

Is This Us? The Construction of European Woman/Man in the Exhibition *It's Our History!*

By Steffi de Jong

Abstract

On the 50th anniversary of the Treaty of Rome, the non-profit organisation Musée de l'Europe staged the exhibition *It's our history!*. The subject of *It's our history!* was the history of European integration from 1945 to today. The exhibition was intended to make European citizens aware that – as the exhibition's manifesto stated: 'The History, with a capital H, of European construction is inextricable from our own personal history, that of each European citizen. It is not the reserve of those that govern us. We all shape it, as it shapes us, sometimes unbeknown to us. It's our history!' One of the means that the Musée de l'Europe chose as an illustration of this supposed interrelation of History and history are video testimonies in which 27 European citizens (one from each European member state) tell their own life stories. The present article explores this use of autobiographical accounts as didactic means in *It's our history!*. The article argues that through the 27 Europeans, an image of European woman/man and European integration is advanced that glosses over internal conflicts in Europe's recent history, leads to the construction of a model European citizen and serves as a symbol for the slogan 'unity in diversity' in which Europe appears as more united than diverse.

Keywords: Europe, Musée de l'Europe, witness, biography, Europeanization, museum, testimony

Introduction



Photo1: Group Picture of the 27 Europeans ©tempora

In 1926, the German author and war veteran Kurt Tucholsky visited the French World War One Museum in Vincennes. He looked at the pictures painted by war artists and normal soldiers, at posters, at ration stamps, military plates, and improvised shoes and clothes made out of news-papers – and concluded: ‘And after I had seen all of this, piece by piece, very slowly and thoroughly, I shake my head and feel that something is missing. What? Us. This is not us. There we are, standing life-sized in the museum and it is not us.’ Tucholsky’s solution to this dilemma seems macabre. If objects alone cannot adequately represent the war with its horrors, one has to start exhibiting human beings:

One should stuff some of those field marshals, some journalists, some secretaries of state, some army chaplains, perhaps as friendly dummies, as an umbrella stand, say, or with a visiting card box in the mouth, so that for once in their lives they would be good for something – one should put these puppets into the display cabinets and write underneath: FROM GREAT TIMES. Then posterity will stand before them in wonder, regard them and shudder, and understand with pity. (Tucholsky 1926).

This was 1926. In 2007, I enter the exhibition *It’s our history!* by the Brussels based non-profit organisation Musée de l’Europe. Organised on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the Treaty of Rome, the exhibition treats the history of European Integration from 1945 until today. Already in the second room, I am confronted with: human beings. Not mounted human bodies, of course. The latter practice belongs to darker chapters of museum history – to the period of colonial exhibitions, early anthropological museums and Gunther von Hagens’ ethically debatable *Body Worlds*. No, I am confronted with a video installation. From a large screen, 27 elegantly dressed men and women are looking at me. They are moving almost imperceptibly. Walking through the exhibition, I will meet these men and women again. They will each soon appear on a smaller TV-screen and tell me parts of their life stories.

Video interviews in which ordinary men and women recount episodes from their biographies, like the ones shown in *It’s our history!*, are an ever more frequent phenomenon in museums. For around a decade, Holocaust and Second World War museums and exhibitions in particular have been including video interviews with witnesses of the war and the Holocaust in their exhibitions (de Jong

2011). Eighty years after Tucholsky's visit to the museum in Vincennes, exhibiting people in museums on contemporary history has become normality, if in a different, less gruesome, form than the one suggested by the German author.

In the present article, I want to explore this phenomenon of using interviews with witnesses of the past in museums in general and in the *It's our history!* exhibition in particular. My thesis is that in *It's our history!*, the use of video testimonies serves to solve what I want to call Europe's memory problem. Through the 27 Europeans who tell their life stories in the exhibition, an image of European woman/man and European integration is presented that glosses over internal conflicts in Europe's recent history, leads to the construction of a model for the European citizen and serves as a symbol for the slogan 'unity in diversity' in which Europe appears as more united than diverse.

Europe's Memory Problem

In 1882, the French scholar Ernest Renan gave the lecture 'What is a nation?' at the Sorbonne. In opposition to the ethno-centric nationalist models of his time, Renan argued for a conception of the nation as a cultural construct. For Renan (1990: 19), the conditions for its construction lie in the way in which a nation's past is represented in the present: 'To have common glories in the past and to have a common will in the present; to have performed great deeds together, to wish to perform still more – these are the essential conditions for being a people'. More important than the exact nature of these deeds is the belief that 'the people' has performed them as a community. Consequently Renan (1990: 11) asserts that 'forgetting, I would even go so far as to say historical error, is a crucial factor in the creation of a nation, which is why progress in historical studies often constitutes a danger for [the principle of] nationality'. Historical error must gloss over those deeds that, in the past, divided the 'imagined community' (Anderson 1983) of the nation. At the same time, suffering in itself, if it is believed to have been a communal act, can be a stronger means of binding a nation together than triumphs 'for [griefs] impose duties, and require a common effort' (Renan 1990: 19).

More than one hundred years after Renan's lecture, the importance of the interpretation of the past for the construction of a nation has, despite several significant differences in their approaches and interpretations, been largely agreed upon by theorists of nationalism (Anderson 1983; Gellner 1983; Hobsbawm 1990; Hobsbawm & Ranger 1993). That this is equally important for the creation of a feeling of belonging to the post-national community of the European Union (EU) has by now become a truism in European politics and an EU-friendly scholarship on European culture and heritage. At the latest since the introduction of the so-called Culture Article in the Maastricht Treaty, which set out to 'bring Europe's common cultural heritage to the fore' (CEC 1992), European politicians, with the support of academics and professionals of the culture and heritage sector, have

tried to actively promote the communality of Europe's past. This attempt has constantly been hindered by three factors: first, the strength of the belief in a specific national heritage, secondly the EU's own motto 'united in diversity', which leaves open the question of how much diversity unity can bear and finally a post-Holocaust memorial culture which has ruled out forgetting. Naively glossing over past antagonisms, as could still be done by the nineteenth century nationalist movements that formed the basis for Renan's study has become unacceptable after the unprecedentedly bloody history of the first half of the twentieth century, a genocide of such dimensions that it has been defined as a 'civilisational break' (Diner 1988) – and the antagonistic past and memory of the people living in the two blocks that Europe had been divided into for around 45 years. Especially regarding the twentieth century with its two world wars, the histories of flight and expulsion, colonialism and decolonisation, migration, Auschwitz and the Gulag that divided and continue to divide the peoples of Europe, the focus has thus been not so much on forgetting as on dialogue. The aim is to get at an, if not common, then at least, commonly acceptable interpretation of the past – the idea being that, as Klaus Leggewie (2011: 7 italics in the original) has recently observed, 'a supranational Europe can only acquire a stable *political* identity, if the public debate on and the mutual recognition of contestable memories is as highly rated as agreements, an internal market and open borders'.

The Musée de l'Europe and the Exhibition *It's our history!*

The exhibition *It's our history!* can be counted amongst the concrete attempts at not only staging debate on, but actually solving the question of what is common about European memory. The exhibition, which has so far been shown in Brussels and Wrocław was originally meant as the opening exhibition of a museum on European history in the unofficial capital of Europe, Brussels. This plan for a museum had to be put on hold, inter alia because of a lack of funds and difficulties in finding a permanent location (Charléty 2005; Mazé 2008). However, the idea goes back to 1997 and was developed in a circle of academics and individuals with close links to the European institutions. Its initiator was the lawyer-economist Benoît Remiche, who has worked for the European institutions. Political patronage was given by the Belgian minister of state Antoinette Spaak, the daughter of one of the so-called founding fathers of the European Union, Paul-Henri Spaak, and the Belgian minister of state and then vice-president of the European Commission, Karel Van Miert. The reasons for creating a museum on European history were presented as fourfold. Firstly, the founders of the museum wanted to write the 'European history of Europe' (Remiche 2006: 14) in opposition to the national histories shown in national history museums. Secondly, the museum was meant to be an antidote to Brussels bureaucracy and a perceived Euro-fatigue. Thirdly, the initiators of the museum based their project on Pierre Nora's theory that we are

now living in a society characterised by an ‘end of the tradition of memory’ (Nora 1996: 6). They wanted to create ‘the place of memory that Europe needs’ (Musée de l’Europe 2007). The desired result was that the museum would reintegrate Europeans into their history, ultimately lead to a heightened awareness of European history and promote an active European citizenship. The main target groups were therefore defined as young people and people of the third age – in other words, those who have to be taught about ‘their’ past and introduced into a European memorial community and those for whom a visit to the museum will mean delving into their own memories and whose potentially antagonistic memories have to be streamlined into a European memory.

Objects of History: The Figure of the Witness in Popular Culture and in Museums

‘My own life story has reached a climax when I myself became an object in Europe’s history’ (Musée de l’Europe 2007). These are the words of Andreja Rither, a former Slovenian Minister of Culture, museologist, former director of the Museum of Contemporary History in Celje and one of the 27 Europeans that told their personal stories in *It’s our history!*. Two considerations mark her declaration. For one thing, we find here the age-old fear of personal oblivion and the wish to preserve the marks that one has left on earth long after one’s death. What better way of doing so than to become an *object of history* – a carrier of the past in a public retelling thereof? Secondly and consequently, the declaration expresses the belief that the individual life story is worth being preserved, important enough to be included into European history and presented to a larger audience.



Photo2: Picture of a Video Testimony ©tempora

Already in 1998, the French historian Annette Wieviorka (1998) claimed that we are living in the 'era of the witness'. Wieviorka argues that since the Eichmann trial, which presented 111 survivors as witnesses for the history of the Shoah, Holocaust survivors have gained ever more importance as witnesses of history, so that today they are amongst the most authoritative carriers of Holocaust memory. Wieviorka's denomination of our era as the 'era of the witness' is today truer than 12 years ago. Not only Holocaust survivors, but also witnesses of all possible historical events are now hardly ever missing from television documentaries on contemporary history. Numberless websites are dedicated to the publication of personal memoirs. We can watch video testimonies on YouTube and in multiple online archives. The book market is flooded with the autobiographies of 'ordinary people' and – most importantly for this study – more and more museums are including video testimonies by ordinary men and women in their exhibitions. Personal memory has, in other words, moved from the sphere of what Jan Assmann (1992) has called communicative memory – a memory based on every-day communication between the members of a memorial community – towards the sphere of what he has termed cultural memory – a ritualised memory based on fixed markers of the past. This transfer is marked by two interrelated movements: on the one hand the belief of ordinary people that what they have experienced in their life is worth recording and might be of educative value for a larger audience and on the other hand the willingness of others – generally a younger generation – to listen to and preserve those stories. We have, as the German oral historian Lutz Niethammer (1985: 10) has observed, begun to ask 'about the subjectivity of those whom we had learned to see as the objects of history'. At the same time, by recording, archiving and exhibiting video testimonies in documentaries and museums, we are turning the very act of remembering into an object of history.

In museums, the use of witnesses can be seen, firstly, as part of a post-modern turn in museology characterised by an attempt to avoid master-narratives (Bennett 2006). Thus, at the Tropenmuseum, in its 2008 exhibition on the 1948 Arab-Israeli war, curators tried, through the use of witnesses, to avoid giving a clear interpretation of a disputed event. Potentially, the presentation of different life stories corresponds to the presentation of different opinions on the event or subject under scrutiny in the exhibition. This allows curators to avoid having to present a clear interpretation of an event. Secondly, as Thomas Thiemeyer (2010: 244) has observed for the musealization of the two World Wars, the use of individuals in museums appeals to the visitors' emotions and their faculty of empathy and identification. 'Personal history emotionalises, because it enables identification, generates loyalty and permits sympathy. It appeals to man [...] as a species'. This potential of identification means that witnesses are powerful didactic means for museums – didactic means that are well chosen by the curators. In her testimonial video, Andreja Rither is filmed walking through a flea market choosing objects for her museum. In other words, Andreja Rither's testimony shows the

practicalities of curatorial work: the work that she herself carries out, saving objects from the rubble of Europe's past, as well as the work carried out by the collaborators of the Musée de l'Europe when they were choosing her and the other Europeans' stories for inclusion into the museum. In the remainder of this article I will concentrate on this choice of the witnesses for *It's our history!*, showing how the chosen witnesses are used to present a common denominator for Europe's memory.

Who are We? 27 National Symbols for a United European People



Photo3: Group Picture of the Aamericans ©tempora

Most Europeans consider themselves as nationals of their countries of origin first and only secondly as Europeans – if at all. This is the result that Eurobarometer studies come up with every year. Models of European identity usually take the national dimension into consideration, whether in terms of being encircled by, of existing alongside or of being a constitutive part of European identity (Fligstein 2008, Risse 2010). Indeed, national identities are inscribed in the European Union's own motto 'united in diversity' where diversity refers more to the different national cultures within the EU than to any other elements that might divide the citizens of Europe such as financial inequalities or the differences between country-life and city-life. More than any other dividing element, it is the strength of national allegiances that is considered to be the biggest threat to the emergence of a genuine European identity and that, in an attempt to make this strength fruitful, is turned into a constitutive part of European identity with the motto 'unity in diversity'.

Entering the exhibition, the visitor of *It's our history!* is confronted with unity. The group picture shown in the second room represents 27 primarily middle-aged, elegantly dressed men and women, half of them sitting down and half of them standing. Where they come from is not easy to make out. It is only in the museum text that accompanies the picture that visitors are informed that the 27 individuals in the picture are 27 citizens of the EU member states. In accordance with the motto 'unity in diversity', the EU appears here as a community composed of the citizens of its constitutive member states.

The group picture is supposed to remind visitors of the so-called 'family' pictures that are taken at EU summits. 'This could have been an official photograph of a European summit with the EU heads of state and government, but it isn't. These are 27 ordinary European citizens' (Musée de l'Europe 2007a: 2), the educational guide points out. The genre of the 'family picture' which, as an attempt of the European elite to be close to its citizens, works as a signifier of democracy, was here taken up by the museum as a signifier of high politics, only in order to be broken again and become a signifier of the analogy in object between the politicians and the European citizens. No matter how difficult negotiations have been, the family pictures of top politicians tell us, we are still a big European family. No matter how different our experiences are and have been, the group picture of the 27 tells us, we still belong to the same cultural and historical space. But who are *we*? Who exactly is it that belongs to this space according to the project of the 27? And how is this space defined?

A closer look at the group picture reveals that the people on the picture are ethnically all white. A similar picture to the one in *It's our history!* was shown in its follow-up exhibition *America – It's also our history!*, this time representing Americans. The Americans on this picture are male, wear workers' clothes and stand upright. They are ethnically diverse – and primarily non-white. In short: the United States appears as a representation of the myth of the melting pot. While the States of America are shown as united because of immigration, for the EU, immigration is, according to the exhibition *It's our history!*, not so much part of reality as a challenge. In one of the final chapters entitled 'The challenges of globalisation' visitors are asked to think about the possibility of 'controlling migratory flows without sacrificing the right of asylum of Europe's labour needs' (Musée de l'Europe 2009: 178). In the opening group picture – as in the remainder of the exhibition – Europe appears as nationally diverse, but ethnically white – as united in *national* diversity.

If the group picture shows the EU as the sum total of the European nation-states, this sum is broken down again into its constitutive parts in the subsequent part of the exhibition. Here the 27 European citizens tell their own stories, which are generally marked by national histories. So are we, if not ethnically, then in our experiences, more diverse than united? Not really.

The Video Testimonies: Diverse in Content but United in Intent

If, in geographic terms, the 27 Europeans represent the 27 EU member states, in temporal terms they can be divided into two groups: those who performed great deeds and were the victims of unjust regimes in the past and those who give testimony on present-day expressions of European integration. With only minor exceptions, this is also an east-west division. In the latter group, there are, for instance, the – almost obligatory – Erasmus student, a Swedish scientist working for the European Organisation of Nuclear Research, a Portuguese entrepreneur running a transportation and logistics company, a Finnish interpreter at the European Parliament, a Bulgarian farmer producing organic yoghurt, a Greek and a Maltese civil servant at the European Commission and the Austrian founder of SkyEurope. The former include a Belgian worker who fought for equal payment in the Belgian national weapon's factory, a Czech co-signatory of the Charter 77, an Estonian participant in the 'Phosphorite War', a Polish fellow campaigner of Lech Wałęsa in the Solidarity movement and a German couple who fled from the GDR through the tunnel dug underneath the Berlin Wall. In one of its exhibition texts, the Musée de l'Europe presents these stories as potentially exchangeable:

The 27 people you will meet here sum up the history of Europe that, for 50 years, has been broken down into the diversity of individual destinies. Others could no doubt have been chosen who have similar stories to tell. But this only goes to prove that what is true for these 27 is also true for a great many other people. At the end of the day, it is true for everyone. For each of us, the history of Europe is our history.

In other words: what unites Europeans is that they belong to a common geographical space, which during the last 50 years has been marked by what *It's our history!* presents as the climax of European history so far – European integration. As the most important relic of Europe's history, the Treaty of Rome is exhibited at the end of the exhibition in a bright, white room in which the only other exhibit is a large acryl painting by the artist Jörg Frank entitled 'Europa: Work in progress'. The very first room, on the other hand, shows Gunter Demnig's 'Friedensrolle', a lead sculpture of a long roll engraved with the names of the various peace treaties signed in Europe since 260 BC emerging from a typewriter. The roll is intended to show that 'each [...] peace treaty marked only an interlude in a state of war that had become considered as part of the course' (Musée de l'Europe 2009: 20). Each peace treaty, that is, with the exception of the Treaty of Rome, which in the topology of the exhibition represents the apex of European history and a new form of peace treaty – the only successful one so far. The 27 stories that are presented between the dark room showing Demnig's 'Friedensrolle' and the Treaty of Rome presented as a relic of European integration, are not so much similar in content as similar in kind. All of them appear as necessary steps on the long way toward European integration: the Solidarity movement as much as the translating work that is being done in the European Parliament at the moment. It is thus not in the different experiences presented that European history is common, but in its teleolo-

gy, in the presentation of European integration as the endpoint in which the different strains of European history meet.

Forgetting by Remembering: Forming Europe's Memory

If the historical climax of Europe is presented as a politically and economically integrated Europe, the goal of the exhibition is also to find a common denominator for memory in this integrated Europe. The title – *It's our history!* – with its telling exclamation mark, serves on the one hand as an invitation to Europeans to become aware of their own involvement in European history. As the manifesto of the exhibition presented in the lobby states:

The History, with a capital H, of European construction is inextricable from our own personal history, that of each European citizen. It is not the reserve of those that govern us. We all shape it, as it shapes us, sometimes unbeknown to us. It's our history!

On the other hand, the title is an appeal to consider this history – whether with a capital or with a small h – as common to all Europeans; as *ours*.

The road to the creation of such a common memory is, as has been illustrated, paved with obstacles. Tellingly, the Musée de l'Europe avoids fully approaching the event that most divides the memory of Europeans: the Second World War. The exhibition starts with the section '1945 – Europe, year zero'. European integration appears here as a phoenix emerging from the ashes – total destruction being presented as the unfortunate, albeit necessary starting point for the crooked, although consistent road towards an ever more united Europe. The exhibition does not represent the war with its antagonistic camps, with its victors and defeated, its victims and perpetrators. What it represents are the consequences thereof – the ruins in which supposedly all of Europe lay. Erasing all questions of responsibility, an aerial view of the ruins of the German city of Cologne – not the Polish Warsaw, the British Coventry or the French Caen – is used as an illustration for the destruction of Europe. In its own way, the Musée de l'Europe thus realises a post-modern version of Renan's dictum that 'forgetting ... is a crucial factor in the creation of a nation'. The Second World War is presented as the founding myth of the European Union. It is remembered; but it is remembered as a pan-European catastrophe in which all Europeans appear equally as victims, not as a series of culturally and socially explicable actions by human individuals (Krankenhausen 2008).

The problem for the construction of a European memory does not stop with the Second World War, however. Considering the collective and individual memories in Europe, the Musée de l'Europe declares that 'the most touching testimonies generally come from Eastern Europe' (Musée de l'Europe 2009: 31), but also that 'the memory of those who were oppressed is not as serene as those who did not have to fight for their liberty' (Musée de l'Europe 2009:14). It is especially the

spectre of nostalgia for the lost communist regimes in the states of the former Eastern Bloc that the Musée de l'Europe considers to be threatening. Optimistically, however, it affirms that 'nostalgia will last for a while during the time Europe will need to truly integrate its new members' (Musée de l'Europe 2009:133).

The 27 Europeans exemplify what such a true integration should ideally look like. As diverse as the experiences of the 27 Europeans might be, the subject of their testimonies is a return to, respectively a close inclusion, in the EU. While according to the museum text cited above, theoretically every European citizen could have been chosen to give testimony on the history of European integration, in reality, EU-critical or nostalgic voices are largely nonexistent in *It's our history!*. (For a discussion of the lack of differentiation between the chosen witnesses, see also the article by Wolfram Kaiser in this volume.) When Klaus Stürmer, the Eastern German who fled with his wife through the tunnel dug underneath the Berlin Wall, talks about his life in the GDR, he falls into metaphors. He remembers getting flowers on the occasion of the elections in the GDR, but 'they felt like barbed wire'. However, to stay within the metaphor, Klaus Stürmer tore down the barbed wire and fled to an integrated and peaceful Europe. Obviously prompted by the interviewer, he concludes his testimony by saying that he is happy that we have got the EU and that other peoples would love to switch with us. The Lithuanian Caroline Masiulis, whose family had to flee to France and who returned to Vilnius to run the bookshop that her grandfather founded in the nineteenth century after it was returned to the family in 1991, is filmed at the spot that is supposedly the geographical centre of Europe. She remembers the announcement of the location of this centre to have been important news for her. The announcement was made by a group of French scientists in the turbulent year of 1989. These Eastern testimonies of a return to Europe are complemented by Western testimonies of work for Europe – as civil servants, lawyers solving Europe's immigration problem or as scientists cementing Europe's position as an important location for research.

Witnesses and Heroes: The Construction of the Ideal European Citizen

While the 27 are used in *It's our history!* in order to solve Europe's memory problem by presenting it as diverse in individual destinies but united in the teleology of Europe's history, they also appear as model Europeans. Their exemplary character stems from two ideas: witnessing as a civic duty and heroism.

In his study on the practice and idea of witnessing, the media theorist John Durham Peters (2001: 722) points out that the act of bearing witness to something can only have a 'retroactive character'. 'A vast quantitative difference separates what we experience and what we are summoned to witness. There's a lot more sensation around than stories'. We all constantly experience events, but we rarely

know whether, at a later date, we might be called to give testimony on today's impressions. Apart from some rare exceptions where the importance of an event is evident at the very moment of its occurrence, the attribute 'from great times', to come back to Tucholsky's evaluation, is only accorded in retrospect. Nevertheless, Durham Peters argues (2001: 723), the retroactive aspect of witnessing has

in everyday civic ideology [lead to, SdJ] the idea that citizens have a duty to be informed about the events of the day. [...] With apologies to Matthew 25:13, the motto of witnessing should be: 'Watch, therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour wherein the event will come'.

Good citizens, in other words, are vigilant citizens. They are aware of what is happening around them and ready to give testimony on it whenever they might be called to do so. It is exactly this kind of citizenship that the Musée de l'Europe promotes in its exhibition. Recording what has happened, from an early age, is the subject of several of the testimonies. Thus, the Spaniard Juan Fernandez Aller gives testimony on Tejero's 1981 coup d'état. He was seven at the time of the events. Gyula Csics, who was 12 at the time of the Hungarian uprising in 1956 even graphically recorded the happenings in word and picture in a journal, which is exhibited alongside his testimony. While not all of the witnesses were as assiduous in recording what happened, their very presence in the museum exemplifies that they have done their duty as European citizens: they have considered European history as their own and been vigilant about what was happening around them.

If recording European history is presented as being important, actively taking part in it is even more so. The majority of the 27 Europeans are doers. While the Second World War is represented as fate, as that which has happened to us, European integration is represented as being actively brought forward by individuals on an elite level as well as on the ground. The Eastern Europeans said yes to an integrated Europe by either turning their back on a dictatorship, fleeing to the west or by actively, but peacefully, fighting the regime. They took part in the solidarity movement or, like the Latvian Sandra Kalniete, organised the Baltic Way. If the Eastern Europeans were fighting for a better life in a democratic and integrated Europe, the Western Europeans are actively 'building Europe' (Shore 2000). The choice for representatives of France and the United Kingdom fell on Roger Lavis and Philippe Cozette. Lavis and Cozette got their fifteen minutes of EU fame when they shook hands at the junction of the construction sites in the channel tunnel between Calais and Dover. In *It's our history!*, the scene is shown again, commented on by Lavis and Cozette themselves. In their testimony, the manual work that represents the beginning of the European integration process in the coal and steel factories and the fictional bridges on the Euro banknotes that join European countries together, meet in a concrete act of tearing down (natural) frontiers between the peoples of Europe and building, not a bridge, but a tunnel between them.

Actively participating in European integration, the 27 Europeans not merely appear as witnesses but rather as role models – or heroes. For the German sociol-

ogist Jan Philipp Reemtsma (2009: 10), ‘heroes represent virtues claiming universal validity in an extreme, thus rare expression’. Heroes do something more than ordinary men and they do it for the common good. What the visitors of *It’s our history!* were presented with were historical heroes and heroes of everyday life. If the Musée de l’Europe claims that ‘for each of us, the history of Europe is our history’, this observation serves as a wake-up call for the (European) visitors to consider their own involvement in the history of European integration. In an exhibition that was designed as the opening exhibition of what was to become an ‘identity museum’ (Remiche 2006:1), however, not every European is capable of giving testimony on Europe’s history. Whether incidentally – because that is what happens if a circle of civil servants, curators and academics convinced of the European idea engage in choosing 27 representatives for the European people – or deliberately, a disproportionately high percentage of the 27 Europeans work for or close to the European institutions. They are thus part of what Camille Mazé (2008) has termed a supranational avant-garde – an avant-garde working and living so close to the European institutions that it has become what on a European elite level is called ‘engrenagé’, so entangled into the system of European integration as to have shifted its allegiances from a national or regional level to a European one (Shore 2000: 147ff). Rather than being examples of a culturally rich and heteroglossic Europe, the 27 Europeans are cues for the coming about of an ideal European identity and citizenship in which Europeans would actively take part in building Europe.

Conclusion

When Tucholsky visited the museum in Vincennes, he was unable to recognize his generation in the representation of an event that for him has been common to all of those who have taken part in it – if not in its political motivations, then in its tragedy. If the Musée de l’Europe invites its visitors to identify with their own history, it does so for a period of European history in which the experiences of Europeans could not have been more diverse. If Tucholsky was concerned about the picture that future generations would have of his time, then the professionals of the Musée de l’Europe are concerned about the picture that the present population of Europe has of its own past and present today. On the one hand, the witnesses in *It’s our history!* exemplify a common European memory. The different and sometimes antagonistic experiences are shown as having ultimately led to the reunion of the European family represented in the opening group picture. This picture also appears as a representation of a commonly acceptable European memory. With national affiliations being erased, the experiences of Europeans that have been antagonistic for 50 years are here remembered together as part of a communal European memory. On the other hand, the use of witnesses is a means to turn the visitors of the exhibition into good, active European citizens. The 27

Europeans shown in the exhibition have, in one way or another, been active in integrating Europe and, as ideal Europeans, they are aware of their experiences in the past, vigilant about the present and concerned about the future. While the Musée de l'Europe claims that in principle everybody could have been one of the 27 Europeans represented in *It's our History!*, in reality the curators were careful to leave out examples that might have compromised their representation of European integration as the climax of European history and chose those that could work as examples to be followed by the visitors of the exhibition. Whether the latter reacted in the way in which they were intended to react, whether any of the visitors did actually become better European citizens according to the Musée de l'Europe's idea is a question that cannot be answered in this article. A question that can be answered here is the one asked in the title: Is this us? Yes and no. It is the prototype of us. It is we Europeans as we ideally should be.

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