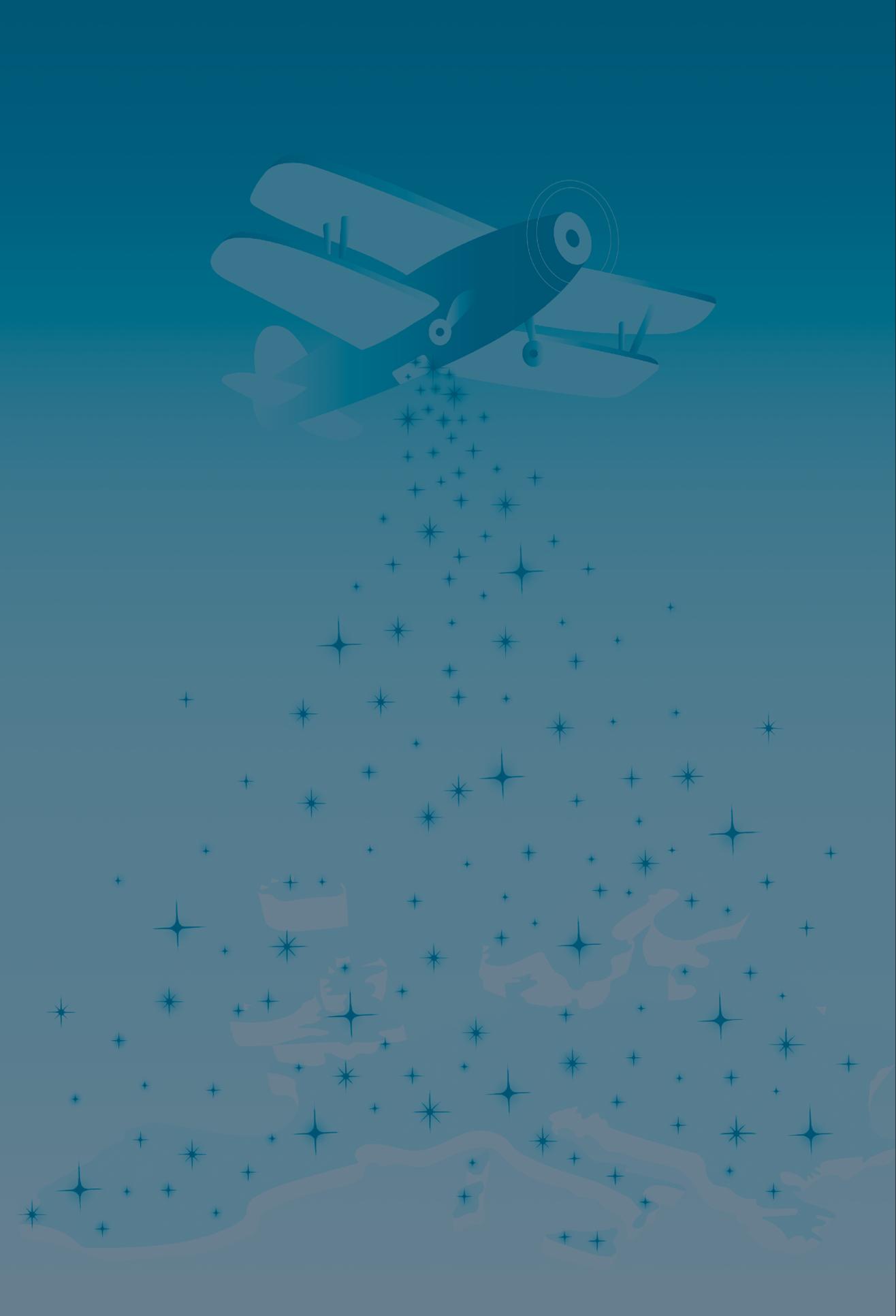


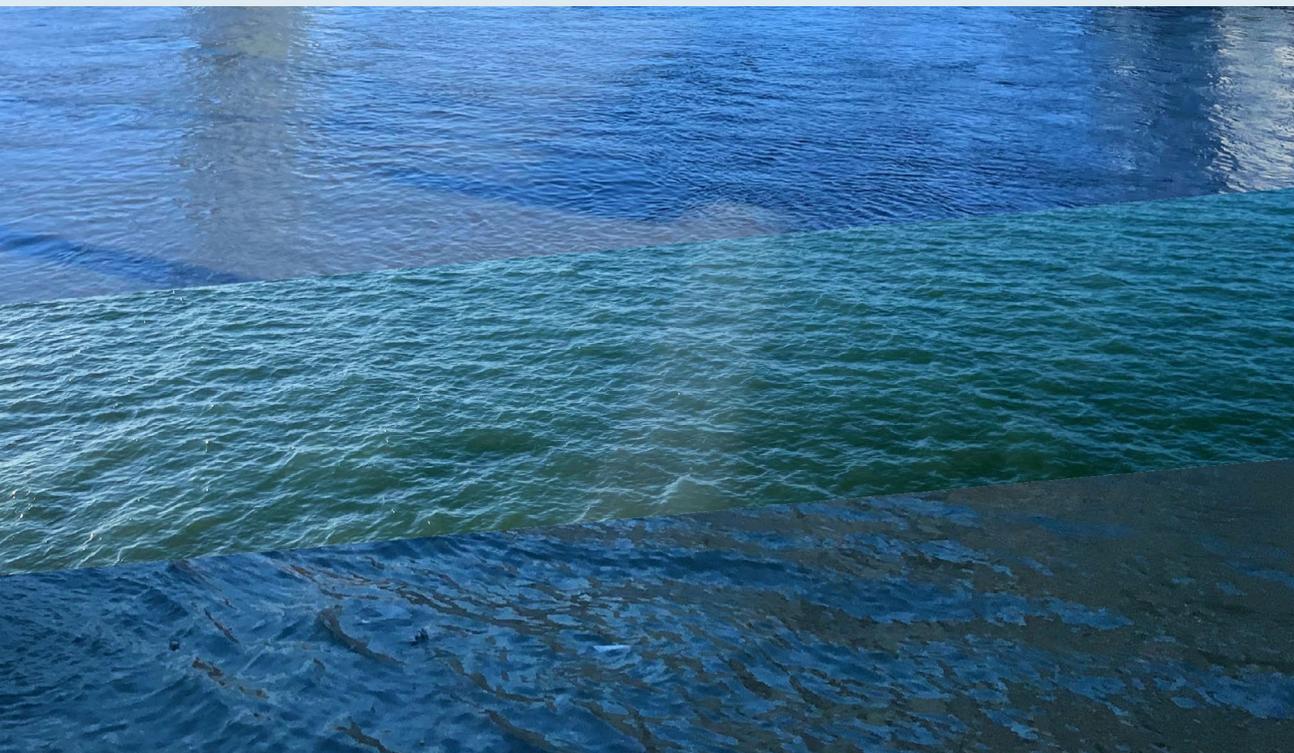
DOSSIER

THE EUROPEAN PAVILION



Launched by the European Cultural Foundation in 2021, The European Pavilion hosts artistic and cultural initiatives that imagine a sustainable and just Europe and bring Europe closer to its communities. The aim is to provide a space and a central stage for debates, learning, exhibitions, performances and other events that highlight the challenges but also the opportunities for Europe as a continent and a living fabric.

In times of shattered realities and uncertainty, we need to turn to the arts and culture to find understanding and niches where people can come together. We need a new lexicon, a new vocabulary, and a new design to be able to live together in peace and harmony with the natural environment. Arts and culture can provide such new narratives and imagery. For that, we need a shelter, a safe space: The European Pavilion is just that.



A SENTIMENTAL JOURNEY THROUGH EUROPE

Monica Sassatelli

To discuss the 'European sentiment' is not for the faint-hearted. So, as an introduction and as gradual accompaniment to an adequate disposition, let me take you with me on a 'Sentimental journey through Europe'.¹ That means mostly a journey through the culturally engrained connotations that 'Europe' has collected along the way. Connotations that have also become affectively charged through time, carrying different overtones in different places and among different people in Europe.

Just very briefly let us recall the main milestones. When we talk of Europe today, we mainly talk of the EU. To be more precise, we often think of something larger and vaguer, and more cultural, than the EU, but the reason we do it are those public institutions that go by the name of European Union. This combination is important. The EU is the concretisation – the institutional and political reality – of an ideal, cultural, philosophical, even spiritual, reality. It is important to say this because we need both the idea(l) and the reality, and because we can intervene more effectively if we see both the distinction and the connection, and the different sentimental attitudes attached to each. To understand the latter, it is also important to recall, today in particular, that the EU is the outcome of a recovery plan.

We are now discussing recovery plans, so we can perhaps connect to that earlier time, when Europe needed to recover from World War II.² Restoring and keeping the peace in Europe has been tactically trusted into a mainly economic coalition, but the founders of the first communities always knew they were trying to unite much more than markets. Indeed the expression 'European sentiment' inspiring the European Cultural Foundation (ECF) comes from Robert Schuman, who declared "Europe needs to recover economically and socially, to organise itself politically, to strengthen its security and project itself culturally. However, all our efforts will be vain if Europe is not animated by a European sentiment."³

The issue of EU's Europe as lacking something fundamental is a recurring theme, a connecting thread throughout the history of post-war Europe. We find it in several expressions – such as 'we made Europe, now we need to make the Europeans' – and in the fact that when speaking of sentiment and the EU together the reference is mostly to anti-EU sentiment, it is a negative reference. It is no mystery that at least since the

1. A nod to Laurence Sterne's satirical travel novel *Sentimental Journey Through France and Italy* (1768): the risk of sounding rhetorical is always high when discussing sentiments, identity, inclusivity; a certain aesthetic, or intellectual, distance becomes a useful escamotage to find ways round the other, worse, risk: avoiding the subject altogether and abandoning it at the mercy of those who do use it rhetorically and instrumentally, effectively and without qualms.

2. This text was mostly written for The European Pavilion initiative launch in Turin, in late 2021. The main horizon then was recovery from the pandemic. Since the Russian army's invasion of Ukraine, war and post-war recovery in the heart of Europe are also more tragically pushed forward. The Democracy Pavilion for Europe conference, within The European Pavilion programme, has taken up tempestively the reformulation of priorities that is unfolding at the time of publication.

3. Cit. in ECF, *Unpacking the European Sentiment*, 2021 Available at: https://cultural.foundation.eu/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Unpacking_report_v02.pdf.

1970s support and allegiance to European Communities then Union decreases in times of crises, prompting new emphasis on what's perceived as lacking, a European identity, a European sentiment, as a way to envision a shared, common future. So, the European sentiment enters the scene in a defensive mode, as a justification, as something missing that needs to be conjured up. This I believe is often underestimated and accepted, when recognised, as inevitable. I am going to challenge that – and say that it is possible to shift the mode from defensive to affirmative, and from past-oriented to future-oriented.

Existing and emerging instances of an affirmative European sentiment need to be given as much attention as the major obstacles they face and that, being the mainstream, often get a disproportionate share of it. First, however, it is important to clarify: what do I mean by defensive mode? I mean that what we say about European identity, or sense of belonging, or narrative, or indeed sentiment is the response to a perceived accusation of a lack, an absence where something important should be, especially when compared to, typically, the nation state and national or ethnic identity. This defensive mode implicitly accepts that the criticism is somewhat correct, that Europe is at fault – that there is no European sentiment, or not enough – and that therefore it must be made.

Who is, then, invested with such a task? Specifically, the cultural sector, the 'intellectuals', historians and novelists, opinion makers and artists, those who indeed make history and stories by writing them, performing them and so on – those who provide institutions with the raw material for the consensus they need.⁴ However, because of how this situation is portrayed in mainstream narratives of European identities, it is as if what is expected is a kind of discovery, as if there was a *passé-partout* to be uncovered to convince people to shift their view and finally feel European, and that once that master key is found, everything will fall into place.

This vision is both too pessimistic and too optimistic. Too pessimistic as a starting point, in that defensive attitude, in agreeing with the criticism, giving in if you like and ignoring precisely those who already speak and act outside the mainstream. Too optimistic in thinking that there can be an instantaneous solution, as if identities were not in fact precisely engrained, affectively charged narratives, and that a 'new' narrative is sufficient as well as necessary. A more productive way is one that is not a reaction to an external and perceived accusation, but instead one that is affirmative and looks at the internal energies and motives to focus on a European sentiment. This alternative view is of course also less optimistic, or less

4. The reference here is to British historian Eric J. Hobsbawm who provokingly commented that "Historians are to nationalism what poppy-growers in Pakistan are to heroin addicts: we supply the essential raw material for the market" (in 'Ethnicity and Nationalism in Europe Today', *Anthropology Today* 8(1): 3-8, 1992). A clever metaphor – however I would like to play a little thought experiment and see what happens when changing the substance being smuggled. Say, not heroin, which is thoroughly and inescapably toxic, but wine. Wine can be equally toxic for addicts and in excess, but is also a celebrated cultural object that injects vitality in the right situation and proportion – notably so in the rich cultures of wine production and wine tasting in Europe. The strength (the intoxicating effect we might say, taking the metaphor perhaps too literally) of nationalism was and perhaps still is such that a drug is an apt simile. The supposed weakness of post-nationalist or European sentiments might display then a different connotation, and also that mildness can be seen not as a flaw, but an opportunity. To be fair, Hobsbawm talked, out of metaphor, of the past: "Nations without a past are contradictions in terms. What makes a nation is the past, what justifies one nation against others is the past, and historians are the people who produce it." (Ibid., 3). One more reason for Europe to be future-oriented, even if that requires a reconceptualisation of identity and of the sentiments attached to it.

5. Chantal Mouffe, 'Art and Democracy. Art as an Agonistic Intervention in Public Space', in Chantal Mouffe et al., *Art as a public issue: how art and its institutions reinvent the public dimension*, Rotterdam, Amsterdam, NAI Publishers, 2008. See also Chantal Mouffe, 'Deliberative Democracy or Agonistic Pluralism?', *Social Research* 66(3): 745-758, 1999.

simplistic perhaps, recognising that there is no instantaneous solution, indeed that we are not looking for a solution – a solution is an end point. Instead, identities and sentiments are ongoing, living phenomena, they are not found or made once and for all, they can never be definitive – which for Europe should be mostly good news.

To shed the defensive attitude means giving space to a more affirmative stance, from where we can tolerate more strife, more dissent, more diversity. Or, rather than just tolerate, promote it as an indicator of a proper public space. I am taking inspiration here from Chantal Mouffe's model of the agonistic public space as the specific contribution that arts and culture can provide to social life. Contrary to dominant visions that rest on the idea that consensus would be the outcome, albeit often only an ideal one, of an accomplished public space, Mouffe moves from the proposition that there is not technical, rational solution grounding a universal consensus, not empirically, not ideally, not therefore as aspiration. Consensus is always specific and partially exclusionary, hegemonic in her words. Whilst this is necessary to social life, as not all sedimented social and cultural practices can be questioned at the same time, the role of critical art remains to show alternatives, open up, pluralise, create space for the agonistic struggle.⁵

The idea that there should be a consensus, by definition in the singular, runs against the idea of diversity and shows that diversity is celebrated only as a façade. It is one of the responsibilities of scholars and artists today to warn against sugar-coated visions of diversity, that only speak of the richness of diversity and tolerance and getting along, and that universal consensus can always be reached. Instead, I think the cultural sector has the responsibility to create a conceptual, affective and effective space where monolithic consensus is not the required basis for competition but, perhaps counter-intuitively, a pluralistic dissent, or agonism, the basis for solidarity. Here the idea of the European Pavilion becomes an apt case and testing ground.

EUROPEAN PAVILION(S)

Having gone through this journey, when I first came across ECF's programme The European Pavilion, I was rather skeptical, I must admit, or perhaps, to say it more 'sentimentally', *afraid*. The choice of pavilion as a metaphorical and physical space sounded like choosing to dwell in the lion's den so to speak. My own defensive mode was stimulated first, understandably. Pavilions were born after all as the quintessential expression

of national representation within the imperialist, colonialist project of world exhibitions, they expressed a certain idea of progress, of standardisation of national identities into comparable 'boxes', each based on internal standardisation, common culture and consensus. In international trade and art exhibitions, national pavilions work a sort of common unit of measure through which nations can compete with each other.

The reduction to the common unit combined with the ideal of a universal, rational consensus means that competition to win the struggle to define the hegemonic canon is the ultimate rationale. One can see here how the ideal of universal consensus actually fosters competition, not as a means to betterment and not for all, as the argument in its defense often goes, but ultimately becoming an end goal. With these engrained connotations, can a pavilion challenge that? Can it become an agonistic space, where the formula instead of consensus-unity-competition would be, counterintuitively, dissensus-plurality-solidarity? What could be a European pavilion, truthful to the journey of European narratives so far, particularly to those voices that are excluded in the search for unity and consensus? Is it possible to rethink the pavilion?

I have tried to follow my own advice and switch from a defensive to an affirmative mode. What I have found – having read the ECF European Pavilion programme, participated at the meeting of the partners during the launch in Turin in November 2021 and followed their work in progress since – is certainly an emphasis on plurality, a valorisation of moments and modes of inclusivity and lack of an urge to be always consensual and to forge a 'unity'. The programme includes as diverse projects as ARNA's 'Dinner for future', reaching to rural communities in search of the 'future of food', or commissions to artists and curators, such as OGR's 'Next in Europe' addressing head on what type of space a pavilion may constitute – and others still that will gradually unfold. Yet, as well as great diversity, there are 'family resemblances' precisely in the collaborative questioning of what has been long the starting point, the common denominator, that is, borrowing from one of the partners, Studio Rizoma's 'Europe after Europe', questioning a Europe of nation states.

The idea of a pavilion that is singular in the name but actually plural and diverse in its concretisation seems really promising to materialise and develop these family resemblances and this quest to reimagine Europe. A space that is not a predefined box but grows with its content, some of which will be contradictory and filled of 'pluralistic agonism'. Outcomes are still very much in progress, but the working method, at least during the two days that accompanied the launch, was

promising: rather than establishing a common format for each to then go home and conform to, use the time to share the different formats and find connecting threads that can expand and challenge the vision of what can be included.

Opening the Democracy Pavilion for Europe conference on 9 March 2022, Charles Esche asked "How do we respond as the cultural sector to the question of democracy today?" He went on to recall that as a frame to look for answers a pavilion first of all evokes "a place in a garden where ideas can flourish," but that it is here used rather as a "thinking structure," a "structure in which it is possible to re-think where Europe is today,"⁶ particularly in relation to the rest of the world and in consideration how that relationship has long been a colonial one. There is potential to reimagine what a pavilion means, whilst still recognising, and also somehow assume responsibility, for the many connotations, as we have seen many of which problematic, that pavilions have acquired in the history of modern exhibitions.

The European Pavilion ambition is to "facilitate a space that encourages experimentation and reflection on Europe," "A space for imagination, a programme that aims to envision the future of Europe."⁷ This emphasis on the future is what requires to radically reimagine what a pavilion is as metaphor for the society it represents. A pavilion that could become a metaphor not of competition and future seen as extractive progress based on domination (of the rich over the poor, of a nation of another, or mankind over nature, as recent critiques of extractive capitalism have highlighted), but a new way to imagine a good future, where solidarity can grow with, not despite, diversity. Notions of edulcorated perpetual peace seem little more than wishful thinking, but in the certainly privileged space of cultural experimentation – privileged precisely in its being able to experiment safely – The European Pavilion makes sense as an open place where to imagine possible other worlds – what art and the future are, or should be, both about.

It becomes relevant here what anthropologist Arjun Appadurai said about the idea of future: at its core is the capacity to imagine and aspire to a better life. To do so means shifting from a politics of probability – the management of risks – to one of possibility – strengthening imagination and aspiration as a cultural capacity. "The future is not just a technical or neutral space, but is shot through with affect and with sensation. Thus, we need to examine not just the emotions that accompany the future as a cultural form, but the sensations that it produces: awe, vertigo, excitement, disorientation."⁸ Future conceived as risk to be managed and a probability to calculate is perhaps

6. These quotes come from Charles Esche opening of The Democracy Pavilion conference, on 9.3.2022, available at www.youtube.com/watch?v=mvVhZSkQswo&t=1751s (last accessed 4.4.2022).

7. See: culturalfoundation.eu/stories/european-pavilion/.

8. Arjun Appadurai, *The Future as Cultural Fact*, London, Verso, 2013.

the dominant notion of future in contemporary society – particularly from the standpoint of those institutions invested with the responsibility of risk management, that have had so much prominence lately. But there are dedicated institutions for the future conceived as risk management, and there are other institutions dedicated to creating new meaning, and to the future as the realm of the imagination of the possible. I would say that this is the specific responsibility of cultural actors in society; we certainly need a new culture of the future.

Italo Calvino, himself citing Dante's *Purgatory*, used to say that imagination is a place where it rains inside.⁹ Not a perfect space, not a space of consensus, certainly not a neutral space, but rather a space that can tolerate trouble (as we have seen the case of Mouffe's agonistic pluralism). A place that is open – it requires openness and acceptance that it's not all about control and self-affirmation. Ideas, diversity, new visions of the good life can only pour inside from outside. A space where, therefore, being outside does not mean being excluded. A space where people are energised to imagine a future, to celebrate a future we cannot yet even imagine, let alone manage. To allow and create such a space is not an escape from reality, quite the opposite. It is a cultural endeavour; that is, a way to address in a meaningful, human, way the challenges we face. It is not to deny them, but to make sense of them, collectively, and so of ourselves. Not playing music as we sink, but keeping ourselves alive and together with stories and imagination, together shaping a European sentiment – while we are, as always, forced to navigate treacherous waters.

9. Italo Calvino, 'Visibility', in *Six memos for the Next Millennium*, Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1988



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MEET THE EUROPEAN PAVILIONS

In the course of 2021, arts and cultural organisations in various countries have joined The European Pavilion. Through their projects, the Pavilions tackle urgent European topics that range from the future of food and the issue of waste in contemporary societies, the state of democracy and the urgency to listen to the unheard and the marginalised voices. They offer perspectives from within and from outside of Europe, and project a trajectory towards the future.

ARNA Dinner for Future

Established in 2011, ARNA (Art & Nature) is a non-profit organisation in the south of Sweden. They work through the culture dimension of sustainability in Vombsjösjönsänkan, an area on the go to become a UNESCO biosphere reserve. ARNA's vision is to contribute to innovation in sustainable development by building bridges between the experiences of different generations, the science of our time, and people's visions for the future. From this starting point ARNA's European Pavilion 'Dinner for Future' is developed as a research-based exploration, an artistic interpretation, and a performative experience of how the future tastes.

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TEXT Lore Gablier



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BRUNNENPASSAGE Story: Telling! Europe

Since 2007, Brunnenpassage is a decentralised, transcultural space for contemporary art located in a former market hall with around 400 events per year. They are working in a transdisciplinary, post-national and participatory way. They create new collective spaces for a heterogeneous audience. They work in partnerships with established cultural institutions in the centre of Vienna, such as national theatres, concert halls and museums. The Brunnenmarket in Vienna is a European island in the middle of a metropolis, with a unique atmosphere and a very diverse population. People from diverse backgrounds reside, live and work here; it is Europe in a nutshell. Brunnenpassage's European Pavilion, 'Story: Telling! Europe', focuses on the sharing of personal experiences that sometimes require a safe and intimate environment, especially when addressing the question of Europe.