

READING THE EURO

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MONEY AS A MEDIUM OF
TRANSNATIONAL IDENTIFICATION

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DEPARTMENT OF CULTURE STUDIES (TEMA Q)

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PREFACE

Media culture is a main element in the formation of cultural identities, whether of people or of places. Cities, regions, nations and supranational formations like the EU are identified by mediated texts that symbolically give meaning to such geographical sites. The same is true for the individuals and groups who populate or cross them.

Such issues were at stake in a team focusing on cultural identities, within the European Science Foundation programme “Changing Media – Changing Europe”, organised by Ib Bondebjerg and Peter Golding, 2000-2004. A series of workshops were held in various “liminal” European cities – places where the intersectional dynamics of personal, urban, national and European identifications were particularly contested or filled with tensions, including Bilbao, Palermo, Istanbul, Berlin and Budapest. We explored and analysed how local monuments, films, television, radio, popular music and the press contributed to establish and transform such identity formation.

I had previously done research on popular music, youth culture and media consumption. In this context, my interest became focused in two main directions. On one hand, I started investigating popular song lyrics of identity in these cities. I hope to be able to complete that study in a not too distant future. My other project concerned euro money as a medium of identification for Europe and its nations. This study is presented here.

The following study owes much to feedback from the ESF team mentioned above. Among them were Karin Becker, Jérôme Bourdon, Daniel Dayan, Kirsten Drotner, Rob Kroes, Sonia Livingstone, Sabina Mihelj, Giuliana Muscio, Roger Odin, Kevin Robins, Maria Rovisco and Philip Schlesinger. Strong support was offered by the team leader William Uricchio, who edits a collection of essays where limited parts of this euro text is to be published as “Meanings of Money: The Euro as Sign of Value and of Cultural Identity” (in William Uricchio (ed.): *We Europeans? Media, Representation, Identities*, Bristol: Intellect Press). A Portuguese anthology about the euro in the media has published another version as “Leituras do Euro” (in Maria João Silveirinha & Cristina Ponte (eds): *Moeda e Comunicação. A representação mediática do Euro*, Lisboa: Livros Horizonte).

The study also derived impetus from the extraordinary interdis-

ciplinary Department of Culture Studies (Tema Q) at Linköping University, where parts of it have been presented at seminars. Also, the Passages project – a collective ethnographic study of media consumption in and around a Swedish shopping centre – was a valuable source of inspiration for ideas on how economy, culture and media interact in late modernity, inspired by Walter Benjamin's Arcades Project (see our English volume, published May 2007 as Fornäs et al.: *Consuming media: Communication, shopping and everyday life*, Oxford/New York: Berg).

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READING EUROS

As a tourist on Patmos in July 2002, I noticed in my wallet not only euro coins with Greek motifs but also some decorated with an Irish harp or a German eagle. I suddenly became aware of the presence of money not only as economic signs of value but also as symbolic signs of cultural identity of geographic and political unities. They are used for instrumental purposes of regulating exchange, but regardless of the ordinary lack of signifying intentions of each individual user, they function as communicative forms as well – as kind of minimalist media, distributed by state formations for use and interpretation among citizens and visitors. Through their carefully planned designs, the euro coins and notes presented an embryonic premonition of a possible shared European identity, transgressing intra-European national borders while contributing to the unification of Europe as one political-economic unit in contrast to the external world.

The introduction of the euro in 2001, and its subsequent spread to an increasing number of nations within the European Union, offers a splendid chance to study changes in national identifications on an official level that also reach deep into the wallets of daily life. How has this chance to contribute to redefining a shared European future been used? This comparative study of euro and pre-euro coins and banknotes as symbolic texts and media artefacts looks for changing national and supranational identifications in these official but widespread signs of economic and cultural value. How are facets of a joint European project signified in the common European images and national coin sides? How do they contribute to the shaping of a continentally shared cultural identity, in relation to previous national currencies?

The following analysis will approach these questions in a series of steps. The first section discusses the role of money as a medium, i.e. as symbolic forms of communication. Then follows an overview over the symbolic facets of the European Union. The main section is then a detailed analysis and interpretation of the designs of all the euro banknotes and coins. For an overview, they are reproduced at the end of this volume. Comparisons are also made with the money designs of the individual countries immediately before the introduction of the euro currency, as well as with the designs used in some

EU countries that have hitherto remained outside of the EMU. The study then concludes by summarising how money as a medium expresses and develops key differences and unities of the European Union.

The current confluence of the culturalisation or aestheticisation of the economy with the economisation or commercialisation of culture necessitates renewed analyses of the strained relations between the market, the state and the lifeworld. In his *Arcades Project*, Walter Benjamin once looked not for “the economic origins of culture” but “the expression of the economy in its culture”.¹ The ambition of the critical theory of the Frankfurt School to connect a phenomenology of inner, personal experiences with material and political-economic structures remains a key task for today’s cultural studies. In *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression*, Stallybrass and White describe consumption sites as hybrid places that mix categories usually kept separate and opposed: “centre and periphery, inside and outside, stranger and local, commerce and festivity, high and low”. This also applies to money, as tools of commerce “situated at the intersection of economic and cultural forces”, blurring cultural identities and crossing the dichotomy of commerce and culture.² Critical attention to symbolic identifications encoded in everyday artefacts may contribute to uncovering key late-modern dream images and to highlighting ideological forms that normally pass unnoticed, thereby de-naturalising what Michael Billig has named “banal nationalism”.³

MONEY AS A MEDIUM

The institution of money is an organising and regulating tool for the circulation of goods and services, for mediating exchange values and binding society together. Coins and banknotes can only fulfil these economic functions of signifying and transferring exchange value if they have clearly identifiable material traits that ensure their authenticity and univocally represent their value, nationality and date of issue. They are means of communication intended for the combined use as unit of account, means of payment and store of value. In order to function as such, they must contain texts, images and patterns that make them interpretable as money. They thus not only signify “frozen desire”, but also forms of identification. Symbolic functions are extra-economic use values of money, indispensable if the primary

functions of coins and notes as means of exchange are to be fulfilled. Many British pound notes and coins carry the inscription “Decus et tutamen” – “An ornament and a safeguard”, from Virgil’s *Aeneid*. This is emphatically true of all money designs: they are at once aesthetic and economic, carriers of meaning as well as of financial value. Money has a secondary function as media texts.

The economic, social and cultural aspects of money are interwoven, and presuppose each other.⁴ Monetary functions are increasingly often carried out digitally, but the use of the specialised artefacts of coins and banknotes still remains remarkably stable, since they are free of cost and relatively simple for the individual user.⁵ They communicate a certain amount of abstract exchange value, but also throw other meanings into daily life circulation. The ways in which to display and safely guarantee their value can be varied and elaborated in response to a wish to make them more visually appealing, or add other layers of meaning that reflect how economic values and the country of origin are understood by its monetary authorities and ordinary citizens. Produced by the international system of state national banks, they circulate condensed images of national identities and sociocultural value hierarchies through their carefully chosen design. Thus, they are widely spread media communicating collective identifications when being used by virtually everyone on a daily basis. Their design and thus semantic content is heavily regulated by political state institutions, making them communications media under strict control by the co-operating state and market systems of modern societies. However, as with other mass media, the mostly unconscious interpretation of their symbolic meanings by the citizens who use them is not fully contained by those systemic institutions, but to a certain degree object of negotiation and transformation. There is always a surplus of meaning in all kinds of textual production, as texts are open to imaginative interpretation.

The concept of media is notoriously vague. Humans are interpretative animals, always ready to produce meanings around all possible phenomena. Today, as micro-electronics are fused with furniture, kitchen appliances or means of transport, a widening range of things come to function as communication tools in a more qualified sense. Of course, money is not primarily a communication medium in the same sense as are books or music discs. These have a primary purpose to communicate meanings, while the mediating

function of money is a secondary though inescapable effect of its primary, economic one. Money primarily belongs to the economic system, but is also drawn into the cultural sphere as soon as humans make them meaningful. What I propose is thus an understanding of both media and of money wide and permeable enough to enable a study of *the meaning of money as a medium*.

Money is thus a communicative tool – a medium – and indeed in a double sense. First, its economic function is itself a kind of strategic co-ordinating action, mediating between people. Second, besides this kind of mediation, money also through designs mediates symbolic forms and meanings among users. If media are broadly conceived as mediating agents between humans, money certainly fulfils such a function already as a purely economic instrument, and has been discussed as such a systemic medium by various thinkers, from Karl Marx to Jürgen Habermas and Niklas Luhmann.⁶ Through its use as a linking device in society, money has social functions that have been mentioned in classical political economy as well as in phenomenological accounts. In his philosophy of money, George Simmel for instance commented on the circularity of coins, the rounding off in economics and the double role of money as symbols of both the eternally fixed and the absolutely mobile.⁷ But there are surprisingly few studies of the cultural or symbolic functions of money seen as material and communicative artefacts.

In *A Flutter of Banknotes* (2001), Brion and Moreau survey the motif history of European paper money. Notes have often showed antique gods or predominantly female allegorical figures representing human virtues or aspects of activity related to the idea of progress: commerce, industry, agriculture, science and art. Symbols of permanence or vigilance were meant to inspire confidence: anchors, hives, towers, open eyes, lamps or cocks. Other banknotes depicted national symbols: coats of arms, heraldic beasts, portraits of monarchs, or more indirectly motifs relating to folklore, local landscapes or place-bound mythology. Portraits in a realist style have dominated since the Second World War, and national figureheads from art, philosophy and science became prominent features from the 1960s. In general, banknotes tend to reflect main values of the issuing societies: “faith in progress, the virtue of work, social harmony, the greatness of a nation”, offering an insight into “the great founding myths of Western society”.⁸

Another study, by Jacques E.C. [Hymans \(2004\)](#), investigates

currency iconography as indicator of collective identities in Europe since the early 19th century, using a database of 1368 notes from all the 15 member states. Its main finding is that time (period) appears more decisive than space (nationality) for paper money images, indicating that states express a transnational spirit of the times rather than unique national identities. Inspired by Ronald Inglehart's theories of cultural shifts, Hymans discerns in these 15 countries an overall trend for the social focus to move from state over society to the individual and of basic norms to move from tradition over material goods to post-materialist values. He sees the paper euro as confirming these trends, but in this case the focus on banknotes hides away the national differences that may only appear on coins. It is also in practice often difficult to decide whether a specific symbolic motif should be understood as a state, societal or individual actor, or reflecting traditional, materialist or post-materialist values. For instance, both antique myths and classical artists connect to traditions but may still be interpreted in contemporary terms, and a scientist can embody both materialist and post-materialist life goals. Still, these studies offer a useful historical background to today's euro iconography.

Else, surprisingly few have seriously studied money as mediated texts in wider cultural contexts. Numismatic studies are remarkably absent from the field of media and cultural studies. Ideas on the role of stamps are relevant, since they are comparable combinations of national value marks and aesthetic images. They share with money key aspects of mass media, being based on public mass-scale, unidirectional dissemination and indirect communication across time and space.⁹ In *One-Way Street*, Walter Benjamin mentioned stamps and letters as windows to the world and as items of collecting, and post-cards as archetypal forms of those almost magical connections that media forge between common daily life and the distant big world outside. He described a postmark as "the occult side of the stamp", stamp-albums as "magic encyclopaedias", and the stamps themselves as "the calling cards that large states leave behind in the nursery".¹⁰ These striking metaphors may well be translated to the Internet rhetoric of the 1990s, where e-mail archives are often read as magic encyclopaedias whose address domain names and the codes describing how messages have been linked across the world are like traces in daily life of the global networks of humanity. There is a persistent connecting magic alive and well in current media utopias,

proving that even the most advanced technologies for perfect reproduction and dissemination can be surrounded by an enchanting aura. Coins and banknotes share these connective capabilities with stamps, in that they also function like calling cards that large states and supra-states place in each little citizen's purse. This is one reason behind the widespread collecting of both these kinds of artefacts. But, as Hymans argues, currencies have the advantage of being both *universal* (issued by every state), *selective* (focusing a more narrow number of designs compared to stamps) and *regularly updated* (unlike flags or anthems), making them a preferred case for studying national identifications.¹¹

A www text informing about the euro designs finds it necessary to declare: "Of course, banknotes have to be more than just attractive pieces of paper." They have security features and formal aspects that enable them to be used functionally as secure and reliable signs of value. However, it is possible to momentarily put this main purpose of money in brackets and instead regard them as "just attractive pieces of paper" endowed with meaning that point at historically specific constructions of collective (mainly national) identities. Of course, numismatic collectors of varying sincerity have always used coins in this manner. A colleague of mine showed me a bracelet she made out of various European coins after a trip in her youth to this continent from her Iowa hometown. To her also, national coins were attractive pieces of shining metal as well as a memory that told her stories about the countries she had visited.¹²

Today, one particular currency – the euro – represents a carefully chartered effort to express and strengthen the emergent political unity of Europe. The euro is a multiple site where identities are represented but also made – in the minds of decision makers as well as among ordinary citizens. As such, it deserves interpretive attention. The euro design is heavily colonised by the political and economic forces of that national and inter-national bank system through which state bodies regulate the globalising market. It offers a glimpse into the ways in which official identifications presently slide into new shapes. Comparing the forms of cultural identification on the European and national facets of the euro highlights some key aspects, potentials and limitations of the project of a transnational European cultural identity.

CONSTITUTING EUROPE

European integration takes place on several arenas. The installation of a common European Union currency in form of the euro is an interesting example, since it offers a chance to study the close but possibly contradictory interplay between political, economic and lifeworld aspects on the interrelation between national and European levels. In the case of the euro, their designs have been deliberately made to reinforce the politically motivated themes of a united Europe. The fact that money is a politically regulated means of mediation in the market system offers clues to how cultural identity formations relate to economic and political ones.¹³

The 2003 draft of a treaty establishing a constitution for Europe refers to Europe as “a continent that has brought forth civilisation”, with inhabitants “arriving in successive waves from earliest times”, who “have gradually developed the values underlying humanism: equality of persons, freedom, respect for reason”.¹⁴ It declares itself to draw inspiration from “the cultural, religious and humanist inheritance of Europe, the values of which, still present in its heritage, have embedded within the life of society the central role of the human person and his or her inviolable and inalienable rights, and respect for law”. It commits itself to a belief “that reunited Europe intends to continue along the path of civilisation, progress and prosperity, for the good of all its inhabitants, including the weakest and most deprived; that it wishes to remain a continent open to culture, learning and social progress; and that it wishes to deepen the democratic and transparent nature of its public life, and to strive for peace, justice and solidarity throughout the world”. And it expresses a conviction that “while remaining proud of their own national identities and history, the peoples of Europe are determined to transcend their ancient divisions and, united ever more closely, to forge a common destiny”. Thus “united in its diversity”, Europe is said to offer “the best chance of pursuing, with due regard for the rights of each individual and in awareness of their responsibilities towards future generations and the Earth, the great venture which makes of it a special area of human hope”. On this background, the constitution founds the European Union, “reflecting the will of the citizens and States of Europe to build a common future” and based on “the values of respect for human dignity, liberty, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights”, in a shared “society of

pluralism, tolerance, justice, solidarity and non-discrimination”, with the main aim to “promote peace, its values and the well-being of its peoples”. It offers its citizens “an area of freedom, security and justice without internal frontiers, and a single market where competition is free and undistorted”, while promising to “respect its rich cultural and linguistic diversity”, and ensuring that “Europe’s cultural heritage is safeguarded and enhanced”. The draft constitution explicitly specifies five “symbols of the Union”:

The flag of the Union shall be a circle of twelve golden stars on a blue background.

The anthem of the Union shall be based on the Ode to Joy from the Ninth Symphony by Ludwig van Beethoven.

The motto of the Union shall be: United in diversity.

The currency of the Union shall be the euro.

9 May shall be celebrated throughout the Union as Europe day.¹⁵

Five symbolic keys to Europe: a flag, an anthem, a motto, a currency and a day. Not a very dense web of meanings to identify the European Union project, but at least a start.

The European *flag* goes back to the Council of Europe in 1955, and became adopted by the EU institutions in 1986. It is declared by the EU to symbolise “Europe’s unity and identity”, through a circle of gold stars representing “solidarity and harmony between the peoples of Europe”. The number of stars has nothing to do with the number of Member States, but was chosen as a traditional “symbol of perfection, completeness and unity”. Twelve is the number of months in a year and the number of hours shown on a clock face, thus connoting the dynamism of time, and the circle is often used as a symbol of unity. “So the European flag was born, representing the ideal of unity among the peoples of Europe”, says the EU website. This symbol of unitarian harmony leaves no space for difference. The closed form appears like a shining wall around an empty void in the middle, with each star shining as a perfect, separate individual shape, one exactly similar to the other. The flag alone thus presents the EU as a pure and shining monolith, far from all talk of multicultural diversity.

The European *anthem* is supposed to be that of Europe in a wider sense, including non-EU nations as well. Its melody is that of

the fourth (final) movement of Ludwig van Beethoven's Ninth Symphony (1823), set to Friedrich von Schiller's "Ode to Joy" (1785), expressing an idealistic vision of the human race united in brotherhood: "Alle Menschen werden Brüder...". This classical work of German poetry and art music was first adopted by the Council of Europe in 1972, and the conductor of the Berlin Philharmonics Herbert von Karajan was asked to write three instrumental arrangements – for piano, for wind instruments and for symphony orchestra. It became the official EU anthem in 1985. "Without words, in the universal language of music, this anthem expresses the ideals of freedom, peace and solidarity for which Europe stands", says the EU website, where it can also be listened to as an audio file: "It is not intended to replace the national anthems of the Member States but rather to celebrate the values they all share and their unity in diversity". There is an interesting homology between Beethoven's time and our own, in that his hopes for the Congress of Vienna to establish European peace after the Napoleonic wars parallels the hopes that the Coal and Steel Union after World War II would finally put an end to the repeated catastrophic hostilities between France and Germany. Schiller's lyrics "Freunde, nicht diese Töne" was precisely a call against violence, silencing the aggressive chaos. This process of civilising domestication of dark forces is also represented in the music itself, where chaotic strife is forced into reconciliation, not by expulsion of the brutes but through their disciplining integration and submission under a more peaceful and happy order, forging unity out of diversity. With the carnivalesque "Freude schöne Götterfunken", set to a kind of elevated but joyful dance tune, fusing high and low culture, a Promethean aura is established around a secularised but transcendental humankind, referring to Enlightenment values and human rights. It is significant that the song is performed by a mass ensemble of choir and orchestra, rather than individual voices.

The Europe *day* is the 9th of May. This was the date of the "Schuman declaration" in 1950, in which the French Foreign Minister Robert Schuman proposed the creation of an organised Europe, thus taking a first decisive step towards the formation of the European Union. The declaration was explicitly motivated by a wish to maintain peaceful relations, nourished by the grim experiences of two disastrous European wars. The Europe Day is meant to be used for "activities and festivities that bring Europe closer to its citizens and peoples of the Union closer to one another". Schuman proposed

that European countries, with France and Germany as the central axis, should pool together their coal and steel production as “the first concrete foundation of a European federation”.¹⁶ It was precisely this industry sector that formed the basis of military power, and those countries that had recently fought a horrible war against each other, resulting in vast material and moral desolation. In 1985, the Milan Summit of EU decided to celebrate 9 May as Europe Day, thus emphasising the foundation of the European Union in values of peace and solidarity that “find expression through economic and social development embracing environmental and regional dimensions which are the guarantees of a decent standard of living for all citizens”. In agreement with the Schuman declaration, EU continues to believe that in order not to repeat the tragedies of history, there is a need for rules and institutions that unite Europe in peace and solidarity, instead of (as in the past) through conquer and domination of one group or power. Such a united Europe must respect “freedom and the identity of all of the people which compose it”, in order to “control the mastery of its destiny and develop a positive role in the world”: “The European Union is at the service of its citizens. While keeping their own specific values, customs and language, European citizens should feel at ease in the ‘European home’.” This talk of Europe as a “home” for its citizens reminds me of the Swedish political ideology of the “*folkhem*” (people’s home), outlined by Social Democratic PM Per Albin Hansson in a famous speech 1928, referring to society and the state as a shared home for all its citizens. This was a home for which all were responsible but which was also expected to take good care of everyone. It was to be based on community, equality, care and co-operation, breaking down social and economic divisions. This egalitarian but paternalistic and somewhat naïve vision echoes in the Schuman declaration as well as in several of today’s EU documents.

The European *motto* “unity in difference” (Latin: *In varietate concordia*) was selected in 2000 from proposals sent to a website by some 80,000 school pupils, and then accepted by the European Parliament. It had previously been the motto of the European Bureau for the Lesser Used Languages. Modified into “united in diversity”, and with an authorized translation into all the EU languages, it was officially written into the European Constitution. Though least known of these symbols among ordinary people, it is increasingly often used in the official EU rhetoric.

Together with the euro, these symbols, jointly identifying the political, economic and cultural entity of the European Union, are integrated in a standard stock of national symbols, and combine to work on several levels: one visual, one aural, one verbal, one economic and one temporal. A sixth symbol might well be added, namely the EU passport, signifying “European citizenship”. While the flag, anthem, day and motto have a more limited and purely symbolic or discursive use, the symbols for money and citizenship have each a double function, as both symbolic expression of identity and material tool of integration – in one case economic, in the other political.¹⁷

Such standardised symbols can never by themselves constitute a sufficient ground for a shared civil society-based European identity of the kind that has been discussed as necessary to underpin the political, economic and institutional aspects of the EU. Such a collective identity project is emerging only slowly, perhaps too slowly, creating difficult tensions in the relations between citizens and the political establishment in Brussels. Jürgen Habermas, Dieter Grimm and others have repeatedly stressed that as a political community, Europe must express itself in the consciousness of its citizens in more ways than through the euro. They have stressed the role of media in shaping that public sphere that is the condition for democratic participation, as integral part of an intermediary area between parliaments and citizens, together with political parties, associations and social movements. Hitherto, this mediating process malfunctions in the EU, where such intermediary structures are to a great extent missing, though there are shifting views on the chances for such a Europeanised communication system to grow that could be the basis of a truly European political discourse, making the European union “a sphere of publics” by letting national circuits of communication open up onto each other – united in diversity.¹⁸ The modern European identity project has emerged from the bitter experience of not only great internal differences but also extreme violence. From this, Europeans claim to have gradually developed methods and institutions for dealing with conflicts by ritualising them, using them for social innovations in dialectical strategies for solving problems through acknowledging “reasonable disagreements”, in a history that has led to increasingly abstract forms of “solidarity between strangers”.¹⁹ All this must obviously be a broad and multifaceted process with a great number of constituents, including political, judicial,

economic and social measures as well as complex processes in the field of culture and communication.

Symbols alone are thus far from sufficient. Still, they do mean something. Flags, anthems, mottos and celebrations are used in rather specific places, but still have a certain effect on how people conceive of what Europe is about. European identifications emerge in everyday interactions among people, but are supported by specific public channels and symbols afforded official status. Each such symbol may in itself appear trifling, but in combination and context, they etch an image of what Europe is for its own politicians and citizens – and for those of other continents. The fact that the final chorus from Beethoven's Ninth – "Freude schöne Götterfunken" with its androcentric call for brotherhood and holy joy – is used as the musical Leitmotif of Europe does produce a meaning-effect, not necessarily as an immediate representation of what Europe is, but of how it wants to be. The European Anthem has suppressed the original words of the theme, but their memory lingers on and resonates with the universal claims of uplifting human peace and solidarity, in the Schuman declaration and other EU texts. In this way, the chosen symbols cement Europe's self-assumed role as standard-bearer in the modern project of enlightenment, with its problematic as well as emancipatory sides. The symbols combine to keep alive the World Wars memories as founding tales and myths of the EU. While erasing completely the colonial as well as the migration issues, they concentrate on the peace-loving praise of diversity and communication as the antidote to Europe's past guilt.

It is interesting to note that the currency is explicitly treated by the EU itself in terms of such identifying symbols, and not only as a practical tool for transferences of economic values. On one hand, this testifies to a certain "commercialisation" of the European project: an explicit acknowledging of the central role of capitalism and the market economy in the union, not only as a hidden linking mechanism but also as a cherished and almost sacralised idol of worship – a currency that has a declared role in signifying the shared identity of the European nations. On the other hand, it may simultaneously also be seen as an expression of a parallel culturalisation of the economy, acknowledging the fact that even money as aestheticised material objects (coins and banknotes) become part of an "experience industry", while they do to some extent lose part of their traditional economic importance due to the increasing role of e-money. Such

money symbols are even more omnipresent than the other four symbols, and therefore deserve closer scrutiny. They belong to a kind of “unflagged” or “*banal supranationalism*”, to rephrase Michael Billig’s term.²⁰ They show how dominant European actors want the EU and its national states to appear in the sphere of everyday money circulation. Experiences and imaginations of the character and role of Europe in the world are formulated in literature, art, songs and films, on television and the Internet, but also in the faces of the euro.

INTRODUCING THE EURO

On 1 January 2002, the seven different values of euro banknotes and eight values of coins were introduced in twelve Member States of the European Union, to be used by almost 300 million Europeans. Monaco, San Marino and Vatican City participate in the euro currency with their own coin designs, through a special agreement. In all, 50 billion coins and 14.5 billion banknotes were released, with a total value of over €664 billion. The banknotes look the same throughout the EMU area, while the coins have the front side (obverse) common to all 12 countries and a rear side (reverse) specific to each country.²¹ Each national set dominates the circulation of money in its respective country, but through travel and tourism, the national circuits leak into each other, so that even though most citizens will mainly see coins from their own countries, they will from time to time in their daily life also encounter images from elsewhere. Studying to what extent various national currencies mix with each other is thus an interesting way to discover traces of international contacts.

The name “euro” was adopted in 1995 as a successor of the previous European currency unit “ecu” which for Germans sounded like “ein Kuh” (a cow) and thus was deemed to invite jokes. The € symbol is based on the Greek epsilon letter, meant to refer to the origins of European civilisation, and with the two horizontal bars symbolising the intended stability of this new currency.²²

BANKNOTES

In 1995 the European Monetary Institute (EMI), forerunner of the European Central Bank (ECB), selected two themes for the euro banknotes, based on the preparatory work of an advisory group of art historians, graphic designers and marketing experts: “Ages and styles of Europe” and a broader theme of “abstract/modern design”. For the first theme, the features to be depicted on each of the seven banknote denominations (5, 10, 20, 50, 100, 200 and 500€) were to represent a specific period of European cultural history: Classical, Romanesque, Gothic, Renaissance, Baroque and Rococo, the age of iron and glass architecture, and modern 20th century architecture. It was also decided that the designs should incorporate the European

flag as “a universally accepted symbol of Europe”. A European-wide competition followed in 1996, with a jury of experts in marketing, design and art history, selected by EMI from candidates proposed by the national banks. The jury selected five versions of each theme, based on criteria of “creativity, aesthetics, style, functionality, likely public perception and acceptability (in particular the avoidance of any national bias and the achievement of a proper balance between the number of men and the number of women portrayed on the banknotes)”. The latter problem was in the end solved by excluding all humans from the designs, and by letting the motifs be completely abstracted from any geographical location. Efforts were then also made to test their “public perception” by making qualitative interviews with 1,896 individuals throughout Europe: professional cash handlers and members of the general public. In 1997, the revised banknote designs could then be created.

It was the Austrian graphic designer Robert Kalina of the Österreichische Nationalbank who designed the banknotes.²³ Apart from basic information such as the value and the name of the currency in the Latin and Greek alphabet, they include a value-specific combination of the twelve EU stars with a set of windows and gateways from seven architectural periods: Classical (5€), Romanesque (10€), Gothic (20€), Renaissance (50€), Baroque and Rococo (100€), Iron and Glass style (200€) and Modern 20th Century architecture (500€). All these architectural elements have been deliberately designed in order not to signify any particular building from any specific country, but are meant to synthesize features that unite the whole continent. They are carefully explained and offered an intended interpretation in the official sources published by the involved governments and banks. The windows and gateways are thus intended to symbolise “the European spirit of openness and co-operation”, while the twelve stars represent “the dynamism and harmony between European nations”. To complement these designs, the reverse of each banknote features a bridge, symbolising “the close co-operation and communication between Europe and the rest of the world”. There is also a map of Europe, including tiny dots for the large-enough extra-European colonial territories of France, Portugal and Spain that also use the euro.²⁴ The visual representation of Europe as a spatial territory is thus somewhat complicated by its colonial past.

COINS

The obverse sides of the eight values of euro coins have a motif created by Mr. Luc Luycx of the Royal Belgian Mint, who won a European wide competition. They depict the value, the name “EURO” and different variants of the EU map and 12 stars linked by parallel lines. The 1, 2 and 5 cent coins supposedly show “Europe’s place in the world”, by having a map of the entire globe with Europe in the centre. The 10, 20 and 50 cent coins depict “Europe as a group of individual nations” by showing each country as a separate island. “A united Europe without frontiers” is meant to be represented on the 1 and 2 euro coins, with an ordinary EU map. These three variants are also clearly differentiated in colours and general design, so that the coin series consists of three different value groups with 3, 3 and 2 sizes in each.

The three design variants together thus tell a narrative starting with entering Europe from afar, noting its place in a global context, then focusing its internal diversity, and finally watching it unite into a coherent entity. The lines between stars imply a kind of unique and holy “star quality” of each state with an emphasis on the linking work of their union. This interpretation is supported when both sides of the coin are acknowledged. Romano Prodi, President of the European Commission, has explained the coin sides as expressing the EU motto of “united in diversity”. In this “preferred reading”, the common obverse side symbolises the unity of the European Commission, whereas the national reverse sides represent the diversity of the European Parliament. The two sides thus together symbolise the centre of economic and political power versus the periphery of each country. The obverse sides symbolically also emphasise pure financial value (a number for the euro amount in question), whereas the rear sides present symbolic and cultural aspects of identity. All “national” coins may be used in all EU countries, resulting in a circulation of national signs between the EU states as well as to all other countries where the euro may be used, for instance through tourism and other travel. This means that a whole range of national symbols will possibly be found in any single EU citizen’s wallet, reminding of the co-existence within the boundaries of this union of regions that might feel rather exotic.²⁵

In order to see the patterns of difference between nations it is necessary to scrutinize the coins designed in each country, and in

order to get hold of the historical dynamics, these will also be compared to the currencies that circulated in the European Union immediately before the introduction of the euro in January 2002. I will for comparison add some countries that have attached themselves to the euro without being EU members, as well as those three EU countries (Denmark, Sweden and the UK) that decided not to switch to the euro in 2002.²⁶

AUSTRIA

Austria decided to produce a complete series of different euro coins, dedicated to plants, architecture and historical personalities, all designed by one artist (Josef Kaiser). The smallest coins contain typical flowers: an *Alpine primrose* (1c), an *edelweiss* (2c), and a *gentian flower* (5c) – with the purpose to remind of ecological issues concerning Austria's contribution to a shared policy for protecting the natural environment. *St. Stephen's Cathedral* in gothic style (consecrated 1147) is a tourist must-see (10c). The *Belvedere Palace* (1714-23) is a beautiful baroque building that is synonymous with Austria's freedom, since the treaty of its sovereign constitution was signed there in 1955 (20c). The *Wiener Secession building* (1897-98) is an exhibition house signifying the birth of the art nouveau style in Austria, as a symbol of the dawn of a new era (50c). The composer *Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart* (1756-91) was already on the old coins (1€). So was the pacifist *Bertha von Suttner* (1843-1914), a symbol of Austrian peace efforts (2€).

Immediately before the Euro, Austria had banknotes with Biedermeier aquarellist Moritz Michael Daffinger (1790-1849) and Albertina Wien (1742-45), which is one of the world's largest collections of graphic art; psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) and the house of the institute of medical history Josephinum Wien (1782-85); political economist Eugen Böhm von Bawerk (1851-1914) and the Science Academy (1735-55); feminist Rosa Mayreder (1858-1938) and other members of the Austrian women's association; medical researcher Karl Landsteiner (1868-1943) and his laboratory for analysing blood at Vienna University; and Mozart and the Vienna State Opera House (built 1861-69). Their old coins had a vast range of motifs, including heraldic eagles, coats of arms, horsemen and flowers; various buildings, towns and regions; images of phases of Austria's history or of its various peoples; symbols of Europe and

the Wiener Secession; references to the Olympic movement and to the House of Hapsburg, portraits of a great number of cultural personalities such as engineer Ferdinand Porsche, psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud, psychologist Konrad Lorenz, dramatists Johann Nepomuk Nestroy, Franz Grillparzer and Max Reinhardt, poet Hugo von Hofmannsthal, artists Gustav Klimt, Koloman Moser, Egon Schiele and Oskar Kokoschka, composers Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, Joseph Haydn, Franz Schubert, Anton Bruckner, Gustav Mahler, Johann Strauß and Franz Léhar, as well as the conductors of the Wiener Philharmoniker Herbert von Karajan and Karl Böhm.²⁷

Austria euros thus combine nature with culture, plants with buildings and famous persons. Nature is in a way universal or at least not bound to state boundaries, though plants like these may be geographically located and culturally identified with a certain region or even nation. Whereas nature is presented as timeless, the cultural motifs point at the 12th and the 18th century, c. 1900 and 1955. The buildings chosen are associated with religion, politics and the arts – three key spheres of society. As such, they may be universally appreciated, while being anchored in a national context and also to some extent in European culture: the cathedral is visited by tourists from anywhere, the constitution was a product of European negotiations after World War II, and art nouveau became a widely dispersed influential style. Mozart as cultural personality did travel a lot to Paris and several German, Italian and Czech cities, and his work was of course soon to become a primary part of global art music. Bertha von Suttner secures an even gender balance and adds a political aspect that emphasizes international co-operation in Europe. The step from Schilling to Euro was no sharp break, as many motifs existed also before. The diverse range of motifs before obviously implies a certain narrowing of the scope with the reduction to only eight motifs. It seems clear that deliberate choices have been made of motifs with some European rather than purely Austrian connection, in line with the EU/euro project as a whole. The total narrative from low to high values moves from nature across material artefacts to the living human spirit, in line with a kind of secularized Hegelian interpretation of historical progress.

BELGIUM

Belgium decided for continuity back to pre euro money, and all the

coins were designed by the director of the Turnhout academy of arts, Jan Alfons Keustermann. As a monarchy, Belgium presents on all its coins the face of its *King Albert II*, with a monogram A with a crown above, placed between the European stars.

Pre-euro banknotes depicted painter and graphic artist of English ancestry, James Ensor (1860-1949); inventor of the saxophone Adolphe Sax (1814-94), who actually lived in France; painter René Magritte (1898-1967); painter and sculptor Constant Permeke (1886-1952); Jugend architect Victor Horta (1861-1947); and the royal couple only on the highest value. All were combined with fitting side motifs relating to their work. The Belgian coins mainly used royal motifs.²⁸

The Belgian euro coins focus on the present, though a very traditional and limited part of that present, in form of the monarch. There is a complete continuity from the past, and this country has thus chosen to present itself only as a kingdom: an aristocratic and old-fashioned form of rule that today has mainly ornamental and decorative functions. There is of course a kind of inter-national network of monarchies that ties the royal families together by marriage and other relationships, and since monarchies are a European invention, this may not totally contradict the EU project. But in spite of its wide and media-supported popular appeal, monarchy is a form of non-democratic elite institution – a remnant of the feudal times in which Europe was radically disunited. This does not fit well with the basic EU principles, and is extremely narrow as a national identification. Sticking to the ancient tradition of letting an image of the sovereign ruler guarantee the money value is a strange remnant from feudalism in a Europe of democratic parliamentary nations. The fact that kings nowadays are more personas of popular culture than any real rulers gives an extra twist to that symbolism. The same royal portraits that two centuries ago presented real political power today rather represent some kind of virtual media fame, in an anachronistic marriage between premodern aristocracy and late modern commercialism. The single design also halts any narrative progress through the coin values, multiplying the impression of ahistorical stasis.

FINLAND

The three different Finnish euro coin motifs built on previous national coins designs. An *heraldic lion* was placed on all the six

smaller values. *Two swans flying above a lake* are found on the 1€ coin; *cloudberry*s and cloudberry flowers adorn the 2€.

Finland's preceding Finnish mark banknotes fronted runner Paavo Nurmi (1897-1973) with a sports arena; novelist Väinö Linna (1920-92) with town houses by water; architect Alvar Aalto (1898-1976) with one of his modernist buildings by water; composer Jean Sibelius (1865-1957) with three flying swans; linguist and *Kalevala* compiler Elias Lönnrot (1802-84) backed by a deep forest with lake; and finally the priest, political economist and politician Anders Chydenius (1729-1803) with a fortress and six flying seagulls on the rear. The last pre-euro coins had motifs from nature: bee cells with two flowers and leaves of lily-of-the-valley; jaircap moss with bear; the heraldic lion coat of arms; three lily pads and dragonfly in the lily pad, with ringed seal on islet in Saimaa lake; two clusters of rowanberries and leaves of rowan tree with male capercaillie.

The Finnish euro motifs do not explicitly denote any particular historical period, though a Finn may well connote them to specific tales and myths of Finland, for instance the coat of arms to the independence from Russia in 1809. The lion as such is no Finnish animal, but the expression of a kind of traditional heraldic exoticism, common all over Europe, thus with a transnational edge to it, even if it is also integrated in an aristocratic or royal heritage of power symbols which is somewhat at odds with Finland's republican constitution and lack of domestic aristocracy. Cloudberry is specific to the northern hemisphere, and though Finland is sometimes called a land of thousand lakes, migrating birds are in fact a kind of border-crossing nomads. There is thus continuity with the past, but also an amount of Europeanism and transnationalism, especially if one regards the narrative sequence from mythic nation symbols to a kind of natural communication where the local is wedded to the translocal.

FRANCE

In France, a national competition chose the designs, all of which are based in the traditional republican symbols from the French Revolution. A young and determined *Marianne* is embodying the desire for a strong and lasting Europe in the smallest coins (1c, 2c, 5c). A *sower* in modern and timeless design, symbolising France integrated in Europe but remaining independent, adorns the next level (10c, 20c, 50c). A *tree* symbolising life, continuity and growth, inscribed

in a hexagon and surrounded by the *republican motto* “liberté, égalité, fraternité”, is found on the highest level (1€, 2€).

The last edition of franc banknotes depicted composer Claude Debussy (1862-1918); author and pilot Antoine de Saint-Exupéry (1900-44); painter Paul Cezanne (1839-1906); engineer Gustave Eiffel (1832-1923); and physicists Pierre and Marie Curie (1859-1906 and 1867-1934). All rear sides showed phenomena related to their respective personalities. For instance, Saint-Exupéry was combined with images of an airplane, his fiction figure of the little prince and a map of Europe and Africa. The franc coins contained the words “République Française” (or “RF”) with the motto “liberté – égalité – fraternité” and one of the stock republican symbols: an ear of corn, a branch with leaves, a tree and a hexagon, the symbolic Republic woman in profile, the Spirit of the Bastille, the Mont St-Michel or the Panthéon.²⁹

All French motifs go back to the French Revolution of the late 18th century, with its crucial universalist and classicist tone. Mythical but also human figures, a tree and a verbal motto points towards France and its role in giving birth to the seed of Enlightenment that may be interpreted as an root also to the EU project. This kind of dissemination is on one hand universalistic but also contains elements of a Eurocentric imperialism. Other motifs, such as cultural and scientific personalities, have been excluded in favour of this sole thematic sphere, strongly favouring unity before diversity. The sequence from low to high values reinforces this impression by telling the story of a youthful new-born nation who then disseminate its message like a missionary of human reason or an imperialist of universal democracy, resulting in the organically tree-like growth of a global society where all have their places. This reconciliation and even seamless fusion of nature and culture is typical of modernity, in which the new is so often permeated by the archaic.³⁰

GERMANY

The *oak twig* reminds of the old German pfennig coins (1c, 2c, 5c). *Brandenburger Tor* (1791) is a symbol of the split and but also the reunion of Germany – the view through the arch is meant to underline the unification of Germany and of Europe (10c, 20c, 50c). The *federal eagle* (Bundesadler) is a traditional symbol of German sovereignty (1€, 2€).

The last series of German mark banknotes showed cultural personalities, each in front of historical buildings of a particular city, and with related objects on the rear sides.³¹ Author Bettina von Arnum (1785-1859) in front of the mansion Qiepersdorf and historical Berlin buildings was backed by the Brandenburger Tor. Mathematician, astronomer, geologist and physicist Carl Friedrich Gauß (1777-1855) in Göttingen shared company with a sextant. Poet Annette von Droste-Hülshoff (1797-1848) in Meersburg shared paper with a writing feather and a beech tree related to her short story “Die Judenbuche”. Baroque architect Balthasar Neumann (1687-1753) was placed in Würzburg and backed by Würzburger Residenz and the Benediktiner-Abteilkirche in Neresheim. Composer and pianist Clara Schumann (1819-96) in Leipzig backed by a grand piano and the Hochschule für Musik in Frankfurt where she studied. Medic and serologist Paul Ehrlich (1854-1915) in Frankfurt was fittingly combined with a microscope. Painter, graphic artist and natural scientist Maria Sibylla Merian (1647-1717) was placed in Nürnberg and backed by a dandelion with the caterpillar and chrysalis of a butterfly. The highest value, 1000 DM, had the brothers Wilhelm and Jacob Grimm (1786-1859 and 1785-1863), as linguists and collectors of German tales and culture, posing in Kassel and backed by *Deutsche Wörterbuch* and the Royal Library of Berlin, one of the places where they worked. As for the old German coins, lower values had a girl planting a tree and an oak twig, while the highest showed the Bundesadler and ex-Bundeskanzler Willy Brandt (1913-92), with the inscription “Einigkeit und Recht und Freiheit” (“Unity and Justice and Freedom”) on the edge.

Like most other countries, Germany has maintained a strong continuity, with a widespread plant with traditional national connotations, the frightening bird that reminds of authoritarian periods of German history (Bismarck or the Third Reich) and, more interestingly, the building that has such a complex history. It was ordered by Frederick the Great and built by Carl Gotthard Langhans, inspired by the Propylaea of Athens. At first it was called the “Gate of Peace”, but after its topping quadriga was stolen to Paris by Napoleon in 1806 and returned in 1814, it became a “Gate of Victory”, and established as a symbol of Prussia. As such it was the site for celebrating the victory over France in 1871, and used in similar ways during World War I and by the Nazis. In the cold war, it became part of the Berlin wall and a symbol of divided Europe, but after the 1989 reuni-

fiction, its opening on the Unter den Linden avenue has made it a symbol of the reuniting of Germany and of East and West Europe at large. It is thus a traditional symbol of Berlin and of unity across deep divides, thus a perfect symbol for the European project, too.³² As a whole, however, the coin series embeds this split/reunion dialectics inside a more conservative and authoritarian story starting with nature and ending with the eagle as both naturalised and mythified symbol of national power, making the German euro series rather ambiguous.

GREECE

The three lowest Greek coin values is devoted to ships: an Athenian *trireme* from the time of Komon, 5thC BC, for more than 200 years the largest warship afloat (1c); a *corvette*, used in the Greek War of Independence 1821-27 (2c); and a modern seagoing *tanker*, reflecting the innovative spirit of Greek shipping (5c). The next three show heroes in the Greek struggle for independence, mainly from the Turkish empire: *Rigas Velestinlis-Fereos* (1757-98, national hero and poet during the Ottoman occupation, exile in Constantinople, Bucharest and Austria, inspired by the enlightenment, French revolution and Napoleon, martyr in the war for independence 1789) (10c); *Ioannis Capodistrias* (1776-1831, Greek political leader in independence struggle and prime minister, striving to get general European support, assassinated in 1833) (20c); and *Eleftherios Venizelos* (1864-1936, Cretan liberty leader against the Turks, head of Crete 1899 and first prime minister of Greece in periods from 1910 to 1933, moderniser) (50c). The highest values carry mythic motifs: the *owl* as a symbol of wisdom, from an ancient Athenian 4 drachma coin 5thC BC (1€) and a Spartan mosaic of the myth of the *abduction of Europe* by Zeus in the shape of a bull (2€).

The last drachma banknotes had each a specific theme, publicized on their national bank website. On the lowest note value, “Letters – Education and their contribution to the nation’s independence” was the idea behind Goddess Athena, backed by the translator and educator Adamantios Korais (1748-1833), who went to Paris in 1788 and was important in the Greek struggle for independence. “Nation’s spiritual preparation for the Greek war of independence (1821)” was the official heading for a picture of the pioneer of Greek Enlightenment, Rigas Velestinlis-Fereos (1757-98), together with a painting

by Nikolaos Gyzis called “The Secret School”. The thematic formulation “The first Governor in Greece after the war of independence (1821) agricultural development” fronted politician Ioannis Capodistrias (1776-1831), who led the first Greek government after war of independence in the 1820s, with the citadel of Corfu on the rear side. “Ancient Olympia, birthplace of the Olympic Games” was the theme for Apollo, God of the sun, wisdom and literature, backed by the temple of Hera at ancient Olympia and a discus thrower sculpture. The theme of “Greek war of independence (1821)” was materialised by general Theodoros Kolokotronis (1770-1843), who led the Greek War of Independence against Ottoman rule in the 1820s and became the hero of many folksongs, together with the town of Karytena. The highest value, 10,000 Drachma, thematized “health”, with pathologist George Papanicolaou (1883-1962) and the God of medicine Asclepius. The watermarks showed either a charioteer of Delphi or King Philip of Macedonia (383-336 B.C.), who made Macedonia the leading power in Greece after his victory over Athens 338 B.C., and was the father of Alexander the Great. Coin motifs included images related to sports championships or classical gods, Homer, Democritus (with an atom) and Aristotle. National heroes included Regas Fereos-Velestinlis (1757-98), the poet Dionysios Solomos (1798-1857) who studied in Italy, Manto Mavrogenous, a heroine of the Greek War of Independence (1821-30) who spoke Italian and Turkish and organised a revolutionary meeting on Mykonos island, revolutionary heroine and sea warrior Laskarina Bouboulina (1771-1825) and general Markos Botsaris (1788-1823). Other motifs were an ancient Greek vessel, the 1821 corvette and a maritime symbol of that same crucial year, and an olive tree branch.

Greece has a focus on its long history and its myths based in classical antiquity. The historical periods referred to are the 5th century BC, the struggle for independence during the decades around 1800 and in the early 20th century, and the post-war period of economic expansion and oil trade. The ships are interesting in that they both connect to Greece as a traditional seafaring nation and to the inherently transnational or even global character of the seas and of trade in general. The three freedom fighters are of course strongly related to Greece as a nation, but also to making connections with other European forces in this struggle, and notably to disconnect from Turkey. If and when Turkey becomes a EU member, it will appear somewhat remarkable that Greece has chosen to identify

through men who mainly fought against that future union partner.³³ It is also notable that all three historical persons are male, while women are instead represented by the abducted Europe, who certainly relate strongly to the EU and connects that union to Greek myth, but in a rather passive and not so glorious manner, since Europe is shown as mastered by the potent male Greek god. Many motifs connect back to the previous drachma coins, but the mythic ones imply a renewal that is meant to link up with Europe, though in a rather strange and patronising way. As a narrative whole there is a progress from artefacts over persons to mythical symbols with natural elements. Nature thus does not come first in Greece, and the highest level cannot refrain from returning to classical antiquity, even though the temporal progress in each of the two first subseries move the ordinary modern way from past to present.

IRELAND

The Irish government decided to give all coin values an identical design: the *Celtic harp* as a traditional symbol of Ireland, with the word “Éire”.

The old Irish £5 note depicted Catherine McAuley (1778-1841), foundress of the Sisters of Mercy with the Mater Misericordiae Hospital in Dublin and a classroom with three children, a verse of the poem “Mise Raifteri an File”, based on the “Songs Ascribed to Raftery” by Douglas Hyde (1903), and a map of Europe without national boundaries hanging on the wall. The £10 note showed novelist James Joyce (1882-1941) with images of Dublin and the opening of *Finnegans Wake*. The highest values notes showed nationalist politicians involved in Irish independence: Daniel O’Connell (1775-1847), the first President of Ireland Douglas Hyde (1860-1949) and Charles Stewart Parnell (1846-91). All were supplemented by related images of houses, writings and artefacts, and all watermarks show a female figure. The Celtic harp was the standard element on Irish £ coin fronts, matched by various animals from traditional Irish inscriptions (bull, fish, horse, deer). A final £1 millennium coin had the word “millennium”, a pair of stairs on one side and a boat with a mast and seven oars plus two stars on the reverse – all based on old designs.

Ireland’s mythic and national motif is a very narrow selection among its older ones. It stresses the Celtic specificity, though popu-

lar fantasy fiction has spread such symbols widely. A musical instrument is in itself a peaceful aesthetic symbol, but with dense levels of association added through the violent Irish history. The lack of change between value levels seem to resonate with the choice of the harp as a musical instrument, as music (and in particular folk music) is so often (in my opinion incorrectly) regarded as a eternal and universal language binding people together across history and across the world.

ITALY

Italy let the viewers of RAI television programme choose between a series of design proposals. Each value got its own motif, all related to key Italian artistic works. *Castel del Monte* castle near Andria in Ampulia, built in 1240 as residence for Emperor Fredric II (1c). *Mole Antonellina* tower in Torino by Alessandro Antoeli (1863; originally conceived as a synagogue but built as the largest tower of Italy and now the key symbol of the town) (2c). The Flavius amphitheatre *Colosseum* in Rome, begun by Emperor Vespasian c. 75 BC, inaugurated by Emperor Titus in 80 AD (5c). Sandro Botticelli's "*The Birth of Venus*" (c. 1485) (10c). Sculpture of *forms of movement* by leading Italian futurist Umberto Boccioni (1882-1916) (20c). Emperor *Marcus Aurelius equestrian statue* at Piazza Capitolium, Rome (1538) (50c). *Leonardo da Vinci's Vitruvian man*, Italian Renaissance (1513): human body, harmony between man and the universe (1€). *Raphael's portrait of Dante Alighieri* (1508-11): symbol of virtues, goodness and beauty (2€).

The lire banknotes similarly had historical cultural heroes: doctor and pedagogue Maria Montessori (1870-1952); mathematician, physicist and astronomer Galileo Galieli (1564-1642); painter Antonello da Messina (1430-79); physicist Alessandro Volta (1745-1827); painter Tiziano Vecellio (1487-1576); artist and scientist Leonardo da Vinci (1452-1519), who was active in France his last years; and painter and architect Raffallo Sanzio (1483-1520). Slightly older versions favoured composer Giuseppe Verdi (1813-1901), merchant and explorer Marco Polo (1254-1324) and artist Michelangelo Buonarroti (1475-1564). Coins mainly reproduced classical subjects in the shape of rather unspecific bodies and faces.³⁴

Italy is the country whose coins are most dedicated to cultural history, with subjects from the 1st century B.C. to the 13th, 15th, 16th.

19th and early 20th centuries. They seem lined up in no particular chronologic order, but the three highest coins all have 16th century motifs, hinting at a rather backward-looking view of the golden Renaissance era. Buildings come first, then visual arts, with the most symbolically charged motifs last. The only female subject is the goddess of beauty, whereas the final male figures stand for grand human values, significantly with the more bodily Vitruvian man placed slightly lower than the universal mind of Dante. Compared to before the euro, Italy has developed a new set of subjects with a wide scope and with a sharper focus on supposedly universal values.

LUXEMBOURG

Luxembourg produced a series of euro coins with identical motifs but in three variants, following the obverse groups. All depict *Grand Duke Henri*, who inherited the throne from his father in October 2000, with the domestic country name “Letzebuerg”.

Previous Luxembourg franc banknotes also depicted the Grand Duke Jean in front of various palaces and backed by the modern European Centre of Luxembourg-Kircherg or the cities of Luxembourg and Echternach. The old franc coins also depicted the Grand Duke.

Luxembourg’s coins can be interpreted in roughly the same way as those of Belgium, though there is more continuity here in that even the previous notes were equally narrow in focus.

NETHERLANDS

The Netherlands also chose to have an almost identical design on all coins: *Queen Beatrix*, in two variants (the 1€ and 2€ with a different layout than the rest), with the words “Beatrix, Koningin der Nederlanden”, and framed by the twelve stars.

The guilder banknotes did not depict the Queen but instead had themes connecting to nature and designed in a rather modern, abstract style: kingfisher, robin, sunflower, owl, lighthouse and lapwing.³⁵ Slightly older versions showed painter Frans Hals (1580-1666) and philosopher Baruch Spinoza (1632-77). The immediate pre-euro Dutch coins had Queen designs as their euro, often with similar geometrical patterns, but there had also been various commemorative coins, as well as a final “goodbye to the guilder” coin issued in 2001, with a funny troll-like figure drawn by a 12-year old

school boy.

This third Benelux nation has chosen the same coin genre as its two neighbours. These coins are quite similar to the pre-euro ones, and the wider and more artistic themes of the old banknotes have gone lost completely.

PORTUGAL

In Portugal, designs were chosen in a graphic competition, won by Manuel Fernandes dos Santos with three seals of the first Portuguese King, Dom Afonso Henriques: the first *royal seal from 1134* with the word “Portugal” (1c, 2c, 5c); the *royal seal from 1142* (10c, 20c, 50c); and the *royal seal of 1144* surrounded by some of the country’s castles and coats of arms within the European stars, supposedly symbolising dialogue, value exchange and the dynamics of the EU (1€, 2€).

The last escudo banknotes connoted the somewhat later era of the great explorations of the world: historian João de Barros (1496-1570); Pedro Alvares Cabral (1460-1526) who first colonized Brazil; Bartolomeu Dias (1450-1500), who first rounded the Cape of Good Hope; Vasco da Gama (1460-1524) who found the seaway to India; and Infante D. Henrique (1394-1460) who started the maritime exploration of Africa. The banknote rear sides had sailing ships in various situations, or warrior knights. The last pre-euro coins had the royal coat of arms on one side – the word “escudo” (like “Schilling”) actually means shield and refers to that coat of arms.³⁶

In continuity with its past coins, the set of Portuguese images is very narrow, with its three hardly distinguishable seals deriving (in chronological order) from a span of ten years in the 12th century. It is the nation state and its birth which is celebrated, though it is on the highest values put in context of the EU, possibly signifying some kind of opening up to the world. Portugal has thus refrained from the old exploration motifs, thus bidding farewell to references to an era of brave but violent efforts to reach around the world in the name of capitalist trade and imperial power.

SPAIN

Spain divided its euros into the three main series: the Romanesque *cathedral of Santiago de Compostela* (11th C), world famous pilgrimage destination (1c, 2c, 5c); author *Miguel Cervantes* (1547-

1616), father of Spanish literature (10c, 20c, 50c); and *King Juan Carlos I* de Borbón y Borbón (1€, 2€).

The pesetas banknotes depicted the (in)famous conquistadors Hernan Cortés (1485-1547) and Francisco Pizarro (1475-1541), conquerors of Mexico and Peru, respectively; the naturalist and scientist in South America José Celestino Mutis (1732-1808) with a flower and a doorway; and Christopher Columbus (1451-1506) who was born in Genova, Italy, and first worked in Portugal before offering his services to Spain, with an ancient astronomic instrument. Only the highest value pesetas banknote fronted the King Juan Carlos, backed by Jorge Juan (1713-73), the scientist and sailor who 1745-55 participated in the measurement of a degree of latitude in Quito. The coins only had the King or the royal couple, with coat of arms, stylized flame with branch of leaves, man and bull, castle, church doorway or water wheel. The last series of peseta coins had a great variety of motifs, changing every year, and dealing with different topics related to the Autonomous regions, personages from the Spanish culture and history, or commemorating important events.³⁷

Like Italy, Spain is a deeply subdivided nation with many regions that have a large degree of autonomy. This may be an explanation why the king alone has not been allowed to dominate all coin sides – and this was true also before the euro. Basque and Catalanian subjects have also been left aside. Instead, it is the relatively less controversial Galician outpost and the central area of Madrid and La Mancha that is represented. Read in a sequence, the coins go from past to present, from national periphery to centre, from buildings to people and from religion over literature to politics. The choice of the famous pilgrimage and tourist cathedral as well as of Cervantes whose *Don Quixote* is regarded not only as a literary point of origin for Spain, but also as the global birth of the novel – both these choices indicate a willingness to emphasise transnational links in various dimensions. As [Anderson \(1991\)](#) points out, the dynastic and the religious institutions were dominant organisers of political power before the era of the nation-state, and both of them tend to transgress national borders, through the pan-European network of royal houses and through the wide circuits of the church. Spain's royal face and cathedral façade can therefore in a sense be said to transcend its Iberic limits. And even more so than with Portugal, the abandoning of the conquistador era may be interpreted as a step in a less violent and expansionist direction.

AFFILIATED NATIONS

Some countries are sovereign states with a formal arrangement with the EU to mint their own coins in the euro style, which are also legal tender throughout the euro area.

MONACO

Monaco has on its euro coins the *coat of arms* of the Sovereign Princes of Monaco on all six lower values, topped by a double portrait of *HSH Prince Rainier III and HSH Hereditary Prince Albert* (1€) and *HSH Prince Rainier III* (2€). Its generic choice thus remains close to that of the Benelux monarchies

SAN MARINO

San Marino features three towers on the low level coins: *first tower La Guaita* (1c), *Statue of Liberty* (2c) and *third tower Il Montale* (5c). The mid series presents the *Basilica of San Marino* (10c), *Saint Marino* on a canvas of the Guercino school (20c) and the *three towers La Guaita, La Cesta and Il Montale* (50c). The republic's official *coat of arms* is on the 1€, the *Palazzo Pubblico* government building on the 2€ coin. Being a republic, this tiny nation has thus avoided the head of state and instead chosen old buildings, a combination of art and city, and a national symbol.

VATICAN CITY

His Holiness Pope John Paul II, Sovereign of the State of Vatican City, is reigning on all the five Vatican coins (only 1c, 2c, 5c, 20c and 1€ were issued). This connects to the most traditionalist monarchies.

EU NATIONS OUTSIDE THE EURO

Three EU member states decided not to introduce the euro in 2002. However, they all seem preparing such a transition in the future, according to the extensive speculation on the web about their future euro designs, where images of “concept coins” or “what-if coins” may be found, more or less supported by actual proposals from the national banks.

DENMARK

Denmark chose not to join the EMU and has thus kept its old krona currency. Banknote motifs include author Karen Blixen (1885-1962); composer Carl Nielsen (1865-1931); actress Johanne Luise Heiberg (1812-90); atom physicist Niels Bohr (1879-62) with yin-and-yang vignettes from his coat of arms; and painters Anna and Michael Ancher (1859-1935 and 1849-1927). Rear sides show various old stone reliefs from Danish churches. Their coins show royal motifs: the Queen's monogram and an abstract pattern inspired by Viking age decoration styles on the lower values; the Queen and the national coat of arms with three lions and nine hearts under a crown on the higher ones.

Rumours on the Net assume that as Denmark will sooner or later enter the EMU, their euro coins will most probably also depict their Queen, thus lining up with the traditional monarchies and leaving out the cultural personalities they now have on banknotes.

SWEDEN

Sweden also stuck to their old krona, and their national bank (Riksbank) offers detailed information on its website. Since this is my own home country, I will therefore also present it in a somewhat more detailed manner. The 20 krona depicts the author Selma Lagerlöf (1858-1940) in front of her home region Värmland landscape (forest and lake), with the manuscript introduction to her first novel *Gösta Berling's Saga* and a horse carriage with Lagerlöf as passenger, plus a microtext from same novel ("The lake has its sources far up in the north, and the country is a perfect country for a lake. The forest and the mountains are always collecting water for it; tiny rivers and brooks stream into it the whole year around. It has fine white sand."). On the back appears a passage from Lagerlöf's *Nils Holgersson's Wonderful Journey through Sweden*, with Nils and Mårten goose flying over the flatlands of Skåne, in southern Sweden. Next, the 50 krona shows the "Swedish nightingale" Jenny Lind (1820-87) with notes from Vincenzo Bellini's opera *Norma*, Stockholm's old opera house and microtext quotation from composer Arnold Schoenberg ("Music conveys a prophetic message, which reveals a higher life form towards which humanity is developing. And it is because of this message that music appeals to people of all races and nationalities"). On the rear is a silver harp, its tonal range and an excerpt from

the score of modern composer Sven-David Sandström's *Pictures for Percussion and Orchestra* over a stylised Swedish landscape. The 100 krona displays the famous naturalist Carl von Linné (Linnaeus, 1707-78) with pollinating plants from his early work *Praeludia Sponsalium Plantarum* and botanical gardens in Uppsala, where he was director, plus his motto in microtext: OMNIA MIRARI ETIAM TRITISSIMA ("Find wonder in all things, even the most commonplace"). On the rear is a bee pollinating flower (which Linné himself never realised the role of), pollen grains, the lobes of a stigma and the result, a germ and a reconstruction of how a flower looks through the multifaceted eye of a bee – all motifs taken from pictures by photographer Lennart Nilsson. The 500 krona has Karl XI (1655-97), King of Sweden 1672-97, during whose reign Sveriges Riksbank was founded in 1668, in front of the first Riksbank building in Stockholm, with the Riksbank's motto HINC ROBUR ET SECURITAS ("From here comes security and strength") in microtext. On its back is the engineer Christopher Polhem (1661-1751) in front of the large gear wheel from his industrial plant at Stjärnsund in Dalarna, with mathematical calculations from his notebooks and Falu copper mine with one of his ore hauling plants. The lesser values leave the royalties behind. The highest value, 1000 krona, shows Gustav Vasa (1496-1560), who founded the Swedish hereditary monarchy and united Sweden into a state with a central government. Following the reformation in 1527, he also incorporated the young Lutheran church, making it into a Swedish state church. He is depicted with oil painting in the Stockholm Cathedral showing an atmospheric phenomenon 1535 (the parhelion picture) and a microtext quotation from Gustav Vasa: SCRIPTURAM IN PROPRIA HABEANT LINGUA ("Let them have the holy scripture in their own language"). The rear shows *Description of the Northern Peoples* from 1555, written by Olaus Magnus (1490-1557), who was the last Swedish Catholic archbishop and a scientific author on Swedish geography and cultural history, together with an image of harvest being gathered and threshed in radiant sunshine. Swedish coins are consistently royalistic, with various combinations of the King Carl XVI Gustaf, his crowned monogram, the lesser national coat of arms and the King's motto "For Sweden – with the times".

The Swedish national bank has on various occasions expressed an intention to stick to the royalist tradition, thus confining their euro designs to only the Swedish King and possibly the lesser national

coat of arms, deriving from the 14th century and consisting of three crowns, deriving from medieval times and supposedly inspired by the three New Testament kings (or holy men) in combination with more or less mythical conceptions of the foundation of the Swedish nation through some kind of merger with three older kingdoms, though this is highly uncertain. The Swedish monarchy is like all others in itself in a way transnational, since the king's ancestor was a French general imported in the early 19th century, and has continually joined blood with other European nations, including the present queen who met the king when she worked as a kind of tourist hostess in Germany. This transnational interpretation is not the dominant or preferred one, since the king as a formal head of state – a ceremonial symbol without real political power – belongs to the very few possible choices that undisputedly points towards the Swedish nation state, neither more nor less. As for the three crowns insignia, they might perhaps also be read as a vague sign of “united in diversity”: plurality and diversification but also synthesis and totality. However, the similarity of the crowns strongly favours the unity side, avoiding any real sign of diversity. After all, three crowns may also be at least thrice as strong as one, implying a very strong and united central state authority where all constituents are made equal and have to conform to the overarching rule. According to the will of the national bank, the Swedish euros will thus side with those of the most traditionalist other monarchies, stressing an anachronistic symbol of the nation state as the only, meagre face of Sweden to the outer world, though there have been voices (including mine) for a more Spanish solution, adding some other motifs as well.

UNITED KINGDOM

British banknotes all have Queen Elizabeth on the obverse side, while the rear sides depict social reformer Elizabeth Fry (1780-1815) with a group of women and children (£5); naturalist Charles Darwin (1809-82) with a humming bird (£10); and composer Sir Edward Elgar (1857-1934) with patron saint of music St. Cecilia and Worcester Cathedral (£20). Almost all coins are related to the history of the United Kingdom. Lower values have the seated figure of Britannia, the badge of England in form of the royally crowned Tudor Rose, part of the Crest of England with a crowned lion, the Scottish crowned thistle badge, the Prince of Wales badge comprising three

ostrich feathers enfilng a coronet of crosses pattee and fleurs-de-lys with the motto “Ich dien” (“I serve”), and a porticullis with chains royally crowned – an adaption of King Henry VII’s badge. A series of ten different £1 coins all have at front three lions – heraldic symbol for England, and the edge inscription “Decus et tutamen” (“An ornament and a safeguard”). On their backs are a series of ten different designs with symbols for Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland, England and the United Kingdom, different heraldic symbols (thistle, leek, flax plant or oak tree with royal diadem, UK shield of royal arms with crown, Scottish lion royal arms, Welsh dragon badge, Celtic collar with cross and pimpernel flower or three English lions) and inscriptions: “Nemo me impune lacessit” (“No none provokes me with impunity”), “Pleidiol wyf I’m gwlad” (“True am I to my Country”), “Decus et tutamen” (“An ornament and a safeguard”, from Virgil’s *Aeneid*). The £2 coin is an exception, with its symbolic representation of the development of British Industry from the Iron Age to the modern computer age, with the inscription “Standing on the shoulders of giants” on its edge.

The design of possible future British euro coins is a strict secret, though most web sources seem to bet on the monarchist choice of Queen faces there, as well.

UNITED BY DIVERSITY

As one of the five official symbols of the union, the euro as such and in its overall design is one of the main European unifying elements, stressing the “unity” in the European motto “united in diversity”. On a first glance, unity wins by deciding all the banknotes, the coin obverses and also the general frames for the national reverses. By deciding values and sizes, and thereby forcing the national reverses into specific preferred patterns, the common coin sides work as a common EU denominator. The euro is formally a coherently designed currency with strong unifying elements. However, scrutinising the contents of the national messages on the reverse sides of the coins discloses a more divergent picture. They may be carefully framed and contained but still seem to express a stubbornly tenacious reluctance towards European integration.

Thus, is it unity in difference – or rather difference in unity? Nations do still in many respects have a greater metaphorical and political weight than the institutions of the European Union. This also happens to be true in an unexpected material sense. According to a 2002 newsclip, the national reverse side is somewhat heavier than the common obverse side. Tossing up a 1€ coin will thus result in the common side showing 57,2% of the number of tosses made. Gamblers, beware! Though European unity may as a preferred obverse face be proudly displayed symbolically to the outer world, the reverse hidden reality of distinct nations still tends to weigh more in the material power games of the union.

How to estimate the balance between these sides, and its meaning-effects? Which kinds of unity and of diversity are actually acknowledged on the coins? Is abstract universalism, shared European values, international co-operation, transnational (or even postnational) relations, or distinct national communities most prominent among the motifs?

DIFFERENCES

The coin reverses express specific national identifications within the overarching unity. Which are the main stylistic genres among national motifs, and which main kinds of national identities do they

produce? Before returning to the common obverses and banknotes, it is time to summarise some general patterns on these national reverses concerning (A) main genres, (B) currency values, (C) country groups and (D) historical changes.

GENRES OF MOTIFS

First, a handful of main “money genres” may be distinguished:

(1) *Rulers* are shown by Belgium, Luxembourg, the Netherlands and Spain, but also the three affiliated as well as presumably the three yet non-Euro nations. All the monarchies – and only these – display their rulers, leaning towards an ancient tradition of authorising money values by showing the ruling head of a clan, empire or nation.³⁸ In modern republics, that practice has become less useful, due to a combination of recurrent shifts of power and perhaps also to some little degree an egalitarian spirit of democracy that shuns displaying such clear symbols of state power as national symbols. (However, the fact that presidents may well appear on stamps contradicts this somewhat optimistic interpretation.) Hereditary monarchies have stable heads of state, at the cost of stripping these anachronistic institutions of all essential instruments of real political power. It is slightly paradoxical that these monarchs nowadays have almost no political power, being reduced to purely symbolic signs for their nation-states. But precisely this makes them doubly useful as money motifs, and perhaps the most easily accessible and in a way uncontroversial choice. Faces of state rulers are symbols of power and one of the few undisputedly nationalist symbols. They fuse aristocratic historical roots with late modern entertainment business and popular culture, and offer a simple solution for countries to avoid the work of finding other ways to signify their relation to the world. If the specific monarch depicted has had no personal role as transnational bridge-builder, this motif is bound to the old European system of nation-states out of which inter-national systems like the UN and the EU were once born, but else contains no other, more innovative or up-to-date transnational impetus.

(2) *National symbols* are selected by Finland, France, Germany, Ireland and Portugal, as well as Monaco, San Marino and probably Sweden in the future. Heraldic animals, coats of arms and other traditional symbols that have been monopolised by certain states fill similar functions as the rulers’ faces, and are equally old as money

symbols. They do avoid the anthropomorphisation of power that inheres in the royal face, instead showing the nation state in a more abstract and superhuman form. But again, they also tend to reproduce feudal roots of the narratives of nation building that became so popular as a way to legitimise and historically anchor the imagined communities born in the modern, bourgeois nationalist movements of the 19th century. Again, all national symbols to some extent do have transnational roots and routes: they have travelled and branched off in various directions, and are never undisputedly local. Benedict Anderson (1991) has pointed out that being much older than nation-states, churches as well as royal houses remain particularly promiscuous in that respect, even when the latter are subsumed under national authorities and bound to their names – the King of X is often closely related to the Queen of Y. Such interconnections are generally successfully suppressed within each national context, but may come out into the open as these coins circulate also in other regions where similar symbols may well be used with a completely different sphere of meaning. For an Irish citizen, the Celtic harp probably is a univocal and deep-rooted image for the Irish nation, but in Wales, Brittany or Galicia it might well intersect with other local traditions, in Jewish tradition it rather reminds of King David of the Old Testament, and for a Greek or a Finn who gets such a coin in her purse, it may well be understood as just a nice old instrument that shows the universal reach of music. The question is which kinds of such lines are drawn through the choice of such symbols: political, military, commercial, cultural, etc. Whereas the harp implies harmony and communication, crowns and seals signify power and authority, eagles and lions like coats-of-arms connote violence and military force, and plants have naturalising meaning-effects of growth, care, boundeness to the soil, etc. In some cases, notably France, national symbols also have explicitly universalistic overtones – at least for the inhabitants of the countries in question. In the classical French imagination, “liberté, égalité, fraternité” is a truly universal motto, as it has also to some extent become due to the combination of colonialism and the global spread of republicanism, emphasised by the US constitution and later the UN declaration of human rights.

(3) *History*, in the form of cultural or political artefacts and individuals, appears on coins from Austria, Germany, Greece, Italy and Spain, but also San Marino. There are many subtypes in this category, as history contains many things with highly divergent

implications. Political events, leaders or buildings may of course relate to key moments of nation-formation, in which case the signification of such motifs come close to the previous ones. Social, scientific or aesthetic heroes or works mostly have a more crossover status, as they tend to move across borders and become important all over the world. They are chosen because they have some special connection to the country in question, and they do of course shed honour to this specific country, but they tend to stress its positive links to the surrounding world rather than its separation from others. A range of other differences appears depending on whether persons, events, buildings or other kinds of artefacts are depicted. Buildings are more fixed to a place than paintings or people who can travel across boundaries, but they may on the other hand easily be visited by many and become widely known and loved, not least through modern mass tourism. Historical motifs tend to be selected to represent various regions within the nation, ages of national splendour and kinds of achievement, so that they taken as a whole represent the moral, intellectual and cultural strength of a country. Taken as a whole, Europe shows two political freedom fighters (the Greeks Capodistrias and Venizelos) and one peace activist (the Austrian von Suttner) who also is the sole woman honoured in this way by the EU, three literary authors (the Greek Velestinlis-Fereos, Italian Dante and Spanish Cervantes) and one composer (Vienna's Mozart). This slight dominance for the cultural domain is increased when buildings are added, with three mainly political (the Austrian Belvedere Palace, the German Brandenburger Tor, the Italian Castel del Monte) against five cultural – mostly religious – ones (the Austrian St. Stephen's Cathedral and Wiener Secession building, the Italian Mole Antonellina and Colosseum, and the Spanish Santiago de Compostela cathedral).³⁹ Greece's three ships express economy and trade but also transports of other kinds, military as well as civil. Adding other human artefacts further emphasizes the cultural face of Europe, with Italy's wide range of monuments and artistic works (Botticelli's Birth of Venus, Boccioni's futurist movement forms, Marcus Aurelius equestrian statue, Da Vinci's Vitruvian man, Raphael's Dante). It should also be noted that the Spanish Santiago da Compostela cathedral as well as Cervantes are of course as much rooted in specific Spanish regions as is the king, and thus may well be less relevant to other Spanish regions. A Basque nationalist in Bilbao might feel them to be irrelevant to his agenda, or even despicable

symbols of what he wants to dissociate himself from. On the other hand, that cathedral is a site of pilgrimage from all of Spain and its surrounding countries, thus lending itself well to symbolise transnational connections, and Don Quixote is after all no particularly heroic figure. Also the Italian series of great art works makes certain definite choices: there are for instance no motifs located in Palermo or on Sicily. On the other hand, their beauty have historically to a large extent come to transgress geographic borders and been appropriated as national artistic and intellectual treasures – or even keystones in a pan-European heritage of the type that proponents for a shared European identity tend to applaud.

(4) *Myths* are used by France and more obviously Greece. There might well be mythical elements in many of the motifs discussed so far, as nation can be regarded as a kind of myth, and local myths and tales may well be implicitly evoked in many disguises. Myth is thus ever-present, but only in a few cases is this presence obvious as the main aspect. The French republican figures of Marianne and the sower are modern myths, once deliberately constructed in order to break with previous traditional ones. They refer back to a classical antique heritage that is explicitly invoked on the two highest Greek coins. The owl of wisdom seems to emphasise the character of the EU project as an intellectual construction, a wise decision for co-operation instead of conflict that has some way to go before it gets anchored in the emotive sentiments of its populations. The abduction of Europe by the bull may be interpreted as kind of a national wet dream, as this animalistic Greek god with his virile force conquers his beautiful female loot, object of his male erotic lusts. Had a comparatively influential nation like Germany chosen a similar symbol, this might have awakened some hostility among its neighbours, but as Greece does no longer seem to pose any real threat to its north-western partners, such an allusion can only produce a smile. After all, as a goal for millions of EU charter tourists, Greece has already since long won the hearts of us all. Still, as the name “Europe” means “the West”, and this bull myth connects to a historical process of culture imported from the East, there is a potential decentring element in such a self-identification of this continent.⁴⁰ The relative scarcity of explicitly mythical subjects on these coins might partly be caused by the reluctance to found the union in the only reasonable narrative: that which acknowledges its deep debt and sustained links to its great Asian neighbour.

(5) *Nature* is depicted in Austria, Finland and Germany. Plants and animals like the Austrian gentian, edelweiss and alpine primrose, the Finnish flying swans and cloudberries, and the German oak twig all offer ambivalent implications. On one hand, they may contribute to a naturalisation of nationalist constructions by illustrating a kind of Blut-und-Boden philosophy of people, nations and cultures bound to the very soil of a specific geographic area. On the other hand, nature rarely respects fixed boundaries – at least not political ones. Swans are eminently migratory birds, and such nomadism can hardly be contained within the confines of a single region, be it Finland or even Europe. Plants do thrive in certain conditions, and may culturally be associated with some specific region, but even such identifications are notoriously unreliable. *Sound of Music* famously made the song “Edelweiss” a prototypical symbol for the Alpine region, but not only is it hard to distinguish Austria from Switzerland in this respect (though one is and one is not at all in the EU): the film was also a typical Hollywood product and the plant can be found lots of places, and not only in botanical gardens. A German coin tradition has used the symbolism of oak groves as ancient places of Germanic worship, but oaks are holy symbols also for Zeus, Jupiter and Kybele, as well as in Christian, Jewish, Indian and Chinese myths.

In practice, the boundaries between these main generic types are thus fleeting and permeable. National symbols may integrate natural or mythic elements, and the balance between separation and connection in each kind of symbol varies between contexts. Strong national symbols may or may not have clear transnational or even globalising aspects, whereas plants or animals also have shifting links to a specific national soil.

HIERARCHIES OF VALUES

There is no uniformity in how the countries have divided the coins into sub-series. Austria, Greece and Italy (as well as San Marino) have eight different designs, though often grouped in internally related subsets in parallel to the obverse groups. (Monaco presents four designs, following the obverse groups but also differentiating between the 1 and 2 euro coins.) The most common solution, chosen by France, Germany, Luxembourg, Portugal and Spain, is to create three back designs, one for each main type of obverse design (though Luxembourg is a border case since all its coins have the same Grand

Duke, only in three variants). Finland also has three types, but with individual designs on the 1 and 2 euro coins and the rest identical with each other. The Netherlands has two main designs (1 and 2 euros differentiated from the lower values). Belgium and Ireland (as well as the Vatican) only present one design each. One might say that the common obverse designs tend to favour a 3+3+2 tripartition, which a majority of the nations have decided to break away from in one way or the other, though the largest and strongest nations have chosen to follow the main rule.

It is hard to see any clear trend when it comes to the motifs chosen for lower or higher currency values. Different countries have made very different such “money-stories”, based on contrasting hierarchies, but one may discern a common story that goes from a basis in nature and technology up to culture, myth and ideas on the highest values, reflecting a possibly typical European dualist hierarchy of body/soul or base and superstructure, which has both materialist and idealist versions, depending on whether the low material basis is seen as founding or simply being subordinated the high lofty values.

GROUPS OF COUNTRIES

One may tentatively discern four main groups of countries, depending on the general and dominating patterns in their euro coinage.

(1) *Nationalists*. Half of the twelve main euro countries (as well as the three associated members and the three non-euro EU members) clearly lean towards the national side, representing themselves by symbols that primarily point out their specificity in relation to European neighbours. It is the monarchies that have generally taken this road, showing the faces of their kings and queens, but there are a few exceptions – in both directions. The three BeNeLux monarchies (as well as Monaco) all depict their monarchs on all their national coin sides.⁴¹ The Vatican State with its Pope also fits in this category, and it seems as if the remaining EU nations of Denmark, Sweden and United Kingdom will eventually make a similar choice. It might be no coincidence that the populations of these latter monarchies have felt it particularly difficult to take the full step into the EMU.⁴² The Iberian Peninsula offers interesting exceptions. The Spanish monarchy has its king only on the largest value coins, and I will therefore place it in another category. On the other hand, Portu-

gal is nowadays a republic, but still has gone the nationalist way and chosen to use the old royal seal and coat-of-arms by the birth of Portugal as a nation in the 12th century – not a royal head but still a royalist form of national symbol.

(2) *Universalists*. France and Ireland have national symbols that invite global interpretations of a much less separatist kind than the previous nationalist ones. Republican symbols are integrated parts of a universalistic discourse and practice, expressly appealing to supposedly universally applicable human values. The figure of the sower associates to divine creativity and human culture in general, perhaps also to the Christian Sermon on the Mount and thus to missionary activities, but primarily secularised ones in the spirit of Enlightenment, with its own reverse side in form of colonialism. Anti-imperialist, postcolonial and postmodernist critiques today have attacked and relativised any such claims, but the EU project itself is only one example of the many renewed efforts to accept their specific location while still defending their universalistic potentials. The harp makes a non-verbal claim of a similar kind, building on the force of instrumental music to move hearts across linguistic and national boundaries. Again, this can be criticised as an ideological illusion, covering the fact that musical life fuels as divisive borders between people or cultures, only along different lines than those of verbal culture. Still, the harp does at least not have a fixed semantic link to any particular territory or state apparatus, at least not to those EU citizens who are not very well informed about Irish mythology, and it may therefore be seen as a kind of universalist statement.

(3) *Culturalists*. On Austrian and Italian coins, cultural history clearly dominates. This may be a way to boost one's own grandiosity by claiming copyright for the treasures of cultural creativity in historical heritage. Anyhow, the effect is one of historicisation and culturalisation. Human artefacts from various epochs are lifted up as crucial for collective identification, implying at least a potential for relativisation of values. Pointing at aesthetic perfection as the ultimate key to values puts more dangerously divisive political issues in the background, in favour of taste issues that may certainly be controversial but usually less violently so. This is particularly true for the most classical of subjects, but due to the way that art history tends to de-politicise and universalise artworks, even for instance the Boccioni movement image is easily appropriated as a kind of UN-protected "world heritage", in spite of the somewhat problematic

nationalist war cult of some of the proponents of Italian Futurism. Also the more political persons and buildings chosen by these two countries tend to emphasise peaceful and co-operative efforts rather than national separatism, notably Bertha von Suttner. A curious exception is the Marcus Aurelius statue, since it originally stood on the column in Rome that was inaugurated in the year 193 to commemorate the victory of this emperor over the Germans. However, even this and all his other martial deeds are today easily forgotten in favour of his rumour as a noble and self-reflecting secular thinker, depicted in that famous statue as a prince of peace. Another one may be the Colosseum, where many European slaves to the Roman empire were once mercilessly slaughtered. Yet none of these motifs are tightly knit to any particular national project, since they mostly pre-date the late birth of Italy's modern nation state. Many artefacts and buildings have been created on top of exploitation of foreign workers or cultures, but the ones chosen in these cases today seem not to exclude transversal identifications. Being included in heterogeneous series, they show artefacts from different historical epochs as a rather arbitrary chain of gems that could be wilfully extended by others, with a slightly different meaning, adding to the historicity and thus secularising relativity of culture.

(4) *Chameleons*. As has been argued here, most motifs have certain potentials for ambiguity – being interpretable in different and sometimes oppositional directions. Some nations present themselves in series of images of highly divergent kinds, combining the previous positions and adding yet others. Thus, Finland, Germany, Greece and Spain use similar national symbols as the first groups (royalties, heraldic animals and coat of arms), but mixed with efforts to transcend borders by adding consciously transnational motifs, either culturalist or naturalist ones. Many of their chosen motifs are often also in themselves ambiguous. Take for instance the Greek Velestinlis-Fereos who was an intellectual and a creative poet but also an activist of national liberation, and all the three Greek individuals combined national liberation from some foreign powers (that is, from Ottoman Turkey) with coalitions with other European countries. If Turkey will eventually join the Union, this separatist symbols will seem to some extent to run against the main rhetoric of peaceful collaboration between the member states. Likewise, the Greek ships combine many different functions, from classical Mediterranean trade cosmopolitanism over warfare vessels to global oil distribution.

And with the mythical subjects on top, Greece certainly presents a quite open and ambivalent series. Finland and Spain likewise combine national symbols with cultural or natural themes with transnational implications, as has already been discussed. Germany is an equally divided case, with the dark heraldic eagle and the oak twigs framing the intermediary motif of the Brandenburger Tor which is itself an extremely ambiguous one. It is a symbol of German unity, from Prussia to the reunited Bundesrepublik of today, but it also reminds of first the struggles between Germany and France and then the cold war divide between East and West Germany (and Europe). The official explanations of this motif repeatedly stress this tension, emphasising that from having been a celebration of anti-French war and then a heavily fortified point of division, it has today become a gate for intense crossings. This is said to be underlined by the specific pictorial perspective used on the coins, emphasising the road through the gate rather than the wall in which it once was a closed door. As Gerard Delanty optimistically states, “Berlin is no longer the symbol of a divided Europe but the capital of a united Germany”.⁴³

It is not only the “chameleons” that offer ambiguous identifications. The categories often blend, as for instance even the most innocent flower is apparently chosen for its associations with a national identity, and the boundary between mythology and nature is permeable. Many of these multi-faceted national symbols have historically developed in fierce struggles against other (surrounding) nations, though in some few instances there are implications of some kind of inter-European co-operation.

In all, there is a slight tendency to a north/south division line with wider sets of images down south than in the Lutheran and possibly more iconoclastic north. This pattern is superimposed on and partly coincides with a political differentiation between constitutional systems – monarchies and republics – most of the remaining monarchies today being found in the north. The respective age of each national formation, as well as other and more specific historical experiences, also contribute to the numismatic style developed in each state. Simple generalisations are hard to make, however. For instance, Maurice Roche argues that societies “based on immigration”, on “acts of revolution” or on “science-based technological production and/or risk-taking capitalist markets necessarily locate and explore their collective identities in terms of their common pre-

sents and futures rather than their pasts”.⁴⁴ This seems mainly to serve as an explanation for the USA, but the diagnosis halts when comparing EU members. It is not quite evident whether this is confirmed by the euro or not, since many nations are awkward mixtures. UK money tended to cling on the ancient royal past even under neo-liberal Thatcherism, as does the Swedish krona in spite of its strongly science-and-technology based production. Another line of interpretation is suggested by William Johnston, who argues that national differences between European countries in terms of forms of celebration can be related to a kind of “civil religion” used to justify and legitimate the various regimes. Different European countries celebrate different kinds of memories. In France, the French Revolution is almost always the focal point. In Germany, there is a “civil religion of *Kultur*”, with cultural personalities in focus: artists, philosophers, musicians and writers. Austria relies heavily on the culture of the Hapsburg empire, with music and theatre as important elements. Italy is said to have a weaker national identity, instead leaning towards city or regional identifications, in addition to the persistent role of the Catholic Church and its saints. Britain’s civil religion circles around the monarchy. Johnston sums this up in a main dichotomy between a French and a German model, stressing either political ramifications or apolitical creativity.⁴⁵ This fits much better to what the euro coins tell us.

TRACES OF TRANSITION

The Brandenburg gate thus expresses a historical transition from division to unification. However, most countries have chosen stability rather than innovation in their euro designs. There are few examples of notable shifts with the introduction of the euro, as most nations lean heavily towards their pre-euro traditions.

Spain and Portugal both gave up the usual themes from their old colonial history, which might have been problematic in relation to the European project. Classical colonialism was a violent competition between European states, which contradicts the present efforts of peaceful co-operation. The colonial imperialism in the third world certainly resulted in strengthened global interconnections, but in an extremely unequal and coercive manner that hardly is good marketing for Europe in relation to Africa, South America or Asia today. Their old motifs showed men who opened up the world for Europe’s

exploitation, undoubtedly with many civilisatory gains but at the cost of so much blood, human suffering and uneven economic exploitation that it must be considered as one of Europe's absolutely most problematic contributions to world history. While Portugal retracted to a more inward-looking nationalist stance, Spain – singular among traditional monarchies – dared to expand its image in transnational and even self-ironical directions, including artistic, architectural, literary and religious themes in its self-image. On the other hand, this modernising tidying-up effort conceals the colonial aspect of Europe's history that has been essential to its very formation and self-understanding as a continent in contrast to its others.

Most other nations have stuck to their respective conventional range of symbols, but in some cases made selections and minor refinements that underline common European values and inter-national links, thus showing how each country contributes with its own voice, but interplaying with the surrounding others. The Austrian, German and Finnish plants have some regional specificity but may also allude to the issues of global ecology that are one of the reasons for transnational co-operation. Finland lets aggressive heraldic lions be accompanied by migratory birds that know no boundaries and may symbolise the late modern age of mobility. Buildings and artworks have been crucial to the history of each country, but also for international relations and visiting foreigners. Many of the depicted individuals have been cosmopolitan in their lives and work, and are well known across the continent. The French republican themes intend to unify the world, and da Vinci's Vitruvian man has a similarly universal intent in signifying the Renaissance focus on humanity abstracted from all characteristics – except gender, where masculinity continues to rule.⁴⁶ And while the German Brandenburg Gate has a painful history of division, the reopened road running through it gives hope for new encounters between east and west. The BeNeLux and other monarchies have given more meagre contributions to this process, reducing their collective identifications to one single and in practice rather marginal aspect.

This is unfortunately also true for my own country, if no unexpected public debate manages to change the minds of the National Bank before Sweden adopts the euro. I previously mentioned affinities between the Swedish *folkhem* ideology of a welfare society and the Schuman declaration. Since the 16th century, Sweden has had a comparatively strong and centralised national state apparatus, based

on such a paternalistic model. This experience has ambivalent effects. The Swedish suspicion against the euro is related to a contradictory combination of fear of central state authority and pride of Swedish welfare, a combination that has been transposed into an isolationism in relation to EU institutions, and will mirror itself in a quasi-protectionist choice of euro symbols.

The latest series of new EU members generally appear to have a quite different position towards the euro than the three present non-euro nations (Denmark, Sweden and Britain) or the West European ones that have chosen to stay outside (Norway and Switzerland). Whereas Sweden has let its national bank decide for a very conventional set of royal euro motifs with no public debate or competition, the eastern newcomers tend to use this occasion to stage a wider process for developing among citizens a greater awareness of the role and function of European co-operation. For instance, autumn 2004 Estonia let its citizens vote among ten coin designs. A spokesman of the National Bank of Hungary has declared that they will choose “symbols that are near to the heart of Hungarians and are interesting”, and that they “would like to put them for social discussion in as wide circles as possible”, through the several competitions that have been launched, as a kind of “social dialogue”.⁴⁷ In this way, the euro transition is made to resonate with wider processes of societal change.

UNITY

The whole set of euro reverse sides seems to display diversity more than unity. But the common obverses and the banknote designs add a coherent direction to the monetary construction of European identity. The harmonious twelve interconnected stars and the map emphasise the cohesion of the union, but in an abstract and unspecific manner. The whole set of bridges, doors and windows on the notes likewise have a deliberately abstract character, in an effort to avoid any specific national bias, and also to steer clear of the androcentrism that so predictably dominated the national coin faces. That kind of abstract unity may well be problematised as an ideological or magical re-enchantment of a continent that is in reality little more than a purely instrumental economic project, and whose symbols are void gestures that contribute little to a possible future European identity formation. Gerard Delanty has argued that the bureaucratic form of EU integra-

tion and institution-building has “a reifying effect”, mirrored in its choice as European anthem of Beethoven’s theme, with its “reifying tone”: “Ironically in attempting to move beyond nationalism, European Community attempted to fashion a European identity using the very tools of nationalism: the flag, anthem, passport, group name and sense of a common history. But, unlike national identity, the politics of European identity sought legitimation in bourgeois high culture, as is exemplified in the choice of anthem and its dedication to ‘cities of culture’.”⁴⁸ Abstract symbolic patterns as well as artistic architectural details conform to this same tendency, possibly testifying to a failure to anchor the EU project in deep-seated popular sentiments.

On the other hand, what unites a collective entity is usually more apparent from the outside than from within. European analysts may be somewhat blind to common traits, over-emphasising internal differences. Based on his historical study of European banknote designs, Hymans (2004: 24) argues that elements of a European “commonality may not be out of reach, for the content of collective identities in Europe has been both more *changeable* across time and more *uniform* across space than identity scholars typically assert. [...] European national currencies at any one point in time have expressed a remarkable commonality of values”, which he sees as promising for the EU project. More comparative research on other continents is needed in order to qualify such optimism, but it remains clear from my reading as well that the euro is not a completely empty signifier of European identity.

The dominant image of Europe as a unity tends to be that of something deeply divided, but striving to overcome internal divisions by conscious efforts of mediation and communication, with a capitalist market system, democratic forms of governance, civil society and an open public sphere as implicit – but often contradictory – tools. “United in diversity” may thus truly imply unity through and by difference. The internal differentiation of this continent may be its perhaps most distinguishable characteristic. This conforms with the Schuman declaration and recent debates, according to which the historical experience of mutual extinction has resulted in a possibly abstract but still to some extent efficient will and ability to develop forms and models for mediating between opposites, enabling exchange without forging unitary identifications. This is one way to read the bridge and door symbols on the euro banknotes. According to the Dutch writer Cees Nooteboom, “national identity is itself a

melting-pot of cultural influences that transcend nationality and Europeanism consists simply in the recognition of unity in difference”.⁴⁹

However, not even the banknote designs are innocent abstract symbols for meta-connections. Many Europeans might find them abstract, but in relation to other continents, there is definitely something typically European in these images. The selection, design and ordering of these anonymous architectural constructions have significant implications. Together, they tell a paper “money-story” of two millennia of architectural styles from Roman antiquity to a future-oriented present.⁵⁰ This story is meant to symbolise dynamism and progress, in constructing a linear hierarchy typical of Western modernity and Enlightenment thinking, where history is conceived as future-oriented progression rather than as retrospective continuity or decay. A variant of this progressivism is inherent in the EU project since the Schuman declaration, for which the Second World War was an ultimate crisis and catastrophe from which all roads must lead to improvement, if the collected achievements of Western culture is finally to be applied in a peaceful manner.

The precise choice of architectural styles offers more signifying cues. The other continents – North and South America, Africa, Asia and Australia – would certainly have made quite different choices. The time span would for instance have differed: only in Europe could precisely the last two millennia be accepted as a reasonable historical totality. It is significant that the Classical motifs chosen for both sides of the lowest, 5 euro notes happen to be Roman rather than Greek. The signifying effect of this choice is at least twofold. Spatially, it avoids placing the origin of Europe to its southeast corner. Temporally, it implies a start around the point zero of modern chronology. Taking a step back behind the magic year 0 would contradict a recurring trope of Europe as a Christian continent, and open the gate to a possibly endless series of previous Neolithic civilizations. Starting with Rome places the birth more in the centre of the continent, and coincides reasonably well in time with the emergence of its dominant religion, which still retains a focal point in papal Rome. The effect is to place the cradle of Europe centrally in Rome and cotemporaneous with Christianity, thus excluding Greek and other “previous” cultures from memory. With its potentially decentering connections to the Middle East, Athens and Ancient Greece appear to imply an ambiguous identity as both European and Orien-

tal, potentially destabilizing the East/West polarity and endangering the self-sufficient idea of Europe as its own product. It is true that the euro symbol € with its basis in a Greek epsilon retains that liminal origin, but in a more hidden and general form, elevating this pre-Christian Greek culture above the mundane flow of history into a kind of universal sphere of pure and eternal origins and foundations for European civilisation. It is also significant that only some of the Greek coin motifs go further back than Christian times, reconfirming that the symbolisms of all the other member states agree to situate the birth of the European project in the year 0 AD and the Roman Empire, which is not only geographically more ideally positioned but also with its great land areas may seem more appropriate for the claims of a continent than the seafaring group of islands and coastlines that constituted the aquatic network formation of antique Greece.

Roman culture also fits better with the fusion of engineering technology and humanist ideas that underpins the whole money story on the banknotes. Choosing hard and stabile human-made buildings implies an emphasis on the accumulable (rather than ephemeral) aspects of human culture (rather than nature): fixed rather than variable capital, heritage rather than the fleeting present, products rather than processes, collective rather than individual works, combinations of harmonic aesthetics and practically useful engineering technology rather than any other artefactual genres or human faculties. The specific choice of building elements – bridges, doors and windows – prioritises infrastructural frameworks rather than meaningful contents, practices of vision among the senses, and movement over stasis (e.g. habitation). The very wish to mediate, link and communicate is possibly typically European. Bridges, doors and windows are classical symbols for a deep-seated European dialectics of difference/unity, closure/opening and border/transgression. The focus on separation involved in the drawing of boundaries as well as in border struggles, the transitions over thresholds in passage rites and liminal phenomena, the current interest in borderlands, hybridity, third spaces and intermediarity – all this testifies to a deep-seated obsession with communication across boundaries that might possibly be universally human but where European thought and political practice have been at the forefront – for good and for worse. For Georg Simmel, “the human being is the connecting creature who must always separate and cannot connect without separating” – “the bordering

creature who has no border”; to Gaston Bachelard, “man is half-open being”.⁵¹ This aspect of European self-identification can on one hand be understood in Habermasian terms as a capacity for communicative action, but on the other hand also in Foucauldian terms as a power/knowledge effect related to panoptical supervision and a constant urge and coercion to communicate and be open, in line with late modern capitalism’s demand for flexibility and with the surveillance trends fuelled by terrorist movements and states.

The bridge motif can be interpreted in two directions. On one hand, it does construct Europe as open to the surrounding world, on the other hand, it also contain expansionist potentials. The inclusion of Turkey in the EU is a relevant example of this thematic. With cosmopolitan Istanbul as prime symbol, Turkey is often depicted as a crossroads between Asia and Europe: a bridge between East and West. If such a bridge is left outside the EU, Europe’s borders may be defended as a fortress wall around a relatively unitary Christian mainland. But homogeneity is then bought at the cost of losing control over this particular bridge, leaving its interface between Europe and the East outside the control of the EU. There are many – including leading politicians – who prefer this purist solution, in order to reinforce Europe’s cultural unity. Others instead argue for integrating Turkey, as a way of increasing the richness and openness of the European project. This clearly supports a politics of multiculturalism or hybridity, but there may also be an aspect of control in this wish. Including such “bridges” implies a certain control of them, reflecting many Europeans’ wish for the border regions to become modernised or civilised according to a European grammar, for instance in terms of human rights, welfare provisions, democratic institutions and free markets. The choice of the bridge motif on the euro banknotes may thus imply both communication and control.

It is instructive to consider absences. Potential signs of division are consistently avoided, such as subcultures of all kinds or religious and political symbols, except for the most general and vague ones (like the Celtic harp). There are maps over the EU area, but the decision not to include any flags of member states on the notes or indeed on any of the national coin sides may perhaps be read as a postnational commitment.⁵² Nowhere is there any representation of specific countries outside the EU, except for the indirect Greek reference to Turkey as adversary. Norway, Switzerland and the Eastern bloc, now gradually integrated into the EU, remain invisible on this first set of

coins and notes, as does the surrounding continents as well as the transatlantic relations that have had such impact on the formation of Europe. The map on some coins are said to show Europe's place in the world, but this external world remains vague and hidden. There is a general talk of openness to other parts of the world, but no specific symbolisation of east/west or north/south relations, of European colonialism or American imperialism, besides the microscopic traces of colonial territories left as strangely placed dots on the maps. National symbols are downplayed to some extent (there are no flags for example), but so are specific regions, including those that cross intra-European national borders (like the Basque countries). Women remain marginal, and there is no representation of children or of the working classes. One key feature of modern Europe is particularly absent: mass migration. There are some possible references to border-crossings in the Finnish swans, the Greek independence men, the pilgrimage site of Santiago da Compostela and the pan-European class of royalties, but no clear symbol for the movements of refugees and workers into Europe and between its regions. The euro imagery does not care to represent the new Europe, by excluding any reference both to its recently integrating eastern half and to the many new immigrants from the Middle East, Asia, Africa and South America.

Think of possible alternatives. Natural motifs (plants, animals or landscapes) would be either too specifically bound to one place or too vaguely confined to Europe, and, more importantly, they would not enable a narrative of civilization and progress. Human portraits or situations would again be too specific, but the selection of infrastructural artefacts also has the advantage of hinting at a parallel to the EU as an infrastructural project for communication between nations. Art works would lack that technological and utilitarian aspect that architecture offers, and which applies so well to the EU, being a tool and a mechanism as well as a work and a symbol. Unlike human beings and some other art forms, the selected buildings are enduring artifices that seem to stand for the stable and trustworthy quality that the Union itself also strives to be.

The historical progress told by the paper money-story is thus traced through monumental but utilitarian public buildings, bearing witness of a harmonious combination of aesthetics and technology, and with a practical use for communication purposes. The identifying narrative of the banknotes declares Europe to be a Western, Christian unity focused on historical progress, enduring stability, a

seamless fusion of aesthetics and technology, boundaries and the processes of communication that cross them.

There are thus aspects of identity, community and unity in this imagery, but more dominant are themes of transport, communication and diversity. So, again, diversity remains the basis also for the unity that can be discerned here: as with the EU, the unity of the euro is constructed out of differences. Europe has many historical experiences in common, but belongs to the most internally differentiated world regions, with its old and established nation states, its many divergent languages and its many national and regional myths. Since the end of the cold war and the fall of the wall, it does not appear as strongly internally divided as many other continents. It has all kinds of minorities but no longer any clear bifurcation, partly due to the EU project of uniting north and south, east and west. This project joins forces with parallel unifying efforts, such as the ecumenical rapprochement between the Christian churches. Christian religion is a unifying factor, but its role in political and economic life is held back by secularising counter-forces and by the efforts to better integrate non-Christian minorities, in particular the growing Muslim populations in many states.

Precisely how these new collective identifications of the euro designs will change over time, with the inclusion of more member states and the addition of later editions, is another question. More studies are also needed of how these money signs are read by those who use them, make them or regulate them. The emphasis on abstract forms in a high art formalist style and on images of technocratic infrastructures is typical for the increasingly problematic EU project from above. The Union needs to reconnect to popular images of more specific histories of inter-human and trans- rather than supra-national encounters. Some potential such germs might lie hidden in Euro football and in the Eurovision Song Contest, or more importantly in transnational currents of everyday civic communication and a long history of movements for social justice.⁵³ But similar traces of interhuman relations and transgressional identifications yet remain absent in the euro designs. Now, specificity only appears on national coin reverses, where they still largely are carefully confined within nation-state borders, with but few signs of emerging transnational and supranational forms of life and identity. Let us hope that future euro editions will open more interesting venues. Still, the euro does offer a unique occasion to study the emergence of a new collectivity

– a possibly banal imagined identity but with real effects.

NOTES

¹ Benjamin (1982/1999: 460). Simmel shared such a focus on the crossings between economics and psychology, the external and the internal (1900/1989: 11ff, 29-38, 43, 462f and 719).

² Stallybrass & White (1986: 27-37).

³ Billig (1995).

⁴ In the preface to Brion & Moreau (2001), Belgian Minister of Finance Didier Reynders states that the banknote fulfils a double role of symbol: for the sum it represents, “but also for the economic and political states of the nations”. Pierre Bourdieu’s theory of economic, social, symbolic and cultural capital likewise notes their complex interrelations (see for instance Bourdieu, 1993: 29ff). “The purely economic cannot express itself autonomously but must be converted into symbolic form” (Swartz, 1997: 90). Even those who aim to contribute to an understanding of the meaning of money tend to close their eyes to issues of design. “Understanding money is a matter of understanding ourselves”, writes Rowe (1997: xxiii), without bothering to waste words on what coins and banknotes actually look like, and the same goes for Withers (1909/1947) and Buchan’s (1997) thoughts on the role of money in history and culture. An exception is Hörisch (1996), who is acutely aware of the materiality of money. Zei (1995) interprets maps, Tito portraits, heraldic symbols, flags, stamps and currencies as representations of the nation-state in Slovenia before and after the dissolution of the Yugoslavian federation. Passerini (2003) includes chapters on the hymn, the flag and the euro, as well as of maps and myths. Its chapters on money avoid any more critical interpretation of the euro symbolisms, instead praising their deliberate abstractness as the precondition for pan-European identification (Servet 2003, Shanahan 2003 and Waswo 2003).

⁵ An expert report on the future of money leaves the impression that traditional cash will for a long time remain side by side with elec-

tronic, digital money forms (OECD, 2002). A possible future global currency – a “geo” – will probably also become embodied in tangible, visible and interpretable shapes. According to Brion & Moreau (2001: 120), the role of banknotes “has been remarkably stable”, even in spite of the growth of e-money. Johansen (2001: 331, 338, 349ff) mentions that cash is the only “forced” form of payment in Norway, where a specific law paragraph states that state coins and banknotes must always be valid means of payment. While cash payments actually increased in the 1990s, he still regards banknotes as degenerating and declining.

⁶ Marx (1844/1975, 1858/1986, 1867/1976), Habermas (1981/1984, 1981/1987) and Luhmann (1988/1996). See also Thyssen (1991) on Parsons’, Luhmann’s and Habermas’ theories of the symbolic generalised media of money, power and love.

⁷ Simmel (1900/1989: 708ff; see also 1896/1991). Later analyses of the social functions of money are found in Heinemann (1969), Sohn-Rethel (1970/1973), Müller (1977), Zelizer (1994/1997) and Rowe (1997), among others.

⁸ Brion & Moreau (2001: 28f, 34, 43, 51 and 110; the direct quotes are from p. 55).

⁹ See Genrup (1997: 113).

¹⁰ Benjamin (1955/1997). See also Hörisch (2001: 190ff).

¹¹ Hymans (2004: 7).

¹² Thanks to Karin Becker.

¹³ Money thus integrates the three levels of analysis distinguished by Gerard Delanty (1995: 13): “Europe as an idea, identity and as a reality”.

¹⁴ Draft of the Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe (European Convention 2003: 3ff).

¹⁵ European Convention (2003: 222). Data on the European symbols are found at the websites of the European Union, the Organization for European Minorities and the web-based *Wikipedia* (http://europa.eu.int/abc/symbols/emblem/index_en.htm),

http://europa.eu.int/abc/symbols/anthem/index_en.htm,
http://europa.eu.int/abc/symbols/9-may/index_en.htm;
<http://www.eurominority.org/version/en/devise.asp>;
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/European_symbols).

¹⁶ The formulation is from the Schuman declaration (http://europa.eu.int/abc/symbols/9-may/index_en.htm).

¹⁷ On “European citizenship”, see Hansen (2000).

¹⁸ Grimm (1995); Habermas (2001). Habermas’ ideas on a “sphere of publics” explicitly derive from an analysis by Philip Schlesinger and Deidre Kevin. Peter van Ham (2000) belong to those who doubt if the European symbols so far will generate the feeling of common historical roots and belonging needed for an emergent European identity, which needs to be an identity in non-identity, acknowledging diversity.

¹⁹ Habermas (2001). This has been discussed in terms of tolerance by Habermas, while Jacques Derrida prefers the concept of hospitality (Borradori, 2003). See also Amin (2004).

²⁰ Billig (1995: 41) includes coins and bank notes with flags as normally unnoticed symbols of modern national states that form a kind of everyday “banal nationalism” that is naturalised and hidden away so that the label of “nationalism” can be projected only onto “others”. See also Risse (1998) and Passerini (2003) on symbolic constructions of European identity.

²¹ Andorra, Montenegro and Kosovo also use the euro without any formal arrangement. On aspects of power and economy in the history of the EMU and other international money regimes, see Ferguson (2001: 332ff). Ludes (2002) discusses the social meaning of money and describes the media debates on the launching of the euro in various countries, with a rich material attached on a dvd/cd-rom, but no interpretation of visual designs. Brion & Moreau (2001: 119ff) has information and images of all euro and immediate pre-euro banknotes. See also Kalberer (2004) and Silveirinha (2004). Facts on the euro designs and launching process derive from the European Monetary Institute: “Selection and further development of the Euro bank-

note designs” (<http://www.ecb.int/emi/press/press05d.htm>); the German Bundesfinanzministerium’s website (<http://www.bundesfinanzministerium.de/>); the ECB website (<http://www.euro.ecb.int/en/section.html>); Burak Bensin: “Euro Money!” (<http://www.angelfire.com/on/fifa/>); an Apple website presentation of how the designs were made: “Making Money on the Mac” (<http://www.apple.com/creative/ama/0201/profile/>); Denis Fitzgerald: “Designing the Euros”, *World Press Review*, 2003-01-05 (http://www.worldpress.org/specials/euro/1120web-euro_design.htm).

²² See Brion & Moreau (2001: 117 and 120) and the web sources mentioned in the previous note.

²³ The banknote designs contain the number corresponding to the value of the note in question, the name of the currency in the Latin (EURO) and Greek (ΣΥΡΩ) alphabet, the initials of the European Central Bank in the five linguistic variants (BCE, ECB, EZB, EKT and EKP) covering the 11 official EU languages, and the signature of the President of that bank. The letters in front of the serial numbers on the euro banknotes indicate in which country they are printed: L = Finland, M = Portugal, N = Austria, P = The Netherlands, R = Luxembourg, S = Italy, T = Ireland, U = France, V = Spain, Y = Greece, X = Germany, Z = Belgium.

²⁴ French Guiana, Guadeloupe, Martinique, Réunion, the Azores and the Canary Islands are thus represented on the map. Mayotte, Saint-Pierre and Miquelon also use the Euro but are regarded too small to figure on the notes, and the French Southern and Antarctic Territories have also been excluded from visualisation.

²⁵ Hörisch (1996: 13ff) notes the ambivalence or double face of money as “heads and tails”: one side with some portrait of a legitimizing sovereign (*Kopf*, head) and the other specifying the monetary value (*Zahl*, number). He makes this the start of a fascinating analysis of the relation between money and poetry (economy and literature, numbers and letters).

²⁶ The planned euro designs of nations joining the EMU from 2004 onwards are not available when this is written, and are therefore left outside this study.

²⁷ Brion & Moreau (2001: 51) explain that Austria has among famous persons prioritised musicians and men of science on their banknotes.

²⁸ According to Brion & Moreau (2001: 51), Belgium has like Spain and Italy favoured artists rather than other professions on their banknotes. In 2003, Belgium released 10€ silver coins (costing 31€ each), only valid in Belgium, to celebrate Georges Simenon, author of the Maigret detective novels. Early 2004, similar coins were launched to honour Hergé's comic heroes Tintin and his dog Millou. Similar commemorative editions have been released by other countries as well. However interesting they may be, such special releases fall outside the scope of this study.

²⁹ Brion & Moreau (2001: 51) mention that France particularly honoured writers on their notes devoted to national figureheads.

³⁰ Benjamin (1982/1999: 544 and 10) defines modernity as “the new in the context of what has always already been there”, that “is always citing primal history”.

³¹ In order to express West Germany's integration into (Western) Europe, almost as an invitation to the Schuman declaration two years later, a 1948 5 DM note showed Europe and the bull (Brion & Moreau, 2001: 118). By similar reasons, this same mythical couple that reappears on a Greek euro coin.

³² Ladd (1997: 72ff). Hörisch (1996: 78ff) analyses the German banknotes, including the gendered sequence of portraits, where the male figures are always worth the double of the female ones, and where science is shown as male and art as female.

³³ Brion & Moreau (2001: 53) also comment how the strained relations with Turkey have continually been apparent on Greece's banknotes, which “since the Second World War have carried portraits of

heroes of national independence, or scenes of combat between Greece and the Ottoman Empire”.

³⁴ According to Brion & Moreau (2001), Italy has a tradition for prioritising artists among famous men on their banknotes.

³⁵ This artistic style seems to be a Dutch tradition: “in the Netherlands, for example, efforts have been made for some thirty years to cast off the yoke of realism – to great success” (Brion & Moreau, 2001: 110).

³⁶ Brion & Moreau (2001: 51) mention that Portugal have mainly shown kings, men of letters and great explorers as great men on banknotes.

³⁷ Brion & Moreau (2001: 51) place Spain with Belgium and Italy as nations that have favoured artists as banknote personages.

³⁸ The Vatican belongs here, too, as its pope shares important formal traits with kings.

³⁹ San Marino’s buildings are also of a mixed kind.

⁴⁰ Hall (2003), Rice (2003).

⁴¹ Brion & Moreau (2001: 53) find that Great Britain and Luxembourg have regularly had their reigning monarchs on banknotes, while Belgium, Sweden and Spain have only done so sporadically, while republics rarely depict their presidents (Finland twice being an exception, in 1955 and 1975). Hardt and Negri (2000: 345-7) list three means of global control: the bomb as ultimate means of violence, money as means to control the market, and ether as the final and dominant medium of managing communication: “The bomb is monarchic power, money aristocratic, and ether democratic.” This fascinating model is hard to apply on the euro, which seems to combine features of all three aspects.

⁴² Hymans (2004: 16ff) notes that “images of monarchs and national leaders have endured to a greater extent” than Inglehart’s model might anticipate, locating “the fiercest resistance to the cultural trends” in the later joiners to the EU.

⁴³ Delanty (1995: vii).

⁴⁴ Roche (2001: 76).

⁴⁵ Johnston (1991: 52ff).

⁴⁶ Brion & Moreau (2001: 51) mention that all famous persons ever selected for banknotes in Belgium, Finland, Spain and Portugal have been male, whereas German and Scandinavian countries have offered women more space, in particular women from literatures, the arts or women's liberation movements. The German notes also strived to balance religious convictions and regional origins of persons represented.

⁴⁷ Gábor Misssura interview broadcast February 2004 by the European Association of Regional Television Circom Regional (<http://www.circom-regional.org/enlargement/SL/SL15-the-euro-and-hungary.pdf>).

⁴⁸ Delanty (1995: 128).

⁴⁹ Quoted from Delanty (1995: 129). Brion & Moreau (2001: 119) likewise state that the choice of architectural styles of Europe as banknote design theme "made it possible to evoke the cultural heritage common to all the Union's member states, thereby fulfilling one of the dreams of Robert Schuman, who had longed to base a European Union on cultural foundations".

⁵⁰ Zei (1995: 337f) describes the narrative told by increasing banknote values as a "money-story".

⁵¹ Simmel (1909/1994: 10, see also 5); Bachelard (1958/1994: 222f). See also Arnold van Gennep (1909/1960), Walter Benjamin (1982/1999: 494, 836) and Victor Turner (1969).

⁵² Brion & Moreau (2001: 120) note that while national symbols were often found on coins, only Finland, Austria and Germany have previously included any national emblem on their own banknotes.

⁵³ Delanty (2003) finds the slogan of "unity in diversity" as a basis for a possible European identity insufficient. He argues (with Habermas) both for the need for actual communication in a transnational public arena and for emphasising a pan-European belief in social

justice, anchored in the idea of a social contract, in popular movements and in the welfare state.

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ABSTRACT

READING THE €URO

MONEY AS A MEDIUM OF TRANSNATIONAL IDENTIFICATION

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Money transfers economic values, and have to be clearly identifiable in terms of value, nationality, age and authenticity. Through their designs, coins and banknotes therefore also spread compact symbols of cultural identities. As mediating material artefacts, they communicate conventionalised collective identifications and meanings.

The introduction of the euro in January 2002, and its subsequent spread to an increasing number of nations within the European Union, offers a splendid chance to study changes in national identifications on an official level that also reaches deep into the wallets of daily life. In the EU constitution, the euro is presented as a key symbol for Europe, together with the star flag, the Beethoven anthem, the “United in diversity” motto and the day of 9 May. The public and political processes that gave birth to the euro designs show how EU institutions, states, economic market actors, designers and citizens interacted to develop new forms of identification across Europe.

The euro is a multiple site where identities are represented but also made on the common banknote designs and the likewise common obverse coin sides, as well as on the nation-specific reverse sides of the coins. Through close readings of these money designs, the study shows how

national identities and facets of the European project are signified. Comparisons are made between value levels, between countries, and with pre-euro money, to discern (1) thematic genres (rulers, national symbols, history, myths and nature); (2) value hierarchies (“money-stories” from low to high); (3) national differences (between nationalist, universalist, culturalist and chameleon states); and (4) historical changes (in the transitions from national money to the euro). Finally, an overall interpretation of the common European symbols reveals key facets of these money meanings of the continent united in diversity, casting light on some of the implications and limitations of the project of a transnational cultural identity.

ILLUSTRATIONS

The following pages reproduce the original set of euro designs of all banknotes and coins from all the EMU countries within the EU. Sizes are neither realistic nor mutually proportional.

Euro Banknote Fronts





Euro Banknote Rears





Euro Coins Common Fronts



Austria

Belgium

Finland



Austria

Belgium

Finland



France

Germany

Greece



France

Germany

Greece



Ireland



Italy



Luxembourg



Ireland

Italy

Luxembourg



Netherlands



Portugal



Spain



Netherlands



Portugal



Spain



Monaco

San Marino

Vatican City



Monaco

San Marino

Vatican City

