

EXCITING AND NEW: EUROPEAN IDENTITY OR THE ARTISTIC FIELD AND THE PRODUCTION OF A CONCEPT OF "FRIEND"

JENS KASTNER

Jens Kastner, Dr. phil., Sociologist and Art Historian, lives as freelance author and university lecturer in Vienna (A). Associated Professor at the Institute for Sociology at the University of Muenster (1999–2004), and at the Institute for Economic and Social History at the University of Vienna University (2008), in the project studies programme "International Development" at the University of Vienna (2008 and 2010). Since 2008, research associate/ senior lecturer at the Institute for Art Theory and Cultural Studies at the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna. Articles in several newspapers and magazines on social movements, Cultural Studies and contemporary art. He is coordinating editor of *Bildpunkt. Magazine of IG Bildende Kunst*.

This text was previously published in *Springerin* issue 2/2005, Vienna.

Culture is in danger and looks as if it might lose its hard-won autonomy as neo-liberal globalisation takes its course. Pierre Bourdieu has delivered this warning and, to avert the threat, the sociologist doesn't advise returning to the opposition between globalisation and cultural nationalism. Instead, Bourdieu advocates the "tradition of artistic internationalism".¹ Such a tradition can only be conceived of as one that works its way into other fields starting out from the autonomy it has achieved. This is something practices in the cultural field do anyway, for this is where, among other things, politically effective affiliations are created and identities are constructed. Even during the present-day transformations of the nation-state, it has not lost this constitutive function. A truly effective cultural internationalism thus has to take account these changes as well. If it is conceived of as European, it turns out to be extremely prone to exploitation by every hegemonic project and is thus really no internationalism at all. Bourdieu's warning words also imply a dilemma. By opposing the culture seen as "European" to a form of economisation perceived as being largely American,² he is conducting identity politics for Europe. For Europe is thereby charged with positive contents and meanings that push others into the background. Even exhibitions of contemporary art dealing with this topic are always in danger of illustrating the politics of the European Union, precisely because "Europe" is a concept that supposedly can be filled with any content whatsoever.³ And even those other meanings of Europe – its colonial past or its present restrictiveness in the area of immigration policies – are open to being co-opted by the hegemonic politics of the European Union if they are addressed in the cultural fields. Like the philosopher Étienne Balibar in his book *We, Citizens of Europe?*⁴, exhibitions such as *Exciting Europe* in Leipzig⁵ and *The New Europe* in Vienna⁶ have addressed the topic and attempted to take a critical look at Europe. What they all have in common is the way they try to open up perspectives for a different, better Europe by engaging with the real, present, prevailing Europe. The titles of the exhibitions function like the question posed in the title of Balibar's book (even if they do not perhaps sound quite as dry), which must elicit a spontaneous and emphatic "yes" from most of those who are structurally among its potential readers before they have even taken a look inside. But those who find Europe "new" and "exciting" are in the situation of Bourdieu described at the beginning of this article – in a dilemma at best. The decisive question to be asked of every such point of view would thus be whether the artistic tradition can be updated in the sense of giving it a critical distance to hegemonic projects and politics. If this does not succeed, artistic internationalism ends at the borders of Europe at the latest.

Balibar, probably one of Louis Althusser's most famous pupils, uses the borders of Europe as the springboard for his treatment of the theme. He is concerned with "historical and

[1] Pierre Bourdieu, "Kultur in Gefahr" (Culture in Danger), in Pierre Bourdieu, *Gegenfeuer 2*, Constance 2001, p. 82–99, here p. 91.

[2] Pierre Bourdieu, "Die Durchsetzung des amerikanischen Modells und ihre Folgen" (The Imposition of the American Model and Its Effects), in Pierre Bourdieu, *Gegenfeuer 2*, Constance 2001, p. 27–33.

[3] And for this to be the case they do not even have to be conceived in a manner as immune to every issue of representation as the "The New Ten", which, in keeping with the EU enlargement, assigned an artist to each new national flag. "The New Ten. Zeitgenössische Kunst aus den 10 neuen Mitgliedsstaaten der Europäischen Union" (The New Ten. Contemporary Art from the 10 New Member States of the European Union) was put on jointly by the Stiftung für Kunst und Kultur e. V. Bonn, the Künstlerhaus in Vienna, the Mannheim Kunsthalle and the Museum voor Moderne Kunst Oostende in 2004/2005.

[4] Étienne Balibar, *We, Citizens of Europe?* 2004, University of Princeton, Princeton NJ.

[5] "Exciting Europe", curated by Margarethe Makovec and Anton Lederer, Galerie für zeitgenössische Kunst, Leipzig, 2 July to 22 August 2004.

political borders in the sense of touchstones for citizenship and civility (borders) and in the sense of powers and lines of division where democracy ceases or revives (frontiers)".⁷ For Balibar, thinking of borders in connection with Europe means directing one's gaze, on the one hand, at the colonial division of the world or its post-colonial consequences, and, on the other, at exclusions within present-day Europe. These two gazes converge, among other things, in the diagnosis of the "recolonialisation" that Balibar discerns in consideration of the situation of migrants in the European Union and which, he says, is reflected both in the conception of people (Menschenbild) and in everyday life. Taking this as a starting point, he reflects on identity and concludes that he can only accept a European "we" if it is a radically democratic "we". If work is to be done on a European identity, then it should only be with the goal of overcoming inner divisions between indigenous Europeans and those who have been declared "aliens" on the one hand, and of achieving an unspecified, newly understood role of Europe in the world on the other.

Pepper and honey

The exhibition *Exciting Europe*, like Balibar, starts with the borders: borders where people are stopped, filtered and monitored are central arenas of migration. But the borders and their course have changed and are no longer necessarily identical with the edges of the nation-states.⁸ For example, the outer edges of the states that have signed the Schengen Agreement are still more sharply defined than those of the enlarged European Union. The art works shown in the exhibition also address aspects of migration into these regions that, from a Schengen point of view, are defined as "safe third countries". The most convincing are the works that give particular aspects of this status quo their aesthetic attention. The video projection *Paprenjak Prison* (2004) by the group Social Impact is mainly about pointlessness. The hopelessness in Jezevo, a so-called "reception camp" for refugees, is illustrated by a view of the motorway from Zagreb to Belgrade, which goes past the Croatian camp. If the road reverses its meaning from mobility to mindlessness, the title of the work also refers back to symbolic markings: paprenjak is a Croatian pepper-honey cake, which serves as a nationalistic symbol for a self-ascribed bulwark function against Islamic invaders of all types and is advertised with the words: "They were after the honey, leaving us the pepper." While Social Impact anticipate the future of EU politics as well in their projections, the work by Adrian Paci derives its effect mostly from the traditions of people who have already immigrated. Here, instead of being shown dressed in their Sunday best in front of their new home, migrant families pose before backdrops of their former surroundings. Only at second glance do you notice that the Albanian immigrants are not standing in Italy, but in front of black-and-white painted panels depicting their country of origin. Four large colour photos thus address in humorous fashion not only the empty spaces on both sides, but also the illusion of the authentic both here and there. The work by the group Skart, which asked needlework groups to embroider doilies, also seems traditionalistic. Migrant women were encouraged to express their experiences in "threaded" words instead of producing epigrams for the kitchen. "There, far away, someone else found his way" is an example of one of these contemporary mottos, which contrasts with the traditional form in a comic fashion.

Martin Krenn works largely without the chronological opposition then/today, which naturally also implies a connection of tradition and modernity ascribed solely to migrants in Europe. In Krenn's work, the personal contact that Paci created to those he portrays is extended. The city residents with a migrant background that Krenn portrays in his large study *City Views* themselves decided on the selection of texts that represents them. Krenn's works are only portraits inasmuch as they condense situations in which sensibilities become evident. Grouping them into thematic areas like "Appropriated Places", "Education", "Work", "Migration Politics", Krenn makes accessible spaces that

[6] "The New Europe. Culture of Mixing and Politics of Representation", curated by Marius Babias and Dan Perjovschi, Generali Foundation, Vienna, 20 January to 24 April 2005; see the review by Christian Egger in *springerin*, 1/2005, p. 69.

[7] Balibar, op. cit.

[8] In their typology and chronology of borders, Joachim Becker and Andrea Komlosy nonetheless rightly assign national borders a special role. The state created both the prerequisite conditions for the spread of paid labour and the release of workers, and a standardisation of spaces brought about by legal and cultural uniformity. The pervasion of spaces and (living) conditions by the state and capital went hand in hand. In my opinion, it is necessary, particularly in connection with the so-called "European unification process", to insist upon this ongoing effect of statehood, even if it presents itself differently than in the 19th century. See Joachim Becker/Andrea Komlosy, "Grenzen und Räume – Formen und Wandel. Grenztypen von der Stadtmauer bis zum >Eisernen Vorhang<„ in Joachim Becker/Andrea Komlosy (ed.), *Grenzen weltweit. Zonen, Linien, Mauern im historischen Vergleich*, Vienna 2004, p. 21–54.

surround the everyday life of the people he is talking with, spaces that were presented, described and thus created by them. The result is pictures of European cities consisting solely of the statements of people who are otherwise underrepresented in the public sphere. In addition, the combination of photography and text follows in the tradition of the social study, without however handing on any unquestioned claims of truth or morality. In the end, artistic ambitions are still important precisely when borders are no longer drawn or read at barriers, but have long been taking place on economic, social and cultural terrain.

All these works are positionings that draw attention to empty spaces and ruptures, but also to exclusion and violence, and thus in the end give an ironic slant to the exhibition title. Martin Krenn's study points among other things to an "other" Europe, one that is not represented. Is it perhaps the new Europe?

New citizenship

The path from a diagnosis of our time to political proposals is paradoxical. Balibar calls the border the "absolutely undemocratic and >arbitrary< condition of the democratic institutions"⁹ Borders divide people into citizens and others. In this way, they also produce individuals without rights, who, according to the principles of humanism, should not occur at all.¹⁰ The individual without rights, a theoretical contradiction in itself yet a reality on a huge scale at the same time, is thus also the point of departure for Balibar's reflections on a new form of citizenship, which is just beginning to form with the fight for the "right to rights".¹¹ The motto of the Brazilian landless movement "Justice for Those without Rights", the Zapatist efforts on behalf of "indigenous rights and culture", and the campaigns by asylum-seekers in Europe for the right to residence can serve as examples of these fights. In view of European asylum policies and the right to citizenship enshrined in the Maastricht Treaty, Balibar even speaks of "European apartheid".¹² To counter it, he advocates the model of a "citizenship without community".¹³ This is only imaginable when state citizenship is not seen as a one-sided act of conferment of a status. Balibar sees it rather as a dialectic process that includes the constituted and the constituting, or as "an ensemble of practices".¹⁴ His theoretical, political proposal is that citizenship, as the active participation of everyone in political life, should form independently of an affiliation based on a community of values or any other kind of affiliation.

Balibar does rather a balancing act between social conditions and the redefinition of terms. This is an exercise also attempted by exhibitions that are called *Exciting Europe* or *The New Europe*. For, what is exciting about Europe, and what is new? Both projects set out from the fact that "Europe" is a construction based on situationally dependent differentiations – from "US imperialism", "Turkish Islamism" or "Balkan disorder", for example. However, the fact that such constructs produce long-lived political concepts and relatively stable material effects makes them a problem: for attempts at redefinition can always fail and conceal precisely the context that caused them. Artistic strategies are just as prone to this as the interventions by Bourdieu and Balibar.

At any rate, on the way from a diagnosis of our time to political advice, from the present to the future Europe, structural obstacles like exclusions and the violent nature of identity processes should by no means fall by the wayside. After all, it was Balibar who, as a critic of the "nation form",¹⁵ emphasized violent economic and ideological structuring. In this account, the unity that organises the social aspect according to the needs of the state is created in the cultural field. They are embedded in the feeling of belonging. What Balibar formulated here for the classical nation-state also applies, in modified form, to the European Union: in the course of the Europisation of capital, work is also being done on calling the individual a "European" in the name of a collective. The fact that all kinds of

[9] Balibar, op. cit.

[10] Giorgio Agamben has also stressed this paradox of humanism and described those without rights as the mirror image of the sovereign; they are addressed by politics as nothing more than "bare life" and thus created as such. For Agamben, refugees are also prototypes of those who embody bare life. See Giorgio Agamben, *Homo sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, 1998.

[11] Balibar, op. cit.

[12] Balibar, op. cit.

[13] Balibar, op. cit.

[14] Balibar, op. cit.

[15] In Balibar's account, the nation form is the form that has been most successful in the permanent struggle for the control of capital accumulation. During the 19th and 20th centuries, the nation form subordinated the existence of people of all classes (and gender) to their status as citizens. In the course of this process, exclusive ethnicities were and are created. Étienne Balibar, "The Nation Form: History and Ideology", in Étienne Balibar/Immanuel Wallerstein, *Race, Nation, Class: Ambiguous Identities*. NY, Verso, 1991.

cultural institutions have been roped into this work on the European identity threatens to go unnoticed even in Balibar's remarks on Europe. He no longer names the institutions – or, to use Althusser's words, the ideological state apparatuses – such as school and family as the breeding grounds for structural violence. Instead, very much in the style of the modernisation theory, violence is only perceived in outbreaks and excesses. It flares up when the connection – until then supposedly stable – between state, territory and population breaks, something which is generally seen, in the wake of globalisation, as the crisis of the nation-state.

With this focus, Europe as a supranational project that strives for power and forms a new type of state tends to be lost from sight. It is however important to keep this fact in view, not least in order to be able to defend the autonomy of the cultural field against its subordination to or integration into the economic field. However, even the examples given here of successful artistic strategies are threatening to lose their function. And this is because they are taken for, or are meant to represent, the thing they are addressing. This idea is not as far-fetched as it perhaps seems at first. For, as well as the critical positioning that has been mentioned, exhibitions of this kind also represent a conscious attitude to migration and all sorts of other globalisation issues, as well as a young, multi-cultural, activist generation of artists who, as people as well as in their works, make an enthusiastic response seem right: so, here it is, the new Europe, and it really is exciting! However, because in fact only a tiny part of an already small social field (because of its elitism) makes up this reality, it is necessary to insist on the theory that the balancing act between social conditions and the redefinition of concepts is contraproductive when it is no longer perceived as a difficult mediation between two different layers – if it is assumed that Europe is really "exciting" or "new", just because it is called so.

Translation: Timothy Jones

**EXHIBITING THE "FORMER EAST":
IDENTITY POLITICS AND CURATORIAL
PRACTICES AFTER 1989 / A CRITICAL READER
EDITED BY CĂTĂLIN GHEORGHE,
CRISTIAN NAE**

Published by:



Universitatea de Arte
„George Enescu” Iași

With the financial support of the Administration of the National Cultural Fund, Romania



Series Editor: Cătălin GHEORGHE
Guest Editor: Cristian NAE
Design: Lavinia GERMAN

Editura Artes
ISBN 978-606-547-155-9

Printed by: SC MASTERPRINT SRL
700481- Iași, str. Codrescu 6
tel./fax: +4 0232-243626
office@masterprintiasi.ro

2013

8,5 RON

CONTENTS

Cătălin GHEORGHE Argument	1
Cristian NAE The Practice of Art History – Art Exhibitions, Between Cultural Geography and Identity Politics	2
Zoran ERIĆ Globalization and Art Exhibitions	4
Louisa AVGITA The rewriting of Art History as Art: Mapping the “East”	9
Svetla KAZALARSKA Re-drawing the Art Map of “New Europe”	21
Raluca VOINEA Geographically Defined Exhibitions. The Balkans, between Eastern Europe and the New Europe	31
Jens KASTNER Exciting and New: European Identity or the Artistic Field and the Production of a Concept of “Friend”	38
Edit ANDRÁS The (ex)Eastern Bloc's Position in the New Critical Theories and in the Recent Curatorial Practice	43
Marina GRŽINIĆ Critical Exhibitions as Neo-colonial Strategies: <i>Gender Check</i> and the Politics of Inclusion	52
Cristian NAE What's New on the Eastern Front? <i>Performance Art</i> and the Nostalgia for Cultural Resistance	59
Milena TOMIC Rearview Mirror: New Art from Central and Eastern Europe	65
Sándor HORNYIK Alternative Time Travelers – Post-Communism, Figurativeness And Decolonization	70
Kelly PRESUTTI <i>Les Promesses du Passé</i> : Shaping Art History via the Exhibition	80
