

Europe's Culture, or Never Mind a Little *Völkerwanderung*

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I.

If you think about Europe, what may be its most salient matter of fact? Invariably, if asked such a question people come up with answers which refer to historical, regional, and cultural diversity. They tell you that this means that the question cannot be answered. Diversity kills the question of just one most salient matter of fact. Yet, a minute of reflection shows that the opposite is true. Diversity is the answer to the question (Morin 1987).

Indeed, what does diversity refer to? What is the matter of fact, of which diversity is just the name or the proxy? If we do not look at the solutions, which are celebrated in Sunday speeches but at the problem solved by possible solutions we must say that Europe came into being by the *Völkerwanderung*, the Migration Period, also called Barbarian Invasions. It is well documented, we do not have to retell it (*Völkerwanderung*, 2008; Migration Period, 2008).

The simple point we would like to make is that it is how Europe dealt with the barbarian invasions, which made Europe the way it is until today. Of course, all other continents know their migration periods as well. Migration is a universal fact. Yet, the way it is dealt with differs. The Asian way seems to be the Empire's way (Wittfogel 1957), with some second thoughts raised by the Indian caste system (Dumont 1970). The African way is the tribes' way, The Australian way, the colonizers' way, as is the Latin American way. The American way is the pioneers' way always pushing the frontier and always claiming to have brought happiness to the terrain conquered, again with some second thoughts raised by philosophers who look at the indeterminate state of boundaries being crossed now used for settlement (Cavell 1989). The European way is a way answering migration as well, yet differently so.

II.

If Europe is marked by *Völkerwanderung*,

Europe 1.0 = Völkerwanderung

then the question is how it switched from barbarians *ante portas* to barbarians within the gates. We call it Europe 1.0 because it indeed refers back to important features of tribal society which we count as 1.0 because it is brought forward by the introduction of language as the first medium of the dissemination of communication, and because there indeed must have been some form to deal with the phenomenon of the migrating tribes even if it only consisted in a knowledge either ancient or invented on the spot on how to fight and when and how to end fights. Europe 1.0, when dealing with the Barbarian Invasions must have developed an "image" (Spencer Brown 1972: p. 42) and a "negation" (Spencer Brown 1972: p. 114) of the "Barbarians" which enabled it to civilize itself by civilizing them.

Observers of all kinds agree to the overwhelming importance of Jewish and Christian religion, Greek philosophy, and Roman *Realpolitik*. It is Jerusalem, Athens, and Rome answering the Barbarian Invasions, which made Europe the way we know it to this day. There are even some who say that this becomes the universal way to answering a global migration which asks for some kind of a cultural world order pushed into every corner of world society not by traders, soldiers, and missionaries any more, but by consultants backed by governments and non-governments alike (Eisenstadt 1969; Parsons 1971; Meyer/Boli/Thomas 1987; Meyer 1997, 2005).

Jerusalem's monotheism bundling the gods of all tribes into just One God thundering and avenging His way along until He became merciful and compassionate when He saw His people complying and willing into their fate; Athens' idealism calling for Plato's *forms* being the unity of the difference between what you see trusting your eyes (phenomena) and what you are called upon to take into account as some abstract and hidden principle deciding on what it relates to, and what not (substance); and Rome's republican vision of an empire all three together constitute Europe's maximal stress cooperation, which is referred to by Heiner Mühlmann as the principle of the catalysis and ensuing code (*decorum*) of any one culture (Mühlmann 1996, 2005).

The Christian God based on Scripture, helped along by the Jewish God knowing how to moderate the Scripture via comments, the Greeks' ideal forms, and the Roman empire all together re-enter the distinction of the *Völkerwanderung* into the space brought about by it. Ever since Europeans worship just one God, again getting into bitter wars of confessions if this one God is contested, are prepared for any abstract idea telling them their way along as

long as they can argue about it, and enjoy power plays which set centers of hierarchies against peripheries as long as that distinction of center from periphery is not called into question. Such a re-entry is elementary to the contextualization of a distinction. Without that contextualization the social handling of the distinction drawn becomes difficult due to a lack of ways to not only draw, but to also observe the distinction and reflect on it.

Of course it took centuries for this form to emerge. The European middle ages are marked by those presumably dark centuries. Yet, Europe ends up with a distinct ability to put forms into the context of singularity (Derrida 1992; Luhmann 1998), and not the other way around as you may perhaps expect.

Europe takes not only part in that singular attempt to deal with the introduction of writing into the society but perhaps indeed shows a peculiar way to deal with the overflow of action and communication brought about by it. Europe, that is, Aristotle (2002: 994b), invents the idea of *telos* and *teloi*, which not just are purposes you may set yourself this way or that way, but also appropriate places preordained as such by a cosmological order dealing with ever looming chaos. Europe invented a feudalism based on competition, on *agon*, moderated by fear of envy, which is inherited from still older societies (Foster 1965). Via fear of envy competition is re-embedded into an order everybody (i.e., observers observing observers) can comply with (Nietzsche 1994). Europe's grand tradition of Jerusalem's Gods, Athens' ideas, and Rome's empire thus gets boiled down to a robust *habitus* of being able, and of wanting, to compete (*agon*), controlled by fear of envy.

This gives us a Spencer-Brown expression, which visualizes the code of Europe in its ancient culture, literate society mode:



Note that *agon* here is short for the Jewish and Christian god, the Greek *form*, and the Roman empire all taken together into the one social form they give the *Völkerwanderung* being tamed into its own kind of civilization. *Agon* means to be able to welcome a little *Völkerwanderung* here and then. It means to take account of all the other tribes being around yet being linked to each other in some unspeakable, unrevealed, if chosen and merciful way. That is why we give the re-entry of the *Völkerwanderung* into its own space of distinction the name of *agon*.

To be aware of competition in the context of a fear of envy helps to not confuse a Christian, Greek, and Roman blueprint to Europe with a blueprint to some utopia. Europe is dealing with the actual fact of migration, which is and stays a reason for utmost unrest. The form it did find is not a form attacked by that unrest but a form framing it, using it, and even enabling it. Europe needs migration. Its form would crumble if migration of all kinds (people, commodities, capital, information) comes to a still-stand.

III.

A possible proof of this claim consists in showing how European form adapted to, and indeed supported, the introduction of the printing press, calling forward society 3.0 dealing with its different kind of overflow, and maybe even the introduction of the computer and its derivatives, calling forward society 4.0.

Again, what may be the most distinct matter of fact of a Europe answering the introduction of the printing press? Yes, indeed, the answer to, and product of, the introduction of the printing press is enlightenment, preceded by (a) renaissance, another re-entry of Greek and Roman art and culture into the form brought forward by Greek and Roman politics, law, and philosophy, a re-entry which carefully peels off the more Christian subversions of Greek and Roman knowledge, and (b) humanism, an experiment in long-distance communication entertained by book-printers and book-binders, and their knowledgeable friends (like Erasmus of Rotterdam who moved to Basel impressed by the quality of a pirate edition of his Latin translation of the Bible, and became friend with its printer, Johann Froben). Yet, enlightenment beats both renaissance and humanism in that it liberates criticisms of all kinds by both giving it access to reason and controlling it by it. Enlightenment consists in encouraging the use of knowledge (*sapere aude*) even if it is not revealed by God but appropriated by uncontrolled, indeed novice reading, as long as that use is made public, that is controlled by the risks of its and its author's self-presentation (Kant 1996; Goffman 1959).

Europe's enlightenment re-enters Europe's form of dealing with migration into the iteration of this very form as a form to deal with unbounded, if only reasonable, criticism. The *telois* of ancient society give way to arguments framed by reason:



The re-entry of the context of *agon* taming the *Völkerwanderung* into its own form of civilization is called reason, thus giving it more space to be explored and exploited. The idea and practice of reason does not mean that all competition is lead toward aims shared by all. Quite the opposite. The idea and practice of reason means that new arguments become available to welcome new barbarians, most notably first citizens, then workers, eventually women, now perhaps animals, robots, and avatars into the same old agonistic form of *Völkerwanderung*, giving them reasons to compete and ideas of how to commit themselves within their society to constraints which are equal to possibly successful ways (Elster 2000).

The advantage of reason over teleology is that it does not have to refer any longer to a presumed cosmological order that accounts for all the *teloi* being advanced. Reason instead is dynamical. It can look for different means apt to pursue certain aims; it can switch between aims if the means available are not to be wasted; and it can still claim such moves within these shifting sandy grounds of means and purposes as rational, which is just perfect. Never mind that perfection, to the never ending chagrin of cultural critique (Arnold 1993), which, however, lives off the same principle, for a long time gave way to perfectibility, which knows no end in itself (Luhmann 1980).

French Enlightenment consists in looking for new forms to deal with an agonic, if dampened, social order and finds it in three revolutions (see Parsons/Platt 1973), not just one, it managed to bring into force, the economic revolution toward a market economy which accepts capital, an asset with respect to time, as it leading principle instead of the ownership of land which became far too exclusive; the political revolution toward democracy which switched the unknown future of any rule of power from the question of the suitability of the heir to the much more operational question of whether a government will be re-elected or not; and the pedagogical revolution which came up with the idea to force whole years of children into school to make sure they learnt to compare among, and compete with, each other supervised by the teacher as the authority which tries to steer that competition toward worthwhile aims.

The enlightenment invested its philosophical reason into ideas of a society which managed to differentiate among the prizes it competed for by channeling the contest toward functional purposes (still paying its tribute to Aristotelian teleology), on one hand, and to inhibit via a moral revaluation of achievement and risk, the legitimation of envy such that ambitious people did not have to fear it any more that much, on the other. The barbarians within the gates are still safely contained, but they are still allowed to play a little barbarian to any established order as well.

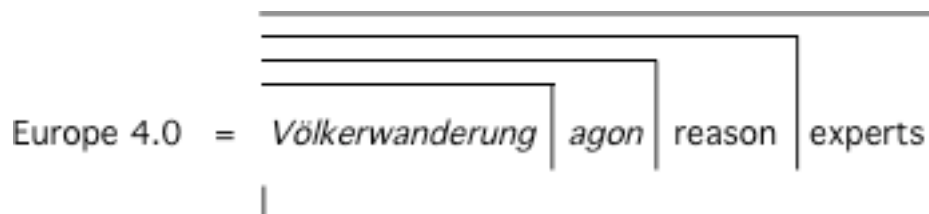
IV.

Mary Douglas' word that culture is "an ongoing argument about rightness of choice" (Douglas 1989: p. 89) seems to have been invented while looking at the arguments constantly being circulated by and within a Europe once and forever dealing with migrating people, "people" here becoming more and more a proxy for ideas, commodities, and capital. Yet, the phrase is meant to lead to a typology of cultures which indeed comprehends many more cultures than just Europe's, all of them differing just by the way the use to argue, above all about how to deal with surprise, by the way.

So what is happening to Europe when "next society" (Kelly 1990; Castells 1996; Drucker 2003; Baecker 2007) is eventually surpassing modern society by finding its structural and cultural answers to the introduction of the computer, the internet, the intranet, and other computing grids? If the next society's overflow of action and communication is not necessarily just the overflow of reference, brought about by language, of symbols, by writing, and of criticism, by printing, but also of control, brought about by machines surpassing the performance of human memory in amount of data, fastness of connection, and richness of connectivity, Europe may well have found already its answer to this challenge.

The answer is called Brussels, or the European Union. The European Union is a political mechanism, which tries to match the computer's complexity by means of administration. It links its own experts to experts in member governments, political allies, business, science, and culture in a way such that its bureaucracy in both modernizing and enlarging Europe at any instant can be sure to work like an expertocratic bottleneck toward the reintegration of people, ideas, commodities, and assets migrating from one place to another and literally flooding landscapes, institutions, and social milieus which are the more unsuspecting as they take their own structures and cultures for granted (Bach 1999, 2006).

Europe gets recoded in society 4.0 as follows:



The central idea is still the same one, looking for a kind of corporate action, which is able to absorb shocks and to turn them into structures living of their expectation of further shocks. Within Europe shocks are constitutive. Experts know how to take them and know how to tell them apart in order to be able to choose appropriate action. It is fascinating to see how these experts shift, switch, and fluctuate in a truly rhizomatic way (Deleuze/Guattari 1988), giving words to this argument and getting silent another one. Every item wanting to invade Europe just has to find an expert, or lobbyist, for that matter, lending it his or her argument, which of course have to be arguments compatible with other arguments. And experts as well invade all kinds of matter such that there are still all kinds of guarantees that Europe will never cease to accept its *Völkerwanderungen*.

Brussel's EU bureaucracy is a living challenge to the introduction of the computer into its administration, but it is in turn a computer of its own challenging the many control projects supported by the use of computers which spread among European industries, governments, and laboratories.

Immigration problems, fences, zones of transition surrounding it, questions of the control of the movement of people, services, capital, and ideas still mark Europe's reality more than anything else. The argument presented here amounts to saying that Europe is coded to deal with those ever new forms of *Völkerwanderung*, always searching for and then wielding distinctions which consist in taming the barbarians such that they quit looting and settle to look for other means to compete instead. Everything works fine if their agonistic instincts are well served.

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