

THE MIND
AND BODY
OF
EUROPE:
A NEW
NARRATIVE

BAT

ROUND TABLE

Round Table:
Brussels

In an effort to gather
some responses and
perspectives on the
Declaration, New Narrative
for Europe organised a
round table discussion at
the Centre for Fine Arts,
Brussels, on

21.05.2014

The lively discussion, with over 30 people – participants, active observers and a moderator – lasted upwards of 2 hours. Unfortunately, we cannot reproduce it in its entirety here, so we have extracted a series of interventions that, between them, are representative of the range of reactions, positive and negative, offered that day. We have respected the sequence of the conversation, thus

hopefully allowing the reader to see how the discussion builds on itself as it proceeds.

Short bios of the voices gathered here can be found in the List of Contributors at the back of this book.

Nicola Setari

As we move towards this week's European elections there is more and more talk about Euro-scepticism and its dangers. What if instead we decided to subvert the negative understanding of scepticism and recover the critical legacy the word and philosophy vehicle starting from their Greek origin? The New Narrative for Europe is not about making propaganda for the European Union, it is a process in which there is a large space for critical and sceptical voices that take on a constructive attitude. What if perhaps we need more Euro-scepticism as opposed to the Euro-patriotism some important thinkers are calling for today? The real danger lies in anti-European discourses, but we cannot ignore the discontent of European citizens.

It is against this background that we gather here today, and we look forward to hearing your constructive criticisms of the Declaration and to discussing, thereby, concrete ideas for how this project can move forward.

Luc Tuymans

I have been reading the Declaration and, well, we were just discussing the Internet, which is something very real, and my first sense is that there is not a great deal of reality in this document, only big ideas. In other words, we need something that is far more specific, otherwise it remains something that we all already know.

I thought the idea, from the beginning, was that we were asked to deliver, next to the narrative, a sort of a visual response. That is very important, and it is missing, of course. The thing is, when President Barroso asked for this, he expected you to deliver it: but it can't be delivered that fast, it has to be developed. But we need to develop something that is very real, very precise; what we develop has to be grounded on things, not on big ideas like these, which we all know. The dangers of populism have already been evoked, and in fighting it you have to be quite specific about things: you have to call them by their names. And I think it is only through that that you can actually go back to a basic form of understanding and communication, and

that is really important at this moment. That is what's at stake. It's about staying alive when it comes to culture. The Declaration traces the evolution, it traces what happened in Europe and inspired the EU, but we know all that. So that's not real information for me.

I don't feel any urgency in the way it is written, or on the content. In summary, I am a little bit disillusioned when I read this.

Luea Ritter

I agree with you in what you said about the need to be concrete. But before we can get that, we need to know if we actually understand where the disconnect with institutions comes from. We need to figure out how to connect again with each other and create something together. Right now, the sense is that the EU is a power over and we are a power under it, but there is no sense of a power 'with'.

Regarding the Declaration, the ideas are very nice, but I also have some questions. For example, is it really true that, today, the European integration process 'stands against all forms of war'. I don't see that. I see that the European

Union, the member countries, are still very much involved in war. It is true that they may not be waging war, but they are selling weapons. There is, then, an indirect connection between the EU and the escalation of war situations outside of our so-called safe territory. And the way we deal with each other, as well as the way we deal with our resources, are a form of war. So writing that here doesn't strike me as really accurate.

The question for me is whether and how we can understand the pattern and dynamic of this disconnect: where does it come from? Can we build imaginary solutions for it? If so, can we move towards a scenario of creating with others, and not just for others. That's why I would love to see here, not just artists, scientists and people working in institutions, but also youngsters, or even children or elders who come from countries currently feeling the brunt of crisis, so that we could hear these voices here.

Pier Paolo Tamburelli

What I see, looking at the document a bit from the outside, and it may be a some-

what naive opinion, is that it looks and sounds very much like the European Union. It's very institutional. As if the one thing the European Union didn't want was conflict. It doesn't want to appear conflicted. And this fear is based on the idea that this unity would somehow go on because it was started in the 1960s. There was a project then, a sort of hidden project: we sent all these kids to study abroad, hoping that they would marry someone from another country, and slowly micro-events would develop into Europe.

The process, I think, was smart and right, and I am sure I am not the only one in this room experiencing the fruits of that every day in his private life. But I also think we have reached a moment in which these automatic processes are no longer functioning as they were designed to function. Basically, these automatic processes were based on an almost religious belief in the fact that the middle class would continue to expand and expand. And the middle class is shrinking and shrinking. And now I think the middle class kids who had that opportunity - I count myself among them - should take responsibility for this project and fight for it. That would in-

troduce conflict, because at that point their vision might conflict with other possible visions for Europe.

I also know that there are people - in the rural parts of northern Italy or France, for example - for whom the thought of the European Union is only frightening. They believe that all they stand to gain from the EU is that their region will be inundated by cheap labour coming from elsewhere in the Union. And the European Union should be able to reach these people and say something, say something that is in fact conflictual, something that is sharp. I think the discussion we are having makes sense, provided we are willing to discuss these things without sweetening them too much, without saying: 'Don't worry, it will all end well.' Maybe it won't end well in every case. What is missing here, and what could perhaps be introduced, is a certain nastiness.

Francesco Cavalli

I think the value of the Declaration is that it could function as a sort of virus. It's important that the Declaration is not a manifesto put out by artists, like the Futurists,

Colophon

Project:

The New Narrative for Europe is a EU pilot project, initiated by the European Parliament and implemented by the European Commission. The Commission set up a cultural committee to assist it in implementing the project. The members of this committee are:

Kathrin Deventer, Paul Dujardin (chair), Olafur Eliasson, Rose Fenton, Cristina Iglesias, Michal Kleiber, György Konrád, Rem Koolhaas (associate member), Morten Løkkegaard (observer), Yorgos Loukos, Peter Matjašič, Sir Jonathan Mills, Michelangelo Pistoletto, PLANTU (associate member), Sneška Quaedvlieg-Mihailović, Tomáš Sedláček and Luisa Taveira.

The Committee advised the Commission during the different phases of the project, and some members were involved in drafting the Declaration The Mind and Body of Europe. Frédéric Meseeuw and Anna Vondracek, from the Centre for Fine Arts, Brussels, assisted the Cultural Committee in the fulfillment of their tasks.

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The views expressed in this book are those of the authors, artists and participants of the various events, and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Commission.

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