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**Representing EU through national stereotypes
Analysis of Czech sculpture "Entropa"**

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Declaration

I, Stella Ghea hereby declare that this thesis, entitled “Representing EU through national stereotypes: Analysis of Czech sculpture ‘Entropa’”, submitted as partial requirement for the MA Programme Euroculture, is my own original work and expressed in my own words. Any use made within it of works of other authors in any form (e.g. ideas, figures, texts, tables, etc.) are properly acknowledged in the text as well as in the List of References.

I hereby also acknowledge that I was informed about the regulations pertaining to the assessment of the MA thesis Euroculture and about the general completion rules for the Master of Arts Programme Euroculture.

Signed

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Preface

Stereotypes are still a persistent phenomenon. From this point of view, the actual European climate in search for more political and cultural solidity offers a paradoxical scenario, where ambitions of unity clash with the persistence of conceptions that falsely derived from stereotypes.

Following this considerations I decided to write about stereotypes. Since the beginning I wanted to unify my previous studies, namely the Czech language and culture, with my actual studies in the Master of Arts program Euroculture. Not so later, I found the ‘perfect topic’ during the semester I spent in Olomouc, where I got to know about “Entropa”, a Czech sculpture based on national stereotypes, created in occasion of the inauguration of the Czech Presidency of the EU Council.

I would like to thank all the people who helped me with this thesis. First of all, grateful thanks to my thesis supervisors, Dr. Nicola Strizzolo and Dr. Antonín Kalous, and to Dr. Gianluca Volpi for his contribution in subchapter 4.3. Deep gratitude must go to Mr. Maurizio Bait, Professor Václav Bělohradský, Mr. Gianpaolo Carbonetto, Professor Annalisa Cosentino, Mr. Alberto Garlini and Mr. Sebastiano Grasso for the extremely kind participation to this work.

Finally, special thanks to my family who have always supported me.

1. Introduction

Interest in studying stereotyping and prejudice comes in part from its immense practical importance. Many societies are becoming increasingly ethnically diverse, and technological advances are increasing global interaction, such that people from different cultures are coming into greater contact with each other. (Stangor 1)

In this world full of complexities and characterized by the overabundance of information that we have to face in our everyday life we tend to prefer pre-conceptions, superficial assessments, and simplistic explanations. Stereotypes clearly belong to this kind of cognitive method, though absolutely not objective, which thus do not permit to see the reality and consequently its complexity.

In my thesis I propose to explore the topic of stereotyping in the sculpture *Entropa – Stereotypes are barriers to be demolished*¹, which was created by the Czech artist David Černý and presented in Brussels in January 2009, on occasion of the inauguration of the Czech Presidency of the EU Council. The purpose of the artwork was to represent the EU member states through national stereotypes. The artifact undoubtedly distinguishes itself by two main reasons: on the one hand, by the peculiarity of its depictions, certainly due to the typical extravagance, which characterizes David Černý's works; on the other hand, by the great scandal that followed the unveiling of the sculpture, which could permit to use the expression “the case of Entropa”. The installation in fact provoked Internet discussions, caused two official protests and inspired at least two civic petitions that were launched by its supporters².

Although it was declared since the beginning that Entropa would have been an ironical representation of the EU, all the reactions toward the sculpture and its creator revealed a general lack of the sense of humor. The prevailing of humorless reactions is due to the problematic question of the artwork's authorship, which turned into a

¹ A picture of the whole artwork can be found at page 28 in *figure I*. A list of images represented in Entropa can be found as annex to this thesis.

² More information at page 33.

sensational hoax – the scandal thereof –, since the Czech artist chose to bypass an important condition of the original contract, which clearly stated that the project had to be a collaboration of 27 EU artists, and decided to create the sculpture by his own.

The aim of the thesis is to verify if Entropa can be considered as a mirror of the European Union and European culture.

In the first part of the thesis (Chapter 2) I examine the concept of stereotyping through an overview of some of the main theories. The formal study of the process of stereotyping started in the twentieth century, precisely in 1922, when the American journalist Walter Lippmann first coined the term stereotype in its modern sense and introduced it into the field of the social sciences. In his book *Public Opinion* (1922) he defined stereotypes as ‘pictures in our heads’. He stated that “what each man does is based not on direct and certain knowledge, but on pictures made by him or given to him. If his atlas tells him that the world is flat he will not sail near what he believes to be the edge of our planet for fear of falling off. [...] The way in which the world is imagined determines at any particular moment what men will do. It does not determine what they will achieve. It determines their effort, their feelings, their hopes, not their accomplishments and results” (Lippmann). In other words, according to Lippmann our relationship with the reality is not direct, but mediated by these pictures, which are often rigid simplification, as well as stereotypes. Lippmann individuated in the media a primary source for the creation of these pictures, and thus of stereotypes, since in those years the mediatic system was gaining more and more importance in the formation of public knowledge.

An interesting and complete study on the process of stereotyping is offered by the professor Charles Stangor in the book *Stereotypes and Prejudice: Essential Readings*, consisting of an overview of the main researches and theories on this social phenomenon. As for the vastness of the readings proposed, I decided to consider only the classic theories³. Since the beginning Stangor underlines the importance of Allport’s study in *The nature of prejudice* (1954). Allport argued that stereotyping is a process of social categorization: each person possesses a “normal and natural tendency to form generalizations, concepts, categories, whose contents represent an oversimplification of his [or her] world experience. [...] One type of categorization that predisposes us

³ With regards to this part, I focused in particular on Allport’s and Tajfel’s studies.

especially to make unwarranted prejudgments is our personal values” (Allport 30-31). Personal values are the starting-point of another very important theory developed in later years by Henri Tajfel, who formulated the Social Identity Theory, cited in Stangor as well: belonging to and identifying with a social group is a very relevant element for one person’s pride and self-esteem. In this sense, we have the tendency to group people together in order to understand them better, so that we divide the world into us (in-groups) and them (out-groups). The categorization causes two main effects: first, the exaggeration of the differences with what we perceive as out-groups and of the similarities in our in-group; secondly, the over-evaluation in positive of the group we belong to.

Chapter 3 focuses on the concept of national stereotypes. It is a particular form of stereotypes, which I decided to explain as for their in Entropa. The content of the chapter mainly refers to Geert Hofstede’s manual *Culture’s Consequences* (2001), which consists in a research project that aimed to explore the cultural differences through the collection of data within the IBM multinational company. According to Hofstede, national stereotypes derive from the so called ‘national character’, a concept that emerged already in the eighteenth century, when philosophers such as Hume, Montesquieu and Kant perceived the existence of “the national genius and character [...] as expressive of a collective unity and uniqueness” (Pickering 94). The idea of nation and national belonging undoubtedly acted as a background for this concept. In the early twentieth century also anthropologist started to focus their interests on ‘national character’, defined as “relatively enduring personally characteristics and patterns that are modal among adult members of the society” (Inkeles and Levinson, quoted in Hofstede 13).

In Chapter 4 the focus lies on the analysis of the sculpture Entropa. I begin with some general feedback, explaining how the art project started and finally took shape. I describe then what happened after the unveiling of the artwork, meaning the reactions and the authorship’s question, which turned to be a huge hoax. The last part of the chapter is entirely dedicated to the analysis of the national stereotypes depicted in the sculpture.

In order to achieve the goal of this thesis, I decided to use a qualitative research method. As already mentioned, the aim is to answer to the following questions: is

Entropa a truthful mirror of the European culture? Do stereotypes in Entropa represent how we perceive the EU member states? In order to do so, I decided to make a survey by proposing few questions on the topic to a target group, composed by professors, writers and intellectuals, chosen for their highly-esteemed works and experiences, which are considered to be relevant in the actual cultural scenario in Europe. The interviews were collected between November 26th 2009 and February 24th 2010. All the interviews were conducted in Italian language in the traditional face-to-face format, except from one case, which comes from an e-mail exchange. I then translated them as accurately as possible. The interviews are attached in Chapter 5.

From the answers collected I developed my analysis, using the approach of visual sociology and focusing on the importance of the context for the understanding of visual works such as Entropa. I finally made my comments and conclusions.

2. The concept of stereotyping

If we are asked to give a definition of the concept of stereotyping, to some extent we are all able to explain the meaning of the term, despite of our good or bad knowledge on the topic itself. One possible definition could lead us to associate the term stereotype with the term of prejudice, since both terms are very often used indifferently and interchangeably. It is true that both terms are preconceptions that usually suggest a negative meaning and that they commonly refer to minorities, to ethnical groups, or, in general, to groups that one person's mind perceive as the "other", the "different", producing a consequential discriminatory behavior. In this sense both terms create "a sense of illusion of precision in defining and evaluating other people" (Pickering 4). However it is necessary to make a distinction between the two terms. According to Stangor:

Stereotypes are beliefs about characteristics of groups of individuals (for instance, that women are emotional or that college professors are absentminded), and *stereotyping* is the application of these stereotypes when we interact with people from a given social group. *Prejudice* is a negative feeling or a negative attitude toward the members of a group". (1)

In other words, while prejudices are generally negative assessments, stereotypes can also have a positive connotation.

We could also define stereotypes as categories. However stereotypes are not necessarily categories: "[s]tereotyping may operate as a way of imposing a sense of order on the social world in the same ways as categories, but with the crucial difference that stereotyping attempts to deny any flexible thinking with categories" (Pickering 2-3). Therefore, stereotypes are not flexible and they are generally fixed, while categories are not fixed for all time and could change.

The wide bibliography written around this concept reveals the importance that stereotypes still have in the contemporary period. Many and many scholars dedicated themselves to the study of the process of stereotyping, considering it as a social, psychological or cultural phenomenon.

The aim of this chapter is to define the concept of stereotyping through an overview of some classic studies and theories, starting from the first modern formulation on stereotypes. From the characteristics outlined, I conclude with a brief summary about the main features of stereotypes and stereotyping.

2.1 Walter Lippmann

The original meaning of the term ‘stereotype’ comes “from the trade vocabulary of printing and typography, where it referred to text cast into rigid form for the purposes of repetitive use” (Pickering 9). Etymologically, it derives from Greek *στερεός* (*stereós*), meaning rigid, and *τύπος* (*týpos*), meaning impression, mark. The study of stereotyping as a social phenomenon was inaugurated by the American journalist Walter Lippmann, who first coined the term stereotype in its modern sense and introduced it into the field of the social sciences. In the book *Public Opinion* (1922) he stated that:

[w]e shall assume that what each man does is based not on direct and certain knowledge, but on pictures made by himself or given to him. If his atlas tells him that the world is flat he will not sail near what he believes to be the edge of our planet for fear of falling off. [...] If someone digs up yellow dirt that looks like gold, he will for a time act exactly as if he had found gold. The way in which the world is imagined determines at any particular moment what men will do. It does not determine what they will achieve. It determines their effort, their feelings, their hopes, not their accomplishments and results. (Lippmann)

According to Lippmann the process of stereotyping belongs to this indirect and uncertain knowledge, and has an important influence in the perception of the world. Lippmann conceived the media as the primary source in the creation of stereotypes, since the “[m]edia stereotyping was one of the specifically modern political problems which he dealt with” (Pickering 17). The influence of the media is in fact defined as a “serious problem in opinion formation and reproduction”, since public knowledge depends on media information and representations, which therefore are assumed to be reliable mirrors of the complexities of the world. Therefore a central problem emerges

when public knowledge is manipulated by the media, not necessarily because of “any malevolent plan”, but because “for sound, for commercial reasons”, etc. (Pickering 18).

On the basis of this view, Pickering acknowledged in Lippmann’s writings two contradictory perspectives on stereotyping, summarized in the following statement:

We are told about the world before we see it. We imagine most things before we experience them. And those preconceptions, unless education has made us accurately aware, govern deeply the whole process of perception. (Lippmann)

On the one hand, Lippmann identified an ‘authority perspective’ of stereotypes: they are formulated by others, so that they are inadequate because of the subjectivity of the person who creates them and uses them. In other words, stereotypes are biased and not rational. If we find ourselves in front of an unfamiliar situation, a new scenario, our behave is not that of seeing first, and then define, but we define first and then see, so that “[i]n the great blooming, buzzing confusion of the outer world we pick out what our culture has already defined for us, and we tend to perceive that which we have picked out in the form stereotyped for us by our culture” (Lippmann). The assimilation of information here clearly involves a loss, since the definiteness of the new and unfamiliar scene depends on the selection of some other person (i.e. the journalist who narrates an event), who introduces and defines it.

On the other hand, there is the ‘order perspective’ that considers stereotypes as a form of ‘individualized understanding’: they are a necessary way of complexity-reducing process, which helps us to create order and make sense. Lippmann defined this sort of filter as the ‘pictures in our heads’.

To conclude, Lippmann argued that each person’s knowledge of the world outside is not direct, but it is mediated by the so called ‘pictures in our heads’, namely the stereotypes. The human mind needs to filter and simplify all the complexities of the world, either using an external, political perspective or using an individualized understanding. These pictures create a sort of pseudo-reality: when they refer to groups of people, these images mature the persuasion that each person of that group possesses the same characteristics, without any distinctions, as well as all printed copies of a newspaper derive from the same printing mark – the typographical stereotype – and have no differences.

2.2 Gordon Allport and The nature of prejudice

Another relevant study on the topic of stereotyping was realized by the Harvard professor Gordon Allport, well known also for his Scale of Prejudice, which offers a system of measurement of prejudice in societies, as well as for his Trait Theory. The book entitled *The nature of prejudice* (1954) is a fundamental work in the study of stereotypes, to the extent that many scholars still refer back to it. He first conceived stereotyping as a process of social categorization, or, as he called it ‘overcategorization’, which is normal and inevitable in the cognitive phase of individuals. As we can gather from the title, Allport mainly used the term ‘prejudice’, which we earlier distinguished from the term stereotype, since the former has only a negative connotation. The use of this term is connected to Allport’s definition of prejudice itself: it is in fact defined as “an antipathy based upon a faulty and inflexible generalization. It may be felt or expressed. It may be directed toward a group as a whole, or toward an individual because he is a member of that group” (Allport 23). His emphasis on ‘antipathy’ undoubtedly underlines the negativity of prejudice, which explains Allport’s focus on some extreme prejudices, such as those that produced the Holocaust and lynching episodes. The targets of his studies are social groups in general, taken as a whole, so that ethnic and religious prejudices are the primary points of his discussion. In sum, Allport’s emphasis on negativity “directed the field toward types of prejudice that produce exclusion and violence, but it distracted the field from other types of bias involving more subtle types of control and exploitation (e.g. affectionate paternalism)” (Dovidio 10).

As already mentioned, Allport argued that prejudgment is normal and inevitable in the process of social categorization:

The human mind must think with the aid of categories (the term is equivalent here to generalizations). Once formed, categories are the basis of normal prejudgment. We cannot possibly avoid this process. Orderly living depends upon it. (27)

Why then do we use categories? Why is categorization necessary? Allport identified the following five reasons:

1. “*Categorization forms large classes and clusters for guiding our daily adjustment*”: in our everyday life we usually face a huge amount of events and situations, and we need to “type” them into categories because “[w]e cannot handle so many events”, and also new events are redacted into old categories.

2. “*Categorization assimilates as much as it can to the cluster*”: in this sense, when we have a problem, we tend to put it into preexistent categories, so that we can “use this category as a means of prejudging the solution”, since “we like to solve problems easily”, with no big efforts.

3. “*The category enables us quickly to identify a related object*”: in order to know things and people better we classify them to “facilitate perception and conduct”.

4. “*The category saturates all that it contains with the same ideational and emotional flavor*”: this statement considers emotional prejudices. Sometimes categories are concepts we create from our own experience, so that in addition to what the category-concept means, there is also “a characteristic ‘feeling’”. For example, toward ethnic groups, we can have a feeling of favor or disfavor, according to our idea of that specific group.

5. “*Categories may be more or less rational*”: although categories originate from the so called ‘kernel of truth’, “irrational categories [...] are formed more easily, for intense emotional feelings have a property of acting like sponges”⁴.

In sum, Allport here acknowledged people’s normal tendency to use categories in order to organize their experiences, which inevitably lead to generalizations and oversimplifications, or in other words to prejudices.

Allport also focused on one particular type of categorization, based on personal values, which easily leads to divide the world into ‘us’ and ‘them’, into categories of ‘love-prejudice’ and ‘hate-prejudice’ (as Spinoza called them), into ‘*in-groups*’ and ‘*out-groups*’. He believed that the separation of people in human groups is a normal attitude, since “[e]verywhere on earth we find a condition of separateness among groups”, so that “[p]eople mate with their own kind” (Allport 26). The existence of in-groups and out-groups has been developed in later years by Henri Tajfel’s Social Identity Theory, which will be the focus of the following subchapter. Concerning Allport’s theory, he believed “[...] the most frequent sources [...] of prejudice lies in

⁴ These five reasons directly refer to Allport’s classification (27).

the needs and habits that reflect the influence of in-group memberships upon the development of individual personality” (quoted in Dovidio 54). Therefore, the division between in-groups and out-groups lays the foundation for the formation of prejudice. Belonging to and identifying with a social group, the in-group, is a very relevant element for one person’s pride and self-esteem; it is “vitally important to individual survival”, it creates a “web of habits”, and we do all prefer “the familiar” (Allport 39). From this statement we could deduce that in-group membership and loyalty imply a corresponding negative attitude towards unfamiliar out-groups. Allport however underlined that in-group attachment does not necessarily involve hostile and antagonistic behaviors toward out-groups, though this is only a ‘happy condition’, since it is matter of fact that many people are worried about out-groups and they assume an attitude of rejection, which he explained through a three steps gradation: verbal rejection (antilocution), discrimination (including segregation), and physical attack, and each stage is dependent from the previous: “there is never a bite (discrimination) without a previous barking (antilocution)” (Allport 43).

In conclusion, these are the main points of Allport’s discussion. With his studies, Allport intentionally laid the foundations of prejudice researches, hoping that later scholars would have used his book as a starting point for further elaborations. He actually anticipated two important theories: firstly, in trying to identify a solution to the problem of stereotyping, he outlined the “effect contact” that later has been formulated as the Contact Hypothesis: it briefly states that there should be a sort of monitored contact between the groups in order to put the images of the other into a right perception and thus reduce bias. Similarly, Allport observed that: “[p]rejudice [...] may be reduced by equal status contact between majority and minority groups in the pursuit of common goals. The effect is greatly enhanced if this contact is sanctioned by institutional supports” (quoted in Dovidio 9). This contact finally will lead “to the perception of common interests and common humanity between members of the two groups” (quoted in Dovidio 9). He both distrusted and believed in social interventions: on the one hand, they could mature the ‘fear of the strange’, but on the other hand, interventions such as education programs, parental influence, peer pressure, and laws, could be important ways of reducing prejudice.

Secondly, Allport’s division between in-groups and out-groups inspired the so called Social Identity Theory by Tajfel and Turner, which I will consider in the following subchapter.

2.3 Henri Tajfel and the Social Identity Theory

A deep study on stereotyping as a process of categorization was developed by the Polish Jewish Henri Tajfel. His personal life experiences motivated him to dedicate much time to psychology and in particular to stereotypes, trying to understand how this phenomenon works. He experienced in person the tragedy of the Second World War, although the Nazi never discovered that he was a Jew. In fact at the outbreak of the war he was in France and was called up into the French army. A year later, the Germans captured Tajfel and he spent the whole war period in different camps for prisoners. He survived the war, while his family was entirely exterminated by the Nazi. After the war he began to focus his studies on the human behavior, constantly preoccupied by a question: how is genocide possible? His intention was to identify the conditions of the process of stereotyping.

Tajfel argued that stereotypes derive from the process of social categorization. What is then social categorization? He intended it as:

the process of ordering the environment in terms of categories, i.e., through grouping persons, objects, and events as being similar or equivalent to one another in their relevance to an individual's actions, intentions, or attitudes. [...] The categorization of incoming information is thus a basic human characteristic. [...] [Categories] affect our perception and interpretation of incoming information. (Tajfel and Forgas 49)

However Tajfel's discussion went beyond the consideration of categorization as a mere cognitive process for the classification and systematization of the outsider world. From his analysis a new aspect emerged, that is the importance of values that he indicated as the 'normative aspect' of social categorization, which is thus "subject to the pressures and distortions of the rich and variegated culture within which it arises" (Tajfel and Forgas 50). In this sense, we order and therefore categorize events, objects and people in terms of values, "*preferences*", rather than in terms of "*factual criteria*", and this determines our behavior, our "social action".

Values influence also, and maybe more importantly, the preservation of one person's categories. Because of this, social categories that originate from a

misunderstanding, from a wrong evaluation, are a problematic question, moreover because the mistake is influenced by one person's culture, and therefore it will be very hard to correct or abolish it.

The value dimensions of social categorization lay the foundation of group membership, already individuated by Allport. Tajfel reformulated this particular process in the so called 'Social Identity Theory'. He defined social identity as one person's "knowledge that he belongs to a certain social group together with some emotional and value significance of his membership" (Tajfel and Forgas 54). The process of social categorization is here involved in the sense that the individual's group membership creates a differentiation between his own group (the in-group) and the others (out-groups). This categorization causes two main effects: first, the over-evaluation in positive of the group the individual belongs to ("positive distinctiveness"); secondly, the exaggeration of the differences with what he perceives as out-groups and of the similarities in his in-group ("we are what we are because *they* are not what we are").

This distinction easily leads to the creation of stereotypes, which are "the most extensively studied examples of social categorization" (Tajfel and Forgas 57). According to Tajfel, stereotypes are first of all *shared beliefs* in a group of people, and have two major functions, cognitive and normative. Considering first the cognitive aspect of stereotyping, he examined some previous researches, which identified an interaction between social categorization and memory. Thus, stereotyping is the result of "the subjective inflation or exaggeration of the significance of social events which either occur or co-occur with low frequency in the social environment" (Tajfel and Forgas 57). In other words, individuals better remember infrequent events and infrequent people. This is why "*negative* behaviors of members of *minority* groups are likely to be overrepresented in memory and judgment" (58). Tajfel acknowledged in this approach what has been defined by Chapman in 1967 as the 'illusory correlation', individuating a direct link between the earlier mentioned "exaggeration of the significance of social events [...] with low frequency" and the formation of stereotypes. In other words the illusory correlation leads us to see a relationship between two aspects that actually are not related, so that the relation is illusory.

Secondly, with the normative approach of stereotyping Tajfel reaffirmed that in the formation and maintenance of stereotypes the value-based influence detains an important task. Stereotypes are therefore a tool of protection of the existing system of values, and any "mistakes" are mistakes to the extent that endanger that system". In this

sense, stereotypes are value-based categories, which play “a particularly important role in the ideologization of various forms of collective action” (Tajfel and Forgas 58).

In sum, Tajfel believed that people use stereotypes, or in general social categorizations, to produce order and simplicity and thus to deal with the complexity of the surrounding environment. This happens not purely for cognitive needs, but also because of a normal value-based approach, which influences people’s perceptions of the outsider world. Furthermore values feed needs of group membership, which lead to perceive positively the in-group and negatively out-groups, a division that increases in time of high stress, social tensions, and could lead to acute conflicts.

2.4 Summary – Features and consequences of stereotypes

As already mentioned, the theories above outlined are considered as classic theories, though many others could be cited. From what proposed so far, it is now time to make the point of the issue and finally identify the main features of stereotypes, and the consequences they can produce.

Stereotypes are first of all shared beliefs, they are part of a system and group consensus detains a lead role in the formation and maintenance of stereotypes. This feature recalls the value-based influence identified by Tajfel: in other words, the surrounding environment, the culture of a group, shapes the individuals' social knowledge and social behavior toward the others. Culturally intended, stereotypes are “learned, transmitted, and changed through indirect sources – information gained from parents, peers, teachers, political and religious leaders, and the mass media” (Stangor 10).

Secondly, stereotypes are classically generalized and homogeneous: in this sense, some characteristics that refer to a group are homogeneously distributed to all individuals assigned to such group. We thus use labels that “distort the ways in which social groups or individuals are perceived, and they obscure the more complex and finite particularities and subjectivities tangled up in the everyday lives of groups and individuals” (Pickering 10). This feature refers to the complexity-reducing process that we need to go through for a better understanding of the world.

One last feature of stereotypes is rigidity, which underlines the fact that stereotypes can be very hardly eliminated, since they are deeply rooted in one group's culture.

If we consider the main consequences raised by the process of stereotyping, one first problem is directly connected to the feature of rigidity. Normally, a stereotyped image derives from a wrong and inaccurate thought, description or judgment, basically due to a mistake or a lack of information. Consequentially, as soon as we possess the right information, the former and wrong assessment should be abandoned and substituted with a new and more rational valuation. Unfortunately this happens very rarely. Despite the fact that a stereotype is confirmed as a wrong assessment, “there are always firm grounds for rectifying it” (Pickering 11). Social consensus also strongly

contributes to the maintenance of stereotypes. The provision of a new and correct information does not mean that some stereotypes will evaporate, because the “rigidity and resistance to information which contradicts them is undoubtedly one of their most salient features” (Tajfel, quoted in Pickering 12).

A further problem is the fact that social stereotypes are subject to modification in relation to definite needs of societies. According to this tendency, the division and separation between in-group and out-groups becomes more decisive. In this sense, stereotypes tend to change and become more noticeable and stronger when tensions among social groups come out (Pickering 12).

Finally, stereotyping involves the problem of simplicity. According to Perkins, this is an inner characteristic of stereotypes, “as all typifications are simplifications since they select common features and exclude differences” (quoted in Pickering 13). Concerning this aspect, there are some opinions that consider stereotypes both simple and complex, a question that involves huge difficulties in defining the reality – the so called kernel of truth – or non-reality of stereotypes. According to Pickering stereotypes “may thus be condemned because they are untrue and because they are true” (15). Their simplicity “can be overcome through the addition of sufficient information about the targeted categories”, however “[t]he provision of additional information [...] cannot be offered as a guarantee of the reality of what has otherwise been falsely represented. While the definition of that reality is always part of what is at stake in any construction of it, the necessary struggle over the meanings of cultural representations cannot depend on straightforward appeals to empirical truth outside the circuits of interpretation in which they are mediated and negotiated” (Pickering 15).

3. National character and national stereotypes

Stereotyping can be manifested through different forms: ethnic stereotypes, gender stereotypes, age stereotypes, national stereotypes, etc. With regards to the topic of this thesis, the focus will be on the last form. National stereotypes are the most flourish examples of the process of stereotyping. Very well known national stereotypes could be the following: Americans are overweight, French are arrogant and selfish, Italian are romantic and all belonging to the Mafia, etc. The list can be very long. But behind this façade, which could be simply ironical, national stereotypes sometimes are dangerous and negative assessments, and might cause exclusion.

3.1 Geert Hofstede and his research

The content of this chapter mainly refers to Geert Hofstede's manual *Culture's Consequences* (2001), which consists in a research project that aimed to explore the cultural differences in thinking and actions among members of more than 50 nations. His survey started from the collection of data within the IBM multinational company through questionnaires most of all about values. Without going into details, I will here consider only the theoretical issues proposed by Hofstede, which I believe important for the topic of this chapter.

Similarly to the scholars I mentioned before, Hofstede restated the fact that the human mind needs to organize somehow the complexity of the world. He called this kind of approach as 'mental programming' or 'software of the mind' (terms that recall Lippmann's 'pictures in our heads'). Mental programs influence our actions and our words, which become to be more or less predictable, since "we assume that each person carries a certain amount of mental programming that is stable over time and leads to the same person's showing more or less the same behavior in similar situations" (Hofstede 2). We do not directly observe to mental programs; however we can describe them through some models, called *constructs*, which are "a product of our imagination, supposed to help our understanding". In sum, we use mental programming because we

need “a simplified design for visualizing something too complex for us to grasp” (Hofstede 2). This kind of approach inevitably involves an element of subjectivity, which Hofstede distinguished in three different levels of mental programming:

1. the universal level, shared by all human kind;
2. the collective level, shared only by some, so that mental programs are “common to people belonging to the same group or category, but different from people belonging to other groups or categories”;
3. the individual level, where “no two people are programming exactly alike, not even identical twins reared together” (Hofstede 2).

The point of division among the three levels is very sharp and it depends on the way mental programs are acquired: in the universal level, mental programming is inherited, genetically transferred, and it is common to the whole human kind. At the individual level mental programs are partly inherited but they are mainly learned in a second moment of individual’s life. Concerning the collective level, our mental programming is mostly or all learned, more intensively when we are young, and in this process culture detains a lead role.

Here we find the linking point to the title of this chapter: Hofstede individuated in culture one of the main constructs in mental programming. Culture is in fact intended as “the *collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from another*” (Hofstede 9). In other words, the term culture here basically refers to national culture, which thus exists as an element of differentiation from another national culture.

Hofstede stated that national cultures are stable, in the sense that they developed themselves through patterns that permit the maintenance of stability. As illustrated in *figure 1*, there is a software of the mind in societies, detectable in common values, called societal norms.

Therefore, according to Hofstede:

[t]he societal norms have led to the development and pattern maintenance of institutions in society with particular structures and ways of functioning. These include the family, education systems, political systems, and legislation. These institutions, once established, reinforce the societal norms [...]. In a relatively closed society, such a system will hardly change at all. Institutions may be changed, but this does not necessarily affect the societal norms; and when these remain unchanged, the persistent influence of a majority value system patiently

smoothes the new institutions until their structures and way of functioning are again adapted to the societal norms. (11-12)

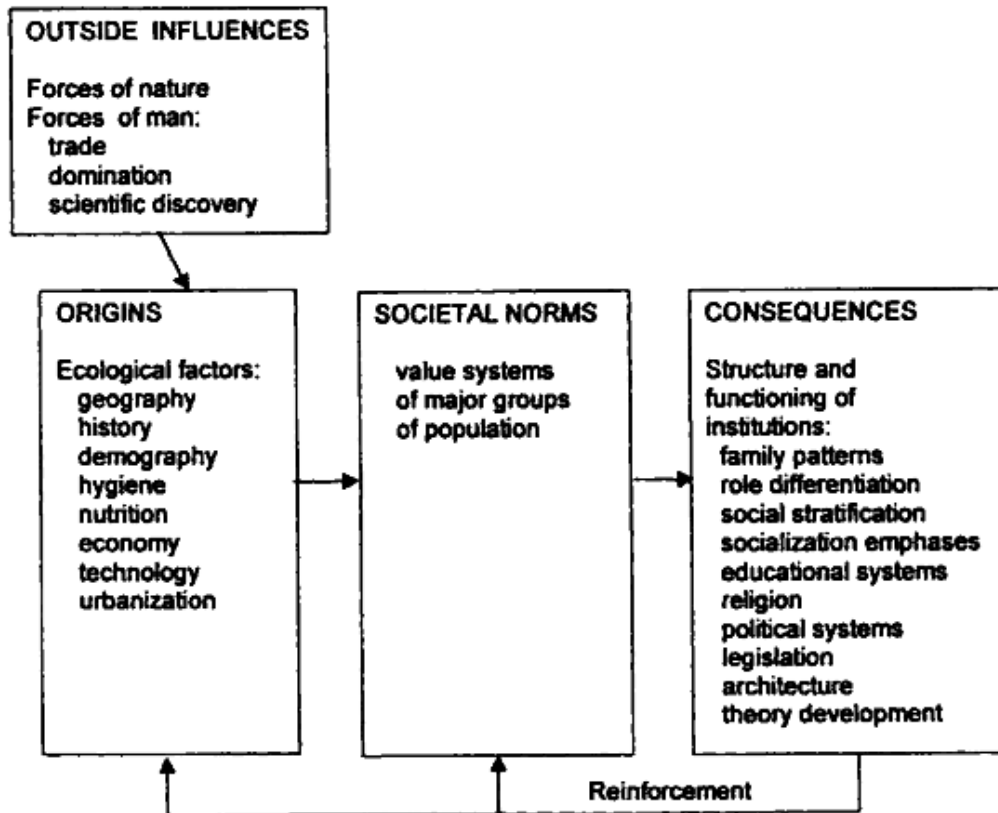


Figure 1. The Stabilizing of Culture Patterns (Hofstede 12).

From this considerations, we can thus identify differences and similarities among cultures in terms of the mechanism above described: cultures that derive from the same context and experiences, historically intended, have developed or will develop a similar culture pattern, whereas differences emerge where there is an element of variety.

3.2 From national culture to national stereotypes

National culture is a term that derives from the concept of ‘national character’, which emerged in the eighteenth century, when philosophers such as Hume, Montesquieu and Kant started to deal with the question of nation. The term was in fact used to indicate the idea of “national genius and character [...] as expressive of a

collective unity and uniqueness” (Pickering 94). The sense of national belonging undoubtedly acted as a background for this concept. Cohen stated:

Nationalism has profoundly shaped our belonging and the symbolic boundaries constructed around it. Nations of course have literal boundaries, where we have to show our passport and maybe a visa if we want to cross over them. [...] Symbolic boundaries are ways of demarcating what is perceived as different from ‘us’, in our relative sameness, and so of heightening ‘our’ sense of this sameness by appearing to provide a place for ‘our’ identity. (Quoted in Pickering 83)

In other words, the sense of sameness is characterized by what we believe is our ‘national uniqueness, exclusivity and integrity’ (Pickering 106), providing us a sense of stability. The national character is a sort of ‘imagined nation’, be it our nation, be it other people’s nation. In this sense, as we perceive our own nation as a unity, we act in the same way also towards foreign nations.

When we make a statement about an aspect of a population, ours or another, the statement should be proven by scientifically valid information. In order to do so, Hofstede indicated four criteria that permit to acknowledge as valid a statement: it must be descriptive and objective; it must derive from more than one source; it must be applied at least to the majority of the population; it discriminates, in the sense that “it indicates those characteristics for which this population differs from others” (Hofstede 14). If our statement does not meet these criteria, we have created an unsupported stereotype, or better to say, a national stereotype. We do often fall in this “trap”: our knowledge of other nations is often wrongly influenced by clichés, by the media or simply by incorrect information, so that it is easy, maybe too easy, to create distorted and stereotyped images. And here again we believe that each person of that nation possesses the same characteristics, attitudes and values (generalization), and that these features are stable and rigid. This is applicable when we make unsupported statements not only about others (*heterostereotypes*), but also about our own group (*autostereotypes*).

Nowadays the topic of the national characters or national cultures is very important in relation to the process of the EU integration and, in a wider perspective, “for better international understanding and cooperation” (Hofstede 15). In the following

statement, Pickering illustrates the paradoxical situation that we are facing at the present moment, where national-centric flows try not to blur broader and international objectives:

We live in an age of scurrying social and cultural change, and this increases the attraction of an illusory stability of identity and pattern of belonging. We also live in an age of international connections and interdependencies, but we still think in terms of nations, of 'our' own individual nation as opposed to others. (105)

The role of culture gains a significant importance in the formation of individuals: the meeting of two similar cultures will rarely cause problems; but there will be constantly an underlying hostility among totally different cultures.

With regards to this point, Giuseppe Mantovani in *L'elefante invisibile* (The invisible elephant) analyzes the cultural dimension of the Western society, which he describes as an invisible elephant, a metaphor taken from an Indian story:

The Sakuntala of Kalidasi, famous in Sanskrit literature, tells the story of an elephant standing in front of a meditating sage. The man looks at the animal and says: "That is *not* an elephant". Shortly afterwards, the elephant turns round and begins to move slowly away, while the sage wonders whether there might be an elephant nearby. The elephant finally disappears. At this point the sage sees the footprints left by the animal and declares: "There *was* an elephant here". (9-10)

The cultural dimension is therefore a symbolic system, as huge as an elephant, which holds up a specific society, and it is not visible if people do not know what to see. Culture is not only an elephant, meaning a massive system of symbols of one society, but it is also "the dragonfly which flits its transparent wings to accompany the tiny details of everyday life: a tit-bit of gossip about a friend, a witty joke, the use of a metaphor in a newspaper headline" (10). Culture's action is therefore hidden. Nevertheless, it is deeply anchored inside ourselves. It structures our thinking systems, it tells us which emotions to feel and when, it suggests us how to behave. However, the silent intense activity of cultures starts to be heard when worlds of different meanings come into contact. As a consequence, people start to misunderstand words, emotions, and behaviors.

Culture in this sense forms the core of one person's identity. Culture is received, it is transmitted either from our ancient fathers, either from groups of our society through very informal ways, such as gossips or satire. Cultural transmission becomes to be a real learning method, which influences the formation of ideas of the individuals of that culture, of that society. Therefore, people interpret events, situations and other people through preexistent categories, which are transmitted from the culture they live in. This phenomenon is known under the name of "framing effect", used in social sciences in order to explain this process, through which one person constantly refers to a schema of interpretation that directly derives from his or her culture.

Even prejudices and stereotypes can be part of one culture and consequently transmitted to individuals. As Mantovani argues, "our society often labeled as prejudice the way of thinking of people belonging to societies far from ours" ("L'elefante" 72), creating a never-ending confrontation between *The West* and *The Rest*. According to the cultural perspective, prejudice is a category of interpretation, which is influenced by the hostility and "antipathy" – in reference to Allport's definition – that one society has developed toward other groups in the course of time. It is clear that this aspect involves some risks, especially in this time where the existence of different cultures is part of our everyday life. As Mantovani states:

"[i]f we are not aware of this framing effect, we cannot realize that the perspective we adopt to examine a situation is not the only possible one, nor necessarily the best. The most serious case is that of someone who does not perceive that he or she is seeing from a particular point of view, but who is sure of seeing things just as they are. ("L'elefante" 87)

In this sense, individuals tend to see the world as they were "taught" to, without admitting any plausible alternative ways of seeing things. As Hofstede stated, "unlearning is more difficult than learning for the first time" (quoted In Onorati and Bracciale 13). And it is here that lays the great challenge of contemporary societies: each culture wants to explain facts, events, stories, but when we are in front of different stories and thus cultures, how we should behave? Mantovani suggests a very simple solution: we should listen for a while, until we have an approximate idea of the situation, and then we can say our opinion. This should be the "new frontier", that is "learning how to set aside time for reflection" and for meeting the other ("L'elefante"

236), keeping in my mind that “[s]ometimes a little humor is sufficient to bridge the gap” (117).

4. The case of Entropa

This chapter examines the sculpture *Entropa* (see *figure 2*), which was presented in occasion of the official inauguration of the Czech Presidency of the EU Council.⁵ I start with some general feedback about the sculpture, analyzing how the idea was born, developed and finally realized. Most of the information I collected come from newspapers, in particular from Czech newspapers, such as *Lidové Noviny*, *České Noviny*, which I consulted on-line, and web newspaper *iDNES*. The last part of the chapter is entirely dedicated to the analysis of the national stereotypes depicted in the sculpture.



Figure 2. Entropa in Brussels. Picture taken from David Černý's website.

⁵ For detailed images of each EU state represented see annex.

4.1. How the Entropa project started

It is a tradition that each member state of the European Union, which detains the Presidency of the EU Council, installs a decoration in the atrium of the Justus Lipsius building in Brussels. Therefore every six months we can see different decorations: in July 2008 France erected a large balloon in the French national colors, or, if we want to look at more recent experiences, in July 2009 Sweden opted for an exhibition of art and interior design, and decorated some areas of the building with raw wooden chairs and tables, and biologic wool handmade carpets that symbolize typical landscapes from Sweden, together with paintings and sculptures; while in January 2010, Spain presented a decoration, called "Travesías" (meaning crossings), which consists of a video installation made of a looping, flowing LED screen more than 30 meters long, which shows images of people walking or crawling along, with which Spain wanted to express the continual sense of movement, the profound territorial, economic and social changes that the EU has undergone in recent years.

In January 2009, by now more than one year ago, the Czech government inaugurated its six-month EU Presidency. In the following citation, the Czech Deputy Prime Minister Alexandr Vondra defines the main features that the decoration was supposed to have:

Since the very beginning we wanted our decoration to be creative. Creativity is a motor of progress and it is important: this is shown among others by the fact that 2009 is the European Year of Creativity and Innovation. At the same time we wanted the decoration to be an expression of artistic freedom in line with our motto a *Europe without Barriers*. (Vondra)

In the name of artistic freedom, creativity and innovation, there was no surprise that the Czech government chose to commission the realization of this art project to a very popular Czech sculptor: David Černý. Few words on the artist are needed. He was born in Prague in 1967 and he is very well known for his controversial and provocative creations. He became very famous in 1991 by painting in pink a Soviet tank, which was actually the Soviet War Memorial, a national monument at that time. Because of this

act, the artist was arrested, while the army repainted the tank in green. Few days later the Deputies of the Federal Assembly repainted it pink. Other very famous artworks are the “Dead horse”, realized in 1999, a parody of the statue of St. Wenceslas on Wenceslas square, Prague; in 2000 the crawling babies sculptures were attached on the pillar of the Television Tower in Prague; in 2005 he created “Shark”, an representation of Saddam Hussein in a tank of formaldehyde. This brief presentation is enough to understand that the Czech artist likes provocation and controversy. His production actually inserts itself into a particular mechanism of representing reality, called *culture jamming*.⁶

According to the original contract, which was signed exclusively with David Černý, the Czech artist together with other 26 EU artists (one artist per each member state) had to create a representation of the European Union, following the logic that each artist had to realize a stereotyped image of his or her respective home-country. In order to fulfill the Czech government motto and according to the commission itself, the sculpture, which was named “Entropa”, was subtitled *Stereotypes are barriers to be demolished*.

The Entropa project started to take shape in February 2008. Later in October an official booklet of the artwork, written in Czech, English and French, appeared in the website of the Czech government. In the brochure’s introduction David Černý himself writes:

This art project that originated on the occasion of Czech Presidency of the Council of the European Union attempts to present Europe as a whole from the perspectives of 27 artists from the individual EU Member States. Their projects share the playful analysis of national stereotypes as well as original characteristics of the individual cultural identities. (“ENTROPA”)

The main idea was basically that, although “Europe is unified by its history, culture and [...] by a jointly created political structure”, there is an underlying tendency to emphasize differences among the European countries. Therefore Entropa wants to represent this diversity with a sense of irony.

⁶ For further information see below at page 45, interview with Václav Bělohradský.

The official booklet provides a pre-view of what has later become a sort of puzzle: each page is dedicated to one EU country, where it was possible to see a drafted representation, sometimes supported by a brief description made by the respective artist. Above each draft also the artist's CV is included.

4.2. The unveiling of Entropa

The artwork was informally unveiled on 12th January 2009, revealing a huge mosaic, made of steel, approximately 256 square meters in area and weighing almost 8 tons, a work project that cost more than 300.000 Euros. Despite the fact that the official launch was scheduled for 15th January 2009, with the activation moving and multimedia components, Entropa immediately raised critical reactions and debates. On the one hand, the focus laid on the authorship's question; on the other hand, the focus laid on the sculpture itself and its representations. With regards to the first point of discussion, on 13th January the Czech newspaper Lidové Noviny pointed out that the names of the authors indicated in the official booklet do not exist – of course with the exception of David Černý – and also the Czech Deputy Prime Minister Alexandr Vondra announced that probably the artwork was created by a smaller group of people (Šafaříková). Very soon the truth came out and David Černý declared in his website as follows:

The original intention was indeed to ask 27 European artists for participation. But it became apparent that this plan cannot be realized, due to time, production, and financial constraints. The team therefore, without the knowledge of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, decided to create fictitious artists who would represent various European national and artistic stereotypes.

To sum up, Entropa was basically realized by Černý and other three co-creators⁷.

With regards to the second type of reactions, they concerned, as mentioned above, the representations themselves. The stereotyped images of the EU in Entropa did not provoke much enthusiasm among the member states. Two countries officially complained: Bulgaria, depicted as a 'Turkish' toilet, and Slovakia, depicted as a

⁷ The team was composed by David Černý, Tomáš Pospiszyl, Krištof Kintera and Libor Svoboda.

Hungarian sausage. As a consequence, the piece representing Bulgaria was covered, while Slovakia simply required for official excuses, without asking the removal of its depiction. On 15th January, Deputy Prime Minister for EU Affairs Alexandr Vondra officially apologized for the scandalous artwork, saying that:

Entropa is a provocation of a kind. I understand that some could feel offended and I would like to apologize to them. [...] We consider Entropa to be a piece of art. Nothing more, nothing less. I hope we can agree on this with the rest of the European family. We hope we will be able to laugh with you – not at you. (Vondra)

Apologies also from the artist David Černý:

We apologize to Prime Minister Mirek Topolánek, Deputy Prime Minister Alexandr Vondra, Minister Karel Schwarzenberg and their departments that we did not inform them of the true state of affairs and thus misguided them. We did not want them to bear the responsibility for this kind of politically incorrect satire. We knew the truth would come out. But before that we wanted to find out if Europe is able to laugh at itself. (David Černý)

The case, however, was not simply solved only by these formal apologies. Czech President Václav Klaus asked the government in a letter to ‘publicly disavow’ the artifact and the Czech government also accused David Černý for having not respected the original contract, which clearly stated that the project was meant to be an international collaboration of 27 EU artists. Already on January 14th 2009, the official Entropa presentation page was withdrawn from the Czech Presidency’s website.

Černý, who expected this reaction, decided to return back the state money he received for the art project. He declared that he never touched that money, knowing in advance that he had no intention to collaborate with other 26 EU artists. The project was however only partly financed by the state, which paid almost 2 million Czech crowns (approximately 80.000 Euros). The project was financed also by private funds from the businessman Zdeněk Bakala, who paid 10 million Czech crowns (approximately 380.000 Euros). Černý was finally asked to sign a new contract: according to it, the artist received the “symbolic” amount of one Czech crown.

Beside this, Entropa provoked also some positive reactions, since the sculpture is after all a piece of art. The then Prime Minister of Czech Republic, Mirek Topolánek, said that “as head of the government he was ‘strictly neutral’, but as a private person he ‘was laughing as much as anyone else’” (Richter and Lazarová). Furthermore, there were some petitions: the Polish cultural group *Indeks 73* published on its website a petition⁸ against the censorship of Bulgaria’s depiction, after being covered.

4.3. National stereotypes in Entropa

As mentioned above, national stereotypes depicted in Entropa are the final result of the collaboration of a small group of Czech artists, though the “leader” could be individuated in David Černý. Therefore, we have to keep in mind that in Entropa we see Czech stereotypes, and as such can be shareable or not. In other words, stereotypes reflect an individual point of view, precisely Černý’s point of view, so that, according to the ‘theory of reflection’, representations are not totally objective, but they inevitably show the artist’s subjectivity.

Entropa distinguishes itself by its ironical and most of all provocative caricatures. Also the name reveals itself as peculiar indeed: the term “Entropa” derives in fact from the combination of the Czech words *entropie* (entropy) and *Evropa* (Europe). The term “entropy” comes from the vocabulary of physics, and precisely we can find it in the second law of thermodynamics: considering the term entropy as a synonymous of disorder, the second law states that the entropy of the whole universe, assumed to be an isolated system, cannot decrease, but it is always increasing. To put it in simple terms, the level of disorder in a system increases very slowly or, at worst, it will worsen rapidly until it becomes total, which is the state of maximum entropy (Baranger).

The concept of entropy is used also in the so called Mathematical Theory of Communication, or simply Information Theory, formulated by Claude Shannon in 1948. He argued that information could be quantified and analyzed mathematically. He intended information as a quantity of signals, which is dominated by uncertainty, in the sense that all messages are possible. When the communicative action starts, the exchange of messages starts as well and consequently uncertainty is reduced. The term

⁸ For further information see *David Černý's Entropa censored. Sign the online petition - http://www.indeks73.pl/en_aktualnosci_79_575.php*.

entropy is used here to indicate the level of uncertainty, which, in other words, can be also intended as a synonymous of ignorance. The more information we possess, the more uncertainty (or ignorance) we have.

In sum, “Entropa” can be intended as a mixture of the words disorder-ignorance and Europe, which could have been a sort of pre-alarm of what actually happened after the unveiling.

Put this introduction, here below⁹ I describe the stereotypes of the EU member states in Entropa, giving a brief explanation with some contextualization there, where I can afford it.

Considering one of the main features of Entropa, that is irony, it is possible to notice that irony is manifested in different ways. Some countries are stereotyped through a very sharp irony, so that the process of stereotyping goes beyond every cliché, with the result that stereotypes are very original depictions that often refer to negative aspects of one country’s past or present. Other images reflect a not so original irony, so that some EU member states are depicted through trivial and common stereotypes, although still ironic and successful. In some other cases, irony is not at all perceived as such: it is the case of the above mentioned Bulgaria and Slovakia, which officially protested against their respective representation. Finally other stereotypes resulted very cryptic and not immediately clear (i.e.: see Finland and Latvia).

This final result is undoubtedly due to the personal knowledge that David Černý himself has toward the countries depicted: it becomes therefore clear that he knows better the culture and history of Central and Eastern Europe, of his “neighbors”, and exactly for these countries the artist created negative images in comparison to those of the Western countries, which are quite “gently” depicted. Moreover, within the group of Central and Eastern European countries, it is even possible to make a further distinction, since even toward some countries of this part of Europe Černý behaves differently, acting with a sort of detachment and creating stereotypes that do not reflect a real and actual knowledge of the state. In sum, in Entropa there are much more cultural and historical references in the images of Central European countries, since stereotypes reflect important questions either of the past, or of the present.

⁹ The description that follows was realized with the contribution of Dr. Gianluca Volpi, professor of history of Central and Eastern European countries at the University of Udine.

Stereotypes of Western EU member states in general are not very negative. Even the sense of irony manifests itself gently, without any particular bitter or offensive references. This could explain why stereotypes do not appear as very original formulations, but they simply remain within the field of common clichés. It is, for example, the case of Austria: the country was once in the vanguard of a great and powerful Empire that lasted until the end of the First World War, from which the country came out reduced to a smaller area. Today's Austria vacillates between green conscience and necessity to acquire economical power. We are all aware about Austria's opposition to nuclear energy. Entropa depicts this country as a green meadow with four nuclear power plant towers, from which vapor leaks, underlining the contrast between favor toward ecology and economical needs of increasing progress.

Within this group I would collocate also Belgium: the country is a half-full box of half-eaten chocolates. Perhaps this is not an image that people would expect for a country that is the heart of the European Community, although simply from the institutional point of view. However, the main feature of Belgium's depiction in Entropa is the idea of a half-country, which could be intended as a reference to the European Community itself, as something incomplete as the box of chocolates, or to the fact that Belgium is a country divided in two halves (Flanders and Wallonia).

France's stereotype is simple and immediate: the country is covered by a banner proclaiming "Grève!" (the French word for strike), proposing an image that refer back to the series of general strikes that took place in France in the course of these years. We can think about the general strikes in 2007, but also to those that occurred in 1995 in public sector, etc. Therefore the stereotype proposed in Entropa catches a precise political and social aspect of France and thus it highlights simply a matter of fact.

Germany's depiction is very provocative. The country is shown with motorways and cars moving on them, indicating the never-ending expansions of highways. According to some opinions, motorways are positioned in order to resemble a swastika. Beside this interpretation, which is not well accepted, the Czech news server *Aktualně.cz* proposed a different opinion: according to it, the position of the motorways remind the number 1 and 8, standing for the letters 'A' and 'H', which clearly refer to the initials of Adolf Hitler, used as a symbol by the neo-Nazi (Baroch). According to David Černý the swastika shape is absolutely unintentional. However, it is necessary to underline the fact that Germany's presence in Czech Republic was and is very strong, so

German past is often remembered, especially by the Central European countries, for the tragedy of the Second World War.

Ireland is a big bagpipe which plays music every 5 minutes. The stereotype recalls again a common cliché, without any particular reference to political or social aspects of the country.

Italy image results very negative, unlike other countries of this group. The boot-shaped peninsula is depicted as a football pitch, where several players holding footballs unequivocally are masturbating. Indeed this depiction is intense and not so far from vulgarity. According to some statistics of 'SportFive', Italy has the highest percentage of football fans, almost 78% of the population. The movements of the players suggest that football matches are perceived as autoerotic spectacles, rituals, the highest level of entertainment, representing the sometimes fanatic passion that many Italians feel for football. To support this idea, there is also the fact that the most read newspaper in Italy is the sport newspaper *La Gazzetta dello Sport*. All things considered, it seems easier to consider this depiction as a truthful mirror of Italy, rather than as a stereotype.

Luxembourg and Malta are very small countries, almost invisible in Europe's map. And this position is underlined also in Entropa. On the one hand, Luxembourg is depicted as an ingot of gold with a "For Sale" sign extending from it. As stated in the brochure, this representation could be intended as a comment on Luxembourg's status within Europe, meaning that, although very rich, it always needs something to get attention, such as a "For Sale" sign. On the other hand, Malta is depicted as a small piece of rock, with a small elephant on it, which is visible only thank to a big magnifying glass. This image recalls the myth of the dwarf elephant of the island, which lived there 20,000 years ago.

The representation of the Netherlands is much more studied, since it shows an aspect that refers to a sort of multicultural crisis in the country. The Netherlands is seen as a land after a flood in the aftermath of climate change. Above the waves only seven minarets of mosques appear – the minarets emit the singing of muezzins. It is an explosive reference to the country's high levels of Islamic immigration and perhaps it refers to historical fears and recent pathologies of cultural eradication.

Portugal and Spain are countries that belong to the periphery, in comparison to the central position of David Černý's homeland. Therefore their depiction is not so provocative. Spain is entirely covered with concrete, in reference to all the construction that recently has been a feature of life in the country, while Portugal's stereotype refers

back to the historical past of the country: it is shown as a cutting-board with three chunks of raw meat on it. Those chunks are themselves shaped like the three Portuguese former colonies of Brazil, Angola, and Mozambique. The idea of these colonies as pieces of meat symbolizes the features of Portugal's colonialism, which is clearly perceived as very negative.

The United Kingdom is another country of the group of Western EU member states. UK is an empty corner, a depiction that criticizes the country for being one of EU's most euro-skeptic members. Again, the stereotype simply reflects a matter of fact. The admission of the UK had been difficult since the beginning, however, even when it became part of the European Union, the country always stood aside and often obstructed EU's actions.

If we consider the Nordic countries, stereotypes reflect a more profound reflection on the countries themselves, with the exception of Finland's depiction, which I personally found difficult to understand. According to the description provided in the brochure, the depiction wants to imagine Finland as if it was made of wood, with exotic animals. The country is in fact depicted as a wooden floor, which could make us think to a sauna floor, and an (apparently drunk) male with a rifle, imagining a red-colored elephant, crocodile and hippo, sweating like if they were in a sauna.

Sweden is a long box – or better to say a long IKEA box – that contains a particular “furniture” inside: a Gripen fighter-aircraft manufactured in Sweden by the Saab Company. The depiction undoubtedly suggests the idea of practicality and convenience of the IKEA's furniture and design, since in this case assembling a plane is as easy as assembling a bookcase. But on the other hand, the “furniture” contained is a combat aircraft, which therefore reveals that Sweden is not only “a country of civic peace with a successful economy”, a country “environment-friendly, politically correct and open to foreign nationals and sexual revolution” (ENTROPA).

Denmark's depiction, together with the Netherlands, has references to one of the most iconic events that have come to signify multicultural crisis in the country. Denmark is a land made of Lego-blocks, but according to some opinions the Lego disposition is not accidental, but on the contrary, it resembles a caricature of Mohammed created by Danish cartoonists for a Danish newspaper, which provoked a controversy in the country in 2006. In fact Danish Muslims immediately protested against the caricature. However, David Černý declared that the resemblance was unintentional.

With regards to the Central and Eastern EU member states, stereotypes in Entropa are much more specific, reflecting most of all negative aspects of one country's past or present. However this does not involve all countries, since in some cases the final image does not reveal a real knowledge of the country from the artist.

Starting with the Baltic countries, in two cases we have the element of negation. The independence of these states was actually based on this element, which in practice consisted in the negation of Russia and all the things Russia meant. Therefore, Entropa depicts Estonia with a modern version of the Soviet hammer and sickle, which, together with the Nazi swastika, were banned as public symbols in 2006, in rejection of the Soviet domination. The same with Lithuania: five sculptures of Brussels' famous "Manneken Pis" statue are presented, all of them peeing over neighboring Belarus, an image that wants to suggest "an alternative monument to Lithuanian independence and as an outlet for the wrongs of the past" (ENTROPA). These images reflect very critical attitudes of both countries against the once-Soviet oppression, since the question of the independence itself was a suffered experience.

Latvia's stereotype, instead, was not built on this basis, but it recovers a mere geographical aspect: Latvia is depicted as if there were mountains, when in reality there is none of them. I guess Latvians dream of having mountains.

With regards to the other countries of the area, it is possible to notice that political or cultural references are more present in some images, rather than in others. Starting from Cyprus, the country is depicted as a piece cut in two, although officially united. The political message is here very clear, which we can find also in other images. The division of the country derives from an exasperation of the identity question between Greek and Turkish people.

The issue of national identity is considered also in other depictions, striking those countries, where there is an extreme sensibility toward the question of the nation. It is the case of Bulgaria, which is represented as a circuit of Turkish toilets linked to each other by pipes, illuminated by neon lights. As above mentioned, the foreign element is used also in other stereotypes in the sculpture (see Denmark, The Netherlands). However, in Bulgaria the question of national identity is still very young, and it is always built upon the confrontation with Turks. Turkish people in Bulgaria are not simply immigrants, but they are part of the country and the community. For these reasons the construction of Bulgarians identity has painful features, which date back to the long subjection to the Ottomans. Due to these aspects, the provocation in Entropa

was too strong and not appreciated by Bulgarian authorities, who required for the removal of the depiction. Few days later the unveiling of Entropa, Bulgaria's piece was covered with a black blanket. In this sense, irony was not able to minimize protests.

Czech Republic is depicted as a LED display, which flashes controversial comments about the world and the EU made by the Czech President Václav Klaus, such as "Some parties in other states could realize that they do not feel completely at ease within a big state in which they are now" (on Kosovo declaration of independence) or "Environmentalism is a dangerous ideology endangering human freedom". Stereotype is therefore based on precise political references. Also in this case the idea of nation becomes relevant, in the sense of a detachment from EU affairs. Czech President Václav Klaus is a symbol of euro-skepticism, recently demonstrated with the prolonged rejection to sign the Treaty of Lisbon.

Greece is like a forest that is entirely burning, recalling the fires occurred in 2007 and the political accidents in 2008. The stereotyped image thus refers to unpleasant events that devastated the country: the fires in 2007 were caused by environmental factors, but in many cases they were provoked by arsonists; it was declared the state of emergency and EU member states mobilized in order to help the country. The riots in 2008 were a result of a general climate of disappointment, where the effects of the economic crisis became more evident. Therefore the stereotype is based on facts that underline points of weaknesses of Greece.

Hungary's depiction belongs to those cases, in which the artist does not show a real knowledge of the country itself. Hungary in Europe is represented with the reproduction of the Atomium in Brussels made of typical Hungarian products, such as watermelons and Csabai sausages. The country is dominated by nuclear know-how, but according to this image, it will always remain a country of peasants and farmers. The stereotype somehow reflects a common minor knowledge that people have about Hungary: it is a strange country, with a strange language, we do not know much about.

Poland is portrayed with monks erecting the rainbow flag of the gay community. The position of the monks undoubtedly recalls the famous photograph "Raising the flag on Iwo Jima", which depicts American soldiers raising the Stars and Stripes flag at Iwo Jima in the Second World War. The picture was later used to create a sculpture, now located in Washington D.C. This is an evident allusion to the Polish pro-Americanism and to its strategic political position, and probably it implicitly refers to the 'Missile Defense' project in Europe of 2008, which vanished with the USA Presidency of

Obama. There are also clear references to the extreme Catholicism of the country: the monks assume the same position of the victorious American soldiers of Iwo Jima, and somehow it indicates that their position in Poland is a sort of conquest, an occupation of the territory.

In Entropa Romania becomes a Dracula Land. The country is depicted in fact as an amusement park, with the shape of Dracula's castle dominated by the famous vampire's head. It suggests a way of marketing through a valorization of what makes Romania really interesting. Even in this case, it emerges an aspect that falsify the national history: the stereotype is based on a legendary character, created by the Irish writer Bram Stoker, that however is identifiable in the person of Vlad The Impaler, Prince of Wallachia, who lived in the fifteenth century. Again there is the national element, since the prince defended his reign from both the Ottomans and the Hungarians and therefore he is commonly considered as a defender of Romanian national identity.

Slovakia is represented as a salami, bound together with a string in the three Hungarian national colors of red, white and green. As mentioned above, Slovakian authorities considered it an insulting message in the light of the historically difficult relationships between the two countries, and consequently complaint and asked for official apologies. It is not a surprise that Černý's interpretation of Slovakia is so negative, offending the national identity of the country itself. He clearly raised old ghosts of the past.

Finally, Slovenia's turn: the country is depicted as a piece of rock engraved with the words "First tourists came here in 1213". It is an ironical consideration on the lack of touristic places in Slovenia, which are mostly natural attractions, and on the fact that those 'first tourists' were Slovenian as well. The sentence reported refers to a message left in the caves of Postojna, which appears to be one of the main reasons for national pride in the country. The stereotype recalls a mania of grandeur of this country that constantly wants to show that it exists and that it is an ancient country, an attitude that derives from the fear of being small and of disappearing easily.

As repeated different times, stereotyped images above presented are exclusively of Czech matrices and as such the sculpture could be quite hard to read, though not at all incomprehensible. I explained that images reflect the personal point of view of the artist, and this is very clear in the final results of the individual depictions: it is possible

to distinguish between the stereotypes of Western EU member states and those of Central and Eastern EU member states. In this last group, stereotypes are more negative and there is a general tendency to attack these countries through the striking of national identity issues. The question of identity in most cases was born in recent years, therefore the idea of nation in these countries is perceived in a different and more sensitive way. This was shown, for example, by the case of Bulgaria and Slovakia.

Beside the depictions of the individual nations, which characterize the content of Entropa, the artifact is equally interesting and alarming – if we want to use this term – in its form. The sculpture looks gigantic and imposing. As stated by Milan Knížák¹⁰ in an article of Czech newspaper iDNES.cz, Černý created once again a sort of game-sculpture, where the technical frame is visible, which is here of huge dimensions and embraces “small and not monumental” representations of the EU member states (Poláková and Záhorková). Černý presented the European Union as a sort of assembly kit, where each nation can be singularly taken out. Therefore each element appear close, but also detached from the others. Černý’s Europe does not look like a synthesis, like something absolutely unified and united. Perhaps, even the so closed and critical reactions confirmed this vision, in the sense that everybody was more worried about the “small and not monumental” depictions, rather than looking at the sculpture with a broader perspective.

4.4. Recent events

The case of Entropa is a clear example of the persistence of stereotypes and demonstrates also how it is difficult to accept them. Although it is subtitled *Stereotypes are barriers to be demolished*, it appeared that Entropa did not stimulate the ‘demolition’ of stereotypes, but on the contrary it provoked the opposite result. To make an example, the Bulgarian artist Petko Stoyanov protested against David Černý’s sculpture and presented his own version of Entropa, as documented by the Polish *Indeks 73* (Kowalczyk), and also other European artists created stereotypes with the clear intention to offend Czech Republic.

¹⁰ Milan Knížák is director of the National Gallery in Prague.

In the aftermath of the scandal of Entropa, debates soon started to reduce. However, in May 2009 the artwork and David Černý provoked other discussions. In fact, the artist decided to remove in advance the entire sculpture from the atrium of the Justus Lipsius building in Brussels, where it was supposed to remain until the end of June 2009. The decision was a sign of protest against “the way the Czech government was wiped out by the old Bolsheviks and socialists and President Klaus” (quoted in “Entropa artwork”). On 8th May 2009 Mirek Topolánek was officially substituted by Jan Fischer and already on 11th May the removal of Entropa began. Now the piece of art is located in Prague, at the DOX Centre for Contemporary Art, and it will be exhibited until the end of April 2010.

More than one year has passed, but people have not forgotten about Entropa, despite the wish of many EU politicians, who hoped that soon debates on Entropa would disappear. According to the Financial Times the Czech artist did “do for the EU what *Borat* did for make benefit glorious nation of Kazakhstan” and created a “collection of nose-thumbing lampoons” (“Czech entropy”). During the artwork’s exhibition in the DOX in Prague, the centre itself is promoting discussions about Entropa and more in general about Europe. In sum, Entropa still makes people reflect. In some very recent newspaper articles, in occasion of the inauguration of the Spanish Presidency of the EU Council, which started in January 2010, some authors still referred back to the case of Entropa, somehow underlining the fact that this year no similar scandals occurred.

5. Interviews

As explained in the introduction, in order to understand if Entropa can be taken as a truthful representation of the European Union, I decided to make a survey by proposing few questions on the topic to a target group composed by professors, writers and in general intellectuals, chosen for their highly-esteemed works and experiences, and who are actively involved in projects and activities related to the actual cultural scenario in Europe. The interviews were collected between November 26th 2009 and February 24th 2010. All the interviews were conducted in the traditional face-to-face format, except from one case, which comes from an e-mail exchange, and they were all conducted in Italian language. I then translated them as accurately as possible. These are the questions I asked:

1. Most of David Černý's works are characterized by provocation, which in Entropa is filtered by irony. From this point of view, what do you think about the sculpture and about stereotypes here represented?
2. Entropa has been defined by newspapers and the media (i.e. BBC, The Guardian, New York Times, Český Rozhlas, České Noviny, Lidové Noviny) as a mystification, a scandal, a hoax. Are the representations perhaps an uncomfortable truth?
3. The sculpture is subtitled "Stereotypes are barrier to be demolished". However, some of the reactions that followed the unveiling of the artwork underlined the opposite effect. For example, other European artists created stereotypes in order to attack Czech Republic, or in other cases they realized their own version of Entropa. Which kind of stereotypes would you realize?
4. Aim of the work was with no doubt to trigger reflection. This since from the name, where the Czech words "entropie" (entropy) and "Evropa" (Europe) are combined, composing the enigmatic title "Entropa". It is not a new fact that the EU member states are different one from the other. For sure, behind the sculpture there was the intention of opening people's eyes, but the consequent reactions

underlined in general critical attitudes from the EU, which limited itself to point the finger at the artist and his artwork. My question is: did the EU intentionally not get the message of Entropa?

5. Would you like to add other comments?

Starting from the following page, the interviews are attached, maintaining the chronological order I conducted them. Since Entropa is an artistic representation, I considered relevant the use of images even in the conduction of the interviews. Therefore I prepared a power point presentation, where, after a brief introduction on the case of Entropa, I inserted each individual images of the EU member states' depiction, so that all details could be as visible as possible. The stimulation through images was therefore fundamental.

Václav Bělohradský (26th November 2009)

Born in Prague, he graduated in philosophy from Charles University (Prague). He has lived in Italy since 1970, where he is currently Professor of Political Sociology at the University of Trieste.

1. First of all, we must use the correct word, provocation is a trivial word. We have to use the appropriate term that is “culture jamming”, which is a blockage, a turnaround, a dispersion of meanings that are related to existent signs, to a public space full of fragile meanings. The artist, for example, took the statue symbol of the Czech identity, Saint Wenceslas on the horse, and presented it upside down; or he represented Saddam Hussein in a tank of formaldehyde. He is a typical representative of this form of art called culture jamming, which can be explained with many words: disturbance, diversion, inversion, etc. The artwork presents itself as a manipulation, as a mystification that highlights the fragility of meanings in a society characterized by the overabundance of information, symbols, signs and representations.

I like this sculpture because I believe that Europe, namely today’s Europe, and in particular Italy are full of stereotypes, full of nationalisms, full of usury, incapable of thinking about the contradictions of their own identity. Italy is currently a scary demonstration of this. Think about Lega Nord¹¹ and the way the party uses the crucifix, the idea of abusing a Catholic symbol in order to mark out and emphasize the local identity. It is one of the biggest disasters in these days. Therefore, I like very much the sculpture, and it is particularly important because it highlights the weaknesses of Europe’s identity, as well as of post-communist countries; think about Bulgaria, which officially protested against its representation. And this is very important, because the new post-communist countries are in tension between nationalism and euphoria toward Europe. So the artist somehow emphasized this tension, and made it visible.

2. We have to distinguish between this sculpture intended as a work of art and the reactions by the Czech people, which focused on the following question: is it possible that a country that presides the European Union criticizes stereotypes in such a radical way? This doesn’t mean that the role of the country that presides the European

¹¹ Lega Nord is an Italian political party.

Union is compromised; therefore I believed that the reactions were in a way very mean, because they were all worried about this problem.

3. I think that it is implicit that each European has in mind his or her own Entropa and I believe this is the most important meaning of the artwork. In order to perceive it properly, we have to ask ourselves: does this Entropa match with the Entropa that we have in our minds? To make it clear, what do we Italians think about the Germans? How do we see the Austrians? How do we see the Hungarians? Therefore, the deepest and the most lasting meaning of this work is this implicit reference to the “Entropas” in our heads.

In my case, if I had to do my own version of Entropa, well, my version of Germany would be very similar: I think it is clear that the huge post-war construction inserts itself into the Second World War’s catastrophe.

With regards to Italy, I would use the theme of showgirls, because I think they are worse than the soccer masturbation, which is indeed disgusting, but showgirls are even worse. This environment characterized by showgirls, by this “showgirlism”, is the most serious phenomenon nowadays in Italy, because it degrades women and public space. It looks like a wave that it is impossible to stop, since all women want to be showgirls.

Concerning France, I would stress more on its nostalgia: France once was the most advanced country, intended as national state, in Europe, with a marvelous and admirable culture, which was the most important culture all other countries referred to. Today it is a country of nostalgia. Therefore I would create something on nostalgia of the role of the late France.

With regards to Holland, I find this version absolutely unfair, because Holland does not have this problem. Since the beginning it was a great country, a country of ten million inhabitants that anyhow was a great country that fought England for controlling the seas. I would use water to define Holland, in the sense of living under a potential wave, a sea-wave that also carries foreign elements. Holland was open to that internet that long ago was the sea, as the Italian Maritime Republics, and those ungovernable, new elements came exactly from the sea, from the open space.

With Belgium I would do something more radical. It is split in two. Belgium is a country that hates itself, so I would do a ripped sock then stitched, to represent the mutual indifference. Or, I would make some references to the failed reflection on the Belgian colonialism, because there are a lot of witnesses about the Belgian richness: for

example, the palace, where the Commission or the Council hold meetings, was entirely built with the proceeds of one of the most brutal colonialism ever existed, meaning with Congo's exploitation. So, as a motive of Belgium's reality, I would use the absence of the memory of its disgusting and bloodthirsty past.

What about Czech Republic?

It will take long to explain, since the question is: what does Klaus represent? And I don't want to talk about it now. I would use another motive, in my opinion more important, that is the irresistible power of the kitschy Czech national identity. It is a kitschy nation. The whole *Risorgimento* and the whole past of the Czech nation are a huge kitsch: kitsch in literature, kitsch in politic, kitsch in moral; I would call it moral kitsch. This fascination toward the kitsch depends on the fact that it is a nation built up from writers and scholars, with little sense of political realism.

4. Yes, I'm afraid it is so. I think that the enlargement weakened European identity, and Europe itself has become more fragile, more worried about not disturbing the others, more anxious about not hurting anybody. It became much less European than it was before. Europe hasn't digested the enlargement yet, on the contrary, the enlargement trivialized Europe. We are degenerating into a mere customs and mercantile union, and it is scary. The great cultural, philosophical and political boosts blew over. We are in front of an European disunion disguised by interests: the *impasse* of the European Constitution is a clear example. French people played on it, since they made the Irish repeat their referendum, while the French no, they are gentlemen, while the miser bad Irish can be forced to repeat a referendum. Today's Europe disgusts me, and I would be much harder than Černý, since Entropa very gently reflects what Europe has become. For example, I perceive this Italy made up by showgirls and Berlusconi as a degeneration both of public space and of the way to do politics. Sarkozy's France is as well populist and lacking in a precise definition of political space and actions.

In sum, I do believe that, unintentionally, the over-anxiety provoked by the enlargement influenced the reactions toward Entropa, because of too many worries about the effects on the new member states. Europe is too worried about not offending, but the right to offend is a fundamental right: when you say "you don't have the right to offend other people's tradition", you have just undertaken the road to perdition. The right to offend! It is the same as the right to criticize. If somebody says: "No, this

offends the national identity”, then offend it! To offend is important, it is an aspect of critics, and everybody has to accept it.

What about Bulgaria’s reactions then?

It is typical; Bulgaria is always worried about its national identity, which actually has a beautiful history. Bulgarians were able to live together with a Turkish minority, and they even protected Bulgarian Jews. Think about it: very few people know that in 1943, when the Germans wanted to start the deportation of Bulgaria’s Jews, the Bulgarian parliament voted in order to stop this massacre and decided to protect its Jewish population. It was an important act. Therefore, if I were David Černý, I would have been more indulgent with this country. Nobody remembers about this, everybody remembers about the Danish, who smuggled their Jews to Sweden, and they were more or less a thousand. Bulgarians preserved from deportation and from being killed thousands of Jews with one vote in the parliament. God bless them for that.

5. I see in Entropa another sign of that general turning-point of the identity issue that we are facing at current time. The concentration on identity is not something typically European: on the contrary, Christianity and its long tradition have always been an attack against identity. Identity is not always something that should be defended. Christianity appealed to universality, destabilizing the local identities. Nowadays, we are observing a return to the local. I’m disgusted by the interpretation of the crucifix as a symbol of national identity. There is the flag, but the crucifix does not belong to Italians.

Therefore, the censorious reactions, so closed, are a sign of this ill-omened turning-point toward the Western culture’s identity. Let’s put it like that: we have passed from an identity based upon a critical and free argumentation to an argumentation based upon identity. I’m very worried and disgusted by this kind of evolution.

Maurizio Bait (28th November 2009)

Journalist of the newspaper *Il Gazzettino* (Trieste). In the year 2006 he was awarded a special prize for his efforts in favor of the meeting among European cultures, namely the Italian culture and the Balkan and Danube area cultures.

1. If the intention was that of proving that Europe is a fiction in comparison to the real Europe made of individual countries and individual local communities, I think that the artist in this succeeded with a barrage of provocations. There are actually only stereotypes, there is nothing that unifies, there is nothing that can be shared, but there are things that have been already said, a lot of clichés, which I personally think in most cases do not correspond to the real effectiveness.

They are actually Czech stereotypes, which can be shareable or not.

Well, in any case this is a *Weltanschauung* from Prague, from Bohemia, and as such can be accepted or not accepted. In any case it is an artistic expression; an artistic expression is not a photograph, it is not a still life, a soulless representation of reality, but it is always an interpretation and as such is subjective.

2. Art can be hoax. Art is a form of creativity. Goethe said that art harms rules, it harms hedges, therefore it would be paradoxical a regimentation of art. Once Claudio Magris said that the regime, the power, tries to stimulate poetry, but then it always ends up with poetry showing its butt to the regime... I don't know if I answered.

3. Italy and football are for sure something that can be used, even if it offers, as all stereotypes, a biased point of view. It is clear that Italy is not only soccer; it is many things, good and bad. The artist is maybe a bit bad with his neighbors.

With regards to the fact that the United Kingdom is not here, I would find in it a more profound meaning, in the sense that euro-skepticism is a sort of euro-isolationism adopted by the United Kingdom, and this is a problem shown most of all in practice life, in the failed accession to the Eurozone, and it is visible in many other behaviors, which will always be an open question that consists in considering the United Kingdom more as a great partner, rather than a great member of the European Union.

Among these representations, I would change something. I would change immediately Germany's depiction, because defining Germany as a national socialistic

country is nowadays a provocation that cannot be shared, at least not by me. In fact today's Germany is more the result of a great post-war auto-analysis rather than a never-ending perpetuation of ghosts, since after all, and again I quote my great fellow citizen Claudio Magris, the national socialism did horrible things, which we hope will be never and ever repeated, but it lasted less than my water-heater. Therefore we cannot throw away the thousand-year history of a nation and continue to label it with that certain episode, which was, I repeat, scary and terrifying. But German people, unlike Italians, auto-analyzed their own past and were able to square with it. I remember, for example, a very important speech delivered last year by the Chancellor Angela Merkel at the Knesset, and she was the first German chancellor, who spoke in that building, in that land, and she said, quoting Ben Gurion: "those, who do not believe in miracles, have no sense of reality". And this is the Germany that I like, this is the Germany that we should believe in. Continuing with swastikas means to have no sense of reality today. Instead, it would be necessary that also Bohemia, Italy, Slovenia, and many other areas, such as the Balkan area that has to be integrated in the European Union, square better with their own past and accept all of it, not only those parts that can be shared with the actuality's conscience and politics.

4. If with European Union we intend the Communitarian institutions in Brussels, it is clear that we have the same thing that we have in every national state, that is a detachment, unfortunately a very wide detachment, between the institutions and the civil community itself, which institutions refer to. Europe is still very far from an effective unity, from being a political community, and it is still very far from a culture sharing, if we of course exclude the question of known and shared values taken from Christianity. Borges said that we are all sons of the Bible and of Plato's dialogues; there is no doubt on this. Our own identity is strong, but then in this global world we have to compare ourselves with other equally important identities.

Put this introduction, it is clear that we are in front of a spread centripetism, and in the states themselves there are a lot of inner differences. Just think about what happens here in Italy, but we can also think, since we mentioned it earlier, about Germany and about the enormous differences still existent between the former West Germany and the former East Germany, differences that are of economical nature, but also in life style and in the vision of the world. Therefore a general and unifying political concept is contrasted by many little homelands. There are political movements

and an effective push from the civil society toward the creation of an Europe made of small parts, rather than having a Europe with a great bureaucracy. In sum, I'm not surprised at all that the central communitarian institutions expressed strong critics against this provocation, which is, I repeat, only partly shared by me. However, this provocation is also an occasion to remind that Europe is made of many small "Europes", that Europe means all of us, that it is not a palace in front of which there is a barrage of flags, it is not a thousand of euro-bureaucrats, whose activity we do not know much about, because of our fault or because of the media system. Europe is made of periphery. Elias Canetti said that everybody is at the centre of the world, and here it is the point: everybody.

5. I think that the European Community's great crisis, which determined the long blockage and stand-by of the Treaty of Lisbon, and consequently of the possibility to proceed by majority vote, rather than unanimity, since it is objectively impossible to proceed with unanimity vote in this enlarged Europe, this great crisis is for sure due to this moment characterized by the America of Obama, to this strong innovative leadership, to the so called "Chinindia", to the shift of the USA's interests from the traditional Atlantic to the Pacific, to all these things. But rather than blaming on the others, and we are very good in it, we should seek faults inside. Europe has to be more aware about its own different identities. Even from this very very provocative sculpture, this seems to be a weakness. Europe must take the most of its strengths from its plural identity. For a plural identity is font of great richness, it is an addition of value. Each extra identity confers to Europe more strength. Europe is not made of a series of yellow stars put in circle on a blue background. Europe is made of human beings, of families, of workers, of home-loans that have to be paid, of companies that have to be driven forward in order to face a market, which is more and more global and competitive. Because of this, Europe has to define a perimeter with shared general rules, and then it has to valorize identity and cultural pluralities, which Europe is rich of, not poor.

Gianpaolo Carbonetto (1st December 2009)

He is currently assignment-editor of the “Culture and Society” section of the newspaper *Il Messaggero Veneto* (Udine). He worked as special correspondent and carried on his activity in particular in Eastern Europe and in the Arabian countries.

1. First of all I would have something to object to the word “ironic”, because normally ironic does not mean satiric. To be ironic is something that jokes but quite kindly. Here I don’t see anything of that, especially toward certain countries. The idea of representing something through stereotypes, seen from one person’s point of view, is not particularly brilliant, on the one hand because stereotypes are certainly a falsification of reality, and if they are not seen with irony, they become dangerous; on the other hand, because stereotypes are a simplification of reality, and one of the most dangerous things is indeed simplification, which is something that art should not fall into, since simplification erases shades and prevents from talking over shades, which are the most important thing not only of nations, but also of people. Therefore simplification leads to alliophobia, to heterophobia, and in sum simplification lays the foundation of any kind of existent racism. If art indulges in this, in my opinion, it is a profound mistake.

2. No, they are not an uncomfortable truth, but they are evidently an uncomfortable part of the truth. It is undeniable that in Spain, for example, there is an over-cementation in some areas. However, reducing Spain to this cementation means to tell tall stories. Spain can instead be a nation that works from the social point of view, in order to make laic its own state, whether we approve it or not.

It is quite ridiculous to reduce Italy only to soccer, but if we want to see it from another perspective, not necessarily a good one, we could reduce it to the mafia. Therefore, I cannot appreciate this kind of work, it is a work that can be a *divertissement*, but to those who create it, and it is not obviously a *divertissement* for those who look at it.

3. I would personally not do stereotypes, because stereotypes are something that I don’t like at all, not even at an individual level. The decision to reply to these

stereotypes with other stereotypes in practice justifies the starting-stereotypes. In front of a stereotype you can behave in two possible ways. You can say: “no, this stereotype does not represent me, I would rather prefer another one”, meaning that, for example, I do not want the soccer-theme for Italy, but I prefer some spaghetti with tomato sauce, and this is a kind of reaction that I do not approve. Another type of reaction that I do approve is say: “no, stereotype is foolishness”. Stereotypes are appropriate in some vignettes and jokes, because in these cases they are used for provoking laughter. In all other cases, stereotypes become not only useless, but even perilous. I cannot keep on seeing the Germans as Nazi. Therefore the very idea of stereotypes, in my opinion, is completely made-up.

4. I would partly connect this answer to the previous one, saying that stereotypes are not barriers to be demolished, but they are foolishness. And this is the first type of answer.

The second type of answer refers more to Entropa itself, meaning to the concept of entropy, that is the inevitable descent from organization to disorganization, to chaos, to a loss of heat, therefore of movement and things like that. Talking about entropy in this phase of construction of a united Europe can have a sense, but it could also be very wrong: we find ourselves in front of a reality, which was born relatively not very long ago, since, if we exclude a glimmer in Montesquieu, who talked about a universal monarchy for Europe at the end of eighteenth century, the idea of Europe as idea of united Europe was born in 1941 at Ventotene with Spinelli, Colonna and Rossi during their exile, where they were sent to by the fascism. However, Europe was effectively born afterwards from the economical point of view, with the creation of a Europe with 6 members and the ECSC in the immediate post-war period. Then it started to develop, so in practice it became united only in 1970s, not earlier. And the step to an international level occurred in a very short period of time from 1970s to nowadays. Furthermore, we must say that every time the number of Europe’s adherent countries changes, Europe itself changes. I mean that it is evident that a Europe with 27 member countries involves much more management problems than a Europe with 6 members. It becomes doubtful the question of the unanimity vote needed for many decisional procedures, the right of veto, and many other problems that have been examined in the Treaty of Lisbon, though without solving them. Therefore, I believe that Europe is something completely opposite to entropy, because entropy does not mean going to a chaos, but it means going

to a cold chaos and thus still, steady. Entropy is that physical phenomenon, where energy is more and more transformed into heat: you lose energy, so heat comes out and spreads, energy then stops and you lie still. It is something very chaotic because organization is in movement, it is not a blockage of movement, but it is a loss. While here [referring to Europe] we have a chaos, which is increasing, it is under construction. Therefore the application of the concept of entropy to Europe leaves me quite perplexed. What I mean is that if we want to apply entropy to a state, an example could be the case of the final stage of the Roman Empire. This could be defined as entropy, in the sense of a chaos, which was more and more dead, inactive and cold. Europe's chaos is still in evolution. If this will lead to Europe's death as a united system, rather than to the Europe dreamed by the three from Ventotene, it is another question. In sum, I absolutely do not perceive Europe as entropy in its physical sense.

5. I don't have any general comments, but I have some particular comments. The idea of giving an explanation to the complex European situation through one person's perspective is quite doubtful. For example, thinking to describe Belgium as a box of chocolates is stupid. But it is clear that in these depictions there are different animosities, which depend on the country. It's hard to believe that the artist has no antipathy toward Bulgaria, as well as toward Slovakia, which is depicted as a sausage that is not very nice to look at.

He thinks he knows Italy, but reducing it to a soccer pitch is something made-up, because the country's complexity is huge, and he should have divided the country itself in different stereotypes. There are some depictions that evidently exist only in his mind, because they are hardly or totally incomprehensible to the audience. Regarding Spain, the depiction is biased because it takes only an aspect and it is evident that the artist doesn't like much Spain, otherwise he would have put something happier. He is not much bothered by Slovenia and used this kind of representation. Slovakia's depiction is very offensive, and also Romania's one is not very comforting, but at least it is comprehensible and maybe it is the only case of irony. Portugal's representation is very offensive, because he put the three great Portuguese colonies as pieces of meat on a cutting board, although it is hardly possible to assimilate Brazil's history to that of Angola or Mozambique, because of different periods of time and different evolutions: Brazil gained relevant autonomy since 1800, while Angola and Mozambique became free after the Second World War with great difficulties. Furthermore, this representation

does not consider the Carnation revolution in 1974, which toppled Salazar's regime and let Portugal be a true democratic republic, clearing the past from everything. It does not take into account that Portugal, if we exclude Salazar's period, was the best colonial power, as far as a colonial power can be good. Angola was an example of mixture of races, not only from the physical point of view, but also from the cultural one. If I go through the other depictions, I don't see a great sarcasm.

In my opinion, art must be able to strike without letting you understand why it strikes you, otherwise it is a caption, and it is not a work of art. You can find this in ancient art, modern art and contemporary art, in some artworks with profound changes of mechanism, and it is important that this happens. Methods were different: it could be the amazement in front of the perfection of some features; it could be the amazement derived from the combination of different elements.

[...] This thing here makes you simply upset, it doesn't make you think over it. Therefore it failed. In my opinion stereotypes do exist and will exist, but they are, were and will be wrong.

Alberto Garlini (3rd December 2009)

Writer and curator of the Literary Festival *Pordenonelegge* (Pordenone). He collaborates with the newspaper *Il Giornale*.

1. From the artistic point of view, it doesn't look like some breathless work. I don't perceive anything particularly enthusiastic. It can be surely ironic, but I don't think there is a sophisticated irony or something particularly funny to hail it as an artistic miracle. In short words, I don't think it will remain in the history of humanity. It is not the Sistine Chapel, this is my opinion. It makes you laugh sometimes, but there's nothing particularly fascinating in it. Moreover, we should watch it from real.

2. No, I believe that in this kind of operation there is a problem connected to the postmodernism in general, to the politically correct line. I ignore the reason why we are all in love with a complexity that does not exist. Postmodernism makes each form of knowledge, each fruition of knowledge, each form of approach to reality uneasy, fragile, disseminated and ephemeral. Therefore we constantly take refuge in stereotypes, as a normal mechanism of knowledge that we have nowadays, so that this knowledge is constantly superficial, and it is always linked to one-off cases, not to a general complexity. However, I don't know why, we do have complexities. And we have this idea, quite absurd and deniable every second, that knowing the other prevents from using violence against the other, but this is silly. We have seen that the most violent cases are based on the knowledge of the other, and in this logic, a stereotype should be a barrier that prevents the complex knowledge of the other, and should somehow encourage violence and thus the clashes of people. But this is not true: what makes two people friends is actually the ability of making fun on our respective defects, and this is what makes possible a quality leap.

On the other hand, we cannot understand that the fact that people see only through a drastic reduction of reality is a human thing, occurred since the beginning of humans' history. We therefore see only through few codes. In practice we Europeans are all identical; we have an ideology that is everywhere the same, the ideology of making money and success, the ideology of power. This is by now a spread mentality, there's no way out, and nobody can say the contrary. In this European life, where we watch the same TV format, we listen to the same music, we eat more or less the same food, we

follow time schedules that derive from job structures and organizations that are everywhere the same, we are almost the same and we tend to underline small differences. Imagine to be in a room with four people, all the same, except from one person, who has a cuff turned up, and the difference that leads to the collective scandal consists of this small aspect, and everybody gazes upon it. Therefore we have always looked at small differences, instead of looking at the 90% of the things that we have in common. And this is why Entropa, which is absolutely normal, becomes to be a scandal, because when we simply play upon these differences, we don't notice them, as if they remain hidden.

3. I'm not an expert of stereotypes. I'm not familiar with them. Perceiving Italy as a big soccer pitch, I honestly do not see it as a stereotype, on the contrary. I wish it were like that, but unfortunately it's not. This could be referred also to other stereotypes in the sculpture. It is clear that a stereotype is not a final formula of something, it is always a caricature of a national specificity. But the point of the question is actually this, meaning that European integration does not occur on this basis.

I think that the depiction of Germany is too cruel, because highways resemble a swastika. But I would not say more, in the sense that I am not interested in seeing stereotypes. All I can do is notice that the European integration, which is very present, faces difficulties, on the one hand, because of economical questions, which we handle as shopkeepers; on the other hand, because of forms of stereotypes and quite distorted national divisions. I think this won't last long, at least I hope so. By now travelling is simpler. It is true that making a trip falls within a postmodern logic, so that it doesn't change radically your experiences, but it remains a superficial, ephemeral vision, based upon the pleasantness of what you watch, without catching a realistic eye.

4. No, I don't think so. I don't think that EU's authorities can get the meaning of anything vaguely artistic. I think that from politicians there is an impermeability even to the easiest, the shortest, the most useless artistic concept, and this is something upsetting, something that we have to face with in our everyday life. They know absolutely nothing about culture, nothing! I am not talking about this kind of culture, which is very interpretative and thus deals with structures of critical reasoning, but probably they don't even know when the Republic of Italy was born. Nothing. It is a disaster; we live in a desert with no idea of culture and cultural game, rejecting every

possibility of being creative in cultural issues. And this is one of the biggest limits of contemporary politics. Contemporary politics totally lost the sight of the cultural duct and thus of the sense of political planning. By now politics is tied to a power managing based on the moment, on the logic of earning as much as possible in the shortest period of time, and does not perform that function to calm down, to transform social anger, injustice, etc., into a form of political project, and therefore critically transform them into a bet against time.

If we look back to the great ideologies of the past, when Christianity said: “now set your anger aside, even if the world is unfair, set it aside, because you will rise up to the Kingdom of Heaven”, the momentary anger was alchemically transformed into a political project for the future. Communism said the same: “you see injustice, you see the rich, while you work hard in the factory; put your actions together and coordinate them with the other people of your class, and in the future you will have the dictatorship of the proletariat and the perfect society”. So once again momentary anger was transformed into political project. Nowadays this dimension of planning the future, which is connected to any kind of idealism, in the sense of having an idea of the future and trying to transform today’s reality into something better, slips completely away from politicians’ hands. From this point of view, if politicians are not even able to look at their own business, try to imagine how they can interpret art. They interpret it on the basis of political categories, and in short words, on the basis of the political convenience of the moment.

5. Actually I said enough, maybe too much. Well, the problem is this, in short. Since this aspect [political planning] is missing, it is also difficult to find a solution to the European problem. While at the beginning European Community was born with an ideal and commercial perspective, today there is a lack of this aspect. I mean that our only possibility is to perceive Europe as a goal we want to reach, as the only system that permits us to realistically survive through global economy, to military questions, etc. Nowadays we find ourselves in the same situation as the Italian City-States (in Italian *Signoria*) of the Renaissance: we are very rich in culture and in money, but we have no political and military power. So whatsoever Charles IX could come and invade us, as it happened in the Renaissance. I don’t mean a military invasion, but a commercial one. We are a very appetizing market, and there are people for sure more powerful than us. Moreover, Europe is coming out of the present crisis worse than other countries, though

Brown and mainly Sarkozy planned for Europe some guidelines in order to react to the crisis. Therefore they culturally outlined what it was to be done, but then other countries followed those guidelines and obtained advantages, see USA and most of all China. So it is a very particular situation. Entropa simply remains in the space of artistic and momentary provocation in comparison to the bigger dynamics that move the world. The artist can be a point of tension, a bright knot, as an advertisement that shows what is currently happening. But what is happening is made of such wide dynamics that we don't know how to change and coordinate them, and through which strategies. Obviously there should be a bottom-up movement, with different priorities, with different perspective, looking differently at reality. It is clear that all this should be based on something real, meaning on a movement that already exists. A strong economical crisis, with much more marked problems of injustice and violence, will surely change the political scenario of the future. It is clear that we do not hope so, but it is also clear that if we do not do anything, nothing changes.

Sebastiano Grasso¹² (2nd January 2010)

Poet and journalist for the newspaper *Corriere della Sera* (Milan), where he is responsible for the Art section. In 2007 he became president of the Italian centre of P.E.N. Club.

1. Entropa falls within those standards of that artistic production, developed especially in the Eastern Europe after the fall of the Berlin Wall, that refers to political and social questions through the debunking of satire and through a not less ironical *mélange* of different styles, that is the recovery of Dada (which includes also the making fun through hiding one name behind 27 presumed authors of the work). Surrealism and Pop-art all mixed in conceptual sauce. In some cases, it occurs to me the Russian Pavel Pepperstein or the Blue Noses, the cultured recall to some iconographical and literary traditions, such as the illustrated fairy tale, the icon, the heirloom of the tales and novels of Gogol and Bulgakov, and all this leads to quite sophisticated results in shape and to even richer results in content. In my opinion, Entropa is guilty of an excess of didacticism and of simplification of the message. More than irony, I see in it a triumph of the carnival. And if the message is immediate, it is necessary to distinguish among shapes and functions of what is communication and what is art. The latter cannot leave aside the fascination given by ambiguity (and surrealists were very well aware of this!), which is here something totally absent.

2. Some forms of art live especially because of the emphasis conferred by the media. In this sense, a scandal is not anymore a scandal: on the contrary, it is a substantial part of the work itself. You can quibble even over scandals. With regards to the “uncomfortable truth”, it is clear that a reference to the substantial disunion of Europe bothers, especially if expressed in occasion of an official presentation.

3. Stereotypes do annoy, since they express unpleasant truth, from which we would like to escape, though they are authentic. But it's here that we find a contradiction: we are always ready to claim the union of the Continent, although we then argue on particularism either linguistic, either political or economical, and these discussions are often anachronistic. For example, when we speak about the preservation

¹² NB: answers received by e-mail.

of national traditions, it is inevitable that we think to recover some stereotypes. Perhaps, instead of making rhetoric or denouncing Europe's union or disunion, as Černý did, it should be necessary to reflect on the identity of this Continent, which carries manifold cultural roots. This is most of all the case of the "old" or "ancient" Continent, on the contrary of USA. Being ancient means to have a long history behind, which cannot be ignored in its negative aspects and has to be preserved in the most positive of its cultural sedimentation. If I had to make a stereotype, I would have used something modern and global in reference to the hypocrisies, which emerges, for example, every time we talk about environmentalism without finding a communion of interests: since each European state applies "national" criteria and strategies, I would have liked them to be represented.

4. I repeat: it is normal that in that official situation European Union rejected a work of this kind. It is evident that this reaction played into the hands of the author.

5. I think that politics, recent history and today's society form an inexhaustible source of inspiration for artists, who often, mentioning a depiction in Černý's installation, become in this sense vampires. But if we think about all the works created in reference to themes such as September 11th or the massacres in Africa or the tragedy of migrants, it is necessary to distinguish between what is aesthetic profiteering (I mean that it is not so good to take the bad things of humanity and make them aesthetic) and what is real denounce. I am afraid that the first category is much more numerous.

Annalisa Cosentino (24th February 2010)

She is currently professor of Czech language and literature at University of Udine. She translates and organizes exhibits: in 2009 she organized a large exhibit of documents and art works entitled *Da una primavera all'altra 1968-1969*.

1. First of all I like David Černý's production; I think his provocations are smart. In this case, I think that the result is at the end not much comprehensible, since these are Czech stereotypes, and thus they are stereotypes that Czechs have toward the other nations. I believe that they are hard to understand, and therefore I understand also the reaction of dismay and of annoyance from some nations, because they probably did not understand that it was something ironical, since these stereotypes do not correspond to their ideas of stereotype. I can say that this is not one of the most successful works of Černý, I think he realized much more interesting works in the past.

2. I think that a mystification is such at the time that the audience collaborates to read it as a mystification. Therefore, in order to be successful, the mystification has to meet a positive reaction, meaning that it has to be a communication that has to be intended. Whereas it is not correctly intended, mystification does not work. In my opinion, the mystification worked only partly for those stereotypes, which, though of Czech matrices, have a "more general" validity. But of course this does not apply to all cases, and this is why I think the work did not succeed as other Černý's artworks.

3. I might say that, as user of these kinds of works and playing the role of the audience, that is the role of a person, who accept the mystificatory and provocative communication, I can receive some stereotypes, because I understand them better, but not all of them. I personally do not have a type of imagination as Černý has, therefore I would not do a representation through this methods. I share the idea that stereotypes exist and that they effectively constitute barriers and it is right and useful to find a system in order to demolish them. However I do not know how, I am not an artist of this kind. It is anyhow clear that I was able to perceive better the mystification, and thus to react better to Černý's idea. I understood well Germany's depiction, I understood better Italy's depiction, which are a little bit more general, but I understood less well some other representations, although I am a person, who knows the Czech mentality. For

example, I found Spain's representation less involving, it did not provoke a reaction to the mystification.

4. In my opinion, there is not the idea of intentionality, but I see in the reactions this element I was talking about earlier: when we receive a communication of whichever nature, we are able to accept the sense of it in the moment that we recognize something, that we find something, which is familiar to us, even if we do not agree with it. So we can say that we do not agree with Italy's representation, though we understand it, and we understand which clichés it refers to. Therefore we react to this communication, we relate ourselves to it. If we don't understand it, how can we react to it? Therefore, in my opinion the rejection depends on this difficulty of comprehension of specific messages that Černý put here. There is a Czech-centrism, for the first time, since in the past he did not have this kind of attitude, but in this occasion he chose the Czech point of view in a very massive way. Therefore, it is difficult that everybody understands it. I repeat, even I had some difficulties in deciphering it, although I hang around with Czech people since a couple of decades. Therefore I think, I believe that in the idea of commissioning a work of this kind to an artist like Černý, there was the intention of doing something new, of proposing a non-standard perspective.

[...] I think that in principle it is right to give artistic freedom to an artist. If he used this freedom in a way that later was not shared, never mind! However I do not condemn Černý for that, because I think that an artist expresses himself as he feels like, his vision is not that of the Czech government. In the end, the attitude of the government toward the artist was correct: since you are the artist, I give you the task to represent things, do it as you believe. It is more correct like that.

5. I can add an information, a small testimony. When we worked for the exhibition "*Praga da una primavera all'altra*" (Prague from one spring to another), which was dedicated to the year 1968, the first presentation took place in Rome, at the Palace of Exhibitions, in a very big hall. We wanted to collocate an installation in the centre of the hall, and since it was a multimedial exhibition, with photographs, works of art and other objects, we wanted to have a plastic work, which was supposed to be a contemporary representation. As I was the exhibition curator, I chose David Černý and I asked him to create the installation. He proposed something that I liked quite a lot, that is a tube of a gas-pipeline, painted with golden color, and inside the tube a Russian tank

was driving on its way, so that from outside you could see only the tank's shadow inside the tube. Therefore it was a very actual idea, we all know about the blackmail on Siberian gas, etc. Černý did not realize this installation because he met the opposition from the directors of the Azienda Speciale Palaexpo¹³. It was an opposition of political nature. They said that it was not possible, because the installation could offend Russians. And the opposition came from the directors of a company, which deals with art, which organizes exhibitions, it did not come from the government. In this sense, the Czech government was more open, because they give free space to one kind of expression. I mean, why should Russians feel offended? First of all it is true that they have gas and pipelines and the person, who is an artist, has the right to give us a representation of reality. Obviously we won't elect him Prime Minister, or at least not now. [Laughs]

¹³ Azienda Speciale Palaexpo of Rome is one of the most important organizations that deals with art and culture in Italy. They are responsible of organizing spaces and events in some buildings in Rome, such as the Palace of Exhibitions.

6. Interviews analysis

The approach taken for the analysis of the interviews is that of visual sociology. Visual sociology has recently become a new interesting approach in the field of social sciences in order to enrich social researches. Images – or art in a broader perspective – are a powerful instrument in shaping our perception of the world, and at the same time, the world itself shapes images and art. In this sense, art is intended as a “process of social construction” (Faccioli 56) and images represented can have a multiplicity of meanings, so that their interpretation is always biased. The reason lies in the fact that in each image, in each work of art, there is inevitably the subjectivity of the creator, of the artist. The artist’s perspective takes centre-stage, and this is very clear in Entropa. However, the analysis of a work of art involves also other subjects: the audience, the society, the observers, whose perspective is not always the same of the artist. Therefore the work of art becomes a co-production of meanings between the artist and the society. As Becker states, images “get their meaning from the way people involved with them understand them, use them and thereby attribute meaning to them” (84). In other words, images get their meaning from their context and consequently leaving the context implicit is always a risk.

On the basis of this introduction, this interviews analysis focuses on the importance of the context for the understanding of Entropa and its stereotyped depictions. It is possible to individuate three cases that show that Entropa was appreciated, understood in its shades, and therefore accepted as an ironical representation of the EU member states. In this sense, the sculpture was perceived as a representation that carries “smart provocations” (Cosentino), that proves “that Europe is a fiction in comparison to the real Europe made of individual countries and individual local communities” (Bait) and that “highlights the weaknesses of Europe’s identity, as well as of post-communist countries” (Bělohradský). The answers therefore reveal that the context of Entropa’s stereotypes is quite clear, so that the ironical message is accepted in most cases. It is not denied the fact that some stereotypes are exclusively of Czech matrices, which therefore can be hardly understood. However, the final result undoubtedly is that of a general acceptance.

There is one case in which the position assumed is more neutral, in the sense that the sculpture has been perceived as ironical, though without any artistic sophistication:

Entropa “makes you laugh sometimes, but there’s nothing particularly fascinating in it” (Garlini). The message is partly accepted, intending the artifact as “a point of tension, a bright knot, as an advertisement that shows what is currently happening”, though it “remains in the space of artistic and momentary provocation in comparison to the bigger dynamics that move the world” (Garlini).

In the other two cases the acceptance of the sculpture fails. The reason lays in the fact that the opinions focused much more on Entropa as a work of art, showing contempt for the lack of quality and ambiguity, of which art should be characterized. In this sense it was criticized the fact that the artist managed to express through the medium of art an intense personal vision, where there is nothing to carp at. Furthermore, the representation through stereotypes in a work of art has been perceived as something not possible, nor acceptable, since “stereotypes are foolishness” and “art should not fall into simplification” (Carbonetto). Therefore Entropa has been accused for its “excess of didacticism and simplification of the message” (Grasso), whereas “art must be able to strike without letting you understand why it strikes you” (Carbonetto). Beside the accuracy and preciseness of these comments, which are absolutely not criticized, the focus of the arguments used in these two cases lies exclusively on artistic aspects and thus remains confined within the field of art. The ironical message and the conceptual potential of the work clearly fail. As stated by Elizabeth Chaplin, the aim of visual sociology is to show that visual art “cannot satisfactorily be explained by internal aesthetic factors”, but, on the contrary, the aim is to show “that the production and reception of visual art works are social processes” (161-162). Considering images, in this case Entropa’s images, as social sciences data, as a process of social construction, may excuse such expressive flaws, such artistic scarcity, because the message is actually another. It is clear that if the context of the stereotyped images escapes, the sociological message escapes as well, justifying therefore the vision of Entropa simply as a work of art, what’s more without any success from the aesthetic point of view. Even Czech experts of art said the same in reference to the artistic aspects of the artifact, which is not so brilliant, but they didn’t reject Entropa at all, because the context was clear to them and thus they understood better the ironical message¹⁴. As repeated many times, the Czech point of view is the protagonist in Entropa; therefore it is undeniable that

¹⁴ See Poláková, Lenka, and Jana Záhorková. “Černého Entropa je mdlá a nepřekračuje komunální humor, míní odborníci.” *iDNES.cz*. iDNES.cz. 14 Jan. 2009. Web. 8 March 2010.

some depictions are less successful and less clear than others. And this is very well explained by Professor Annalisa Cosentino:

[W]hen we receive a communication of whichever nature, we are able to accept the sense of it in the moment that we recognize something, that we find something, which is familiar to us, even if we do not agree with it. [...] in my opinion the rejection depends on the difficulty of comprehension of specific messages that Černý put here. There is a Czech-centrism [...]. Therefore, it is difficult that everybody understands it. I repeat, even I had some difficulties in deciphering it, although I hang around with Czech people since a couple of decades.

In sum, the sociological message in *Entropa* lays in its context, in the sociological text, although an unconventional one, that surrounds each image and explains us its value. The interviews reveal that *Entropa*'s context was much clearer in some cases, rather than in others, where the mystification was "not correctly intended" (Cosentino). From the above observations, it is therefore possible to make the following conclusion: interpretations differ because of different cultural paths of each interviewee, because of their knowledge more or less thorough of the context, which, I repeat, is mainly a Czech context.

Beside these considerations that focus on the specific stereotypes in *Entropa*, whose reception, as just mentioned, is directly linked to the question of the context, it is necessary to make some reflections on stereotypes in general. In other words, what did emerge about stereotypes in the interviews? In the first part of this thesis I described in detail the process of stereotyping and I outlined the main features of this phenomenon. In the interviews stereotypes are intended as simplifications of the reality or of a part of reality, confirming therefore the features individuated in Chapter 2. With regards to the usage of stereotypes, I would individuate two attitudes: on the one hand, stereotypes are accepted because today's Europe – and not simply Europe – is full of stereotypes, since they belong to a normal cognitive method, of course biased, that is part of our everyday life, and therefore it was possible to reflect over a work such as *Entropa*, and in some cases, it was also possible to reproduce other stereotypes according to question #3; on the other hand, stereotypes are totally rejected, because they are dangerous formulations and do not reflect the reality, so that even thinking over *Entropa* was hard. This last

point is demonstrated by the fact that in some cases the interpretations toward the sculpture were very rigid, in the sense of a general incapability of going beyond the stereotypes represented in Entropa, which thus caused an even stronger attachment to what I would call the ‘literal meaning’ of the artifact. In this sense, the behavior of some interviewees was negative toward the general idea of representing the European Union through stereotypes, beside the final result itself. It is clear that Entropa does not represent a universal way of perceiving the European Union, but it is also true that the artifact says something, it is not a mere speechless picture. In this sense, the so closed reactions that followed the official unveiling of Entropa somehow demonstrated a failure: the EU member states focused their attentions more on the single stereotypes represented, in some cases simply on their respective representation, so that it was very difficult to move forward and to stimulate a general reflection on stereotypes as present social phenomenon. As some interviewees proposed, this is due to the fact that art and politics are two entities apart, therefore “it would be paradoxical a regimentation of art” (Bait), and moreover politicians are not able to interpret art, since they tend to interpret it simply “on the basis of political categories” (Garlini). However, the negation of seeing the EU through stereotypes and most of all through the stereotypes proposed by Černý can be explained through psychological and sociological reasons. First of all, people tend to prefer the familiar, rather than the unfamiliar, people prefer confirmations, rather than disconfirmations (Arcuri and Cadinu 90): Entropa’s stereotypes are intentionally provocative and thus reflect, although not always, non-familiar images, Czech stereotypes that were hard to understand, explaining why the reactions were stricter toward some depictions rather than toward others. Secondly, the case of Entropa demonstrated that stereotypes are perceived more strongly when they are shown. This aspect belongs to a paradoxical and in a way ironical situation that occurs in the process of suppression of stereotypes: I am referring to the so called *rebound effect*, elaborated by Macrae (see Macrae, Stangor and Hewstone 1996). A rebound effect occurs when “once-suppressed thoughts return to exert an impact on thought and behavior that is often greater than would have been the case if the thought had never been suppressed in the first place” (Macrae, Stangor and Hewstone 238). The Entropa project was conceived in order to demolish stereotypes and it did it through a representation that itself refers to stereotypes: in this way the motivation of the observer to suppress stereotypes decreases, since he/she finds himself/herself in front of a sculpture based on stereotypes. Therefore, according to the rebound effect, Entropa

manifests itself through a greater impact, revealing a paradoxical situation, which normally consists in the over-formulation of stereotypes, instead of their abolition. And this was clearly shown even in this case: to restate, the critical reactions of the EU authorities and the production of other versions of Entropa or of other stereotypes in general could be taken as a confirmation.

This last aspect is showed also in the answers to question #3. Other visions of Europe emerged through the formulation of personal stereotypes, of different images of the EU member states, which thus confirm the actual existence of this form of simplifications. Even if some interviewees were a little bit reluctant to propose other stereotypes, somehow they did it. It emerged the idea that each of us has his or her own Entropa in mind, meaning a personal and individual vision toward the other nations. In this sense, some proposed more profound consideration of one country's past, valorizing it, rather than offending it, showing that stereotypes are not necessarily negative assessments, but that they can also have a positive connotation. It appeared that it was therefore possible to have a more positive and happier Entropa, celebrating those historical events that made one country great and admirable. So, for example, Bulgaria is celebrated for its great act that saved millions of Jews during the Second World War; Portugal's colonial power is defined as one of the best, etc. I would like to focus on Germany's depiction, which interested the attention of the majority of the interviewees. In fact, most of them affirmed that the depiction proposed by Černý is "too cruel" (Garlini), "perilous" (Carbonetto), "it is a provocation that cannot be shared" (Bait). However, there are two cases that accepted Germany's depiction: it was accepted by Professor Cosentino, and in particular by Professor Bělohradský, who states as follows: "[...] my version of Germany would be very similar: I think that it is clear that the huge post-war construction inserts itself into the Second World War's catastrophe". These different opinions are very relevant to support the idea of the importance of the context. While there was a general refusal to see a swastika on Germany's piece in Entropa, which undoubtedly recalls the horrible things of which the Nazi were responsible, Professor Bělohradský, native from Prague, went beyond the very meaning of this symbol, and intended it as a general reference to what the Second World War meant for Germany. So once again, the question of the context becomes relevant, since it permitted different interpretations and different stereotyped formulations.

The last two questions I proposed, and in particular question #4, wanted on purpose stimulate and lead the interviewees to make some considerations about the

current situation of the European Union, and therefore to go over the literal meaning of the individual representations in Entropa. In the answers obtained, it is possible to individuate some key issues that are part of the conceptual potential of the sculpture: the European identity, the European integration, the richness of Europe's culture, etc. A wide distrust emerges toward Europe: the general image offered is that of a weak and fragile Europe, which even in front of this kind of expression reveals its disunion. In this sense the question of the enlargement is considered as fundamental in this phase characterized by a general uncertainty, waiting to see if the Treaty of Lisbon will bring some changes. European countries are still much more worried about their own national interests, and therefore the idea of a real European unity fails. Pessimistic feelings dominate, although it is possible to perceive that this general distrust is much more addressed to the bureaucratic Europe, rather than to a Europe made of values and cultural richness. This explains what was said about EU authorities and politicians, giving the impression that it is not possible for Europe to move forward because of this climate of anxiety due to the enlargement, due to the economic crisis, and to other factors that were underlined in the interviews.

On the other hand, Europe is valorized as well. For example, the application of the concept of entropy has been rejected, believing that the current situation of the European Union cannot be related to entropy, simply intended as a chaos, but Europe's evolution has to be intended as a chaos that is "under construction" (Carbonetto), which will lead either to a stand-off or to a new chapter in its evolution. Although the assiduous search for an European identity and the over-concentration on the question of identity made Europe weak, it is however true that Europe has a great past behind. I would identify in this aspect another important key issue emerged from the interviews. It is undeniable the fact that Europe "carries manifold cultural roots" (Grasso). If we try to define ourselves as Europeans, we realize that within this label there are more differences than homogeneity: therefore we find out that "the alleged common identity" is actually made of multiplicity (Mantovani, "Intercultura" 23). Seyla Benhabib, a Turkish Jewish professor of political science and philosophy at Yale, states that:

[a]ny view of cultures as clearly delineable wholes is a view from the outside that generates coherence for the purpose of understanding and control. Participants in the culture, by contrast, experience their traditions, stories, rituals and symbols, tools and material living conditions through shared, albeit

contested and contestable, narrative accounts. From within, a culture need not appear as a whole; rather, it forms a horizon that recedes each time one approaches it. (5)

In this sense, the problem of identifying a European identity lays in the fact that in this process we face more differences than commonalties. But at the same time differences become to be the only point of distinction among countries, and this is why we tend to hang on to them. Even Entropa highlights that Europe is made of countries that differ one from the other. The reactions toward the sculpture showed that these differences were clearly perceived as a weakness, as an attack against a unity that however does not exist. In sum, from the interviews emerged that Europe's inner differences do not have to be considered as weaknesses, but, on the contrary, as a point of strength, since "a plural identity is font of great richness, it is an addition of values" (Bait).

I would conclude saying that even these reflections can be read in a sociological sense: Entropa can be intended as a documentary, since it shows us what needs to be changed or what needs to be appreciated and celebrated, such as Europe's cultural differences and thus Europe's cultural richness.

7. Conclusions

The aim of the thesis is that to understand whether *Entropa – Stereotypes are barrier to be demolished* can be interpreted as a truthful mirror of the European Union. The path I presented began with the definition of the concept of stereotyping, considering some of the classic theories and individuating the main features of this social phenomenon. I explained that stereotypes are part of a normal complexity-reducing process toward the surrounding reality, according to which we tend to simplify things, people, and events in order to understand them better. Therefore our knowledge of the world is not direct, but is mediated by what Lippmann called the “pictures in our heads”, which are inevitably affected by the media. The process of stereotyping is therefore a process of simplification, which often leads to the creation of categories. Regarding this point, I explained Allport’s theory, which argued that the formation of stereotypes is a process of social categorization, and therefore the usage of categories is again justified because of a normal need of the human mind to simplify people and things. Social categorization easily leads to the formation of in-groups (us) and out-groups (them), a distinction that laid the foundation of the Social Identity Theory formulated by Tajfel. The theory states that people’s need to belong to one group leads to group memberships, which establish themselves through the dimension of values and emotions, and are thus based only on preferences, rather than on factual criteria. Therefore the creation of stereotypes is a normal consequence, and they develop in one group in the form of shared beliefs toward (but very often against) the out-groups.

I then focused on national stereotypes, since *Entropa* is based on this particular form of stereotypes. Hofstede’s analysis was the main reference for the explanation of the concept. I explained that national stereotypes derive from the eighteenth century concept of national character, which is simply an earlier term for national culture. We tend to perceive our own national culture and also one other nation’s culture as a unity, where simplifications are very often used. In this sense, if we make a statement about an aspect of a population and this statement cannot be scientifically proven, we consequently produce national stereotypes.

The above theoretical issues acted as a background in preparation for the analysis of the sculpture *Entropa – Stereotypes are barrier to be demolished*. After an overview of the events that occurred before and after the unveiling of *Entropa*, I proposed a brief

analysis of the artifact focusing on the different results of the stereotypes proposed, identifying that the depictions that refer to Central and Eastern EU member states are much more negative and provocative, revealing a thorough knowledge of these countries history and culture from the artist.

The analysis then continued through a qualitative research method, which consisted in a series of interviews submitted to a target group as above described. Comparing the answers, the result can be summarized as follows: it emerged that stereotypes in Entropa partly reflects how we perceive the EU member states. This is mainly due to the fact that the representations were quite difficult to read because of the Czech matrices of the stereotypes and because of the very use of this kind of simplification in a work of art that was not well received. Therefore the ironical message was successful in some cases, but in others it failed. Why did this happen? Quoting Becker's expression, "it is all a matter of context" (84). The question of the context was in fact the focus of the analysis I proposed: in this sense, people who knew the context in which the artifact was created, accepted the ironical message. From these findings, I can therefore conclude affirming that the Czech point of view of the national stereotypes in Entropa was a sort of limit for the understanding of the whole artifact, although some depictions resulted more general and common than others.

Whether we consider Entropa as a work of art or not, and beside the individual depictions, the sculpture succeeded in one aspect. The sphere, in which the activity of the interviewees takes place, embraces three fields: society, culture and art. As demonstrated by the answers collected, it is undeniable the fact that the case of Entropa triggered for a general reflection, which clearly focused on the European Union. Therefore it is possible to say that Entropa, sociologically intended, can be interpreted as a documentary, as a mirror of the current situation of the European Union.

To conclude, this thesis shows that stereotypes are still used as a normal cognitive method and that their ironical usage can be very difficult and dangerous, if the context is not completely understood. It shows that a work such as Entropa provoked many debates and reflections about stereotypes in particular. The aim of the artwork, as repeated many times, was to criticize, or better to say, to demolish stereotypes through an ironical representation. Therefore, the 'ideal result' was that of accepting the images depicted with a sense of humor and most of all there was the intention to make people thinking over stereotypes. This kind of approach was indeed peculiar and non-standard, and perhaps because of this the EU member states hardly reacted in a positive way,

missing the chance to demonstrate EU's open-mindedness and to compare the one with the other, bringing to light most of all the negative aspects of the past and reflecting on them. However, the interviews conducted and here presented demonstrated that a general reflection on the European Union still exists within the intellectual sphere, and in particular within the social, cultural and artistic fields.

Although Entropa often offered stereotyped depictions that reflect negative aspects, so that in some cases it resulted very offensive and provocative, I believe that the message is not simply that of criticizing, but it wants also to simulate the European Union and more in general Western society to critically reconsider its history and values, which will permit Europe to move forward and to face the incoming challenges. Therefore I like to think about Entropa as a documentary of the European Union, which carries a benevolent intention of changing the current course of things, even if the instruments used were very provocative and disconsoling. In any case, critics sometimes are much more helpful than compliments.

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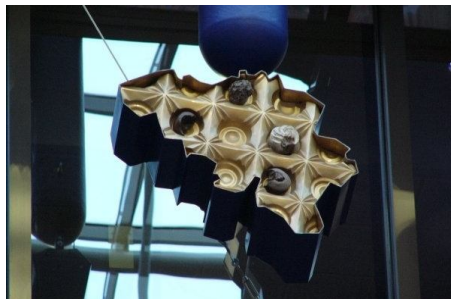
Grasso, Sebastiano. Personal Interview. Received by e-mail 02 Jan. 2010.

Annex

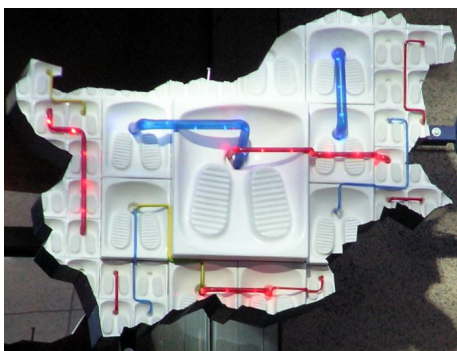
Table of EU members depictions in Entropa



1. Austria



2. Belgium



3. Bulgaria



4. Cyprus



5. Czech Republic



6. Denmark



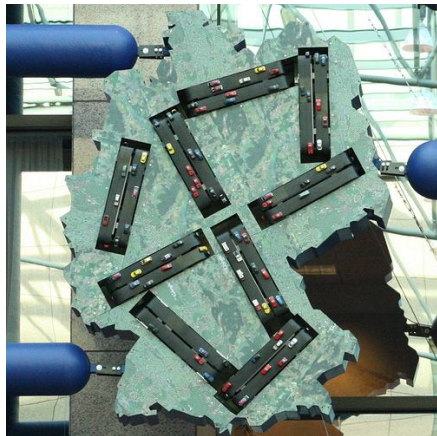
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8. Finland



9. France



10. Germany



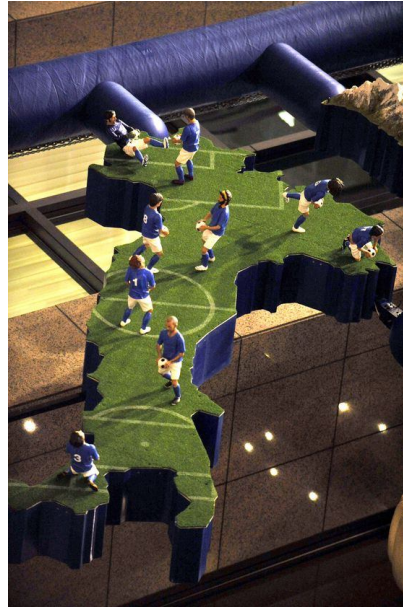
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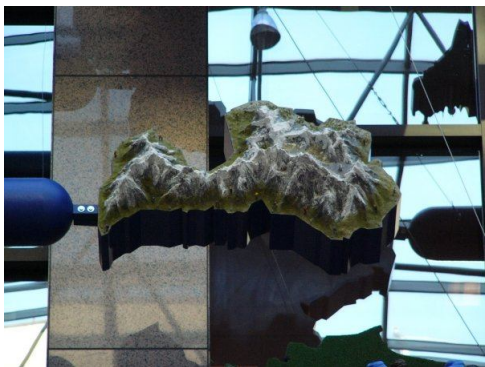
12. Hungary



13. Ireland



14. Italy



15. Latvia



16. Lithuania



17. Luxembourg



18. Malta



19. The Netherlands



20. Poland



21. Portugal



22. Romania



23. Slovakia



24. Slovenia



25. Spain



26. Sweden



27. The United Kingdom