

Andreas Lorenz

European Network of Cultures – The Wandering and Adventures Have to Continue

- Europe today is based on relatively strong political and economical foundations. The feeling of belonging to each other culturally, however, is still lacking. This couldn't even be changed by the famous "common European values". Neither have these values encouraged finding a common identity, nor do these values define the European foreign affairs. What sounds like a platitude, requires cultural and political consequences to the outside.

- The Special that was taken place in the modernity and the avant-garde since the beginning of the 20th century, is not that it turned away from the past, but that the foundation was rocked and the fall of a traditional system has been executed.

- In the course of the 20th century the modern art was much improvised and was almost close to its borders. Today it often lacks ideas and innovative thoughts which are the foundation for a modern and "new" art. The principle of l'art pour l'art, i.e. produce art for its own sake, might soon be a victim of its own demand, of course depending on, how far the artist's own system, his societal surrounding, and, of course, he himself is able to orientate in his surrounding. How large is his surrounding, his cognitive horizon, actually?

- If modern art and music today have the apparent problem to continue to be avant-gardistic, one could absolutely state that with the extension of the „new-European thought“ (Europe in form of the EU and not the Old Europe or occident) new forms and ways of expression can be found.

The joining of ten new countries to the European Union demands to think about the European identity: on the one hand, the mistakes made in 1989 where "European cultural affairs" constantly demonstrated the superiority of the Western civilization need to be avoided. When searching for cultural common grounds which could be humus for a European self-conception we in the West were satisfied with common grounds which overshadow that we are separated by dramatic differences in

mentality. Artists and intellectuals in Eastern and Southern Europe not only criticize the Western arrogance and biased perception of Eastern Europe; they as well criticize the West's one-sided attention for the "Wild East", for the pictures from Balkan or the demonstration of the orange revolution in the Ukraine. The experience the people east of the former Iron Curtain made after its fall rather nurtured the doubts concerning the values of the Western society, than gave trust. In East and West moral concepts exist in various forms.

On mutuality and differences of the European culture, the Lithuanian lyric Tomas Venclova said the following: „I don't believe that there will ever be an absolutely joint and centralized world – not even a European republic. A part of the world's beauty and variety consists in its borders, if they only weren't insurmountable. The cult of a national state will disappear, but the feeling of home and love for a certain region, I think, will always exist. Every region is an intersection of certain cultures, and our identity will be of the following kind: like a mosaic...consisting of segments.”

Besides an improvement in the subject "Europe" in school, there has to be a further "Europeanization" in the bi- and multilateral cultural exchange. That is: turn away from the inner European cultural exchange that is handled in the way: representation of own culture – to an exchange that tries to develop projects jointly and over the boundaries, in which East and West have the possibility to meet each other. Thus, Germans will work together with Polish and Russians or Czech on projects; jointly develop the artistic conception, a dramaturgy. They so to say not only learn to talk about, but also with each other.

This approach was the starting point for a project of the European Centre of the Arts Hellerau: the Hellerau scholarship for music, which firstly was advertised in 2002.

18 musicians, composers, dramaturges, video artists, and cultural managers out of four European countries (Germany, Ukraine, Russia, Macedonia, as well as Brazil) had been meeting for 2 years for several work stages and developed a joint project with the title "Passport".

„Passport“ unites four compositions – for music theatre in a broader sense – that deal with the topic of inner European borders and their different perceptions. The success of the premier performance on the sixth of October 2004 in the sold out Festspielhaus Hellerau was convincing and concluded in an invitation for the well known program “musica viva” in Munich 2005. For the year 2006 performances in Odessa and Skopje are planned.

Despite the overall success of the artistic joint venture the reaction within the team was controversial. During the different processes of development the team split up in a German and an Eastern European fraction. The mental differences and the different artistic philosophies caused fundamental conflicts that could only be resolved through the intervention of the sponsor.

Many young eastern and middle European artists take every chance to get scholarships or working permissions in western countries, hoping that this might result in financially profitable projects from or in Western Europe. For some this might work, but even more important is the fact that many eastern European artists get a quiet good overview of the western European cultural scenes through these kinds of journeys. Back in their home countries and educated in European Avangardism these artists are able to integrate their impressions and experiences in their national cultural identity – or consciously try to avoid this. This way or that way, no one can take their experiences away from them.

These artists have a crucial advantage compared to a lot of western European artists. They know a different culture, they made a degree at a western European university, they dealt with different ways of living while only a few western European artists or intellectuals try to cope the seemingly disturbing eastern European cultures. That is not to say that there are no Germans, French, Fins or English or Swedes in eastern Europe. But these artists are only a small group of idealists that one can constantly find there while travelling through eastern Europe.

I so far did not have the possibility to work in eastern Europe for a year or longer. But since 1993 I regularly travel to cultural centres in middle, eastern or south eastern Europe that walk new cultural passes. Examples are the “Dialog of Cultures” in Baku/Aserbaidshjan – a festival and a conference – or the “Ilkolm-XX-Festival in Tashkent, other festivals in Almaty or Kazan.....

In the last years different cultural events could be established that owe their existence to the sponsorship of the Soros-Foundation.

After the fall of the iron curtain almost no cultural institution could sustain its existence the same way it did during communism. In our case the institutions and structures of the former GDR that provided the framework for cultural exchange before 1989 broke down, and in 1991 we faced a situation in which we were not able to run a cultural exchange with eastern European countries.

This situation caused me to travel through Eastern Europe to see the changes and developments in the years after the breakdown. Since this time I was and I still am able to transfer different projects of eastern European artists to Germany because I made contacts to artists in a fast developing and innovative cultural scene.

Compared to the time of my first journeys to Eastern Europe, which had the status of being exotic, many of the stronger eastern european economies are now able to support their own cultural scene and get new cultural impulses from inside. These impulses from artists and intellectuals that are still hungry for success and innovative are spreading out to the rest of Europe.

The search for answers of a new european identity outside the economic expansion in eastern Europe can get a lot of new impulses through commonly shared discussions, which provide an idea of a new Europe and new ways of thinking.

The reflection about a common heritage like joint experiments in during the “Golden Twenties” – like the exercising of a social and cultural utopie – is more than a retrospective activity it can show us the way to face the present as well as the future. This becomes more obvious, if one describes a perspective (according to Chvatik) of this reflection: What should Europe sustain of itself, if like it seems today it wants to become a respected actor in the world? The sense and identity crisis of today cannot give answers to the overwhelming power of a global and all dominating economy.

But the search for answers during the emerge of a new Europe might get a new motivation through the reflection of a possible cooperation in the intercultural exchange and produce a new quality of a peaceful coexistence between the people of Europe. The economic impulse of an Europe that is growing together might be strong enough to be the base not only of a peaceful coexistence, but also of a mutual fertilization between the cultures in Europe.

In the meantime, the second edition of the Scholarship programme has now begun. While the new scholars from Germany, Sweden, Russia, Lithuania and Poland had their first session in October 2004, the new ideas developed there have to be put into practice in early March now, when the group will meet for another ten days in a university institute in Görlitz.

The final session will be in Dresden, in late September, and lead to the performance during the 19th Dresden Days of Contemporary Music.

The Scholarship programme of the European Centre for the Arts has been decided to run as a permanent project of our institute. Currently the third programme is being advertised, which will address young artists and creative practitioners from the Czech and Slovak Republics, and perhaps from Poland and Hungary.

Together with the German scholars they will form a team, we hope, which will bring the idea of an intellectual brotherhood in Central Europe to Dresden, and some inspiring creative results.

After this rather elitarian project, with a high-brow creative background in mind, I would now like to make some personal remarks about another scholarship programme targeted at Central and Eastern Europe. Under the motto "Culture and Language Exchange Programme Central Eastern and South Eastern Europe" a number of former scholars from the Robert-Bosch-Stiftung have joined forces in 1996 to use their experiences they made in the guest countries they stayed in, and to use those experiences for the time after. These activities led to the establishing of the "MitOst"-society, which started with nine members in 1996, and has now 1400 supporters throughout Europe.

MitOst was originally inspired from the Robert-Bosch-Stiftung and their programme for young academic lecturers. Those who had lectured on this programme, and had gained experience as lecturers for German as a foreign language, had come to Eastern Europe in 1990 with the clear intention to gain valuable experience and support the new structures in what were free, but impoverished, even chaotic parts of Eastern Europe.

This exchange which brought about sometimes the unexpected, sometimes a sharp contrast with the individual background, left quite an impression, and consequently an inspiration: there must be something done for the development of the Eastern parts of Europe. Those from the richer, and peaceful, parts of Europe, i. e. Western Europe, must not leave the Eastern part of the continent unsupported.

We must learn to communicate, to get to know each other better, to start and build a common tradition. And who would be better equipped to do that than those who had just taught as a lecturer for one or two years, and had just come back to Germany from their stay at an Eastern European university, full of ideas, contacts, and friendships?

Since 1997, members of the MitOst-society developed 50 projects in several countries of Central and Eastern Europe. Most of the projects have focussed on the problems arising from the new European identity, but there have also been several projects, which have dedicated themselves to the apparently 'simple' idea of meeting, and exchange, between the cultures. Let me give you some examples.

There were projects on "The Slavics as part of the European culture", there were seminars about the notion of memorial, and remembrance; and there were projects simply designed to make young German and Eastern European intellectuals and artists meet and discuss. "New Music and Poetry from Eastern Europe" was among them; it brought together young musicians and poets from five different European countries in one project which featured the interdisciplinary aspects inherent in both music and poetry. In 2003, Dresden has been the host for another event entitled "Dialogue of Cultures", which came as a trade fair, if you like, for young practitioners in arts administration and management, for young musicians and producers, who introduced cross-cultural projects in their home countries Uzbekistan, Russia, Ukraine, Moldavia, Macedonia, Poland, and Germany.

Last year we have successfully completed a tour through the Ukraine from a Dresden ensemble of musicians. Entitled "Banned and suppressed music in the Ukraine", the ensemble toured five Ukrainian towns, and performed music from the so-called "New Jewish School" as the finale in a concert in the Dresden Synagogue. The New Jewish School, which is mostly serious music from the early years of the

twentieth century, proved a thought-provoking theme for both the concerts and the seminars and workshops in Lviv (?), Kiev, Charkiv, Poltava, and Odessa. The seminars and workshops discussed, from several aspects, the problems arising from the fragmented biographies of musicians or artists who had to suffer from totalitarian regimes in the 20th century, and they put a very difficult topic on the public agenda.

To be honest, the idea behind the project was a bit ambitious from the start: a German ensemble tours the Ukraine, and focuses on how society handled those artists who were either suppressed, or forced into exile, through a totalitarian regime.

Musically spoken, the development of the New Jewish School, and Jewish art music, had only a very limited amount of time to ripe, and blossom. With the beginning of Communism in the Soviet Union, and Fascism in Germany, all those developments were brought to a sudden end. The academic and public discussion, and reflection of this chapter of European history, and the biographies of European artists and intellectuals in the totalitarian political systems of the twentieth century, has only started now. In Germany, there is some tradition to research and discuss this topic; in other countries of what used to be the Warsaw Pact, this topic has been almost non-existent until the wall came down.

Even today, hardly any of the artists or academic in those young democratic systems of both the new EU member states or those nations associated to Europe, in the East and South East of Europe, can afford to put this topic on the agenda. Quite literally, the discussion of it is not worth a dollar, be it through a creative or academic approach.

Let me draw to a close now. All of those projects of the MitOst-society, despite all diversity, share a common ground: they all came to life thanks to an existing human network in Central and Eastern Europe. In all the towns with events we either had, or still have, Lecturers from the Robert-Bosch-Stiftung-programme, or scholars from the German Academic Exchange Service, or scholars from the Theodor-Heuss-society, or members of the MitOst-society, who can effectively support the preparation and organization locally.

After the time when we just had the big ones of European Culture Politics like Goethe-Institut, The British Council, or Institut Français, there is now an increasing

number of major public or private foundations joining the work of cross-cultural exchange, and the exchange and discussion of those values which build a common European tradition.

How ever good these traditional forms of exchange may be, what we need more of in the future is a clear call to "go east" for all those in Western Europe who are still lazy and well catered and complacent. If they really want to enjoy their part in the European process of dialogue and play in that orchestra, they simply have to learn the score first.