

Karl Schlögel

Archipelago Europe

Rotterdam, Europort, the mouth of Europe. Europe has its conceited capitals and its genuine ones. The staging of power takes place in the former, along with the rituals of self-promotion. It is there that you find the backdrop of the press conference, where the powerful make their statements. There are no press releases coming out of real capital cities. These cities thrive on everyday business, not the pomp and circumstance of state. Rotterdam is a European capital vital to all, but hardly ever noticed. At Rotterdam, Europe turns to face the oceans and the world. Here, in the delta of the Scheldt, the Meuse, and the Rhine, Western Europe's largest river flows into the sea. Via this delta, the world makes contact with Europe. All of Europe's main arteries lead to Rotterdam, and from Rotterdam, to all of Europe, above all back up the Rhine: the Ruhr Region, Cologne, Frankfurt, Strasbourg, Basel, Lyon, Marseille, Barcelona, and Milan. Rotterdam is the terminus of the "Blue Banana", that high-energy, high-performance zone that has become one of Europe's main axes. The best way to get to know this European capital is to take a boat tour around the harbour and to glide between the towering stacks of thousands and thousands of containers, those cities constantly on the move, rising up one moment, carried away the next, and sent somewhere else.

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Harbour scenes in Rotterdam

They still have old names that speak of old, colonial Europe, of Batavia, Sumatra, and other far-off regions. Anybody who wants to know what comes together here need only look at the lettering on the containers, at the flags on the ships and the tankers, and note the names of the shipping companies and hauliers. Rotterdam is the city of the great Erasmus, but above all the place where, day by day, hour by hour, Europe is imagined and made. If all the activity in Rotterdam were to stop and the mouth and estuary of Europe closed for only a moment, the entire continent would go into convulsions, the motorways would grind to a halt, the stock exchange displays would go haywire. Rotterdam sets the pace in Europe. It is in Rotterdam that every parcel begins its journey to Europe. Europe hangs on Rotterdam, where this movement begins. And Rotterdam is a new city. This city, together with its docks and quays, once completely reduced to rubble by German air raids, is one huge new edifice, like Europe after 1945.

Heathrow: Circling in the sky above London. No place in Europe is as close to the world as London. You almost always have half an hour to think about this, as your plane approaches London-Heathrow, but is forced to maintain a holding pattern. The plane spirals its way down, together with the other planes waiting their turn. There's time to study the cityscape as you fly over the same places again and again: Greenwich, Canary Wharf, Tower Bridge, the Houses of Parliament, Hyde Park, and Windsor Castle; then the plane banks north, then east, and it's the same thing all over again. London beckons to the world with its airport terminals, its attempts to bring order to the chaos of all this movement, to channel and sort it. What masses of people are constantly on the move! What patience the

experienced travellers display! How they knowingly and calmly make their way through the tunnels and up and down the lifts, through the detours and up and down the stairs! A relay, a hinge on which the world's traffic hangs. A gateway to the world, which with all its labyrinths is more below ground than above it. Europe and the world. This is the procedure: check-in, passport control, security, the practised gesture, the smile, the routine. The cosmopolitanism that has been acquired and practised until it is second nature. In the downward spiralling movements in the sky above London, you feel something of Europe's pull, the attraction of the world beyond. In this connection with the world, which is established daily and hourly to the exact second, there is more power, more evidence than in the lions that symbolize the Empire and greater plausibility than in the Imperial Archives. This spiralling movement, these holding patterns in the sky above London connect Europe with the world. The congestion, the power, the rush.

The swimmers in the thermal baths of Hotel Gellert in Budapest. The Gellert, which faces a takeover bid by a powerful joint-stock company, still hosts people who come to swim. You go out, as it were, onto the veranda, the Buda Hills in front of you, the city behind you; you can enjoy the hot springs and still be in the centre of a metropolis. Summer or winter, the public consists of senior citizens. Young people prefer the gyms and fitness centres. The swimmers in the Gellert's pools come from Austria, Germany, the Netherlands, and Italy. They profited from European unification even before the European Union expanded – and still are, at least for the time being, since the deluxe renovations are not yet finished. Arriving by coach, the well-off guests fill the plush, upper-class

surroundings. In Europe, even retirees have their spots: the Gellert's thermal baths, the hotel complexes of Spain's Balearic Islands, the wintering retreats along the Turkish Riviera. But the process of increasing value, which feeds on the pensioners, will soon put an end to their stay – or has already done so. The luxurious conviviality of the older generation, which comes primarily from the west, is certainly worth talking about. It makes a difference in Europe whether you get old or are a senior citizen.

Edward Hopper's Gas Station: LUKOIL, ORLEN, BP, SHELL. The new Europe has a new colour. It pierces the night sky. It is garish. It is as unmistakable as the sign itself. The lettering of the oil company's logo is a signal recognisable from far away. It is the signature of the newly mobile Eastern Europe. The new Europe is mobile. Mobile Europe is petrol station Europe. Petrol stations have a particular style, their own aesthetic, a specific design. Their design is reminiscent of Edward Hopper's bleakly laconic pictures. Petrol station design entails their being new, transparent, that they shine in neon colours, preferably those of the company: *Shell, BP, Aral*. They should also stock the entire standardised and variegated range of beverages, magazines, and cigarettes. They were the pioneers of digitalisation and the now common practice of paying by card. The electronic price boards show the slightest fluctuation on the oil market, no matter where we are. The world, of which we were once so certain, and the prices, which were as reliable as the authority of the state, now flutter as delicately and sensitively as a light breeze or the wing of a butterfly. Everything happens so quickly today. The transition to a new routine has been completed without leaving behind any traces, conversion accomplished as if there had never been foreign currencies

or suspicion. Petrol stations in the new Europe are centrifuges of growing routine and normalisation. As is the case all over the world, you will see people there who just want to have a coffee or beer. They seem like fossils in a world where everything has become new. The petrol station Internationale makes life easy, fast, and safe. You can concentrate on more important things.

Ikea on Leningradskoe Shosse. Europeanisation consists of the production of uniform standards in design, service, the routines of logistics, the rhythm of work and leisure. All of Europe is based on the expectation that routines are unalterable and unshakeable. IKEA is a world unto itself, an international network of stores. The most astonishing thing about it is not the lamps or the shelves but the homogeneity of its standards. They are as uniform as the design of its furniture. Businesses such as IKEA sell precision, reliability. Every IKEA store is identical. IKEA on Leningradskoe Shosse in the north of Moscow, and now Varshavskoe Shosse as well, and elsewhere: The empire of identical standards and identical designs is expanding. It will be the measure of other things.

High-speed routes. Europe is being manufactured year by year, month by month, and day by day. Movement, which holds it together, is its basic mode. If movement were to fail, even for a short time, Europe would disintegrate into its component parts. The manufacturing of Europe can best be observed at certain locations: airports, motorways, and high-speed railroads. The high-speed connections turn big Europe into a small continent. The borders of individual states are crossed before the TGV really gets going. The nation state is too small for high-speed trains.



Petrol station in Nowy Targ in southeast Poland with the Tatra Mountains in the background.

Kiev: A geographical shift. Suddenly, on the edge of Europe, golden cupolas emerge. Europe is still in a state of flux, incomplete. From our perspective in the centre, we don't have a clear view of what is happening at the edges. We don't even know where the border is. The border is a place nobody is interested in. And then all at once, from one day to the next, the entire map changes. As if in an earthquake, a tectonic shift, the ground suddenly rises, something emerges out of the water. Initially, it is just a matter of television reports concerning irregularities in some election far, far away; then there is mention of conflicts, interference, trouble. Every day and night, crowds gather on the city's biggest square, a monumental circular place, such as could only have been constructed after a war in a city whose centre had been totally destroyed. The crowd is in good spirits, the people's eyes are shining, they are wearing orange, they are inventive in laying siege to the old, corrupt system of power, they while away the dreadfully cold nights by building campfires. The whole town brings tea, hot drinks, and sandwiches. And then at some point, the golden cupolas of the St. Sophia Cathedral and the Monastery of the Caves emerge from behind the scenes of the demonstrators on the square. You can see past them far into the countryside and across the Dnieper. The "city of cities" is there once again, exactly where, over 1,000 years ago, the "route from the Varangians to the Greeks" ran. Kiev has returned to the map of Europe.

Europe at the beach. It runs between Rimini and Bari. Its sections are called Costa Brava and Algarve. They are spread over Rhodes and Crete. They are to be found in Eilat and Sharm-el-Sheikh and as far away as Martinique. The southern coast of Turkey has long belonged to Europe. The beaches are linked to the cities and can be

reached easily at any time, just like a suburb. From Manchester to Alicante, from Düsseldorf to Adanya, from Berlin to Majorca, from Moscow to Dubai, from Vienna to Benghazi, from Warsaw to the Canaries. Those who go to such places don't discover a new world, they create their own. They don't really come together, but lie on the beach – every man for himself – or disappear into the disco. Europe revolves around the annual holiday, during which its normal activities die out for a few weeks. Europe undergoes the same procedures: checking in, settling into a flying container, arriving in southern climes, living in affordable hotels, going to the beach, gazing in wonder at the sunset, preparing oneself for the end of the holiday, performing the inevitable farewell ritual. The new image of Europe is being created by the pictures made with digital and video cameras, thus creating new horizons of experience. From now on, you no longer compare different dream destinations but cost-effectiveness.

The arts pages. Producing the frame of reference for reporting on and discussing cultural matters and events has entered a new stage. In addition to articles from London, Paris, New York, and Milan, there are those – at least from time to time – from Petersburg, Moscow, Budapest, Cracow, and Thessaloniki. With every vernissage that finds its way into the arts pages of the major European newspapers, there is a shift in the frame of reference, at first only for a short time, and easily reversible, but then, it attains a certain continuity and permanence. A new cultural sphere is being created. It echoes inside. Europe is a huge resonating chamber, in which there are now so many voices that individual ones are easily missed. White noise. What was once new, even sensational, becomes ordinary. Getting used to things, becoming ordinary: That is how inte-

gration is measured. The European cultural scene is presented day by day. It is a never-ending tapestry of discourse and debate. We know about the productions in Moscow and the nuances of the Glyndebourne Festival, what Bayreuth is like this year, and what's new about the latest offerings from the House of Wagner. Cultural space is being expanded every day. Europe is a realm of art, a realm of music, a huge exhibition hall, and the arts pages are a huge logbook that helps us keep track of things.

Europe on wheels. Holiday time. Europe still goes on holiday, especially in the summer. It rediscovers its old, cross-border, occidental synchronicity, which has been prepared and implanted for centuries. No new feast-day or holiday calendar can change that. The European cycle is stronger than the calendar of national holidays. The synthesising of time, the production of a European rhythm. The creation of synchronicity. It is the settling down to the procedures of travel, the efficiency and inodorousness of motorway service areas with their Europe-wide identical changing facilities for babies, showers, etc. In the summer, millions of Europeans move from one end of Europe to the other. Mass migration. Millions in transit. On the move without taking notice of each other.

Budget airlines. Easyjet, Ryanair. Europe is only a name. The adventure that Easyjet, Ryanair, and all the other budget airlines offer is real. Ryanair has catapulted Ireland from the edge of Europe practically to the middle. Stansted is where you change on the way from Berlin to Cape Town. The diminutive form with which passengers are lured – little Cracow, little Basel, little Bratislava – has a true ring to it and goes further than flattery that is embarrassing. Europe is becoming a matter of proximity, of

something that is almost intimate. Europe does not want to wait until the railway bed – which dates from the 19th century and was ruined in the 20th century by armies surging back and forth, by fronts, tanks, troops, refugees – is brought up to 21st century standards. With Easyjet, the trip from Berlin to Cracow does not take ten but one and a half hours and costs the same. That changes a lot. A new class of travellers is emerging: Someone who lives in Mainz, but works in Turin; authors who come for readings in Germany from their house or workplace in Ireland; shopping tourists who arrive in Berlin at midnight from Moscow, go shopping during the day, and take the night flight to be back home the next day; shuttle services that are scarcely more expensive than the suburban railway from one end of the city to the other.

The mobile phone in the open-plan carriage. The mobile has introduced a new sound, a new tone into our world. It indicates that the person sitting beside us or in the row behind us and gesticulating in a lively manner, keeping on and on at someone who is not visible, is perhaps talking to someone they know at the other end of the world. The girl in the underground in Berlin inquires into her mobile about the weather in Jerusalem. Animated, gesticulating mobile users stand near us, but they don't speak to us, they don't even look at us. The sounds generated by the mobile are the accompanying music marking a new epoch. At any time of day, anywhere in the world, we are connected with anybody and everybody, no matter where they are. From now on, the mobile is always there: with the bodies of those who have been torn apart by the Metro bombings and can no longer answer; when the deadly mechanism is triggered; when contact is taken up with the blackmailers; at any kind appointment.

Hinges. Bridge over the Belt. Bridges produce new configurations. Bridges over a sound turn two coasts into the banks of a stretch of water. Thus twin cities come into being within sight of each other. And thus two distant landmasses are turned into a continuum. Crystallisation as the starting point for far-reaching conglomerations. A metropolitan area stretching across the sea, for example, between Copenhagen and Malmö or between Istanbul and Üsküdar. The tunnel under the Pas de Calais serves the same function: It has welded the south of England and the north of France together, making London and Paris neighbours. It is the same with the ferries linking Tallinn and Helsinki or Baltiisk and Gdańsk. What will happen to Switzerland, when the new tunnels through the Alps are finished?

ZVAB. Abebooks. Amazon. Browsing in antiquarian bookshops has been replaced by searching on one's PC monitor. Every evening, we can wander through the book-selling world, from the Winterfeldtstrasse in Berlin to the quays along the Seine, from the market square in Tübingen to the Wollzeile in Vienna, from Charing Cross to Strands on Broadway. ZVAB is a marketplace for 10 million antiquarian books, Abebooks for more than 5 million. The disappearance of a pleasure, the end of a desire, and the start of a new passion. The transformation of the old hunting urge, which was haptically and visually trained, into an instinct that is merely focused on titles, authors, and prices. And so the nocturnal searcher shuttles back and forth between the antiquarian bookshop on Kollwitzplatz in Berlin and one in Brighton, between Vancouver and Adelaide in Australia. He has not read a book, neither has he held one in his hand, nor has he seen a bookseller. An enormous expansion of the search range.

Security. The door we used to go through is now a double one: the traditional, physical door and the electronic one. The public sphere is armed. Mounted cameras swivel automatically. They face the empty space that is lit up by spotlights, the area that people cross from time to time. The gates are guarded. In the lobbies, those who check all movement, faces, bags, and identity cards have taken up position discreetly yet demonstratively. No movement without supervision. The security check has become routine. We have grown used to showing our IDs and passports, to looking at the camera, opening our bags and briefcases. Wherever there is security, there is something of importance. The important things are in the capitals. The pieces of equipment used in security are monuments to importance. Security-free zones indicate that coverage is not complete. Security crosses borders. It is one of the most important indicators of the speed at which Europe is coming together.

Cash machines at the University of Sofia: It was in the mid-1990s that I first saw ATMs in the entrance hall of the St. Clement of Ochrid University, Sofia. At the time, there were not many cash machines, and none at all at universities. Even in Germany, they were not that widespread. Cash machines suddenly stood for instant access to money. Foreign visitors could just withdraw money, where previously they often wandered around for hours, because there was no currency exchange facility available. What tricks you often had to use in order to carry out this trivial, yet vital operation. Now, they are everywhere in the former eastern bloc. They have been installed, as it were, in one go, almost without a transitional phase. They functioned without a trial or settling down period. Secondary modernisation in a surprise coup, without loss of

friction. The establishment of norms and normality. Human beings do not need to be led by the hand. You can easily expect them to handle a lot – just like the babushkas came to terms overnight with the pictures of naked girls, and sometimes even men, on display in the newspaper stands.

Kanaksprak. In the zone of interference in the big cities, where the streams of migrants flow along the residential areas of the local populations, a new sound can be heard more and more, a new language, new gesture. It is cool, it works with understatement, sets itself off from what is generally understood, but is as international as MTV, on whose stock of signs the new languages have drawn: Kanaksprak (Turkish German) in Germany, Kurdish Swedish in Stockholm, Maghrebish on the outskirts of Paris. Everywhere in Europe, there are sources of new dialects, laboratories for new languages and idioms.

Drifting dunes of plastic rubbish. In the night train from Sofia to Bucharest. The soil in Romania is somehow always black, pitch black – because that really is the colour of the soil here, or because there is such a depressing atmosphere. The sun rises, but does not glow. It has more the character of a chemical reaction, when substances form a compound and everything liquefies. Bucharest lies behind the dunes of plastic waste that the wind blows over. They bury everything beneath them, and like those black birds, ravens, or crows – I can't tell the difference – hovering above the ravaged fields, they are carried along. The rubbish, the plastic waste: It is sticky, insoluble. It is tough, stronger, and lives longer than human beings, it lasts beyond death, something that is hard to grasp. It deposits itself takes firm root everywhere. We pass

through a district of industrial plants that have been closed down or are just run-down. They resemble carcasses, with broken windows that nobody will ever repair. They will simply be left standing there in the landscape. In their entirety, they will rust, fall into disrepair, collapse, and be covered in dust and ashes. Has there ever been a landscape that has suffered such neglect and dilapidation? The post-socialist era is buried under the dunes of rubbish, plastic refuse, of chemical and nuclear “waste”. Society scarcely has the strength to fight this new kind of rubbish, which is non-perishable, non-biodegradable. People have not yet understood that these are not sunflower seeds, which you simply spit out on to the ground. It is a foreign, hostile, hard, tough substance that will require tremendous strength and resources to remove. The wind drives the waves of plastic waste in front of it towards Bucharest, like the wind drives the sand dunes on the shore.

Third language. Lingua franca. The third language, which holds everything together, is English, an English that has been parsimoniously reduced to a pathetic, yet indispensable minimum. People from neighbouring countries who don't speak or understand each other's language convey the bare essentials to each other in English. The third language helps them communicate when they don't have anything else to say to each other. In a way, it replaces Yiddish, which has been eradicated, German, which was brought into disrepute by the German master race and removed from circulation as a consequence, Russian, which, despite Pushkin and Tolstoi, was after all the language of the occupiers. English has replaced Latin, which held Europe together in the early modern age. Its dissemination is worked on daily, hourly, weekly, minute by minute: *CNN, Moscow Times, Baltic Independent, Prague*

Post; hotel receptions, airport announcements, safety instructions in planes, the language of cash machines. The universe speaks English, the European one, too.

Codes, sound. Towards the end of the 20th century, new sounds could be increasingly heard, sounds that would never again fall silent, namely the humming of the computer, the clicking of the keyboard, when a number is keyed in on the mobile phone, the standard text of the mailbox. With them came a new language, which older people have to learn and younger people, above all the youngest ones, pick up on the side, as if automatically. They are conversant with the procedure of logging on, the way you answering the machine whenever you come into contact with it.

Eurolille, the new city connected to the tunnel. The tunnel under the Channel has made London and Paris neighbours, and Euralille is both a stopover and a side trip. The architect Rem Koolhaas designed the new station, around which a new town is rising. That is how it has always been in Europe. For example, when a new bridge was built over a river, when a new mountain pass was opened, when a new caravan route was established: Again and again, towns were founded. Others fall into ruin, fade away. Among the new towns in Europe since 1989 are Narva on the Estonian-Russian border, Kalvarija on the Lithuanian-Polish border, Ruse at the bridge over the Danube between Romania and Bulgaria, Rostov-on-Don at Russia's new southern border, and the container cities on the Finnish-Russian border.

Brussels's anthropology. Brussels is a name, but also a place. Brussels really exists. It is one of the capitals of the

new Europe. Brussels has become home to thousands and thousands of Europeans. Anybody who has lived and worked there leaves the city a changed person. He does not find it easy to cope in the smaller world outside Brussels. He sees the world in a different light. For him, the world has grown smaller. He cultivates bi- or even trilingualism, where others are trapped in their mother tongue. He has understood the procedures you have to understand in an organisation where 25 states have been joined together. Procedural knowledge. Knowledge about the channels through which something can be got under-way. Brussels is said to be enchanting – in some parts. It is the city of Victor Horta, the legendary Palace of Justice, and many other things. But what we need above all, if we want to understand Europe as it continues to grow, is a field study, an anthropology of Brussels that is the result of participatory observation and detached analysis. Brussels is Europe in miniature. We look forward to what this city has to reveal.

St. Petersburg/Baden-Baden. Festival Europe. Baden-Baden has a new festival theatre. It will have to be used in order to be profitable. Baden-Baden has become a festival venue with a catchment area that stretches from Zurich to Luxembourg, from Nancy to Frankfurt am Main, from Stuttgart to Basel. In Baden-Baden, the St. Petersburg musicians of the Mariinskii Orchestra, under star conductor Valery Gergiev, are very frequent and most welcome guests. By setting a new tempo and bringing new renown to St. Petersburg, Gergiev has delivered the city on the Neva of its provincialism. He has linked the city again to the international festival circuit, where the star conductors hold sway. The Russians in Salzburg, at the Met, in Covent Garden, and in Berlin. And vice versa: Pierre Boulez in Moscow,

Riccardo Muti in St. Petersburg. The Europeanisation of the festival circuit is complete. Europe is once again where it was around 1900: Richard Strauss in St. Petersburg, Gustav Mahler in Budapest, and Diaghilev in Paris.

Love Parade. The car number plates that can be seen along the main axis of the Berlin district Tiergarten the night before the Love Parade come from all over Germany, but also from far afield: Poznań, Wrocław, Gdańsk, Szczecin, Katowice, Cracow, Warsaw. Young people have also come by bus from Riga, Kaunas, Vilnius, Prague, Amsterdam. The sound, the euphoria, the parties that ensue that night. Everything that belongs to it: the outfits, the jargon, the cult. The Love Parade experience crosses borders. In the minds of those who experienced it in the 1990s, it will be an essential part of their personal history. The young people who came from far away keep to themselves. It doesn't really matter whether the Parade takes place in Zurich, Cologne, or Vienna. The pleasure in moving your body, having fun with slogans, being prepared to go until you drop, working off aggression, everywhere the same thing: Dionysos is back in the cities.

Planet Moscow. Again and again, Moscow takes even the regular visitor's breath away. You are unable to keep up, you can't catch up. The towers are growing up into the sky at a semi-annual rhythm. Like streams of lava, the cars surge through streets once disproportionately wide, but now unable to cope with the traffic. Stalin's high-rise buildings have rivals, but at night, when they are lit up, they shine like Cesar's Palace on the Strip in Las Vegas. It is no wonder that the decision to build the Tower of Russia, the tallest building in Europe, has already been made. Only the frenzy of demolition, the orgy of destruction, can

keep pace with the building boom. Icons of Moscow's architectural history have already fallen prey to it: the Manege beside the Alexander Garden, the art nouveau department store *Voentorg*, Shchusev's Hotel Moskva from the 1930s. Nobody knows how it was possible that, within the shortest time, entire streets, entire districts have been restored, renovated, illuminated. However, it is no illusion; it is a fact. Nobody knows how it came to be that there are so many luxury limousines rolling through the city, but they do – indisputably and not for advertising purposes. Moscow, the old, grey, yellowish-grey city has become flashy and colourful. Once the town of queues, Moscow has become incredibly fast-moving. It has become as expensive as London or Tokyo, and you wonder both here and there how you can exist or even survive. But 12 million people do so without trouble flaring up. Moscow has effortlessly synchronized the different times that converge here: that of the provinces, which percolate into the city by train in the shape of migrant workers and that of global players, CNN, and plastic money. But Moscow is closer to London than to Kostroma or Tula. Granted, there is still Moscow time, which differs from CET by one hour, and from GMT by two. However, Moscow's clocks are not slower than those in Berlin or Paris, if anything more hectic. Moscow is the planet that has taken off and left Russia behind. Moscow has entered the 21st century, while beyond it, the vast country cannot keep up and is perhaps falling back into the 19th century.

New landmarks. Has the new Europe produced buildings that have become or could become, as it were, symbols, icons of a new beginning, of a happy end to a by and large catastrophic century? I cannot think of any such building. The millennium buildings were all somehow contrived,

fanciful and capricious edifices. There is the Guggenheim Museum by Frank Gehry in Bilbao, the Bibliothèque Nationale and the Centre du Monde Arabe in Paris, the Olympia Stadium in Athens, and a parliament building in Strasbourg – but you would be hard put to it to say that they mark a turning-point, an end, or a beginning. It is a different matter with those silhouettes that have given entire cities a new appearance: the growing skylines in Frankfurt am Main and London, the tower blocks in the centre of Warsaw that hem in and thus restrain Stalin's Palace of Culture and Science, the new high-rises in Vilnius and Riga, and also the pinnacles and towers on Potsdamer Platz in Berlin. There are also reconstructions and new buildings: the massive dome on the Cathedral of Christ the Redeemer has altered the Moscow skyline; the Church of Our Lady in Dresden; the Gresham Palace on Roosevelt Square in Budapest, which gleams in its new splendour; the newly restored National Library in Sarajevo. But a building of the kind that heralded the 20th century – Gustav Eiffel's tower built for the Paris World Fair – 100 years on Europe has not managed to produce anything like that.

The skyline of Tallinn/Reval. Since Estonia has become an independent and free country, you can approach its capital not only by rail or air but also by sea on one of the hourly ferries from Helsinki. Since Estonia has become one of the boom countries of post-Soviet capitalism, new tall buildings are shooting up. The silhouette made up of the Church of St. Olai, the Town Hall tower, and the towers on Cathedral Hill has been expanded in the last ten years by new towers: hotels, office blocks, but above all banks. They are being put up in increasing numbers in the new district, where the Viru and Olympia hotels were built in

the Soviet era. Now, however, a sort of Tallinn City is emerging, whose buildings have reflecting glass panels, asymmetrical façades, aerial masts on top, silver exteriors, and at night, phosphorescent lighting. It is another town. From the end of the Middle Ages, Reval had a silhouette that was finished and fixated. Only once was a monumental landmark erected, namely the Alexander Nevsky Cathedral on Cathedral Hill, where it still stands today, hated by many as a symbol of Russian-Soviet rule, accepted by others as an additional attraction in the somewhat monotonous hues of the northern Hanseatic town. But now, there are the towers, from whose heating and air-conditioning systems clouds of steam ascend in the winter, a touch of the City of London. Entry into the century of high-rise building. It suits Tallinn, and it is only a continuation of the outline of St. Olai's towers.

Weather map. The newspapers and evening television provide detailed weather reports, with information on temperatures, wind direction, and humidity at important locations in Europe and beyond. Naples, Istanbul, Kiev, Glasgow, Helsinki. That is the sort of information that only a reading and viewing public which is one place today and somewhere else tomorrow needs to know. Formerly, during the Cold War, when Europe was still divided, the continent was depicted in its entirety only on the weather map. Now the weather map depicts a Europe that can be reached, a Europe within one's grasp.



Berlin, Potsdamer Platz. Photo: Thorsten Klapsch

Berlin. Europe's Pleasure Ground. Somehow or other, Berlin is not complying with the plans for the future as conceived by those responsible for running the city, i.e. the fulcrum of Europe, the interface of unification, the heart of Europe. Berlin has a mind of its own and is doing its own thing. There is a lot to be said for it becoming the favoured recreation area in Europe, Europe's Pleasure Ground. Berlin is spacious. The streets are wide. There is room for everybody. Parking is not a problem. You need have no qualms about getting around town. There is a big, open sky because roof heights are regulated, which means the horizon is not restricted.

There is enough of everything: streets, parks, lakes, living space, footpaths, pubs, street cafes, space between the houses. There are three opera houses, three first-class symphony orchestras, several first-class theatres, museums in abundance. The air has become better since factories have closed down. Berlin is no longer an industrial city.

The city is still busy filling the empty spaces produced by a regime, a war, and a long period of division. That is why you find things in the middle of this city, a national capital, that are unaffordable elsewhere. A sandy beach in the summer in the middle of the government quarter, gardens, fallow, unused land (which, in other towns, would be choc-full of cars), plans for golf courses (where three underground lines once crossed). Above all: lakes that can be reached within 20 minutes, concert halls that you can get to by bicycle. Berlin is one of the few major cities that can afford the luxury of turning its centre into a playground in the summer. No weekend goes by without the town centre being closed off for purposes of entertainment: the Carnival of Cultures, Love Parade, Christopher Street Day, the Berlin Marathon, the Kurfürstendamm as

catwalk, the Museum Island as an open-air cinema, fireworks on Pariser Platz.

Everything takes place at a central location where otherwise state visitors are to be seen. Here, there are pubs that know no closing time, boats that glide along canals and waterways. "Cinemas and Pubs", "Pleasure and Wellbeing" take up most of the city magazines. Moreover, in comparison with other cities such as London or Moscow, Berlin is dirt-cheap. The budget airlines have long since discovered Berlin. Anybody dissatisfied with Berlin's broad expanse can go out into the surrounding countryside in Brandenburg. In half an hour, you are out in a deserted landscape. You are not even far from the sea. Usedom calls itself Berlin's bathtub. In the summer, Ahlbeck, Kühlungsborn, Swinemünde and Misdroy become Berlin suburbs. Berlin has something for young people who have had enough of other German towns, but also for older people, pensioners, and retired diplomats who want to be as close to the opera, the political brain trust, the foundation, as to a lakeside restaurant. You never feel bored in Berlin, which is in the process of becoming a 21st century theme park with filled-in tunnels, deserted railway tracks, topographies of terror, scenes of horror real and staged.

Ambulances. Moscow, Istanbul, Madrid. On the map of Europe, which is being redrawn, new symbols are appearing. War is returning to the towns and cities. Explosions, signs of fire, shock waves. Close by, marksmen and explosives experts have taken up position. Armoured vehicles. Armed men in black. The districts where it has occurred are sealed off. Ambulances and fire engines race towards the scene, blue lights flashing, sirens wailing. A façade has collapsed. The window panes in the surrounding area have been blown out onto the street, which is now covered in

glass splinters. Beside the briefcase, a torn-off hand. Passers-by running away, clutching their bleeding heads. Others are being led away. In the street lie corpses. The beams of headlights. Pictures being taken from a helicopter. Railcars ripped apart, burnt-out trains in the lit-up underground tunnel. A picture taken by the surveillance camera on the station platform. The places have names: Antocha in Madrid, the Northeast Musical Theatre in Moscow, the British Consulate in Istanbul, a school in Beslan. In this way, a new map of Europe is being drawn.

Anniversaries. Synchronisation. Europe is growing old. Europe is growing old together. Divided Europe celebrated its anniversaries against each other, after 1989 Europe celebrates together. Anniversaries and commemorations – the liberation of Auschwitz, the anniversary of Stalin's death, the Uprising in East Germany, the Warsaw Uprising, the landing of the Allies on Omaha Beach, the beginning of the war, the end of the war. The anniversary celebrations for the great Europeans are more pleasant: Mozart. Erasmus. Dvořák. Gombrowicz.

The disappearance of the post, the disappearance of the letter. We are taking leave of an entire chapter of our culture, one based on the writing of letters. Even the most conscientious of us who have yet to abandon letter-writing now write e-mails, because they are quick, effective, efficient. They leave no traces, not even scraps of paper that can be put together again. Only whatever is suspicious is retained and saved by the institutions responsible for doing so and accordingly equipped. E-mails will change everything: how we think about proximity and distance, how we address others and send greetings, our notions of intimacy and discretion. It used to be that people did not trust the

post with their letters to Moscow or Warsaw. Contact was laborious. The letter was the form of communication between friends. A benchmark of commitment. E-mail is for general purpose communication. Complete strangers have access to it. The eastern countries have skipped the modernisation phase of the good old postal system. They have gone straight over to electronic post.

First names. Top-level family gatherings. Since the twilight of the 20th century statesmen, or at least a good many of them, have been on first-name terms. They address each other as Tony, Gerd, Jacques, Fred, Vladimir, Aleksander. They cultivate gestures of intimacy publicly: They take each other by the hand, pinch each other's upper arms, occasionally hug each other, exchange kisses. The kiss moved from east to west. Their wives and girlfriends also introduce themselves to one another, spend holidays such as Christmas together, something hitherto considered a family affair. They talk about how their children are turning out and how you prepare spaghetti. This has never happened before, except among the European aristocracy. But they were among themselves and kept it to themselves.

There is no substitute for Geneva. Geneva is a web of international relations. The whole town – the Palace of Nations, the museums, the hotels, the residences, the embassies – is geared to receiving the world, to negotiating problems of global proportions. Its raison d'être seems to consist of organising a location for purposes of mediation. Every third nameplate is an indication of the city's international, global dimensions. The world seems to have taken up residence here, where it can dine in Turkish kebab restaurants, Lebanese and Thai restaurants. The

diplomacy of the 19th and early 20th centuries has been condensed in Geneva. What Geneva once was, is now to be found in the building on the East River in New York.

Black hole Belarus. There are places that have dropped out of the new Europe. They have lost time and strength. They are big, important, once vibrant cities, which, as a result of hate, self-imposed isolation, and finally war, have wasted away. Belgrade is a case in point, a city, once a gathering place for Europe, no longer recognisable. But this atrophy can also hit entire regions, countries, and states. It has happened to Belarus, even though the backbone of east-west traffic runs through it. There has been no knock-on effect from the radical changes that have taken place in neighbouring countries such as Poland, Lithuania, Ukraine, even Russia. Nor has there even been any sign of the regime easing off. Our picture of Europe would be incomplete and quite wrong if we were to close our eyes to the possibility, indeed, the existence of “black holes” in the middle of Europe.

Peregrinatio academica. Thirty years ago, studying abroad for a year was still the exception, the result of a specific effort made by a particularly energetic and cosmopolitan student. The European student exchange programmes with the European names Erasmus and Socrates have turned studying abroad into something that is taken for granted, a routine. Imperceptibly, unspectacularly, there has been a return to academic peregrination, which existed before the nation-state. Salamanca, Bologna, Heidelberg, Cracow, Tartu stand not for historical reminiscences or adventure, but are simply stations in an academic career.

Piazza Garibaldi, Naples – Central Station, Kiev. The busiest square in Naples, in front of the Stazione Centrale, is also the departure point for the long-distance coaches. From the heart of Naples, the journey goes direct, non-stop, to Przemyśl, Katowice, Lublin, and on to the Baltic states. There is a daily direct connection to Kiev via Zhytomyr and a daily flight from Naples to L'viv (Lemberg, Lwów). You realise how close Ukraine is, above all, the western region of Galicia, when, in the alleys near the Via Tribunali, you hear snatches of Ukrainian in the evening or, on the church portals, you are invited to take part in Uniate Rite services. There are also Ukrainian kindergartens. That shows that Ukrainians have long since settled in Naples. Similar observations can be made in nearly all other large West European cities, for example, at the Central Bus Station in Hamburg or the Radio Tower in Berlin. In the evening, dozens of buses stand ready for departure. The Great Migration has long been underway, and nobody can stop or reverse it. Europe has long since become a continent of commuters and migrants.

Translated from German by John Kerr, Langen, Hessen