

On April 12 2007 I attended the annual Premisela Lecture by Polish designer Josef Mrozek entitled "A Tradition Imagined—Some Remarks on European Design." I went there, in part because it was down the road, but also because the title attracted me. What could European design be, other than (modernist) history and nostalgia for the vanished world before World War II? Isn't it time to close down Museum Europe? Obviously, we could also think of Europe as a forward-looking constructivist project that positively defines the Europe as an open continent. This radical-autonomist vision of Europe opposes the conservative agenda of the Euro-sceptics and the managerial politics of EU bureaucrats alike. Radical Europe is one that rejects exclusion and the border regimes against refugees and migrants. European design, beyond EU rhetoric of 'creative' opportunities, could be situated within this new vision that productively engages with Eastern Europe, Russia, Turkey, Africa and the rest of the world.

We did not hear much of 'designing Europe' during this evening in the Tropenmuseum. Instead, Mrozek talked of tradition as the "part of heritage that undergoes daily evaluation." We could excuse Mrozek's obsession with tradition (instead of focussing on change, innovation, Islam, multiculturalism) because of Poland's traumatic past. It might be a bit hard for the Mrozek's of this world to become visionary as this activity so closely borders to utopianism. But at a certain point the legitimate reworking of the buried tradition flips into present day conservatism and straightout boredom. I do not know enough about Polish design to judge Mrozek's work but I can't say that it addressed any of today's topics—and it wasn't untimely either. Maybe it is better for the world that Europeans do not aspire anything, go low on ideas and disappear from the historical stage for a while.

What surprised me more was the hardcore US-American globalist attitude of Premisela director Dingeman Kuilman. In his introduction to Mrozek's lecture Kuilman asked: "What has the Netherlands got to do with Europe?" Apart from the fact that the Netherlands is geographically located on the European continent and that the Netherlands is one of the founders, in 1957, of the European Union, it is pretty astonishing to hear a Dutch cultural official state that "the Netherlands cannot avoid Europe." It was a perfect proof of the widely-heard complain of backwardness, arrogance and ignorance in the Dutch art scene. Eastern Europe is, at best, an exotic backwater, a deep province where nothing ever happens. So why bother with Warsaw? Kuilman's answer was that we had to "stop enlarging the small differences." What we need, so Kuilman, is a European design policy. I

agree. But haven't we passed the post-1989 time of 'difference' and isn't it time for honest conversations, real collaboration beyond good intentions and a truly unified European practice that stops talking and starts designing new traditions that are truly 21st century?