

## 9 Is a museum of European history possible? Heritage and European ‘narrative identity’

The historian Charles Seignobos was fond of saying: ‘Asking questions is very useful, but answering them is very dangerous’. Some seemingly simple questions have elusive answers. What is Europe? What is European history? Is there such a thing as a collective European memory? Can Europe be said to have a cultural identity? What would likely constitute a community of destiny and a common heritage? How can we devise a narrative for Europe that would be more than just the sum of its national histories? Can we avoid the risk of instrumentalising and idealising history if we consider that recourse to historical heritage serves to ‘ensure that the dynamics of convergence and solidarity prevail over the forces of division and rivalry’?<sup>574</sup> Such questions have been debated for decades and even centuries. The debate is divided between those who believe that ‘there is no Europe, there has never been’<sup>575</sup> and those who, like the medievalist historian Marc Bloch, believe that ‘there is no history of France, there is a history of Europe’ or even a history of the world.<sup>576</sup>

It is such a complex issue that Europe as an institution, whether the European Council or the European Union, has never really wanted to go down the slippery slope of the ontology of the European phenomenon. For this reason, Jean Monnet, a pragmatic follower of functionalism, thought

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574 Speech delivered by Jacques Chirac, President of the French Republic, on the political situation and democratisation of Yugoslavia, Belgrade, 7 December 2001. <https://www.elysee.fr/front/pdf/elysee-module-9860-fr.pdf>

575 André Malraux, « Après un silence de quatre ans, André Malraux expose pour notre journal ses vues et ses idées sur les problèmes du monde actuel », Interview with *Labyrinthe* (Genève), n°5, 15 février 1945, p. 1–2. [https://malraux.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/128jg\\_labyrinthe\\_interview\\_15021945.pdf](https://malraux.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/128jg_labyrinthe_interview_15021945.pdf)

576 To ‘dissipate the illusion of local causes’, Marc Bloch believed it was possible to identify ‘A European phenomenon that could only be attributed to European causes’. Marc Bloch, « Pour une histoire comparée des sociétés européennes », *Revue de synthèse historique*, 1928, quoted in Marc Bloch, *L’Histoire, la Guerre, la Résistance*, *op.cit.*, p. 363. Yet, regarding Europe, the medievalist lamented ‘the lack of a serious attempt to leverage history to shed light on the concept’. Marc Bloch, « Problèmes d’Europe », *Annales d’histoire économique et sociale*, 1935, quoted in Marc Bloch, *L’Histoire, la Guerre, la Résistance*, *op.cit.*, p. 456. It should be noted that Marc Bloch was not afraid to use the term ‘European civilisation’.

that European unification should begin with the economy and industry, with '*de facto* solidarities'. It explains why European identity can only be 'complex' and not easily *ascribable*, as the typical European 'unity in diversity' narrative reflects. It also shows that the European narrative is fond of leveraging 'European values' presented as an axiological and programmatic heritage: they are valid for the future, which seems odd when speaking of heritage as a legacy. The problem is that these values (human rights, democracy, freedom of thought, religious liberties, etc.) are not unique to Europe, given that history attests to the fact that Europe has shown very little respect for them (as stressed by the resurgence of colonial history since the turn of the third millennium).

Admittedly, a basic consensus has long been emerging around this European cultural *koine*, consisting of Greek philosophical, political, and artistic thought, Christianity and Judaism, the heritage of Rome, humanist philosophy, and the Enlightenment, embodied in the American and French revolutions of the late 18th century and the European Revolution of 1848'.<sup>577</sup> Yet, it should be mentioned, on the one hand, that this *topoi* is questionable, historically speaking. On the other hand, during the debate triggered by the draft European Constitution (2005), it appeared that certain countries, including France and Belgium, did not accept the reference to Europe's Christian roots. Only the pluralist option was retained in the draft through the vague term of 'religions'.<sup>578</sup>

We might add that the intellectuals of post-war Europe, which had asserted itself against the Nazi and fascist past, made sure that Europe was seen first and foremost as a project and not as a closed identity. They were quick to brandish fear and the rejection of what some of them called 'European nationalism'. It was a rather useless fear. First, post-war European federalists consistently ruled out the idea of a European superstate by virtue of their federalist ideas. Then, 'European nationalism' would imply the possibility of a common narrative about the nature of Europe, the presence of a popular movement and a European self-awareness, all of which seemed unthinkable and perhaps impossible. Instead, the prevailing feeling was the difficulty in incarnating Europe (its history, ipseity, project), creating a European heritage, and identifying 'places' where European memory could

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577 Gérard Bossuat, « Des lieux de mémoire pour l'Europe unie », *Vingtième Siècle, revue d'histoire*, n°61, janvier-mars 1999, p. 56.

578 Chantal Delsol, Jean-François Mattéi, *L'identité de l'Europe*, Paris, PUF, 2010, p. 45–63.

appear in its singularity and irreducibility. Paul Valéry observed in his day: 'It is remarkable that the man of Europe is not defined by race, language or customs, but by desires and by the amplitude of will'. Philosopher Léon Brunschvicg made the same point at the same time. In *L'Esprit européen. Être et penser*, he insisted that culture was not a reality that was 'already here', an accomplished heritage that just needed to be uncovered; it was an aspiration, 'the effort of consciousness to possess itself'.<sup>579</sup> The historian Lucien Febvre, for his part, spoke of a 'conquest'.<sup>580</sup> How, then, to patrimonialise such 'desires', 'will', and 'effort'?

Supposing the thesis of an original and ipse-identity for Europe is inoperative as a myth. Should we settle for speaking of 'narrative fiction',<sup>581</sup> in other words, an identity constructed through the discourse on the nature of the history of Europeans and what the European project should be in ethical and political terms?

We have forgotten that the self-same Paul Valéry was behind the creation of the International Museums Office (1926), which was intended as a tool 'for bringing nations closer together after the First World War'.<sup>582</sup> We know the result. Yet the idea of narrativising European history was relevant as the promise and condition of a 'narrative identity', to use Paul Ricœur's expression.<sup>583</sup> If Europeanists shared the idea that museums could be a factor of cohesion and union, why did it take so long to build the House of European History?

### *The European Union's powerlessness to define the cultural 'identity' of Europe*

A museum is a narrative. A narrative presupposes a consensus on the answers to the questions I raised at the beginning of this introduction.

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579 Léon Brunschvicg, *L'Esprit européen. Être et penser*, Neuchâtel, La Baconnière, 1947.

580 Lucien Febvre, « Esprit européen et philosophie », *Annales. Économies, Sociétés, Civilisations*, 3<sup>e</sup> année, N. 3, 1948. p. 297–301. [www.persee.fr/doc/ahess\\_0395-2649\\_1\\_948\\_num\\_3\\_3\\_1643](http://www.persee.fr/doc/ahess_0395-2649_1_948_num_3_3_1643)

581 Paul Ricœur, *Temps et récit*, 1, *L'intrigue et le récit historique*, Paris, Le Seuil, coll. « Points-Essais », 1983, p. 288.

582 Nina Gorgus, *Der Zauberer der Vitrinen. Zur Museologie Georges-Henri Rivière*, Münster/New York/München/Berlin, Waxmann, 1999, p. 61.

583 Paul Ricœur, *Temps et récit*, 3, *Le temps raconté*, Paris, Le Seuil, coll. « Points-Essais », 1985, p. 442. 'The fragile offspring of the union of history and fiction is the assignation to an individual or a community of a specific identity that can be called their *narrative identity*'.

In its various manifestations and concepts, a history museum is always a more or less conscious way of echoing our 'fixation on origins', our 'embryogenic obsession'.<sup>584</sup> Is it epistemologically possible to envisage the construction of a unique narrative? How can such a narrative be protected from exploitation for the issues at stake? It is a difficult mission for a nation. In the same period, the project to create a 'Maison de l'Histoire de France' (2010–2012) foundered under fire from academic circles. The general *topos* was as follows: 'In the age of Europe, in the age of a world without borders, yet also increasingly divided and conflict-ridden, should we rebuild the reassuring wall of a mythical France that prevents us from understanding the complexity of the past and from preparing for the complexities of the future?'<sup>585</sup> From the outset, the threat of exploiting the French people's 'desire for history' and 'need for identity' was raised: 'As it stands, and despite all the efforts made to attract and win people over to this great need for identity, that it would be so urgent to satisfy by such a "pedagogic" means, the forthcoming creation of a House of French History augurs the worst for history, and nothing good for France and the French people'.<sup>586</sup> If a country like France, known for its Jacobin culture, was unsuccessful<sup>587</sup> in this endeavour, then for Europe, the mission might have seemed unachievable from the outset.

The project that gave birth in 2017 to the House of European History (use of the term 'museum' was cautiously avoided, and Europe only appears in adjectival form) clearly poses the 'challenge of the narrative on the unity of Europe'.<sup>588</sup> It is a museum disguised as a 'house'. This reflects a European bias that exists in other areas. This belated interest in museographing European history bears witness to the very hesitant and discreet way European institutions approach culture. How can we build a unique

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584 Marc Bloch, *Apologie pour l'histoire ou métier d'historien* (written in 1942 and published for the first time in 1964 by Armand Colin). Quoted in Marc Bloch, *L'Histoire, la Guerre, la Résistance*, *op.cit.*, p. 869.

585 Isabelle Backouche, Vincent Duclert, *Maison de l'histoire de France. Enquête critique*, Paris, Fondation Jean Jaurès, 2012, p. 102.

586 Jean-Pierre Babelon, Isabelle Backouche, Vincent Duclert, Ariane James-Sarazin, *Quel musée d'histoire pour la France?*, Paris, Dunod, 2011. The quote is taken from the publisher's presentation of the book.

587 But we should point to an exception: in 1987, the Federal Republic of Germany and the Land of Berlin founded the Deutsches Historisches Museum.

588 Étienne Deschamps, « La Maison de l'histoire européenne au défi du récit sur l'unité de l'Europe », 16 mars 2018. <https://www.c2dh.uni.lu/thinkering/la-maison-d-l-histoire-europeenne-au-defi-du-recit-sur-lunite-de-leurope>

and shared narrative on such crumbly foundations as 'unity in diversity'? The current trend leans towards the pluralisation and communitisation of memory rather than its unification. Berlin's *Volkskunde-Museum*, a symbol, changed its name to the Museum of European Cultures (Museum Europäischer Kulturen) in 1999. The myth of Europe's 'spiritual unity' has given way to a secularised approach that prompted the sociologist Edgar Morin to say that 'European culture cannot be defined by an essence but by multiple conflicts' and that 'Europe is a notion that is all at once multiple, vague and diverse'.<sup>589</sup> The argument for an identity of non-identity (or 'non-identity in identity')<sup>590</sup> emerged, as well as the belief that the expression 'European identity' was an oxymoron. As early as 1978, the orientalist Edward Saïd argued that cultures were 'hybrid and heterogeneous' and 'defied any unitary description'.<sup>591</sup>

How can we pluralise identity and promote a common heritage? This was the challenge set for the House of European History.

Before the 1980s, Brussels's Europe had no interest in European culture. It was the remit of the Council of Europe in Strasbourg. The principles that led to the creation of the Council of Europe remain unclear about the 'common heritage' that needed to be preserved:

'Unshakeably attached to the spiritual and moral values which are the common heritage of their peoples and which underlie the principles of individual freedom, political liberty and the rule of law, on which all true democracy is founded'.<sup>592</sup>

The preamble to its statutes mentions universal values: 'peace', 'justice', 'international cooperation', and 'preservation of human society and civilisation', which are not specific to Europe. The Council of Europe has very few means and perhaps very little ambition. It is only a 'consultative' body. A European Convention on culture was signed on 19 December 1954, which primarily stemmed from good intentions: 'The study of the languages,

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589 Edgar Morin, « De la difficulté de définir une "identité" culturelle européenne », *in Europe sans rivage. De l'identité Culturelle européenne*, Symposium international, janvier 1988, Albin Michel, 1988, p. 241, p. 244.

590 Edgar Morin, « Logique et contradiction », *Philosophie et société*, March 2019. <https://tiersinclus.fr/edgar-morin-logique-et-contradiction/>

591 Edward Saïd, *L'Orientalisme. L'Orient créé par l'Occident* (translated from the English), 1980, Seuil, préface de Tzvetan Todorov, p. 19. 1<sup>st</sup> edition: *Orientalism*, New York, Vintage Books, 1978, p. 7.

592 Quoted by Édouard Bonnefous, *L'Europe en face de son destin*, PUF, 1952, p. 249.

history and civilisation of the other Contracting Parties, as well as of their common civilisation.' The conception of culture remained quite traditional, as evidenced by the Council of Europe's first six exhibitions. They provided a highly academic chronological overview of the major stylistic movements from the 15th to the 20th century. The first exhibition, 'Humanist Europe', was held in Brussels's Palais des Beaux-Arts from December 16 to February 28. Only in the 1980s did a change come about, with the creation of the European Cultural Routes in 1987.

Around the same time, the Europe of Brussels began positioning itself in this area. It was a consequence of the general impetus given to the European project by François Mitterrand and Helmut Kohl. Let us consider the example of the Maastricht Treaty (7 February 1992). The tendency was to narrow it down to the decision to create a common monetary area. It would hence become a renewed source of inspiration for the anticapitalist and sovereignist *topos* of the anti-European narrative that would come with the rise of populism. The word 'Maastricht' would then be seen as an insult. Eventually, the other dimension of this treaty was written off. Removing the adjective 'economic' from the European Economic Community (EEC) was a sign that this new phase in Europe's history should not be limited to the economic dimension. The EEC thus became the 'European Community'. In fact, under this Treaty, the Community was granted powers in the field of culture. In this document, culture is presented as a constitutive 'factor in the integration of European citizens'. The treaty mentions that the European Union:

- Contributes to the flowering of the cultures of the Member States
- while respecting their national diversity
- at the same time bringing the common cultural heritage to the fore.

Of course, the limitations are immediately obvious, which once again demonstrates the European project's *superego*: it is still a state-national conception of culture. What we have 'in common' is the past.

For the first time, the Treaty on European Union included a chapter specifically dedicated to education, training, and youth. It was the express recognition of culture as a community competence. The Leonardo da Vinci, Socrates, and Youth for Europe programmes were launched in late 1994 and early 1995 to 'inspire in young Europeans a sense of active European citizenship, solidarity, and tolerance while involving them in shaping the future of the Union'.

Article 128 of the Treaty of Maastricht (it would become Article 151 of the Treaty of Amsterdam, with some slight amendments) reads as follows:

1. The Community shall contribute to the *flowering of the cultures* of the Member States, while respecting their national and regional diversity.
2. Action by the Community shall be aimed at encouraging cooperation between Member States and, if necessary, supporting and supplementing their action in the following areas:
  - Improvement of the knowledge and dissemination of the culture and history of the European peoples;
  - Conservation and safeguarding of cultural heritage of European significance;
  - Non-commercial cultural exchanges;
  - Artistic and literary creation, *including in the audiovisual sector*.
3. The Community and the Member States shall foster cooperation with third countries and the competent international organizations in the sphere of culture, in particular the Council of Europe.
4. The Community shall take cultural aspects into account in its action under other provisions of this Treaty.

It was a step forward in confirming the European institution's interest in culture and heritage. It was also a way of reducing the Council of Europe's monopoly in this area. The European Union could now award grants and prizes to certain cultural projects. Yet, it was also a step backwards. The drafters had very subtly refused to cross the Rubicon. Indeed, as Luuk van Middelaar pointed out, speaking of 'scant consolation', the expression 'European culture' was carefully avoided.<sup>593</sup> In fact, the Treaty article merely recognised the existence of a culture that was specific to Nation-States. The idea of a *common European culture* thus remained controversial. How could diversity lead to unity? How could unity respect diversity? The pending issue was how to square the circle.

The power of this indefinable identity, perhaps Europe's unsurpassable ontology, is also its weakness (and vice versa): it prevents a closed, clear, and popular identification. According to the sociologist Alain Touraine, this paradoxical situation is linked to the 'notion of modernity', which may be

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593 Luuk van Middelaar, *Le passage à l'Europe. Histoire d'un commencement*, Gallimard, 2012 (1<sup>ère</sup> édition 2009) p. 349.

used as a starting point for trying to define European cultural identity. His initial definition of identity is that it represents the ideal correspondence 'between culture, society and politics'.<sup>594</sup> Yet 'the fundamental characteristic of modern European culture has been to destroy the notion of identity', in other words, to disjoin culture, society and politics. And it was this conception of modernity that was rejected by totalitarianism. This brings us back to the argument put forward by the federalist historian Denis de Rougemont on the 'paradoxical unity' of European culture, based on the 'balance of opposites',<sup>595</sup> which philosophers such as Edgard Morin have updated by describing it as 'dialogical'. The inability to conceive of the monistic nature of European culture is precisely what would make it unique. Its unity would be its diversity. Therefore, European identity would be its 'complexity' and its aptitude for self-criticism, which would then be the source and guarantee of the value of freedom invented in Europe.

One can quickly see how difficult it is to build a policy around this aporia. 'What is simple is always wrong. What isn't is unfit for use,' as Paul Valéry would say. This is why national populism retains its performative power despite the growing interdependence of economies and cultures. For many years, European politicians had regarded culture as a mere spiritual complement. However, in the early 21st century, culture was revealed to be an explosive subject! As I mentioned earlier, this is demonstrated by the violent reactions to the attempt to include a section on the Christian origins of European civilisation in the Treaty establishing the European Constitution. Another related and hazardous issue is that of European identity. The Lisbon European Council (2007) came up with a compromise formula that merely acknowledged the impossibility of a definition:

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594 Alain Touraine *in Europe sans rivage. De l'identité Culturelle européenne, op.cit.*, p. 132.

595 Denis de Rougemont, one of the great thinkers on the idea of Europe, defined European culture as composite, contradictory, and dialectical, able to balance 'opposites'. He was fond of quoting Heraclitus: 'Opposites cooperate, and from the struggle of opposites comes the most beautiful harmony'. Rougemont would often refer to 'creative tension' (Denis de Rougemont, *Lettre ouverte aux Européens*, Paris, Albin Michel, 1970, p. 118–121). He argued that Europe is the 'homeland of diversity', the seat of 'inseparable antinomies' (faith/rationalism; authority/freedom; national/universal; tradition/innovation; myth/science; reformism/revolution). This explains its 'differentiated unity', or its 'paradoxical unity', which unfolds in the 'free interplay of its diversities', and which is the source of its 'dynamism' (Denis de Rougemont, 'La Cité européenne', speech given at the University of Bonn, on 15 April 1970, for the reception of the Robert Schumann Prize. <https://www.panarchy.org/derougemont/cite.html>).

‘The term *European* combines geographic, historical and cultural elements that all contribute to the European identity. Such a sharing of ideas, values and historical links cannot be condensed into a final formula. On the contrary, it is constantly redefined by each successive generation.’

This definition should be considered in light of the latest push towards identity and ethnicism that occurred in the heart of Europe, in former Yugoslavia, in the 1990s. The Serbs had left ‘historical time’ to dive deep into the agonising myth of original purity and cultural homogeneity.<sup>596</sup> Nazism, a ‘culturicide’ historical movement, was a suicidal and genocidal attempt to break free from the common axiological heritage. The underlying message could be summarized as follows: Europe’s complex genetic makeup makes creating a simplifying, unifying, and rallying narrative like ‘national novels’ difficult. Therein lies the challenge of making Europe understood and loved. How can complexity be made popular? How can it be something for which people would be ready to die? Yet, ultimately, this frustration-producing challenge might be seen as a safeguard against what Marc Bloch called ‘the idol of origins’.<sup>597</sup>

### *The challenge of creating a unitas multiplex heritage*

There is a consensus among European historians that European culture is first and foremost governed by the ‘dialectic of the one and the many, the general and the particular’<sup>598</sup> and that the history of Europe is, above all, marked by ‘diversity and conflict’.<sup>599</sup> The historian Robert Frank offers an

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596 Ivan Čolović, « Les mythes politiques du nationalisme ethnique », *Transeuropéennes*, 1994, p. 61–67, quoted by Jacques Semelin, *Purifier et détruire. Usages politiques des massacres et génocides*, Paris, Seuil, 2005, p. 66. See also: Ivan Čolović, « Les prêtres de la langue ». Poésie, nation et politique en Serbie, *Terrain*, 2003, n° 41, p. 35–46; *Id.*, « L’espace spirituel et la communication interculturelle » in Aline Gohard-Radenkovic (dir.), *Intégration des minorités et nouveaux espaces interculturels*, Berne, Peter Lang, p. 17–27.

597 Marc Bloch, *Apologie pour l’histoire ou métier d’historien*, *op.cit.*, p. 868.

598 Nicolas Roussellier, « Pour une écriture européenne de l’histoire de l’Europe », *Vingtième Siècle*, Paris, no 38, avril-juin 1993, p. 89.

599 Jean-Pierre Rioux, « Pour une histoire de l’Europe sans adjectif », *Vingtième Siècle*, Paris, no 50, 1996, p. 106.

interesting interpretation of the thesis on the dialogical<sup>600</sup> and dialectical nature of European identity:

“The issue of “European dialogic” is very stimulating intellectually. But isn't it a truism endlessly repeated to please us Europeans, flattering the creative impulse of a superior Europe by virtue of its dialectical fertility? Great care must be taken to ensure that its use does not, in turn, become a tool for glorifying our culture in a teleological manner. (...) Are we not in danger of moving from the pink legend of European unity to the red and black myth of the unity-diversity of the “European genius” able to give birth to a European Union that harmoniously combines opposites in the most perfect subsidiarity?”<sup>601</sup>

Is European history impracticable? Is European history impossible to find? Is European culture impossible to grasp? There is a growing consensus that it is impossible to think of Europe as anything other than a *'unitas multiplex'*.<sup>602</sup> Hence, the need to conceive of unity in diversity to ‘think identity in non-identity’ and avoid ‘the illusion of identity’.<sup>603</sup> This is why it is so difficult to envisage the heritagization of the dialogical nature of European culture.

A conflicting movement between diversity and unity is creating tension and inhibition, of which the timidity of European policies could be a symptom. However, there is one aspect I haven't yet touched on, and it is the over-emphasis on diversity. In the aftermath of the war, it could be interpreted as a beneficial break with the liberticidal and fusionist ideologies that had swept across Europe in the 1930s, which were particularism and difference killing machines. It could equally have been a way of protecting European culture against the two hegemonic cultural models of the time: the American and Soviet models. And later on, to protect against the destructive and standardising effects of globalisation. A fascinating semantic

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600 ‘Dialogics is precisely about including the third party: two opposing propositions are necessarily linked even while opposing each other. Each is wrong and false in partiality; while they tend to exclude one another, both become true in their complementarity. This is the dialogic we have seen at work, not always or everywhere, but *wherever there is complexity*. Edgar Morin, « Logique et contradiction », *Philosophie et société*, March 2019.

601 Robert Frank, « Une histoire problématique, une histoire du temps présent », *Vingtième Siècle. Revue d'histoire*, vol. n° 71, no. 3, 2001, p. 82.

602 Edgar Morin, *Penser l'Europe*, Gallimard, rééd. 1987–1990, p. 24.

603 Jean-François Bayard, *L'Illusion identitaire*, Fayard, Paris, 1996.

evolution occurred: 'cultural exception', 'cultural diversity', 'intercultural dialogue', 'cultural cohabitation'.<sup>604</sup> Diversity was no longer an expression exclusive to 'shelter identities' and 'bulwark identities'. It had been legitimised by Unesco in 2005, through the Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions. The development of intangible heritage reflected this new momentum.

This phenomenon coincided with the emergence, at the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries, of another paradigm on which European cultural construction policies attempted to reposition themselves: heritage. In and around the 19th century, heritage was primarily a device for constructing patriotic memory. It was culturally part of the right-wing imaginary realm,<sup>605</sup> even of the counter-revolutionary right, for whom the present was dictated by the past, with continuity as the ultimate value. The 1980s saw the triumph of a new approach to both the past and identity, based on the notion of long and sustainable time, and brought into the limelight by ecology. The primary aim was to 'protect'<sup>606</sup> the past and respect the environment in a non-productivist, even anti-capitalist, way. The heritage approach is also a way to ascribe a new and non-conservative value to the past.

Heritage and the idea of Europe progressively wended into the left wing's political and cultural notionality. Edgar Morin's intellectual itinerary is very interesting in that respect. Morin comes from the anti-European Marxist left. He explains that the 'psychological moment' that triggered his Europeanist conversion came in the 1970s, with the oil crisis and its aftermath: 'I had the feeling then that Europe had become a poor old thing. (...) Yet Europe was becoming a less ambiguous concept to me in the sense that the colonisation period was over'.<sup>607</sup> This crisis spectacularly revealed Europe's 'organic' dependence on the outside world and validated the analysis that it no longer dominated the world. He mentioned in an

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604 Dominique Wolton, *L'autre mondialisation*, Paris, Flammarion, 2003, p. 175.

605 Jean-Pierre Chaline, « Le patrimoine », in Jean-François Sirinelli (dir.), *Histoire des droites en France. T.3 : « Sensibilités »*, Gallimard, 1992, p. 730–755.

606 When the European institutions tackled the cultural issue, they did it through architectural heritage and its protection. A charter of European architectural heritage was enacted in 1975. In March 1980, the European Commission and the Council of Europe jointly organised a symposium on the conservation of architectural heritage, which led to the creation of a European Monuments and Sites Fund.

607 « Edgar Morin. La nouvelle conscience européenne », *Défi pour l'Europe*, n°7, 1987, p. 5. Archives de Sciences Po Paris, Fonds UEF 5 / 1771.

interview that Europe 'has come to a point of infinite frailty' and that 'the true values that Europe had granted the world were threatened because it was threatened.' However, Morin's idea of European identity is anything but defensive: 'The nature of European identity is not in any particular one of its elements or moments, but in their dialogue, i.e., the fruitful convergence of conflicts, competition, dialogue, complementarities'.<sup>608</sup>

The late 1990s, as epitomised by Pierre Nora's project, bore witness to this newfound faith in heritage's capacity for political creation, repair, prevention and even reassurance. In 1994, in an issue of the journal *Le Débat* dedicated to heritage, Daniel Thérond discussed the reconfiguration of European memory following the fall of the USSR, setting out to find a 'European cultural model'. In imagining 'the reconstitution of a pan-European cultural area', he wrote: 'Should we not consider how knowledge and understanding of Europe's heritage can contribute to constructing a system of relations between communities based on acceptance of differences and other identities?' He believed in 'the educational value of heritage'.<sup>609</sup> Dominique Poulot, an astute observer, expressed this in 1993: 'Over the last ten years, the notion of heritage and associated social phenomena have taken on unprecedented importance in European cultural life and the Community's political and administrative discourse'.<sup>610</sup> Does this mean that heritage could adapt by shifting from patriotic memory to European memory? Here, heritage should be understood as the selection and hermeneutical process of the past by the present and for the future; this is 'reversed filiation' (Jean Pouillon) or 'invented tradition' (E.-M. Hobsbawm). I posit that it is a matter of proposing an *alternative narrative* to the heroic, unifying narrative that is less and less resistant to academic analysis.

During the international symposium organised by the French government in 1988 on the 'European cultural idea', Pierre Nora delivered a presentation on the theme 'Realms of memory in European culture'. Strik-

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608 *Ibid.* In this interview, Edgar Morin detailed what would be the salient feature of European culture, an 'open' culture that has integrated the fact that man is no longer at the centre of the world and that Europe is no more than a 'peripheral instance': 'He who believes must know that doubt exists; he who doubts must know that he cannot escape believing in certain myths.'

609 Daniel Thérond, « Grand Europe : les gageures du patrimoine », *Le Débat*, no 78, janvier-février 1994, p. 166.

610 Dominique Poulot, « Le patrimoine culturel, valeur commune de l'Europe », *Relations internationales*, no 73, printemps 1993, p. 43.

ingly, he avoided the title 'Realms of memory of European culture' from the outset. Why? A cautious approach to a concept that is difficult to control and which could lead to two pitfalls (inherent in any quest for identity): either the 'hegemonic overvaluation of a culture' or the defensive and comforting posture that would turn European culture into 'the sanctuary of rational and democratic humanism threatened today by the invasion of new barbarians'. His premise was that if there is a 'common cultural identity', it consists of a 'divided memory' and 'fragmented history', bearing in mind that the junction between national memories and European memory is difficult to find. Yet, he played along. He identified a few places that could be used to outline a 'topology of European memory, shared by all, and specific to each': military places (Lepanto), geographical places (The Rhine River), scientific places (The Tower of Pisa), economic places (The City), artistic places (Florence) and symbolic places (the Czestochowa pilgrimage). Defining the nature of cultural identity seemed impossible to him. However, not an inductive approach based on places of historical memory (and therefore on the particular) that could reveal, through 'so many different identities', the 'invisible thread' from which 'an unconscious organisation of European memory' and 'the latent truth of our history' would emerge. Ultimately, Nora settled for a difficult-to-avoid paradox: European cultural identity presents itself as both 'unobtainable and self-evident'.<sup>611</sup>

Eight years later, in 1996, the historian Jean-Pierre Rioux ironically commented on the 1960s, which had manufactured the myth of 'the glittering unity of art and mind', nevertheless acknowledged that Pierre Nora's 'Realms of memory' had yet to find 'a European expression'. In his article « Des lieux de mémoire pour l'Europe unie » (Realms of memory for a united Europe), Gérard Bossuat seemed to agree with him. Everyone knew that the concept of the nation had developed and been legitimised with the policy of inculcating and embodying a national memory through education, stories, monuments, symbols, and commemorations. It was even called the 'national narrative', so little did this ideological construction have to do with history and the history of historians. It was the price to pay to form a community and an identity, not to mention the tragic events of the wars. It takes time to manufacture a sense of nation. But as far as Europe

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611 Pierre Nora, « Les lieux de mémoire dans la culture européenne », in *Europe sans rivage. De l'identité Culturelle européenne, op.cit.*, p. 38–42.

is concerned, is it possible to know whether or not there exist 'places of shared memory' capable of 'founding a European civic identity'?<sup>612</sup>

His two-pronged conclusion is similar to that of the creator of 'Realms of memory'. He looked for emblematic heroes but only came up with 'failed' heroes (Charlemagne or Napoleon), 'dangerous' heroes (Hitler), 'unsung' heroes (Monnet), or 'ambiguous' heroes (De Gasperi, Mendès France). He explored memorable shared events, yet he discovered that the memory of Europe 'nestles in the frightful inter-European confrontations', in 'the doctrines of intolerance' and the 'places of the suffering of Europeans'. Does this mean that only negative memory can unite? Then, he sought 'founding places of Europe', where populations 'intermingled', 'decisive' events in Europe's history, creative places, economical places, and symbolic places. He found the division of Verdun (843), the Congress of Vienna, the Rhine, the slave trade, university towns, works of art, the Leaning Tower of Pisa, Galileo and Max Planck, etc. In summary, Bossuat was convinced that the 'history of Europeans remains a source for European conscience'. It could be a means of education and 'accepting the diversities that are emerging or exploding all over Europe'. This leads back to the fine balance between unity and diversity that blocks any attempt at memorialisation and the creation of heritage for the purposes of identity and unity: 'Realms of memory can only reflect the dispersion and rivalry between the peoples of Europe. Hence, the Gordian knot, the fundamental contradiction in the history of European unity, rejects any national realm of memory as a European realm of memory, with a view to unity. This is why the European institutions are so reticent or cautious.

### *Can cultural heritage embody 'the common value of Europe'?*

One can see that it is as difficult to write a European history of Europe as it is to define European cultural identity. This observation begs the question of whether or not heritage could be seen as the missing link to connect to the ultimate source that would precede, transcend and reconcile national histories.

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612 Gérard Bossuat, « Des lieux de mémoire pour l'Europe unie », *Vingtième Siècle, revue d'histoire*, no 61, janvier-mars 1999, p. 57. See also: Sonja Kmec, Benoît Majerus, Michel Margue, Pit Péporté, *Dépasser le cadre national des « Lieux de mémoire »*. *Innovations méthodologiques, approches comparatives, lectures transnationales*, Peter Lang, Berne, 2009.

This is more or less what a theoretician of museography and heritage attempted to put forth. Observing, as many others, that the late twentieth century coincided with 'a veritable explosion of heritage enterprises', Dominique Poulot wondered whether cultural heritage was not about to become a 'common European value'.<sup>613</sup> The heritage approach may have one virtue: it steers clear of the ambition of grand teleological narratives that smooth out history to ignore the 'granites of identity'. This is history through object, detail and sequence. Nevertheless, it is still part of the dynamic of 'imagined communities'<sup>614</sup> and 'invented traditions'.<sup>615</sup> It always comes up against the question of selection and embodiment. On this journey, the European institution has encountered two challenges: building a European consensus around memory and producing an embodying effect. Indeed, heritage must be embodied, even though the focus is primarily on 'intangible' heritage nowadays. Pierre Nora had foreseen this: the shared European idea is 'what is less carnal and embodied in a cultural idea'. The most obvious example is the iconography of the European currency. The birth of the euro could have been an opportunity to combine culture with economics. It seemed a good idea to illustrate Europe's heritage in an accessible way. The belief that culture could strengthen the sense of belonging was still at work here. However, this project for the visual identity of euro banknotes failed. In November 1994, the European Monetary Institute commissioned a working group to develop proposals for cross-cutting visual themes that avoided national references.<sup>616</sup>

Three themes emerged from the eighteen initially proposed:

- 'Ages and style of Europe': Ordinary characters from iconographic works and architectural styles and monuments;
- 'Legacy of Europe': Illustrious characters and their achievements;
- 'Abstract and security': Geometric and non-figurative shapes to ensure that designers retain their freedom and convey an idea of the future.

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613 D. Poulot, « Le patrimoine culturel, valeur commune de l'Europe », *art.cit.*, p. 43.

614 Regarding this concept, see Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism*, London, Verso, 1983. See as well: Christine Chivallon, « Retour sur "la communauté imaginée" d'Anderson. Essai de clarification théorique d'une notion restée floue », *Raisons politiques*, vol. 27, no. 3, 2007, p. 131–172.

615 Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (dir.), *The Invention of Tradition*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1983.

616 Claude Vigier, « Les billets en euro se dessinent », *Revue d'économie financière*, n°36, 1996. L'Union monétaire européenne, p. 69–78.

The theme 'Legacy of Europe' was eventually rejected as it was most likely to pose problems regarding historical choice (events, figures, movements, etc.). Thus, the 'Fathers of Europe'—key figures in art, science and thought—were discarded. History was eschewed in favour of European culture: abstract or archetypal architectural forms (triumphal arch, aqueduct, Ionic column, arch) and stylistic elements (Romanesque, Gothic, Renaissance, Baroque, modern and contemporary) that show no reference to existing monuments. The symbolism of link and openness is reflected in the doors, windows, and bridges, which show that Europe is, first and foremost, a project and not a closed identity. With a view to enlargement, the European Central Bank launched a new series of banknotes named 'Europe' in 2013 to represent the European continent as a whole. This series consistently avoids historical markers in favour of mythology, such as the face of Europe on a Greek vase.

It wasn't until the early 2000s that the European Union positioned itself in the heritage field by creating the 'European Heritage' label (2005–2011). Heritage seemed to appeal to elite academic institutions such as Sciences Po Paris, which created the 'Sciences Po European Heritage Prize' in 2014. This process would culminate in 2018 with the European Year of Cultural Heritage.<sup>617</sup> It was an interesting initiative by the French Ministry of Culture, which opened up new perspectives despite its mitigated impact and the fact that the red line had not been crossed: this would not be the Year of Cultural Heritage. Similarly, European Heritage Days have yet to truly exist as such. The 'European Heritage' label, as officially presented on the French site (this was, in fact, a French initiative), 'aims to highlight the European dimension of cultural assets, monuments, cultural sites, places of memory, etc., that are witnesses to the history of Europe or European integration'.<sup>618</sup> The European Union website states: 'European heritage sites bring the European narrative and underlying history behind it to life'. The quest for a 'European narrative' is still ongoing, and there is a persistent belief that history can be used to serve the future.<sup>619</sup>

Analysing the list of cultural sites that have been awarded the 'European Heritage' label (awarded by the European Union since 2005) reveals that six of them symbolise Europe's tragic heritage. The 2020 selection includes

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617 Which referred to the European Year of Monumental Heritage (1975).

618 <https://www.culture.gouv.fr/Aides-demarches/Protections-labels-et-appellations/La-bel-Patrimoine-europeen>

619 <https://culture.ec.europa.eu/fr/cultural-heritage/initiatives-and-success-stories/european-heritage-label>

two rankings (out of 10) that have a direct connection with Europe at war: the Łambinowice Commemoration Site (Poland) and the Lieu de Mémoire at Chambon-sur-Lignon (France) dedicated to the memory of the Righteous (those who helped Jews during the Nazi period). There is also a classification linked to the care provided to victims: the Benevolent Colonies (Belgium and the Netherlands). The Sighet Memorial (Rumania), listed in 2018, is the first site dedicated to the commemoration of the victims of communism. However, the underpinning philosophy is to highlight the European dimension of cultural assets, monuments, cultural sites, places of remembrance, etc., as witnesses to a shared history and a 'common' culture that have led to the construction of Europe.

Yet this approach to heritage must be seen in light of two competing phenomena: the popularity of 'World Heritage' (UNESCO) and the unpopularity of the demand for the 'restitution' of 'spoliated' cultural property by Europe's museums.

A second attempt was made. As the boom in heritage coincided with an upsurge in the museum offer, the idea emerged that the realm of memory of European history and culture could be a museum. The fantasy of a grand European narrative was revived. Because a museum is a narrative. But as with any narrative, it is a choice, a point of view. Herein lies the challenge. A unique site, a unique narrative. The Graal of European identity finally embodied. This was moving away from heritage as a *substitutive narration* to face the issues of the *narrative*. And it was just as much of a challenge after so many years of denial. As one of the project contributors put it, the House of European History is 'the challenge of telling the story of the unity of Europe'.<sup>620</sup> Yet, as this contributor describes it, it is a narrative controlled by the institution because the aim is to 'instrumentalise the museum tool for the political use of the past beyond the state-national framework and to make institutionalised memory a category of public action at European level'.

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620 Étienne Deschamps, « La Maison de l'histoire européenne au défi du récit sur l'unité de l'Europe », 16 March 2018. <https://www.c2dh.uni.lu/thinking/la-maison-de-l-histoire-europeenne-au-defi-du-recit-sur-lunite-de-leurope>

*The challenge of the European narrative: The House of European History in Brussels*

The House of European History in Brussels opened to the public on 4 May 2017.<sup>621</sup> It is located in the Eastman building in the centre of the Parc Léopold, close to the EU institutions. It is a major project with 4,000 m<sup>2</sup> for the permanent exhibition and 800 m<sup>2</sup> for temporary exhibitions. It was ten years in the making from the idea proposed by the President of the European Parliament, Christian Democrat Hans-Gert Pöttering (13 February 2007):

'I would like to suggest a locus for history and for the future, where the concept of the European idea can continue to grow. I would like to suggest the founding of a 'House of European History'. It should (...) be a place where our memory of European history and the work of European unification is jointly cultivated, and which at the same time is available as a locus for the European identity to go on being shaped by present and future citizens of the European Union'.<sup>622</sup>

This suggests, an idea which the Lisbon European Council would take up a few months later, an identity that is not closed but in the making. A committee of nine experts was created, including historians and museum experts. It was deemed to be an independent committee. In September 2008, it published the 'guidelines for a House of European History'. The project's purpose was indeed political (and not a purely intellectual exercise), in other words, to participate in the formation of a European civic spirit:

'The idea and desire to associate freely in supranational institutions at the European level is a feature of the continent's recent history. The rejection and almost total overcoming of nationalism, dictatorship and war, and the desire, which emerged in the 1950s, to live in peace and freedom throughout Europe, the supranational union with a civil character, must be priority messages from the House of European History. The exhibitions must show that Europe, united through shared values,

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621 I am basing my analysis partly on the master's thesis of a student I supervised, Lionel Van Vyve (Erasmus Mundus DYCLAM+ master's degree), 2022, and on my visits to the House of European History.

622 Hans Gert Pöttering, 'Inaugural address by the President of the European Parliament', 13 February 2007. Parliamentary documents. [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/CRE-6-2007-02-13-ITM-003\\_EN.html?redirect](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/CRE-6-2007-02-13-ITM-003_EN.html?redirect)

can live freely and peacefully in a world of progress. The House of European History must encourage better participation of citizens in the decision-making process of Europe united.’

The House of European History would not be a museum in the traditional sense but a dynamic exhibition, documentation, and information centre with an educational aim. In addition, care had to be taken to ensure that there was no duplication with the *Parlamentarium*, inaugurated in 2011, which focuses on the history of the ‘construction of Europe’ and the workings of the European Parliament. Yet this all-in-one approach was overwhelming! It implied bringing together the past and the present, evoking the links between the present and the future, combining history, values and the politics of European integration, and providing a forum for European citizens to debate and confront current issues. It was meant to serve as a mirror, a showcase and a window all at once.

An international competition was launched in July 2009 for the design of the museum: in 2011, the contract was awarded to the architectural studio Chaix & Morel et Associés (France), JSWD Architekten (Germany) and TPF Engineering (Belgium). The project's scientific team was created in January 2011 to tackle the content, collection, and future exhibition policies. An advisory body (Scientific Committee) was set up, chaired by the Polish historian Włodzimierz Borodziej (1956–2021), in charge of advising the scientific team. Naturally, the contentious issue was whether the independence proclaimed was genuine, given that the Parliament's Bureau (comprising the President and 14 Vice-Presidents) approved all the significant decisions and that the Governing Board, the supervisory body, was placed under the responsibility of the former Secretary General of the European Parliament, and then of Hans-Gert Pöttering, its ideator.

How was this narrative organised? The project's scientific team chose three criteria:

- The event (or the idea) must have a European origin
- Have disseminated throughout the continent
- Must be relevant to this day.

The approach had to be transnational and interdisciplinary (history, sociology, archaeology, museology, etc.), incorporating political, technical and cultural aspects. The background is chrono-thematic, and despite some venturing into the Middle Ages or mythology, it runs from the 19th century (with the Industrial Revolution) to the present day, with a punctum on the

unification process after the Second World War. Based on these criteria and presuppositions, the project team proposed six themes on five levels, in line with the following axonometry:

Shaping Europe<sup>623</sup>

Europe: a global power (1789 to 1914)

Europe in ruins (1914–1945)

Rebuilding a divided continent (1945–1970s)

Shattering certainties (from the 1970s to the present day)

Europe now<sup>624</sup>

The scenographic approach is perfectly designed from an educational and kinetic standpoint. It forces visitors to ponder the matter. It begins with two simple yet huge questions: What is Europe? Where does it stop? We are, correctly, told that 'Europe has never been a clearly defined space'. Another question is: 'If we remember the past, can we avoid reproducing its errors?' A pretty bold question at the very core of a place of remembrance! It is a departure from the usual doxa and conventional narrative. The guide to the permanent exhibition was updated in 2022 to include a crucial element compared with the 2017 version: it explains that memory is not absolute and that it can be 'a form of imprisonment in the past'. Its prophylactic virtues, so to speak, can thus have pernicious effects and act as an 'obstacle to future progress'.

Fortunately, the concept designers avoided the pitfall of a complacent and self-glorifying narrative. For example, they had no qualms about mentioning the failure of the draft European constitution, or the BREXIT. The darkest moments of European history (wars, colonisations, racism, 'ethnic cleansing', etc.) feature alongside the most enlightened moments (democracy, social security, education, housing, medical progress, rising standard of living, etc.) The coverage of the post-Cold War renaissance in Eastern Europe and the section on how Europeans and non-Europeans perceive Europe are welcome surprises. The project's civic and interactive (or demagogic, depending) dimension becomes apparent at the end of the tour when visitors are invited to voice their opinion on what Europe should be doing in different areas (defence, trade, forms of democracy, etc.). The

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623 This objective encompasses three elements: the cartography of Europe, the myth of Europe, and European memory and heritage.

624 This objective was strangely named 'Praise and Criticism' without the guide of the 2017 permanent exhibition.

temporary exhibitions, meanwhile, feature themes that encourage critical reflection. For instance, the exhibition on waste ('Throwaway', 2022–2023) or on information overload ('infodemic') that is characteristic of our current environment: 'A History of Forgery and Falsification' (October 2020 to January 2022).<sup>625</sup>

It was a sizeable challenge. It wasn't all plain sailing. The eurosceptics in the European Parliament pursued a strategy of stalling the process by firing on all cylinders (budget, conflict of interest, etc.). The United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP) representatives were particularly prominent in this endeavour. For Marta Andreasen MEP (UKIP), 'It is bad enough that this ill-conceived, pointless and ridiculously expensive project has been allowed to go ahead'.<sup>626</sup> However, non-political criticism and objections echoed this opinion. Some felt the presentation was too optimistic, while others felt it was too negative. What unites was given greater prominence than what divides (and vice versa). The prism of anti-totalitarianism favoured the East-West division to the detriment of southern Europe.<sup>627</sup>

Inevitably, historians found much to criticise and be frustrated by. Even when it was only at the project stage, some academics expressed contempt, such as Frank Furedi, a professor of sociology at the University of Kent, who spoke of the 'Museum of the lowest common denominator'.

I was surprised that the narrative should begin in the 19th century, the century of the formation of nationalism that would lead to three European wars. I would have started at the time of the fall of the Roman Empire (according to the medievalist Marc Bloch) or with the expansion of Islam (according to the medievalist Henri Pirenne) when Europe was cut off from the Mediterranean. I would have dedicated a special section to the Europe of the Enlightenment, i.e., the 18th century. This is when the famous values that constitute, in the words of the official guide, 'certain basic and typically European' were developed. One could point to omissions, clumsy comparisons, and under-representations (i.e., labour struggles, migrations, decolonisation). One might wonder why the Munich Agreement (September 1938) is missing while the German-Soviet Pact (September 1939) is

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625 <https://historia-europa.ep.eu/fr/fake-real>.

626 <https://www.euractiv.fr/section/politique/news/une-maison-de-l-histoire-europeenne-trop-couteuse-pour-les-eurosceptiques/>

627 Christine Dupont, 'Between Authority and Dialogue. Challenges for the House of European History', in Paul Ashton Paul, Tanya Evans, Paula Hamilton (dir.), *Making Histories*. Berlin/New York, Walter de Gruyter, 2020.

featured prominently. One might, for example, take issue with the choice of associating Nazism and Stalinism under the common banner of 'totalitarianism', which is directly linked to a politico-commemorative resolution of the European Parliament that did not win the support of historians.<sup>628</sup> Some date choices may seem surprising, such as 1917, allegedly marking the beginning of the 'Cold War'.

Criticism was inevitable because any narrative is a choice, and choices can be criticised. Like truth, history does not exist in itself: it is the product of confrontation, provided that the historian's ethics are respected. Some said it was a 'propaganda'<sup>629</sup> museum. However, the fact of presenting events while criticising them should not be dismissed as meaningless. For instance, in a display case is the Nobel Peace Prize medal awarded to the EU in 2012 and, next to it, a red banner reading, 'Europe in 2012: crisis, chaos and unemployment', a slogan used in Oslo when the prize was awarded. Another example is a Dutch architect's work, consisting of a six-metre-long 80,000-sheet white paper intended to represent the cumbersome nature of the Community's technocratic process (i.e., the legal texts that the Member States must transpose into their national law). The same goes for the Brexit referendum.

Like any museum, it is a product of the culture of 'negotiated reality'<sup>630</sup> and 'fiction'<sup>631</sup> in the anthropological sense. It does not offer ready-made history, and 'visitors must be aware of the relativity of the choices made'.<sup>632</sup> And this is what makes this project so unique. This brings us back to the notion of a complex history, of a European identity made of its own contradictions, the essence of which is perhaps not to have one. Does the

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628 European Parliament resolution on European conscience and totalitarianism, Resolution P6\_TA (2009)0213, European Parliament (2 April 2009). This resolution states 'that the dominant historical experience of Western Europe was Nazism, and (...) Central and Eastern European countries have experienced both Communism and Nazism'. It introduces 23 August (the day the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact was signed) as a joint day of 'commemoration of the victims of Stalinism and Nazism' (which, after much criticism, will become the 'European Day of Remembrance').

629 Jean-Baptiste Malet, « Bienvenue au musée de la propagande européenne », *Le Monde diplomatique*, mai 2021, p. 28.

630 'Negotiated reality'. Jeanne Cannizo, 'Exhibiting Cultures: Into the Heart of Africa', *Visual Anthropology Review*, Volume 7, Spring 1991, p. 151.

631 Sophie Wahnich (dir.), *Fictions d'Europe, la guerre au musée, Allemagne, France, Grande-Bretagne*, Paris, Éd. des Archives contemporaines, 2002.

632 Taja Vovk van Gall, « Comment forger un récit européen? La Maison de l'histoire européenne : travaux en cours », in Antoine Arjakovsky (dir.), *Histoire de la conscience européenne, op.cit.*, p. 59.

House of European History offer visitors the chance to experience this shared culture and develop their awareness as Europeans? It remains to be seen what impact the House of European History has had on the civic and historical awareness of Europeans. After all, it should be explained why, just two years after the House opened, on 19 September 2019, the European Parliament felt compelled to adopt an (interminable and inaudible) resolution on the ‘importance of European memory for the future of Europe’. Cultural time is not political time. It takes more than a museum and resolutions to develop the ‘European spirit’.

The whole issue of the narrative's feasibility (or otherwise) is at stake here: ‘How can we reconcile diverging perspectives while allowing different points of view to be expressed without negating the national’?<sup>633</sup> In a more general way, the House of European History raises the fundamental question of whether post-national societies that tend to become ‘transnational’ can produce a ‘collective identity’. This question is all the more challenging to analyse because the institutional discourse mirrors the concerns that identity issues inevitably raise. Institutions tread cautiously in this field, similar to the House of European History concept designers, for whom ‘It is first and foremost a matter of discarding the concept of identity, seen as too restrictive, in favour of the concept of collective memory’.<sup>634</sup> A more neutral and consensual concept. In fact, the project initiator used the word ‘identity’ only once in his speech. In contrast, the term ‘culture’ appears 19 times: ‘Europeans can be proud of what they have achieved over the centuries in terms of values, freedom, law and democracy’. He mentioned ‘our common European culture’, suggesting we ‘rediscover what we have in common’. It is as if the less connoted term culture had become a politically correct alternative to the term identity, following the similar shift that occurred between European ‘exceptionalism’ and ‘diversity’.

I would like to conclude by acknowledging the impressive sculpture entitled ‘The Vortex of History’. It stands 25 metres tall at the centre of the museum, under the glass roof, and connects all the levels of the building.

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633 Camille Mazé, « Des usages politiques du musée à l'échelle européenne. Contribution à l'analyse de l'europanisation de la mémoire comme catégorie d'action publique », *Politique européenne*, vol. 37, no. 2, 2012, p. 72–100. *Id.*, Camille Mazé, *La fabrique de l'identité européenne. Dans les coulisses des musées de l'Europe*, Paris, Belin, Socio-histoires, 2014.

634 Christine Dupont, « La Maison de l'histoire européenne », *Biens Symboliques / Symbolic Goods* [Online], 6 | 2020, on line since 30 April 2020. URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/bssg/436>.

It is made of an inextricable weave of metal ribbons. There is no better way of representing the complexity of Europe! These ribbons feature quotes from intellectuals and artists. Among these quotes, I would like to mention the one by linguist Julia Kristeva: 'Europe is the only place in the world where identity is not a cult but a question'. Yet, how can 'a question' be patrimonialised? Herein lies the challenge. Marc Bloch has raised the ultimate question: 'Can history really serve as a foundation for solidarity?' he answers that 'it is doubtful'.<sup>635</sup>

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635 Marc Bloch, « Une nouvelle histoire universelle : H.G. Wells historien », *Revue de Paris*, 15 août 1922. Quoted in Marc Bloch, *L'Histoire, la Guerre, la Résistance, op.cit.*, p. 869.