

Foreword: Europe without the Myth of Europe?

When we discover that there are several cultures instead of just one and, consequently, when we acknowledge the end of a sort of cultural monopoly, be it illusory or real, we are threatened with the destruction of our own discovery. Suddenly it becomes possible that there are just others, that we ourselves are an 'other' among others. All meaning and every goal having disappeared, it becomes possible to wander through civilizations as if through vestiges and ruins. The whole of mankind becomes an imaginary museum: where shall we go this weekend – visit the Angkor ruins or take a stroll in Tivoli in Copenhagen?

Paul Ricoeur, History and Truth

Against all predictions, the millennium-long trajectory of European self-searching seems finally to be reaching equilibrium in the form of the European Union. The most recent segment of that evolution began in the post-war years with the notion that a certain European destiny should be the basis for a European union that would steer Europeans clear of future war on European soil. The early 20th century architects of European union were convinced that the justification for an economic institutionalisation of Europe was the common spiritual and cultural heritage that linked the past and future of all Europeans. Beginning in the late 1980s, however, the breakthrough of EMU displaced the European cultural heritage as centre of gravity of European construction. Phase III of economic and monetary union, which took effect in January 2002 cemented a decades-long instrumentalisation of the European cultural project. For years the institutional, economic and political ascendancy of the EU only became more imminent, more explicitly inescapable by the day and the question of European culture never seemed farther away, never less salient, never less interesting. The occult narrative of European cultural her-

itage was dismissed as a key to understanding the European present. 'Business as usual' in everyday Europe quietly settled into a routine of precisely that: political-economic Europe.

The cultural counterattack has been rapid and effective. Already in the late 1990s European construction experienced a relaunch of culture as political point of reference for further development. European security policy is now shaped in the name of a European 'family of values' and the EU 'city of culture' and 'year of language' programmes have become among its most well-profiled. Culture is not only back; it appears as though it is through and through compatible with politics and economics. The opposition between the economic logic of European construction and its cultural and spiritual foundations in a deep European past is no longer obvious. It is this strange opposition that forms the backdrop for a reconsideration of European culture as the anchor of politics and economics.

Marx once noted that all great world historical facts and persons appear twice: the first time as tragedy, the second time as farce. In what sense can the European cultural reality be recreated, retransmitted, and reproduced by the cultural custodians of our time, without simply being sullied as farce? Can such a thing as cultural reproduction take place without a culture-threatening de-contextualisation? The experience of European culture is more often the experience of an artefact, an *objet-trouvé* that belongs to the past, derives its meaning from the past, an object that can be understood only through a reconstruction of the past, theorized in the discourses of the post-modern, post-Marxist, post-colonial, post-feminist, multicultural, transnational, global reality. 'Cultural consumption', claims Jean Baudrillard, 'can be defined as the time and the place of caricatured resurrection, the parodied evocation of what is no longer, of what is consumed in the primary sense of the word'.

Culture is hardly one research object among others. It is produced through historical, economical technological and political processes. It is therefore not only culture itself which is being rapidly transformed. It is also our understanding of what culture is – the concept of culture – which functions in a completely new way. The question of a European cultural heritage is therefore deeply connected to what is today called globalisation, the widespread dominance of telecommunication, mass tourism, technology and ecological excess. The movement goes hand in hand with the decline of nation-state categories such as culturally or ethnically based rights, values, categories and control. Internationalisation implies a displacement of the cultural subject from the national to

the international or post-national level. National institutions, national cultural self-understandings, the culture-enhancing powers and institutions are all in an apparent phase of decline. Culture as a basis for legitimisation of the nation-state, for its legal institutions, for its economic systems, etc., is more problematic than ever.

The purpose of this volume is to explore the relation between the cultural present of Europe and the heritage that has produced that present, to attempt to understand and to analyse the 'European' within the framework of culture, economics and politics by focusing on the museum that Europe is, Europe as a reproduction of its own cultural place in the representations and manifestations of the postmodern culture industry. Is there a European cultural identity? What is culture and in what sense can it be transmitted across time, and from one setting to another? How do the new waves of migration dissolve and reconstitute the traditional categories of culture? To what extent can Europe be crystallized as the European 'cultural heritage'?

This book grew out of an interdisciplinary conference held at the Norwegian Institute in Rome in June 2002. The conference gathered scholars from a number of fields all sharing a common interest in understanding the notion of culture as a function of economic and political forces in the process of European construction. I am grateful to the participants for their contributions as well as for their collegiality and friendship. The conference was part of the sequence of concluding conferences for the interdisciplinary Programme for Cultural Studies, financed by the Research Council of Norway. Director Bjarne Hodne, Svein Bjørkås and other members of the Group for Internationalization were instrumental in the first phases of the project, while Administrative Leader Randi Sæbøe was a central resource for the follow-up. The conference was based on research conducted thanks to the hospitality of the Ivar Aasen Institute, Volda University College and its director Prof. Stephen J. Walton. I am grateful for Andrew John Feltham's typically thoughtful assistance in preparation of the manuscript. My thanks go as well to the unusually competent and helpful staff of the Norwegian Institute in Rome.

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