Thoughts on a European Alliance of the Academies
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"The disaffection with culture ... was one of the ingredients from which the Nazi pudding was boiled."
Gabriele Tergit describing the 1930s in Berlin[1]

Culture must lay its cards on the table. And by culture, I mean the cultural workers, artists, and cultural institutions. We are (all) talking about Europe. We (all) want a transnational Europe, a peaceful republic that is made up of many nations.
We (here from a German perspective) – does that also include Chemnitz? Chemnitz, where demonstrations were protected at the end of last year, in which acts of violence and the murder of "foreigners" were called for, where the Hitler salute was given and racist and Nazi slogans were hollered out?
Do we mean a Europe that is no longer ashamed of anti-Semitic caricatures and attitudes? Do we have to live with that?
I think not. I – and, I hope, a large majority of the population along with me – want a Europe that is not chauvinistic, not anti-Semitic, not xenophobic. A Europe of tolerance and enlightenment. An open continent where inhuman borders are not set up, a continent that is no better or worse than any other, but rather is prepared to defend human rights and to uphold relations with one another in the spirit of tolerance. And a continent that does not forget the historically unprecedented situation that the Second World War conjured up – as Hannah Arendt wrote, "Suddenly, there was no longer a place on earth where wanderers could go without being subject to the most stringent restrictions, no country that would assimilate them, no territory where they could build a new community."[2]

Fifty years ago, Europe was a utopian idea. Enemies for centuries, countries that had colonised half the world, and fought wars against each other and killed each other, were the ones who came up with the utopian idea that unified them. Some of them allowed themselves to be guided by the vision that Europe could only exist politically and economically if it was unified.
It is the most complicated social, political, and economic experiment one can imagine – overcoming the wounds of war and the centuries-old differences between the countries. And yet, these countries decided to form a coalition. That was unique in the history of mankind.
In terms of the economy, many steps have already been taken under what is at least a broadly shared foreign policy. But barriers still exist to accepting and respecting the profound differences between the member states. That is the difficult part.
The various pylons upon which this very complicated and at the same time beautiful idea – Europe – is built, consist of social, political, and economic necessities. And our part as the Akademie der Künste, as artists and intellectuals, is to try – just like the political parties, the

governments, and so on – to form alliances and develop networks between the cultural institutions where the idea of building Europe is stronger than the desire to destroy Europe. It is important to remember what the dream meant. It is important to once again use the language of political and cultural idealism, a language that has too often been disparaged. We don't see the glass as half empty but rather as half full.
Art, philosophy, and the intellect know no bounds. And artists are quite experienced in the arduous business of overcoming boundaries. We want to share a few ideas along this line and declare tolerance as the "façon de vivre".

When I was still a child, in Argentina, Europe was a smell: the smell of my mother's clothes, the things she carefully kept in boxes over the winter (maybe it was the smell of mothballs). In the suburb of Buenos Aires where I grew up, I heard mysterious German words such as "Spätzle" (from my father), or soft-sung French sounds like "Au clair de la lune, mon ami Pierrot ... Prête-moi ta plume, pour écrire un mot ..." (my mother). Without knowing it, I was already a European. Later, during adolescence, there were the poems that Jorge Luis Borges wrote about European cities and languages. It was a very vague idea of a place to which we belonged and yet didn't belong.
Later, much later, when I was attending journalism school and was already a staunch Latin American, I was against Europe. Europe had colonised us, forced its culture on Latin America with Bible and sword.
And after that, during the most difficult period of persecution of dissenters by the Argentine military dictatorship, Europe and, in particular, Spain did not want to take in any "sudacas" (Spanish derogatory term for South Americans). And the Federal Republic of Germany closed its eyes, selling weapons to the generals, and didn't do a thing about the kidnapped citizens of German nationality.
And we (the "we" was a clear feeling at that time) – we Argentines had fed Spain, during and after the Second World War: Without wheat from Argentina, the Spaniards would have starved to death. That was how I felt back then, as did the generation of young people who were fighting injustice.
I had set out on the road to Europe even before the Argentine military dictatorship began. I was able to go to Europe, because I had decided in favour of Germany – the country my family had been driven out of. From then on, I had many homes, was a native in many languages.
In Europe, Ulm was a home to me, where, miraculously, a place existed at which foreigners and Germans studied together: Ulm School of Design, an anti-fascist establishment set up by the Geschwister Scholl Foundation. There, an international utopia of teaching and learning was brought to life.

Europe seemed to me to be a given at this time. But that always meant Western Europe: France, Holland, Belgium, Italy, Scandinavia ... The big step of spanning the continent, of including the East, came much later. What an opportunity! What an incredible step forward!

Poland, Hungary, Bulgaria, all the countries that had been behind the Iron Curtain, were now part of the process of European unification, became part of the EU.
Europe, where the worst crimes against humanity were committed in the 20th century, where genocide has never been atoned for – a continent that was overrun by shame and horror. In peace, this Europe would finally overcome the insults, differences, and crimes. This Europe wanted to be one, and to never again drown its differences in blood.

But the great dream seems to be stuck. As Jo Lendle and Robert Menasse wrote in 2016: "A common economic area without common economic policy. A monetary union without common financial and fiscal policies. Ultimately, a political union whose members fight against and block political union."[3]
Yes, Europe is imperfect, full of faults, and still not a transnational republic. But the dream is still there: the desire of millions of people for the borders to remain open, for war never to break out again …
This became apparent when the Europeans recently voted in droves – it was clear to everyone that it was about a united Europe, about the *utopia* of Europe, so the people voted. A moment of joy, a sigh of relief.
But lo and behold: The elected politicians were not to be the elected representatives in Brussels at all. The voters had not been informed as to how the election process for the European Parliament worked. There were no transnational lists either, but rather representatives of the parties of the different countries. What happened after that is well known: When the parties could not agree in the European Council, the government representatives called out new names. And soon, hope and joy turned into deep disappointment.
It was as if parents had not told their children the whole truth. And soon the disaffection was back.
"What a sad paradox, that intellectuals today in the united Europe, in the European Union, which is going through a serious crisis but still works according to democratic principles and believes in the free market, in a Europe they once dreamed of and whose Parliament one can now freely elect, that these intellectuals now seem to be more helpless than they were before, in the bad times", writes Adam Zagajewski.[4]

For me, the question is: Are we so helpless? At a moment when the administrative and political dreams of Europe do not seem realistic, do artists have the strength to come together? Can they compose a declaration of mutual tolerance and support, a European alliance of academies and cultural institutions, a declaration of the necessity of cohesion, the clear rejection of nationalism? The declaration of a common language, translated into all the wonderful European languages ...
In addition to the fact that Schengen and a common currency are practical: Can a real sense of curiosity exist among European artists with regard to others? Can there be a serious desire to overcome the social, psychological, and other barriers?

Göran Rosenberg writes, “The modern nation state only became possible because people were capable of expanding their tribal ties to establish socially constituted loyalty toward imaginary communities. What we now understand as the justice of a democratic society – equality before the law – is perhaps just an extended form of loyalty.”[5]
This is no small matter. The expanded loyalty toward a real Europe of many homes, as opposed to an imaginary one, is certainly a big step!
What meaning can the cohesion of European cultural workers have in a time when society threatens to become more unequal than ever through biological change and change driven by information technology, as historian Yuval Noah Harari never grows weary of proclaiming?[6]
Can artists and intellectuals, despite this threat of inequality – in addition to the existing inequalities – maintain the existence of a shared continent, the idea of cohesion?
Can artists counteract the dangerous “disaffection with culture” that Gabriele Tergit wrote about, with their creativity and work, as well as with a clear attitude? Despite all of the differences, can artists develop a sense of curiosity about each other, agree to cooperate with each other?
Can art and culture workers, representatives of art and research academies and other art institutions find a new identity in a European friendship? Are the cultural representatives of such different societies capable of entering into a commitment, an alliance that we can draw on in the case of an emergency? And that we can also count on in peaceful times? The Akademie der Künste asks these questions. We want an **alliance** that comes from the desire to uphold peace between the European countries. We want to take the *res publica* of Europe seriously.
“Right now, nobody knows,” write tireless campaigners for Europe, Ulrike Guérot and Robert Menasse, “how the entirely new, never-before seen, avant-garde project in terms of world history, namely post-national European democracy, will be institutionally drawn up in specific terms. Discussing this using all the imagination of the dreamers, using all the creativity that this continent is capable of is the task that is facing us today.”[7]
We want to invite artists and intellectuals from the countries of Europe to a meeting that will serve to uphold the avant-garde project that is Europe, and during which we can forge and propagate an **alliance of the academies** and other European cultural institutions.

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[1] Gabriele Tergit, *Etwas Seltenes überhaupt: Erinnerungen* (Frankfurt am Main: Schöffling & Co., 2018).

[2] Hannah Arendt, *Elemente und Ursprünge totaler Herrschaft, Bd. II Imperialismus* (Berlin: Ullstein, 1975.

[3] Jo Lendle and Robert Menasse, introduction to *Europa – Akzente 3 / 2016*, ed. Jo Lendle and Robert Menasse (Munich: Hanser Verlag, 2016).

[4] Adam Zagajewski, "Die Schließung einer offenen Gesellschaft" ("The closure of an open society"), in Lendle and Menasse, *Europa – Akzente 3 / 2016*.

[5] Göran Rosenberg, "Europas viele Heimaten" ("Europe's many homes"), *Lettre International* 118 (Autumn 2017).

[6] Cf. Yuval Harari speaking at ETH Lausanne: "Society is threatening to become more unequal than ever before" (SRF Kultur-Aktualität, 11 July 2019), https://www.srf.ch/kultur/gesellschaft-religion/harari-an-der-eth-lausanne-die-gesellschaft-droht-so-ungleich-zu-werden-wie-nie-zuvor

[7] Ulrike Guérot und Robert Menasse, "Manifest für die Begründung einer Europäischen Republik" ("Manifesto for the foundation of a European Republic"), in Lendle and Menasse, *Europa – Akzente 3 / 2016*.

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