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Visions of Europe

Interdisciplinary Contributions to Contemporary Cultural Debates

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Ceci n'est pas un manifeste— Envisioning Europe and European Studies

John H. Smith

> "We wanted to present a possible vision of the future of Europe." – "Wir wollten eine mögliche Vision der Zukunft Europas zeigen."
>
> Daniel Cohn-Bendit, Interview, 71

> "We don't seem to have time for the further development of democracy, for solidarity and visions for this [new] Europe, in brief, for 'Eurovisions.'" – "Wir scheinen keine Zeit für die Weiterentwicklung von Demokratie, für Solidarität und Visionen für dieses Europa, kurz gefasst – für ‚Eurovisionen' – zu haben."
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> Oskar Negt, Interview

How do we "see" Europe? In what genre do we write down those visions? Beginning in 2009 in the wake of the euro crisis, a sizable number of manifestos—explicitly so called or implicitly serving that literary and political function—have appeared that attempt to give a "vision of Europe." Some (e.g., Jürgen Habermas') are consciously downplayed in the form of essays, although they, too, respond to "the lack of a broader perspective" of what Europe should be (Habermas 41). Small books like Ulrich Beck's have also been accompanied by Internet manifestos ("We are Europe"). They offer both explanations of the crisis's origin and prescriptions for future action, parsing out blame variably to neoliberalism, the financial sector, the national governments (particularly Angela Merkel's Germany), the parties on the right or left, the European Union itself ("Brussels"), and other major and minor actors.

About the same time, in a distant part of the globalized world, namely, Southern California, a new academic unit was being forged out of programs in German, French, Italian, and Russian, which came to have the name, "Department of European Languages and Studies" (a title whose awkwardness and ungrammaticality reflect both the need for compromise and the fulfillment of multiple interesting functions—see below). As a celebration of the successful founding and as an exploration of the scholarly territory that the

new department would be covering, a full two-day conference was held on the topic "Visions of Europe," out of which the present volume has emerged.

What is the connection between the visions of Europe presented at the conference and in this volume, on the one hand, and the many manifestos, essays, programs, and position papers being published today in Europe? Why engage in the one kind of envisioning or in the other? It might seem as if the one set contains the "real" visions, aimed at transforming or saving Europe, while the others are merely "academic." I will argue that both types of visions are doing different and important work. On the one hand, the manifestos are involved in the process of "political will-formation" (a phrase used in Article 21 of the German constitution and often cited by Habermas, e.g., 126–27) that is indispensible for the continuation of the European Union as an experiment in transnational democracy. The analyses and proposals might differ widely, but precisely the dialogue they establish promotes the public sphere in and about Europe that is so necessary. On the other hand, the scholarly investigation of historical and contemporary events from a decidedly *European* perspective, which also points beyond the borders of Europe, is involved in a transformation of knowledge and its institutional organization, which likewise reflects and promotes a unique transnational moment. Both kinds of visions play their role in support of the project which is Europe, i.e., in giving shape to an entity and an area of research that does not so much have an identity as an open future toward which Europeans and Europeanists must strive by interrelating its various organs into an evolving whole (for a similar vision of "transnational European studies," see Donahue and Kagel).

Manifestos

A vision is not worth anything if it is not made manifest. That is the *raison d'être* of manifestos. It is, after all, the motivation behind one of the most famous of all time, the *Communist Manifesto*, to make the "ghost" that is "haunting Europe" visible. The desperate need for visions of Europe to be made manifest now so that Europe itself does not get reduced to nothing but a past ghostly apparition can be measured by the number of manifestos that have been published over the past two years or so—be they called by that generic name or "essay" or "lecture." They are peppered with the imperative mood (as in "Don't accept the present situation!" in Cohn-Bendit and Verhofstadt 21), are full of fundamental

questions that attempt to provide direction (like the title of the collection of Weimar lectures, *Quo vadis Europa?*), and strive to make truly imaginable for the readers a Europe that can move radically beyond the formation of the nation state, beyond even a mere collection of nation states.

Perhaps the father of these manifesto writers, even if he is rarely cited by them, is Stéphane Hessel, whose short 2010 pamphlet, *Indignez-vous!*, gave voice to the drive behind what would become the "Occupy" movement, and has undergone dozens of editions in multiple languages. The source of his indignation and outrage is what he sees all around him in France and Europe as the betrayal of the principle and values expressed by the resistance movement during the Second World War and institutionalized in the immediate postwar period. Although not concerned with Europe as such, it is clearly a battle cry to (re)establish the conditions under which the modern European social welfare state (not necessarily *nation*-state) developed, conditions that he sees as indispensible for genuine democracy. Significantly, he does not limit his democratic and humanist vision to the borders of those states comprising Europe, as he devotes a short section to "Mon indignation à propos de la Palestine" (17–18). He concludes with a call not to the "workers of the world," but rather as follows: "To those men and women who will shape the 21st century we call out with passion: 'to create is to resist, and to resist is to create'" [Créer, c'est résister. Résister, c'est créer] (Hessel 22). This combination of resistance against the twin evils of global capitalism and dangerous nationalism and the creation of new democratic possibilities underlies the European manifestos.

Assessments of the contemporary situation and the origins of the present crisis tend to converge on a number of interrelated points. First, the economic basis of the European Union as a trading and monetary zone limits its ability to develop a broadly unifying principle. This structural problem had been intentionally built into the union from the start, and was furthered after 1989, thanks to the belief that *political* union would be more difficult, if not impossible, and thus *economics* should lead the way (see Eppler and Giegold in *Quo vadis Europa?* 18, 65). Second, under the guise of the Union, individual nations have, in fact, been pursuing their own nationalist agendas. Germany's "Agenda 2010" and economic policies going back to the government under Chancellor Gerhard Schröder after 1998 gave it an advantage that eventually created the imbalance that crippled economies like Greece and Spain. A symbol of this inherent nationalism was the withdrawal of Angela Merkel and

Nicolas Sarkozy into a back room at the meeting of the EU heads of state in May 2011, only to emerge with the plan for the others to follow. Habermas comments on the image of the two of them, exhausted yet fulfilling a nationalist rather than European and truly democratic strategy, as the end of a vision: "Will it become the iconographic image of the collapse of a vision that had shaped Europe for a half century of its post-war history?" (112). In this regard, Merkel's more recent Europe-oriented stance, if it is genuine, may be too little too late. This predominance of national interests means, third, that the kinds of political institutions that would be necessary to regulate international finance capital are lacking. Such institutions, which would challenge state sovereignty by dictating a European fiscal and monetary policy, are necessary if the EU is to fulfill what could be a profound function, namely a necessary middle position transcending nationalisms and offering the only resistance possible to the forces of globalization. The general call of many of these manifestos is summarized in the phrase: "More Europe!" Unfortunately, one needs to continue to ask: "What is envisioned by Europe?" since some, like the economists behind the "European Solidarity Manifesto" paradoxically aim for saving Europe by segmenting the Eurozone into a Southern European Union (with the Euro) and a Northern Europe of individual nation states with their own currencies, a vision oddly represented by Giorgio Agamben, who calls for a "Latin Empire" united in Europe in cultural opposition to the Germano-Anglo-Saxons.

Let me unfold an argument on the crisis that underlies the assessments of Heiner Flassbeck, Ulrich Beck, and Robert Menasse: the crisis of the euro emerges not from the laziness, spendthriftiness, or corruption of individual (southern European) states but directly from the logic of nationalism that continues to be pursued, especially by Germany, in an age of neoliberal globalization. International corporations put pressure on national governments in order to expedite the flow of their capital. The governments turn (or are forced to turn) those global interests into national ones with policies intended to protect "our" jobs and increase "our" competitiveness. Thereby a kind of nationalism arises which torpedoes supranational (e.g., European) responses to global capitalism. This is especially clear in the case of Germany, which has pursued its own interest to the detriment of European solutions. In the age of globalization, however, this kind of nationalism also works to the detriment of the individual nation's people. Here the left, i.e., especially the German party of that name (*Die Linke*), is powerfully direct: "The lowering of real

wages in Germany—especially through the 'Agenda 2010' of the red-green federal government under Schröder—led to a surfeit of exports of inexpensively produced commodities, while for others the consequence was a surplus of imports and chronic debt" (Dehm 131). Thanks to a neoliberal bias that reigns also in the US, the origin of the financial crisis was covered over by the rhetoric of a debt crisis. Add to this falsifying mix nationalist myths of thrifty and efficient Northern vs. profligate and corrupt Southern Europeans. Thus, Flassbeck states starkly: "The currency union was so to speak on the path to collapse from its inception because, fully misrecognizing the conditions of a currency union, Germany began after the enactment of the [Lisbon] accords to undermine the agreed upon goals for inflation, thereby attempting through the lowering of wages to gain a competitive edge over its European partners, who could no longer defend themselves by devaluing their currency" (29). The only winners are the international corporations. Robert Menasse makes this "crazy" [verrückt] logic explicit: At the nation-state level, the interests of neoliberalism are played out via the devolution of the state apparatus with the reduction in state services and living standard (which has been true in Germany and yet is especially brutal when some countries and the IMF can impose it on Greece, Argentina, etc.). But countries like Germany have then used this neoliberal strategy to develop nationalist policies at the expense of others in the common currency union. Thus, the one supranational level—Europe—that could offer resistance to neoliberalism is likewise undermined by national (i.e., really neoliberal, global) interests. To this economic logic there must be a political solution. Menasse thus calls for a discussion of the fundamental question: "What should a European democracy look like, how can it take shape and be formed through a constitution?" – that is, "What will what has never yet existed look like, this thing which is historically completely new, the worldwide innovative, bold, avant-garde European project: a post-national democracy?" (95).

Menasse's vision is both fascinating (or even amusing) and unsatisfying. As a writer of fiction he had the original idea to write a novel about Brussels. An intriguing notion indeed—if that is where the European reality is being created then it is the world that needs to be represented in all its bureaucratic richness. So he actually spent years researching in European Commission, Council, and Parliament, interviewing countless workers in the huge EU apparatus. And what he found were not faceless cogs in the machine called "Brussels" but

young people from many countries committed to making this new organization work. "The 'Brussels bureaucrat,'" he writes panegyrically, "is thus a historically completely new type of civil servant [*Beamtentypus*], the first that does not owe allegiance to a sovereign or his/her government, and the first who even places state bureaucracies into question and if necessary corrects or suspends their rules and decisions" (21). Menasse's vision for the future makes for an odd kind of manifesto; here, too, not workers of the world uniting but, rather, the well-intended bureaucrats uniting for the good of a whole that would finally transcend the interests of individual nations: "The whole conquers its opposing parts" [Das Ganze besiegt seine Gegenteile] (29). While I have no reason to doubt his findings and in fact find them more plausible than, say, Enzensberger's clichéd mocking of the "soft monster" [sanftes Monster] that is Brussels, this is hardly a vision that will rally the masses.

The Dutch journalist Geert Mak stresses the years beginning in 2010 as the critical ones for the future of Europe and calls for "politicians with somewhat more courage, vision, and charisma" (135). What is needed, furthermore, is a public sphere since "in the united Europe [vs. the United States of America], despite many attempts, no valuable public debate on European issues has taken hold" (69). The questions haunting Europe for him are: Is Europe two things, an economic reality and a political idea (the "project" or *Vorstellung*; Mak 100)? And what is the relationship between these two things? Is the crisis in the one necessarily the downfall of the other? Not unlike Etienne Balibar's earlier conception of the "people of Europe" as a process rather than a fixed entity with a firm foundation, Mak's manifesto-like reflection does not see this problem of identity as something that needs to be *overcome* but, rather, as the very issue whose discussion can be unifying. The crisis over a unifying definition of Europe has been present from the beginning (see Pavkovic) and it is, perhaps, the crisis itself which *is* the unifying definition. Thus, Mak hopes that this present crisis will provide "us with the chance finally to see Europe as it is, with all its strengths and weaknesses, the chance to ask ourselves the question, what kind of European unity we can and want to have" (136).

For this reason, Oskar Negt's intervention is particularly relevant. He offers not a manifesto or an essay but an "Entwurf"—an open-ended design that tries to lay bare the principles of the European project. Negt truly turns to the cultural dimension. Unlike Adolf Muschg, who, oddly for a writer of his stature, reduces the cultural to the economic, Negt focuses on the utopian,

visionary, imaginary. Where Habermas looks to the "civilizing" process of the legalization of transnational democracy, Negt focuses on the social conditions necessary for such a democratizing process. Here we see the disciplinary difference between the political and the social philosopher! He makes three key points: 1. Europe is itself a *Bildungsprojekt*. 2. It involves pursuit of "historical learning" given the diverse histories of the countries (61–63). 3. It is a unique project that, as Habermas says, is a stepping stone to world society or at least a collective means for addressing non-nationalist crises (the "Krisenherde" that Negt addresses, 65–81). He emphasizes the relationship between democracy and learning/Bildung. "Europe must not become an entity without memory" (82). Moreover, it must learn to unite precisely through its differences: "Even linguistic diversity, as paradoxical as it might sound, is an essential element of the formation of European identity" (82). Negt even brings in Hegel quasi against himself at the end: Hegel couldn't understand how something like Europe (based on the Holy Roman Empire) could be more than a constitutional anarchy; but Negt wants to see the new "state" that arises out of the decline of the nation state as a kind of *Aufhebung* (117). Negt powerfully shifts the terrain of where the vision of Europe is to be formed and transmitted.

Learning to See Europe

Thus, although they are by no means in agreement with each other, collectively these manifestos can be used to paint a common picture. Europe has come together over the last sixty-five years, especially over the last twenty, as a common economic market. In particular, the introduction of a common currency was intended to be the means toward greater integration or networking (perhaps entanglement) of the societies. The fact that there were inherent structural and ideological contradictions embedded in this original idea has now become painfully manifest. It is right to speak of a *Euro*-crisis, not because everything depends on fixing the currency but because the problem arose in placing too much emphasis on the economic from the start. This meant that there was not enough *political* integration—particularly the formation of a supranational central bank and acceptance of corresponding loss of individual national sovereignty. It also meant that Germany was able to pursue a basically nationalistic economic policy that gave it a tremendous competitive advantage—all hidden by a neo-liberal ideology. Beck forcefully argues that the only way