

## **Jörg Metelmann**

### **My *Metropa*-Europe**

*Metropa* – the vision of a European superfast train network acts on both the body and soul. It is a joyful experience to look at this map, and it is much more. The imagining of such transit also allows for an energy to deal with the issue in a different way than the Commission in Brussels or the transportation ministries would – in other words, different to that which is technically sound, stuck in the status-quo, and lobby-driven.

By making 'reality' a bit artistic and off-beat through a simple, ingenious transformation from geography to topography to vision, a door is opened to a “better insight”, a term coined by the artist Paul Klee in 1920. It not only involves a mental component, but becomes a lived reality. It is a "better insight" because it does not require me to make a moral judgment. When I experience this art, I can simply get excited about it, take pleasure in the balance of its many associations, and take in this different way of seeing the world. It is a small self-transformation within the realm of the aesthetic.

The metropa vision brings a great deal of tension to a head: logos against myth – here the logical technical European world of bureaucracy in Brussels, there the everyday life of the future that can already be felt today via the network map. In the EU infrastructure policy guideline (TEN-T, Trans-European Network-Transport) from 2013, several corridors are supposed to bring united Europe to life. In addition to roads, airports and ports, 15.000 kilometres of rail lines for high-speed lines are also to be expanded. This is the technological EU version: rational, solid planning, and the promise of progress for everyone – but nobody can feel it.

What a difference in perception at metropa! The public-affective intervention is nothing more than the transformation of the technical-political solution to transport infrastructure challenges into an artistic-aesthetic vision of a united and dynamic continent that, for all its size and diversity, suddenly seems almost tenderly close and familiar. How much more zest for life can metropa release when it comes to tangible cooperation!

As reported in the German newspaper, the *Sueddeutsche Zeitung*, the network plan affects us directly because one looks "with almost childlike enthusiasm at the lines and dots, at the colors and names of the stations" and in the imagination "is able to find proximity where there was previously only distance." And vice versa: the genuinely global feeling of a metropolitan world, in which the

unconnected is connected by a continuous movement of a colorful subway map, is fed back to the familiar awareness that you are already at home in five stations, e.g. with the L3 from Podgorica back to Munich or with the L9 from Glasgow to Cologne. In this respect, the network map of the super-express train is a mental cinema, a place of longing and a palpable feeling. But in reality it is also an abstract utopia as a “non-place” (Greek Ου-τόπος, *Ou-Topos*) because who can currently imagine Tel Aviv and Marrakech as the final stops of Line 1? And yet, what a thought to be able to drive from there to there with a day ticket ...!

The well-known landscape of the European continent, which is more or less familiar to all EU citizens (and British and Swiss) in its dimensions, is perceived completely anew by a different map display, as if one only had to lift the veil of the bureaucratically managed everyday life in Europe in the “capital city” (like in Robert Menasse’s novel “Die Hauptstadt”) to feel once again how much passion and good vibrations exist through this unique peace mission. All of this is also a physical state because very familiar experiences (the seats of a subway, the signal from the doors, the activity of the travelers) combine with the desire for thinking of movement within public European space; the obvious narrative potential (I can already see the ARTE mini series before me) and the qualities of social connections cannot be overestimated. [...] The reality is not complete, it is just a suggestion: the old combustion engine mobility is at an end and THIS could be the future, says the network plan. Metropa as an experience is a guiding star for action that does not get caught in what is immediately feasible. At metropa, sensual affectivity, intensive perception, the physical feelings of the activity and the free play of categories come together without me ultimately having to say, “this works or doesn’t work” in technical, political or moral terms. I can simply assert: “I am important with my perceptions and that's good”.

The Great Transformation is an artistic process, a collective work of art, a poem with many voices. We must never forget that and must not succumb to the normative power of the economically factual. We therefore need poets and artists at least as urgently as engineers and change managers. To work on a future other than the ruinous fulfillment of today's growth forecasts, we need aesthetic education in many forms.

*Short passages from: "Grüne Wiesen mit KLEE / Green meadows with clover - transformatives or: 'Better knowledge' through aesthetic education"; the full text will be published in autumn 2020 in: IMAGINEERING. How the future is made (S. Fischer Verlag) by Jörg Metelmann / Harald Welzer (ed.)*

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