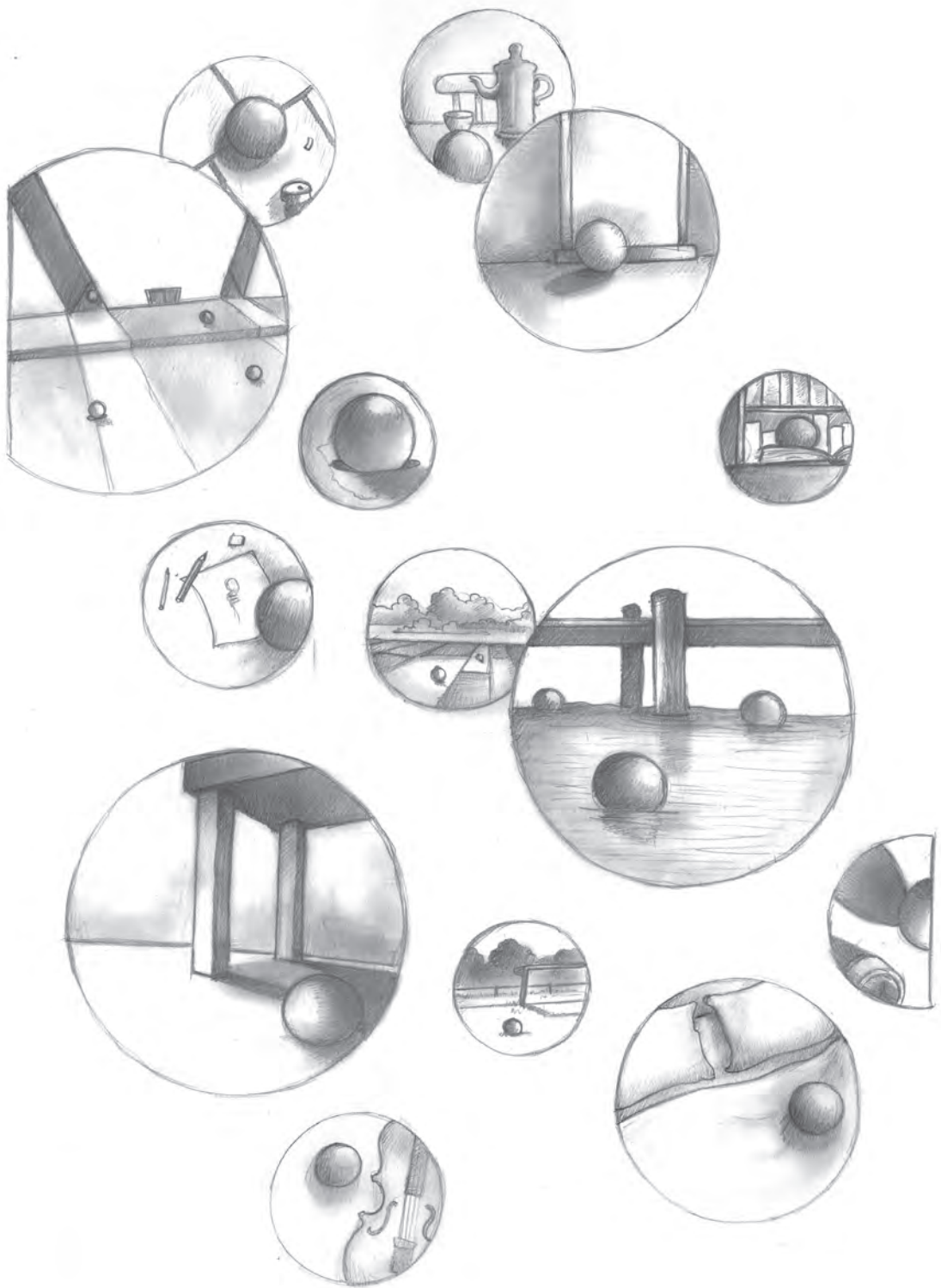


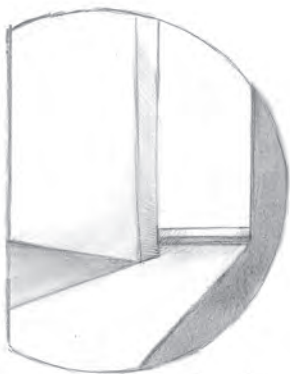
In the first chapter of the Rise and Fall of Osvald, we are introduced to the fluid character of our European hero.

Siebe de Boer









Continent of Broken Dreams?

*Aren't there any new narratives
inspiring the young generations of
Europeans, within and beyond the EU,
at the beginning of the 21st century?*

*And if there are any, where are they
emerging, and who is telling them?*

Odile Chenal

Continent of Broken Dreams?

The making of European narratives? A rather trivial topic when Europe is in such deep crisis! When we are in the heart of a storm, when the institutional bedrock of the community of Europeans is shaking – is it really the right moment for tales, emblematic stories, and narrations?

Yes it is! Beyond the refreshing lightness of the term, there is an urgent and increasing need for new, inspiring narratives from across Europe.

This essay looks back on the attempt by the European Cultural Foundation (ECF) to grasp something of the European narratives in the making, and retraces the course of our tentative journey.

Why Narratives?

The word narratives, borrowed from art criticism and the social sciences, made its appearance in political discourses a few years ago. Here and there, on various European platforms, politicians started claiming that ‘Europe needs new narratives’. We all know why: there is a disconnection between Europe and its people, between the European Union and its citizens. The 2005 referendum was the wake-up call to a creeping malaise: those living in the EU are often critical of the distant power of Brussels and its rather non-transparent decision-making processes; they don’t feel they are citizens of Europe. And those who strive to become part of Europe’s political project – the EU – feel excluded.

The initial vision of Europe as a project for peace and welfare has blurred; even the magic of 1989 does not resonate any more. People living in this continent experience Europe every day, yet they don’t feel that they belong to it. Young people often do not see the need for Europe between the local and the global. At the same time, there is a strong

movement towards the national, a withdrawal within national borders in European countries.

A few years on, the malaise has transformed into a profound crisis that is much more than a financial one. Is it the confusion of a fragmented society which seems to be unable to picture itself in the future, beyond fears and borders? Is Europe a continent of broken dreams? Aren't there any new narratives inspiring the young generations of Europeans, within and beyond the EU, at the beginning of the 21st century? And if there are any, where are they emerging, and who is telling them?

With these – bold! – questions raised, ECF decided in 2009 to engage in a reflection on these narratives that we are all in such urgent need of. Needless to say, ECF had neither the pretention nor the naivety to seek out any ready-made European narratives, let alone *the* big collective story. What we reflected on was the making of new visions and stories and how they break through in the European public sphere. What we hoped for was some insight into what these narratives could tell us, if they could tell us anything.

We should indeed confess that we have been seduced by the concept of 'narrative'. In spite of its multilayered meanings and its (too) convenient vagueness, we gladly adopted it rather than such terms as 'vision', 'identity', 'culture'. Because a narrative is a storyline in the making, at the intersection of the personal and the public; an open-ended exercise of cultural and political imagination.¹

Through research and essays (as this publication shows), but also through cultural projects, seminars, and debates, we have explored over the past four years the semantic jungle of narratives. It really was an exploration. We did not know precisely what we were looking for, or which trails to follow first. We had no idea where this journey would

¹ We even created our own definition: Narratives are collective stories and representations, which are made of people's memories of the past, experience of the present, and above all imagination of the future. Narratives underpin and bind communities; they make them move.

lead us. Four years later, we pause to decide how to go further. We take stock of our findings, and try to decipher the map we have been drawing on the way.

Trails

The first choice we had to make was whether we would go in the direction of political discourses and narratives or search through the limitless territories of non-institutional narratives. Institutional narratives – the visions and stories given prominence by European institutions – are badly needed. Like many others, we hope that one day there will be strong independent voices, in Brussels or elsewhere in Europe, able to propose bold objectives and new dreams that transcend national and electoral interests. But, as necessary as they are, these institutional narratives will not work if they do not chime with people's experience and imagination. For this reason, without ruling out incursions into the territory of political discourse, we decided to focus primarily on 'bottom-up' narratives: cultural expression, ongoing storylines, and citizens' voices that are less – or not yet – heard.

Yet one question concerning institutional narratives continued to puzzle us: how might European political narratives avoid reusing (but with a European gloss) those very instruments of 19th-century nation-state building – the exclusive identity discourse, monolingualism, culture of borders, centralism, etc.? What narratives could be woven for a European space with flexible borders, a multiplicity of languages, and yet strong national frames? How can European institutions develop narratives that are shared by people of all backgrounds and generations in Europe, without denying differences, dissonances, and even conflicting memories and perspectives?²

Wishing to investigate primarily non-institutional narratives, we

² Several contributors in this book add to this reflection, especially Wolfram Kaiser and Monica Sassatelli, but also Milla Mineva and Kerstin Poehls.

were naturally confronted with an impossible choice. Where to start? Which direction to choose, when there are a multitude of directions. Which of Ariadne's threads would we follow? It would be futile to report on every hesitation, turning, confusion, impasse, dilemma, and choice (made rationally or intuitively). So here are just a few of the chosen trails.

One can try to identify narratives through the changing perception of space, the *new geographies*. We live in a multilayered system of visible and invisible borders, and the shifting is constant. The EU itself is increasingly becoming a border-management authority: opening borders here and at the same time restricting passages there, in order to regulate various flows of people and goods within and towards Europe. New experiences and visions of Europe are therefore emerging among those people who, in very different ways and circumstances, are crossing these physical, social, and cultural borders. They draw their own maps, which happen not to coincide with our segmented national and political geographies. Who are they? Not only nomadic artists, not only the thousands of privileged Erasmus students, and not only the hundreds of thousands of well-travelled decision-makers and networkers flying daily across Europe – but also 'migrants'; those who, coming from elsewhere, can be called 'new Europeans'.

Some attention is paid, especially artistically, to the perspectives of those who have tried to enter European territories, often risking their lives to do so. Here is Europe as an impregnable fortress, an inaccessible dream. But what is the vision of those migrants who are inside? They are endlessly questioned about their double cultural belonging, but what is their image of Europe? And, to start with, is there any Europe in their stories? Writers and other artists among them show us that Europe is often perceived as a fragmented, complex space of routes, channels, margins, checkpoints, and points of contact. Their experiences from inside contribute to the drawing of new maps, progressively blurring our static representations of Europe. And are fully constitutive of our new

narratives.³

Another broad trail is offered by the perceptions of *Europe from outside*. For centuries, Europe has perceived itself as the very centre, the space around which the rest of the world was displayed. And for all kinds of reasons linked to our distant and close past, we often, even in this global age, keep on looking at Europe from the inside. New narratives will not only be generated by inward contemplation, however. The views from other regions of the world, and the expectations they hold, will be intrinsic dimensions of future European narratives. The stories and discourses of the so-called new global powers should be carefully listened to. Former European colonies, especially, can cast an eye of critical empathy on the old continent. The European narratives of the 21st century can only be those of a continent which envisions itself as one of the players on the global stage.⁴

Multi-loaded *lieux de memoires*, hidden and unfinished histories, conflicting memories: *history* is a vast field for investigating narratives, in a future perspective as well. Many organisations and research centres, writers, social scientists, and artists are questioning the European future in the light of its past. ECF has not yet ventured into this territory, but there is a key that we could be tempted to use more in future activities: the key of *generations*. “Change only comes through coalitions between generations,” the former Chancellor of West Germany, Helmut Schmidt, is said to have remarked. How will we be able to invent compelling stories for the future, in a Europe where the gap between old and young is growing everywhere – in urban spaces, market strategies, political practices, digital communication, etc? At ECF, we believe there is a dynamic potential in two-way exchange and confrontation between groups of people that have been through very different historical experiences – a potential for apprehending, and preparing better for change. In spite of the rapid demographic change (read: *ageing*) of our

³ See contributions from Kerstin Poehls and Rainer Ohliger.

⁴ See contributions from Amitav Ghosh and Paul Scheffer.

European society, which could lead to increasing tension between generations, the ‘intergenerational’ dynamic for forging new narratives remains largely unexplored and untapped.

Social Experimentation

As previously said, top-down institutional narratives constitute a necessary part of the political landscape. But in the context of European fatigue and disaffection for established political vehicles, they will not be effective enough to lead Europe towards its future; and surely not if they do not come to grips with citizens’ initiatives. The stories of tomorrow indeed must also be looked for – and perhaps first looked for – among local, groundbreaking initiatives where young, and older, people develop new political languages and practices and experiment with new models of civic participation, joined by artists whose imaginative approach sharpens the challenge of such initiatives. It is about carving out new routes for our continent, re-inventing its democratic models, shaping its future: thinking outside the box, across sectors and disciplines, across fragmented social and physical spaces.

Naturally, this is again a *mer à boire*. The only possibility is to identify some spots. And dive in. This is what ECF wants to do in the near future.⁵ It means that we will also reflect on the narratives ‘the other way round’: instead of asking ourselves *Are there new narratives, and if so, where?*, we will identify – and connect – local projects that seek social transformation, and reflect on what it is they are telling us and how they inspire the making of larger narratives, beyond borders.

Four years on, we have not changed the world – Europe is not going better, the opposite is true – but, in the first sketch of our new map of Europe, there are bright spots. Yes, we believe that there are new stories in the making for Europe – by many people, in many domains, and

⁵ See Katherine Watson’s contribution.

especially through artistic expression and social experimentation. But the voices are still too hushed; the stories do not yet echo in the public and political spheres. It is the pressing responsibility of European transnational players to further identify and amplify them. They will inspire people in Europe to imagine themselves as the new plots of their own narratives.

'Indignez-vous!' declares the 94-year-old Stephane Hessel, in a pamphlet that has become a bestseller throughout Europe. Yes! And we should add a second volume: 'Imaginons-nous!'.

Odile Chenal is *Head of Research & Development at the European Cultural Foundation.*

Connecting the Threads

*But what should be the new compelling
narrative of the European project?
Scholars and other intellectuals
have given different answers to this
question.*

Bas Snelders

Connecting the Threads

As one of the contributors to this volume rightly points out, the European Cultural Foundation (ECF) is not the only institution searching for and collecting new European narratives. On the contrary, this pursuit is part of a more widespread movement. A common refrain in recent years is that Europe needs a new story to tell. Among the earliest and arguably most fervent champions of this idea was Timothy Garton Ash. In a column published in *The Guardian* (March 2007), he stressed that, since the end of the cold war, the shared political narrative that sustained the post-war project of European integration for three generations has fallen apart: “Most Europeans now have little idea where we’re coming from; far less do we share a vision of where we want to go. We don’t know why we have an EU or what it’s good for. So we urgently need a new narrative.” But what should be the new compelling narrative of the European project?

Scholars and other intellectuals have given different answers to this question. For instance, Ulrich Beck in his 2004 *Das kosmopolitische Europa* (Cosmopolitan Europe) maintains that such a narrative should emphasise a political and cultural vision for a multi-ethnic and cosmopolitan Europe. Beck’s idea of a European narrative is further developed by, among others, Helle Porsdam, who argues that this narrative is intimately bound up with human rights – indeed, may even be characterised as a ‘human rights narrative’. In this, according to Porsdam, “the European narrative shows a certain similarity to the American Dream or narrative – a Dream that, in its political manifestation, may be described as the right to have rights. On the part of the European Union, human rights are emphasized as something

upon which all Europeans agree.”¹ In a similar vein, Garton Ash proposes that the new story should be woven from six strands, each of which represents a shared European goal: freedom, peace, law, prosperity, diversity, and solidarity. None of these goals “is unique to Europe, but most Europeans would agree that it is characteristic of contemporary Europe to aspire to them.”

Like Garton Ash, Klaus Eder suggests that, rather than take a *single* story, Europe should perhaps combine a *series* of stories that distinguish it from the national Member States of the EU.² Since there are many stories about Europe floating around, however, it remains problematic to decide which of these narratives actually ‘should’ or could be selected for such a combination. Eder argues that there is no definitive solution to this problem, but that Europe is confronted with the challenge of coordinating at least three hegemonic stories: “There is a story based on a successful process of unification, i.e. the story of the European integration process as a successful economic and political project, which founds a European citizenship narrative. This is the story of the making of a rich, yet socially responsible continent, the story of an economic yet social Europe. There is another story that emerges from the memory of a murderous past of Europe. The space of communication based on shared memory is a potential source of strong feelings. Stories telling a shared past constitute boundaries with high emotional value. There is finally a story that relates to Europe as an experiment in hybrid collective identities, not as a ‘melting pot’, but as a ‘diversity pot’, which is a story in the making.”

Seen from this perspective, European narrative is a dynamic

¹ Porsdam, H. 2007, ‘On European Narratives of Human Rights and Their Possible Implications for Copyright’, in: F. Macmillan (ed.), *New Directions in Copyright Law: Volume 6*, Cheltenham, 335-358; eadem 2009, *From Civil to Human Rights: Dialogues on Law and Humanities in the United States and Europe*, Cheltenham/Northampton, MA.

² Eder, K. 2009, ‘A Theory of Collective Identity: Making Sense of the Debate on a “European Identity”’, *European Journal of Social Theory* 12/4, 427-447.

combination of different stories. In Eder's view, the stories by which Europe is constructed do not simply co-exist; rather, they influence one another: "Europe produces stories about itself in the permanent confrontation with stories about the Other which again is producing effects in the Other who produces his own stories by looking at the first as the Other." It has been argued that Europe fails because there are simply too many stories. Eder suggests, however, that this plurality of stories may in fact turn out to be an advantage: "instead of imposing a hegemonic big story Europe can live with a diversity of stories that need only one property: to offer nodes as docking stations for other stories. Thus storytelling in Europe will be an open process, capable of taking up new stories without assimilating them. The only criterion that counts is: to be able to continue to tell a story."

The idea that the diversity of stories may well turn out to be an advantage for Europe has recently also been put forward by Janie Pélabay, Kalypso Nicolaïdis, and Justine Lacroix in their conclusion to *European Stories: Intellectual Debates on Europe in National Contexts* (2010). They argue that the quest for a unique and unanimous European narrative is actually a non-starter: "The pluralism that characterises Europe's cultures and politics, Europe's socio-economic systems, and Europe's national bargains extends perhaps even more deeply to its intellectual traditions, thus giving rise to a 'deep diversity' of narratives about Europe and the EU." In analysing the ways in which 'public intellectuals' have debated Europe since the early 1990s, they discovered not one story but a multiplicity of stories. Moreover, these stories not only displayed many divergences between different EU Member States, but also multiple lines of contestation within distinct national contexts. This leads them to suggest that "it is perhaps the combination of this diversity of stories into a grand and extravagant polyphony that is the ultimate European story."

ECF has also been interested in the role of 'public intellectuals' and their visions and interpretations of Europe. With the SPUI25 academic-cultural centre, ECF organised *Narratives for Europe: Stories that Matter*

(2011), a series of lectures, dialogues, and interviews in which ten authors and thinkers were invited to present their stories about Europe. In her presentation of their reflections here, Niña Weijers points out some of the most significant convergences between them. By combining the different stories told during the events, she can be said to offer the first rough outlines of a new narrative for Europe. To be sure, the present volume does not intend to present or identify any ready-made European narratives – a point Odile Chenal emphasised in the previous section. As the title of the book suggests, it is about the ‘making of narratives’, the ways in which narratives emerge, unfold, and impact in Europe today. And how they contribute to the remapping of Europe.

The content of the book is largely based on some of the essays gathered in the ‘Reading Room’ of ECF’s online space Narratives for Europe, and it is organised along a few main themes that we identified. The contributors to the ‘Reading Room’ and to this book are authors that we have encountered over the past four years during our exploration of European narratives. By way of an introduction, the other essays collected in this volume will be briefly presented below, not necessarily in their order of appearance, but highlighting some of the connecting threads between them.

It is now commonly agreed that the ‘foundational’ myth of Europe as a project for peace and shared welfare does not ‘work’ anymore. Besides, it has gradually given way to other institutional narratives. The dominant narrative of Europe at the institutional level today is one that tries to find its unity in diversity. In her contribution, Monica Sassatelli discusses the unity-in-diversity rhetoric, and how it is taken up beyond Brussels. She points out that the institutional narrative of Europe is not only used by the EU institutions themselves, but also by people in contact with these institutions, such as scholars and ‘public intellectuals’, as well as local recipients who translate the narrative into actual initiatives and policies – notably in the cultural sector.

One of the cultural institutions in which the unity-in-diversity

rhetoric has found its way is the museum. This can be linked more broadly with recent developments in the museum sector to create European museums and reorient existing collections toward a more 'European' narrative. The emerging musealisation of Europe and the Europeanisation of the museum sector serves as the starting point for Wolfram Kaiser's essay, in which he addresses the development of cohesive master narratives of EU history in museums and exhibitions. He shows that there is a trend towards presenting any story as just as valid as any other story of the past, which manifests itself in the rapid growth of eye-witness industry in museums. Eye-witness accounts are often used to advance an enthusiastically positive and optimistic narrative of post-war European integration and the present-day EU and its future. Pointing out that this narrative strategy is highly ineffective, Kaiser suggests to induce, collect, and represent narratives of Europe by engaging citizens in 'participative narrating' – that is, motivating them to tell their own stories.

Besides permanent exhibitions and collections, temporary exhibitions have also displayed a growing interest in European narratives. The development of narratives about Europe in exhibitions of modern and contemporary art from Central and Eastern Europe – which have been proliferating since 1989 – is discussed by Svetla Kazalarska. It proves that a set of stereotypical narratives have recurrently been brought into play, including so-called Europeanisation narratives that were triggered by the European integration process throughout the 1990s and by the two waves of EU enlargement in 2004 and 2007. These narratives greatly resembled the clichéd 'European talk' of EU institutions in that they emphasised the role of art and culture in bridging the differences between the two parts of Europe. Whereas most of these narratives underscored the diversity of artistic processes in Europe across space and time, they simultaneously insisted on the idea of Europe having a cultural and political identity of its own, thereby simply reiterating the familiar unity-in-diversity rhetoric.

By contrast, more recent art exhibitions seem to be in search of

inspiring alternatives to Europe's dominant institutional narrative. Illustrative in this respect is the series of three exhibitions titled *Scenarios about Europe* (Museum of Contemporary Art, Leipzig), in which a group of curators worked together with different artists to put forward new propositions about Europe. In her exhibition review, Wietske Maas argues that the resulting scenarios directly confront us with difficult questions about Europe's immense diversity. Some of the scenarios will eventually also be transferred to a number of cities – both inside and outside Europe – that are chosen because their relationship with Europe's institutional level is, in a sense, 'askance'. In this, China will be given a central role since, as stated by the project's curator Barbara Steiner, "its relationship with Europe may be seen as particularly exposed in comparison with other relationships between European and non-European countries."

Indeed, the growing importance and influence of new economies such as China challenge current conceptions of Europe. The big question for the coming decades, raised here by Paul Scheffer, is how Europe will manage to deal with the economic and cultural innovation from East and South with which it finds itself increasingly confronted. The most important change is that the public perception of Europe in countries such as China, Brazil, and India will acquire ever greater significance for European societies. According to Scheffer, the growing importance of the 'outside gaze' presents an invitation to write history in a new way and to replace the old 'foundational' myth of Europe with new narratives. He argues that a new narrative about Europe "should no longer take Berlin as its point of departure, but Beijing; must no longer begin in Paris but in São Paulo."

One example of such an 'outside gaze' is provided here by Amitav Ghosh. Like Scheffer, Ghosh acknowledges the importance of the newly emergent countries. But at the same time he argues that Europe is perhaps better equipped to point the way out of the economic and environmental crises that are currently facing the whole world: "If there is a silver lining in this grim scenario, it is that Europe happens to have

arrived at a point where it is singularly well-suited to take the lead.” Europe is able to show the way because it is, in the words of Ghosh, “the only part of the world that has succeeded in articulating and acting upon a vision of political organisation that goes beyond the nation-state. Its progress down that path has been slow and fitful, it is true, but I think deep down Europeans understand and appreciate the world-historical significance of the project they have embarked upon....”

In addition to the ‘outside gaze’, conceptions of Europe today are also greatly influenced by migration, both inside the EU and beyond. Until very recently, immigration and immigrants in Europe often served as ‘others’ in constructing nationally dominated historical narratives. “In these narratives, immigrants are not yet seen as an essential part of Europe or its nations; rather, they serve as entities against which excluding and exclusive collective narratives and identities are forged,” as Rainer Ohliger points out in his review of the film project *Migrants Moving History: European Narratives of Diversity* (2008). The film documents the narratives of various European ‘immigrant intellectuals’ in an attempt to identify possibilities for more inclusive European counter-narratives. In fact, a gradual shift towards more inclusive European narratives can be seen in the countless exhibitions that have been dedicated to migration all over Europe and inside the EU over the past ten to fifteen years.

The museal display of migration in current exhibitions in Europe is addressed here by Kerstin Poehls. Discussing how and why the phenomenon of migration is being narrated in temporary exhibitions, Poehls shows that the display of migration essentially serves as a negotiation of the borders of Europe. Questioning notions of European universalism, these exhibitions show how various public spheres and discourses interact and thus encourage museums to play a more central role in the self-reflection of European societies. Current migration exhibitions are anything but neutral or detached from political discourse. According to Poehls, they clearly reflect how a self-reflexive

and budding version of cosmopolitanism that is closely linked to the concept of transnationalism – and which can be described as ‘Europeanness’ – is slowly but surely being incorporated into exhibitions.

The narratives told by the migration exhibitions often seem to showcase an overtly positive picture, in which individual migrants are presented with their dreams and plans for the future. In this sense, they are comparable with those ‘Europeanisation’ exhibitions discussed by Kazalarska, which seem to place great hopes and expectations on rebuilding the broken historical ties between the various European cultural centres in the aftermath of the EU enlargement. Yet in many of the new Member States optimism seems to have given way to disappointment and disagreement, as pointed out by Milla Mineva in her essay on the development and use of European narratives in Bulgaria. She shows that the institutional narrative of unity in diversity, while politically effective there at first, eventually turned into a more private narrative used by citizens to legitimise their own interests. According to Mineva, the problem of Bulgaria today, and of Europe at large, is the general lack of any new utopias. She therefore pleads for the invention of new collective narratives that will unite the people of Europe again, inspiring them to create a common future.

This brings us back to the basic idea that Europe needs a new story to tell. While all the contributors underline the importance of new European narratives, Jason Dittmer makes the case for graphic narrative (for example, *bande dessinée*, comics, and graphic novels) as a medium especially suited to the production of new European narratives, both in official EU cultural policy and private enterprise. He outlines the role of space in graphic narrative, juxtaposing this with the way space is imagined within the EU, and suggests that Europe and graphic narrative share a common spatial imagination. Dittmer argues that openness to the outside world should be a crucial element in any new European narrative, and to that end he offers up narratives of everyday life as a genre worthy of promotion: “Rather than tales of heroism that remind readers of past imperialism, European everyday life (including its

connections to non-European lives) might serve as a powerful attractor around which a new European politics can emerge.”

More or less in keeping with Dittmer’s suggestion, the different chapters in the present book are framed by a series of short comics revolving around the everyday life experiences of Oswald, a common European, who may nevertheless be perceived as a ‘hero’. The five stories, told by a variety of artists from across Europe and beyond, are introduced by Thijs van Nimwegen. In recounting the genesis of Oswald, van Nimwegen describes Oswald’s stories as a sort of narrative relay: “nobody knows what’s waiting after the next turn, when a new author takes over the baton. We can only wait and see what will happen next to Oswald – and to Europe.” This reminds us of Klaus Eder’s point, referred to earlier, that European narratives should offer nodes as docking stations for other stories. “The end of the theoretical story is the observation that Europe is a space with contested stories and that it is through contestation that stories that bind can be told. In this space the linkages between stories will multiply and link many other stories that so far nobody considered to be part of Europe.”

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Our Hero Oswald

*Is Oswald a victim of violence,
or a hypocritical journalist who
died because his motives were
unsound, getting famous by
writing about other peoples'
misery?*



Thijs van Nimwegen

Our Hero Osvald

January 2011 was a cold, rainy month in the city of The Hague, the Netherlands. The ‘Comixiade core team’ – as we had begun to call it – consisting of Michal Slomka, Aneta Bendakova, Guido van Hengel, Vladimir Palibrk and me, met up for the first time in the office of Platform Spartak. To escape the dread of outdrawn wintry meetings, we took walks on the beach of Scheveningen and let ourselves be inspired while gazing into the swirling mists hanging over the grey expanse of the North Sea. And it was inspiration indeed that we needed: in the coming year and a half, we would have to coordinate the production of a great number of high-quality comics.

Our general theme was the untold narratives of Europe, not the great history, but the stories roaming the back alleys, subway stations, slums, and docklands of the continent. The problem we faced was how to give such a broad theme a clear binding factor. “We need a recurring character,” someone said. “Like a protagonist,” someone else added. “A recognisable face to be seen in each comic,” a third clarified. This was the moment Osvald was born, while dark clouds were moving in from the West and dusk was falling over the abandoned tourist shops of the pier of Scheveningen.

We returned to the office to flesh out the details of this persona. Osvald’s name was borrowed from the old world philosopher and historian Oswald Manuel Arnold Gottfried Spengler (1880-1936), best known for his book *The Decline of the West* (‘Der Untergang des Abendlandes’), in which he prophesises the decay and ultimate decline of Western civilisation – a fitting, gloomy, doomy reference, especially in a time of crisis, with Europe seemingly bound for exactly that social collapse. On a more practical note, the name Osvald was easily pronounceable in most European languages. We supplied Osvald with a background as a journalist, a nicotine-addiction, a great love for playing

the clarinet, and a striped shirt. Just the outlines, not too much detail – the details were left for the artists to fill in.

While we may not have been fully aware of it, the choice of an inquisitive, yet somewhat antisocial (anti-)hero as our binding protagonist is rooted in a long and respectable narrative tradition in Western fiction. It's the tradition of the individual against the collective and 'the system', the dreamer against dull everyday life. Edgar Allen Poe's Auguste Dupin may have been one of the first in a long family tree. Emerging halfway through the 19th century, after the decline of Enlightenment, in a romantic tradition that valued individualism above all, this detective inspired many epigones. Himself a dehumanised 'thinking machine', his literary offspring developed ever more quirky personal traits. While Jules Verne's protagonists are still men of science without any distracting personalities, Sherlock Holmes, perhaps the most famous of this kind, was a definite bohemian, fond of pipe smoking and the occasional hit of cocaine, and definitely not a well-adjusted member of society. In contrast, the system, in Holmes' case represented by Scotland Yard, is bureaucratic, haughty and arrogant, yet wholly incompetent.

The 20th century saw the advent of modern comic strips and, of course, the transfer of this kind of protagonist to the new medium. Tintin is probably the most famous example. While clean-shaven and polite, he eschews authority whenever he thinks he's right – which he always is. And if authority – the collective – appears, it may not be malignant, but most of the times it is dim-witted and clumsy – just think of the twin police detectives Thomson and Thompson.

In literature, and later in film, the hero-against-the-world turned into more of an anti-hero and lost his positive outlook. Franz Kafka's Josef K. (*Der Prozess*), George Orwell's Winston Smith (*Nineteen Eighty Four*), and Döblin's Franz Biberkopf (*Berlin Alexanderplatz*) are characters that have to find their way through an unknown, frightening world, and find out its hidden, secret truth – hidden by a system that has turned from dumb yet relatively harmless into a frightening, repressive

machine. This searching in itself is what still makes them part of the tradition – the need to find out what is the nature of that unseen thing in the dark.

Osvald carries characteristics of all of these protagonists. He's curious yet disillusioned, active yet lethargic, creative yet bound towards his own demise. He's a journalist, but a journalist who has turned his back on big scoops and instead focuses on those aspects of life many of us would rather not see. He's an enthusiastic musician, but he prefers a concert for two in an abandoned alleyway to a place in the limelight.

The best part of Osvald though, is the fact that we, the Comixiade core team, never designed him to be that way, on that dreary afternoon on the beach of Scheveningen. He was created by dozens of artists, and his appearance, character, and personal traits are shifting even as we speak. Osvald may therefore represent a whole new generation of the inquisitive anti-hero – a fluid character, showing different traits, depending on the reader.

The comics presented in this volume are all examples of these traits, and follow Osvald's fragmented life. In the first one – *Ovarian Lottery (Birth of Osvald)* – we are introduced to the character's fluidity, even before he is born. Most comic characters – like Tintin – seem to have no families, no life outside of their adventures, and they were never born. However, animator Siebe de Boer from Groningen, the Netherlands took it upon himself to depict Osvald's birth. This experimental, wordless comic – almost like a painting – meditates on the randomness of birth. As Siebe explains: "This comic is based on a concept by American business investor and philanthropist Warren Buffet. He proposed to imagine rules – economic, social, environmental – for the world you're going to live in. But there's a catch; you don't know if you're going to be born rich or poor, male or female, in the North or in the South. There are 7 billion balls in the drum, and you can only pick one of them. It's the most important thing to ever happen to you."

In the second comic, we see Osvald having acquired the characteristics we gave him. In *Muted (Rise of Osvald)* he's living the life

of a European wanderer, exploring the streets of Istanbul – a city illustrator Agata Wawryniuk from Wrocław, Poland had never visited, but compiled from photos, videos, and her own imagination. Amsterdam-based writer, translator, and editor Canan Marasligil wrote the scenario. She decided to give Oswald a complicated start and have him explore the current climate in Turkey. In her own words: “Journalists, artists, writers, intellectuals may be prosecuted, silenced, even put in jail for their work and their ideas. Political context aside, I wanted to explore Oswald’s capacity to overcome this, imagining him as a sort of European hero. He realises all music has been muted, but he tries to play anyway, and in the end the sound finally comes out of his clarinet. In the background, we can see the police arriving, but Oswald plays... and plays... For me, he is a symbol of hope that I still want to believe in.” In a way, this comic also represents Oswald’s wild years – he’s at his most Tintin-like here, with a dash of inquisitive Holmes thrown in.

Oswald’s Secret, the third comic, is a small intermezzo showing Oswald creating a patchwork blanket – a fitting symbol of European collective identity as a patchwork of individual narratives. Belgrade-based artist Maja Veselinovic works mainly as a children’s book illustrator, and her style here is colourful, open, playful, and direct. As for Oswald’s development, here we see him in mid-life, grown to maturity and self-confident. He has found his place, and clearly lost some – not all – of his wild hairs.

The fourth comic was drawn by Tomas Kucerovsky from Brno, Czech Republic. Kucerovsky has created concept art for a number of computer games, and this has made his style ‘graphic’ in more than one meaning of the word. I found him to be the perfect artist to visualise my own scenario for *Spengler Complex (Europe)*, in which we see an aged Oswald, gone cynical and negative. In a heavily urbanised continent in the grip of economic crisis, he indulges in apocalyptic fantasies, made more real by long walks through depressing neighbourhoods. The border between reality and fantasy is gradually blurred, as urban decay becomes urban crisis and turns into urban destruction. A link is made with a general

European preoccupation with end days and the downfall of empires, a mind-set described by his (partial) namesake, Oswald Spengler, mentioned earlier. This is Oswald the anti-hero: caught in an unclear netherworld with no way out like Winston Smith, roaming the urban sprawl under the doom of his own thoughts like Franz Biberkopf.

This dark tone is sustained in the fifth and final comic, *Good Story (Death of Oswald)*. This play of storylines was created by brothers Vladimir (scenario) and Vuk Palibrk (comic art) from Pancevo, Serbia. We see Oswald, now an old man, experiencing an internal conflict. The ending is deliberately open and unclear: is Oswald a victim of violence, or a hypocritical journalist who died because his motives were unsound, getting famous by writing about other people's misery? As Vladimir explains: "The twist lies in the fact that he wanted to write a good story, but instead became part of a story himself: 'Journalist killed in Belgrade street riots'." Oswald's death seems a simple necessity, like Joseph K.'s casual demise.

However, Oswald is still a comic character, meaning he cannot really die and lives on if the artists and the public want him to. The comics presented here are just a small part of the complete epic of Oswald, comprised in the 'Comixiade' book. Many other aspects of the character are revealed there and we even see alternative outcomes of the Oswald storyline, as his stories are an example of a collective, interactive tale, a hyper textual comic making for a sort of narrative relay race; nobody knows what's waiting after the next turn, when a new author takes over the baton. We can only wait and see what will happen next to Oswald – and to Europe.

Thijs van Nimwegen studied *Comparative Literature and Journalism* in Utrecht, Antwerp, Groningen, and Leipzig. He is a producer and project manager for Spartak, *Interdisciplinary Platform for Eastern Europe*, where he co-founded and organised *Comixiade*, part of ECF's *Narratives* initiative. He also works as a translator of English language literature, researcher, and occasional web designer.

Muted

Rise of Osvald

*In this second episode, we see Osvald
living the life of a European wanderer,
exploring the streets of Istanbul.*

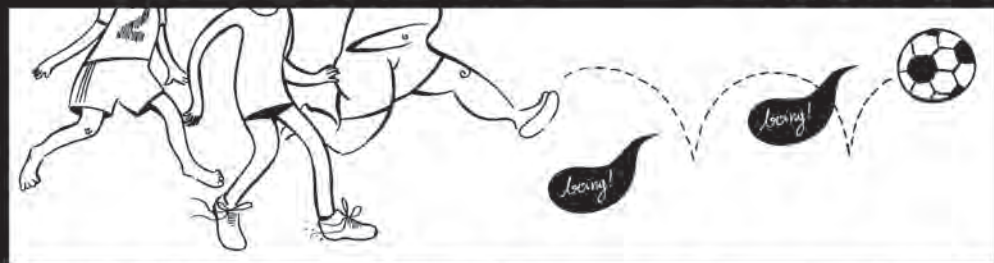
Canan Marasligil and Agata Wawryniuk

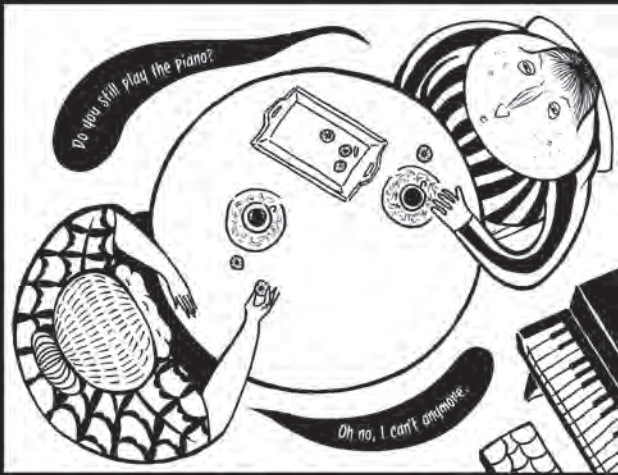


"Although the variety of technological tools to combat oppression increases constantly, the things that must be done against oppression are still the same as it has been since the beginning of human history: it is to speak up and then to speak up again"

Ece Temelkuran







THE NEXT DAY

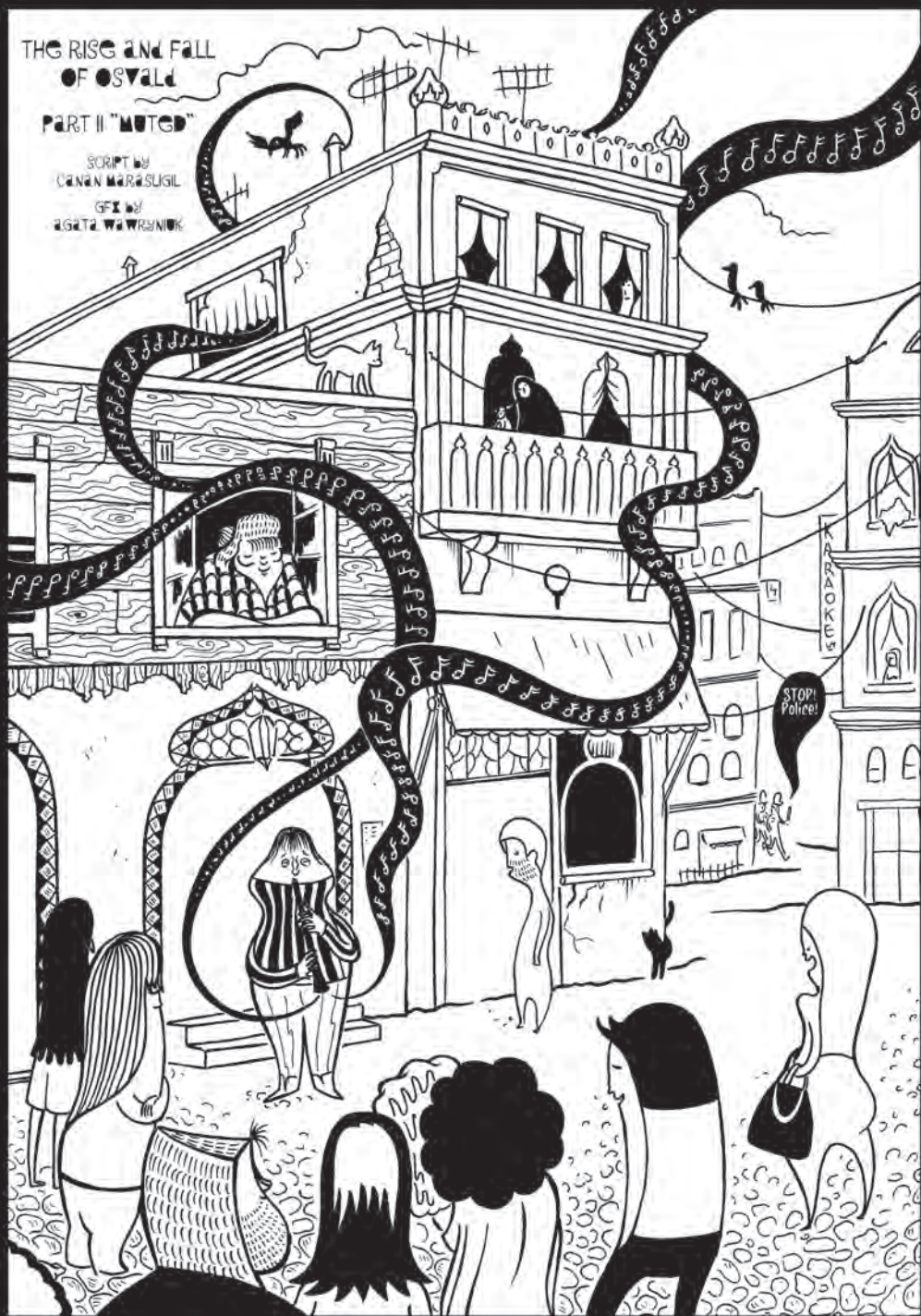


THE RISE AND FALL
OF OSVALD

PART II "MUTED"

SCRIPT BY
DANIEL MARCUS LIGIL

GFx BY
REGINA WARR/NOR







The Fabric of Europe

Has Europe Lost the Plot?

*Are European narratives only on
the intellectualised, elite side of the
spectrum, speaking only to the brain
and not to the heart?*

Monica Sassatelli

Has Europe Lost the Plot?

What is Europe's narrative? Even opposing views often reach similar conclusions: some say there is no European narrative, others that there are too many and therefore, by this very diversity, they have no shared meaning, solidarity, or identity. Since the start of the current euro-crisis the public debate has been dominated by those who argue that a fundamental lack of solidarity, well-hidden during times of economic growth, has now been exposed, bursting like one of those financial bubbles that brought us here (although, not only us Europeans). Europe fails because its many narratives are not part of one story.

Still, despite the amount of energy that has been devoted to the study of European identity, the main questions remain open and their premises unchallenged. Is diversity something Europe has to 'deal with', in the sense of mitigating, alleviating, *tolerating*? Are the supposedly homogenising forces of globalisation necessarily at odds with 'preserving' specific identities? Are European narratives only on the intellectualised, elite side of the spectrum, speaking only to the brain and not to the heart? Is this especially the case when narratives emanate out of the EU, a technocratic project pushed too far too fast, as the current economic and political crisis encourages many observers to argue? Perhaps some answers and alternatives lie in looking at the concrete and evolving institutional narratives of Europe, and how those are taken up beyond Brussels.

Europe Seen from Brussels

The emphasis on Europe finding its 'story' currently animating public debate can be linked more broadly to shifts in how identities are conceptualised. In the social sciences, there has been a well-documented

'narrative turn' towards a focus on meanings and their dependency on contexts, rather than on structural ('factual') aspects in social life. Identity, in particular, can be seen as a narrative. That is, having realised that the concept of identity has essentialist overtones, and that when speaking of identities it is easy to forget that they are constructs based on self-understandings that draw from cultural repertoires and available narratives, the focus has shifted to the latter, to the narratives.

Contemporary Europe is a good example of both the possibilities and the dangers of narratives of identity. By thinking of Europe as embodied in specific narratives – public, academic, institutional – we can consider the several 'Europes' that are at stake. As well as several narratives of Europe, there are several performances of these narratives. If a key dimension of Europe's story is its institutional narratives, another one concerns how these will be performed beyond Brussels and other institutional headquarters.

The apparent contradiction of the opposing critiques of lack or excess of European narratives may find a solution here: Europe has several narratives, but what about its story, its making sense of them in a meaningful plot? Does Europe have dedicated storytellers and public spheres for that story? The current economic crisis can be placed in the storyline of necessary further European integration, or, as the media have tended to stress, of the 'dangers of renouncing national sovereignty'. As many observe, European institutions – organisations originally qualified by other specifications, from 'Coal and Steel' to the more broadly 'Economic', until they successfully appropriated the term 'European' – at the very least *had* a plot. This was a story of centuries of European wars put to a definitive end by increased collaboration and co-dependency; both the narrative and the economic strategy of the evolving EC institutions have been driven by this plot. It has been so successful in this that new generations of Europeans are less sensitive to it. European 'public intellectuals' keep referring to it, whilst acknowledging that it may no longer be what can hold Europe together. Umberto Eco declared that the 'shallow' European identity that was

sufficient for the founding fathers, thanks to that shared objective, may not be so any more: “Their Europe reacted to war and they shared resources to build peace. Now we must work towards building a more profound identity.”¹

Today, Europe is in search of a new story to tell; first and foremost to itself. Needless to say, we can look in several directions for European narratives. Whilst certainly not limited to the process of European integration, contemporary Europe cannot ignore it: this institutional context is also that of more comprehensive or cultural ideas of Europe. It is not surprising that the interminable media debates on the current euro-crisis often end with vague references to a broader, more cultural, European identity, generally then bemoaning its inexistence. Looking at the EU and Council of Europe in particular, the image of a fragmented narrative becomes less tenable, as there is general agreement amongst analysts as to what the dominant narrative of Europe at the institutional level is.

The main institutional narrative about Europe’s culture and identity today is that of ‘unity in diversity’. Because of the need to incorporate the diversity of nations, especially at the level of culture and belongings, and because the painstaking process of imagining the Community and then Union has always been under everyone’s eyes, they have elaborated a complex rhetoric, which is synthesised in the well-known formula ‘unity in diversity’. This is seen as a solution to the need for accommodating multiple allegiances and the plurality of national or local cultures (that is, of the much more powerful and established institutions).

It is possible to follow step by step how the Council of Europe and the EU in particular have reached that narrative, and we find it embodied in key texts. Its earliest incarnation is probably in the Council of Europe’s

¹ ‘Umberto Eco: “It’s culture, not war, that cements European identity”’, *The Guardian*, 26 January 2012 (Interview by Gianni Liotta). This article is part of a wider project on Europe (see www.guardian.co.uk/world/series/europa).

1949 statute (“Diversity lies at the heart of Europe’s cultural richness, which is our common heritage and the basis of our unity”), but it is only in the 1990s that it started to be operationalised at EC/EU level. The 1992 EU treaty article on culture states that the Community should promote “the flowering of the cultures of the Member States, while respecting their national and regional *diversity* and at the same time bringing the *common cultural heritage* to the fore” (TEU, art. 151). Making sense of Europe’s diversity – creating a narrative structure that integrates diversity without subsuming it, and progressively reframing it not as an obstacle or a lesser evil but as a resource and a strength – has been the European institutional strategy.

This has been much criticised as contrived and the result of compromise rather than vision. It is a solution that many dismiss as empty rhetoric, as a cosmetic treatment to hide either irrelevance or a hidden hegemonic agenda. Indeed, the identity-building technologies used by nation-states are still in the hands of nation-states (education, media, but also welfare and military service). So self-proclaimed European institutions have to be very cautious when they try to plot their narratives of European culture. Too much emphasis on unity or too much detail on the actual content of the ‘common cultural heritage’ and they will provoke criticism from right and left, too much emphasis on diversity and they will simply provide arguments for those who say that actually there is no story to tell at all.

Telling Stories

Still, ‘unity in diversity’ is translated into actual initiatives and policies too, notably in the cultural sector. Although these are many and diverse, they have a similar style: they mainly stimulate local direct action, bestowing the title of ‘European’ to local agents, who then act as European, thereby providing content for that empty idea of ‘unity in diversity’. As a narrative ‘unity in diversity’ thus ‘decentralises’ the selection of the narrative elements, whilst promoting a common frame.

The danger of such an ‘empty’ narrative is that it risks being either ignored, or appropriated in too many different ways. Some believe it is therefore only viable when combined with stronger narrative structures, such as the post-WWII peace projects. Here, however, we start to see the limitations of concentrating on narratives only, with the risk of losing sight of who is telling the story.

The institutional narrative of Europe may be quite formulaic by now. However that narrative will be performed not only by the institutions themselves but also by people in contact with those institutions, particularly so because of the decentralised policy style mentioned above. Scholars and ‘public intellectuals’ participate, but so too do local recipients of the policies that translate the narrative into practice. Let’s look for instance at the European Capital of Culture (ECOC).²

Established in 1985, the ECOC is one of the longest running, most representative EU cultural initiatives. Whilst the EU is the initiator, the implementation is basically local (as with most EU cultural policies). Cities are asked to show a European dimension, but what exactly constitutes such a dimension is left to their own judgement. As a result, programmes have been very different, and it is this that highlights “the richness and diversity of European cultures and the features they share,” which is the ECOC official mission itself. This programme reconceptualises and repositions cities in a European space and history. ECOCs are not about the celebration of an essentialist European culture – that would be a *faux pas* the EU has learnt to avoid – rather, ‘European’ qualifies the cities themselves, becoming part of their self-representation, of their story.

The title has progressively become a transformative one: it is the candidate cities’ aspiration to become European capitals of culture that is assessed. Because the EU demands but does not define the European dimension for these candidates, it is precisely their ability to fill their

² For an extended account of research on the topic, see Sassatelli, M. 2009, *Becoming Europeans: Cultural Identity and Cultural Policies*, Basingstoke.

candidature with meaningful stories, which wins the title. These cities thus *become* European. And if we look inside this European dimension as interpreted 'locally' we see that 'unity in diversity' is adopted but redefined. In the ECOCs and their programmes the interpretation of 'diversity' becomes broader, and deeper. On the ground this narrative structure is indeed appropriated, but it is not necessarily interpreted according to default institutional meanings. Its ambiguity is used to actually far exceed the EU's intentions – which are mostly about combining national and regional diversity within Europe – and moves towards something more like a cosmopolitan allegiance. For instance, most cities holding the ECOC title have a significant number of projects dealing with non-European cultures in their programmes. The notion of culture itself has expanded progressively, from high art in the first years to a much more encompassing one: this in a programme that began with Athens and Florence celebrating their contribution to the great European heritage.

These are practical forms of cultural Europeanisation that often escape analysis because of their 'banality'. However, there is a key difference between banal Europeanism and banal nationalism, for which the expression was first coined. If banal nationalism is based on forgetting difference and complexity, so that its stereotypical identity stresses homogeneity, banal Europeanism's public discourse has a different frame or plot that stresses 'unity in diversity'. Europe and the nation are imagined, naturalised, and made banal differently: the nation stresses (or imposes) homogeneity, commonality, and single, exclusive identification, whereas Europe opts for an opposite solution that claims to be based on plurality, diversity, and multiple allegiances. Whether or not this is seen as creating a society or identity depends on how normative our view is of what a cultural unit and identity should look like.

Imagining Diversity

Europe's story is *about* diversity and as such, contains a plurality of narratives. European institutional, public narratives are indeed recurrent and common, top-down if you like, but they allow and even need to be performed differently by different actors, in different contexts. What is relevant is both the fact that the institutional narrative frame is maintained, and that what makes it possible – as EU institutions have progressively discovered – is that it is a capacious one which the diversity of voices and public spheres can appropriate and fill with narrative elements. The shift to diversity as a resource, whether introduced as mere rhetorical gimmick or not, is fundamental.

The national story was about imagining a homogeneous, fraternal community based on similarity; as a categorical form of identification it could, generally, tolerate only modest amounts of diversity, because both the ideological and practical requirements of national democracies relied on similarity and centralisation. Europe, instead, sees itself as 'unity in diversity', and this is another way of imagining a community. It is not a matter of being rhetorically 'inclusive': stories are, by definition, exclusive, they weave in certain narrative elements and exclude others. No story is the story of everyone, which is precisely why there are many. Notions of 'inclusiveness', often invoked by intellectuals and politicians about Europe, can be misleading; but so too notions of exclusion. European identity is a poor categorical identity, it struggles with defining both internal similarities and external differences, whilst the inverted combinations (internal differences, and external similarities) seem almost more appealing and, indeed, more European.

As long as European narratives continue following other plots (like the national one) or thinking that existing narrative structures are the only possible ones, the European story may not work. Instead, the European story may be able to sacrifice much less diversity to the coherence or homogeneity of the whole story than that required by other, apparently similar, accounts of large-scale collective identities.

Out of necessity rather than virtue, Europe has to find resources for telling a new type of story about identity, diversity, and solidarity.

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How Diversity Defeated Unity

*Has Europe's Eastern periphery
actually discovered the secret of
European identity? Is the periphery
able to tell the new inspiring narrative
of Europe?*

Milla Mineva

How Diversity Defeated Unity

'Who is the most popular politician in Bulgaria?' is the question by which the temperature of public confidence is regularly taken here. Popularity charts occupy newspaper front pages and even lead to changes in public relations strategies. One such drop in ratings got the ex-premier of Bulgaria, and today's Chairman of the Party of European Socialists (PES), on a motorbike and transformed him into a rocker. In the last three years the chart has been headed invariably by one European Commissioner, Kristalina Georgieva. Has Europe's Eastern periphery actually discovered the secret of European identity? Is the periphery able to tell the new inspiring narrative of Europe?

A similar expectation accompanied 1989, when the fall of the Berlin Wall inspired Western observers to hope that Western Europeans, who had more or less got used to democracy, would reveal new enthusiasm for political participation. Nothing of the kind happened, however. While diagnoses shifted from optimism to accusation, the West expected 'voice' and the East discovered 'exit' (to use Albert Hirschman's terms). Not fortuitously, Francis Fukuyama's idea of the end of history, brought about by the final victory of liberal democracy, was born then. Today, more than twenty years later, liberal democracy is in crisis, although we prefer to discuss economic policies rather than the withdrawal of citizens from the institutions of representative democracy.

According to Jürgen Habermas, the revolutions of 1989 were marked by the absence of new ideas and new projects for the future. Viewed from Bulgaria, this authoritative diagnosis is only partially true. Indeed, no new political ideas existed: the return to Europe proved sufficient to motivate the huge transformations in Eastern Europe. That, however, was a project about the future, and the model of 'the normal European countries' was a motivating vision for the citizens of Eastern Europe,

though one without utopian horizons. There was no need for utopia, as there was geography. Yet, from the perspective of the contemporary crisis, something further seems to have been more important, namely the last political (i.e., collective) project for a common future.

Eastern Europe actively contrived its own 'return' to Europe, giving an account of itself as essentially European in order to obtain the right of membership. Such was the role of the 'Central Europe' metaphor and the idea of 'abducted Europe' through which the Balkans turned into 'Southeastern Europe'. During the 1990s a narrative about the collective fate of Eastern Europe developed as did a desire for identification with the European community. In the last years of the twentieth century, the European narratives – multiple and uncertain (as they are still today) – were politically effective, and they were used by a large number of Eastern Europeans to change their own lives.

In this essay, I would like to adopt a pragmatic attitude to the identity narratives. The meanings that we construct succeed in becoming prevalent not only because they undergo a certain process of institutionalisation, but also because they are useful in providing answers to practical questions (as Eva Illouz reminds us). In reality, European narratives, re-read, poached, and shifted by people who used them, were successful in legitimising certain life strategies. I shall attempt to show how Europe was invented here, how Europe was being narrated during the accession process, and what cultural resources were used to legitimise the collective change.

The EU quickly became synonymous with Europe, which has always been perceived in Bulgaria as a normative horizon. In fact, the dominant narrative about Europe was the familiar account of civilisation, of the 'advanced' Europeans who would import 'modern norms, values, and rules'. In this play, local and European actors participated simultaneously. On the one hand, the idea of accession as a mastering of norms imposed from the top legitimised even the pursuit of unpopular policies and justified the weaknesses of the local political elites. On the other hand, it allowed European actors to rediscover

meaning in the EU, whose underlying narrative had already lost some of its glitter. As it is, the export of European values helped both Western and Eastern Europe to claim a new legitimacy.

The use of old cultural resources and an essentialist concept of 'original European values', have an extremely curious side effect. European actors referred to the recent past and insisted on its being read again. They were looking for the common European identity at the point where the founding narrative had originated – during World War II on the one hand and the Cold War era on the other. Eastern Europe had to cope with its own traumatic past and follow a 'European' model so that it could be recognised.

Local actors, too, looked back in order to search for the historical legitimacy of their own European identity, but finding it only in the remote past. National histories were retold so that they could present the EU as the necessary destiny of Eastern European nations. In this process the national framework was not replaced by a European one (or not in Bulgaria, at least); rather the national history cannibalised the European one. Here is one example: in Bulgaria, a number of research papers were published with the objective of proving that Bulgarians were 'the first Europeans' (here we may refer to one of the books, *Bulgarians: The First Europeans*, by historian Bozhidar Dimitrov, Director of the National Historic Museum). The Bulgarian European Commissioner's rating is a reflection of this particular perspective: she is Bulgarian, recognised as European.

So, what was the unexpected effect of that account? The adhesion of the EU and Europe, the contemporary effort through accession to a supra-national unity, and the discovery of eternal European values actually prevent debate and the opportunity to formulate a European present. Due to the accession process, the political debate vanished legitimately – the promise was that we all would live better when the country became an EU member, while the path to change was clear and set by the roadmaps of European institutions. Rather than a debate on the European values of today, a reinterpretation of history took place,

leaving us with a policy of consensus and ritual (political) party fights. In fact, it was this particular reinterpretation of the European narrative – the only one to enhance the national account – that proved effective in the mobilisation of collective efforts. The elites resorted to the ‘us’ that was at hand instead of initiating the long and risky negotiation for the ‘us’ that we desire to be.

What happened to ‘diversity’ in the EU’s motto? There were actors who recited the proper European narrative ‘unity in diversity’ so loudly that it started to seem unnecessary to debate publicly how much and what unity, on how much and what diversity. The narrative of diversity was effective for individual strategies, while the collective still remained within the framework of the national. Diversity accorded superbly with the market narrative, which focused on private interest and individual actors. Just as the concept of ‘diversity’ was reinterpreted as cultural diversity, the discourse on inequalities was substituted with a conversation about acknowledgment of horizontal cultural differences.

Diversity was also relevant to another discourse: that of the active citizen. After the end of the communist era, Eastern Europe was narrated through collectivist metaphors and, not accidentally, there existed active policies for the building of a civil society in opposition to the state. In fact, that narrative overestimated the ideological consistency of communism and underestimated its real historical practice of blocking of collective acts, which resulted in the alienation of people from the idea of collective activity. In that way, policies for the creation of activist citizens actually enhanced and legitimised a withdrawal from the contemporary public debate and enclosure within the private space. Protests actually increased in number after 2007, but they have always been presented as non-political. These civil protests refuse to formulate political visions and claims and refuse to speak about the common good, which meanwhile has been totally delegitimised. Civil protests have been powerful only when protecting private interests and blocking policies that threaten them. Citizenship has simply transformed itself into an individual strategy, whereas the

characteristics of a citizen have begun to be described as personal competencies and idiosyncrasies.

Social networks also play their role in the process of diminishing the civic sphere. Individual citizens easily identify followers. One of the most significant prerequisites of democracy – public debate of our common future – is replaced by communication with followers and a refusal to hold a debate. In that manner, it is easy to form civil groups that are active and confident about their rightness, who consider themselves a majority (as they never face their opponents) and who are able to successfully protect their own private interests.

One of the most recent protests was that of the jailers in June 2012. Their slogan was: 'Europe for us too'. In reality, the collective dream of a European future has become a private narrative used by various citizens to legitimise their own interests. European integration did not establish relations and solidarity at a supra-national level, rather it was transformed by local actors into a strategy for individual mobility and personal welfare. Citizens emancipated themselves from the territory, from neighbours, from public institutions. Citizens became mobile, turned into managers of themselves and, reminiscent of Luc Boltanski, rapidly mastered the new spirit of capitalism to become part of the global world. Bulgaria today reminds us of Margaret Thatcher's famous statement that there is no such thing as a society, but only individuals and their families. The social has shrunk to the family.

Quite recently, in a debate on the challenges facing liberal democracy, Ivan Krastev provocatively suggested that Bulgaria be regarded as the future of Europe. Transition, which has drawn on the legitimacy of European narratives, has effectively led to the complete disintegration of the social state and the application of unpopular economic reforms, without meeting any civil resistance. What was invented, claims Krastev, is a democracy in which politics does not offer a choice between alternatives, but is a system with no alternatives. It is the only possible political system which citizens dislike yet do not rebel against, because they have grown to believe that no other options exist. It is a democracy

that people accept, but which they cannot influence.

This description greatly resembles the European situation at the moment. The March 2012 issue of Eurobarometer shows a decline in the approval of EU policies implemented in response to the financial crisis. Moreover, those policies, after all, gain approval primarily from better-off social groups, although a downturn was observed from these groups as well. This means that employment policies are not perceived as opportunities to redistribute the burdens of the crisis or to equalise the positions of various social groups, but are seen as measures that benefit the elites. In fact, the discourse on redistribution seems to have been de-legitimised, as policies have been designed to provide incentives to businesses and to create conditions for economic growth, while trickle-down economics are expected to do the rest.

In the last twenty years, these passwords – economic growth, fiscal stability, and support of business – have been major political issues and the drivers of policies in Eastern Europe. The promise was that the market would guarantee fair distribution and welfare would ooze from top to bottom, provided there was economic growth. Actually, the dominance of economic discourse and the market imagination over the political seems to be the most precise description of what has happened in Eastern Europe and of what is currently happening. How much growth do we need? How much market are we in need of? The dominance of economic discourse – with its belief that the invisible hand of the market will solve the problems in a natural way – blocks the social imagination. How can people invent utopias if the social world is managed by natural forces? Should we be surprised that this pro-market discourse has given birth to individuals selfishly staring at their private interests?

At the onset of the financial crisis the Chinese hieroglyph – for both crisis and *opportunity* – was a popular metaphor through which we tried to render meaning to the unexpected collapse. It becomes more and more difficult to think of what is happening as an opportunity. Neither states nor markets appear to be successful in identifying viable solutions

and gaining back the citizens' trust. Today, it seems better to recall Antonio Gramsci, who, in the 1930s, defined crisis as a moment when the old is dying and the new cannot be born. On the one hand, the feeling that we cannot continue as before is shared throughout Europe. On the other hand, although the civil protest movements in recent years have clearly stated 'their indignation', they have not succeeded in formulating their desires, in making political claims, and, so far at least, have not yet conceived any new utopias.

The future rather looks like an insurance policy, a risk we must prevent; it is fears, not dreams, that (pre)determine our actions. And that metaphor contains something more than a fear about the future. Signing an insurance agreement is an individual act – various risks lurk around us, against which we can employ only individual strategies. Being afraid of the future is not the issue; it is that we have desisted from thinking about the future collectively. Mobile individuals have lost the sense of being together; the absent account is the one about the meaning of living in a political community, of feeling connected to strangers – individuals different from ourselves – of being responsible for those who face other types of risk. Our societies have become so individualised and fragmented that they have lost the mystery of the modern social relation, the secret of solidarity with unfamiliar people.

As Pierre Rosanvallon has written, it becomes increasingly harder to find meaning in society. It is for this reason we are in need not simply of a European narrative, but of a new political narrative. When the first European Coal and Steel Community was established, the founding fathers, as we call them now, shared one hope: that the common economic interests and practices would naturally result in a functioning democracy at the supra-national level. Today, we can observe that the very concept of political unification is in crisis; instead of coming to life in a natural way, political Europe has become a matter of risk and active commitment. We now need to invent collective political narratives that will unite globally mobile people to create a common future so that we can enjoy the world we shall live in tomorrow.

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No New DIN-norm, Please:

Narrating Contemporary European History

*Clearly, collecting European narratives
is not an innocent cultural practice.*

Wolfram Kaiser

No New DIN-norm, Please:

Narrating Contemporary European History

Multiple institutions are currently asking us Europeans to tell them our European stories. They more or less explicitly seek a degree of convergence and consensus in the way we remember, individually and collectively, our past and debate our future. Clearly, collecting European narratives is not an innocent cultural practice. Rather, it is a highly politicised normative practice to bolster – in this case – a particular ‘European’ position in what the sociologist Claus Leggewie has recently called the European ‘battlefield of memory’.

The search for European narratives appears to be motivated by two contemporary experiences. First, globalisation has created many opportunities, but also socio-economic losers who are harking back to an apparently better past. In an attempt to capitalise on the desire to feel emotionally secure through the collective memory of such a better past, populist right-wing political parties in particular propagate the resurrection of national master-narratives. More transnationally connected and socialised elites have rightly criticised these proposals’ underlying romantic notions of the nation which are defined in opposition to others. However, they have to offer other, more inclusive ways of remembering the past without sinking new historical narratives in a sea of globalisation and global history. ‘Europe’ appears to have the potential to serve as a sufficiently inclusive intermediate site for developing such new narratives.

At the same time, the search for European narratives is often also motivated by the desire to strengthen the legitimacy of the European Union (EU). The early European integration process was still characterised by a strong permissive consensus. The citizens of the present-day EU largely agreed that integration was a good thing, but

they were not interested in its supranational politics. Since the debate about the Maastricht Treaty in the early 1990s, however, European integration has become much more contested. The quality of the EU's policies no longer appears sufficient as a source of its popular legitimacy. Apparently, the EU as a polity is also in need of new narratives that could anchor it more than hitherto in a shared understanding of Europe's history and culture.

In the nineteenth century, historians played a key role in devising master-narratives as hegemonic ways of telling stories about the past, to form new nations and to foster state-building. In the words of the British historian Eric Hobsbawm, these historians were "to nationalism what poppy-growers in Pakistan are to heroin-addicts," supplying "the essential raw material for the market." More recently, however, historians have been inclined to deconstruct such national master-narratives. They advocate – with Konrad Jarausch – 'narrative pluralism' and 'narrative tolerance' towards different ways of remembering the past and even, the same events. As these historians refuse to provide authoritative narratives of the past, they are naturally reluctant to devise blueprints for new European master-narratives.

Just as these historians, many cultural institutions like museums now only define the extreme limits of their own narrative tolerance. Within these limits, however, they often consider and present any story as just as valid as any other story of the past. This trend has fed the rapid growth of the eye-witness industry in museums which started with the Holocaust memorials and museums.

Social psychologists and historians using oral history methods have shown that many decades after the events, people have a very blurred vision of the past. They integrate knowledge acquired and stories heard since these events into how they recollect them. It is crucially important to human beings to make their recollections appear coherent and compatible with their contemporary life circumstances and normative preferences. Thus, these testimonies tell us much about the eye-witnesses, but very little about the past.

'Narrative tolerance' in cultural institutions creates two fundamental interlinked issues which most museum curators conveniently ignore. First, the vast majority of visitors still expect the museum to provide them with a reasonably cohesive and intelligible narrative of what happened when. Thus, they are bound to take the accounts of eye-witnesses at face value. Second, as the curators induce, select, and present sections of particular eye-witness accounts using particular representational forms, the eye-witness is in fact another medium for propagating particular narratives while avoiding obviously authoritative statements.

One excellent example of such an attempted exercise of narrative authority drawing upon eye-witness accounts is the exhibition *C'est notre histoire!* which was on show in Brussels in 2007-2008 and in Wroclaw in 2009. To advance an enthusiastically positive and optimistic narrative of post-war European integration and the present-day EU and its future, the curators put 27 eye-witnesses at the core of their exhibition – one per Member State. At the entrance to the exhibition they actually claimed that they could have chosen any other EU citizen to tell the same story about lived European integration.

The exhibition company Tempora has claimed that the combination of testimonies for *C'est notre histoire!* was not guided by any particular rationale. However, most of the 27 testimonies clearly appear to have been neatly selected and arranged so as to cover most of the EU's major objectives and policies. In a similar vein, the European Parliament (EP) Visitors' Centre opened in the autumn of 2011 also uses 27 eye-witnesses to explain the wonderful advantages of EU legislation and the beneficial role of the Parliament in bringing them about.

This particular approach to utilising eye-witnesses for telling stories about the past involves the strategic identification of the overall narrative message; the asking of pre-formulated questions designed to provoke targeted replies; as well as, finally, a suitable technical and representational strategy to support the oral narrative. But this approach to narrating Europe raises two fundamental issues. The first concerns

the obvious strategic manipulation of the resulting narrative message about Europe's contemporary history and the future of the EU. Can such a narrative strategy possibly be credible in the eyes of the beholder, or visitor? The answer to this question is emphatically, no. Visitors sense how hotly contested European integration was, and they definitely know how controversial many issues are in the present-day EU. If the narrative message glosses over such frictions and controversies, it can only contribute to the alienation of citizens from the EU.

But such a glossy narrative message is not only ineffective, it is also not desirable; at least, if cultural institutions like museums really wish to serve, as they should try to do, as an important arena for debate about our understanding of a partly shared past and our preferences for a common future. Indeed, from this perspective it would be their primary purpose to bring out how our understanding of the past still differs, not just across national divides, and how our preferences for the future diverge; this precisely to assist a more strongly transnational deliberation about, and negotiation of, our narratives of the past and our views of the future. It is not the outcome of such a deliberation and negotiation that matters, but the process of engaging European citizens in it.

How then to induce, collect, and represent narratives of Europe? The first option for cultural institutions is to engage citizens in what we might call participative narrating – that is, to motivate them to tell their own stories. Stories collected in this way will be stories of transnational encounters and experiences that will normally have taken place in a predominantly European geographical and social space. Such individual narratives may concern the first holiday outside of one's own country or falling in love with another European national, for example. They may be predominantly positive or negative experiences including hurtful memories of occupation, oppression, and racism.

This form of participative narrating has potential to strengthen our collective memory of transnational and intercultural encounters in Europe. In this way it may well enhance what sociologists call our

civilisational identity as Europeans. Some of these transnational experiences may have been facilitated by legislation and policies of the present-day EU. But the non-strategic participative narrating is unlikely to bring out, let alone emphasise, the political context of European integration. It is, therefore, unlikely that this form of narrating European history as shared history can strengthen our identity as EU citizens.

Narratives of European history designed to strengthen our collective political identity would have to go beyond the participative narrating of individual transnational experiences. To this end, memory entrepreneurs have proposed a variety of negative narratives of the European twentieth century. They always include the Holocaust as a key reference point. But, as Timothy Garton Ash has lucidly observed and sarcastically put it, not all Europeans may be keen to accept an equal share in the responsibility for the extermination of European Jews by Germans (and others) during the National Socialist rule over large parts of Europe, through the Europeanisation of this particular 'German DIN norm' for collective memory. Moreover, narratives of the Holocaust at the core of our collective memory can only remind us of basic norms of decent human behaviour and minimum standards of the rule of law, for example. Such repeated reminders are no doubt important for societies. However, these norms and standards are just as relevant to any other country or region in the world, especially others that have experienced genocides of one kind or another. Memory of the Holocaust definitely cannot be a source of legitimation for the EU and its present-day economic structure, political institutions or policies.

Participative narrating of individual transnational experiences, then, needs to be complemented by a debate about what makes us European. Such open debate could produce narratives of our shared contemporary history which reflect our collective critical understanding of our past and its manifold dark sides; narratives, moreover, which would be characterised by a shared awareness of our internal diversity and fragmentation. Such a discursive construction of European narratives would set them apart from the nineteenth-century foundation myths

and master-narratives. However, such narratives cannot just cultivate the memory of negative reference points and over-emphasise internal difference. Collectively, we need to overcome our post-colonial inhibitions to define more clearly what actually makes us, as Europeans, different from other parts of the world.

EU institutions have developed and propagated all kinds of smaller and larger myths. These narratives often serve particular institutional interests. Instead, we should debate narratives about larger questions about our political and societal organisation in contemporary historical perspective in which the EU would then feature as one key dimension. One of these narratives should evolve around the democratic constitution of Europe and its entities which has always been contested and remains fragile. Crucially, this is not, and must not be told as, a story from Aristotle to Barroso. It would have to address the deficiencies and weakness of European democracy past and present as much as its fundamental strengths, such as the recognition and protection of human rights and the transnational institutionalised negotiation of ideas and interests in the present-day EU. Nevertheless, such a narrative would remind us of core values that unite us; it would also enable us to propagate these norms and institutional solutions more confidently than the post-colonial value-neutral recognition of cultural difference might tolerate, which only induces contempt for an apparently soulless European society.

A second narrative could evolve around our understanding of the relationship between individual rights and enterprise and social solidarity and cohesion. Within Europe, we have been largely united by the search for a third way between a liberal market system and a communist planned economy. This search is also linked to contested issues of European integration and EU politics. But despite different traditions and preferences within Europe, we nevertheless share similar ideas and have joint policies on social and welfare issues when compared to the United States or China, for example. Crucially, only this external comparison with other parts of the world can help us develop

reflexive narratives of our own – relative – unity.

Cultural institutions like museums can tell such stories in different ways. They may well use the narrative of the so-called founding fathers, for example. But let us not proceed to the sacralisation of their political deeds. After all, Robert Schuman voted for Marshall Pétain in 1940 and Konrad Adenauer toyed with the idea of allowing Spain under Franco to accede to the present-day EU – behaviour and preferences that museums should discuss critically and not keep silent about, let alone condone in order to create a new European mythology utilising the same methods as nineteenth-century nationalists. Instead, such narratives should bring out how these politicians engaged in negotiating their different views on joint challenges such as the future of democracy in the Cold War or of social cohesion in the reconstruction of post-war Europe, and how in the end they arrived at common decisions and sometimes even, shared positions. They did so in the highly institutionalised political framework of the present-day EU which greatly facilitates the transnational experiences to be recorded in participative narrating processes. Moreover, despite legitimate criticism, it actually contributes a great deal to making our continent such a wonderful place to live.

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Migrants Moving History:

European Narratives of Diversity

*What role do immigrants play in the
construction of historical narratives
within a uniting Europe?*

Rainer Ohliger

Migrants Moving History:

European Narratives of Diversity

What role do immigrants play in the construction of historical narratives within a uniting Europe? Can the cultural diversity spurred by immigration be included in new European narratives of diversity? What would such broadened historical pictures look like? Such general questions lay behind the project *Migrants Moving History: European Narratives of Diversity*; questions triggered not least by the fact that immigration and immigrants in Europe often serve – and have served in the past – as ‘others’ in constructing nationally dominated historical narratives. In these narratives immigrants are not yet seen as an essential part of Europe or its nations; rather, they serve as entities against which excluding and exclusive collective narratives and identities are forged.

The project *Migrants Moving History: European Narratives of Diversity* tried to challenge this rather linear and one-dimensional assumption and identify some possibilities for more inclusive European counter-narratives. Immigrant voices, immigrant stories, and migration history became the starting point for this process. The project itself was launched in 2008 by Network Migration in Europe (Berlin) and enjoyed the support of the German Hauptstadtkulturfonds. The main ambition of the team was to document the narratives of various European ‘immigrant intellectuals’, writers and film-makers, in interviews lasting around two hours each.¹ Twelve individuals living in ten major European

¹ The following artists were interviewed: In Amsterdam, Fouad Laroui (writer); in Athens, Gazmend Kapllani and Petros Markaris (both writers); in Berlin, Wladimir Kaminer and Emine Sevgi Özdamar (both writers); in Istanbul, Annie Geelmuyden Pertan (art director and film-maker); in London, Sarjit Bains (film-maker); in Luxembourg and Paris, Jean Portante (writer); in

cities were interviewed. These interviews formed the basis for a dialogue centred on the interrelation of history, migration, and diversity in Europe. The film footage was condensed into a 23-minute documentary, with an accompanying website making available a broader array of film material.² Thus, the film material created a diverse narrative mosaic and established a virtual European dialogue, echoing crucial European voices on history and diversity.

Mosaics of Belonging – Towards New Identities

In the more recent research on identity formation in culturally diverse societies, it is argued that hybridity – the mixture of identities and a contextual or situative approach towards questions of belonging – is on the rise. Individuals as well as groups increasingly meander between various forms of belonging that overlap and intersect. Identity is no longer conceived in the singular; instead, plural and pluralistic conceptions are gaining momentum. In Europe this pluralisation of identities is due not least to the fact that immigration reshaped Western European societies, making them ethnically and culturally diverse and thus questioning the nation-state paradigm of a single clearly-bound national identity. The statements, reflections, and narratives of the interviewees provide ample evidence of this seminal shift, and of the redefinition of spatial and social belonging in contemporary Europe.

Jean Portante, a Paris-based writer who was born in Italy and raised in Luxembourg, reflected on the transitional state of immigrants by pointing to the experiences of his parents and the interrelated family mythology: “My mother did not give up her plans of return,” he said. “For

Madrid, Basel Ramses Labib (film-maker); in Oslo, Nefise Özkal Lorentzen (film-maker) and Michael Konupek (writer); in Warsaw, Steffen Möller (writer and comedian). Nine of these artists are immigrants themselves, and three were born into immigrant families.

² The film and other extracts of the interviews are available on the project’s website: www.migrants-moving-history.org.

her, it became something mythical, mythological. She settled in the definite interim, while my father had long settled in the interim definiteness.” This example of early post-war labour immigrants sheds light on the fact that the process of social inclusion – or its lack – exercised a lasting impact on the self-perceptions and individual positions of immigrants. Ambiguities and ambivalences of belonging emerged. Although the narrative of home and return was kept up, the practice of settling down produced a new state of being in-between definite and interim belonging.

Portante’s Turkish-German colleague, the writer and actress Emine Özdamar, elaborated on this state of transition by drawing an analogy: “Sometimes you think that you have to choose one country and its language or the other. It’s as if you are stuck between your husband and a lover. You keep thinking you have to make a decision. [...] They say, when you’re somewhere strange you lose your native language or that you’re in-between two places.” However, her personal experiences provide evidence that it did not turn into a question of either-or: “Well, you don’t have to be in-between two places, you can be in both. I realised about myself that I am in both places.”

The experience of being and living in several worlds simultaneously featured in many statements. The German-born writer and comedian Steffen Möller, who commutes between Warsaw and Berlin, put it as follows: “I’m neither a Pole nor a German. I am a ‘betweenner’. That’s what I call myself. The English would call it an ‘in-betweenner’, I think. [...] My home these days is the Eurocity train between Berlin and Warsaw. I usually sit in the train restaurant with all the other betweenners. We are people who always make comparisons. We’re people who have a train in our heads that continuously goes from East to West.”

Life in two countries and languages offers double or even multiple identities. The Greek-Albanian writer Gazmend Kapllani stated: “As I live in two languages, as I have lived in two countries, my life can be divided almost exactly in two; I think that I participate in both identities.” The author argued that this dual perspective and double state of

belonging creates a benefit for his intellectual work, as it makes him see things differently: “Of course, immigration gives me great freedom of movement as a writer and as a journalist. It is the telescope, the keyhole through which I can see the outside world.” Portante even argued that this position results in something more than just being in two worlds: “You are becoming something new, you are neither this nor that. [...] We have another point of view, another perspective on things when we are not entirely submerged in them.”

According to the Czech-Norwegian writer Michael Konupek, “It is not only the transitional situation – leaving one country and settling in another – but this transitional feeling remains a key theme of your life because it becomes a spiritual condition.” The Istanbul-born, Turkish-Greek-Norwegian film-maker Annie Geelmuyden Pertan sees this state as the basis for her having become European: “I am what? I’m really nothing. I don’t belong anywhere. I’m half Norwegian – I only lived in Norway seven years of my life. I’m half Greek – I live in Turkey. That’s why I said I don’t belong anywhere. I’m a European citizen, let’s say.” All of which goes to show that immigrants could be at the forefront of ‘building Europe’: supposedly marginal positions and perspectives could form the basis of a newly emerging Europe based on diversity. As Möller claimed: “I think migrants are the avant-garde of Europe. [...] And I think this is the future.” The British-Indian film-maker Sarjit Bains portrays immigrants’ trajectories as a European dream analogous to the American dream: “I’m sure there’s a European dream for immigrants, and a lot of immigrants have achieved that European dream.”

Although all those interviewed argued in favour of immigration and the positive influence it had exercised on their own work and lives by shaping new and multiple perspectives and identities, they were aware of the challenges and problems. Bains illustrated this point by citing the British example: “Britain feels very scared of immigration. You know, they feel that at any time we’re going to be overthrown by thousands of people, and that kind of hasn’t changed.” The Istanbul-born, Greek-Armenian writer Petros Markaris argued that incorporating diversity

into European society is a pressing challenge for a European cultural policy: “The Europeans have to be open enough to say that what we have now has been achieved by the participation of others, of immigrants. But it’s not enough if they accept it openly; they have to integrate it culturally.” However, there are serious challenges to be overcome, particularly by the non-immigrant or majority populations. “No majority, let’s say, tends to accept multiculturalism. [...] In general, people love uniformity. They love compact things. And they look at the Other as a crack in that uniformity. And they do not want cracks.”

An open-minded and diverse cultural policy, it was argued, could help to create an inclusive environment that would make Europe safe for immigration and cultural diversity. Yet it is not only culture that matters, but also politics in general, and citizenship politics in particular. The exclusive politics of naturalisation and citizenship no longer match Europe’s reality. Both the Russian-German writer Wladimir Kaminer and Özdamar suggested that citizenship policies need to be reformed to make Europe fit for its current and future diversity. Kaminer portrayed his ideal of citizenship in a fairly ironic mode: “My political vision would be multiple citizenship. You could have several states to choose from without having to move, without emigrating. States would function like service providers, like telephone companies.”

Özdamar also set her hopes on multiple citizenship as a solution to problems of exclusion: “Well, I always said: ‘You need 18 passports. Two are not enough.’ You never know who did what to whom in history or will do so in future. That’s why we should have a passport report in the morning, right after the weather report, where to go with which passport today. It would be wonderful. When a Frenchman travels to Algeria, say, he could do that with his Dutch or his Turkish passport. It would be a wonderful solution.”

Bringing Migration into the Historical Equation

Europe's political and historical discourse about belonging and migration is not least a discourse about historical and narrative inclusion and exclusion. The dominant, victorious form for constructing belonging used to be the homogeneous nation as a strong force for building collective cohesion. The nation-state acted as its legal and political tool and national history as legitimising narratives. Nation-states formed national identities based on national narratives. Nation, nation-state, and national narratives have developed into interdependent forces ever since the late 18th century, when nations and nation-states emerged as the ruling political categories in Europe. Minorities, whether ethnic or immigrant, usually served to demarcate lines of exclusion. However, the triadic nexus of nation, nation-state, and national narratives came increasingly under attack in the second half of the 20th century, coinciding with increasing levels of migration. Labour migration, humanitarian migration, and migration related to decolonisation re-shaped Europe's ethno-demographic fabric, its constituency and thus its polity. Diversification became an ever increasing, albeit controversial, social and political force in Europe. This social and cultural reality of diversity and hybridity is currently about to generate new historical narratives.

Immigration is an omnipresent phenomenon of human history. There is no history without mobility and migration. "Migration is the history of mankind," argued Kaminer. "It is something that always goes on, because people continually migrate, travel throughout the world. It is this movement which makes the earth keep rotating." Regarding the European case, Portante stated: "Of course, all of European history is made up of departures and arrivals. It does not exist without that." However, mainstream narratives do not portray things like this, as Markaris argued: "There has always been immigration. It's not anything new. However, I think we look at it as if it was new, but it's not." What is still missing is the normality of recognising and tackling this fact not

only politically, but also historically. Instead of narrative inclusiveness, the phenomenon of ‘othering’ immigrants and labelling them collectively as strangers dominates the public discourse. In the case of Great Britain, Bains observed: “If it’s not the Jamaicans or if it’s not the Indians, now it’s the Eastern Europeans.”

European history and contemporary practices provide rich evidence of how exclusionary practices are continuously perpetuated. Portante argued that we have to look back to the 1950s to understand these patterns and mechanisms of exclusion: “The Italians were not welcome – they were like the Arabs in today’s France, like the Turks in today’s Germany, the Romanians in Italy.” Breaking through these patterns means bringing history into the equation, as Kapllani remarked: “From some point onwards, Europe will deal successfully with immigration, but it won’t deal successfully with it if [Europeans] deny the history of immigration, if they don’t see it as an integral part of their own history.” Markaris made a strong plea for a common European effort to achieve this goal: “Maybe we could sit down and say and discuss: ‘How do we bring our diversity, how do we bring our different experiences together to create a common experience and common politics?’ It needs discussion. It needs an open discussion, then working through the results.”

Not surprisingly, the interviewees argued in favour of creating inclusive European narratives that would incorporate the immigrant experience. Doing so would involve more than just telling the history of migration as a separate chapter and adding it to national history. It goes far beyond this, and points to new forms of history that would intersect with various levels of existing narratives, linking migration to the past experiences of Europeans, and seeking to uncover the universal messages these experiences can convey. Fouad Laroui argued that the historical narratives of immigrants, as well as non-immigrant Europeans, need to be put into a communicative framework. A fertile ground for such cross-communication could be the history of migrations, both overseas and within Europe. The Spanish-Egyptian

film-maker Basel Ramses Labib illustrated this idea in relation to Spain: “An intersection of history and immigration is to make an analysis or films or research about similar experiences of Spaniards who left Spain and went to Germany, France or Switzerland, in order to work during the 1950s and the 1960s, and the immigrants who currently come to work in Spain [or Europe].” Laroui went even further, suggesting that the historical experiences of migration be universalised: “We should immediately ask ourselves the universal question, that question of what kind of humanity is in immigration. It’s only then that we can see the extraordinary richness of this experience.”

Does European history need to be enlarged by experiences of immigration to make the continent a better, fairer, and more inclusive place? The respondents overwhelmingly agreed that it does. However, there were also some critical remarks warning that the very status of ‘being an immigrant’ should not eternally be prolonged and thus petrified. History should not place and keep people in small commemorative boxes. It is worth remembering Laroui’s somewhat ironic comment: “We are only immigrants in the eyes of others. I do not see myself as an immigrant when I wake up in the morning. When I shave in front of the mirror, I do not see an immigrant. I see myself.”

Rainer Ohliger is co-founder and board member of the Network Migration in Europe. Ohliger’s main field of expertise is historical and international migration, (public) representation of migrants and minorities, and interethnic relations. Among his publications are *European Encounters: Migrants, Migration and European Societies since 1945*, Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003 (co-edited with Karen Schönwälder and Triadafilos Triadafilopoulos); and *Cross Over Geschichte: Historisches Bewusstsein Jugendlicher in der Einwanderungsgesellschaft*, Hamburg: edition Körber, 2009 (co-edited with Viola Georgi).

Stories that Matter

Whether Europe is a reality that we cannot avoid, or whether Europe already no longer exists: the urgency of the discussion hardly seems to permit a middle course that transcends this antithesis.

Niña Weijers

Stories that Matter

Every time the Romanian author György Dragomán crosses a border within Europe he is beset by a sense of disbelief: How can it be this simple? The reality of his youth – in Romania under the repressive communist regime of Ceaușescu – where it seemed impossible that the Iron Curtain would ever fall, is still stronger than the current reality, in which the Iron Curtain has actually fallen. This conveys something of the inexplicability of great upheavals in history, but it also says something about the physical presence of history in our present – in this instance so physical that the present is perceived almost as a fiction. “We may not be strong enough to live in the present,” the American author Saul Bellow once wrote. He has a point here: our present is characterised by a constant glancing backward and looking ahead. At the same time the ‘now’ is all we have, and escape is not an option even if we wish for it. When Dragomán travels across Europe and is astounded by the relativity of the national frontiers, he is confronted with this very field of tension, this crossroads of past and future, where the present – in all its complexity – is always the only option.

If a Europe appears on the horizon, then which Europe is it and to whom does it belong? In the spring of 2011, the European Cultural Foundation (ECF) and the SPUI25 academic-cultural centre invited ten authors and thinkers from Europe and beyond to talk about this. The question was posed at a moment when the Greek government still had Papandreou at its helm, Berlusconi was still sitting more or less firmly in the saddle, and the survival of the Euro (and the EU, for that matter) was not the urgent question it has now become.

In the current debate, it is the economy by which Europe’s degree of unity or division is measured, and not so very undeservedly. This debate

seems to be characterised by a division between Europhiles and Eurosceptics. Whether Europe is a reality that we cannot avoid, or whether Europe already no longer exists: the urgency of the discussion hardly seems to permit a middle course that transcends this antithesis. And that when right now it is useful, if not necessary, to challenge that discrepancy, which usually arises as an absolute. Polarisation is simplification, and thus dangerous. The invited authors already concurred about this six months ago. The following presents a selection from their musings.

Being European

A true European, the Danish author Jens Christian Grøndahl observed, is someone who has absolutely no desire to be a European. If Europe does not speak to us because we hold the view that we would rather possess a national or even a regional identity, then that is a very *European* notion. Even someone who deems Europe too small, too narrow or too myopic in the light of global politics and culture cannot avoid the fact that this idea is very European in nature. Consider phenomena such as democracy and equality before the law: by definition they strive for universality, while at the same time they are inextricably (and characteristically) embedded in European thought. Kant may have dreamt of a global community of free, enlightened individuals, but he simultaneously defined himself as a European *pur sang*.

According to Grøndahl, being European is a paradoxical kind of identity that continuously shifts between the local and the international, the progressive and the conservative, between diversity and homogeneity. Moreover, these variables are themselves ambiguous in nature: in its homogeneity the international can be just as conservative as what we regard as 'old-fashioned' nationalism, whereas a nationalistic refusal by the citizen to be erased by the international market can in fact be indicative of progress. For him, the paradoxical identity which belongs to that being European should not be neutralised.

Indeed it cannot be neutralised, for it is the ambiguity itself which creates the condition of possibility.

In Grøndahl's view, the use of the term 'identity' remains problematic in this context, because it refers to 'being identical to yourself'. It presupposes unity and the belief in essence and, invariably, to remain the same. Yet that is precisely what the ambiguous nature which underpins our being European precludes. There is no shared core that binds us; what we share is sooner a permanent non-sharing, and inherent to that negation is the existence of an opportunity to share something. A shared European identity, no less than a national identity, is a myth. It is a sentimentality rather than a social reality: what we clutch at if the world seems too capricious, too big or too strange, and the future too uncertain.

Grøndahl is by no means alone in calling this kind of myth creation into question. Joep Leerssen, Professor of Modern European Literature at the University of Amsterdam (UvA), spoke about the identity myth which taints the narrative of Europe as well. For Leerssen, in Europe there is a propensity to regard the continent itself as an identity, as something with a will and an agenda: the continent of progress, of the development of science and art, of "man's emergence from his self-imposed immaturity," to quote Kant once more. But a narrative is misleading if the protagonist is something other than an individual. Continents, nations, and societies do indeed have a history, but when something they do not possess is attributed to them – a mind of their own, a personality, intentionality – then that history ends up being confused with something that is strictly individual, strictly human.

The danger that lurks in this myth of a narrative of collective identity corresponds with what Grøndahl outlined earlier: the temptation to define history based on essential characteristics, and thus with essential contradistinctions. In other words, this is the peril of melodrama, which reduces European history to a conflict between modernity, democracy, tolerance, and progress on the one hand, and all their attendant negatives on the other. It is a story based on the contrast (magnified or

otherwise) between good and evil; a story, therefore, that is highly efficient from a rhetorical perspective – populist politics continues to thrive on it – yet allows no leeway for the reality of a complex world full of irreducible ambiguities. For to be fair, the Enlightenment also brought dictatorship, Romanticism fed the nationalistic sentiment, and even the anti-democratic, anti-cosmopolitan regime of the Nazis was imposed using hypermodern means.

Cultural Boundaries

To state that discrepancies within complex narratives are not absolute does not imply that their differences are neutralised. Those who assert that it ultimately does not matter whether you veer left or right (because everything is relative) are actually rendering harmless those concepts such as left, right, progressive, conservative, tolerant, and xenophobic, and can at best be termed cynics. Differences, even if they are temporary rather than definitive in nature, are what makes it possible to talk about Europe at all, to conduct politics, to write novels. The Dutch author Nelleke Noordervliet subscribes to this when she quotes a pronouncement about Europe by the 19th-century Swiss art historian Jacob Burckhardt: “Was uns bedroht ist die Zwangseinheit, was uns rettet ist unsere Vielfalt” (‘What threatens us is the forced unity, what saves us is our diversity’). Noordervliet imagines Europe as a quilt, in which each individual piece retains its own identity in the process of integration into the greater whole.

The Greek author and publisher Takis Theodoropoulos examines the history of that ‘forced unity’ of Europe more closely. He argues that since the 1950s a new Europe has been premised on the idea that nobody wanted to experience a nightmare like the Second World War ever again. The political frontiers were defined by allowing only the nations with a democratic government to join. In addition, the new Europe distanced itself from its colonial past, of which it was ashamed, to cast off its cultural arrogance of yore: ‘the equality of all cultures’

became Europe's new creed. People truly believed that the dust and dirt of the past could be buried, that a brand-new structure would arise from it. According to Theodoropoulos, multiculturalism and tolerance in fact became a cloak for a new form of indifference and even racism, which erased the colonial past.

Nigerian author Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie – the only non-European speaker among those invited – made a similar point. She highlighted the fact that the current European narrative about Africa is a tale of benevolence and aid, a narrative that is almost completely divorced from the colonial past. As if Europe were to acknowledge the past in all its complexity, then Europeans would be held personally responsible for it. According to Adichie, it is remarkable that Europe acknowledges that the period of the Enlightenment still ties in closely with today's institutions and our thinking about the nation-state, while denying that its past in Africa, barely 60 years ago, has any relevant link with the present.

The damage that this policy of effacement has inflicted is, according to Theodoropoulos, now apparent. The new Europe is afraid of cultural frontiers, generally regarding them as a necessary evil, and thus as something which must be overcome. That obviously applies in some cases, such as the Berlin Wall or the Green Line dividing Cyprus that still cuts through Nicosia, but cultural boundaries are necessary, if we want to preserve our European capital. We don't all want to speak the same homogeneous 'airport English', just as we don't want to live in a world where everyone eats the same food, sings the same songs, and dresses identically.

Theodoropoulos regards the desire to eradicate such cultural boundaries as going hand in glove with the wish to forget the less than wonderful aspects of the European past, because we associate this past with the concepts of nationalism and cultural arrogance that leave us with a bitter taste. In effect this mirrors, to return to Leerssen's words, proclivity for melodrama; for a simplified version of the past, in which good and evil are each other's counterpoles and even the evil seems to be ineradicable.

This is a consequence of the increasingly popular assumption that the past is a burden that Europe does not need. It is, Theodoropoulos notes, as if *we* were the ones who invented democracy, or tolerance. Our democracy may well differ considerably from the democracy of the Athens of the 5th century BC, but that is still where its foundations lie. We are, in other words, gradually forgetting that even this institutionalised European phenomenon of democracy started out as an experiment.

Theodoropoulos believes that this presents a major problem. We take too much for granted and hardly ever think beyond what is generally accepted and the security of institutions. Europe has lost its urge to experiment, he concludes, which is an absolutely necessary precondition if we really want to create something. Following in Grøndahl's footsteps, he therefore proposes that we stop talking about European identity, that which already exists and is taken for granted, and instead proceed from an attitude that critically investigates itself and adapts itself continually.

The British author and literature scholar Adam Thirlwell has also subjected Europe's diversity, and the cultural capital that resides within it, to a more probing examination. Proceeding from something that Milan Kundera formulated, he decides that Europe is a continent with 'maximum diversity in minimum space.' It is a model for the high-speed *Internationale* and at the same time a locus of nationalism and xenophobia, offering a glimpse of the 'purest' form of internationality to be found in the European bureaucracy of politics and economics, yet on the other hand the nationalistic prevails in our everyday, personal environment. And then there is something known as 'European culture', that curious supranational history of art, literature, and music. But what does that European culture actually entail, Thirlwell wonders, or, more specifically, the European novel? For him this phrasing of the question mirrors a broader political question: Who does Europe belong to?

Thirlwell argues that the European novel finds itself in a field of

tension. Literature is the art of language and languages are national and specific, and in the great majority of cases literature does not straddle frontiers. Initially that is not consistent with the idea of an international novel, but when that novel is translated it certainly starts to become part of the international. However, the effect of translation not only democratises; it also homogenises and excludes: in European literature (just as in European bureaucracy) the more or less coincidentally triumphant English, French, and German predominate, so that several more minor languages – and authors – remain sorely underexposed.

In a utopian thought experiment, Thirlwell imagines a form of the European novel that remedies the difference between major and minor languages, between the politically powerful and the politically weaker languages. A truly democratic practice of translation, in which translation does not depart from the original but instead involves producing *translations of translations*, resulting in a chain of translations and re-translations that do not proceed from the original (a Spaniard makes a Spanish translation of an English translation of a Polish book, etc.). A kiosk of literature where the ranking of the original work above the translation has no need to exist, given that the translation is no longer a derivative but a new original. A place where the entities ‘centre’ and ‘periphery’ prove to be moveable and therefore relative, rather than fixed quantities. In other words, an imperfect, rough, amateurish, numinous, and essentially democratic approach to the European novel. An opportunity for internationalism without tyranny.

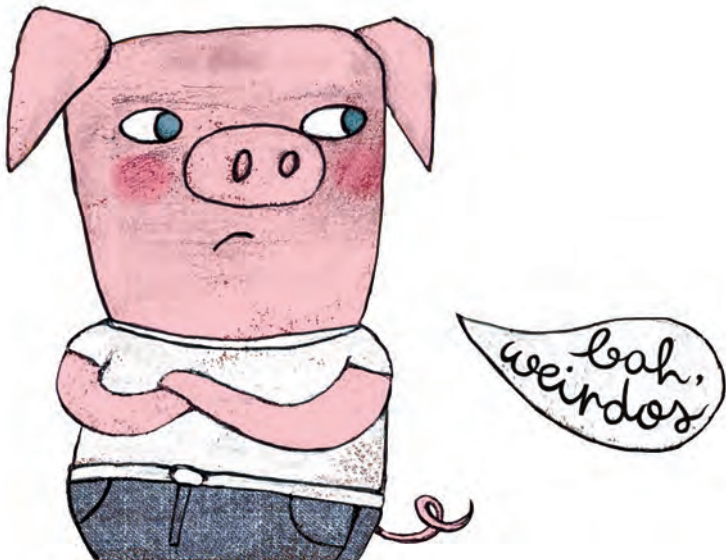
Internationality without tyranny: this is reminiscent of what Grøndahl conceptualised as being European without the static essentialism of identity and of Leerssen’s notion of a European narrative without melodrama. This is what Theodoropoulos meant when he stated that Europe is not an immutable entity but an attitude, and it is Noordervliet’s quilt. It is a mode of thinking that, no matter how divergent the lines of approach, acquires relevance in the field of tension that is Europe and refrains from attempting to neutralise this. Here we have György Dragomán who stands at a European border and crosses it, without forgetting that doing this is in fact an impossibility.

Niña Weijers studied Literature in Amsterdam and Dublin. She published short stories in magazines such as *Passionate* and *De Gids* and contributed to several literary events and festivals. She is currently working on her first novel, which she combines with her job as a programmer for the academic-cultural centre SPUI25. In this function, she helped to organise the series *Narratives for Europe: Stories that Matter*, for which SPUI25 teamed up with ECF.

Osvald's Secret

A small intermezzo showing Osvald creating a patchwork blanket – a fitting symbol of European collective identity as a patchwork of individual narratives.

Maja Veselinovic



Oswald's SECRET

by Maja Veselinovic



WE ALL
HAVE SECRETS...

AND OSWALD
HAS A FEW
AS WELL.
BUT OSWALD
ALSO HAS
A CAP,
KNITTED
AND VERY
SPECIAL
ONE

HE BELIEVES IT'S MAGICAL.



ACCOMPANIED BY HIS BEST
FRIEND KARMEN, AND WITH
A MAGIC CAP ON HIS HEAD,
OSWALD IS ABLE TO KNIT
WHATEVER HE IMAGINES...

Oh Karmen, I'm so
excited! This scarf
is going to be
gorgeous~

Of course
it will



DRIVEN BY CREATIVE
PASSION OSVALD AND KARMEN
FORGET ABOUT TIME...

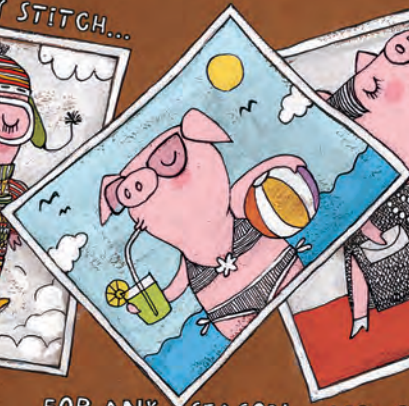
SOMETIMES THEY EVEN START
DANCING
IN THE RHYTHM
OF
KNITTING NEEDLES
JINGLING



LOOP BY LOOP...



STITCH BY STITCH...



THEY CREATE
WONDERFULL THINGS... FOR ANY SEASON... AND OCASSION.

AS A PHOTOGRAPHER, OSVALD
TRAVELS A LOT AND KARMEN
OFTEN FOLLOWS HIM. HOWEVER,
UNDER SOME CIRCUMSTANCES
IT IS IMPOSSIBLE



Sorry dear, I can't
take you to Serbia...
They... well, they like
your kind a bit
too much...

bah,
weirdos



BUT LUCKILY, KARMEN KNOWS HOW TO
ENJOY LONELINESS QUITE NICELY.

SHE DOESN'T NEED
THE MAGICAL
CAP FOR THAT...



OK, MAYBE JUST
A COOKIE OR TWO.
SOME EXTRA ENERGY
COULDN'T HURT...

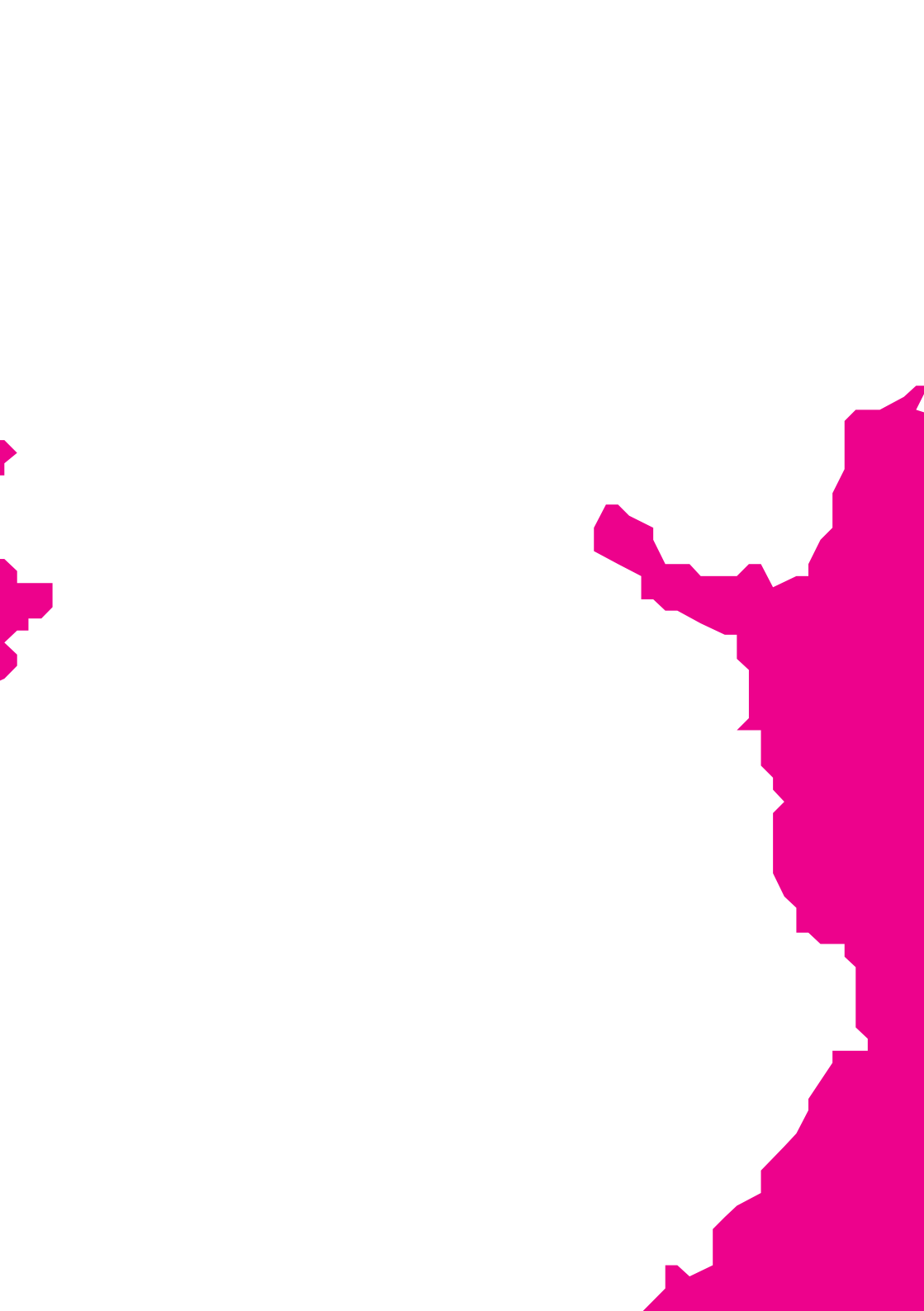


AND
THEN,
LOOP BY
LOOP, STITCH
BY STITCH...
PICTURES ARE
KNITTING
THEMSELVES...

OH, JUST IMAGINE
HOW BEAUTIFUL
DREAMS
WILL BE UNDER
SUCH BLANKET!

the end





The Arts
(of) Making
Narratives



Graphic Narratives of Europe

*My argument here is that graphic
narrative and Europe share a common
spatial imagination.*

Jason Dittmer

Graphic Narratives of Europe

In this short essay I will argue for an emphasis on graphic narrative (e.g., *bande dessinée*, comics, graphic novels, etc.) in future attempts to narrate the European project, either in European Union cultural policy or in private enterprise. I will do so by first noting the particular difficulties of narrating Europe, in particular the historical and linguistic challenges as well as the need to avoid replicating past racisms and exclusions by narrating a plural and outward-facing polity. Following this, I will outline the role of space in graphic narrative, for the purpose of juxtaposing these properties with the way space is imagined within the EU. My argument here is that graphic narrative and Europe share a common spatial imagination. Finally, I identify a few genres of story that reflect particular visions of Europe before offering one, the everyday, as particularly helpful in narrating an outward-facing, understandable Europe.

The Problem

The narrative of Europe in the post-war era has long been one of increasing prosperity and stability, serving as a powerful source of diplomatic 'soft' power and as a unifying identity in the wake of the Cold War. In contrast, the more recent narrative of Europe has been less positive, with the limits of EU expansion putatively reached and fiscal crisis in Europe threatening to drag down the global economic recovery. The narrative has shifted from one of the incorporation of 'new' areas into Europe to one of fragmentation. Schisms among European states, such as those between immigrant-sending and immigrant-receiving states, and between the fiscally sound and those in need of a 'bail-out', threaten to undercut the positive image of Europe both in its Member

States and beyond. The current crisis only highlights the flaw previously perceived by Eurosceptics: a technocratic elitism that sees democracy as a problem to be surmounted rather than as a fundamental source of legitimate power. Given this, the danger is that new attempts to narrate Europe might attempt to tap into exclusionary, monolithic nationalist or racist visions in order to legitimise the European project.

Narratives of Europe have never been easy to produce, at least not unambiguously positive ones. The history of intra-European conflict is well-documented, and in some ways defined the twentieth century. The experience of past hegemony is problematic as a basis for narrative not only because of its racist underpinnings, but also because some parts of Europe (Ireland, Poland, etc.) experienced imperialism through the lens of the colonised rather than as an outward-looking experience. Because of this history, narratives of European commonality have tended towards artistic, philosophical, and scientific achievement, a 'common heritage' of intellectual interchange among the peoples of Europe that may not have much traction with broad swaths of the population.

Attempts to narrate Europe also struggle because of its sheer linguistic diversity (23 official languages at last count). Critics claim that the lack of European-wide media (largely a result of its linguistic diversity) prevents a collective sense of 'us' from emerging. Others argue that this diversity is the only possible way forward, as any attempt at linguistic convergence would cause popular support for the EU to disappear overnight. The Culture 2000 and Media 2007 programmes of the European Commission have attempted to produce a unified cultural space in hopes of fostering this 'us' in the face of continued linguistic diversity.

For instance, the Media 2007 programme has recently contributed to the co-production by Swedish and Danish television producers of a television show called *The Bridge*, which paired a Danish and Swedish detective on a murder case that began with a body found at the midway point of the Øresund/Öresund Bridge that connects the two countries. Importantly, Swedish and Danish are closely related and are mutually

intelligible to some extent. Indeed, one of the in-jokes of the show is the mutual complaining between the Copenhagen and Malmö police departments about pronunciation of common words. The bilingualism of the show, combined with its demonstration of teamwork across national borders, clearly marks the show as representing a common European space. Of course, I watched the show fully subtitled in London, the show having been sold on to the BBC, adding another dimension to the show's credentials as a pop culture artefact circulating through a common European space. Still, such television shows are expensive and dependent on the high degree of regional cohesion characteristic of Scandinavia. Further, such shows can never fully surmount the linguistic diversity of Europe: the humour dependent on knowledge of Swedish/Danish accents was completely lost on viewers viewing with subtitles. How might graphic narrative enter into these efforts to narrate Europe in ways that generate broader enthusiasm for the European project in cost-effective ways?

The Form of Graphic Narrative

There are two elements to the form of graphic narrative that are crucial to my argument: the way it combines images and words into a single medium, and the way it is composed out of a montage of panels. With regard to the former, there are interesting tensions at work in graphic narrative. First, we describe the consumption of graphic narrative as an act of *reading*, although it is clearly as much about *looking* as it is about reading. This is because the images in graphic narrative are juxtaposed with one another in a way that we *read* as a story that unfolds over time. But lest we imagine graphic narrative as simply a text to be read, it is worth considering its nature in another way: while it is possible to imagine graphic narrative with no words at all, it is impossible to imagine one with no images. Rather than trying to resolve this tension one way or another, it is fruitful to set it aside and accept graphic narrative as both image *and* text, with the images carrying much

of the load in the production of a story over time.

If the first element of graphic narrative is how we read it within a single panel (by both reading the text and looking at the image) then the second is about how we make sense of the many panels that confront us on a given page. The space between panels is known as the gutter, and it serves as the signal to a reader that the panels on either side of it are meant to be understood as distinct images. But in what order are panels meant to be 'read'? A simple reading (often signalled by reference to graphic narrative as 'sequential art') would assume that the artist has an order in mind, and it is up to the reader to figure it out using clues left in the comic by the artist. However, to think of graphic narrative this way is to lump it in with other sequential media such as writing and film, treating panels like words or filmic frames. Considering graphic narrative as its own form, however, calls our attention to other ways of thinking about panels.

Panels exist not only in relationship to the panel 'before' and 'after' it, but in what can be called a topology – a set of relationships of varying intensity – produced through the act of reading. For instance, *all* panels ever printed have a basic relationship with one another, namely that they are all panels in graphic narrative. Panels in a single comic book or graphic novel share another relationship: existing in the same material 'book'. Panels on the same page share another relationship, modulated by readers' perceptions that some panels are meant to be following on from other panels. Further, panels have relationships not only with those that precede or follow them but also with others, in the same graphic narrative or further afield, that they reference, ape, satirise, and so on. Therefore, a web of relationships can be traced not only through a single page or comic, but through the entire archive of comics that have ever been published. These relationships may be intended by artists and writers, or not, but they are brought into existence through the act of reading.

Imagining a European Space

What does this have to do with the European project? There are two ways in which graphic narrative connects with the desire of some political elites for culture to suture Europe together. First, because so much of the burden of telling the story is borne by the images, graphic narrative is an excellent medium for circulating among various linguistic communities, with the small amounts of text in speech and thought bubbles digitally erased and new translations inserted. There are of course problems: namely that speech bubbles (for dialogue) are often sized and shaped for the text in the original language, and that sometimes the words are drawn into the image (in, for example, the sign above a store entrance) and therefore cannot be digitally replaced. Still, in comparison to other media, graphic narrative is relatively easy to translate into multiple languages for multiple markets, and there are numerous success stories to emulate, such as Hergé's *Tintin* comics and Jack Chick's evangelical cartoons. Therefore, just as *The Bridge* worked to tell a European story through the exploitation of linguistic similarity in Denmark and Sweden, graphic narrative can work through the exploitation of a language common to all: the visual.

The second way in which graphic narrative connects with the European project draws directly on the EU's conceptualisation of space. The European Spatial Planning and Observation Network (ESPON) is an EU think-tank that seeks to understand spatial patterns in Europe; crucially, however, some understandings of European space are idealised and promoted. ESPON's favoured vision incorporates a range of kinds of space: territorial, scalar, and networked. I will explain each in turn.

The territorial vision of Europe emphasises the borders of the EU, seeing them as a key divide between the inside and outside. This is, perhaps, the most obvious form of European space, and one that is most linked to traditional nation-states (just as comics are neither pure text nor pure image, the EU is neither pure state nor pure international organisation, but a hybrid of both). Another dimension to this spatial

imagination is scalar – emphasising the influence and interests of the EU beyond its borders, as manifest in (for example) the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP). Finally, the networked spatiality links specific places within the EU with other places, both in the EU and beyond. This can be seen, for example, in the way that corporate regulations legislated in Brussels de facto regulate other markets because of the global importance of the European single market.

These three spatialities can be found in my above description of the topology of graphic narrative: one might imagine the space of a single comic as territorial space, while its relationships to all others with the same title, and all others in the same genre, might be understood as scalar relationships. Finally, the relationships of various intensities between various panels might be considered a networked space, sprawling across borders without regard for traditional understandings of territory and sovereignty. Because of this ‘spatial congruence’ between the forms of both graphic narrative and Europe, it makes sense to think of graphic narrative as a medium that embeds within it a mode of thinking about space that might foster a ‘European’ attitude of multiple, simultaneous identities and connections through space.

European Graphic Narrative

Having made this link between graphic narrative and Europe, one question remains: what kind of stories to tell? Being a terrible storyteller, I am loath to speak much on this question. Still, I feel obliged to offer some thoughts which truly creative people should feel free to disregard.

Given the cultural moment in which we live, in which American superheroes fill the cinema, it would be tempting to adapt the largely American superhero genre to our purposes by creating a European nationalist superhero whose adventures might adorn our graphic narrative. This would be a mistake. The nationalist superhero has, as a genre, struggled to speak to the plural nature of any nation, and in the case of Europe this is of the greatest importance. If such a path is to be

trodden, it would be better to follow in the model of *Alpha Flight* and *The 99*, two superhero comics that are about a team coming together, allowing for diversity and respect to emerge organically from the storyline (the teams are Canadian and Muslim, respectively). Still, the nationalist superhero genre's conventions articulate a particular relationship between legitimacy and violence that is troubling, especially in light of the aims and objectives of the European project.

Instead, I would offer the suggestion that a European form of graphic narrative should follow different generic conventions, particularly those associated with the analysis of everyday life. Graphic narrative about everyday life has emerged as a significant genre, emphasising not only ordinary events (rather than extraordinary events 'worthy' of narration), but also the haziness of cause and effect, as well as the boredom and 'spaces between' significant events. This may seem a strange choice for a European narrative, but it has several advantages. First, by portraying 'everyday' European lives, it is possible to show Europe in a comprehensible and non-heroic light to which others (including non-Europeans) can relate. Therefore it gestures towards inclusion rather than exclusion. These points of connection between lives in various European (and non-European) sites can be portrayed through the topological space of the page itself; just as the connections to any given panel are multiple and heterogeneous, so are the connections to any European life.

Conclusions

In this brief essay I have argued for graphic narrative as a medium especially suited to the production of new European narratives. My argument has hinged on the hybrid nature of graphic narrative as both text and image, and on the topological relationships among both the panels of a graphic narrative as well as the various sites and nodes of European space. Such congruence may seem too abstract to be useful. But the reading of graphic narrative necessitates the bridging of gutters

and the creation of a coherent entity out of a fragmented space. Isn't this what the European project is ultimately about? Inculcating such habits among Europeans must advance the European project, and doing so amongst non-Europeans can help to promote European influence abroad. This openness to the outside world is a crucial element of any new European narrative, and to that end I have offered up narratives of everyday life as a genre worthy of promotion. Rather than tales of heroism that remind readers of past imperialism, European everyday life (including its connections to non-European lives) might serve as a powerful attractor around which new European politics can emerge.

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Museums in Movement?

Mobilities and Migration
in Current Exhibitions in Europe

*Museums have also always been
places where ideas about the future are
presented if not generated.*

Kerstin Poehls

Museums in Movement?

Mobilities and Migration in Current Exhibitions in Europe

Migrants on their way to Europe and crossing the Southern and Eastern EU borders have been the focus of EU policy-makers and the EU border control agency FRONTEX, of NGOs, international media, and public spheres for quite some years. Each person arriving on a Mediterranean island – be it Lampedusa or Lesbos – has his or her individual story to tell about the reasons for moving. Simultaneously there is a geopolitical context that brings unsolved questions of citizenship, human rights, and belonging to the fore. Currently, and in addition to that, not only Greek observers consider the current crisis as a catalyst of human movement comparable to the vast waves of emigration that characterised Europe during the 19th century. Migration inside the EU and beyond co-exists with other significant forms of mobility such as the ‘Easy-Jet-Set’ and long-distance commuting due to wage differentials and diverging legislation inside the EU. Mobility is simply everywhere around us: as a fundamental condition of life, as a global phenomenon that policies attempt to ‘manage’, and as an ideal that influences ideas of ‘successful’ cosmopolitan biographies.

How is this reflected in one of the most immobile but nonetheless influential cultural institutions Europe has produced – namely the museum? More and more museums all over Europe and inside the EU in particular are discovering migration as a topic for exhibitions. A number of museums on migration have been founded or are meant to be established since the end of the twentieth century in France, the United Kingdom, Germany, Scandinavia and elsewhere. How and why is this phenomenon being showcased in temporary exhibitions? Temporary exhibitions are expected to be more courageous than permanent ones when it comes to a provocative thesis or metaphor. They may set trends,

new ways of thinking about society – and provoke productive disturbances. Although national politics and histories vary, these exhibitions have a role to play within a pan-European debate on European societies' relation to migration.

Migration is a topic accompanied by so many – in part mutually exclusive – expectations that criticism from one side or the other is guaranteed; it also challenges traditional principles of the museum that link objects to places. Therefore, temporary migration exhibitions do already influence work behind the scenes of museums.

Blurring Effects, Objects, and the Circularity of Europeanisation

The topic of migration challenges the ways in which museums have traditionally operated. Firstly, migration as an exhibition topic blurs the imagined nation-states and consequently Europe. Today people, ideas, goods, but also conflicts evolve and move transnationally – we might find this so encompassing and normal that we take it for granted. And yet, the nation-state is still a powerful actor beyond the surface of everyday life, something which the reintroduction of national border controls by some countries inside the EU and the Schengen area in 2011/12 reminds us of. This retrogressive move shows the political interest in regulating migration at a time marked by both an economic crisis and an ever increasing number of immigrants and transit migrants, especially from Northern Africa, crossing the outside borders of the Schengen area. What we see around creates a (potentially enriching) confusion for the museum, an institution invented precisely to help construct the nation as a meaningful point of reference and as a category to organise the world.

Secondly, the way in which migration questions the nation can be observed in the ways objects are selected for museum showcases. Collections are most frequently organised in a way that links objects to a geographical place. This invites both comparisons over time and

comparisons between two or more places – but also veils movements across borders that might be equally characteristic of those objects. Objects without a genuine geographical place do not easily fit into such traditional collection systems, and it is through them that we find the hidden norms of collection systems.

In contrast to traditional questions – ‘Where was this thing invented, produced, used?’ – other aspects become relevant and justify its inclusion in a display: ‘What does this thing tell us about ideas on the move, about human beings, knowledge or conflicts in movement?’ The shift that is indicated by such questions highlights the changing role of objects. Does migration steer museums towards employing objects as symbols rather than as epistemic objects – things provoke new questions? Mobility makes it more difficult to place objects and to fit them into traditional collection systems.

These two aspects consequently lead to a more general, third, dimension: not only the nation as the historical paradigm of the museum is challenged, but also the place and space that a certain museum and its displays relate to, be it the city, the region, the nation or Europe. If mobility and migration are in focus, these seemingly well-defined entities are undermined or ask at least for redefinition under new auspices. There probably is not just one answer to the question what the EU and Europe are, but many – and these answers are both provisional and entail even further questions. Isn’t that an ideal ground for temporary exhibitions? Together with museums of migration, they navigate in this contested field of Europeanisation, and they do so along with political parties and activists, scientists from various disciplines, media and public opinion. Because of its European omnipresence, debates about migration reveal Europeans’ self-understanding. In this sense, migration exhibitions do indeed demand experimental approaches, both in aesthetics and narratives. Those may set their imprint on what we see in future museums.

Inside the museal field, the debate on how, where, why, and for whom museums of migration should be founded revolves around

objects, and specifically objects that have been donated by migrants or their families. These objects do often carry along some melancholy – something that creates difficulties for curators with a more theoretical approach who do not attempt to highlight the aura of an object, but rather see their exhibition as a political statement. For some curators, objects should provoke a kind of dialogue with the beholder, resulting in further questions rather than definite answers. It is hardly surprising that the material qualities of the ‘classic’ themselves hardly turn it into an object generating further questioning. The suitcase is used so frequently that it has turned into heavy luggage in itself and for some curators of migration exhibitions it has become a half-joking game to observe how and where suitcases have been included in the next upcoming display of migration (visitor research on this aspect is still outstanding).

Museums in Movement

‘Everyone’ within the museal world suddenly seems to put migration on display. In the UK, archives and museums jointly work for a more ‘inclusive’ approach towards cultural heritage; in Germany, the local museums of history in Frankfurt and Stuttgart are being completely reconceptualised; the same applies to the city archive and museum in Munich. Museums in Scandinavia, in the Balkans, and in Greece are also turning their attention towards mobility. What are the reasons behind this phenomenon? Are they just pragmatic? Is it the search for new funding or for cooperation that is leading museums to focus on migration? Or is the aim to attract new, significantly younger and more diverse audiences? All of these aspects are of importance for the current focus on migration in museums. The degree to which this is the case depends on the urban (or rural) context of the respective museums and on how much the museums are dependent on external funding and cooperation for their survival.

Migration is a buzzword, and hardly any cultural institution in

Europe that seeks funding on the regional, national or EU level – be it in the field of performing or fine arts – can be successful without hinting at the migration dimension of the specific project or the impact on intercultural dialogue of its general activity. This trend is both to be welcomed and very general. However, the increasing presence and explicit mentioning of migration in museal displays also indicates some more fundamental changes that transcend the area of funding or cooperation contracts. Specifically, there seems to be a need to make the relation between a preserved past inside the museum and complex realities outside the museum more explicit, and focusing on migration is apparently an appropriate way to do this.

Exactly the other way around, political activists, for example, use travelling exhibitions as a means to present their ideas to a broader audience – making use of the strengths of the medium ‘exhibition’ and its seemingly ‘detached’ nimbus. Thus, the open-air exhibition *Traces from Lesbos through Europe* that was held in the Migration Detention Centre at Paganí on the island of Lesbos, for instance, presented individual migrants with their dreams and plans for the future. The exhibition was anything but neutral or detached from political discourse.

Migration as a ‘hot’ topic object that involves various political views and thus implicates ongoing discussions might not force all museums to begin raising their voices in a debate about Europe and its societies, but it might very well strengthen the need for a clear and recognisable position that a museal institution takes in the discourse on migration. In line with MIGMAP – to give one example from the influential exhibition *Projekt Migration* in Cologne in 2005 – this means that museums might be asked to convert their hidden, traditional worldview into an explicit political position.

Maybe this is a farewell to the usual “dissociation, classification, storage, acquisition of meaning” (Henrietta Lidchi), i.e. the process traditionally applied to things on their way into the museum? The initial dissociation of things usually meant either spatial or temporal distance

from their origins. This is not applicable for our topic: neither time nor space separates migration and its objects from the European reality in 2012. Quite on the contrary, exhibitions on migration reflect how the museal space opens up to current political debates that are anything but 'dissociated'. Firstly, exhibitions have often functioned as an "outpost in the vast land of exemplification" (Walter Benjamin) – that is, a place where ongoing debates crystallise in a three-dimensional way. This is particularly the case with exhibitions on migration in Europe.

Secondly, museums have also always been places where ideas about the future are presented if not generated. This holds especially true for our context: migration is a core field of EU politics, it represents a substantial challenge for any traditional understanding of nation-states, and it is certainly a phenomenon that brings questions of settledness and naturalisation, of identification and the impossibility of a singular European identity to the fore. These fundamental aspects were usually veiled behind the semblance of universalism and the way in which museums historically meant to represent the world in an 'objective' manner: they presented themselves as detached from ongoing political debates, commenting maybe from a distanced position outside. The museums and exhibitions we have seen, however, have moved away from this position: they are not outside, but – whether this is intended or not – in the very middle of a political process. In this sense, exhibitions on migration reflect how the process of musealisation is today accompanied by a more explicit demand of self-reflection and self-positioning that museal institutions are provoked to undertake by the public, the media, funding institutions, other exhibitions that have been successful in one way or the other, and by political debate. Some current exhibitions reflect how a self-reflexive and budding version of cosmopolitanism that is closely linked to the concept of transnationalism is slowly but surely being incorporated into exhibitions: Europeanness.

Exhibitions on Migration tell Several Stories at Once

Generated both from within and from discourses outside the museal field, exhibitions on migration question notions of objectivity or of European universalism. In doing so, they show how various public spheres and discourses interact, and thus encourage museums to play a more central role in the ongoing self-reflection of European societies.

Exhibitions on migration tell several stories at once: firstly, they present stories of migration in a certain city, region or nation, and within a particular period of time. To a greater degree than other topics, migration unveils the constructed character of geographic or political entities such as the nation or the EU. It shows how, hidden below the norm of settledness, mobilities are and have always been omnipresent in and fundamental for European societies.

Secondly, exhibitions on migration add a new chapter to the meta-narrative of museums: implicitly, they challenge the relevance of the nation. More specifically, they challenge both the historical idea that initiated the invention of the public museum and the political fundament of European integration today. They provoke questions of contemporary globalisation phenomena that are equally implicitly put on display. The consequent effect is a blurring, or 'un-writing' (Irit Rogoff) of the concept of the nation-state.

Finally, migration as a museal topic conveys a view on how the institution 'museum' relates to such a fuzzy thing as mobility, and it leads to a number of aspects that deserve the attention of both museum professionals and researchers. The underlying question – 'What is being put on display, by whom, for whom, and for telling what kind of story?' – may sound banal and commonplace, but answering it means to take up a position towards history and today's political discourse.

Thus, exhibitions on migration contribute to a larger extent than other exhibitions to a meta-debate on the current role of museums in Western societies. They do so by contesting the predominant role commonly attributed to objects. Here, it will be interesting to see how

collection systems can be extended towards a greater attention for mobility. Finally, yet importantly, exhibitions on migration more often than not explicitly address future developments in society instead of reflecting primarily on the past. They do so by relating migration to urban developments as well as by placing (metaphorically speaking) national and European political discourses inside the showcase.

Despite varying contexts, there are some traits that are common for many exhibitions. Their sometimes veiled, sometimes explicit gaze into the future has always characterised museums – here, it becomes explicit. It will be interesting to see how this will affect the museum as an institution embedded in urban space, in Europe, and yet aware of global phenomena.

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Re-drawing the Art Map of 'New Europe'

*The battle of the narratives for Europe
is still being fought on all fronts. As
marginal as it may seem in the grand
scheme of things, art history makes no
exception.*

Svetla Kazalarska

Re-drawing the Art Map of 'New Europe'

If you were asked who your favourite Eastern European artist of our times was, would you be able to name any?¹ It would not surprise me if you could not. Contemporary Eastern European art was until recently virtually non-existent on the art map of Europe, which is yet another, even if less critical, side-effect of the Cold War's ideological divisions. The battle of the narratives for Europe, however, is still being fought on all fronts. As marginal as it may seem in the grand scheme of things, art history makes no exception. Narratives about the visual arts of Europe's former East have thus been proliferating since 1989. On the one hand, Central and Eastern European art evokes the historical turbulences this part of Europe has gone through; on the other, its history has been largely shaped by the region's political history. How have art curators dealt with this predicament? What narrative strategies have they employed in presenting the artistic production of the former East to the rest of the world? And, how have these strategies re-shaped the art map of 'united' post-Cold War Europe?

The most immediate response of curators exhibiting modern and contemporary art from Central and Eastern Europe after the fall of the Berlin Wall was to try to accommodate it into the master narrative of Western art history, mostly by emphasising similarities and parallel artistic developments. One such exhibition was *Europa, Europa* (1994), curated by Ryszard Stanislawski and Christoph Brockhaus in Bonn. This exhibition, as art historian Piotr Piotrowski (2009, 19) points out,

¹ This essay draws on the findings of a research project ("Contemporary art as *ars memoriae*: Artistic and curatorial practices of facing the ghosts of the past in post-communist Europe") that I carried out as a Körber Junior Visiting Fellow at the Institute for Human Sciences in Vienna from January to June 2007.

“subjected the art of Eastern Europe to an inspection of the West, an inspection that used its own language and its own value system as the criteria of significance and excellence.” It is in view of this love-hate relationship of the East with the West that Eastern European cultures are often described as ‘self-colonising’, i.e. cultures which “import alien values and models of civilisation by themselves and [...] lovingly colonize their own authenticity through these foreign models”.² Such critical awareness of the ‘dangers’ of self-colonisation often guides the work of Eastern European curators, as many exhibition concepts reveal.

What one may call ‘post-colonialist’ curatorial narratives are narratives which critically examine the implications of the imagined ‘colonisation’ of the East by the West in terms of both culture and economy. Such narratives are passionately engaged in questioning the positions of the centre and its peripheries, the mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion, construction of otherness, and the negotiation of geopolitical hierarchies and boundaries. Take, for example, the theme of the inaugural First Prague Biennial (2003) – *Peripheries Become the Center* – which clearly demonstrates the emancipatory standpoint taken by its curators. It is also in this context that exhibitions such as the *Last East European Show* (2003) at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Belgrade, or terms such as the ‘former West’, coined by Igor Zabel (and presently serving as the title of a long-term research and exhibition project, run by BAK, Utrecht), came into being.

In order to legitimise themselves, post-colonialist curatorial narratives resort to different claims. Most often these are art-historical claims challenging the postulates of Western art theory and re-establishing Eastern European art’s status. The arguments abound: tracing the historical origins of avant-garde back to the East; questioning the exceptionality of Western modernism by introducing the notion of parallel modernisms in the East and in the West; highlighting concurrent developments of conceptual art in the East and the West; emphasising

² Kiossev 1999, 114.

the similarities between American pop art and Soviet 'sots art'; examining links and contacts of second avant-garde Eastern European artists with neo-avant-garde Western movements, such as *Fluxus* and *Wiener Aktionismus*; rehabilitating socialist realist art as a legitimate successor of the early avant-garde, etc. *Dream Factory Communism* (2003) at Schirn Kunsthalle, Frankfurt, curated by Boris Groys, was particularly influential in endorsing the idea of continuity between Russian historical avant-garde, socialist realism, and sots art.

Other post-colonialist curatorial narratives refer to the East's 'underdevelopment' as resulting from its totalitarian experience, viewed as an act of historical injustice bestowed upon it. Such apologetic claims may be spotted in the use of tropes such as 'severed avant-gardes', 'interrupted' or 'impossible histories', etc. in the titles and concepts of many exhibitions. A revealing example is *Living Art – On the Edge of Europe* (2006) – an exhibition at the Kröller-Müller Museum in the Netherlands, which aimed to restore 'justice' to the previously marginalised Eastern European artists, no less deserving of recognition than their Western counterparts, by granting them access to and centre stage on the international art scene, and perhaps more importantly, market.

In fact, the cumbersome situation of Eastern European artists under the totalitarian regime is often highlighted by curators. Even if such 'heroic' narratives are found in Western and Eastern contexts alike, they appear to be much more common in the United States, where many Soviet dissident artists emigrated in the 1980s, and where several substantial private collections of 'non-conformist' art from the former Soviet republics are housed. One of the largest collections of this kind, *Norton and Nancy Dodge Collection* at the Zimmerli Art Museum in New Brunswick, N.J., takes pride in embodying "the purest rationale for the creation of art: the struggle for freedom of self-expression in spite of – and in defiance of – a repressive government".³ Heroic narratives thus attach an aura of martyrdom to Eastern artists, portraying them as

³ Dodge/Rosenfeld 1995, 7.

'heroes' in the struggle for freedom of self-expression – unquestionably a major factor in the development of modern art.

Another curatorial strategy for overcoming the pitfalls of the post-colonialist rhetoric is to focus on local contexts instead. Such 'contextualising' narratives insist on the incomparability between the artistic processes on both sides of the Iron Curtain and underline the diversity and specificity of Central and Eastern European art in terms of content and context of production (and let's not forget, distribution), even if less so in terms of art form. Some exhibit the artistic practices in culturally and historically distinctive regions such as Central Europe, the Balkans, the Baltics, and the countries of the former Yugoslav Federation. The Balkans, for example, conceived as "the most radical and illustrative theme of Eastern European otherness",⁴ appeared as the focus of three internationally acclaimed curatorial projects – Harold Szeemann's *Blood and Honey: Future's in the Balkans*, Rene Block's *In the Gorges of the Balkans: A Report*, and Peter Weibel's *In Search of Balkania*, all three of them taking place at about the same time in Austria and Germany in 2002 and 2003.

Contextualising narratives produce country-specific art-historical taxonomies and periodisations, taking into account local artistic traditions along with the political events which affected the individual countries and the differences in the repressive regimes and their politics in the field of culture. Curator and art historian Elona Lubyte, for instance, used the metaphor 'quiet modernism' to describe the nature of artistic processes in Soviet Lithuania in the 1960s-1980s. In the same vein, contextualising narratives attempt to break down clear-cut dichotomies by pointing out their relativity. Some curators discuss the ambiguity of the distinction between 'official' art and 'unofficial' art, and introduce in-between categories, such as semi-official art or semi-non-conformist art. Furthermore, they allude to the compromises that both official and unofficial artists were compelled to make in their work and everyday life.

⁴ Peraica 2006, 473.

The most productive strategy for situating contemporary Eastern European art on the art map of 'New Europe', however, has to do with the efforts made for its historicisation and institutionalisation. The sheer number of collections, archives, galleries, museums, art biennials, journals, and research institutes dealing with the late socialist and post-socialist art of Central and Eastern Europe has noticeably increased in recent years. The most evident outcome is the establishment of what one may discern as an Eastern European contemporary art canon – a solid number of artists and works appearing repeatedly in larger exhibitions.

When talking about historicising Eastern European art, it is impossible not to mention *East Art Map* – an ongoing project, initiated by the Slovenian artists' group Irwin in 2001, which paradoxically turned the task of 'mapping' the art of Europe's former East into an art project itself. Given the lack of an art-historical referential system for artworks and artists in Eastern Europe, the aim of *East Art Map*, as its authors assert, is "to present art from the whole space of Eastern Europe, taking artists out of their national frameworks and presenting them in a unified scheme."⁵

Another noteworthy project is the *Interrupted Histories* exhibition (2006) at Moderna Galerija, Ljubljana, which challenged the West's domination in establishing the internationally valid art-historical canon. The artists and groups invited to participate in the show acted as archivists, curators, historians, anthropologists, and ethnologists at the same time. The purpose of these self-historicising strategies, however, was "not to establish yet another collective narrative such as the Western world is familiar with."⁶ As the curator of the show, Zdenka Badovinac (2006, 11), remarks, "these artists are not interested in creating a new big history, but are rather interested in the conditions that sustain the tension between small and temporary histories and

⁵ Irwin 2006, 12.

⁶ Badovinac 2006, 11.

what is defined as big history.” The very principle of constructing ‘grand narratives’ is at stake here.

The establishment of specialised collections of modern and contemporary artworks from Central and Eastern Europe has played a critical historicising and institutionalising role, since collections have a much more lasting impact on art history than single exhibitions. *Kontakt. The Art Collection of Erste Bank Group*, set up in 2004, is indisputably one of the most ambitious collecting endeavours in this realm. Interestingly, the rationale behind *Kontakt*’s collecting strategy combines post-colonialist (“reformulating art history and thus questioning the Western European canon of art”), contextualising (“to develop a collection with a sound art-historical and conceptual basis that deals with artistic positions rooted in a specific location and context”⁸), and Europeanising (“to present works that play a decisive role in the formation of a common and unified European art history”⁹) intentions.

ArtEast 2000+ Collection, whose beginnings go back to the 1990s, pursues similar goals. The initiative, however, does not come from a financial group in the West, but from an art museum in the East – Moderna Galerija in Ljubljana. With the opening of the Museum of Contemporary Art Metelkova in Ljubljana in November 2011, the *ArtEast 2000+* collection found itself a permanent home – moreover, a certain chapter in the historicisation of modern and contemporary Eastern European art seems to have come to a close.

Unsurprisingly, the European integration process and the two waves of European Union enlargement in 2004 and 2007 gave rise to projects showcasing the art and culture of the new Member States. An unprecedented number of exhibitions on the so-called New Europe (usually initiated and supported by various European institutions) employed a specific curatorial narrative emphasising the role of art and

⁷ Marte 2009, 87.

⁸ Seidl n.d.

⁹ Seidl n.d.

culture in bridging the differences between the two parts of Europe, culturally and politically divided during the Cold War. Building bridges, crossing borders, and tearing down walls appeared as central metaphors in the curatorial statements of these 'Europeanisation' exhibitions. Whereas most of them underscored the diversity of artistic processes in Europe across space and time, they also insisted on the idea of Europe having a cultural and political identity of its own, as the title of the exhibition © *EUROPE EXISTS* (2003) in Thessaloniki most unequivocally asserted. The oftentimes irreconcilable claims of the curators about aesthetic heterogeneity and homogeneity, independence and interdependence, specificity and yet exemplarity, simply reiterated the formula 'united in diversity' and thus reproduced the major predicament of European cultural identity narratives as a whole.

One might take the exhibition *Passage Europe: A Certain Look at Central and East European Art* (2004) at the Museum of Modern Art in Saint-Étienne as an example. Its curator, Lorand Hegyi, situated the exhibition in the context of the new chances, hopes, and expectations for rebuilding the broken historical ties between the various European cultural centres, opened up by the EU enlargement. The exhibition highlighted the role of artists in the process of re-opening and re-establishing of the 'connecting passages' of Europe – metaphorical meeting places where artists, writers, philosophers, architects, film and theatre experts, and musicians exchange intellectual ideas and cultural messages. In fact, many 'Europeanisation' exhibitions seem to be placing great hopes in the potential for transcendence and transformation that creative work and contemporary art practices hold. Whereas contemporary art's unmatched power of subversion and deconstruction comes in very handy when it comes to addressing the controversial nature of post-Wall Europe's identities, it is still doubtful whether it has the potential for constructing new ones.

In the end, curatorial aspirations for a critical, comparative and transnational examination of local artistic processes in the former Eastern Bloc, along with their stylistic variations and mutations, viewed

in the context of diverging historical processes, political circumstances, and external influences, may well undermine any narrative structure. The bottom-line, however, is simple: it is complicated.

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Scenarios about Europe: Beyond the Status Quo

*Art's capacity to understand, with
empathy, other cultures and ways of
thinking can allow us to contemplate
a future that would otherwise be
unimaginable.*

Wietske Maas

Scenarios about Europe: Beyond the Status Quo

Scenarios about Europe is a European collaborative project involving artists, curators, and organisations – a look at how artistic narratives can stimulate a revitalised thinking about Europe. It resulted in a series of three exhibitions shown in Leipzig's Museum of Contemporary Art (Galerie für Zeitgenössische Kunst – GfZK) from September 2011 through to March 2012. The project's conceptual approach understands Europe as a geographic space of cultural profusion and contradiction. *Scenarios about Europe* is not a defence of Europe as a unified, conclusive identity, but rather a dislodging – affected by art's energisingly different gaze and sensibility – of such anchored conceptions.

Under the direction of Barbara Steiner, a group of ten international curators were entrusted with the task of curating one artistic scenario per exhibition, each time working with different artists. The series of 30 scenarios (three scenarios per curator) involved collaboration between different artistic practices, communities and publics, generations, and cultural contexts. The scenarios do not neatly fit together, but are more like a medley of fabrics, a quilt that shows both the provincial patches and metropolitan seams of this multiple thing called Europe. Between them, the scenarios form new relationships between particular narratives and urgently needed alternatives to clichéd conceptions of European identity.

For each exhibition, the curators were allocated one zone in the museum's new building, GfZK-2. It was left up to them to decide whether to feature a project by one or several artists. At the time of writing, the 30 scenarios were the first cursory plots; a study for a bigger project entitled *Europe (to the power of) n* will be transferred in 2012-2013 to the contexts of the project's partner cities within and outside the European Union – for instance, Brussels, Istanbul, London, Łódź, Minsk,

Novi Sad, Høvikodden/Oslo, Donostia, San Sebastián, and Beijing. These cities were chosen mainly for their ‘dislocation’ from the official narrative of EU-Europe. What exactly will happen in the translation between the scenarios and their realisations in the lively, gritty realities of each city remains to be seen. This moment of translation from the blueprint exhibition trilogy in Leipzig to dispersed European and extra-European metropolises will, in a best-case scenario, generate fertile resonances between intention and reality, between a particular view of Europe and the capacity of art to probe a different scenario, one that does not shy away from the dilemmas and complexities of Europe as a figure of thought.

The sheer immensity of the scenarios will not allow a write-up that includes all 30. Instead, I have chosen to zoom in on three curatorial narratives of three curators spanning the three exhibitions. The first is Belgian curator Filip Luyckx, who selected artists that draw an image of a future European society in which biological and cultural hybridity is taken for granted. The second is Spanish-Basque curator Peio Aguirre, who invited artists whose work is sensitive to a regional or local environment in response to the homogenising forces of an overarching national identity or free-market ideology. The third is Belarusian curator Lena Prents, who invited artists from her home country to explore the debates and realities of Belarusian/European identities in a country whose most influential curator is the state.¹

A Cosmopolitan Gene Pool

Europe is essentially made up of its inhabitants, people who live across a geographical expanse, from inside the rim of the Arctic Circle to the Mediterranean coastlines. As Filip Luyckx remarked, “The future of the continent lies in the talents and weaknesses of all individuals and

¹ Prents, L. 2012, ‘Representation and Context’, in: B. Steiner (ed.), *The Scenario-Book*, Berlin, 182.

communities together”² – and also in the way they are able to cooperate with one another across natural and cultural archipelagos. Luyckx sees that this is precisely where the creative possibility in forming a European identity lies: not by becoming like one another, but by looking at the continual movement of people and the interchange of cultures as the *a priori* condition of the continent. Only if we step back from the microcosms of our own cultures and timescales can we see that the story of Europe is one of cosmopolitan flux between genes and cultures over the course of millennia.

This cosmopolitan ideal is incarnated in Belgian artist Koen Vanmechelen’s scenario, which is based on his long-term *Cosmopolitan Chicken Project* (CC®P 1999-2010),³ which explores questions of genetic and cultural diversity using the chicken and the egg as artistic tools. In collaboration with a leading geneticist, Vanmechelen has been crossbreeding ‘purebred’ chickens from around the world. The project highlights how humans, in domesticating animals over thousands of years, have developed a strong bio-cultural relation with their pets and livestock. The animal is a cultural product. Although purebred poultry such as the Red Jersey Giant and the Poulet de Bresse are renowned for their gustatory qualities, they are also mascots of national identity. To sabotage these fabricated genetic borders, Vanmechelen started crossbreeding the Flemish Mechelse koekoek with the French Poulet de bresse to create the Mechelse bresse. The Mechelse bresse was later cross-bred with the English redcap to create the Mechelse redcap, and so on.

These hybrid ‘super bastard’ chickens undermine concepts of cultural and racial purity, acknowledging instead the biological strength of genetic diversity. Moreover, Vanmechelen’s new lineage of mongrelised

² Luyckx, F. 2012, ‘The Critical Fundamentals of Europe’, in: B. Steiner (ed.), *The Scenario-Book*, Berlin, 170.

³ CC®P – abbreviation of the project’s name: *Cosmopolitan Chicken Project*. Needless to say, the ‘®’ stands for registered trademark.

chickens creates an archetype chicken which is an apt analogy of the complexity inherent in our global condition: each of our own lives forms part of a much longer story that has been shaped by thousands of years of bio-cultural mixing, a story when told back far enough transgresses cultural and ethnic binaries. The CC@P project thus becomes a simile for Europe, which cannot put any exclusive claim on any singular cultural or genetic heritage. Europe itself never was and never will be a sealed-off ethnic unity, but rather a deeply entrenched story of mass migration. We are all entangled within a history of genetic exchange that exceeds the boundaries of any region, nation or even continent.

Inside the gallery space are fourteen chicken portraits assembled like a royal family tree. These are the portraits of the CC@P bastard chickens that stem from the Mechelse koekoek and the Poulet de bresse. On looking at the portraits we see that the artist has kept the Mechelse strain in each generation of cross-breeding. It is no coincidence that he chose the Mechelse chicken. The artist's name has an affinity with the Mechelse koekoek that sardonically mocks the certificate of authenticity of being Mechelse, of coming from Mechelen, Belgium. A more critical reading, however, is that the experiment ends up reinforcing the artist's own identity as a Flemish man who compares himself with every other nationality and ethnicity, one that redefines and re-centres the Eurocentric subject.

Another chicken-and-egg quandary raised by CC@P is that the experiment not only connotes but also follows the same logic as genetic breeding programmes. The different sub-species of chickens which Vanmechelen cultivates would not necessarily reproduce of their own choosing. The 'genetic freedom' in this regard is scripted by the human, not the animal. The artist has transformed the chicken into an allegorical chicken, manufacturing life according to a predetermined albeit aesthetic rationale. Vanmechelen even registers the project with a trademark – CC@P – which stamps the chicken as an owned, potentially commercial product licensed to a genetic and artistic research venture, rather than as a free form of life. Arguably, the artist

could have been using this trademark symbol ironically; nevertheless, this use of the bio-industry's genetic manufacture, modification, and ownership is too ambiguous to stand as a critical repudiation of the industry. But Vanmechelen is himself aware of the unpredictability of genetic behaviour and the attempt to pursue a breeding programme of any sort: "Manipulation never is without risks. The egg hides a mysterious entity, whose essence is still hidden for us. Possibly positive, but maybe destructive. Genes never listen. Its freedom can mean rapture or capture."⁴

Life itself is nothing but migration, and our genes have the capacity to transcend any border, whether political, economic, cultural or social. As a European narrative, the *genetic freedom* scenario speaks about the borderless circulation of genetic exchange that defines all of our lives – nature is larger and ultimately more formidable than our cultural constructs. *Genetic freedom* compels us to see that borders of nations and cultures are but fictions created in our own heads. The bottom line is that we, like the chickens staring before us, are all hybrids in a larger evolutionary story. Alongside this evolutionary story, we need ambivalent rather than determining voices of culture to enable us to fathom hybridity as a natural part of life.

Keeping the Patchwork of Diverse Urban Fabrics

Europe as a mosaic of peoples and communities in conflict is the motif of Peio Aguirre's curatorial plot. Each artist chosen by Aguirre examines how local environments or expressions of atypical local identity challenge an archetypical image of selfhood and belonging perpetrated by nationalist sentiment or by the homogenising force of economic power.

For *Scenario 2*, Annika Eriksson was invited to produce *Wir bleiben* (2011), a film-installation about a house on the verge of gentrification in

⁴ Koen Vanmechelen, quoted in the accompanying wall text.

Mitte, a central district of former East Berlin. This building, in which the artist herself had lived for ten years, is now largely vacated. When the residents found out that they were to be evicted by the company that bought the building, Eriksson decided to return to her former home to make a homage to the house and her ex-neighbours' silent fight to stay put.

Wir bleiben ('We're staying') interlaces the narratives of the four remaining residents through a video installation which provides an intimate window onto the domestic environments of the tenants' apartments. An empty hallway; an unadorned room; the close-up detail of chipped paint on the doorframe; the characteristic floorboards (*Dielen*) of a Berliner *Altbau*. The static frames of the house's interior give a sense of having walked over an invisible threshold into a layered space where the material details – windows, corridors, rooms – and immaterial memories of the residents are differentiated and multiplied.

Together, the stories of the remaining tenants form a soundtrack, a defiant murmur against the widespread erasure of the public housing sector and any political debate around the right to social housing. *Wir bleiben* shows us how our lives are continuously moulded by the structures in which we live – by the physical shape of the homes in which we dwell, but, moreover, by the global economic culture which ultimately determines how and where we live. The Mitte building thus becomes a monument to the struggle that is taking place inside and against a cityscape which is incrementally denying the right of individuals of different class backgrounds to be participant citizens.

Ultimately, this scenario raises the question: What will happen to the life of city centres if people from different scales of the social spectrum cannot participate in them? Will the new frontiers of profit reduce the commingling of city lives till we end up with (and in) a uniform zone of corporate speculation? Although Eriksson's portrait of the house and its inhabitants is a localised story, it also alludes to the much larger story of how Europe has valued the European market over and above its people.

Wir bleiben is an artistic narrative that causes us to pause and consider the myriad identities that contribute to the larger culture of the city. It gives the tenants a symbolic value, not through any explicit form of activism, but by making their passive occupation and the personal testimonies that constitute the city, any European city, visible.

Europe Inside Out

Europe is a continent of changing contours. Its geographic territory is the subject of constant dispute. Recently a claim was made that the waters of a small lake bearing the name of Sho in north-east Belarus is the geographic mid-point of Europe. This ostensible 'centre' does not, however, accord with Belarus's fraught relations with Europe, which involve permanent political negotiations. For *Scenarios about Europe*, curator Lena Prents invited three artists from Belarus who deal with narratives of a country that is geographically inside yet democratically outside Europe. Marina Naprushkina (*Scenario 1*), Aleksander Komarov (*Scenario 2*), and Jura Shust (*Scenario 3*) depict the equivocal relationships between language and identity, democracy and dictatorship, and Belarus and Europe. In their own ways, the artists explore an outside view of Belarus and of Europe, one that is not defined by the autocratic state.

Naprushkina's *Wealth for All* opens up a disturbing view on the contradiction between empty rhetoric, exemplified by the utterances of her home country's authoritarian regime, and the reality of everyday life. Unfulfilled political promises to improve Belarusian society are reproduced by the artist in the form of large printed advertising images on tarpaulin sheets that are normally used to cover the facades of buildings in Minsk. These giant images show the finished results of impressive projects such as the national library, shopping malls, and memorials. Yet under these pixellated plastic veneers the unfinished buildings remain in a state of suspended construction, frozen between the wiles of a beautiful dream and the reality of an empty ideological exertion. Accompanying the tarpaulin facades are video portraits of

several Minsk residents who recite verbatim the speeches of German politicians (Angela Merkel, Guido Westerwelle, Oskar Lafontaine) translated into Belarusian. The phrases of linguistic sophistry – such as the title ‘Wealth for All’, which was Gregor Gysi’s electoral slogan – are political mantras divorced from the everyday, fervently undemocratic and unattainable reality experienced by Belarusian citizens.

In his film *Language Lessons*, Komarov asked Belarusian intellectuals to reflect on the complex history of the native Belarusian language, including its status and use as a form of resistance since the early years of *Perestroika*. His film recounts the fable of the foundation of Minsk, according to which the city was named after a miller who ground granite which was then baked into bread and distributed among the people. This fable becomes a metaphor for the whole of Belarusian history and culture in which solid culture (that which is familiar) is perpetually ground and milled. Komarov’s film is punctuated by fragments of a heroic Soviet stone sculpture, but instead of capturing the total sculpture as a super-human tableau, the artist concentrates on the everyday people it depicts, removing them from their stylisation and presenting them in relation to the protagonists of his film. The shards of stone sculpture and the distributed stone flour in the legend correspond with Belarus’s real-life scenario of a shared language understood by everyone having been subject to intensive political transformation and thus never becoming fully formed.

Shust’s *Euro Windows* also deals with the fragmented translation of ideals into actualities. The poster-sized graphics are stark black-and-white drawings that depict issues around the ‘Europeanisation of Belarus’. The artist’s ‘windows’ view Europe as an ambiguous construction which oscillates between democratic human ideals and commercial branding. For example, Belarus’s national symbol of a flying white stork weather vane is illustrated within a glass bell, thereby becoming an image of both freedom and confinement. The label ‘Europe’ is a hallmark of consumer products, associated with free choice; however, equating consumerism with freedom leads to a contradiction

in terms, given that Europe's continued trade with Belarus finances President Lukashenko's repressive state apparatus. Moreover, consumerism for its own sake is itself a questionable objective, since unrestricted economisation in all social areas has spawned Europe's own crisis of economic and social solidarity.

Conclusion

All in all, *Scenarios about Europe* is a diligent search for artistic interpolations that confront us with difficult questions about Europe's immense diversity. The most telling scenarios offer an engaging hypothesis regarding the complex and contradictory realities of Europe, provoking a sense of Europe beyond the anaesthetising effects of 'financialisation', nationalism, and out-of-touch political programmes. Yet it is clear that the presentation and realisation of an individual scenario is not enough; rather, the value is accumulative, making worthwhile the time spent constructing this vast multifarious stage for postulated storytelling. It is a stage for exploration – of thinking about Europe in terms of potential values and community, and how these could be extended beyond the purposes of a singular ideological story.

A narrative that reflects the lived realities of its participants requires a genuine process of active engagement and reinvention by and between different voices. *Scenarios about Europe*, and subsequently *Europe (to the power of n)*, has taken an intrepid step by summoning artists, curators, and respective partners to spend years together building this common yet changing stage through which the participants can enact stories, thoughts, and actions without demarcating a monolithic direction. Art's capacity to understand, with empathy, other cultures and ways of thinking can allow us to contemplate a future that would otherwise be unimaginable. Yet it is also the very process of making such an exhibition and the wider context of interactions between people, places, and pasts occurring 'behind the scenes' which build the necessary structure for artists and creative thinkers to contribute to a shared

narrative for Europe.

This *modus operandi* creates a dynamic collaborative space in which we can encounter one another's sensibilities, values, doubts, and quests – a common affectivity, which is precisely what is missing in the growing gap between Europe and its 'people'. *Scenarios about Europe* presents a complex challenge to the established perceptions of Europe's history, offering entry points into a changing European space which plays a modest rather than a dominant part in a globalised world. In setting the scene for such artistic scenario-thinking, the project reminds us that it is the prospect of a longer-term collective process that, over time, stitches together new sensibilities for perceiving, thinking and enacting Europe differently.

Wietske Maas is an independent artist researching urban food ecologies. She works for the European Cultural Foundation as creative producer of its annual Princess Margriet Award.

Spengler Complex

Europe



*Osvald takes a walk in the suburbs
of a European city and thinks about
urban decay and the end of civilisation.*

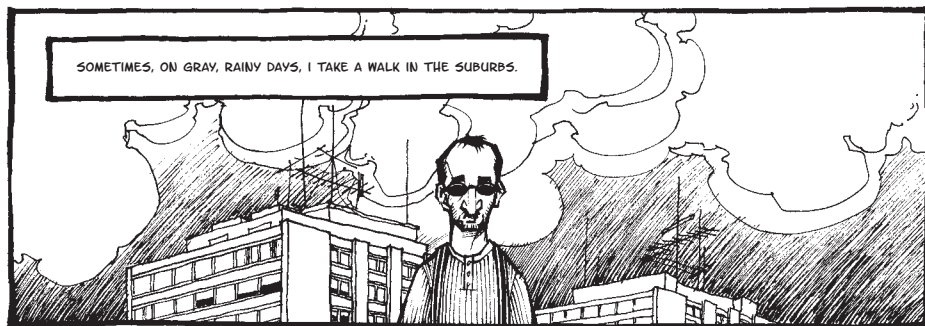
Thijs van Nimwegen and
Tomas Kucerovsky

COMIXIADÉ PRESENTS: OSVALD

THE SPENCER COMPLEX

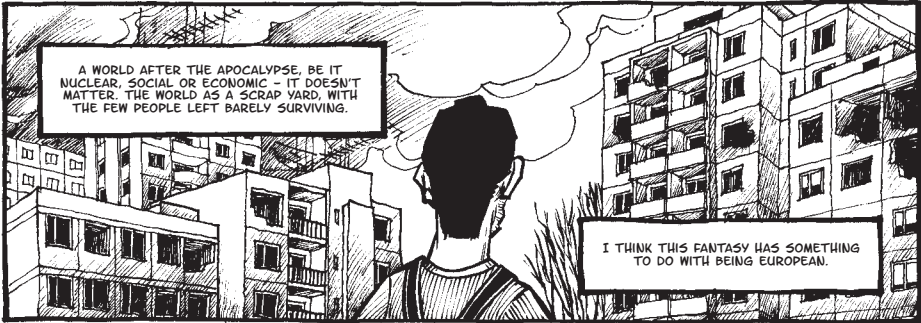
STORY: THijs VAN NIMWEGEN

ART: TOMÁŠ KUČEROVSKÝ



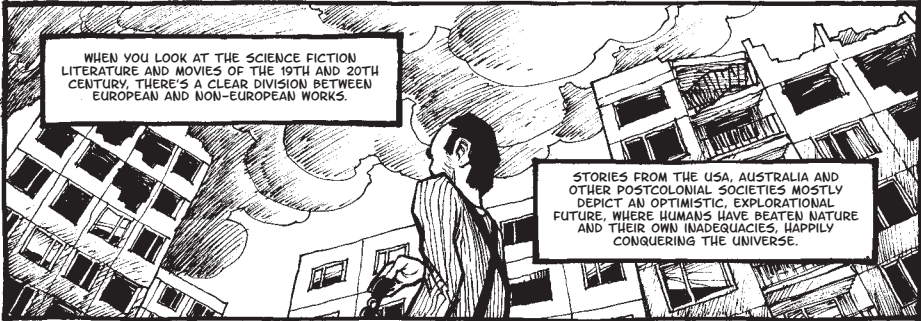


I IMAGINE THIS IS NOT A SLUM. I IMAGINE THE WHOLE WORLD IS LIKE THIS.



A WORLD AFTER THE APOCALYPSE, BE IT NUCLEAR, SOCIAL OR ECONOMIC - IT DOESN'T MATTER. THE WORLD AS A SCRAP YARD, WITH THE FEW PEOPLE LEFT BARELY SURVIVING.

I THINK THIS FANTASY HAS SOMETHING TO DO WITH BEING EUROPEAN.

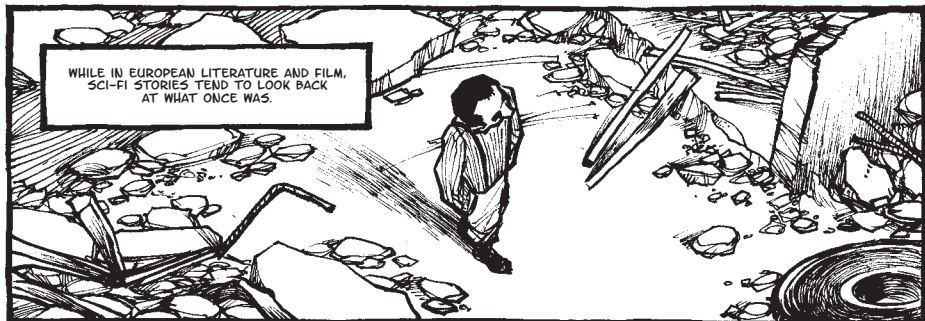


WHEN YOU LOOK AT THE SCIENCE FICTION LITERATURE AND MOVIES OF THE 19TH AND 20TH CENTURY, THERE'S A CLEAR DIVISION BETWEEN EUROPEAN AND NON-EUROPEAN WORKS.

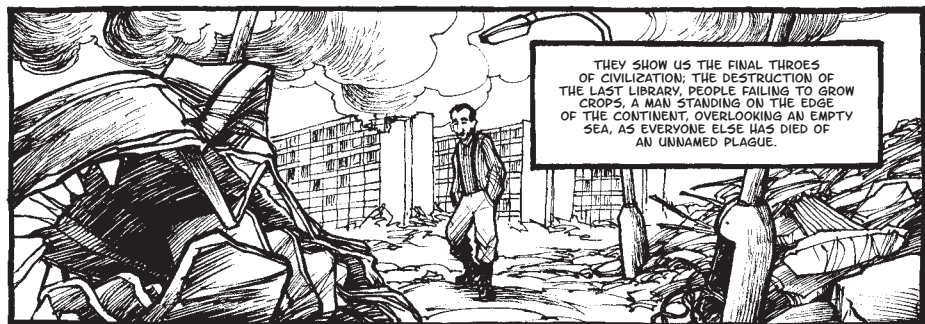
STORIES FROM THE USA, AUSTRALIA AND OTHER POSTCOLONIAL SOCIETIES MOSTLY DEPICT AN OPTIMISTIC, EXPLORATIONAL FUTURE, WHERE HUMANS HAVE BEATEN NATURE AND THEIR OWN INADEQUACIES, HAPPILY CONQUERING THE UNIVERSE.



IF THEY SHOW US A POST-APOCALYPTICAL WORLD, IT'S ONE WHERE THE PROTAGONIST IS A REBUILDER: THE FIRST NEW AIRPLANE, RESTORING THE POSTAL SERVICE, REDISCOVERING OLD KNOWLEDGE.



WHILE IN EUROPEAN LITERATURE AND FILM, SCI-FI STORIES TEND TO LOOK BACK AT WHAT ONCE WAS.



THEY SHOW US THE FINAL THROES OF CIVILIZATION; THE DESTRUCTION OF THE LAST LIBRARY; PEOPLE FAILING TO GROW CROPS, A MAN STANDING ON THE EDGE OF THE CONTINENT, OVERLOOKING AN EMPTY SEA, AS EVERYONE ELSE HAS DIED OF AN UNNAMED PLAGUE.



IT'S HUXLEY VERSUS ORWELL, RODDENBERRY VERSUS SHELLEY, OSWALD SPENGLER MAY HAVE SUMMED UP THIS EUROPEAN FIXATION ON DEATH INSTEAD OF REBIRTH THE BEST.



I WILL LEAVE THE EXPLANATION OF THIS SPENGLER-COMPLEX TO THE MASS PSYCHOLOGISTS.

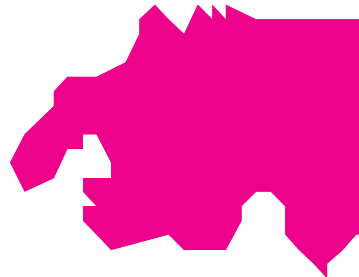
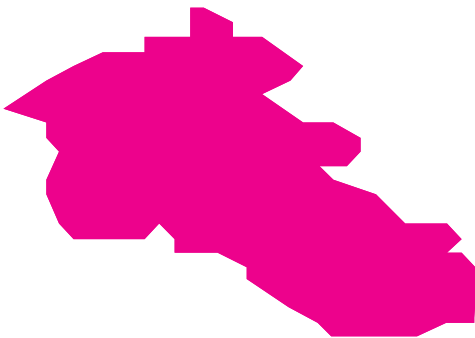
AS FOR ME, I DEFINITELY GET A MASOCHISTIC THRILL OUT OF THIS LITTLE FANTASY.







Through the Looking Glass



The Dwarfing of Europe Revisited

*In other words, we can only perceive
Europe as 'home' if we form an image
of a new 'abroad'.*

Paul Scheffer

The Dwarfing of Europe Revisited

Everything has become so unpredictable that nobody seems to remember what the world looked like a short time ago. For many years the euro was celebrated as the crowning glory of integration, but over the last few years ‘rescuing’ that single currency has been the only concern. And nowadays nobody is surprised when European countries appeal to ‘developing countries’ such as China and Brazil to contribute to an emergency fund that is meant to haul us through the monetary winter.

Or take the top-level talks of seven wealthy, industrialised countries, the so-called G7. From the mid-1970s this was the forum where the global economy’s principal problems were discussed. Until a few years ago it was inconceivable that China would join those talks as an equal participant. And now, in the midst of the euro-crisis, nobody can imagine holding a meeting without that country. The G7 seems to have been dissolved and the G20 is suddenly the forum where the world’s financial troubles are discussed.

It is not just in Europe that the credit crisis has laid bare a shift in power relations; the much larger American mountain of debt has altered the landscape, too. For behind the ‘credit orgy’ on the far side of the Atlantic Ocean lurks China, which facilitated this accrual of debt by garnering huge dollar reserves. This has resulted in an interdependence between the two countries that was well-nigh unimaginable a decade ago.

I

In *The White Tiger*, the Indian novelist Aravind Adiga describes the rise of an entrepreneur in Bangalore. The novel takes the form of an open letter to the Chinese premier, Wen Jiabao. The businessman has

heard that the politician will be visiting his city in order to acquaint himself with the keys to success of Indian entrepreneurship, especially in the field of information technology.

Somewhere in the margins of his narrative we read: "White men will be finished within my lifetime. There are blacks and reds too, but I have no idea what they're up to – the radio never talks about them. My humble prediction: in twenty years' time, it will be just us yellow men and brown men at the top of the pyramid, and we'll rule the whole world. And God save everyone else."

This is a witty summary of whole shelves of books to be found in many a scholarly library, books which predict that the world economy's centre of gravity is shifting slowly but surely to the East, in the same way it once shifted to the West. When European countries look to Chinese support to solve their debt crisis, then we are seeing what is afoot in a nutshell.

The credit crisis accelerates a development that has been ongoing for much longer, namely the beginning of the end of Western hegemony, more particularly that of America. Over the coming decades, three of the world's four largest economies will be non-Western: Japan, India, and China. The growth of the last two countries is astonishing: in China growth has averaged nine per cent per annum over the last 30 years, i.e. doubling in size every eight years. The average income there is seven times as high as in 1979 and 400 million people have been freed from poverty. Forecasts indicate that China's GDP will be higher than that of the USA by about 2025. Another figure serves to illustrate this: estimates suggest that in 2020 the Chinese share in world trade will already have reached 12.1% in 2020, while the USA's will be 8.8% and the European Union's 8.3%.

Demographic balances are in the process of shifting as well. In 1913 Europe still accounted for 14.6% of the world population, but by 2001 that was just 6.4%, and about 40% of that world population lives in China and India. The Singaporean diplomat and academic Kishore Mahbubani has highlighted this idea: "It is futile for the 12 percent of

the world's population who live in the West to imagine they can determine the destinies of the remaining 88 percent, many of whom feel newly energized and empowered.”

The contribution of a large part of the world population to the global economy has, of course, been exceptionally small over the last hundred years. In 1960, the combined share of China, India, Indonesia, and Brazil in the world economy was no more than 29% of the weight of these countries in terms of population. That has already risen to 65% and the forecast for 2030 is 95%, so the share of these countries in the world economy will by that time reflect their share in the world population.

In addition, the demographic make-up of the Western world is changing rapidly. The USA will increasingly be populated by migrants from outside Europe. It is forecast that by the middle of the 21st century a quarter of the USA's population will be Hispanic, and that is without mentioning the many other population groups. This also applies for Europe, where the level of immigration is comparable. In countries such as Germany, France, and the Netherlands, by circa 2050 about a third of the population will be immigrants, or their direct descendants. Also in that regard, a traditional world is being lost.

The history of globalisation does not follow a rectilinear path, but displays constant shifts in the balance of power. The French historian Fernand Braudel ascertained long ago that the centre of the world economy shifts time and again: “In the years 1590-1610 or thereabouts, the centre shifted to Amsterdam, which remained the midpoint of the European zone for almost two centuries. Between 1780 and 1815 it shifted to London, and in 1929 it crossed the Atlantic Ocean and established itself in New York.”

From this perspective, the waning of the European powers had of course been ongoing for a long time. The big question for the coming decades is how the Western world, and Europe in particular, will manage to deal with this change, which is part and parcel of globalisation. A shift towards Beijing and Shanghai first and foremost is to be expected, though the economic weight of Mumbai, São Paulo, and Moscow will

also increase proportionately. And the birth of new global powers is rare: the current list with countries such as the USA, Russia, Germany, France, and the UK has remained stable for almost 200 years.

There are certainly questions to be asked about the sustainability of Chinese growth. Sooner or later the country will have to abandon its artificial undervaluation of its own currency. The country will also be confronted with highly treacherous political reforms and after 2025 will be faced with the consequences of a rapidly ageing population. In addition, it is already contending with the devastating environmental damage of decades of untrammelled growth. Lastly, the country will feel the consequences of slower growth or even recession in Europe and America, with all the attendant risks of social unrest. The trend is, however, obvious: the relative balances of power will shift eastward.

II

This development means the Western world will be confronted with scores of new questions, but the most important change is that the perception of Europe in countries such as China, India, and Brazil will acquire ever greater significance. Having lived for almost two centuries with a European and later American predominance, developments are now moving towards a world that is polycentric at least, a world in which Europe will increasingly be confronted with economic and cultural innovation from the East and South.

It is obvious that the USA's and Europe's relative loss of power will have consequences for how the West is perceived by the rest of the world. And in the same way the 'orientalism' of European countries was once imperative for other parts of the world, the evolution of the public perception of Europe in countries like China and Brazil will prove to be increasingly relevant for European societies. Thus there is every reason to study that image-building in greater depth, throughout its historical development but with an emphasis on the era after '1989', which can be pinpointed as the dawn of a new era – certainly from a European perspective.

The British historian Arnold Toynbee saw this development looming long ago. “The paradox of our generation is that all the world has now profited by an education which the West has provided, except the West herself,” he wrote in his 1948 essay ‘The Dwarfing of Europe’. “The West to-day is still looking at history from the old parochial self-centred standpoint which the other living societies have by now been compelled to transcend.” But that complacent attitude could not endure, for “sooner or later, the West, in her turn, is bound to receive the re-education which the other civilizations have obtained already.” In the ascendancy of the so-called BRIC countries we can see Toynbee’s prediction being borne out. Europe touched the world and on the rebound the world is now touching Europe.

We are seeing an unparalleled post-colonial role reversal, or rather we are witnessing the end of the post-colonial world. Last year the Angolan president, José Eduardo dos Santos, received the Portuguese prime minister in Luanda. During the state visit, dos Santos uttered these amiable (or rather patronising) words: “We are aware of the difficulties the Portuguese people have faced recently, and Angola is open and available to help Portugal face this crisis. At this difficult time when the financial crisis is affecting Portugal, it is important for us to remember the historical ties between our countries.”

Slowly but very surely the roles are being reversed. While for a long time the South migrated to the North, we are now seeing the first movements in the opposite direction. The long queues in front of the Angolan consulate in Lisbon tell the story. The diminishing opportunities in their own country are propelling more and more Portuguese people in the direction of former colonies like Angola and Brazil.

“Here you at least have the sense that things are moving, people are positive and full of confidence,” as one of these young migrants phrased it. “I will never return to the depressiveness of Portugal.” The departure of these youngsters speaks volumes about expectations for the future. The elite of Angola, a country which only gained its independence in 1975 and until recently was strife-torn and poverty-stricken, is now

buying up Portuguese businesses. Even Portugal's national airline could change hands at some point.

"This is a post-colonial role reversal that is unprecedented in world history. Not only Portugal, but also other European countries will increasingly orient themselves towards countries that we still called the Third World until recently," says Paulo Gorjão, the Director of the Portuguese Institute of International Relations and Security. The exodus of Portuguese people to the former colonies is a fine illustration of a tide that has turned. The moment has come for more students or entrepreneurs from European countries to leave for Shanghai, Mumbai, São Paulo or Singapore. The half million Portuguese people in Brazil have preceded them, and their emigration marks the beginning of the end of the post-colonial world.

To compensate for the growing uncertainty this entails, there are sufficient advantages: "For five hundred years the West has been the only civilization carrying the burden of advancing human knowledge and wealth," as Kishore Mahbubani rightly notes. "Today, it can share this responsibility." And sure enough a time will come when Nobel prizes will no longer primarily be won at American universities. The British Asia expert Martin Jacques goes a step further: "The emergence of Chinese modernity immediately de-centres and relativizes the position of the West. In fact, the challenge posed by the rise of China is far more likely to be cultural in nature." And what applies for China in particular is also relevant to the world's other emerging economies. The time has dawned when views about modernity are no longer determined by Western conceptions alone; a 'contested modernity' will prevail.

That is not the whole story, of course, as the development is not quite so unequivocal. Will English gradually be supplanted by Chinese as the world language? Will films, music, science, and literature from Asia sweep the world? For the time being it does not seem that ethnocentric China will surpass the melting-pot of the USA in terms of culture. But even if this process moves more slowly, then it is still undeniable that the relative balances in the global economy are

primarily shifting eastward.

By no means is it about the economy alone; perhaps it is ultimately more about culture. The question raised by the Indian historian Ramachandra Guha has implications that extend beyond India: “One would think that given its size, diversity and institutional history, the Republic of India would provide a reservoir of political experience with which to refine or rethink theories being articulated in the West.” This is the hope associated with the great ongoing shift: the thinking in Europe and the USA must become increasingly aware of the experiences in other parts of the world, which are shaking themselves free of historical dependencies.

III

The loss of power provokes useful self-reflection in another way. We have experienced it before: the shock of decolonisation had a beneficial effect in the post-war decades. Without that experience, Europe’s unification would have been inconceivable. The decisive initiative for conciliation was, after all, undertaken by former colonial powers like France and the Netherlands, which saw a means to check their decline in the integration of the ‘old’ continent. They first had to be thrown upon their own resources before they could regard one another as neighbours, which also explains the United Kingdom’s reticence about identifying with the European Community. The illusion of imperial greatness was long cherished, even though there was less and less reason for this after India gained her independence in 1947.

Thus Asia’s rise also provided a major incentive for the creation of the internal market and the introduction of the euro in the early 1990s. Many people realise that Europe can only retain its standing in a global rivalry if it manages to reform itself. Economic and monetary unification – with all the serious problems we have encountered in recent years – is nevertheless an important precondition for Europe to make its own voice heard, to be able to continue pursuing its own societal model.

That relative loss of power should become an important element in how we talk about Europe. The story about unification is still primarily founded on what is sometimes termed the European civil war of 1914-1945: the self-destruction of the old continent in two world wars. But it remains to be seen whether that reference to the past still possesses the same power of expression in a world where Europe is in relative terms actually shrinking.

Politicians are accused of being concerned about nothing but the short term, but European unification demonstrates the capacity to learn from the violent past. The French man Jean Monnet, who was the founding father of European integration, spoke in his memoirs about “the fear that another war would approach if we did nothing in the foreseeable future,” and he wondered what could be done to bind France and Germany, creating a shared interest between the two nations before it was too late.

That reference to the war has motivated many to seek a closer rapprochement. They are images that make a lasting impression: a remorseful Willy Brandt on his knees in the Warsaw ghetto, Helmut Kohl and François Mitterrand standing hand in hand on the battlefield of Verdun, and more recently Vladimir Putin and the Polish premier Donald Tusk at the mass grave in Katyn. These conciliatory gestures highlight the guilt and shame about the wars that Europe brought upon herself and the world. And contrary to what many people thought, these emotions have not faded with the passing of time.

When the topic is Europe the war is never far away, to this very day. For example, the recent euro-crisis has prompted cautionary, or rather dramatic, statements to be uttered by Poland, France and, of course, Germany over the past year: the failure of the euro means that the chances of war in Europe will increase significantly. The French Minister of Foreign Affairs expressed this in muffled tones, but Poland’s Finance Minister, Jacek Rostowski, was rather more explicit: “There is a danger of an historic economic disaster – like the Great Depression in the 1930s – that would lead to war in Europe.”

A politician like Helmut Kohl acted on that conviction: unless he anchored his country in a monetary union the ghosts from the past would return. You could interpret such drum-beating as well-intended blackmail, but that pairing of currency and peace is currently being propagated anew, and that is the 'gut feeling' of Europe. It is difficult to argue against that 'never again', but it is not merely the memory of the war which ought to stand on its own two feet; the spectre of a potential recurrence of violent conflict diverts attention as well.

People understand the experience of a generation as well as this experience's productive significance for the project of European unification. 'Never again!' is, however, a form of Eurocentrism that is gradually becoming passé. It unintentionally but insistently turns the gaze inward, when an essential motive for integration lies outside the continent.

A new narrative about 'Europe' should no longer take Berlin as its point of departure, but Beijing; must no longer begin in Paris but in São Paulo. In other words, we can only perceive Europe as 'home' if we form an image of a new 'abroad'. When talking about Europe's *raison d'être*, then that resides first and foremost in a world on which continental powers such as China, the USA, India, and Brazil will stamp their mark. 'Europe' is the only scale on which to mould a distinctive societal model in the global economy. If that is correct then European integration is not about the loss of sovereignty, but about greater influence attained by acting together.

Paul Scheffer is a Dutch author. He was professor of urban sociology at the Universiteit van Amsterdam between 2003 and 2011; currently he is professor of European studies at Tilburg University. In 2000, he wrote an essay 'Het multiculturele drama' ('The multicultural drama') which was very influential in shaping the debate on multiculturalism and immigration in the Netherlands. His 2007 book, *Het land van aankomst*, was published in English in 2011 as *Immigrant Nations*, and is a comparative study of immigration in Europe and America. Scheffer is a columnist for NRC Handelsblad and publishes regularly in other European journals and magazines.

Confluence and Crossroads: Europe and the Fate of the Earth

*The new Europe has yet to find its
story – and politicians and leaders
will never be able to give it that story.
This story can only come from writers,
dreamers, and thinkers – and it has yet
to be told.*

Amitav Ghosh

Confluence and Crossroads:

Europe and the Fate of the Earth

I

Bengal, where I am from, is a vast delta where thousands of creeks and rivers flow into each other to form a landscape that is mapped upon a grid of interlocking waterways.¹ Here a confluence of rivers is both a seam and a separation – it joins many shores even as it holds them apart. The Bengali word for confluence is *mohana* which reflects this ambiguity while also adding to it an element of beguilement that evokes, in my mind, the image of the ‘crossroads’ – a metaphor that is almost universally identified with riddles and paradoxes, confusion, and crisis. But a crossroads is not just a link between points in space. It is also a junction in the axis of time, in the sense that it lies between the beginning of a journey and its end. This is one of the reasons why I want to use the twin images of the ‘confluence’ and the ‘crossroads’ to frame two issues that are of critical importance today, to Europe as well as the rest of the world.

II

The first of these issues is migration. In recent years, as you well know, migration has come to be associated, in the minds of many Europeans, with a failure of cultural assimilation. But to put this in perspective let us consider the example of the hundreds of thousands – possibly millions – of Europeans who are now working on other continents: for example, in Dubai, Japan, Singapore, Brazil, Mozambique, South Africa, China, India, Thailand and so on. Let us ask: to what

¹ Ghosh’s essay is a shortened version of a speech delivered during the event *Imagining Europe* (4-7 October 2012), which was organised by ECF.

degree do these Europeans integrate into their host societies? The reality is that many, if not most of them, make every effort to maintain a strict distance between themselves and the countries they live in. They have their own clubs, they send their children to their own schools, they live in their own neighbourhoods; and very few become conversant with the languages and cultures of the places they inhabit.

If we look at the issue from this point of view – that is to say, if we start, not by looking at immigrants in Europe but by asking what Europeans do when they are working abroad – I think it quickly becomes apparent that most human beings respond in much the same way when they find themselves in an unfamiliar place.

In the latter half of the 20th century there was an ironic reversal of this process. European governments, often with good intentions, responded to the presence of immigrant communities by providing support for what they saw as the most ‘authentic’ elements of their cultures. These policies – let us admit it – frequently had retrograde and damaging effects: the state’s money and support went to the most ‘traditional’ – which were also often the most hidebound – sections of migrant communities. The secularists and progressives were either ignored or treated as if they were irrelevant.

The problem lies perhaps in squeezing the lived reality of life into rigid frames like ‘culture’, ‘tradition’, ‘religion’ and so on. Instead of thinking of ‘culture’, why don’t we think about everyday practices – what people actually do? Why don’t we think about the ways they spend their time; what they like to eat; what sort of music they listen to? When we think about questions like these, an odd thing happens. We find that migrants and their hosts are not so different after all; neither of them are stuck within their ‘cultures’. Both have evolved, unwittingly or not, towards each other. We find that Holland is a country of soccer-playing rijsttafel eaters who are famous for growing a Turkish flower – the tulip; we find that Britain is a land of cricket-playing, korma-eating reggae singers; Germany becomes a land of döner kebab and Eurovision and skateboarders. Why then should states support mosques and temples

rather than football clubs and dance troupes and art exhibitions?

But the issue of migration takes on a completely different aspect at the edges of the European confluence – that is to say in Southern Spain, and especially in Greece. As I see it, the violence that is being visited on immigrants in Greece today is just as critical a test for Europe as is the collapse of that country's economy. Greece is sometimes looked upon as an exception. But in my view Greece is not a laggard but an outlier – it is a country that sometimes provides glimpses of things to come. When riots broke out in Greece in 2008 they seemed inexplicable. But in retrospect it is clear that they were the first signs of a wave of unrest that the currents of the Mediterranean would soon carry to Tunisia, Egypt, Israel, Spain, and even beyond to England and the United States. This is why Greece is so important: if the ascendancy of the fascist, anti-immigrant right continues its rise in that country, it will have profound consequences for all of Europe. These developments will spread beyond Greece, and the violence that is now being inflicted upon Africans and Asians will soon be turned against other Europeans.

One thing we can be sure of is that the pressures of migration are only going to intensify in the years ahead, not just in Europe but around the world. This is because the numbers of people displaced by climate change is going to grow very fast.² It is essential for Europe to take the lead in creating a template that can be used everywhere for dealing with the mounting crises of displacement that will arise from accelerating disruptions of our planetary environment.

III

From confluence to crossroads: I come now to a fork in the road that confronts not just Europe but the Earth itself.³ Let me put it briefly: the resources of this planet, which we all inhabit, are dwindling very fast, while its atmosphere and climate are changing in ways that may bring

² For more on this, see Campbell *et al.* 2007.

³ I am echoing the phrasing of climate scientist James Hansen (2009, loc. 2202): "humanity has reached a fork in the road."

an end to civilisation as we know it.⁴ There is now an almost-universal consensus amongst scientists that very significant environmental change lies ahead, for the planet as a whole.

The United States is by far the world's most powerful and important nation. It is also the nation that has contributed the most to our knowledge of climate change. What is more, the US has already begun to feel the effects of climate change: large parts of the country are now in a condition of permanent drought, forests are dying in the mountains, and many regions have been hit by severe floods. Australia is similarly suffering the effects of an extended drought.⁵ For all these reasons, the US and Australia should, by right, be taking the lead in addressing climate change. But instead of an awakening, what we see in the US is a determined, well-orchestrated effort to suppress public awareness of climate change. At a time when a sense of the collective interest, and the public good, is more necessary than ever before, these concepts seem to have lost all meaning in the world's most important country.⁶ The same is true of Australia, which is perhaps even more reckless in its approach to these issues.⁷

Where else then are we to look for leadership on this issue. Could it perhaps come from newly-emergent nations like India, China, Russia, Brazil, and South Africa? These countries certainly have the most to lose in the sense that they have the highest at-risk populations. Yet to hope that they will take the lead on this issue is unrealistic, and in a sense, unfair. The emergent powers are all striving to raise the living standards of their own people; and they are all motivated, to a greater or lesser

⁴ See Kolbert 2006, Chapter 10: "It may seem impossible to imagine that a technologically advanced society could choose, in essence, to destroy itself, but that is what we are now in the process of doing."

⁵ McKibben 2010, 5, 60.

⁶ Elizabeth Kolbert (2006, Chapter 8) writes: "the United States, having failed to defeat Kyoto, may be in the process of doing something even more damaging: ruining the chances of reaching a post-Kyoto agreement." This judgement was proved correct at Copenhagen.

⁷ For Australia's resistance to the Kyoto Protocol, see Flannery 2006, 226-227.

degree, by a desire to 'catch up' with the West, in all things, including carbon emissions.⁸ Even though two of them are already among the world's top three polluters, it is still true that at this point in time, their per capita contribution to the net stock of carbon in the atmosphere is small.⁹

The rapid increase of emissions from these countries thus has a dual aspect: in one sense it represents a new level of intensification in the globe's collective rush towards disaster.¹⁰ But in another sense, it is also a challenge, a clear declaration that if there is to be any cutting back, if sacrifices are to be made, then they must come, in the first instance, from the West, which has gobbled up far more than its fair share of the world's resources. In other words, the emergent countries have taken the stand that history has absolved them of taking the lead in this matter: they are rather looking to be led – not by coercion, but by example.

Where can this leadership come from? This sorry process of elimination leaves us with only one possibility: Europe. Here are the reasons why: Firstly, if there was ever a transnational issue then it is climate change – the weather has no respect for national boundaries and borders.¹¹ Yet in the face of this dire crisis, many nations, especially

⁸ Tim Flannery (2006, 306) discusses this issue at some length.

⁹ These arguments have been recognised as well-founded by European nations (although not the US and Australia). Cf. Kolbert 2006, Chapter 8: "Pieter van Geel, the Dutch environment secretary, described the European outlook to me as follows: 'We cannot say, 'Well, we have our wealth, based on the use of fossil fuels for the last three hundred years, and, now that your countries are growing, you may not grow at this rate, because we have a climate change problem.'"

¹⁰ James Hansen (2009, loc. 3302) provides a damning list of all the ways in which the US is moving backwards on the carbon emissions issue.

¹¹ See, for example, Burke/Mabey 2006: "The biggest global problems that will dominate the 21st century, from terrorism to climate change, from mass migration to organized crime, cannot be solved by nations acting alone. They require a pooling of sovereignty. Europe is the world's most

the larger and most powerful ones, are pursuing their national interests ever more aggressively. Nationalism is indeed one of the most pernicious threads in the helix of disaster. Europe, where nationalism was born, and which has endured its worst excesses, is the only part of the world that has succeeded in articulating and acting upon a vision of political organisation that goes beyond the nation-state.

Secondly, experience shows us that if climate change is to be tackled effectively then it will require stringent regulation and oversight by national and transnational bodies. That the issue has burst upon us at a time when much of the world is in thrall to an ideology of laissez-faire is but another aspect of the catastrophic convergence that we are now faced with. In this too Europe is an exception: the public good continues to be a cherished ideal, and regulatory oversight is accepted to be one of the most important functions of government. This perhaps is why corporations have not been able to create an industry of climate denial in Europe. As a result the European public is far better informed about climate change than people elsewhere.

Thirdly, climate change cannot be addressed without a historical reckoning. To move ahead will require a massive change of expectations amongst people. Unfortunately, in most countries around the world, this is, politically speaking, an impossible message to communicate. Here again Europe, with its highly educated populations, holds the only possibility of hope, although even here, it will not be easy to educate people into a realistic awareness of what lies ahead – but this is one place where it could succeed and if it does it will set an example for the world.¹²

sustained and far-reaching experiment in the practical and political realities of sharing sovereignty.”

¹² The European Union’s documents on climate change, such as *Climate Change and International Security and Europe in the World* are salutary in their realistic approach to the issues, and also in that they do not envisage planning for climate change as a principally military exercise.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, Europe is equipped to lead on this issue because it is the one part of the world that has already undertaken large-scale preparations for climate change. No country is a better example of this than Holland.

The project of Europe has been flawed in many ways: it was excessively bureaucratic; it placed the interests of business above those of people; it was half-hearted in some respects and over-reached in others. Its most important failure perhaps was an imaginative one: the leaders who founded the European Union forgot that people need stories to live by. The old story – that of European nationalism – had two hundred years of story-telling behind it; that is why it had such a grip on people's imaginations. The new Europe has yet to find its story – and politicians and leaders will never be able to give it that story. This story can only come from writers, dreamers, and thinkers – and it has yet to be told.

Through most of the journey that has brought the world to this fork in the road, Europe has led the way. In doing so, it has created an immense continent of carbon in the atmosphere, a dark shadow wholly out of proportion to its size. Now that we have arrived at this turn in the road it is clear that what lies ahead is not a fork but an unbridgeable, steadily-growing chasm. We can only hope that Europe will now take the lead once again, in showing us how best to turn back.

Amitav Ghosh is an Indian author, whose work has been translated into more than two dozen languages. He published his first novel, *The Circle of Reason* in 1986, and his second, *The Shadow Lines*, in 1988. Since then, Ghosh has written a number of books, including *The Glass Palace*, which won the International e-Book Award at the Frankfurt book fair in 2001. *Sea of Poppies* was shortlisted for the Man Booker Prize, and was awarded the Crossword Book Prize and the IndiaPlaza Golden Quill Award in 2008. Most recently, he has published *River of Smoke* (2011), which is the second volume of a projected series of novels, *The Ibis Trilogy*. Ghosh has also published in journals and

magazines like *The New Yorker*, *The New Republic*, and *The New York Times*.

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Good Story

Death of Osvald



*In this final chapter of the Osvald-saga,
we find out how Osvald meets his
demise.*

Vladimir & Vuk Palibrk

OSVALD

IN EPISODE

GOOD STORY



SCRIPT: VLADIMIR
PALIBRK

DRAWING: VUK
PALIBRK



THAT'S ME, OSVALD. I'M 38, AND A BIT BORED.

THAT PEOPLE WILL CITE ME AND MENTION MY NAME WITH A SMILE ON THEIR FACE.

ACTUALLY, WHEN I STARTED THE FREELANCE JOURNALIST CAREER I THOUGHT I'D GET FAMOUS... AND CELEBRATED.

... BUT NONE OF THAT HAPPENED SO FAR. HOW COULD I ACHIEVE THAT?

FOR SURE, I KNOW ONE THING: I NEED **THE** STORY... ONE WELL-CHOSEN, WISELY WRITTEN AND PLACED IN THE RIGHT MOMENT, STORY...

BY SHOOTING AND REPORTING ABOUT SOMETHING SHOCKING, DISTURBING, EXTREME... ON THE VERGE OF CIVILISATION AND HUMANITY... SOMETHING THAT CAN BE EXAMPLE OF WHAT **SHALL** NOT BE THE REGULAR PRACTICE...

FOR SURE THAT WAS THE WAY HOW MOST OF JOURNALISTS AND REPORTERS GOT FAMOUS!

...THOSE WERE SOME CHALLENGES INDEED... AND WHAT CAN I DISCOVER TODAY? SEEMS THAT EVERYTHING IS ALREADY EXPLORED AND WRITTEN ABOUT... I NEED SOMETHING FRESH, NEW, UNHEARD SO FAR.

WOW, LOOK AT THIS!



LATER THAT WEEK IN BELGRADE, SERBIA

THIS IS GOING TO BE AMAZING...

...5000 POLICEMEN WILL GUARD THE PRIDE MARCH IN BELGRADE?? THIS SOUNDS LIKE IT'S GOING TO BE VERY TIGHT... AND WHERE IT'S TIGHT, THERE ARE USUALLY SOURCES OF GOOD STORIES!

CARMEN! LET'S GET PACKED! WE GO TO BELGRADE!

GROK!



THAT'S IT, THE WORLD HAS TO SEE THESE PICTURES, TO KNOW ABOUT THIS VIOLENCE AND INTOLERANCE OUTBURST,

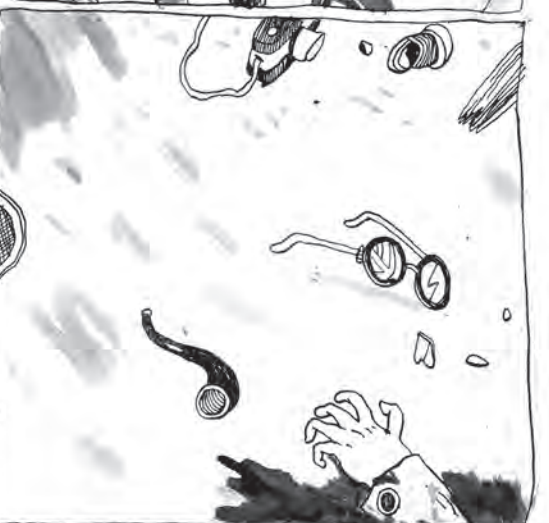
THE MODERN WORLD IS HUNGRY FOR STORIES OF THIS KIND

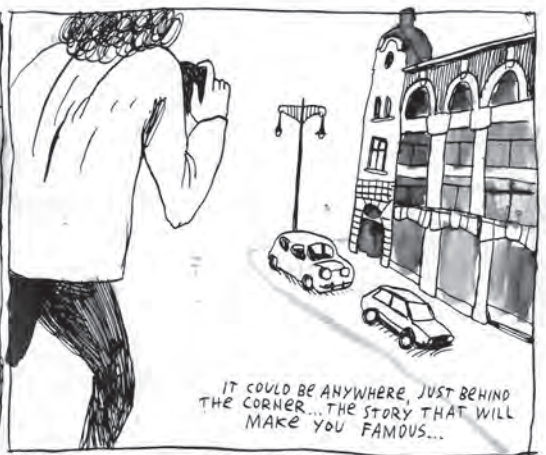


MODERN WORLD THAT WAS BUILT ON HATRED, VIOLENCE AND INTOLERANCE WILL JUDGE THIS AS A PART OF ITS PAST, AS SOMETHING THAT IT GOT RID OF LONG TIME AGO...

I MUST GET A LITTLE CLOSER, GOOD PHOTO IS WORTH TAKING A RISK...







IT COULD BE ANYWHERE, JUST BEHIND THE CORNER... THE STORY THAT WILL MAKE YOU FAMOUS...



IT SHOULD NOT BE SO HARD TO FIND, A PERFECT STORY IN WHICH YOU PARTICIPATE YOURSELF...



... COULD BE ANYWHERE...



... JUST BEHIND THE NEXT CORNER...



An Afterword

*The key role of culture
in building Europe
could not be more urgent.*

Katherine Watson

An Afterword

The last four years (2009-2012) have been only the most recent chapter in an almost 60-year journey for ECF, a journey that continues. While one thematic focus may have drawn to a close, it has set the course for the next – so neither an end nor a beginning, but a step along the way. Throughout our history, our vision has been of an open, democratic, and inclusive Europe in which culture is a key contributor. Reflecting back over 60 years, one could say that this vision was and is a timeless one, critical at any given moment. This is true; however, we do believe that now, when Europe's confidence is shaken and it is facing perhaps the most severe assault on its identity, both internally and externally, the key role of culture in building Europe could not be more urgent.

We considered the word narrative as a word in motion – moving in space and in time, connecting what is and has been with what could be; like Europe, a work in progress, mired in questions and perhaps confusion – while momentarily stalled, not in the least stagnated. Narratives are journeys, and ECF's work has been to trace some of these journeys, to follow their twists and turns, their intersections, convergences, and confluences. The individual lines traced form the intricate web that is Europe.

We looked to the grass roots, to the edges, the peripheries – of European communities and the continent; at views from both the 'inside' and beyond Europe. And we see now that we need to do more of this – supporting the grass roots, connecting the centres with the peripheries, and reflecting on Europe's place in the world.

As Milla Mineva remarks within these pages: “Today more than twenty years later, liberal democracy is in crisis, although we prefer to discuss economic policies rather than the withdrawal of citizens from the institutions of democratic democracy.”

This is the case. However, although we have witnessed a growing gap between people, democratic processes, and structures (hence the need for new narratives), ECF has also seen and supported hundreds of organisations which show that culture is an invaluable tool for engaging people in the future of their communities – and, indeed, the future of Europe and the world.

We have seen strengths locally, heard voices that are not only reacting to crisis but also finding new ways of acting – European change-makers who are living a new narrative for Europe. But this is a narrative that is outside of the institutional narratives. We have also seen a fresh new approach to Europe and to European narratives, as cultural organisations work comfortably and keenly with other sectors on common causes.

New art forms mix and remix our narratives in ways that allow multiple perspectives on our pasts and stimulate shared participation in our future. New forms of communication use the image to vault over language barriers. Witness *European Souvenirs*, a collaborative artwork premiered in Amsterdam during *Imagining Europe* (6 October 2012), which saw five artists from Spain, Poland, Turkey, the Netherlands, and the UK embark on voyages of discovery through personal and public archives to unearth, expose, question, and remix memories of migration. Their personal collections then converged in a live cinema event – a conversation in real time that wove together the threads of their particular quests. The audience experienced a rich improvisation layering, juxtaposing and remixing sound and image.¹

¹ For more on the *European Souvenirs* project, see www.europeansouvenirs.eu.

Remixing is a continuing, open, and participatory process. The remixed products are openly shared and others are invited and encouraged to participate in the process to rewrite context and content, helping us to connect with past and present narratives – and imagine future ones. This is truly the building of new narratives, both in method and in results – and why *European Souvenirs* is so compelling. Even though it is a performance and therefore a ‘product’ or an artwork, it is also an invitation to reflect on our own memories, to contribute them to the remixing *oeuvre* and to a much-needed intergenerational exchange.

Our strategy for 2013-2016 will be to connect local change-makers and help them scale up their actions. In so doing, we will facilitate an enabling environment to make the local European. These connected local actors will present an active remapping of Europe – reclaiming the lost public arena and reinvigorating democracy.

ECF’s challenge will be to help build the bridge between those who are reinventing democracy, repossessing the public space, and our democratic institutions which are presently so disconnected from European citizens. Along the way we will need to find the means to illuminate this work, and so engage a wider European public and also policy-makers; to bridge the gap or open up some ‘connecting passages’ (a phrase Svetla Kazalarska uses here) between citizens and institutions so that the necessary changes can be made, and Europe can move forward firmly rooted in European people and cultures.

Katherine Watson is *Director at the European Cultural Foundation.*





EUROPEAN
CULTURAL
FOUNDATION

Remappings

The Making of European Narratives

“ So how far are we in the story?
Are we dangling close to the
cliffhanger? Are we Icarus or are we
Don Quixote? Are we as desperate and
heartbroken as Hamlet or are we more
like a Dante shuffling through the
underworld towards the light? ”

Abdelkader Benali

