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# The Currency of Europe? Representing Unified Europe as Film in the Age of the Euro

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Sasha Rossman

## Introduction

In 1985, the Committee for a People's Europe produced a report proclaiming the importance of culture and information circulation for the construction of a unified "Europe" under the aegis of the (then) European Economic Community.<sup>1</sup> The field of cultural production ought to be mobilized, the report suggested, in order to produce an "image" of Europe "in the minds of its people."<sup>2</sup> Even in the phase prior to currency union and the eastward and southward expansion in the following millennium, visual representation clearly already appeared to European functionaries as a key element in promoting the idea of a unified Europe. This admission belied the perception that there was a lack of visual forms that could serve as points of identification for a growing European project characterized by technocratic and fiscal integration—qualities that perhaps might be seen as resisting representation.<sup>3</sup> How was one to construct an affective identity for a group of states united through economic channels? How was one to lend "Europe" an everyday currency, in the multiple senses of the word?

This paper addresses the ways in which the struggle to find representational form for Europe continued as the EU developed in the early 2000s, a key period of European Union expansion. In particular, I examine two films from 2002 which articulate an image of a new "Europe" in the wake of the Iron Curtain's fall. 2002 was the year in which the Euro was launched, tightening financial bonds between a rapidly growing number of member states.<sup>4</sup> In many ways one might view this as a time of euphoric growth; borders appeared to be disappearing, paving the way for a more tightly-knit, integrated Europe characterized by an increasing circulation of goods, people, and money. Yet, the cinematic

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<sup>1</sup> Committee chair Pietro Adonnino wrote "action in the areas of culture and communication... are essential to European identity and the Community's image in the minds of its people" and that it thus was in the field of cultural production "that support for the advancement of Europe can and must be sought." Adonnino, cited in Cris Shore, *Building Europe: The Cultural Politics of European Integration* (London: Routledge, 2000), 46.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, Luisa Passerini, "Dimensions of the Symbolic in the Construction of Europeanness" in *Figures d'Europe Images and Myths of Europe*, Luisa Passerini, ed., (Brussels: P.I.E. Lang, 2003), 21-34 and the other essays in the collection; see also Shore, *Building Europe*.

<sup>4</sup> It was also the year in which Galileo, the EU's satellite navigation and positioning system, was approved *and* the year in which the EU recommended the conclusion of membership negotiations with ten eastern and southern European states. A time line of events from the year is provided on the EU's own website: [http://europa.eu/about-eu/eu-history/2000-2009/2002/index\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu/about-eu/eu-history/2000-2009/2002/index_en.htm) (accessed April 15, 2016).

## 2 | Sasha Rossman / The Currency of Europe?

representations of Europe made at this time paint a more nuanced and conflicted picture of an expanding European Union.

The slapstick French romantic comedy *L'Auberge Espagnole* (directed by Cedric Klapisch) and the somber, Swedish socio-critical art house feature *Lilya 4-ever* (directed by Lukas Moodysson) appear at first glance to provide two very different images of Europe at the millennium. Yet, as different as these films are in their aesthetic-philosophical approaches and target audiences, they share several qualities that structure their narratives of contemporary “Europe.”<sup>5</sup> Each film is concerned with the story of a young person from a broken home who travels abroad, driven by economic motivations. And in each film boundaries and borders—either crossed or closed—play key roles in articulating an image of Europe as a space of either integration or alienation, in which economics and financial transaction play a conspicuous role.

Perhaps the ambiguity inherent in “the idea of Europe,” to borrow Denis de Rougement’s phrase,<sup>6</sup> necessitates the portrayal of borders as a means of supplying edges to an entity that resists enclosure on numerous fronts, including that of representation. Certainly there is a long history of films that one can understand as ‘representing’ Europe, which all take the form of voyages in which a group of “European” individuals come together, frequently in a “non-European” setting. From Josef von Sternberg’s 1932 *Shanghai Express*, which featured a cast and crew of European exiles, to Jules Dassin’s 1962 farcical heist *Topkapi*, in which the future founder of the European Capital of Culture program Melina Mercuri appeared, films portraying “Europe” have consistently done so by exiting the continent in order to make its boundaries visible as part of an international comparison.<sup>7</sup> Most obviously, sets of visual and behavioral clues in these films unite the “European” group of protagonists in contrast to their cinematic “others”; geographic border crossing becomes a means of establishing new cultural boundaries.

My analysis of the films made in 2002 aims to show, however, that although both directors follow the timeworn trope of the voyage as a means of visualizing Europe, their films register and respond in new ways to the particular sets of contradictions inherent in the structure of the European Union: specifically the tension between political and economic forces as agents of contemporary European integration. For while the films orchestrate visions of Europe as constituted through border crossings, the borders to which the directors draw the viewer’s attention are not simply cartographic, or ‘cultural.’<sup>8</sup> Rather,

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<sup>5</sup> I am deliberately conflating “Europe” here with the European Union not only because both directors are EU nationals (and the films take place, by and large, either in the EU or in relationship to it), but because their films seem to uncannily prefigure the specific frictions that have erupted so violently in the EU lately, more than a decade after the films were made.

<sup>6</sup> Denis de Rougement, *The Idea of Europe* (New York: Macmillan, 1966).

<sup>7</sup> The tension between comparison and cosmopolitanism also informs the administrative pan-European projects that began in the 1920s with organizations like Film Europe. Seeking to construct a cosmopolitan “European” visual culture that defined itself in contrast to Hollywood, Film Europe and similar later funding and production schemes frequently met with issues of linguistic and cultural difference as well as protectionist legal structures aimed at stimulating domestic film industries in individual nations. On Film Europe see, for instance, Andrew Higson, “For love or money: transnational developments in European Cinema in the 1920s” in *Europe and Love in Cinema*, ed. by Luisa Passerini, Jo Labanyi, and Karen Diehl (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 43-59.

<sup>8</sup> On the problem of defining the cultural, here in the sense of intercultural conflict that would posit one nation as a culture vs. another, see Rosemary J. Coombe, “Contingent Articulations” in *Law in the Domains of Culture*, ed. by A Sarat and T. Kearns (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1998), 21-64.

I argue that both films symptomatically deal with the ways in which political and economic bodies compete with one another for dominance in contemporary Europe as dramatized recently in the “Grexit,” “Brexit,” and refugee crises.<sup>9</sup> The metaphor of political and economic “bodies” becomes literal in these cinematic mediations of Europe. Substituting individual human bodies for these entities serves to lend an elusive notion of “Europe” a graspable representational form along the lines of that which European functionaries perceived, as previously mentioned, to be lacking—albeit in unexpected ways. Specifically, this representational form enables us to trace the otherwise visually elusive role that economics plays as a driving factor in European integration.<sup>10</sup>

In these narratives of contemporary Europe, finance is a silent ‘actor’ that finds embodiment in the gendered coming-of-age stories of the films’ young protagonists; money and its exchange thereby appear as foundational to the production of “European” subjectivity as depicted in the films—enabling its expansion but also drawing limits. The preoccupation with the relationship between economics and border crossing, my interpretation suggests, makes sense when seen in the context of the introduction of the Euro in the very year the films were released. The question of the relationship between money and embodied integration had been the subject of an expansive EU information campaign in the years leading up to the realization of a common currency, and further questions over symbolic embodiment also played a significant role in the development of official visual symbols devised to represent the EU as a cultural and political entity.

Before proceeding to an analysis of the films, I briefly lay out what I mean by the conflict between economic and political authority in Europe. In this context, I investigate the formal attributes of the EU’s own official visual language: the Euro, the EU flag and promotional EU films. I then analyze the films in relation to these official representations of Europe. My leading question throughout is neither what, nor where is Europe. Instead, I suggest that these visual representations encourage us to ask *how* Europe is, as a structure. Because this structure is elusive, visual representations, I argue, can offer a rich and underutilized possibility for considering the respective “characters” of finance and politics in contemporary Europe which can be usefully elucidated through visual analysis.

## Europe’s Enduring Fuzziness?

Political theorist Kenneth Dyson has characterized the EU and the Euro Area in particular as being infused with a kind of “fuzziness” that originates in the fault lines between political power and economic power at the center of the European Union project. As he, Elie Cohen, and other scholars of contemporary European economics have pointed out, “The Europe that has been constructed so far has made extensive use of economic

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<sup>9</sup> For a very recent collection of texts on this subject see, for example, <http://nearfuturesonline.org> (accessed April 16, 2016).

<sup>10</sup> In this these films differ from anthropological accounts that in recent years have attempted to understand, for instance, the economic role that refugees and migrants play at Europe’s numerous borders. For more on these anthropological investigations, see Helen Kopina, Christina Moutsou, and Jaro Stacul, *Crossing European Boundaries: Beyond Conventional Geographical Categories* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2006) 7; Serhat, Karakayali and Vassilis Tsianos, “Transnational Migration and the Emergence of the European Border Regime: An Ethnographic Analysis,” *European Journal of Social Theory* 13 (2010): 373- 287. Regina Römhild, “Aus der Perspektive der Migration: Die Kosmopolitisierung Europas,” *Das Argument* 285 (2010): 50-59.

## 4 | Sasha Rossman / The Currency of Europe?

means to achieve its political goals.”<sup>11</sup> As Cohen observes further, “the law and the market operated not as a substitute to the political will, but as the political will in disguise.”<sup>12</sup> In other words, European unification is based upon a principle, which, crudely put, posits that political union will follow a technocratic financial merger. This began as a sequential, step-by-step program that has progressed from the Marjolin Memorandum (1962), the Delors report (1989), the Maastricht Treaty (1992) to three stages in the later 1990s which culminated in the creation of the common currency in 1999. Each of these steps wove a European Union of states more closely together by tightening a growing web of financial enmeshment. The economy is, in this structure, the “organizing and regulative principle,” as Wendy Brown has written, of the post-national federal organization that is the EU.<sup>13</sup> The cornerstone of this organization is the European Central Bank, an organization conceived according to the model of the German *Bundesbank*. Following an ordoliberal philosophy, both banks are explicitly designed as entities that are not subservient to political bodies. Instead, they are designed to respond to the ostensibly apolitical mandates of the market, specifically by controlling inflation and stabilizing currency. Because political interests might run against market dictates, ordoliberalism perceives politics *and* people who pursue political interests as being undependable; the credo is that “the economy” knows better than people.<sup>14</sup> This notion implies two principle beliefs: 1) that “the economy” and “the market” create their own abstract laws whose authority derives from their independence from human actors and 2) that these laws ought to be binding for people because the market knows best. “The market” or “the economy” thereby present themselves as entities that are explicitly disembodied and, therefore, authoritative and concrete. People, on the other hand—and political agents in particular—appear conversely to be embodied and so lacking in concrete authority. If we think of this in visual terms, we would observe a dialectic in which the invisible (financial interests) becomes visible and, thus, present while the visible (people) is perversely disembodied and thereby rendered invisible and impotent.

This, however, can generate a great deal of friction in the rather frequent cases when political conflicts and economic conflicts become enmeshed. This was recently and dramatically made manifest when Greece saw its sovereign political will battered down by ECOFIN, or the informal Euro Group of Euro Area Finance Ministers. ECOFIN has no legal political authority, but is nonetheless a key agent in the implementation of the fiscal policy that asserts authority as the prime organizing factor of states in the Euro Area, but also more generally in the larger Union.<sup>15</sup> Writing about ECOFIN, former Greek finance minister Yanis Varoufakis highlighted the paradoxical ways in which disembodiment and

<sup>11</sup> Elie Cohen, “The Euro, Economic Federalism, and the Question of National Sovereignty” in *The Idea of Europe: from Antiquity to the European Union*, ed. Anthony Pagden (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 266.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Wendy Brown, *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism's Stealth Revolution* (New York: Zone Books, 2015).

<sup>14</sup> See Cohen, and also the volume of essays collected in *The Euro at Ten: Europeanization, Power, and Convergence*, ed. Kenneth Dyson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008); and the ECB's own pamphlet about itself: Hanspeter K. Scheller, *The European Central Bank: History, Role and Functions* (Frankfurt: European Central Bank, 2004).

<sup>15</sup> Dyson, “The First Decade: Credibility, Identity, and Institutional “Fuzziness” in Dyson ed. 8; see also Etienne Balibar, Sandro Mezzadra, and Frieder Otto Wolf, “The Brussels diktat and what followed” <https://www.opendemocracy.net/can-europe-make-it/etienne-balibar-sandro-mezzadra-frieder-otto-wolf/brussels-diktat-and-what-follow> (accessed April 16, 2016).

embodiment played constitutive roles in the conflict between political and economic entities:

So what we have is a non-existent group that has the greatest power to determine the lives of Europeans. It's not answerable to anyone, given it doesn't exist in law; no minutes are kept; and it's confidential. So no citizen ever knows what is said within. [...] These are decisions of almost life and death, and no member has to answer to anybody.<sup>16</sup>

Hence the fuzziness that Dyson describes, making recourse to a visual metaphor much like Varoufakis. For in this constellation, the economic arm of the EU acts as an agent while absenting its figurative qualities and assuming the guise of a neutral 'zone' of free market and currency exchange. Is Europe thus, Dyson asks, an 'actor' or an 'area'? And if it is an 'actor,' is this actor visible or not? Can it be called upon to answer for itself?

One EU official wrote in the early 2000s that "Monetary policy is not a decision for the political arena: it is a technical matter, not an instrument for political involvement."<sup>17</sup> The paradox here is that the EU, and the Eurozone in particular, are politically driven projects—and processes—which are "entangled in highly technical issues of central banking, financial and fiscal policies and economic reform."<sup>18</sup> This entanglement means that what began as an act of political leadership later abdicated itself to a large extent to a monetary union, or area of exchange. While the monetary sector itself has no political agency, it still implements decisions that have political and indeed corporeal effects—for instance in the case of particular nationals subjected to austerity-driven cuts in social services and welfare.<sup>19</sup>

The perceived lack of a body attached to monetary union preoccupied EU functionaries in the lead up to and aftermath of Maastricht. This became apparent in the ways that discussions about the role of culture, material, and visual representations were implemented as a means of disseminating information about the EU and monetary union to the public. As Jacques Santer, the president of the European Commission observed in 1995, the EU needed to "get closer to the citizen" and the means of doing so was to launch an information campaign designed to lend a 'face' as it were to a fiscal union that lacked a tangible body.<sup>20</sup> In many respects, this campaign framed the European political project as a consumer project. Slogans like "The Euro, a democratic choice" conflated free choice of purchase with political freedom, even as the fiscal realm officially enjoyed autonomy from the political arena.<sup>21</sup> This 'fuzzy' situation found visual expression in cultural artifacts like the Euro itself.

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<sup>16</sup> Yanis Varoufakis "Full Transcript: Our Battle to Save Greece" in *New Statesman*, 13 July, 2015 at <http://www.newstatesman.com/world-affairs/2015/07/yanis-varoufakis-full-transcript-our-battle-save-greece> (accessed on 20.10.2015).

<sup>17</sup> Cited Shore, 99.

<sup>18</sup> Dyson, 31-32.

<sup>19</sup> Cohen cites article 107 of the Maastricht Treaty in *Les traites de Rome et de Maastricht* (Paris: La Documentation Française, 1992), 68 in Cohen in Pagden ed., 269. See also German Florian Gathmann and Veit Medick, "Chancellor on the Offensive: Merkel Blasts Greece over Retirement Age, Vacation Merkel" in *Spiegel Online* May 18, 2011 <http://www.spiegel.de/international/europe/german-chancellor-on-the-offensive-merkel-blasts-greece-over-retirement-age-vacation-a-763294-druck.html> (accessed 16 April, 2016).

<sup>20</sup> Shore, 40.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 104.

6 | Sasha Rossman / The Currency of Europe?

The new Euro notes were conspicuously devoid of human bodies. Instead of portraits, Robert Kalina’s designs under the rubric of “Ages and Styles of Europe” and “Abstract/Modern Design” featured a series of architectural passages: windows and bridges.<sup>22</sup> These passageways were inventions, composite designs intended to represent the progression of “European” architecture from antiquity to the present as an evolution of infrastructural accomplishments. They appear simply as unbounded mechanisms of extension and passage, hovering above maps from which borders are erased and the edges of Europe appear to merge seamlessly with an expansive colored ground. Devoid of human figures, we see simply a materialization of financial interconnectivity that mirrors the function of the bills themselves which travel across space, connecting one economic interaction with another.<sup>23</sup>



**Fig. 1 Robert Kalina’s “Ages and Styles of Europe” designs for the Euro**  
<https://www.fleur-de-coin.com/images/eurocoins/banknotes/specifications.jpg>

<sup>22</sup> On the design of the Euro see Jean-Michel Servet, “L’euro: fenêtres et monts d’un nomadisme monétaire” in *Figures d’Europe: Images and Myths of Europe*, ed. Luisa Passerini (Brussels: P.I.E. Lang, 2003) and Shore, 87-122. See also the EU website <http://www.new-euro-banknotes.eu/> (accessed on 16 April, 2016).

<sup>23</sup> Robin Stam, a Dutch designer, recently produced an interesting visual project in which he made the Euro bridges as functional structures, thereby turning the fictions of the Euro into unglamorous facts. See Kristien Allen, “Euro Bridges: An Uncommon Monument to the Common Currency” <http://www.spiegel.de/international/zeitgeist/euro-bridges-an-uncommon-monument-to-the-common-currency-a-795930.html> (accessed May 14, 2016).



Fig. 2 Robin Stam's realized Euro bridges in Rotterdam

(<http://www.designboom.com/design/fictional-bridges-on-euro-banknotes-realized-by-robin-stam/>)

Perhaps it is not accurate to say that the human body is entirely missing from the currency of unification. Present on the bills are the stars that one also finds on the EU flag. This circle of twelve stars refers to the twelve stars in the crown of the Virgin Mary, as described in Revelation 12.1. On both the flag and the money, therefore, a human figure is present, albeit in a highly abstracted form that dovetails in an interesting manner with the image of monetary flow represented on the bills, as well as by the azure blue ground of the flag, a color also associated with the Virgin.<sup>24</sup> Here, as in cartographic representations from the 16<sup>th</sup> century onward that figure Europe as a virgin queen, Mary's impenetrable womb symbolically circumscribes and protects the flow of commercial exchange which appears thus as both 'liquid' and bounded, profane and sacred: an economic theology.<sup>25</sup> Aside from this abstraction of the Virgin Mary, bodies appear more concretely on the new currency, but only on one side of its coinage and not on the notes. Here, we find portraits or sometimes allegories designed by individual member countries, small nods to their national sovereignty (the monarchy in Spain, for instance, or the French Marianne). An image of progression thus materializes, moving from the individual bodies on the lowest value objects to a sanctified freedom of monetary circulation on objects of greater value.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>24</sup> See Yves Hersant, "Douze étoiles d'or" in *Figures d'Europe Images and Myths of Europe*, Luisa Passerini, ed., (Brussels: P.I.E. Lang, 2003), 99-106 and Shore, 42-48.

<sup>25</sup> The conflation of Europe with the virgin has numerous historical precedents; see Wolfgang Schmale, "Europa- die weibliche Form," *L'Homme. Z. F G.* 11, 2 (2000): 211-233.

<sup>26</sup> Beginning in 2013, the body also appeared in the form of a hologram designed by Reinhold Gerstetter of Europa on the Euro currency. On Gerstetter's designs see Hans-Hermann Kotte, "Neue Euro, alte D-Mark - der Banknoten-Designer Reinhold Gerstetter im Gespräch "Die Köpfe kommen wieder" *Berliner Zeitung* <http://www.berliner-zeitung.de/neue-euro--alte-d-mark---der-banknoten-designer-reinhold-gerstetter-im-gespraech--die-koepfe-kommen-wieder--16627144> accessed April 16, 2016, and



This same rhetoric of evolution pervades the visual materials that the EU produced in these years, in part to support the project of the common currency. Though not necessarily seen by a wide public, these films, like the ongoing series of exhibitions on the Euro currency (in Malta the show was tellingly titled *Euro Genesis*), aimed to establish a more visceral, public type of contact between “Europeans” and the means of EU integration (finance and technocracy).<sup>27</sup> Films like *Passion to be Free* (1996) for instance, depict “Europe” along the lines of the developmental model found in the common currency. The film presents an image of Europe that appears as evolutionary timeline driven by a desire for freedom, a goal realized most fully through the mechanisms of monetary rapprochement. The movie begins with shots of infrastructure in movement: trains, planes and automobiles moving through space. It then moves to shots of people in movement, which serve as “embodiments” of the infrastructural images presented at the film’s outset. The mobility of this infrastructure (undergirded by an “unhindered” flow of currency not hampered by national trade regulations and the irritation of currency exchange) implies that Europe, and “Europeans,” are free—even as it also implies paradoxically that this freedom is itself bound to finance. This particular freedom appears as the pinnacle of a developmental evolution to which the film crescendos.

Similarly, in the informational film *The Tree of Europe* (1988), Europe appears as a biological organism (the tree) that, although battered by the wars of the past, grows steadily towards the heavens. Images of the tree are intercut with quick shots of living rooms in which children dressed in t-shirts decorated with national flags sit (presumably watching *The Tree* on TV). They are the individual “nuclear” elements of Europe, stand-ins both for the nations of the Union, as well as the young nuclei from which the union will grow. The focus on growth in both the images of the tree and the children conflates biological development with economic growth: the children will grow like trees into an ever-expanding consumer market that will drive the means of transport and circulation we see featured so prominently in *A Passion to be Free*.<sup>28</sup>

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<https://www.ecb.europa.eu/euro/banknotes/europa/html/index.en.html>. The hologram’s function is a security measure intended to hinder counterfeiting.

<sup>27</sup> See, for example, [http://ec.europa.eu/economy\\_finance/articles/euro/2013-11-14-euro\\_coin\\_exhibition\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/economy_finance/articles/euro/2013-11-14-euro_coin_exhibition_en.htm) accessed May 14, 2016.

<sup>28</sup> Matthias Belafi has described the importance of the family in current representations of EU organizations, particularly the European Council. The images of the Council, he argues, produced on the occasions of their meetings offer a set of snapshots like those in family albums that mark the entrance, exit, and growth of the Council as if it were a family unit, evolving over time. See Matthias Belafi, “The European Union as a Family? The Family Photos of the European Council as a Representation of the European Union” in *United in Visual Diversity: Images and Counter-Images of Europe*, eds. Benjamin Drechsel and Claus Leggewie (Innsbruck/Wien: Studien Verlag, 2010) 92-103.



**Figs. 3-4 *The Tree of Europe* (Daniel Tardy, 1988)**

The official EU visual rhetoric is thus one that emphasizes the crossing of borders, whether through erasure (the currency has no boundaries) or through figures like trees or vehicles (trains and planes) that move, like money and goods, from one place to the next and grow. As Dyson has observed, Europe often appears today in a form analogous to a balance sheet tracing the production of surplus; we might see the multiple references to biological development in the films as a kind of visual parallel to this model, conflating physical growth with the technocratic forms of the balance sheet and the graph).<sup>29</sup> This conflation is perhaps most present in a series of posters promoting economic union which depict an hourglass filled on top with coins from the old national currencies that merge, in time and space, into a colossal Euro coin located in the bottom part of the glass.

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<sup>29</sup> Dyson, 9.

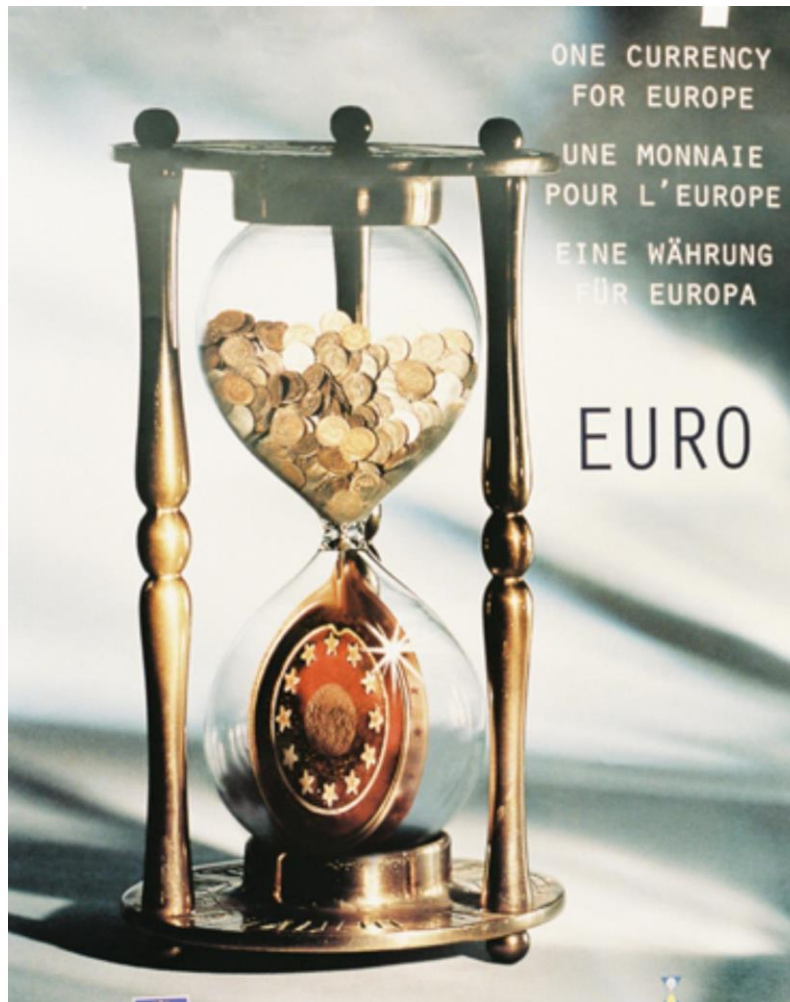


Fig. 5 The European Commission's hourglass poster for the launch of the Euro information campaign

If we ask, therefore, *how* is Europe, according to these depictions, then we would answer that Europe is evolving as an economic infrastructure that grows both thanks to human agency but also independently from it—according to the abstract laws of economic expansion and decorporealized transaction. If “Europe” has a body here, it is not a political body, but the technocratic body of a firm, or business, legitimated on the agents of its spread (currency) by the contractual signatures of the heads of the European Central Bank, the closest index of the human to appear on the Euro notes. Through a dialectical process in which the invisible becomes tangible and the embodied is dispossessed of its tangibility and agency, these representations lend the ordoliberal structure of the EU an apt mode of figuration. In doing so, however, they also hint at the “fuzzy” trappings of this structure.

### ***L’Auberge Espagnole, or the Business of Writing Europe***

Representing Europe in ways that are linked to financial transaction is not new: from images of the Adoration in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance to allegories of the four

continents in the Baroque period, Europe has frequently found a representational “body” connected to trade and mercantile exchange.<sup>30</sup> But the representations discussed above present a new image type of Europe as a figure of growth and movement—in reference to financial and biological growth—that incorporates extant iconographic elements but configures them in innovative forms that are (perhaps unintentionally) well-tailored to the political and economic structure of the EU.<sup>31</sup> This background of circulating representations provides a useful lens through which to examine films produced by individual filmmakers at this time that also present images of a “new” Europe as an area/agent of circulating currency, people, and goods. Cedric Klapisch’s *L’Auberge Espagnole* strikingly takes up much of the visual rhetoric produced officially by the EU. His adoption of this material occurs on both visual and conceptual levels. The following analysis explores how the transposition of this visual rhetoric assumes a form in Klapisch’s work that, while still foregrounding the role of finance in the EU, also succeeds in gendering the visual rhetoric of economic expansion (which it combines with national stereotypes) in ways that reproduce the boundaries whose collapse the film seeks to celebrate. Viewed in this manner, Klapisch’s film can be seen as offering an unexpectedly rich exploration of Europe in the age of monetary and political integration: what appears to be a joyful frolic offers, on second glance, an ominously precocious glimpse of the conflicts engulfing the EU today.

To begin with, the story that Klapisch’s film recounts is one of progressive development. The narrative of *L’Auberge Espagnole* is a *Bildungsroman*. The movie recounts the story of a young, straight-laced Parisian college student, Xavier (played by Romain Duris), who is preparing for a career in the French Ministry for the Economy. Following the tip of a senior administrator in the ministry, who is a friend of Xavier’s father, Xavier decides to go to Barcelona in order to learn Spanish because in the expanding Eurozone there will be a need for Spanish speakers in the world of finance. Xavier arrives in Barcelona, where, after various comedic misadventures, he moves into a flat that he will share with nationals of various Western European countries including Denmark, Germany, England, Belgium, Italy, and Spain. The scenario thus reads immediately as an analogue to EU cultural initiatives like the Capitals of Culture: Europe appears as a pair of high-profile tourist destinations (Paris and Barcelona) and is comprised of officially recognized member nationals.<sup>32</sup> One should not be fooled, however, into thinking that Europe here is

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<sup>30</sup> See for instance Michael Wintle, *The Image of Europe: Visualizing Europe in Cartography and Iconography Throughout the Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), Elizabeth McGrath, “Humanism, Allegorical Invention, and the Personification of the Continents” in *Concept, Design and Execution in Flemish Painting 1550-1700*, eds. H. Vlieghe, A. Balis, C. Van de Velde (Turnhout: Brepols, 2000), 43-71, and *Federschmuck und Kaiserkrone: das barocke Amerikabild in den habsburgischen Ländern*, eds. Friedrich Polleross and Wolfgang Neuber Bild (Wien: [Künstlerhaus](#), 1992).

<sup>31</sup> An excellent example of this iconography can be found in the atrium of the European Parliament itself, where Olivier Strebelle’s stainless steel monumental sculpture “*Confluences*” radiates through the building. This work is comprised of curves of gleaming steel that swirl to the top of the atrium like a set of “liquid” financial conduits. Philippe Dasnoy, *Olivier Strebelle: a Life in Sculpture* (Brussels: [Fonds Mercator](#), 2008), 199.

<sup>32</sup> On capitals of culture see Monica Sassatelli, *Becoming Europeans: Cultural Identity and Cultural Policies* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2009), especially chapters 3 and 4 and Ginette Verstraete, *Tracking Europe: Mobility, Diaspora, and the Politics of Location* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2010), Chapters 2 and 3.

simply a neutral spatial “area” and not an agent. In fact, Europe serves as the invisible agent that propels the story of Xavier’s maturation, his ‘becoming European’ in multiple senses.

Europe manifests itself in the movie as an active ‘agent’ in two ways. Most obviously, the means by which Xavier travels is the Erasmus student exchange program—one of a set of EU-wide programs established in order to promote cultural and intellectual exchange through official channels between universities. Less obviously, this links Xavier’s voyage in more than one respect to de-corporealized forms of circulation. One, of course, is the university bureaucracy which, despite being the butt of Kalpisch’s jokes, serves as the story’s narrative motor. Secondly and more importantly, however, is the role played by Europe-wide finance. Economic motivations undergird Xavier’s trip; he aims to get a job in finance in the future, speculating on the economic future of Southern European economies like Spain’s. Europe thus manifests itself as a project of financial investment: as Xavier will grow through the exchange program, so too will the enmeshed economy, to the presumed financial benefit of all. Profit maximization is the goal. Europe is both the means and the end. The resemblance to EU promotional films like *Passion to be Free* is clear, both deploy shots of transport hubs and photogenic European cityscapes to hail the freedom and growth that comes with an integrated economy.

On the surface, Xavier’s experience would seem to transform him from a disembodied subject to an embodied one in the sense that he comes into his own as both a sensual and creative individual through the course of his travels; he may thus be seen as an embodied stand-in for the European technocracy that springs from the dry roots of bureaucracy and blossoms into a sensually-awake, creative agent. We are reminded as well of the high value the European Commission and Parliament place on cultural work as a means of “producing” Europe. We know from the outset that he is reluctant to work in finance dealing with masses of paper in a cubicle. The trip to Spain appears to open him up to other experiences, unlocked by the supposedly sensual South. Yet the financial metaphors never lurk far below the surface. The conceit of the film is that Xavier moves into a shared apartment (the film’s title puns with the colloquial French expression *auberge espagnole*, roughly equivalent to a ‘potluck’ in English). Real estate thus provides the structure through which Xavier will come into contact with Europe: his roommates are youngsters from all different EU states. Payment for an apartment is the means by which they come together. Economic need leads to a situation in which each member shares a separate bedroom and must pay, or face collective ejection. When the rent is raised, the German and the Italian must move into a room together to make room for another ‘member’ of the community. Europe, we might say, is a form of rental contract.

If the film’s premise of border crossing and collective college hijinks indicates that borders are collapsing in contemporary Europe, this would be misleading. For the film aims to maintain neat differences between national stereotypes, such that their comingling is always limited by the boundaries that separate them in a cultural imaginary. This transpires in part on a narrative level: The German is anal-retentive, the Italian slovenly, the English roommates are big drinkers, and so on. Over the course of the film, the flat becomes messier and messier. The once neatly organized refrigerator in which each nation had its own shelf, becomes chaotic as the untidy roommates begin to place their food anywhere it fits. The progenitors of this ‘mess’ are predictably the Italian and the Spanish roommates, indicating that even if the film wants to present the viewer with a scene of cultural mixing, the economic and national stereotypes which separate the characters remain bounded and firm.

Perhaps more subtly, and yet more importantly, the film also maintains strong national boundaries when Klapisch turns his eye to sexual reproduction. Ostensibly, the European *Auberge Espagnole* opens itself for Xavier's sexual education: he receives lessons in how to seduce women from the stock lesbian character (played by Cecile de France). Yet instead of romancing a foreigner, Xavier turns his attention to a married French *bourgeoise* with whom he embarks on a torrid affair which goes awry, as does Xavier's long-distance relationship with his uptight Parisian girlfriend. Likewise, problems ensue when his roommates begin to mingle sexually with 'others.' The Danish-Spanish couple breaks up, for instance, when the Dane's ex shows up with their small child. The Englishwoman's tryst with an American buffoon ends in comic disaster, and she returns willingly to her English suitor. On the other hand, Klapisch allows de France to have an affair with her female Flamenco instructor, perhaps because there is no immanent prospect of inter-cultural (re)production. Moreover, the dance teacher-student relationship is one of supply and demand: at its core, it is an economic transaction, paralleling the film's general underlying paradigm.<sup>33</sup> Europe is open to sexual exploration in the way that shops are open to consumers for monetary (and perhaps cultural) encounters, but they eventually close their doors. One is reminded of the images in *The Tree of Europe* of small children dressed in flag t-shirts representing their individual nations, posed in the enclosed living rooms of their respective nuclear families. In Klapisch's film borders seem to disappear, only to reassert themselves mutely, but humorously, under a blanket of transparency that masks their socio-economic nature: Unity in diversity is the driving principle (in accordance with official EU cultural policy<sup>34</sup>) that both brings people together and keeps them apart.

On a visual level, this manifests itself in the frequent use of split screen techniques and inserts which play a key role in the film. In moments of conflict or resolution, Klapisch tends to introduce a plethora of insets which fracture the whole image into parts, much like videos that the ECB produced to illustrate the 'human' side of the Euro, in which a bank note disintegrates into a collage of individually bounded portraits and then reconfigures as a bill.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Belafi, 2010.

<sup>34</sup> See Shore, especially chapter 2.

<sup>35</sup> <http://www.new-euro-banknotes.eu/>

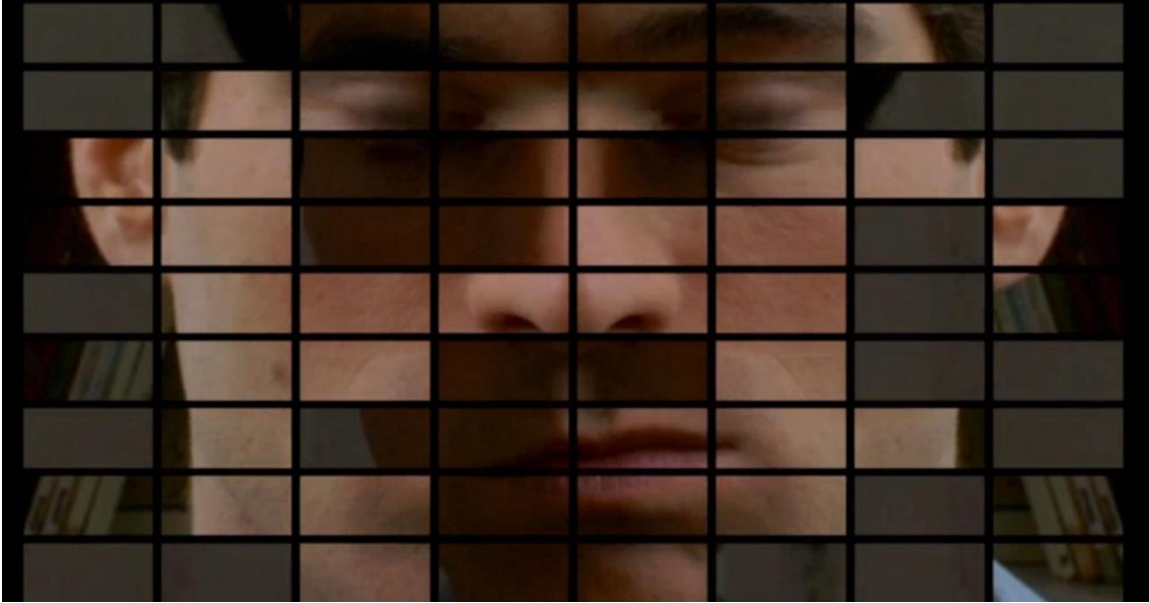


Fig. 6 Split Screen in Cedric Klapisch's *L'Auberge Espagnole* (2002)



Fig. 7 Split screens in a Euro informational film on the European Central Bank website (<https://www.ecb.europa.eu/euro/html/index.en.html>)

At the film's conclusion, a shirtless Xavier sits in front of his computer back in Paris. Having run away from the job in economics he received upon his return to Paris, Xavier has finally learned from the lessons gathered in Spain and decided to become a writer. His half nude body indicates his rebirth as a corporeal subject, contrasting with the buttoned-up suit he wore to his first day at the office. Xavier examines a pile of photographs, images of himself as a younger man. "I'm not him," he muses, "I am him, and him and him." Suddenly an array of photographs of all the film's characters begins to occupy the screen, one flashing after the next. "I am him, and her, and her, and him," he thinks in voiceover; identities and bodies are not solid, but rather part of a stream of disembodied images. The voiceover, like the split screen, is after all a voice that emanates not from Xavier's body,

but from his computer where the camera shows the viewer a glimpse of the text which he is writing: the story of the film itself. As Xavier begins to type, more and more small inserts occupy the space of the screen. Each click of the computer keys seems to generate a new face, a new image, and a new story. However, each click and each story or face is separated by the lines of a black grid. Europe is a “vrai bordel” (a true mess), he declares, but the mess is in fact a neatly regulated grid which processes and organizes stories and bodies digitally through computing instruments.

The other meaning of “bordel” is brothel, which plays into the relationships that Klapisch sets up throughout the film between gender, economics, and Europe. As an area, Klapisch genders Europe as female, building on tropes that informed Renaissance and Baroque allegories of Europe from Boccaccio to Abraham Ortelius.<sup>36</sup> Like the mythical figure of Europe, the ‘area’ of exchange opens itself to the (commercial) transactions of the film’s protagonist.<sup>37</sup> As an agent, however, Klapisch genders Europe as male. Not only does Erasmus (the historical figure) appear as a character on several occasions, but Xavier himself is the agent who ‘writes’ Europe as a story, making sense of the experiences he has consumed and putting them into narrative and discursive form. Within the visual and narrative economy of the film’s depiction of Europe, it is significant that we never meet Xavier’s father and only encounter his eccentric mother with whom he has an antagonistic relationship. The absent father figure is the catalyst for Xavier’s voyage. He encouraged his son to study economics and encouraged him to go to Spain to further his career. Yet while it might seem that Xavier has broken with the career that his father has mapped out for him, in fact he has not. He has simply reformulated it by becoming a contemporary *homo oeconomicus*, himself.<sup>38</sup> He thus reproduces in an ‘innovative’ form the role that his father had charted for him. In true neoliberal form, this ‘innovation’ is able to incorporate contradictions or differences and turn profit from them. Xavier thinks he is leaving the world of finance behind, even as he charts a career path that makes the consumption of difference (Europe’s cultural ‘capital’) into a product. This form of filial production is aptly rendered a disembodied process. The father is not there; he has simply provided a seed which generates narrative and growth. Xavier’s divorced mother, on the other hand, serves as a figure from which Xavier is constantly trying to separate himself: her worrying feels restrictive, emotionally as well as geographically, since she does not want him to leave Paris. If she, thus, stands in for the restrictive political formation of the feminine nation (*La France, La République, La Nation*), Xavier’s absent father can be seen as a (dis)embodiment, like ECONFIN, of a new Europe of capital which gives birth through unseen channels to a ‘liberated’ (i.e. liberal) cosmopolitan creative class of non-contractually employed European cultural entrepreneurs.

Perhaps for this reason, Klapisch’s camera likes to dwell on Duris’ nude body in an apparent attempt to draw attention to the corporeal nature of the author/protagonist as it threatens to ‘melt into air.’ Yet rather than differentiating Xavier from the economic underpinnings of the plot, the preoccupation with his body, which would appear at first glance to *ground* the character in fact does the opposite: manifesting a morphological

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<sup>36</sup> See McGrath.

<sup>37</sup> See Montrose.

<sup>38</sup> On the distinctions between *Homo Politicus* and *Homo Oeconomicus* in the historiography/theory of Europe see Wilfried Nippel, “*Homo Politicus* and *Homo Oeconomicus*: The European Citizen According to Max Weber” in Pagden, 129-138.



change instead of asserting the body's presence. As part of Xavier's development, he begins to shed his excess 'baggage,' including his girlfriend(s) and, ultimately his clothes. Born anew in front of his computer in the scene described above, he hovers between the weight of his body and the weightlessness of his writing. His discarded 'baggage' becomes interwoven into the sinuous meat of his autobiographical production. In fact, Klapisch moves from this scene directly to a final shot of Xavier running on a tarmac, arms spread wide like an airplane. Like the Europe figured in EU information campaigns, he is becoming weightless, taking off into the ether of the disembodied networks (data cables) that are the motor of the filmic narrative.



Fig. 8 Xavier (Romain Duris) in Cedric Klapisch's *L'Auberge Espagnole* (2002)

How is Europe here? It is a space of discursive composition, one in which bodies circulate within a financial structure of interwoven economic networks. We might see Xavier, in fact, as an allegory of Europe-as-entrepreneur. Having matured through the consumption of a temporally limited exposure to Europe (as area, i.e. space of potential), Xavier returns home to Paris where he starts his own firm, as a member of the "creative class."<sup>39</sup> It is important that he does not take a job in a state bureaucracy which would be associated with organized labor and community structures. Instead, he *becomes* his own business, an independent writer who realizes himself as an aesthetic project and producer at once, engendering weightlessness: his is no longer a body with mass, but rather a firm-of-one whose mind is his capital and whose computer is his toolbox. He's an investment project, and, like Europe, he is in the process of becoming a cultural business; he is agent and area simultaneously. Xavier's can thus be seen on one hand as an allegorical representation of Europe (figured in his personage), and on the other as a representation of an ideal "European" subject whom we see shaped by the economic structures of the EU, the neoliberal rationalities of self-investment, and the cultural aspirations of a cosmopolitan

<sup>39</sup> On the creative class, see for instance Richard Florida's website <http://www.creativeclass.com/>.

bourgeoisie. One is reminded of Jacques Delors comment from 1985: “The culture industry will tomorrow be one of the biggest industries, a creator of wealth and jobs.”<sup>40</sup>

And so while it initially appears as though the film presents Europe as a site geographical and cultural mixing (i.e. an ‘un-bordered’ area), one begins to discern in Klapisch’s work the ways in which the unresolved tensions between political and economic forms of governance in Europe play themselves out in ways that inadvertently demonstrate how the ebullient opening of borders to a new Europe is dialectically paired with numerous systems of border closure. The frictions engendered by this dialectic irritate the film’s apparent embrace of unity in difference as a European *Leitmotif*. Seen in particular with the hindsight of the real estate bubble crash in Spain in 2008 (only six years after the film’s release), Klapisch’s narrative assumes a somewhat sinister form. For the disembodied ‘laws’ of finance demanded a physical corrective to the distortions of the market that provided, ironically, the very kernel of diversity’s profitable production in the film: Spanish real estate. The corrective arrived in the form of austerity measures whose disembodied financial foundations had profound embodied impact: in terms of unemployment (which has reached over 25%) and ultimately eviction which paradoxically has sent new streams of migrating labor-seekers into the EU precisely because they cannot ‘pay the rent’ in a federal sense. The harsh weight of austerity thus holds up an uncanny latter-day structural mirror to Klapisch’s deceptively light-footed romp.<sup>41</sup>

## Bridge to Nowhere: *Lilya 4-ever* and the Rape of Europe

Swedish director Lukas Moodysson’s third feature film opens with a shot of a visibly agitated young woman running through a gray concrete urban landscape. Arriving at a bridge, she pauses, visibly contemplating suicide while staring blankly down at the cars speeding forward on the highway below. Moodysson shot the scene in Malmö, Sweden, two years before the longest rail and car bridge in Europe connecting Sweden to Denmark would open with great fanfare. Like the bridges on the Euro, this engineering feat was poised to usher in a new era of European interconnectivity and circulation: not only did the Öresund bridge visibly connect northern Scandinavia directly to western Europe, but an underwater data cable invisibly facilitated streams of information which were of particular importance to the new needs of banking and finance in this era.<sup>42</sup>

For Moodysson’s heroine, the bridge marks the end of the line and not an ethereal set of open possibilities. Unlike spectral flows of money and information through a data cable, Lilya’s movement is decidedly limited: she jumps, landing with a dead thud. We are thus presented at this climactic moment in the film with multiple—and contrasting—ideas of passage: the disembodied flow of finance and communication vs. a decidedly embodied leap, the former marking a lively and generative fiscal potential and the other reminding us of the weight—literal and metaphoric—of human life. If Moodysson’s prior features

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<sup>40</sup> Cited in Shore, 45.

<sup>41</sup> In 2002, when the film was made, both Ireland and Spain (two countries later put on austerity diets) contributed 26% of Euro Area GDP. Dyson, 9.

<sup>42</sup> Josef Vogl has noted that such data streams enabled 1.9 billion dollars to flow through the networks of New York City in a single day, also in the year 2000. According to Vogl, already in the 1990s money had started flowing electronically in New York in sums which equaled the entirety of the world’s GDP every two weeks. Vogl, *Das Gespenst des Kapitals* (Zurich: Diaphanes, 2010/2011), 18.

(*Show me love!*, 1998 and *Together*, 2000) poignantly deal with the challenges that communities in Sweden face in incorporating difference, his third film presents a European community conspicuously devoid of human or communal warmth.

If we situate Moodysson's film in the context of EU economics at the end of the twentieth century, it is tempting to link Lilya's crash onto the pavement to the types of events which have rocked the European markets with increasing frequency since the 1990s. In 1992, for instance, on Black Wednesday the UK was forced out of the ERM (the European Exchange Rate Mechanism) after financiers' short selling of the pound upset the currency's stability. While speculators picked up millions, the ensuing recession cost taxpayers and the British government an estimated £3.4 billion.<sup>43</sup> Profits earned at a distance through intangible transactions undertaken via fiber-optic cables find a pendant in the physical costs absorbed by bodies and lives at once connected and removed from global financial networks. The dimensions of the sorts of sums that characterize such events are so colossal that they verge on a fiscal sublime which, like an underwater data cable, resists visualization. Lilya's crash, however, could be seen as serving as an embodiment in Moodysson's film for the human costs of these bursts and bubbles in a market place where the spirit of 'integration' produces casualties in the forms of human ghosts. These market place events were not separate from the construction of Europe, but were embedded deep in technical structures of EU integration (the ERM, for instance) and as the common currency launched, anxieties relating to increasing unification found expression, as already suggested, in the ways in which Europe appeared in film and visual culture. It is in this context that we should understand Moodysson's work, which I analyze as a counter-narrative to Klapisch's comedy.

The director's well-received social drama *Lilya 4-ever* recounts a grim tale of illegal migration and human trafficking.<sup>44</sup> The director loosely based the story on the life of Danguolė Rasalaitė, a teenager from Lithuania who had been forced into prostitution in Sweden and committed suicide by jumping from a bridge in 2000. The tragedy made headlines in Sweden, where debates about migration, economics and the Eurozone were being hotly debated when the movie was released.<sup>45</sup> Reviews of *Lilya 4-ever* generally consider the film to be a brutally honest form of social realism, a combination of Ken Loach's politically-charged cinema and Lars von Trier's cruel, *Dogma* melodramas.<sup>46</sup> I suggest, however, that one can also read the film as an allegory of Europe: filled with anxieties over economic uncertainty and neoliberal subjecthood in the period of EU expansion. The film, I argue, conflates the topos of the rape of Europa with heavy-handed Christian symbolism in ways that articulate a representation of Europe as desire, a figure embodied in a gendered manner not only in the protagonist Lilya, but more importantly in the bodies of an audience in search of both security and redemption. An advertisement sponsored by the *Bundesverband deutscher Banken* (Federal German Bank Association)

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<sup>43</sup> Dury, H el ene.

[http://is.muni.cz/el/1456/podzim2011/MPF\\_AFIN/um/27608616/27608949/Black\\_Wednesday.pdf](http://is.muni.cz/el/1456/podzim2011/MPF_AFIN/um/27608616/27608949/Black_Wednesday.pdf). Retrieved 13 April, 2016.

<sup>44</sup> It was nominated for two Euro prizes that year, indicating its success in addressing a "European" audience: best film and best actress.

<sup>45</sup> See John T.S. Madeley (2003) 'The Swedish model is dead! Long live the Swedish model!' The 2002 Riksdag election," *West European Politics*, 26:2, 165-173, DOI:10.1080/01402380512331341161

<sup>46</sup> <https://web.archive.org/web/20081224071200/http://www.calendarlive.com:80/movies/reviews/cl-et-lilya18apr18.0.1186594.story>, <http://www.empireonline.com/movies/lilya-4-ever/review/>

in 1996 indicates that the reference to the myth of Europa and the bull held a renewed currency at the time, specifically in relation to worries over monetary union. A young woman stares out from the advertisement enticingly, leaning between a white bull's horns; "you know the father of the *Wirtschaftswunder*" the text reads (referring to former German chancellor Ludwig Erhard), "here is the mother: *Europa bedeutet Wohlstand und Sicherheit*" ("Europe means wealth and security"). It might initially seem odd that the topos of rape, seduction, and trickery associated with the myth might suggest security, yet Moodysson's film offers a means for reflecting upon how the story could serve as a form of Freudian wish-fulfillment which enjoyed a peculiar resonance at the time.

SIE KENNEN DEN VATER  
DES WIRTSCHAFTSWUNDERS.  
HIER IST DIE MUTTER.

*L*udwig Erhard gilt als der Vater des größten Erfolgs in der deutschen Wirtschaftsgeschichte. Er setzte die soziale Marktwirtschaft durch und ermöglichte das weltweit bestaunte Wirtschaftswunder. Nicht ganz so bekannt ist die Mutter des Erfolgs: Europa. Denn durch den erleichterten Warenaustausch mit unseren Nachbarn konnte sich unsere Wirtschaft entfalten und Wohlstand für alle mehren. Der wirtschaftliche Aufstieg der Bundesrepublik nach dem Krieg ging einher mit der europäischen Integration. Mit jedem Schritt zum vereinten Europa steigerte sich der Nutzen für die Bundesrepublik, ohne die sich immer weiter öffnenden Märkte unserer Nachbarn wäre das Wirtschaftswunder unmöglich geblieben. Heute liefern wir fast sechzig Prozent unserer Exporte in Länder der Europäischen Union. Mit dem Euro, der einheitlichen Europa-Währung.

vergrößern sich noch einmal die Chancen für Made in Germany, für den freien Fluß von Waren und Dienstleistungen. Dabei sind die wirtschaftlichen Vorteile nur ein Aspekt. Je enger die Staaten der EU zusammenwachsen, desto unwahrscheinlicher sind gewaltsame Konflikte und um so größer ist Europas Gewicht in der Welt. Europa bedeutet Wohlstand und Sicherheit. Darum unterstützen die Banken die Europäische Währungsunion und die harte Euro-Währung.

*Ihre Banken*

WEITERE INFORMATIONEN ERHALTEN SIE BEIM BUNDESPREKARIAT DEUTSCHER BANKEN, KATZENBUCH 1, 10677 KÖLN



**Figs 9-10 Advertisement by Scholz & Friends Dresden GmbH/Berlin for the Deutscher Bankverein, 1996**

A brief, but key scene in the film finds high school student Lilya, played by Oksana Akinshina, and her scrappy companion Valodya on the street in what Moodysson depicts as a grim, decrepit Soviet-era housing estate in an unspecified location in the former U.S.S.R. Lilya has been abandoned by her mother (who has moved to America via a mail-order bride service) and has never known her father who left after Lilya was conceived. What is left of the state social welfare system has nothing to offer Lilya other than the anemic consolation that her situation is indeed "awful." Her aunt has thrown her out of the apartment in which Lilya lived with her mother; she has neither family nor state protection, nor does she have money: a labor economy is non-existent in her environment. In a doomed attempt to raise cash, Lilya initially tries to build her own consumer economy by setting up a small stand on the side of the road where she's assembled junk to peddle. She asks a passerby if she'd like to buy something and the woman responds that there is nothing here [to buy].

This quick moment registers the tensions, I suggest, between what one might call the end of an exchange economy and the beginning of a neoliberal economy following the

paradigm that Wendy Brown provides in *Undoing the Demos*. Even if we acknowledge that “neoliberalism” can mean many things that are temporally and spatially contingent, Brown argues that there has been a general shift in the late twentieth century from a model of *homo oeconomicus* as an interested party in an exchange economy within the public realm to a figure that “takes its shape as human capital seeking to strengthen its competitive positioning and appreciate its value...the specific model for human capital and its spheres of activity is increasingly that of financial or investment capital, and not only productive or entrepreneurial capital.”<sup>47</sup> Lilya’s unsuccessful garage sale, when seen in these terms, replays precise this very transition: her failure to either sell goods or derive a modicum of support from a social-welfare state or her absent family leaves her with slim options. She must either starve or turn to prostitution, since other forms of employment do not appear to exist and her attempt to deploy productive capital falls flat.<sup>48</sup>

It is important to remember that, in spite of its pretensions to realism, Moodysson’s film is a potent fiction: perhaps other options would exist in “reality,” but the narrative he builds presents a scenario in which Lilya lives with no options other than to make herself into both product and firm. In this manner, she appears as a dark mirror image of the ideal “European” character of Xavier in Klapisch’s film. She is no longer a purveyor of material goods, but human capital. One can argue of course that prostitution cannot be conflated with neoliberal subjecthood. However, I suggest that the ways in which the film’s narrative is constructed imply that for Moodysson, anxieties over neo-liberal subjecthood are exactly what is at stake in contemporary Europe, and he stages these concerns through the figure of the young woman forced into prostitution. In terms of Lilya’s story, it is useful to turn again to Brown. She writes, “a subject construed and constructed as human capital both for itself and for a firm or state is at persistent risk of failure, redundancy, and abandonment through no doing of its own, regardless of how savvy and responsible it is.”<sup>49</sup> This describes Lilya’s situation well: as a laboring (or studying) individual, she has become surplus (i.e. superfluous), and she must invest her limited independent resources into a venture that might offer speculative value. In doing so, however, she is permanently at risk of “failure” and “abandonment,” and also at the mercy of a deregulated market which can prove deceptive.

This is where her story begins most obviously to intersect with the myth of Europa and the bull, encouraging us to read the narrative as a “European” story: “Europe” locates itself by means of a departure (to the East) and a “return” to a mythic point of origin. Legend has it that as the Phoenician princess Europa was gathering flowers with her maids, Zeus appeared in the form of a white bull. Deceived by the god’s form, Europa is enchanted and approaches the animal, only to be carried off to “Europe” (an ambiguous location to which she lent her name) in either an act of seduction or rape, depending on one’s point of view.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Brown, 33.

<sup>48</sup> Even theft does not present itself as a viable alternative because Lilya’s neighbors appear to have scarcely more than she does (at one point she does take a loaf of bread and a bottle of vodka from her aunt, a very meager form of sustenance).

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.

<sup>50</sup> On the history of the iconography of Europa and the bull see Schmale, 2000, Claudia Bruns, *Körper, Karten, Kollektive Europas Grenzdiskurse Interrelationen zwischen Geschlecht, Raum, Religion und Rasse in Kartographie, Mythos und europäischer Identität* (forthcoming Köln u.a.: Böhlau, 2016), and Michael Wintle, *The Image of Europe: Visualizing Europe in Cartography and Iconography Throughout the Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

Likewise, while at a disco, Lilya makes the acquaintance of Andrej, a handsome young man with a big red car. Putting up a gentle and caring front, Andrej disarms Lilya and fools her into thinking that they can escape to Sweden together and start an honest life with gainful employment as vegetable pickers. Like Europa, Lilya boards the moving vehicle (i.e. the bull), only to find herself tricked. Andrej provides her with a fake passport and a ticket to Malmö and sends her to Sweden with false promises that he will join her later. Upon her arrival, the trick reveals itself immediately. Not only are there no vegetables to pick, but also there is no “employment”—in the sense of contractual labor—awaiting her.



Fig. 11 Andrej and his car in *Lilya 4-ever* (Lukas Moodysson, 2002)

Instead, she is locked into a sparsely furnished apartment, raped, threatened, and forced to have sex with a stream of anonymous men. Her imprisonment in the apartment mirrors her imprisonment as a subject whose political existence has been severed; she has no recourse, either at home or in Sweden, to legal or state resources or protections. The walls that increasingly close in upon her physically represent not simply a lack of possibilities, but also serve visually and symbolically to demonstrate the enclosure of an individual reduced to life as a neo-liberal *homo oeconomicus*, a purely financial, *privatized* endeavor. If Lilya was able to cross the border into the European Union (thanks to the deception of a fake passport), she cannot escape from a society in which the individual has become an economized commodity. Whereas Xavier models this development as a means of investing in one's self as a creative financial endeavor, Lilya's survival is tethered to the reification of her body. While Xavier creates cultural capital, Lilya is consumed. Her figure thus presents a visceral counter-image to the ordoliberal embrace of the market's laws and the questionable logic, for instance, undergirding EU austerity policies that legitimate human suffering (and ironically curtail democratic self-determination) as a necessary cost for economic health in spite of numerous indications to the contrary. Brown writes of this

phenomenon: “At this point, the throne of interest has vanished and at the extreme is replaced with the throne of sacrifice;” a kind of political theology.<sup>51</sup>

Tropes of Christian sacrifice in fact play a key role in Moodysson’s film. Lilya carries around an image of angels with her and after her suicide, she joins Valodya—who has also killed himself—on a rooftop. In death, they prance lightly, lifted by their new buoyant white wings that counteract the gravity that engulfed their bodies while they were alive. The emphasis on the Christian story (initially Moodysson intended Jesus to be a character in the film) deliberately posits the neoliberal terror that attacks and imprisons Lilya as a non-Christian, or anti-Christian development. Significantly, the neoliberal economy is figured as a disembodied force: the social protections of the welfare state and traditional forms of contractual labor has literally vanished. This disappearance stands in stark contrast with Lilya’s martyrdom and Moodysson goes out of his way to emphasize her corporeal suffering, for example in a montage sequence of rapes in which the viewer does not see Lilya’s body, but only close-ups of her male aggressors while they assault her. The handheld camera, which remains closely attached to the protagonist’s body throughout initiates a visceral connection between the viewer and Lilya, so that her suffering is extended to the audience in ways intended to provoke an affective response to an economic philosophy that pervades not only the film but also contemporary socio-economic life in general.

An important intertextual point of comparison for understanding this affective construct is the 1989 Soviet film *Intergirl* (*Interdevochka*) directed by Petr Todorovskii and based on Vladimir Kunin’s novella of the same title. *Lilya* bears a striking similarity to the Soviet film, but also manifests important differences: an indication both of the changing times as well as the difference in target audience (*Intergirl* being explicitly aimed at a Soviet audience). *Intergirl* recounts the story of Tatyana, a Leningrad nurse who moonlights as a prostitute in order to earn hard currency. Cultural historian Helena Goscilo has pointed out that Tatyana serves as a cypher for anxieties over Glasnost-related transitions. She is both a ‘good’ girl and a ‘bad’ girl; she can recite classic poetry and literature by heart, but also enjoys the consumer goods hard currency can buy. After a Swedish client falls in love with her, she moves to Sweden where he showers her with gifts. However, she misses her homeland, embodied for her by her mother, a saintly schoolteacher with whom she had lived. At the close of the film, Tatyana’s mother finds out about her daughter’s sex work and kills herself; simultaneously Tatyana speeds in her car through the rain to rejoin her mother in the homeland and dies behind the wheel, a victim of the emptiness of Western consumerism (here figured by her new Swedish Volvo). The film can be understood as following the lines of much Eastern European ‘exile,’ or diasporic cinema, including works like Tarkovsky’s *Nostalgia* (1983) or Kieslowski’s *White* (1994) in which Eastern Europeans struggle to find a home in the West. In these movies, as Hamid Naficy writes, “the nurturing of a collective memory, often of an idealized homeland is constitutive of the diasporic identity.”<sup>52</sup> As Goscilo has argued, in the case of many Soviet and post-Soviet films, including *Intergirl*, this collective memory distills itself in the figure of the mother: a stand-in for the cultural construct of Mother Russia. In *Intergirl*, Tatyana’s mother, the working schoolteacher, appears as a manifestation of Soviet “culture.” She is both a laborer

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<sup>51</sup> Brown, 84.

<sup>52</sup> See Naficy, *An Accented Cinema: Exilic and Diasporic Filmmaking* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).

and a producer of cultural knowledge, as opposed to her daughter who the film associates with the loose morals and degraded, consumer (vs. producer) “civilization” of the West.<sup>53</sup>

In *Lilya 4-ever*, in contrast, the heroine’s mother is absent—having abandoned her daughter to move to America in the pursuit of (material) happiness. There is no nostalgic homeland present in the form of a ‘family’ structure that reproduces and extends itself genealogically. Moodysson depicts the post-Soviet present *and* the West as emptied out, devoid of family and traditional labor, as well as of employment which might serve to connect the family structure to the structures of the state or a company which could offer welfare and protection. In this wasteland, the atomized self is the only means of survival; the neoliberal fantasy of self-improvement becomes nightmare. This emptying, however, provides a point of entry for an audience seeking to recuperate something from the story: the hope for a Christian redemption carried out through the longed-for political agency of an EU-Europe that the film pictures paradoxically as both victim and potential savior.

In *Intergirl* this is clearly not the case: instead of an opposition between political and economic forces, we find an ideological struggle between East and West. Soviet audiences responded overwhelmingly positively to the film (which was a box office hit) perhaps because they were able to identify closely with the struggles of the star (Elena Yakoleva) whose career the film helped launch. Yakoleva rarely leaves the frame. In a scene analogous to Moodysson’s rape montage, for instance, Tatyana must have sex with a client in order to earn money for her visa.<sup>54</sup> Unlike Lilya, however, Tatyana’s face remains the focus of the camera’s eye throughout the scene; it is the client who disappears. Yakoleva’s emotive facial expressions in this sequence make her, therefore, a complex figure of identification. She is not emptied out, but rather filled with a subjectivity that manifests itself as an ongoing struggle between her desire for the West and her simultaneous deep attachment to a ‘cultural’ home. Tatyana is not a tragically hapless figure like Lilya, subjected involuntarily to the vagaries of a neoliberal market, but rather an active agent in control of her finances (she works) and her life (she has the luxury of making rational decisions). Disembodiment plays no role in *Intergirl* and Europe appears neither as an agent, nor an area. Instead, there is an embodied Russia *and* an embodied everywhere else. We still find ourselves in the age of Cold War economics.

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<sup>53</sup> See Helen Goscilo, “The Gendered Trinity of Russian Cultural Rhetoric Today: the Glyph of the H[i]eroine” in *Soviet Hieroglyphics: Visual Culture in Late Twentieth-Century Russia*, ed. Nancy Condee, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 68-92.

See Almira Ousmanova, ‘Window to Europe’: The Social and Cinematic Phantasms of the Post-Soviet Subject in *New Danverous Liasons: Discourses on Europe and Love in the Twentieth Century* eds. Liliana Ellena, Alexander C.T. Geppert and Luisa Passerini, (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2010), 95-113.

<sup>54</sup> It is worth noting that her estranged father forces her to earn this money, providing an interesting parallel/contrast to Xavier’s absent father in *L’Auberge*. In *Intergirl*, the father figure is likewise associated with finance (and the demoralizing effects it wreaks in human lives) as opposed to the mother, who is associated with the genetic and cultural womb/*hortus conclusus*. See Ousmanova, and on the trope of Europe as Marian garden see Schmale, 2000.





**Fig. 12** *Intergirl* vs. *Lilya 4-ever*: embodied star (*Intergirl* Petr Todorovskii, 1989)



**Fig. 13** *Intergirl* vs. *Lilya 4-ever*: disembodied star (*Lilya 4-ever* Lukas Moodysson, 2002)

In contrast to Tatyana, the figure of Lilya thus appears as a representation of post-Cold War Europe in two regards. She resembles Europa, the mythical princess who came to Europe from the East through an act of deception. But she is also a Christian figure, a stand-in for a Europe of Christian values that has faded in the new neo-liberal era. Moodysson thus presents us with an image of a contemporary Europe as a zone of economic exchange which is not “Europe” as a Christian *agent* of social democracy. The rape of Europa/Lilya thereby conflates in the film with the penetration and potential resurrection of the body of Mary, whose abstract presence we have already noted on the EU flag.

Just as Klapisch ‘went south’ to look for Europe, Moodysson has gone east to ‘find’ Europe in his representational project. In *Lilya*, however, Europe is, interestingly, not ‘found’ in the former Soviet Union. Instead, Europe comes from the East—in two guises—back to the West. We can argue that on a basic level she comes figured as the martyr Lilya/Europa. This would, however, be too simple. A more nuanced reading would suggest that Lilya is not the figure of Europe, but the agent by which Europe discovers itself as an audience—hence Moodysson’s ejection of Lilya off of the screen in the climactic rape montage. Ratcheting up the tension through visual technique in this scene, and in the film more generally, Moodysson intends to unite dramatically an audience linked affectively through responses of horror to the defiling of Mary’s/Europa’s/Lilya’s body.<sup>55</sup> However, this binding of the audience together also binds the audience to Lilya in another way: it indicates that the audience, not Lilya, is in fact the defiled body. It becomes clear upon reflection that the fictional Lilya is only a stand-in for the victims of neoliberal economics, i.e. Christian Europe itself (the affectively bonded audience). ‘Europe’ thereby emerges as a double projection of desire in Moodysson’s film. On one hand, Lilya is a figure of desire: the audience desires her redemption. On the other hand, Europe is an abstract figure of desire, a wish for a whole, healthy body that is not penetrated and ravaged in the manner of the neoliberal subject whose constitution is entirely economic, no longer under the protection of political representation.

These dynamics in Moodysson’s film seem, therefore, to have registered more than a social concern over the issue of prostitution. They resonated with the same tensions that informed the 2002 Swedish election. Though Göran Persson and his Social Democratic party enjoyed popularity thanks to the Social Democrats successful presidency of the EU and a growing trade surplus, the conservative parties argued that the rosy trade balance could be explained in part by the sale of Swedish companies to foreigners. Moreover, integration into the European (and global) market provoked anxiety, on both the right and the left. The left-wing parties arguably viewed immigration and integration with even greater trepidation than the Liberals, since they feared its effects on the strength of the national trade unions and collective wage bargaining.<sup>56</sup> Persson’s party won the election, but only as part of a coalition government with the Greens; the Liberals proved in fact arguably to be the biggest winners, cornering a much larger share of the vote than expected. The following year Sweden voted overwhelmingly not to join the Eurozone.

These political tensions find an opaque reflection in the various paradoxes of the film. For example, on one hand, Moodysson’s “Europe” concept as an entity that needs political

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<sup>55</sup> Historically a doubled iconography developed on maps where Europe appeared as a Virgin Queen, adapting the Greek myth to Christian rhetoric, thanks in part to moralized versions of Ovid that circulated beginning in the Middle Ages. See Schmale, 2000 and Wintle, 2009.

<sup>56</sup> See Madeley, 2003.

rescue can be seen as extending across national boundaries: his is an ‘inclusive’ message about the ways in which neoliberal economics affect the human subject. On the other hand, the emphatic Christian inflection of this message posits Europe as a Christian community, dialectically restricting the ‘human’ boundaries which he may intend to open. One can read the political struggle into this dialectic in the following manner: the Leftist parties aimed to bolster political regulation by halting international flows (of capital, but also migrants), while the Liberal party’s economic embrace of foreign capital and their correlative (self-styled) embrace of immigration emerged from an economic ideology that Moodysson’s film acerbically dismisses.

These dynamics are further complicated by the film’s emphasis on potential Christian redemption. For if, in the official EU imagery an economic Europe is one associated with weightlessness and circulation, then Moodysson’s antidote would have to be a firm *grounding*. This emphasis on the gravitas of the earth is apparent in the film in several key scenes: when Lilya’s mother abandons her the teenager sinks viscerally into the mud; when Lilya muses in a fantasy sequence about how she ought to have seen through Andrej’s deceit she exclaims, “Vegetables don’t grow in winter!” This quip implies that if one were to remain grounded in the cycles of terrestrial production, then one would see through the chimeras of neoliberal ideology which posit that “the economy”—and not humans or the earth itself—generates production. But is the market irrational? Josef Vogl’s analysis of neoliberal markets in relation to literature has offered two competing models for understanding, on a narrative level, market operations: either one can assume that the market is rational and that its crashes or bubbles are aberrations, or one can assume that the market itself generates these swings and dips in order to self-regulate.<sup>57</sup> In either case, the market appears as a fundamentally rational ‘real.’ If this is so, then perhaps only the ‘irrational’ of the spiritual offers a rebuttal. This would appear to be Moodysson’s response, except that he suggests that Christian ‘belief’ can in fact germinate rational (political) realities.

The film provokes us to ask whether the dichotomy that Moodysson constructs is false: are not religious belief and belief in the market part of an intertwined, irrational political theology as alluded to in EU symbols like the euro note, itself? Both ‘bank’ on the issue of trust, but as *Lilya 4-ever* suggests, trust is nowhere to be found in a world in which the market generates only illusions and tricks. How is one to trust that which cannot be seen and only appears in mediated form, in filmic narratives like *Lilya*? How can a medium of illusion, like cinema, differentiate its own illusory techniques from the illusions produced by finance? *Lilya* makes the complex play between embodied and disembodied forces of the market and politics its subject in ways that intersect with the problem of narrative medium/mediation, itself. In the film, this exploration plays itself out through the fulcrum of gender and East-West border crossings which provide a means of representing that which eludes visualization: the ghostly forms of Europe’s present and future in the age of EU expansion, and the growing hegemony of finance capital. If we ask *how* is Europe using *Lilya 4-ever* as a diagnostic vehicle, one might respond that the Europe of 2002 is conflicted. It *wishes* for an intact (Christian) political body that is geographically inclusive (East and West) and powered by (re)productive labor—conceived of as an antidote to an economic model of privatization and open capital flows. But this wish quickly manifests

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<sup>57</sup> See Vogl, 21-23.

its own political limits as it becomes intertwined with religious and gendered projections of desire that coopt Western Europe's Eastern, female 'other' as a means of 'discovering' a European norm which Moodysson suggests neoliberalism has perverted.

## Conclusion

To what question are these films an answer? My analysis has tried to show that both films articulate representations of "Europe" at a time of great transition in which the European Union was expanding in large part through the increased integration of European finance. In doing so, the movies appear to reflect the tensions that grew in response to the mechanisms of the growing technocratic intimacy at the heart of the unified Europe project. Although the films are very different, they also manifest important similarities that might be seen as lending "Europe" a sort of consistent currency, "unified" in its "diversity" since in spite of their differences the films' structural bases are remarkably consistent. Each appears to respond—however unconsciously—to a palette of contemporary images associated with European Union expansion and currency Union (the euro, films, and the flag) that form the foundation upon which the filmmakers build their representational forms. Both tropes and images of travel and transport become central motifs, as do narratives of development. At the same time, however, the challenge of representing the "infrastructure" of integration and expansion in filmic narratives demands that the filmmakers attempt to render structural (and infrastructural) organization tangible. In both films, this attempt results in an attention to the physical presence of the protagonists, but also in an interconnected focus on housing, family, gender, border crossing, and deregulated labor. This constellation of motifs appears to provide a broad but insistent foundation for films that seek to represent Europe made around the turn of the millennium.

This remains consistent with the historical context of the attempt to introduce a new common currency into Europe *and* to create cultural/visual representations of Europe which could serve as an affective common currency. Indeed, questions of economics structure both films, in narrative as well as visual terms (e.g. the relationship between embodied and disembodied actors), just as money connects the films' central motifs. Finance is a silent, but defiantly active agent within each of these European narratives. Although the films propose divergent visions of the ways in which money and Europe are mutually constitutive, each movie makes money-matters a central organizing principle, much as the technology of finance is the principle organizational mechanism of the European Union. In the films, as well as in the EU, the authority of finance does not go unchallenged. Individual bodies rub up against it, often with great friction, as if searching for a political body that is missing.

This search generates sparks that make the boundaries between the political and the economic flash into view. Hamid Naficy has written that "[b]order consciousness emerges from being situated at the border, where multiple determinants of race, class, gender, and membership in divergent, even antagonistic, historical and national identities intersect."<sup>58</sup> Yet whereas Naficy intends to claim a space of "exilic liminality" that transcends national binaries, films like *L'Auberge Espagnole* and *Lilya 4-ever* aim to overcome binaries not in order to arrive at a multiplicity of points of view, but rather to construct an oddly singular

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<sup>58</sup> Naficy, 31.

Europe; they aim for clarity, not ambiguity. Nonetheless the means by which they hope to achieve this often threatens to shatter beneath the weight of the tensions that run through the cinematic narratives. The struggle to channel these contradictions into a visual form suggests perhaps that we ought to understand contemporary “Europe” not as an ontological, or a unified geographic or cultural entity, but rather as a conflicted “border spectacle”: an unstable set of images released at moments in which tensions between various boundaries (geographic, gendered, cultural, ideological) flare up and thereby open—rather than foreclose—discussions about the nature of “representation” writ large in Europe today.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> On ‘Border Spectacle’ See Nicholas De Genova, Sandro Mezzadra and John Pickles, eds. “New Keywords: Migration and Borders,” in *Cultural Studies* ([Volume 29, Issue 1](#), 2015), 55-87.

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