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*Le Musée du Point de Vue, Jean-Daniel Berclaz*

### ***Le Musée du Point de Vue***

*Le Musée du Point de Vue* (“the museum of points of view”) is a long-term project by the French-Swiss photographer Jean-Daniel Berclaz. It is a museum without walls: at open-air “vernissages” the surrounding views are the works of art on display, and the landscape in which visitors find themselves has



become a ready-made. Berclaz's game of invisible transitions was exhibited as part of the *belle voisine* programme in March 2007 in the Villa du Parc of the Centre d'art contemporain in Annemasse, France. Excerpts appear throughout this issue of *Passages*, inviting the viewer on a journey through both manifest and hidden border regions.

# Far Away So Close

## Gazing across Lake Geneva

Etienne Barilier

**Spatial proximity does not guarantee cultural affinity. Etienne Barilier reflects on two nations simultaneously joined and divided by a common landscape – which happens to be one of the most beautiful in the world |**

Every morning I have the great good luck of seeing one of the most beautiful landscapes in the world spread out before me: Lake Geneva, at its widest point and, beyond the lake, splendid mountains, lofty but not forbidding. In the course of the hours, days and seasons, these mountains, together with the lake and the sky, yield infinite variations on the themes of light, space, and time. In *The New Heloise* (1761), Jean-Jacques Rousseau paid a pre-Romantic literary tribute to this landscape. And it is not surprising to learn that Tchaikovsky wrote the very beautiful melody for his violin Concerto on the heights above Montreux. The Swiss landscapes have always been highly inspiring.

The Swiss landscapes? In truth, my view of Lausanne is not Swiss. The peaks of the Dent d'Oche and the Cornettes de Bise are in French territory. The lake itself is half French. But still: since there is no customs office floating in the middle of these waters, I unconsciously imitate the clouds and the seagulls, and forget about the border which claims to cut the lake in two. After all, when the play of sun and cloud divides it into zones of shadow and light, this division has nothing to do with the demarcations of geographical maps. Of course I could have been more precise by saying that Lake Geneva and its mountains constitute one of the world's most beautiful *binational* landscapes. But what does nature care about national borders?

**From Lausanne to Evian.** Maybe things are not that simple. Perhaps nature is not that independent of human classifications and restrictions. But before pursuing the question of nature any further, let us take a look at the significance of bor-

ders for culture. Let us travel by boat across the twelve kilometres of sweet water which separate us from the "Sweet France" of song and legend. We disembark on the quay at Evian. We walk into the first newspaper kiosk we find (although, to be exact, here they are not called "kiosks" but "*Maisons de la Presse*"). There is hardly a Swiss newspaper to be found. If at all. We encounter the same situation in the bookstores: hardly any books by Swiss authors, if at all; no more and no less than we would find on the Champs-Élysées in Paris. Cultural Switzerland does not seem to exist here. Then again, if we look around us, we will notice that even "natural" Switzerland has almost disappeared: there are no mountains, barely any modest hills. Seen from here, the city of Lausanne looks like an oversized stain on the already uninteresting landscape. It is easy to understand why the people of Evian would not be interested in looking at or thinking about it. Of course, every morning a contingent of day workers from here commutes across the border to Switzerland. But for the inhabitants of neighbouring France – "*la France voisine*", as we Swiss call it – Switzerland is just an economic entity. Besides that, it is nothing but an unknown spot on the horizon.

Still, if I am to tell the truth, I must admit that France is not completely sealed off from neighbouring Switzerland, and Evian is not as far removed from Lausanne, culturally speaking, as Perpignan or Le Havre. The proof? Once I was invited to Evian to speak about my books. I have never been invited to Le Havre, or to Perpignan either. The Savoyard audience was very welcoming, with a warmth that testified to the links, however undefined, between us. Nevertheless, I

was almost as exotic, almost as unknown, at twelve kilometres' distance from where I live, as I would have been in the rest of France.

**Political borders and cultural barriers.** One thing is sure: barring a miracle, there will be no Swiss newspapers for sale in Evian, and certainly no Swiss literature, unless Paris sets the example. Political borders are very daunting barriers for culture to cross, protected as they are by the barbed wire of prejudices and the high wall of national political traditions. Another example? Like many writers from French-speaking Switzerland, I once received the *Prix Alpes-Jura* literary award: a true cross-border prize, one might think; the cultural expression of a natural community. After all, the Alps and the Jura are mountain ranges shared by Switzerland and France. But that was not it, at all. The prize, which is presented in the splendour of the Palais du Luxembourg in Paris, is one of a whole collection of awards offered to deserving representatives of "la Francophonie" whether they hail from Africa, Vietnam, Lebanon or Canada. It is hard to shake the impression that France likes to lavish paternalistic affection on its former colonies. And Switzerland, after all, is one of them: wasn't the Helvetic Republic created by Napoleon?

I am not trying here to ridicule a great country which, after all, supplies French-speaking Switzerland with the lion's share of its culture. I would just like to emphasize that the *Prix Alpes-Jura*, as honourable as it may be, does not at all reflect a cross-border concept of culture. It is one of the honours which Paris bestows, sometimes with real generosity, on representatives of French culture from around the world. Paradoxically, the prize turns Switzerland into a far-off land, like Quebec or Benin. We must face the facts: the world of culture is shaped far more by politics than by nature.

France is admittedly a special case. The land of the Jacobins is more centralized than any other European country, and although the distance in kilometres is about the same, St. Gall is closer to Constance than Lausanne is to Evian. But in spite of everything, even with Germany, Austria or Italy, geographical closeness cannot triumph over national differences. Nature is never stronger than politics.

**Interpreting the Landscape.** Could it be, however, that nature itself – or what we call nature – is already political, or at least cultural? After all, landscape itself changes its meaning from one country to the next. The same mountains, the same lake, whether seen from France or from Switzerland, can represent very different concerns or ideals. To paraphrase Blaise Pascal, it is not only the truth that changes from one side of the Pyrenees to the other; it is the Pyrenees themselves which change their meaning, depending on whether we are viewing them from France or from Spain. Like the Alps or the Jura, they are shaped by the way we see and feel, and change their aspect as soon as we have crossed the border. The Alpine glaciers are as sublime in Switzerland as in France, but it is not really the same sublime: the height of the Swiss peaks proclaims diligence and virtue, while the height of the French peaks is grandeur itself. For Switzerland, the Alps mean freedom and protection. For France, they are the obstacle that Napoleon overcame. As Amiel has pointed out, a landscape is a state of mind. But, it must be added, a landscape is also a national vision, and even a national treasure. In this sense, the border stretching across the middle of Lake Geneva may well be invisible, but it is no less real, or difficult to cross.

**Intellectual economy.** In spite of everything, what is difficult to cross is – fortunately – not impossible to cross. As a result, the inhabitants of border re-



Le Musée du Point de Vue, Jean-Daniel Berclaz

gions are holders of both great privilege and great responsibility. They are located – to use a fashionable technical term – at the “interface” of two worlds. Perhaps more than anyone else, they are compelled to confront the surrounding reality and to respond to it. It is precisely because they live on the border that they are required to cross it. And isn’t that crossing of borders the cultural act *par excellence*? No progress, no discovery, no broadening of the mind can occur without crossing borders of one kind or another. As soon as we have recognized the Other, we have entered into a process of exchange for mutual benefit. Paul Valéry, reflecting on Europe’s extraordinary cultural vitality, described the entire continent as

the fruit of “*the exchange of all spiritual and material things*”. He even spoke of an intellectual “*economy*”, precisely because the intellect lives on and enriches itself through exchange. According to Valéry, our ancestors not only exchanged – or traded – commercial goods, but also “*beliefs, languages, customs and technical developments*”. The mind thrives on exchange, as does life itself. It posits differences, which means: borders to cross. All culture is exchange, and all exchange crosses borders.

If borders didn’t exist, we would have to invent them, in order to have an intellectual and cultural life. When, every morning, I admire the view of the French mountains across the lake, I have the



impression that we are exchanging glances, just as two people would. France begins in the middle of the lake, and even if the borderline which separates us is invisible, it secretly distinguishes the gentle and elegant French waves from the earnest and sober Swiss waves. But perhaps it is the awareness of this invisible difference – the awareness of the cultural nuances which human beings lend to nature – that spurs us to live and create. Look: on this side, the lake is a tableau by Bocion. Over there, it is a Corot. And I would not want to give up either one. ┐

Etienne Barilier was born in 1947. He is a novelist and essayist, and has published over forty books, including the novels *Le Chien Tristan*, *La Créature*, *Le Dixième ciel*, and *L'Enigme*. He has written essays on musical, literary, philosophical and political subjects. Several of his works deal with Europe and European culture, including: *Contre le nouvel obscurantisme* (1995), which was awarded the Prix Européen de l'Essai, and *La Chute dans le Bien* (2006).

# Metropolitan, Binational, Cultural

## Cross-border exchange between the Lake Geneva and Rhône-Alpes regions

Jean-François Rohrbasser and  
Jean-Bernard Mottet

Neighbouring countries are linked not only by economic but also by cultural interests. With “La belle voisine”, an artistic programme spearheaded by Pro Helvetia, a binational region discovers and expands its joint cultural identity.

### Reports from the cities of Geneva and Lyon on an exemplary exchange I

*La belle voisine* is an artistic and cultural programme spotlighting the Rhône-Alpes region of France, and particularly its regional capital, the city of Lyon. Currently many Swiss artists are participating there, and in a later stage of the exchange, we will be welcoming French artists to Switzerland.

For Geneva, initiatives involving cooperation or partnership with Lyon, and even more so the French towns and villages surrounding the canton, are an established fact of life. Cross-border links have increased rapidly as the region has de-

veloped, with more and more French nationals taking up employment in Geneva and the lake area, and many Genevans benefiting from the facilities and advantages – particularly in finance and property ownership – offered by their larger European neighbour.

The border, then, is no longer a real border – to the point where there is now talk of creating an integrated Franco-Vaudois-Genevan urban area with a population of nearly 700,000. For the time being, the possibility is envisaged primarily from the point of view of spatial development and



Le Musée du Point de Vue, Jean-Daniel Berclaz

transport systems, with the aim of meeting the region's most urgent needs. But the effects of this increasing cross-border permeability go far beyond these specific fields to embrace all the services that contribute to people's quality of life. This is the background to *La belle voisine*.

**Cross-border identity.** Initiated at the ministerial level in both countries, this programme aims to acknowledge the importance of regional and local entities in building cultural bridges across national borders. In a way, one could describe it as a necessary – and paradoxical – corollary to the ongoing process of globalization and the creation of pan-European political structures.

For Geneva, *La belle voisine* is an opportunity to highlight the cultural dimension of the ongoing development of the city and its region. As a re-

sult, the project has symbolic value. It illustrates the desire of close neighbours to acknowledge a joint cultural identity beyond national borders. It can also be seen as a happy coincidence, at a time when the Swiss federal government is asking the major Swiss cities to reflect on the concept of urban development and to present development projects.

The initiative is also interesting in that France has just named Geneva as one of its twelve potential metropolitan areas. Rather than interpreting this as an echo of historic ambitions to annex their territory, the Genevans – exhibiting their legendary pride – have reacted positively to the honour thus conferred on them, and to the responsibilities it would bring. But above all they have begun to accept that this view of Geneva reflects the true state of affairs. Other Swiss cities,



such as Basel or Chiasso, must undoubtedly experience the same type of relationship with their German or Italian neighbours.

**Partnership and projects.** An urban area or region cannot be built exclusively on economic and financial foundations. This is why Geneva's French partners have insisted on including a cultural dimension in the development programme jointly pursued by elected representatives on either side of the border.

However, this goal cannot be achieved by simple decree, nor by the well-meaning interest of the authorities alone. Its success depends on the terrain or territory, in other words on the needs and expectations of the populations concerned, combined with those of artists and cultural operators. The process of integration requires that a dialogue first take place at this level, with a view to setting up exchanges and partnerships and, at a later stage, joint projects.

This process has in fact been going on for several years. As far as literature is concerned, libraries in the cross-border region have concluded an agreement granting free access to each others' members. This partnership has also given rise to the *Lettres frontière* operation, involving meetings between writers and publishers from French-speaking Switzerland and their counterparts in the Rhône-Alpes region.

In the theatre sector, the aim of the *Colporteurs* project is to get audiences moving around Lake Geneva. There are a number of festivals on either side of the border to attract theatre-goers: *La Bâtie – festival de Genève*, which in the last twelve years has branched out to Annemasse, Divonne and Ferney-Voltaire; the *Dansez* contemporary dance festival, organised from Haute-Savoie; or *Jazz-ContreBand*, jointly planned by Swiss and French associations. In another original initiative, a number of associations and institutions have been coordinating their programmes, working out a common promotional format and granting reductions to all holders of a "Dance Pass". This enables people on either side of the border to attend dozens of contemporary dance workshops and performances each year.

All of these projects are supported by the local and regional communities. But they also receive support from institutional bodies such as the Comité régional franco-genevois (Franco-Genevan Regional Committee) and the Conseil du Léman (Lake Geneva Council), whose understated but effective activities have paved the way for these exchanges.

**Grounds for hope.** Today, the *belle voisine* programme is implemented largely by cultural operators who know one another well and have been working together for years. The fact that most of

the organization is handled by the Pro Helvetia foundation is seen as due recognition of the process of cross-border integration and as a commitment for the future.

The question remains: is the symbolic – and concrete – recognition accorded to the project as it currently stands a prelude to further developments? After all, *La belle voisine* is very much an ad hoc project. And the urban area and region will not be a reality until the partnership has been formalized around a mutually accepted concept of cultural policy.

The next steps are already being taken. Later this year, a working group will draw up an 'atlas' of cultural players and facilities. At the same time, the Groupe de concertation culturelle (Cultural Dialogue Group) involving the Canton, the City of Geneva and a dozen or so municipalities – a group set up to debate common issues and projects of regional significance – will be enlarged to include representatives from the French municipalities. One key question concerns the cultural facilities to be provided in the catchment area. Geneva is hoping to build a new theatre, while Annemasse, its near neighbour, is thinking of redeveloping its town centre with plans to include a cultural institution. Would it not be in everyone's interest to develop these two projects together? There are plenty of grounds for hope: the recent signature, by the City of Geneva, of a partnership agreement with Lyon as part of the French city's candidature for the title of European Capital of Culture bears this out. Rather than compete with one's *belle voisine*, a more rewarding approach is to enter into partnership and work together for cross-border integration...

For the time being, it is to be hoped that the strong signal sent by Pro Helvetia will be picked up and passed on by both the Swiss federal authorities and those of the French Republic and its regional entities. So that today's symbols become tomorrow's reality. —

Translated from the French by BMP Translations AG

Jean-François Rohrbasser is a councillor for cultural affairs (*conseiller culturel*), and Jean-Bernard Mottet a councillor for public relations (*conseiller en information*), of the City of Geneva.

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## Lyon Plays the Host

Four questions for Patrice Béghain, cultural councillor of the city of Lyon

*Passages: Contemporary Swiss art is being featured for three months in Lyon and the Rhône-Alpes region. What do you think about that?*

Patrice Béghain: I am very pleased, of course! When the Swiss Consulate General in Lyon and the Swiss Embassy in France proposed this event more than two years ago, the reaction was very enthusiastic. First of all, because of the obvious geographical links between Lyon and the Rhône-Alpes region and Switzerland. I also think it important that Lyon's cultural institutions, which often welcome artists from all over the world, should be open to their immediate neighbours, and therefore to contemporary Swiss art and artists.

*And yet, exchanges of this kind, particularly between the Rhône-Alpes region and the Swiss part of Lake Geneva, have existed for some time. What additional advantages does the belle voisine programme bring?*

I would say that it enables us to move up a gear... A neighbour is not someone we turn to spontaneously, because we feel that, basically, we know each other already. *La belle voisine* reveals to us the true worth of this neighbour. We are going beyond good neighbourly relations to engage in a real dialogue. *La belle voisine* also demonstrates Lyon's desire as a city to be open to the outside world, and particularly to Europe. As you may know, Lyon is a candidate for the European Capital of Culture title in 2013. In this connection, we are planning a number of activities in conjunction with Switzerland, in particular with our friends in Geneva.

*How did you experience the belle voisine venture in its early stages?*

I am always a bit wary of diplomatic initiatives in the cultural field. Often they are based more on political goodwill than actual content. But in this case, the opposite has been true. I would particularly praise the professionalism of our Swiss partners: the fact that they appointed an event coordinator in Lyon, that the Swiss Arts Council Pro Helvetia has become involved, that

together we have taken the time to think it all through, and that we have done a thorough job. The result: the *belle voisine* project is based on a solid partnership. It is a project which includes artists, cultural operators and so on, and therefore seems to me to augur well for future developments.

*Patrice Béghain, what is your personal experience of Swiss artistic activity?*

I enjoy it particularly as a theatre-goer, through a number of important Swiss directors who sometimes work in France, such as Christoph Marthaler. I am also familiar with contemporary art, as a large number of Swiss artists are represented at the big international events. And I am also familiar with Swiss literature... I am not a specialist, but I think there is a breeding ground of talent which the Swiss do not appreciate sufficiently. Is that because some of their artists take up a critical stance vis-à-vis Swiss society? Which leads to a sort of conflict of interest? If this is the case, that stance has to be accepted, in my opinion. Whether in France, in Switzerland or elsewhere, an artist should not behave like a docile, bleating sheep. Artists are expected to expose our failings. They are there to alert us to the flaws and deficiencies of our society. And that is what I particularly like about Swiss artists, maybe even more than those of other nationalities. Whether we consider the fine arts or the performing arts, the Swiss possess this critical dimension – an acerbic quality, a willingness to break with convention – which I personally regard as very important. ─

# Pas-de-Deux in Annecy

## A Swiss choreographer in France

Carine Bel interviews Gilles Jobin

**The dancer and choreographer Gilles Jobin will be programming Swiss dance events during a three-year term as artist in residence in Annecy, for the Swiss-French cultural exchange “La belle voisine”. This past March saw the premiere of the first programme, “Article 3”. What are the benefits for the Swiss dance scene? |**

*Carine Bel: In Annecy you are showing several facets of Swiss choreographic creation. How would you define that term?*

Gilles Jobin: For the Swiss pavilion at the Seville World Exhibition, Ben Vautier wrote the slogan “*La Suisse n’existe pas*”: Switzerland doesn’t exist. His words struck a chord with me: I would have to leave the country to make a name for myself. When asked to put together a show for *La Belle Voisine*, his phrase came back to me. Switzerland still does not exist. I decided to use it as the show’s basic theme: What is Swiss identity? Twenty-six different cantons and systems of education, and four national languages. Swiss culture does not have its own ministry; it depends mainly on the cities and cantons for support. And rather than Swiss artists, we have artists from the canton of Vaud, Geneva, Zurich or Basel. Or else German-Swiss artists, French-Swiss artists, foreign artists... Lots of foreign artists live and work in Switzerland. What matters to artists here is their art itself, rather than any sense of belonging to a country. So *Article 3* presents pieces by about ten established artists currently living in Switzerland.

*Your company is based in Geneva and is also associated with a national French theatre. Does straddling the geographic border influence your work?*

Yes, when it comes to organization. For our three-year association, the Annecy theatre is putting at our disposal a production cell for developing different sorts of projects: workshops, stage creations, *carte blanche*. The deal includes venues, a team, a cultural promotion network, a chance to build up audience loyalty unhampered by canton-

al borders, and the opportunity to meet other artists, stage directors and choreographers. It serves as a springboard. In Switzerland, this kind of exchange – between an artist and a venue for the performing arts with substantial means at its disposal – does not exist.

*What borders does this situation enable you to cross?*

The one between the Swiss and French dance scenes. I am the middleman, passing along the information collected on one side of the border to the other and vice versa. I see no mental barriers between Switzerland and neighbouring France, no geographic ones either, but differences in organization. My territory stretches from Lausanne to Lyon at the heart of a huge metropolis that develops joint projects: transportation, lodging. Structurally, though, a gap separates the two countries: France has a very well-organized dance network, whereas in Switzerland, the dance profession does not officially exist. Training options are few: no public schools worth mentioning, just some private courses and companies doing what they can. The “Geneva dance scene”, led by about a dozen artists showing their creations beyond the Swiss border for ten years now, has acquired some renown. The powers that be have only recently begun thinking about training structures.

*What borders apply to dance?*

Dance is easy to export because there are no language barriers. In *Double Deux* (double two), I brought together twelve dancers with nine different nationalities. Differences are an ingredient of my work. They stimulate the discovery of the

“Other”, enrich the choreography. My profession? International artist. It is a profession governed by a different mode of development: first heading out for different parts of the world before getting back in touch with one’s own region.

*Do you see body codes, in the same vein as cultural or linguistic codes?*

Not really. A body code is distinctive of a person, the person’s sensibility and experience, but not his or her nationality. Dancers are marked by the training they receive, which varies from one country to the next. A Dutch dancer trained in Spain would tend to follow in the footsteps of Pina Bausch. Trained in France, however, that dancer would develop a broad knowledge of contemporary dance. In a country suffering from a dearth of dance programming, the dancer would lack any references. Swiss dancers of my generation are practically self-taught, formed by what they glean here and there from different training courses and dance companies.

*What ties would you like to initiate between Switzerland and neighbouring France?*

Dance shows go on tour. Training for dancers and dance teachers could also be integrated into a network.

*Does your choreographic language enable you to cross borders between disciplines?*

“Tutti frutti” is all the rage today. I don’t believe in it. Every field has its own characteristic features. I like digging into mine. I’m open to all sorts of influences. My father was a geometric painter, and I grew up immersed in his outlook. I chose dance – with its variations and deviations, but always dance.

*When “borders” are mentioned, you reply with “connections”. Why?*

Animals and plants know no borders. Borders block the way. It’s the organic mass that appeals to me: the points at which connections or divergences occur, the passages between individuals. Take the Western world’s obsession with organizing everything. I use it as a basis for creating suggestive images that appeal to the viewer’s subconscious, connecting each person with him- or herself. I write a score that allows both performers and spectators to give free rein to their imagination. What is suggested varies: life, childhood, sexuality... The experience that belongs to each of us is singular, and not all of us will connect at the same points.

*Your piece Double Deux deals with the single and the multiple. What are the body’s borders?*

Vital space. Within an urban industrial society, couples merge and re-merge. It is the contacts

and the lines of connection in how people function that matter. What are the necessary passages for creating life? If we were to equip every citizen with a GPS for one week, we could come up with a map of the routes followed. Borders produce bottlenecks of bureaucracy, breaks in our mode of functioning that disrupt connections and disturb the ways we choose to move about. For example, technical equipment cannot be brought across a border without authorization. Every day, some 80,000 bodies cross the border into Geneva. Their social life is in France, their professional life in Switzerland.

*Your work in dance moves forward like a flowing, blazing organic mass. Where is it going?*

On a journey. I want to capture the audience and carry it along with us. Those joining the take-off will find themselves on the other side of the planet. Upon landing, they’ll return home with a head full of pictures. ─

Translated from the French by Margie Mounier

In 1996, after a career as a dancer with several Swiss companies, Gilles Jobin spent a year in Madrid, where he embarked on his first solo creations. From 1997 to 2004 he was based in London, where he staged his first group piece: A+B=X. Since 1998, he has been in-house choreographer for Lausanne’s Théâtre de l’Arsenic. Based in Switzerland again since 2005, he is now also associate choreographer with the Bonlieu Scène national in Annecy (F). Jobin has received several prizes, including the 2001 Young Choreographic Talent Award, bestowed for the first time on a Swiss choreographer by the SACD (Society of Dramatic Authors and Composers, Paris/Brussels/Montreal). He receives frequent invitations to produce and tour, in Europe and around the world.

Carine Bel was born in 1966 and lives in Annecy. She has a degree in Political Science, and works as a freelancer in the fields of journalism and multimedia communication.



*Le Musée du Point de Vue, Jean-Daniel Berclaz*

# Chansons de geste

## Promotion and prospects for French-Swiss singer-songwriters

Olivier Horner

The “chanson” is a French popular song genre with roots in the lyrical traditions of folk, cabaret and the singer-songwriter movement. Its fans are primarily francophone – but the songs themselves are not necessarily made in France.

The Geneva music journalist Olivier Horner outlines the specific challenges faced by French-Swiss “chansonniers” |



“Raze the Alps...and show us the sea,” was the French-Swiss singer Michel Bühler’s battle cry in the early 1980s. Today, Swiss-French artists continue to feel confined by the Swiss borders. With a pool of only 1,800,000 citizens, the “French-Swiss chanson” biotope has to export to survive. And even if distribution requires crossing the Alps to catch a glimpse of the Mediterranean, the Côte d’Azur that comes into view also does not constitute a big enough population to permit singers to hit the jackpot, or even to make a decent living with their music. Yet France and French-speaking Switzerland are sustained by the same cultural references. They share a common core of intellectual and edu-

cational traditions, whether in literature, cinema, poetry, music or television.

These joint experiences are at the heart of the multidisciplinary *La belle voisine* (beautiful neighbour) project spearheaded by Pro Helvetia. French chanson of course fits in particularly well, if only because it uses the same language – apparently unlike the visual and plastic arts. What counts is that, for once, chanson is represented on a par with other performing arts (drama, dance, classical music), historically deemed more prestigious. The fact is that the Swiss government is not in the habit of granting subsidies to contemporary music, including the chanson, despite all its potential as

a showcase for Switzerland abroad. This is so especially in the francophone world, where such diverse Swiss performers as Gilles, Sarclo, Stephan Eicher and Henri Dès are all well received.

**Enlarging the radius.** The *belle voisine* project's highlighting of the creativity of French-language singers and songwriters in the Rhône-Alpes region is a worthy initiative. Once the spotlights on the event go off, however, won't "our" chansonniers again have to fend for themselves? Who will help with record distribution, with invitations for stage appearances in Paris or elsewhere in France? In the opinion of Marc Ridet, who heads the FCMA (Swiss Foundation for Chanson and Contemporary Music), it is "vital for this type of exchange to continue". If not, then all this exposure thanks to *belle voisine* will have been in vain. He explains: "The Rhône-Alpes region tends to be very open to Swiss artists. A chanson festival like last January's *Les Courants d'air* in the Thonon/Evian area featured several Swiss singers: Thierry Romanens, Jérémie Kisling, Nour, K, and Solam." Funding was made available to them by the FCMA for those specific concerts. Ridet points out: "Thanks to this sort of operation, we can expand the Swiss territory. The logical extension of French-speaking Switzerland comprises the Rhône-Alpes region, as well as Franche-Comté or Belfort. It's more important for French-Swiss artists to perform in Annecy or Thonon than in Berne or Zurich. Conceivably, in the foreseeable future it might no longer be necessary to head for Paris, if we put enough effort into those nearby areas. In terms of cultural development, for instance, things could be concentrated within the Rhône-Alpes region, just as they are economically. It's the very image of a regional hub." All the more so since one third of Swiss nationals living in France have settled in the region.

**A common language.** Featuring several representatives of the latest wave of Swiss singers (K., Kisling, Romanens, François Vé, Yoanna), *La belle voisine en chansons* is an inspiring example of a co-production between France and Switzerland – in this case, between the FCMA and France's Dessous de Scène Productions, at the initiative of Pro Helvetia. It proves that a shared language does indeed exist across physical borders. And that the French-Swiss chanson is alive and kicking, without having to refer back to the eternal Gilles, "father of the French-Swiss chanson" and author of such popular classics as *Les Trois cloches* (immortalized by Edith Piaf and Les Compagnons de la chanson) and *A l'enseigne de la fille sans cœur*. If this chansonnier from Vaud (born 1895 as Jean Villard) still inspired the generation to which Michel Bühler and Sarclo belong, no trace of his influence weighs down on the young singers of today. In 2006, Nicolas Michel, aka "K", received the Young Swiss Talents award at the Printemps de Bourges music festival, before being selected by the Mon-

tauban Festival for the "Bravo des pros" award. His lyrics and stage presence came across well in both Switzerland and France. Last year, too, K. was selected to represent the Young Talents of Switzerland at the annual French public radio community concert *Couleurs francophones*. Several stage appearances at the prestigious La Rochelle music festival *Francofolies* and, in September of 2006, at the Granby (Canada) International Song Festival brought additional acclaim. His plans for this year include a re-recording of his album *L'Arbre rouge*, specially for France. As for Jérémie Kisling, extensive media exposure in French-speaking countries has allowed him to go on tour not only in Switzerland, but also in France, Belgium and Quebec. All the more so as his second album, *Le Ours*, was released by Carla Bruni's record label *Naïve*. Meanwhile, for his album *La saison des trèfles*, François Vé received the famous French Charles Cros Academy's 2006 "Coup de cœur", awarded to support and encourage the careers of young song interpreters with quality lyrics. Kisling received the same prize in 2004, for his first album *Monsieur Obsolète*. Undoubtedly, Thierry Romanens is the one who has travelled most widely across French-speaking territory. An avid stage performer and recipient of several awards, he had given 160 concerts in a two-year period, shortly before releasing his third album in six years, *Le Doigt*. Others – like Zedrus, Polar and Pascal Rinaldi – crisscross the French-speaking stage scene more discreetly. Nonetheless, even if an Eric Linder, aka Polar, can release his first French-language record with a multinational record company like Virgin-EMI in France and boast lyrics by France's renowned Miossec, artistic competition is fierce for those who want to stand out from the crowd. It is worth pointing out that Pro Helvetia has provided funding for many of these artists' tours abroad, including Romanens, K, Kisling, Vé and Sarclo.

**Prophets without honour.** All these details underscore the fact that, their various successes notwithstanding, only rarely are Swiss-French singers "prophets in their own country", or in France. Sadly, too, they generally have to forge a reputation for themselves abroad before getting a taste of success in Switzerland. Certainly Michel Bühler and Sarclo would have something to say about a Switzerland that welcomes the chanson imported from France but turns a cold shoulder on the efforts of its own children. Bühler and Sarclo tried their luck in France. So did Pascal Auberson, who actually made something of a name for himself in Paris in the mid-seventies. In the wake of his first album in 1981, Sarclo won many awards, including the Prix Brassens. He also caught the eye of French singer Renaud, who invited him to open his show a few years later. Yet, despite their indisputable talent, and the respect they may garner

from industry insiders, none of these singer-songwriters have been able to make a real name for themselves in the French-speaking world. At least not commercially.

What was – and still is – missing, for these French-Swiss artists to establish their reputation in the long term – since their number has not gone hand in hand with public recognition? First and foremost, the answer would be solid funding structures.

**Effective support.** Although the FCMA – funded by the cantons, cities, and certain private interests – has been in existence for ten years, it remains underendowed. Its budget varies from 200,000 to 250,000 Swiss francs, depending on the annual project schedule. Given the cost of a marketing budget, which – in such a highly competitive realm as music – is so vital to calling attention to an artist at the start of his or her career, how can the FCMA fund the artists sufficiently? Ridet, who directs Swiss Music Export as well as the FCMA, declares: *“We need a solid financial hub in French-speaking Switzerland beyond showcases like music festivals – Nyon’s Paléo, Geneva’s Voix de fête and Bulle’s Franco-mania – and [local public] Radio Suisse Romande. And this not only on behalf of structures like ours but of the labels as well. It would almost pay to set up a permanent office in Paris, like the Belgians and the Québécois have, to improve the distribution networks for records, promote stage appearances and ensure media coverage. In Paris, our Swiss Cultural Centre, for instance, provides us with no help at all, when in fact it should serve regularly as a showcase. Instead of dividing up the subsidies, the politicians should, for instance, support a Swiss record company, who would negotiate distribution contracts for its record productions in France.”*

Most of the decision-making centres are located in Zurich, making it no easier to grasp the specific features of the francophone market. Ridet ironically notes: *“Go explain to someone in German-speaking Switzerland that Thierry Romanens has trouble with audiences in Paris but does well in other parts of France, Belgium and Quebec! Or how important the partnerships with the Fnac [music and bookstore chain] and Le Mouv’ [radio station] are for the chanson festival scheduled for next September at La Maroquinerie [concert hall] in Paris.”* For that upcoming event, Ridet is obliged to beg for subsidies left and right to finance the four-day festival – although it represents an ideal showcase for French-Swiss chanson. The results of this sort of initiative could be ten times more effective than a few concerts organized for the Swiss Music Club stage under the auspices of last January’s Midem (International Music Market) in Cannes. The latter project was subsidized by SUISA to the tune of some 500,000 francs, which included rental fees for the Swiss market stand put at the disposal of publishers, producers and distributors.

**Prospects for the future.** Freelance artists, too, complain of a lack of funding, all the more bitterly inasmuch as their travelling makes them permanent representatives of French-speaking Switzerland abroad. For Thierry Romanens as much as for Jérémie Kisling, France remains the logical capital for furthering both their art and their careers. It is also a wellspring of inspiration: Paris and its outskirts already represent the cultural cradle of chanson, but even more, they are undeniably the trend-setting centres for today’s cultural and media events. Failing to invest in this sector comes close to encouraging the suicide of the French-Swiss chanson. It also underestimates a cultural sector that, for years now, has established itself as an economic industry in its own right. Swiss cultural policy for the chanson and contemporary music lags badly behind when it comes to promotion. By contrast Belgium, a country of a comparable size, has been in the forefront for a long time now. Here in Switzerland, the prospects depend on our catching up with the others. ─

Translated from the French by Margie Mounier

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# A History of its Own Carouge versus Geneva

Joëlle Kuntz

A border can be the site of peaceful coexistence or conflict; it can link or divide. A case in point for Joëlle Kuntz is the evolving relationship between her village, Carouge, and the nearby city of Geneva. Carouge has maintained its own identity over the centuries, showing that borders can be mental as well as physical |

Why do we say two people in love are “crazy about” each other? Because they have lost that sense of self which normally separates one person from another. They merge, like two bodies that have become one: the state of being invoked by the expression “I’ve got you under my skin.” But time passes, the initial madness subsides, and the need for an autonomous space resurfaces. Things may even go so far that the former lovers “can’t stand the sight of” each other. The thin barrier erected in self-protection after the early stages of infatuation grows into an impenetrable wall. Where there was fusion, there is now repulsion. The experience of the border is universal and rooted in the body: first detaching from the mother’s body, then establishing one’s own space, finding a place to inhabit, making one’s mark, building a house and tending one’s fields. It is the experience of creating a boundary between “mine” and “yours”, inside and outside.

We experience these boundaries from earliest childhood onward, first with our parents and siblings, and later in school, where we learn about the limits of a village, a city, a country, a group of countries, separated from another village, city, country or group of countries. In today’s society, where self-fulfilment often seems to depend on the size and cost of one’s apartment, a couple living together may become obsessed with drawing up boundaries.

**After the Fall.** There is no escaping borders. Except in paradise, which is not love, but space, an infinite space for everyone. In contrast to hell: flesh against flesh, the unbearable heat of the others’ bodies, leading to hatred, evil, destruction until the end of time. After committing the Original Sin, Adam and Eve “fall” from the infinite space of heaven, where they were blissfully alone, down to the finite space of the earth, where they will have



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to live with their numerous offspring. We have learned the consequences for humankind of this “fall”: having to share the planet’s surface, human beings lost not only their spatial but also their moral innocence. From now on, each square metre shall be counted, attributed to an owner, stamped with the seal of the law or physical force. Enclosures, walls, gates, barriers, borders: they all begin as physical boundaries before becoming mental and political ones as well, and represent the rational, civilized (but not necessarily peaceful) response of an earth-bound humanity haunted by chaos, uncertainty, the undefined, and the lack of one’s own space – in other words, haunted by what it calls “hell”.

Borders between nations are recognized, but not always respected. They do not have an easy time of it. Laid down in the more or less distant past according to considerations never lacking in seriousness, they stubbornly resist the random movement of history. What changes is their political character, their psychological scope, and their symbolic significance. A very high vertical boundary, like the Rhine between France and Germany, one day becomes a horizontal “bridge” between the two countries. The border is still there, but it is no longer high or forbidding. One scarcely takes more note of it than of the border separating the Canton of Vaud from the Canton of Geneva. Its role is now that of witness: testifying to what once was, and has now been superseded, but must not be forgotten. After all the deaths it caused, this now-harmless line on the ground continues to separate two distinct historical narratives: reconciled and pacified, yes, but not about to merge.

**Between Carouge and Geneva.** I live in a small municipality near Geneva: Carouge, which belonged to Savoy until 1815 and is still not truly Genevan. The two towns are separated by the Arve river, cold and grey as a *gendarme*. Spanning the river is a bridge, which travellers had to cross when going from Provence to Germania in Roman times. Along with the bridge, the Romans left a villa and a few inns. The place remained insignificant under Savoyard rule, until John Calvin put Geneva under the authoritarian yoke of his Reformation. As a result, an array of dissidents took refuge on the left bank of the Arve: Catholics expelled from Geneva, French Huguenots waiting for residence permits in the ‘Protestant Rome’, rejected Huguenots, tax-evading businessmen, and enterprising Savoyards looking to serve the needs of this new population with their bistros, cabarets and artisanal skills. On the right bank of the Arve, the orderliness of Geneva; on the left, the chaos of Carouge. “It is impossible to describe how much the inhabitants of the two towns hate each other,” a witness wrote much later.

On this terrain rife with rivalries, the Sardinian monarchy built an ambitious new town, with ruler-straight streets, newly-designed houses, and wide squares planted with trees. The result was an urban space in the Italian style, attractive enough to compete with Geneva. In 1830 Hegel noted the exodus of residents from the old, “petrified” imperial cities to towns with fewer restrictions and lighter taxes. “Thus Altona sprung up next to Hamburg, Offenbach next to Frankfurt, Furth near Nuremberg, and Carouge near Geneva.”

Taxes are still lower in Carouge than in Geneva. Geneva’s residents flock to Carouge for the restaurants and nightlife. The Sardinian town, which had been taken over by student-squatters in its more dilapidated days, is now under the protection of those same students, who in the meantime have become lawyers, architects or designers. With its “Italian” flair, Carouge invites Genevans to come and spend the money for which they can find no satisfying outlet in their own city – as they did during the reign of Victor Amadeus, Duke of Savoy and King of Sardinia. Savoy is long gone, but the Arve continues to tell its story and the story of Carouge, which is not to be confused with the history of Geneva.

**A Territory of One’s Own.** Borders, whether big or small, mark off territory acquired at one time or another – through conquest, negotiation or some other more or less happy arrangement. On the planet’s surface they form a tangled web of lines, each one invested with meanings and rationalizations. They are known, and generally recognized – which is an absolute novelty in the history of the world, especially in comparison with the colonial age, during which colonizers helped themselves to territories where, by their account, there had been “nothing and nobody” before their arrival.

The fall of the empires, of which the Soviet Union was the most recent, had two serious consequences for borders: the subjective value of local (national or intra-national) borders has increased, and invasion is no longer considered legitimate. The United Nations Charter incorporates these changes into two important principles: 1. Every people has the right to self-determination, i.e. the recognition of its right to exist within its designated borders; 2. It is forbidden to use force to alter a nation’s borders.

This ban is not necessarily respected – as the case of Iraq currently demonstrates – but is still valid as an international principle. Violating it requires resorting to lies (“weapons of mass destruction”) or political hypocrisy (“restoring democracy to the Middle East”). In any case, violating the ban conflicts with international perceptions of justice as they have developed in the world since the Second World War and the end of colo-

nialism, and with the resulting notion of universal entitlement to a homeland. The consequences of “to each his own” are not always positive, however, as the wall currently separating Israelis and Palestinians demonstrates. A people’s desire for a homeland, and the ensuing glorification of its borders, often paves the way for ethnic cleansing – the extreme expression of the principle, and unfortunately still common practice in many parts of the globe.

**Markets and Politics.** The long historical era of conquest and territorial expansion is over. Every inch of our planet has been partitioned, occupied, claimed. There are no more blank spaces on the maps, no virgin territory: our world has become finite. For lack of an object, the dream of a “better elsewhere” must remain unfulfilled. We recognize each other (without really knowing one other), we have been proclaimed equal, and we are all faced with the task of finding our way within this space which we now perceive in its global scale. The work of surveying is finished – even the ocean’s waters far beyond the coast have been divided into territories – and now the question arises of what role these countless, glorified borders may play.

Bourgeois, economic, touristic and cultural interests demand the flattening of borders in order to obtain access to markets and experiences. This runs counter to the wish to raise borders even higher, in the interest of the military, and for the purposes of security, protecting national identity, and preserving differences. Anyone can have a passport, but it is the travel visas that count. The passport – proof of belonging to a nation with uncontested borders, and thus a guarantee of freedom – is supplanted by the visa, which uses administrative means to regulate travel across other uncontested borders. In the realm of consumption and the circulation of goods and people, borders are resented, but in the domain of politics and law they are protected and praised.

The market and the law do not move in the same direction. The former, non-territorial, does not lead to order and politics, in other words, to maintaining peace. For that purpose, divisions are needed: there must always be “us” and “the others”. The contest between the market, which tends toward the universal, and state law, which is based on territorial limits, is not yet over. Contrary to appearances, the state and political society continue, in principle, to dominate economic society, which is free to act but not free to create its own legal system.

The domain of consumerism fills our shopping baskets but does not satisfy our souls. As soon as conflict flares up, souls rush back behind their borders. When mad cow disease was making headlines and the danger seemed to be moving closer

to home, the butchers at my Sunday market on the French side of the border announced they were selling “French meat”. The ones in Carouge posted signs advertising “Swiss meat”. The main criterion for buying meat was no longer its price, but the perceived safety of its country of origin. Domestic products were suddenly in greater demand again. In spite of everything, it seems that borders will not be disappearing any time soon. ─

Translated from the French by Marcy Goldberg

Joëlle Kuntz is the author of a book-length essay on borders: *Adieu à terminus, réflexions sur les frontières d'un monde globalisé* (Paris, Hachette-Litterature, 2004). She has also published *L'Histoire suisse en un clin d'oeil* (Geneva, Editions Zoé/Le Temps, 2006) in which she explains to French tourists the origins of the Swiss mentality found on the other side of their common border.

# Virtual Regions

## Borders, communities and the World Wide Web

Beat Mazenauer

**The structure of the Internet was conceived to transcend borders. But diversity among net users has led to the development of virtual regions, communities and even neighbourhoods I**

The World Wide Web makes the utopia of a global neighbourhood a reality. Web 2.0 in particular brings people closer together through interactive services and technologies such as weblogs, file-sharing and online games, and extends our personal range of action as a result. Community is taking on an international dimension, moving away from a physical presence into the virtual world. There no longer seems to be a place for the collective experience of a regional reality; it is being absorbed by the global network. Viewed from that perspective, internet and region appear to be incompatible terms. And yet, a more objective investigation reveals a number of common inter-

faces. Regions are still alive and well in the internet in a wide variety of forms.

**Social barriers.** The economist John Kenneth Galbraith once complained that the term globalization was misleading: what it really means is limited internationalization. That is equally true of the internet, which certainly does not link the entire global population. The intercontinental data connections that span the globe are found predominantly in the northern hemisphere, leaving large parts of the world unconnected. Graphs clearly show the data lines between North America, Europe and East Asia humming industriously, with



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only a few solitary strands heading off to regions such as Africa. This imbalance reflects a political and economic divide that splits even the virtual world into regions. It creates gravitational fields with a high information density, split off from marginalized regions where the internet is only slowly making headway through a few isolated and slow connections.

That divide is also reflected within comparatively densely networked societies. Having the internet at our fingertips is still determined principally by social factors: by money and education. The higher the weighting of these factors, the higher a person's digital skills and internet usage tend to be. Social regions are emerging, with technical skills determining career prospects. Equality within the digital network is still an illusion that is not free of ideological wishful thinking.

**A platform for self-promotion.** The global and the regional are not necessarily mutually exclusive, especially from an economic and communications perspective. Simple and inexpensive (potential) transmission around the world makes the internet an outstanding promotional platform. For example, for many years now the Estonian Literature Information Centre has had a well-structured website which very effectively provides insights into the regional literary scene. It would not have been possible to attract such widespread attention through any other communication channel. Language altogether plays an important role in the internet, and regional offerings are countering the trend toward rudimentary English. Farsi has become one of the most common languages in the weblog scene, because the Iranian opposition inside and outside the country recognized the



potential of the internet at a very early stage. Hossein Derakhshan claims that the Farsi version of his weblog is read by an average of 20,000 people a day, while the English version is read by 500. The internet thus enables emigrants to take part in the debate “back home”. In mid-February 2007 an Egyptian court sentenced weblogger Abdelkarim Suleiman to four years in prison for destructive views. The internet is therefore redrawing regional boundaries.

But above all, the goal of internet providers now is to achieve commercial success, as Google’s economic concepts indicate. One of the most elaborate tools is Google Maps, which provides an extremely high-definition bird’s eye view of the world. However, these images are only the entry point for a range of more far-reaching services. Google offers specific information on local services, businesses and restaurants to serve users’ earthly needs. Is there a bookshop nearby? Where is the nearest bank? The internet provides practical assistance in daily life and thus supports regional markets.

**A second life in the community.** The fashionable “A” factor – anytime, anywhere – cannot mask the fact that humans are by nature social creatures. We all need familiar surroundings. Our region provides the framework in which we encounter friends, like-minded acquaintances and possibly enemies. In the internet, communities fulfill the same purpose.

For example, [www.readme.cc](http://www.readme.cc) is a platform for European readers to exchange notes on their favourite books. Naturally, language plays a central role here because books are still rooted in linguistic regions. However, translations and discussion forums foster exchange across these boundaries. Comparable communities have mushroomed in recent years: MySpace, YouTube and Flickr are just a few examples. They do not replace the real world, but they offer a make-believe world, a projected space in which a kind of alternate life takes place. The 3D platform Second Life is indicative of this trend. It promotes itself as offering users a vast and rapidly growing online world where they can attain or create virtually anything they can imagine. Indeed, a new, virtual region is evolving in Second Life. Its topography is characterized by the fact that its residents are gradually moving into the territory and endeavouring to realize the vision of a self-created world. But even here, the laws of economics play a role. Second Life is creating a new marketplace with its own special currency, the Linden dollar.

In *The Arcades Project*, Walter Benjamin wrote that embarking on unknown routes gives rise to a fear of disorientation. The lonely wanderer passing through a labyrinth of lanes is haunted by the fear of getting lost or being assaulted. Conversely, this

fear is also a sign that there is a familiarity that we can only derive from our own space. Defined in this way, the regional does not stop when we enter the internet. The user is like the lonely wanderer. As we surf through the virtual jungle, we are constantly required to make decisions (e.g. virus warning!) that can be disturbing and yet sharpen our awareness. Our personal experience always remains confined to our shared space, the community, the paths we surf, the language we use. The internet reflects and simulates those boundaries because it was created by people for people, whose horizon of experience only permit brief encounters with utopia. ┐

Translated from the German by BMP Translations AG

Links:

Internet visualization: [www.caida.org/tools/visualization/mapnet/Backbones/](http://www.caida.org/tools/visualization/mapnet/Backbones/)

Estonian Literature Information Centre: [www.estlit.ee](http://www.estlit.ee)

Hossein Drakhshan’s weblog: [www.hoder.com](http://www.hoder.com)

For information on Abdelkarim Sueiman see the Sandmonkey weblog: [www.sandmonkey.org](http://www.sandmonkey.org)

Google Maps: <http://maps.google.com/>

Readme.cc – The European Forum for Readers: [www.readme.cc](http://www.readme.cc)

Second Life: [www.secondlife.com](http://www.secondlife.com)

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# In Praise of Borderology

## A philosophical plea for the science of border-crossing

Otfried Höffe

**In the Barents region in the extreme northeast of Europe, a new institute devotes itself to a new science: borderology. As Otfried Höffe points out, a border can mark the limits of what is known, as well as the boundaries that separate us. Borderologists study these limits, in order to find ways to cooperate across them |**

So far, the term is an unknown. Neither philosophy nor the social sciences nor politics are familiar with “borderology”: the subject of study at the Barents Institute in Kirkenes, a research institute founded in 2006 and situated on the border between Norway, Russia, Finland and Sweden. Borderology, this mixture of two languages, is not an elegant term, but it does justice to the task at hand; it recognizes borders and crosses them. Greek, the language of Occidental rationalism, enters into a creative alliance with today’s global language, English.

Borders not only separate; they also form contours. In contrast to the older term, “regionalism”, as in *Regio Basiliensis*, borders refer to entities that

cross a divide that is more or less at the edge of the world, far away from the capital cities. This applies to the Barents Region in the far north of Europe, but also to that part of Eastern Anatolia that includes border areas of Turkey, Armenia, Georgia and Azerbaijan and has cleverly already made contact with the Barents Institute.

What is the challenge to which borderology seeks an answer? The entire globe has long been divided into political units, each claiming unqualified sovereignty for their respective territory. These units often maintain rigorous boundaries, as demonstrated by a variety of legal ordinances and security forces, by language(s), local customs and religion, frequently by currency and, in many cases,

even by the written language. Though aware of these partitioning factors, borderologists still seek economic, ecological, social, cultural and even political and religious cooperation. Yet, to expect new principles for such purposes would be naive. Humankind has cultivated cross-border cooperation since time immemorial. It is not a matter of discovering hitherto unknown principles, but rather of making a selection, defining priorities and exploring nuances. Three substantial principles provide a starting point: peace, subsidiarity and mercantilism, along with intercultural discourse as a methodical principle.

**Intercultural Discourse.** To guarantee a minimum of justice and impartiality, the substantial principles must not privilege any of the parties seeking cooperation. The cautionary dictum must be taken seriously: “What is *universalism for the West is imperialism for the rest.*” Hence, political philosophy takes a methodical approach to an intercultural discourse that is conducted on three levels. In *political theory*, it does not recur to specific elements of European-American legal culture. A concrete application of these principles remains explicitly open to cultural difference; the principles are defined by their right to difference. On the level of *political history*, discourse relates historical awareness to the knowledge of society and its ideas. We are reminded of the influence of the East on Greek civilization, Egypt, for example, or Babylonia, and of the fact that its legacy in the Latin Middle Ages was transmitted not only via Rome, but primarily through Syrian Christians as intermediaries from the Islamic-Arabic world. Finally, for *political praxis*, the discourse calls for a careful implementation of the principles in order to ensure their openness. In view of modern civilization’s claim to law and justice, all cultures have the right to acculturation in the literal sense of the term: i.e., incorporation in keeping with their own culture.

**Peace.** The first substantial principle obviously satisfies the methodical principle, since peace is a highly valued ideal in many cultures and epochs. However, while the modest, negative concept is foregrounded in global politics today, namely the absence of violence, the positive concept with its connotations of justice and friendship prevails elsewhere, from the cultures of the Mediterranean, the Greek *eirini*, the Hebrew *shalom* and the Roman *pax*, to the Arabian *sulh*, the Persian *solh* and the Chinese *he ping*.

The Old High German expression for peace, *Fride*, which is related to the German words *frei* (free), *freien* (outdoors) and *Freund* (friend), also signifies a state of order and well-being. It is only at first sight that these meanings might appear to be too exacting. Many border regions eminently illustrate how positive peace, namely friendly rela-

tions, can be cultivated within the framework of negative peace. Even in the Far North, East and West were sharply opposed for decades. Taking advantage of the end of the East-West conflict, the Norwegian Barents Institute in Kirkenes, just a few kilometres away from the Russian and Finnish borders, is seeking close collaboration with both neighbouring countries and Sweden as well.

**Mercantilism.** One does not expect a philosopher to sing the praises of the most obvious principle: mercantilism. Yet the oldest known thinker of ancient Greece, Thales of Milet, was not only a famed mathematician and a natural scientist, whose life experience and linguistic skills ranked him among the seven wise men of Greece; he was also an entrepreneur. The most famous economist of modern times, Adam Smith, also held a chair of moral philosophy. And in his benchmark sketch on peace, Kant remarked that “*the power of money is perhaps the most dependable of all the powers included under the state power ... to promote honourable peace.*” Philosophers clearly recognize the significance of commerce, but they reject the economic thinking that confines it to goods and services. The truth is that knowledge, science, literature, music and, in fact, all culture is exchanged. This wider understanding is vital to borderology. Although both advocates and opponents of globalization take the narrower view, borders themselves ignore it with unabashed aplomb. The motley bouquet of developments known as globalization is taking place in three contexts: as a global community of violence, as a (fortunately) wealthier global community of cooperation and as a global community of fateful interdependence, namely the community of privation and suffering. Even in the second context, economics do not play the only role, or even the most salient one. In terms of content as well as history, culture in its broadest definition – including philosophy and the sciences, with the educational system attendant upon them, music, literature, art and even sports – can clearly compete within this wider context. All over the world Bach, Beethoven, Mozart, jazz and pop music are played, astro- and microphysics are studied, and research is done into the building blocks of life and the conquest of cancer. All over the world people read Homer, Dante, Shakespeare, Molière and Goethe as well as Persian, Indian and Chinese writers. Everywhere people devote themselves to Plato, Aristotle, Descartes, Hume and Kant along with the classics of Buddhism and Confucianism.

**Subsidiarity.** One principle vital to borderology has long been underrated by social and political scientists. Only through the debate on the European Union did the general public become aware of its significance. However, the distinction between that principle and the distantly related



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principle of federalism was still unclear. There is a more recent tendency to equate subsidiarity with the delegation of powers and decentralization. By delegating, you pass on tasks with which you may not be able to cope, but for which you are responsible. The principle of subsidiarity is diametrically opposed, starting at the bottom, where political justification is in the hands of individuals or of small social and political entities. The principle takes two complementary forms; in a positive sense, it establishes the “right to competence” (*Zuständigkeitsrecht*) and in a negative sense, it is a “prohibition of deprivation” (*Wegnahmeverbot*). In other words, individuals and smaller entities must

not be deprived of anything they can achieve on their own and on their own initiative. Such competence should not be arrogated by a higher power. To prevent the individual or smaller entities from being at the mercy of the state as a single, potentially overpowering but also overextended social entity, subsidiarity is extended to include a constructive “connective precept” (*Zwischenschaltungsgebot*). This calls for strengthening social forms and instituting them, where they are missing. By taking the responsibility for the many-faceted level in between the private sphere (family, associations, private business) and the state, civil society is practising the “connective precept” intrin-

sic to the notion of subsidiarity. According to the principle of subsidiarity, border regions have the right to cooperation that crosses state borders, without having to acquire permission from a supranational body. Governments even have a certain duty to yield to “borderological” demands. In any case, they bear the onus of proof if they wish to put in a veto; they must demonstrate that the demand would infringe significantly on the rights of others.

**Experimental Borderology.** Above and beyond its immediate scope of action, borderology fulfils a task of world-historical importance. Cross-border cooperation offers a counter model to the supposed clash of civilizations, a much-vaunted thesis that is not empirically persuasive. The borders of civilizations are not nearly as clearcut as Samuel Huntington presumes, nor do they all clash with one another. There is no indication of large-scale blocks forming along religious or culturally-defined lines. There is, for example, not even a remote indication of sameness in turbulent Africa that would warrant speaking of one unified civilization. Moreover, as seen from a European point of view, Japan not only has two heterogeneous religions, Shinto and Buddhism, living peacefully side by side even within a single person; it is also receptive to many elements from the West, including Christianity. In Eastern (Central) European countries, a substantial part of the population does not profess to Orthodox Christianity and is nevertheless Slavic. Finally, Latin America feels too closely allied with Spain and Portugal and to Christian churches to justify setting the continent off against the West as an independent cultural area.

Much greater fragmentation and regionalization is caused in many regions by the “narcissism of small differences”, as in the conflicts in the Islamic world between Sunnis and Shi’ites, rural and urban populations, or “high Orthodox” and “liberal” Muslims. Cultures tend to be distinguished primarily by transcultural factors such as age, gender and profession, social and political attitudes, habitation, geography and climate. This leads to cross-cultural common ground and, at the same time, to distinctions within a culture itself. Young people from the metropolitan areas of Western European have more in common with their counterparts in Eastern Europe, Japan and China than they do with their own older generation of rural inhabitants. The tension generated by such differences may be a far greater source of conflict.

Conflict between cultures is undoubtedly often a factor when violence prevails; nor is there only one single strategy to resolve conflict. But cooperation across borders may well rank among the most promising strategies, for three reasons. First,

it has set itself a modest and therefore realistic goal. Cooperation takes place on a small scale and far away from capital cities, which often jealously defend their singularity and difference. Second, cooperation follows flexible principles. By doing without detailed, explicitly stated rules, it does not impose recipes on other regions, thereby quelling cultural specificities. Third, it rejects any missionary campaigns. It simply suggests we come and see how cooperation functions and what advantages it has. When we observe how all sides benefit, it is impossible to ignore the model of cooperation. ┘

Translated from the German by Catherine Schelbert

Otfried Höffe is a professor of philosophy, holds a research chair in political philosophy at the University of Tübingen and is visiting professor of legal philosophy at the University of St. Gall. Recent publications include *Lebenskunst und Moral. Oder Macht Tugend glücklich* (2007) und *Wirtschaftsbürger, Staatsbürger, Weltbürger. Politische Ethik im Zeitalter der Globalisierung* (2004), both Beck Verlag, Munich. *Democracy in an Age of Globalisation (Studies in Global Justice)* is forthcoming.

# Regio Basiliensis Cross-border cultural policy and its benefits

Eric Jakob

**The Regio Basiliensis is one of Europe's oldest organizations for the promotion of cross-border networks. As its managing director Eric Jacobs argues, transnational cultural cooperation is one of the Regio's most important, innovative and promising aspects |**

Ján Figel, the European Commissioner for Culture, announced after a meeting of the EU Media and Culture Ministers in February 2007 that the culture economy is to become a fixed component of the European Council's work schedule. The fact that the subject of culture will feature more prominently on the EU agenda than has been the case so far is due above all to the circumstance that culture and creativity are making an increasingly important contribution to the EU economy. In a study by the EU commission published in November 2006, the economic importance of the culture and creativity sector is examined, with remarkable results. In 2003 about 2.6% of the EU gross domestic product came from the culture sector, whereas the real estate sector contributed 2.1% and the chemical and plastics industry 2.3%. Between 1999 and 2003, growth in the sector was over 12% higher than the general growth in the other economic sectors. 5.8 million people were working in the culture sector in 2004, which corresponds to 3.1% of the enlarged, 25-country EU workforce.

The study is based on a wide-ranging definition of culture that includes maintenance of the cultural heritage, fine arts and performing arts, film, radio, television, video games, music, books and the press, as well as design, architecture and advertising. Altogether, though, it provides a solid basis for rescuing the culture economy from its shadowy existence and clearing away outdated attitudes. Art and architecture do not play a marginal role in the economy at all. On the contrary, they offer a lot of qualitatively superior jobs, which cannot so easily be outsourced to the Far East. The culture sector is the driving force behind cre-

ativity, and creativity is the basis of social and economic innovation. In the transition process from an industrial and service society to a knowledge society, culture plays a key role. If Europe is unique in one branch of the economy with regard to its great diversity and attractiveness, it is in the field of culture. 55% of world tourism goes to Europe. Or as Ján Figel put it: "Europe is a cultural superpower."

**For the Basel region, culture has long been a priority.** The Basel region and the trinational Upper Rhine region have not waited for this EU study to realize the value of culture not only in economic, but also in non-material and social terms. With the slogan "Culture unlimited", Basel Tourism advertises a region with a wealth of culture that is crisscrossed by national borders and at the same time triumphs over them. Augusta Raurica, the biggest Roman theatre north of the Alps, testifies to an early enjoyment of culture in the region. In the Middle Ages, the art of book production and book culture were developed to particular mastery in Alsace. The invention of printing with movable type by Johannes Gutenberg made Strasbourg and Basel the first strongholds of the art of book printing. This in turn attracted many scholars and led to the founding of universities, forming the basis for Upper Rhine humanism. Masterworks of architecture like the cathedrals of Strasbourg, Freiburg and Basel are part of the region's cultural heritage. However, present-day architects are also active in the region, adding to Basel's reputation as the architecture capital of Switzerland. Together with architects like Saana, Diener & Die-



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ner and Frank O. Gehry, Novartis is building a “Knowledge Campus” close to the French border. Roche is striving upwards, with a double-helix tower by Herzog & de Meuron. In Weil am Rhein, Germany, the architecture park around the Vitra Design Museum is being extended. With its large art collections, Basel is one of the most important museum cities in Europe; its Kunstmuseum has the oldest municipal art collection in the world. Every year the city hosts the world’s most important trade fair for modern and contemporary art, known as Art Basel. Among the Upper Rhine museums, those in Mulhouse put the main emphasis on technology (cars, railways, the Electropolis). In Colmar the main attraction is the Musée d’Unterlinden with Mathias Grünewald’s Isenheim Altar. In addition, culture is very much alive on numerous stages, large and small, with plays, opera, dance and music. The Burghof Lörrach, for example, enriches the region every year with its international festival STIMMEN (VOICES).

**Culture crosses borders.** In the Basel region, one soon comes up against national borders. Correspondingly, work, habitation and life in general are conducted on a cross-border basis. 60,000 international commuters from the German state of Baden Württemberg and from Alsace, in France, commute to work in the Basel region every day. At the same time, many Swiss do their shopping in Alsace or South Baden, dine on the region’s asparagus, or take up residence there with a first or second home. The canton of Basel-Stadt, with its surface area of 37 square kilometres and population of 180,000, is the core of a trinational urban and suburban region with a population of 700,00. Nevertheless, the rest of Switzerland takes no notice of this fact, and it is not reflected in federal statistics. Cross-border cooperation in all areas of politics, administration, economics and culture is a matter of course here. And the Regio Basiliensis, founded in 1963, is one of the oldest organizations in Europe that is professionally devoted to regional and cross-border networking.

As in many other fields, the Upper Rhine region can also take pride in many cross-border achievements and projects in culture:

- The *Upper Rhine Museum Pass* for 98 Swiss francs or 61 euros was introduced in 1997 and provides entrance to over 170 museums for one year.
- *Regioartline* comprises a bilingual cross-border art portal and an art magazine that appears regularly.
- In the framework of the *Regionale*, regional art galleries from the three countries exhibit contemporary art at the end of each year.
- The monthly 30-minute TV magazine *Vis-à-vis* by France 3 Alsace and SWR Freiburg covers everyday culture in the three countries.

- The *Trischola* framework promotes cross-border school exchanges and multilingualism.
- The *Oberrhenschulbuch* (Upper Rhine textbook) includes cultural information about the region, alongside standard school subjects.
- The *Upper Rhine Theatre Exchange* fund has supported guest performances in theatre and dance since 1993.
- The *Upper Rhine Virtual Architecture University* includes cross-border syllabi and planning projects.
- The *ExpoTriRhena* permanent exhibition at the Museum am Burghof in Lörrach focuses on the history and culture of the region.
- The *Biblio 3* network links the region’s public libraries across national borders.

There is further cross-border cooperation in connection with multilingualism, the media, dance and music festivals, orchestras and choirs, trinational exhibitions, culture tourism, tourist guides and maps, archaeology and ancient history, institutional networking of cultural and historical societies, etc.

**Cultural cooperation pushes the boundaries.** If one compares cultural cooperation with other areas of cross-border exchange, a few specific aspects emerge which represent both opportunity and risk. Unlike traffic planning, urban and rural development or the environment, cross-border cooperation in culture is not absolutely crucial. It generally does not spring from necessity and often cannot even appeal to categories like usefulness, gains in synergy or increased efficiency – as cross-border economic cooperation, or cooperation in the job market or health care provision, can. Culture cooperation happens on a voluntary basis, to a great extent, and thus requires its own justification and an intrinsic motivation on the part of those involved.

The cultural life of a region has many facets and very different protagonists. Partnerships, target audience and costs differ to a considerable extent depending on the product. Art Basel is geared to a global market, the city theatre to a regional audience and the local history museum to a local public. That is why, in international cultural cooperation, flexible cooperation in different spatial perimeters is required, even more so than in other fields. In the construction of a bridge over the Rhine or the building of a joint incineration plant, intercultural exchange largely remains a means to an end. That is not the case when jointly putting on a play or organizing a cultural event, where intercultural exchange is itself the essential objective. The demands with regard to knowledge of the language and culture of a neighbouring country, and also to the empathy that has to be stimulated are higher than elsewhere in cross-border culture cooperation.

In view of this, it is problematic that, as in Europe, we in the Upper Rhine region do not have a joint cross-border media and communication area. The media worlds are still strongly marked by national borders and perceptions: hardly anyone in Alsace or South Baden is interested in the Swiss Axpo Super League, and, conversely, Basel football fans are not primarily focused on French or German championships. Cross-border media reporting mostly has the character of “looking over the fence” and is seldom the expression of a common identity.

Even if the EU states that culture is worth spending money on, it does not follow at all that there is more EU money available for culture. The new EU INTERREG funding programmes for cross-border cooperation starting in 2007 are completely geared to the Lisbon Strategy for strengthening economic competitiveness. The same goes for the Swiss Confederation with its New Regional Policy as of 2008. Applications for financial backing for cross-border culture projects will tend to have a harder time of it in future than they do already.

**Intercultural competence as a factor for future success.** Europe has been shaped by a common history and culture. Europe is, however, still shaped by national and administrative borders. These borders – scars of history – have frequently cut across historical regions and randomly divided peoples. Over the centuries a complex network of cultural landscapes has developed. Despite the differences mentioned above, cross-border cooperation is playing an essential part in healing these historical scars and making Europe’s cultural wealth visible. The European framework in which this cooperation is taking place guarantees that no new borders develop in the process and that no ethnic-secessionist impulses are aroused.

Europe is indeed a superpower in matters of culture and must also use this mark of global uniqueness correspondingly. Yet one should not just measure Europe’s cultural wealth on the basis of the number of films produced, computer games exported or tourists steered through Europe’s cultural assets. At least as important is what effect this cultural richness has on people: intercultural competence. On no other continent do so many people live in such a small area. Nowhere else is the number of nations and ethnic groups higher. On the multi-ethnic continent of Europe, the spirit of invention is stimulated by the proximity of the Other in one’s own country and a mental proximity to the world. Europe’s diversity, its many languages and differences in mentality, which are often perceived as weakness and fragmentation, must be interpreted positively, especially in the age of globalization. For international organizations and multinational companies, but also for small or medium-sized Swiss firms operating

abroad, it is one of the biggest challenges to understand, respect and profitably use the various cultures, mentalities and languages of their partners.

Like multinational companies, the cross-border culture regions of Europe must see themselves more than ever before as laboratories of intercultural understanding. There are already multilingual courses of study in various places, exchange programmes at all school levels and in business, specific intercultural training and further education courses and media cooperation, but they could be extended, in the Upper Rhine region and elsewhere. And there is a need for as many opportunities as possible for cross-border encounters. In contrast to a bridge or an incineration plant, which continues to exist as a product of cross-border cooperation for the next generation, too, intercultural exchange must be restaged constantly, as it only materializes in the making and has to be called forth again and again. ┘

Translated from the German by Joyce Bachmann-Clarke

Eric Jakob is managing director of Regio Basiliensis and chairman of the Culture Forum of the German-French-Swiss *Oberrheinkonferenz* (upper Rhine association).



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## **A Medal for Monique** A portrait in miniature

Martin Zingg

Monique lives in Alsace and comes to Basel to work as a cleaner. And sometimes also to shop. An homage to a border-crossing veteran with a unique point of view |

“Saint-Louis, of all places”, she says. She says it in French. Monique lives in Saint-Louis, right on the border with Switzerland, in Alsace. But she is no native Alsatian; she always has to make that clear. Not that she has anything against the Alsations – why should she? She has been living here for a long time and has grown accustomed to them – but originally she is from Nancy. She moved to Saint-Louis, of all places, because her husband Maurice is from here and absolutely wanted to live here. Here the two of them have their work, here their daughters are growing up, and over the years Monique’s siblings have ended up here too. The mentality is different than in Nancy, it seems to her. She still feels it, even after all these years, but then she can’t quite put her finger on what the difference actually is. “Discretion”, she says: it could be that people in Lorraine are a little bit more reserved than in Alsace, but she can’t think of any examples at the moment, it’s more of a vague impression.

She trained as a nurse but gave up the work soon after her first daughter was born. That was twenty years ago. The pay was bad, the work hours difficult. Since then has worked as a cleaner for a number of Swiss families, just a few, and for nearly two years she has also been working in the laundry of an institution for the handicapped, mainly on the ironing machine.

In Switzerland – it gnaws at her conscience – she can almost always count on people to understand her language. She speaks only enough German to communicate the bare minimum, and if she can get by without it, all the better. Every few months, while we drink coffee together in the kitchen, she declares she finally wants to take a course. It’s embarrassing, she says. Shameful really, *c’est honteux*, that she can’t speak a word of German. And she explains to me in French that people understand her everywhere she goes, anyway. I tell her: for that reason it’s unlikely the situation will ever change, since there is no compulsion to change it. She laughs her agreement. *T’as raison*.

The few words of German really do suffice when she does her shopping. For example, she prefers to buy her furniture in Germany. Right beside the border – which is hardly noticeable anymore, because one simply drives right through – she knows a furniture outlet selling merchandise of a type she and her husband have never seen in France. Such nice things. And so inexpensive. If these items were sold in France, they would not be so cheap, she says. Monique is an expert on prices; she is constantly comparing the special offers in France, Germany and Switzerland. To her, the region is one big shopping centre.

Chocolate, for instance, she buys in Switzerland. But not just any kind. What she buys on sale at the discount supermarket can’t be found in France. At any rate, not that good and not that cheap.

*Crème fraîche*, on the other hand, she gets in Germany. In Weil, at the market, it is simply less expensive than elsewhere. Fruit and vegetables she buys only in Saint-Louis, but there too she finds a wide selection. Cigarettes she used to buy in Switzerland. At the moment, though, she is trying to kick the nicotine habit. She has been a smoker since the age of fifteen, for nearly a quarter of a century. Now she wears a patch on her shoulder, and in her coat pocket she carries a kind of cigarette substitute. Straw, so to speak, containing no nicotine, but no taste either. Yes, and because she doesn’t smoke anymore, and as a result has been putting on weight, she no longer goes shopping at the discount supermarket which, she heard, was recently bought up by an even bigger supermarket chain. There she used to buy cartons of cigarettes at a time, and St. Gall sausages. Her husband likes them so much. St. Gall sausages are impossible to find in France. She won’t be able to buy them for her husband until she has quit smoking for good, and that may take a while.

Saint-Louis is a beautiful spot, I say to her once. No, it is not really a pleasant place, she answers. Recently, while she and her family were out at a nearby party, two teenagers broke into their house. Gypsies. How does she know they were gypsies? Neighbours happened to see how the two boys snuck into the garden and broke open the cellar door with one blow. Friends of her daughters, the neighbours thought. They boys had behaved so matter-of-factly. When they left the house, they had taken everything they could get their hands on in a hurry. Gold, silver, jewelry, but also a small medal Maurice had once been given. An award: in France many awards are distributed for many things. Do you have that in Switzerland too, those awards, those medals? No... I begin to prepare a reply, but she has already understood: *Les Suisses n’ont pas besoin de ça*. It seems to me that she, of all people, certainly would deserve one. ─

Translated from the German by Marcy Goldberg

Martin Zingg was born in 1951 in Lausanne. A print and radio journalist, he lives in Basel. For twenty-five years he was co-editor, together with Rudolf Bussman, of the literary journal *drehpunkt*. Among his numerous publications, he most recently edited a book on the Swiss author Otto F. Walter and a collection of critical reviews by Martin Walser.

# From Lörrach to Liestal

## The VOICES festival and the Basel region

Wolfgang Göckel

**For four weeks each summer, the German town of Lörrach brings the music of the world to the Basel region, thanks to the VOICES festival and its trinational network of venues in Switzerland, Germany and France. A rousing example of cross-border cooperation in three-part harmony |**

Lörrach has a population of 47,000 and owes its label as “a pleasant place to live” primarily to people like Helmut Bürgel. He is in charge of cultural activities in the town and is both the manager and the artistic director of the Burghof venue which, in the cultural landscape of the Upper Rhine region, occupies a unique position as the House of Voices. By the by, but showing a big commitment, the Burghof team has been organizing the festival known as VOICES for 14 years now, keeping an ear open for what is going on in music all over the world, beyond the mainstream.

The weeks of the festival are becoming the best opportunity to explore the area where Germany, France and Switzerland meet and all its extraordinary places. One example is the disused rolling mill in Münchenstein/Baselland. In the hot July of 2006, Lörrach’s Burghof team transformed the interior of the rolling mill into a concert and theatre venue. The 5th Street Theatre from Istanbul opened VOICES at the Rolling Mill and related in song how people and nations oppress and destroy each other, just because their religions, languages and cultures are different.

VOICES at the Rolling Mill demonstrates how exceptional cross-border co-operation can function. The partners are Burghof Lörrach and kulturelles.bl, a section of the Baselland Department of Education and Culture. The partners are Helmut Bürgel and Niggi Ullrich, who is the cultural officer in the canton of Baselland. In 2006 Helmut Bürgel wanted to focus the festival on music cultures in Turkey, and Niggi Ullrich urged him to make use of the spectacular venue in Münchenstein where, alongside Swiss labourers, hundreds of Turkish

workers once earned a living. Now the industrial site is being used for other purposes, turning into a cultural biotope and attracting resourceful craftsmen, artists and small businesses.

The idea of the new rolling-mill VOICES venue first came up in autumn 2005. In February 2006 Helmut Bürgel and Susanne Göhner, the second managing director of the Burghof venue, went to Istanbul together with their adviser, Burhan Öcal. They carried out background research, listened to and held discussions with artists and agencies, and developed ideas about who could appear at the rolling mill with which programme. Early in the year, Marion Schmidt-Kumke from Burghof also set out to find further partners for the rolling-mill project. Mark Searle, the technical director of the Burghof and the festival, developed a concept for adapting the mill interior for voices. Niggi Ullrich had noted where contacts were still to be made and doors to be opened in Baselland. All the avenues explored by the twenty-member Burghof team and Niggi Ullrich between February and July 2006 came together in the week before the festival opened at the rolling mill.

**Jointly testing new ideas:** VOICES is a sought-after partner, Niggi Ullrich assures us. “People know how good they are.” Justice would not be done to Niggi Ullrich’s idea of cultural production, though, by simply ordering a concert from Burghof for the summer and paying for the service. Every year he and Helmut Bürgel turn over new ideas and put together projects like the *Path of Voices* in 2005, which first led festival visitors up the Jura heights to Schöntal Monastery to hear the Basque singer

Beñat Achiary. On other days it led them to Dornach Monastery, to the churches of Arlesheim and Muttenz, and finally over the French border to the Romanesque abbey church of Ottmarsheim and to the moated castle of Inzlingen in Germany. In 2006 a grant of 135,00 Swiss francs from *kulturelles.bl* enabled *VOICES at the Rolling Mill* and two other projects to be put on in a festival programme lasting 32 days. *3 Sisters* consisted of the moving sacred choral music of three world religions in the churches of Obertüllingen, Bettingen and St. Chrischona, each occupying an elevated position above the bend in the Rhine and according to legend founded by three sisters. Of an equally high standard artistically and yet completely different was *Aftershock*: for a few days the festival brought together carefully selected local musicians and the Asian Underground composer, electronica artist and bandleader Nitin Sawhney, and reserved the large stage in Lörrach's market square for them to give a final concert.

In 2007 America is the featured guest at *VOICES*, and once again *kulturelles.bl* and the Burghof are joining forces. They have engaged the voice artist Bobby McFerrin and his ensemble Voicestra. For one week in June they are working in Arlesheim with pupils from local schools and young singers from the region and giving several concerts, one at the Burghof in Lörrach on June 24, and one in the cathedral square in Arlesheim on June 30. This kind of workshop with experts is an integral part of the festival. In 2007 *VOICES* is offering twelve courses in a *Singing Summer Workshop*.

**Expertise from Lörrach:** It would seem logical for people living in a border region to join forces. Yet that can only happen as intensively as it does here when there is the right chemistry between participants. Helmut Bürgel and Niggi Ullrich are united by a liking for what is new and a passion for music. Their partnership has lasted for more

than a decade now. It began in 1995 with a trilateral project marking the end of the Second World War. Then Burghof Lörrach joined in the programme series created by *kulturelles.bl* and called *Winter Guests*, consisting of readings staged at the beginning of each year. In 2007 Niggi Ullrich entitled them *The Russians Are Here*: Tolstoy, Pasternak and other writers were featured, and readings took place at the Burghof Lörrach in the mornings, and in Liestal on the Swiss side of the border in the afternoons.

Co-operation between Burghof Lörrach and the urban canton of Basel-Stadt is not as close, even though the *VOICES* evenings in beautiful Wenken Park in Riehen, one of the two villages that form part of the canton, are traditional. Wolfgang Graf of the Riehen Culture Office is the Burghof partner there. However, in the city of Basel *VOICES* only finds a venue every now and then, most recently in 2005. In that year Helmut Bürgel and Michael Koechlin, head of the culture section in the Basel Department of Education, and Urs Schaub, director of the Kaserne culture centre, placed the *Urban Village* in the grounds of the Kaserne: three days with artists in residence from four continents, with a colourful bazaar and free admission during the day.

Until 2001 Basel still had its own festival, called *Music of the World*. For Michael Koechlin a good music festival in the summer is a cultural necessity in a city like Basel – and why not make use of Lörrach's expertise for that? The Basel media also keep lobbying for co-operation. Siegfried Schibli, for example, stated in the *Basler Zeitung* that what Basel's culture vultures cobbled together in the way of festivals did not even approach the verve, instinct and professionalism of the festival organizers in Lörrach.

**Short routes to a long history:** Nothing has come so far of Michael Koechlin's intention of putting



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Urban Village on the culture calendar every two years, alternating with the *World in Basel* theatre festival. The three-day festival on the grounds of the Kaserne still did not achieve financial success in 2005. Because Helmut Bürgel has to calculate more carefully, and therefore plans fewer venues, VOICES 2007 will probably not include a performance in Basel at all. All the same, those living in Basel can enjoy the festival. It's not far to Lörrach, Arlesheim and the other venues this year: just a short hop on the regional railway or a tram, and in many cases even a short bicycle ride.

Incidentally, the Museum am Burghof in Lörrach also deepens awareness of shared surroundings in the Upper Rhine area. In 1995 it presented tri-national regional history for the first time in the exhibition entitled *After the War*, together with the Baselland Cantonal Museum in Liestal and the Musée Historique in Mulhouse, in three parallel

exhibitions. In 1998 there was a similar project, on the 1848 Revolution, called *Nationalism Divides; Freedom Unites*. Because it was not possible to create a long-term conceptual connection between the three regional museums in the aftermath of the two parallel projects, in 2002 Markus Moehring opened *ExpoTriRhena* in the refurbished Museum am Burghof: a permanent exhibition on the region and its history. —

Translated from the German by Joyce Bachmann-Clarke

Wolfgang Göckel lives in Lörrach and works as a freelance journalist in the Basel region.

Websites:

[www.burghof.com](http://www.burghof.com)

[www.kulturelles.bl.ch](http://www.kulturelles.bl.ch)





*Le Musée du Point de Vue, Jean-Daniel Berclaz*

## **Polenta and Palm Trees** The Regio Insubrica links Switzerland and Italy

Patricia Arnold

Insubria is not a country or a province, but the name for a new cross-border partnership which aims to revive some ancient traditions in the lake district spanning southernmost Switzerland and northern Italy. Two organizations, the Regio Insubrica and the Fondazione Novalia, hope to put Insubria (back) on the map |



A massif basks in the red glow of the setting sun. A slender sickle moon rests on a chain of mountain peaks as if it belonged there. White peacocks flaunt their extravagant tails in the castle grounds. On the lakeshore promenade, palm leaves yield gently to the wind. In autumn, oak leaves fall in the forests. Azaleas, camellias, magnolias, and cypresses all bloom and give off their distinctive perfumes in sun-drenched gardens. Nature and landscapes on postcards could hardly be more beautiful, nor more kitsch, than the reality of Insubria. Upon arriving in this region, the writer Hermann Hesse was struck each time *“by the breath of the warmer climate, the first sounds of the sonorous language, the first vine terraces, and the stunning churches and chapels”*.

On this patch of land, heavy mountain scenery yields to lighter Mediterranean tones. *“I-can’t-take-it-any-longer weather”* is how the natives refer to the crystal clear days in spring, autumn, and winter. This is when the mountains stand out with knife-blade sharpness against the azure blue sky. In the subtropical humidity of summer, the landscape loses something of its sharp contours. *“Sublime”* was how the British painter William Turner described the scenery in the 18th century. Artists of almost every era – Leonardo da Vinci, Alessandro Manzoni, Antonio Fogazzaro, Carlo Emilio Gadda, Stendhal, Flaubert, Balzac – have all fallen under the spell of this graceful yet bizarre atmosphere.

**Celts, Romans, and Hollywood stars.** Today, stressed-out executives, Hollywood stars, and fashion designers are all drawn to this region. Every year, tens of thousands of visitors endure traffic jams with a greater or lesser degree of patience. They all want to spend their holidays in Insubria. Tourism is the most important source of revenue for this region, itself home to some 2.5 million people. Unfortunately however, overdevelopment and brutal modernity have left ugly scars on the fabulous landscape.

Where exactly is this place called Insubria? It does not really exist at all, at least not in any political sense. Geographically the region stretches between the Alps, the Adda, Po, and Ticino rivers, the lakes of Como, Lugano, and Maggiore, and dozens of other inshore bodies of water. In the centuries before the birth of Christ, a Celtic tribe – called the Insubrians by the ancient Romans – made its way into this territory. This tribe founded Mediolanum, or what is now Milan, as well as the town of Locarno in Ticino. Insubria was green and fertile, and has always been a “*Via delle gente*”, a route of peoples. Those who passed through left their mark: Romanesque churches, medieval fortress sites, Renaissance buildings, Art Nouveau villas, and parks.

**Strategic office of the future.** Since 1995, the Swiss-Italian working group Regio Insubrica has been at work in this ancient region. This body is made up of the southern Swiss Canton of Ticino, the Italian border provinces Como, Varese, and Verbania-Cusio-Ossola, and – since last year – the provinces of Lecco and Novara. The association now encompasses more than 200 members, including politicians as well as representatives of public and private institutions. They promote cultural and educational exchanges, develop plans for expanding tourism, and initiate new highways.

“*Strategic office of the future*” is how General Secretary Roberto Forte describes the Regio Insubrica initiative. The aim is to release new creative forces and to design a blueprint for a healthier environment in the future by engaging in open dialogue with Ticino and the north Italian border provinces. There are many problems in this region that need tackling. Urban sprawl and tremendous traffic chaos are threatening to destroy a landscape that was once so beautiful.

Thousands of northern Italians cross over the Swiss border every day to work in Ticino. There is a shortage of jobs in their home country, while wage and salary levels are also higher in Switzerland. The commuting masses cause alarming levels of air pollution in urban areas. Prompted by Regio Insubrica, the southern Swiss Canton and the Italian regions of Lombardy and Piedmont recently signed a protocol in which they pledged to take measures to combat this environmental pol-

lution. But ponderous bureaucracy and a lack of funding on both sides of the border combine to prevent any rapid action. And all Regio Insubrica's enthusiasm cannot change that: all it can do is provide the initiative. Only politicians working in their own circles can make things happen. And so the introduction of public buses with low fuel emissions, to replace the ones circulating hourly across the border, is likely to remain a dream for many commuters for a while to come.

**Battling a parochial approach to policy.** On the scientific front, there has been more progress. Groups of experts are working together, for example on the development of broadband and fibre optic technologies. In the sphere of medical research, too, cooperation is showing results. A joint medical faculty, the Italian-Swiss Facoltà di Medicina Insubrica, is being approved as an extension of the University of Varese. The idea of cross-border education for doctors and other medical professions appeals to one general practitioner from the Piedmont border region. He fears, however, that equitable selection criteria will be impossible to achieve. As he sees it, given the few training positions available, the chances are that “*people will erect new mental barriers to replace the old ones,*” and that national pride and fears of a loss of identity will hinder collaboration. “*Trenchant individualism*”, reckons General Secretary Forte, “*is something that can only be eliminated very, very slowly.*” The attorney is convinced, however, that in a globalized world parochial thinking no longer stands a chance. His watchword is the old slogan: “*Together we are strong.*”

**The Fondazione Novalia.** In the minds of the region's inhabitants, Regio Insubrica is still not a force, even after 17 years. If they have heard of the concept at all, they dismiss it as ‘fantasy’. “*This idea is no flight of fancy,*” objects architect Matilde Pugnetti from the north Italian border town of Cannobio vehemently. She has been cultivating exchanges of ideas with colleagues, protectors of historical monuments, artists, and art critics in southern Switzerland for years. As she sees it, you only have to drive through the region to see the fruits of joint collaboration at work. The architecture and building styles in the villages and communities on both sides of the border are virtually identical. Romanesque churches sit sternly and soberly, little stone houses huddle close together in village centres, magnificent villas set in generous gardens convey the charm of a bygone era, both in Ticino and in the northern Italian border provinces.

As President of the Fondazione Novalia, Matilde Pugnetti has made Insubrica a reality. The cross-border foundation deals with a topic that has been little discussed so far but is highly contro-

versial: the restoration and renovation of buildings that were created in the twentieth century, and the cultivation of landscapes that developed over this period. The discovery of new building materials, such as cement, changed the way in which buildings were constructed over the last hundred years, and at the same time unbridled progress destroyed much of the precious natural environment. The Fondazione Novalia brings together experts, students, and other people interested in this problem. Novalia organizes four-day “travelling symposia” during which participants make their way through Insubria. In 2007 they will travel from Milan in Lombardy to Stresa in Piedmont, and from there by boat across Lake Maggiore to Ascona in Ticino. Along the way, architectural crimes and landscape destruction will become all too evident. “*The Territory*” is the catchword of the event this spring. “It is high time we halted this environmental decline,” says Matilde Pugnetti. As she sees it, quality of life, together with physical and spiritual well-being, will ultimately depend on a harmoniously-designed environment.

**Ideas instead of bureaucracy.** Ideas cross borders faster than bureaucracy does. Regio Insubrica General Secretary Forte was stunned to come across maps of Ticino on which Lake Maggiore simply ended at the Swiss border, cut off from its much larger expanse on the Italian side. A depressing discovery. Is Insubria a delusion? The lake ripples in the wind. Small waves slap gently against the shore. Lush greenery and colourful flowers sprout from hanging gardens. Brass bands strike up dance tunes at village festivals. In the autumn, chestnuts are roasted and polenta is stirred in great pails. A great cultural heritage and many common traditions link the people that inhabit the region of ancient Insubria. The

Regio Insubrica working group and the Fondazione Novalia are trying to carry this heritage over into a viable future. ┐

Translated from the German by BMP Translations AG

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*Le Musée du Point de Vue, Jean-Daniel Berclaz*

## **An Artist's Cross-Border Commute**

**Painter Bruno Ritter lives in Bergell and works in Valchiavenna**

Andreas Bellasi

The Bergell area of the Grisons and the Italian Valchiavenna form a cross-border region with a common language but enormous contrasts in topography and climate. The artist Bruno Ritter navigates this landscape every day and welcomes its influence on his creative work |



Magnificent. And overwhelming. In both senses of the word. That is the first impression. Seen from above. With a shudder. Or great enthusiasm. From the north, where it represents an unexpected and stunning contrast to the Engadin: it is from the north that the Bergell's praises have been sung. In prose and verse. As the shortest route between the edge of the forest and the Alpine world on the one hand, and southern vegetation and a mild climate on the other hand. But at the same time, the dramatic sweep of mountain landscape draws attention away from the linguistic and cultural border which runs unnoticed through the lake known as both Lej da Segl and Silsersee. There is no shadow here to trouble the observer. Maloja, the mountain pass that isn't one, receives

sunlight year-round. All the more menacingly yawn the precipitously craggy cliffs. Now the road descends sharply, through seventeen hairpin turns over a distance of only six kilometres and an abrupt two-hundred-metre drop in altitude into the basin of the Casaccia valley. Further sharp declivities follow, leaving the seasons behind. The deeper the valley, the higher the horizon, the less the sun shines on the villages in winter. After Stampa, birthplace of the Giacometti artists' dynasty, the valley broadens. Just a little. It does not yet grant the mountain flanks a warmer light. For the time being, that remains a mere idea. This is the source of the saying that the Bergell has produced so many artists "because it is so desolate, because one cannot live here unless one makes art."

**Rock.** In Bergell the mountains are all there is now. The rest is in the past. Glorious history. The valley lives off it. The emergence of the Bergell peaks was one of the final geological developments in the creation of the Alps. And the rock has still not come to rest, by any means. Avalanches are therefore a constant occurrence. Many villages, especially in Valchiavenna, were built on the debris the rockslides left behind. And the open scars of rock falls all date from recent times. As do the barriers intended as protection against the precarious mass of rocks. The people insist on staying. They are bound to the cliffs. Their roots reach deep into the rock.

Whoever does not flee from the mountain becomes a part of it. Is incorporated into the rock. Bruno Ritter sees the omnipresent mountains eideetically, more erotically. The painter treading that thin line that is the border uses the colours of the valley: yellow, orange, brown, green and blue. Crooked bodies. Erratic limbs. The mountain becomes a woman. The cliffs: thighs, belly and breasts. Reduced to the torso. "Because there's no escape."

In addition, the rock walls lining the valley glow. They are contaminated with radon, the radioactive noble gas produced by the decay of radium, which leaks out of the pores and cracks in the rock face. Because it is one of the youngest geological formations in Europe, the Bergell and Valchiavenna region is also one its most radioactive. Of course this is not spoken about. The danger is to be averted through silence.

**Diffidence and depression.** But Bruno Ritter, who is not intimidated by border, talks about it. Because it fascinates him. And he laughs. With sly sarcasm. The Swiss artist, born in 1951 and raised in Schaffhausen on the border with Germany, emigrated to Valchiavenna twenty-five years ago be-

cause he was disgusted with Switzerland. Today he navigates daily the short distance of 32 kilometres – and 1500 metres altitude – between Maloja, where he lives, and Chiavenna, where he works. Sometimes it is nearly impossible to bear. Atmospheric contrasts which find their way into his expressive paintings.

The landscape remains constant. "Provided one has confronted and accepted it." But the silence is deceptive. The valley is a nervous one. There is a constant rumbling of erosion under the surface. The traveller between and across borders sees its effects in the people. They are unsure, keep their thoughts to themselves. The elderly are not the only ones who walk hunched-over. And they are not just stooping to gather chestnuts. They resemble the landscape. The mountain has bent their backs. In humility they surrender themselves to their existence. And their diffidence often develops into depression. "Stooped posture foreshadows the final fall." Says Bruno Ritter.

But whoever wants to survive in the valley ignores the impending danger. Represses it. Mountain-dwellers mistakenly believe themselves stronger than the mountain. Or they move away. And carry around the emotional baggage of their former home for the rest of their lives.

To Ritter, travelling between his residence and his workplace means living with contrasts and tensions. Whereas in Maloja the winter can have an arctic chill, in Chiavenna the milder climate conjures up gentler colours. Ritter does not paint landscapes. "The mountains are vehemently present. Therefore I cannot idealize them." But, he says: "They are my background."

**Homesickness.** The mountain-dweller cannot be easily transplanted. He remains rooted to his place of origin. Enchained over broad distances. Only Diego Giacometti severed his roots. "La campagna,

*che bel merd* (“the countryside, what a load of crap”) he jeered, in Paris.

Work, except for farming, has always been scarce in the valley. So most Bergellers are commuters of a sort. Many make the daily trip to the Engadin, upon which the valley is economically dependent. Even more have been drawn further away, down to the lowlands. But they come home for the weekend. The soul does not commute. It cannot be at home in two places. And so homesickness is a problem. It is homesickness that drives them all home.

The Bargaiot idiom, a dialect somewhere between Rhaeto-Romanic and Lombardian, helps preserve the local heritage. It is still the official language at community meetings. Outsiders and those who have moved here must adapt to it. The church is the only place where the valley dialect is not heard. The Swiss Bergell is the only Protestant region within Italian-speaking culture. Converted to the new faith in the early seventeenth century through religious refugees, mainly Waldensians, from Italy. Even today, the valley’s pastors are Italian.

**Passing through, staying here.** If the Bergell region is inhabited at all, it is because it is a transit zone. Half the world has passed through here at one time or another. Except that in the old days the pace was more humane. Travellers stopped here. Horses had to be changed. While the passengers took pleasure strolls. marvelled at the variety of the landscape. As the pace of travel grew quicker, the valley was reduced to a transit corridor.

The Grisons part of Bergell has 1300 inhabitants; in Catholic Valchiavenna there are 8000. Economic differentials have meanwhile levelled out. In spite of low wages, the flow of day workers into Switzerland in the service of the Engadin’s tourism industry has also caused money and prosperity to

flow back to Valchiavenna. Cultural exchange across the border, however, remains minimal and marginal.

**Gateway to the world.** The Bergell is in no rush to arrive in Italy. But the declivity of the valley does come to an end. The curves and bends are definitively left behind; Chiavenna lifts the weight of oppressive declivities. There is still no southern expanse in sight. The mountain range still rises powerfully at the edge of town. Only the Alpine roughness seems a little tamed. Oleander, palm trees and cypresses reflect the gentler climate. And the vegetation is a little lusher.

The little town is not idyllic. Or romantic. Says Bruno Ritter. But this is where his world begins. Here he found his patrons. They gave him access to Italian culture and the Italian art scene. They arranged for his discovery by the renowned art critics Raffaele De Gada and Giovanni Testori. His work has been exhibited at one-man shows in Sondrio, Bellano and Milan. Unlike the raw climate of the Val Bregaglia, in Chiavenna life takes place out on the street. On the Via Dolzina Bruno Ritter is no stranger. Not that they would have to, he says, but: “hardly anyone knows what I do.” —

Translated from the German by Marcy Goldberg

Andreas Bellasi, born in Zurich in 1951. Lives in Canton Grisons. Journalist and writer. Has published several books, including the biographical novel *Borromini* (1997). Most recently he edited *Höhen, Tiefen, Zauberberge: Literarische Wanderungen in Graubünden* (Highs, Lows, Magic Mountains: Literary Walks in Grisons; 2004). In 2006 he received the Grisons prize for literature.

Bruno Ritter: [www.brunoritter.it](http://www.brunoritter.it)

# Around Lake Constance

## A literary topography

Bernadette Conrad

The Lake Constance region, which spans Switzerland, Germany and Austria, has developed a unique literary culture, thanks in part to cross-border cooperative structures. Bernadette Conrad, a literary critic who lives in the town of Constance, sketches the contours of this trinationaI literary land- and lakescape I

As Manfred Bosch asks it, in his lovingly critical *Mein Bodensee* (My Lake Constance): “To be sure, we live in ‘favoured parts’, as the cultural geographers would no doubt have it; but does this mean we have to put up with the unceasing repetition of this formula, in a tone of voice that calls for not the least bit of gump-tion?” There has never been a lack of beauty in these parts, favoured by the arts, among other things, as they are: the region of Lake Constance is extraordinarily blessed, both in its climate and in its exquisite landscapes. Nor have its literati shied away from attempting to display a bit of gump-tion, indeed, anti-romanticism in their depiction of it: “Flat and blue, Lake Constance lies there, its fat, legless cadaver hanging southward, its misshapen stumps of arms stretched out to the west. Ships like mould. At the decapitated torso’s southern armpit, thrust into the Swiss shore, is Konstanz.” (Hermann Kinder, *Himmelhohes Krähengeschrei* [Crows Crying to the Heavens])

Manfred Bosch and Hermann Kinder have earned the right to be critical: they are two of the longest-serving, most loyal satraps of a ‘literature by the lake’, active on the contemporary literary scene for decades. But of whom, precisely, are they the contemporaries?

**Where does this literary present begin?** Is there any beginning that is not also the continuation of something else? Manfred Bosch’s seminal *Bohème am Bodensee* (Lake Constance Bohemian), which examines in minute detail the local literary situation, focuses on the first half of the twentieth century. But what came after that? According to Jörn Laakmann, a long-time habitué, the key event

was the foundation of the University of Konstanz in 1966, which attracted young intellectuals and precipitated climate change in this “lovely, lousy provincial place”. To which Oswald Burger, head of the Literary Forum of Upper Swabia and, like Bosch and Kinder, a lakeside literary activist, retorts, “No – the caesura came in 1968, when Martin Walser moved to Nussdorf.”

Or did the literary present day begin perhaps as early as 1967, when District Councillor Walter Münch established the Literary Forum of Upper Swabia in Wangen? “Come, let his orneriness swell our breasts,/He does us good./We’re only frightened lest his tank run dry,/the spendthrift!” When Martin Walser penned his little encomium to Münch in 1977 he himself was already famous. But Walser owes his role as intellectual godfather of the entire Lake Constance literary milieu in the main to his decisive advocacy of a younger generation of writers, as well as of the scene itself. “Walser was our colleague, our champion,” recalls Manfred Bosch, “someone whose work on behalf of other authors was unparalleled and without ulterior motives.”

And now here is the Literary Forum of Upper Swabia celebrating its fortieth anniversary. It has remained true to its basic concept, an annual meeting at which new works are presented and unvarnished critique is exchanged; nor has it strayed from its original venue, the venerable Council Hall in Wangen in Upper Swabia. Oswald Bürger, who took over from Münch as head of the Forum in 1992, notes that his predecessor’s original idea had been to found a workshop in which a pan-Alemannic mentality, as it were, could come

into being and express itself, across national borders. Notwithstanding the fact, of course, that the 'Alemannic region' in which the some 400 forum participants live stretches from Zurich to Stuttgart, from Freiburg to Munich.

*"But what remains is the return route. It is easier to come down from Wangen than to go up to Wangen. It's like a mountain. Praise be to Thee, oh Lord, that the Lake lies low, even when it smiles."* (Hermann Kinder, *Die schönsten Radtouren* [The Finest Bicycle Trips])

**Sweet home Lake Constance.** No matter whether a writer comes from here, like Peter Renz, or comes here to write, like Zsuzsanna Gahse; whether one only becomes a writer on arrival here, like Hermann Kinder, Jochen Kelter, Peter Salomon and countless others, or returns here as a writer, like Lena Kugler: the landscape around Lake Constance leaves no one cold. Rather, and in so many ways, it grows into the works of literature they produce.

The region around Lake Constance has been the middle of her world since she was fourteen, says Gahse, originally from Hungary and for some fifteen years now a lakeside local. Her childhood spent surrounded by three German-speaking countries was a signal episode in her life.

For Kugler, meanwhile, who attended school in Singen, ten kilometres from the lake, it was the border region itself that called her back: *"I enjoy living on borders. That was one of the main reasons for my return from Berlin. The end of countries, and the beginning..."* And perhaps, says Kugler, this predilection has something to do with her father, who was granted refugee status in Switzerland without ever receiving Swiss citizenship. In her novel *Wie Viele Züge* (How Many Trains), she writes: *"She could take up her position at the crossroads again, spear the colours of the passing cars on her thumb and wait for someone to take her with them to the border. She could go back once again to the snackbar, sit down at the farthest window table, part the red curtains and let her gaze travel between the two customs sheds; imagine once again how the border and the no-man's-land at this table were running through her, foamy and slightly sweet, like the Export beer she always ordered."*

Manfred Bosch relates the experiences of a young man growing up in the 1960s in Radolfzell, desperate to escape the confines of his hometown, finally fleeing to Munich only to find himself there *"in three or four expatriate clubs. There was clearly a void there that wanted filling. I had discovered home as a concept worth rehabilitating."*

*"I always came home to the foreign familiarity, the familiar foreignness of my Thurgovian hideaway, where the gods of the Reich remained before the doors,"* writes Jochen Kelter, who has lived as a German on the Swiss shore since 1969. And Peter Salomon, too, has found in his (adopted) homeland a kind of

retreat: *"The first hot day in May/(...) I travel backwards/Through the summer landscapes:/Ortenau, Hegau, Bodensee –"*

And then there is Ernst Köhler's take on Konstanz, at once nostalgic and pensive: *"Our city, as you know, is very old and very fair. (...) You won't find the dreary cretinous masses here ... indeed, there isn't any of that grand social malaise which brings such masses forth, and which even now in many parts of the world is already threatening the last enclaves of mature, civilised urban life. Here, if you will, Europe is still what it once was. And while certain people may claim that the atmosphere here is stupefying, they remain nonetheless. They all remain."* (From *Und er kommt und findet sie schlafend* [And He Comes and Finds Her Asleep])

**Regional, national, international.** Writing and thinking across borders, and forming the corresponding associations, is taken for granted in Lake Constance literary circles. Internationalism is the norm here, and an inspiring one at that. For the most part. Although this should on no account be taken to mean that authors are mired in the local. Should the astonishing lakeside literary floruit of the 1970s and 80s – with Walser as its spirited chief ideologist – perhaps be ascribed to a moment in history that has now passed? This is what author Ulrike Längle asks herself: she is a long-time member of the literary community around the lake, and co-founder in 1984 and now head of the Felder Archive in Bregenz, an institution that does double duty as the Vorarlberg Literature House.

*"Alemannic isn't exactly the flavour of the month anymore,"* she says, adding that the authors of the up-and-coming Vorarlberg region's literary scene – like Michael Köhlmeier, Arno Geiger and Robert Schneider – move only tangentially, if at all, in Lake Constance circles. *"Has internationalism really come to this,"* wonders Längle sceptically, *"or do authors in fact orient themselves mostly to a national or international tradition within their respective countries, and only then within their region of geographic origin?"* Indeed, notes Längle, this is surely also manifest in the structure of public institutions, with authors from Vorarlberg hardly ever appearing on the programme of Switzerland's Bodman House. She thinks, by the way, that Switzerland is the most begrudging in its attitude to the international spirit. But that can only be partly true.

**Backwater bijou?** Founded in 1991 by Beat Brechbühl and Jochen Kelter, who were soon joined by Elke Bergmann, the Frauenfeld Poetry Days at the local ironworks constituted only the second poetry festival in the entire German-speaking world! Beat Brechbühl recalls the hold that Dutch poetry exerted over him at the time, and notes that the organizers were in any case bound to an explicitly international, non-regional concept. It was no co-



*Le Musée du Point de Vue, Jean-Daniel Berclaz*



incidence that the same period saw the emergence of the Thurgau Cultural Foundation, what with extra funds having been earmarked for culture in the wake of the 1991 Swiss anniversary year. Brechbühl, an author in his own right as well as the founder of Im Waldgut, a small publishing house, is now even considering a further poetry festival for eastern Switzerland. In the meantime, the Frauenfeld Poetry Days are no longer under his and Kelter's aegis, directorship having passed to Klaus Merz in 2005 and, in 2007, to Markus Bundi.

When one thinks of the Swiss writers who come from Lake Constance, or at least from the edges of the region, or who live there today, authors who have long since won renown beyond their national borders, like Peter Stamm from Weinfelden, Markus Werner near Schaffhausen (the recent recipient of the Lake Constance Literary Award) and poet and verbal artist Christian Uetz of Romanshorn (winner of the 2005 Thurgau cultural prize), the grass on the Swiss side of the fence suddenly looks pretty green. And of course there's the fact that the Swiss take on the region of Lake Constance, or Switzerland's share of it, is completely different from that of the Germans anyway, who are immensely proud of their 'southern strand'. For the Swiss, meanwhile, in whose eyes Thurgau, St Gallen and Appenzell, the cantons nearest the lake, are something of a provincial wasteland, culturally speaking, the region is inferior to the great metropolitan centres and the suave elegance of western Switzerland. Perhaps this is another reason for the German dominance of the pro-Alemannic movement. As for Vorarlberg, says Längle, its distance from Vienna and a mere 340,000 inhabitants might make it a backwater, but that doesn't stop it from being "an exciting little cultural bijou" of a backwater all the same.

**Litera-Tour.** Founded in 1950, the International Lake Constance Club (Internationale Bodensee-Club or IBC) adopted bordercrossing as part of its institutional programme. Its triennial Droste Days, held in Meersburg, are expressly reserved for female writers, while its *jour fixe*, occurring five or six times a year, grants as yet little-known authors an audience. Held in the grand old Schloss Meersburg, the regular meeting enjoys the generous support of the chateau's proprietors, the Naessl-Doms.

The IBC indulges in some real bordercrossing, in the literal, geographical sense, with its annual September cruise of international waters on the good ship "Litera-Tour", featuring a reliably top-flight guest list. In his *Gegenbö auf dem Narrenschiff* (Headwind on the Ship of Fools), the Swiss poet Hermann Burger, victim of an untimely demise, delivered perhaps the finest, or at least the funniest account of the early years of this literary

institution: "A crowd of benevolent spectators thronged into the captain's mess, its wainscoting Nussdorf-brown; Martin Walser, in leafy green linen and red suspenders, got on in Meersburg, accompanied by a team from Austrian television; Mrs. Hella Baumstark, local president of the Konstanz chapter of the Lake Constance Club, read out the excuses of those who had not been able to make it, including no less a personage than Marcel Reich-Ranicki; it took three quarters of an hour to get our first beer, payable immediately, in Swiss currency exchanged at par (...) Hella Baumstark apologised for the failure of the microphone, explaining that the technician responsible had missed the MS Überlingen in Konstanz and was vainly attempting to catch up by speedboat, and that we would just have to make do and shout as loud as she was doing. Right, Martin Walser yelled into the room as a storm broke outside, I had a reading in Manhattan once and a German literature scholar from back home asked me what was on the programme. So I told her it was a text about a train ride from Stuttgart to Singen culminating in the sentence, 'When you travel to Singen you have to be prepared for Radolfzell.' The literature scholar predicted that I would fall flat on my face with that one in Manhattan, and when I asked her where she came from she answered, 'Pfullendorf'."

**The Literary Commons.** So while the International Lake Constance Conference did not exactly invent such internationalism, it does provide it with crucial support, especially when it comes to stipends. The nine countries and/or cantons surrounding the lake have formed a 'backstage network' within the conference, according to Werner Grabher, chair of the Culture Commission. Every year, the winners in various literary genres receive 80,000 francs; in addition, a major cultural forum is organised annually to consider matters such as (at a coming session) the potential need for a central literature house in Vorarlberg.

Meanwhile, the local writers never tire of discussing literature, whether informally among colleagues or in 'authors' associations'. In the early nineteen-nineties Walter Neumann and Zsuzsanna Gahse started a new group, to fill the space left by the recently dissolved regional chapter of the German Writers' Association (Verband deutscher Schriftsteller or VS). Once again, patron of the written word Vincent Naessl-Doms opened the doors of his venerable chateau, and now every other month sees a meeting of the Meersburg Authors' Circle, a sworn band of writers assembled both by invitation and application for readings and discussions.

And finally, since 1981 there has also been *Allmende* (The Commons), a literary journal that attempts "to lend a voice to authors from the Alemannic world, for their literary texts, essays and papers" (Manfred Bosch). A forum had thus also been initiated for writing in dialect.

The notion that a “*magazine for the enlightened regional patriot*” might well satisfy a real need brought Bosch and Walser together in 1978. And thus *Allmende*, the “*central organ of Alemannic literature, was born in Walser’s living room,*” relates Oswald Burger. *Allmende’s* scope is generous. Among its regular contributors are Peter Bichsel and Arno Geiger, who owes his ‘career’ to the literary forum. Not to mention the Libelle Press, in the Thurgovian town of Lengwil. Run by Ekkehard Faude and Elisabeth Tschiemer, it publishes acclaimed works in a manner at once resolute and relaxed: which is to say, it is unique. And if its list does every now and then feature *recherché* regional curios, such as the work of Fritz Mühlenweg, well, all the better, seeing that the press is by no means ordinarily led by an exclusive regional favouritism in making its selections.

**The old and the new.** The amazing thing is that all of these initiatives, now between 25 and 40 years old, continue to thrive on the energies of a solid group of regulars, and no small group at that. One might wonder whether that’s all there is to it. Whether they haven’t also brought forth anything new. And of course they have. In its *Allmende Forum*, the journal has been seeking for three years now to showcase recent literary history in an additional venue, with exhibits in the Hermann Hesse House in Gaienhofen, while in the Swiss town of Gottlieben the Emanuel Bodman House, at the instigation of Jochen Kelter and currently under the leadership of Zsuzsanna Gahse, is on its way to becoming the region’s literary centre. Together with the University of Konstanz, Hermann Kinder has started *Author in the Region*, a two-week series of events that makes the rounds of local schools and bookshops each November, while for his part, Oswald Burger hosts Überlingen’s *Word Menu*.

As Lena Kugler puts it, these are all vehicles and structures worthy of recognition, whether one takes advantage of them or not. She herself is intent on making her own way, having read at the Literary Forum of Upper Swabia as an 18-year-old before setting off for Berlin, to return just seven years ago, and does not participate in this institutional world. “*I feel good in its proximity,*” she says, now 33, “*and I am very grateful to it. But I don’t belong there anymore.*”

So how much of this alleged regional kinship is actually authentic? Just how deceptive are all those picture-perfect views of Lake Constance? “*Just by looking out the window you are already abroad,*” says Ulrike Längle, who appreciates bordercrossing as a very real way of life. “*But is the lake actually what is holding us all together, or is it not rather a big empty space, onto which you can project anything you like?*” —

Translated from the German by Rafaël Newman

Bernadette Conrad, born in 1963 and raised in northern Germany, since 1986 one of the ‘newcomers’ who has found something like a home in the Lake Constance region. She works as a literary critic and freelance contributor to *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, *Die Zeit* and *du*, among many others – and all from Konstanz, where she lives with her daughter.

# Scene Change

## A Liechtenstein actor in Switzerland

Roswitha Feger-Risch interviews  
Ingo Ospelt

**Surely there is no great difference between Liechtenstein and Switzerland? Contrary to this common belief, there is a cultural divide along the Rhine, one experienced by many artists when they seek performance opportunities and funding. Ingo Ospelt (46), a cabaret artist and actor from Liechtenstein who became a Swiss citizen three years ago, shares his experiences navigating between countries and cultures |**

*Roswitha Feger-Risch: At the LiGa (The Liechtenstein Gabarett) you once said, "We are not in Switzerland here. Not yet!" You are from Liechtenstein, but you and your family have been living in Switzerland for a long time. Why?*

Ingo Ospelt: After graduating from the acting academy in Zurich, my wife Eveline Ratering and I lived and worked for seven years in a number of German cities. We decided to return to Switzerland for personal reasons, and also because we are socially and professionally well-rooted in Zurich. Today we are based in Uster and work as freelancers in theatre, primarily in the German-speaking part of Switzerland and in Liechtenstein.

*You grew up in Liechtenstein. Your father is from Liechtenstein; your mother is German; your wife is Swiss. Which language do you speak with your children?*

We speak standard German at home, even with the pets: partly because of our time in Germany, but also because German is my mother tongue. I also never spoke the Liechtenstein dialect in

school. I only started learning it for performances with the LiGa. I am now learning Swiss German. I don't know where my homeland is: a very modern condition, I think. It is becoming increasingly difficult for me to associate home with a specific location. The places in Liechtenstein that I used to consider home have changed, some of them beyond recognition. But even if I do not have places in Liechtenstein that make me feel at home, I can feed off my memories like a primordial soup.

*What are the advantages, for you, of life in Switzerland?*

As an actor I could not live in Liechtenstein. The outlook would be different if I were a world-famous actor like Oskar Werner, who retired to Liechtenstein after a major film project. I enjoy living and working in Zurich; I find the city very central. I like Zurich, its history, its cosmopolitanism. I became a dual citizen three years ago. I wanted to have the right to vote in the place where I live.



*Le Musée du Point de Vue, Jean-Daniel Berclaz*

*But you do often perform as a cabaret artist and actor in Liechtenstein, and also work as a director.*

For many years I didn't perform in Liechtenstein at all. It just didn't happen. But then things changed with the LiGa and my solo projects. What particularly interests me in Liechtenstein are stories with a connection to the country, stories from or about Liechtenstein. My new play *Wohin?*, which begins in Vaduz and ends in the outside world, continues where the previous two – *Wie der Hagsticker dreimal die letzte Ölung bekam* and *Die Goldene Boos* – left off. So the theme of home has even led to a trilogy: a way of coming to terms with history and, as a result, with my own history.

*Is working in Liechtenstein different from working in Switzerland?*

If I'm producing a play, I have a better network and better access to resources in Zurich. The whole process, from the first idea to the completed production, is carried out more professionally there than here. There is also a big difference in terms of the national or cantonal funding of a piece. In Zurich there are clear guidelines for funding theatre productions, which must be followed. For example, one must already have a venue for the piece. A jury of four theatre professionals oversees the grants. Of course there is much more competition in Zurich. In Liechtenstein the approach is more pragmatic. If the budget is correct, the biggest hurdle has been cleared. As a result, funding applications are usually reviewed faster in Liechtenstein than in Switzerland. It's a small scene and people tend to know each other.

*The generous cultural funding in Liechtenstein is usually either praised or criticized. Is the funding here really so great?*

It is not bad, but it could be improved. These days I receive solid support from the state. Some good examples of Liechtenstein's cultural funding are the year-long fellowship and, most recently, the studio in Berlin. What I still miss is discussion of the content of the individual projects. That is mainly because the members of the culture commission are not theatre professionals. In addition, amateurs and professionals still receive support from the same source – although things will be done more professionally in the near future.

*Is there a difference between performing in Liechtenstein and in Switzerland?*

In Liechtenstein it is especially enjoyable to perform in a cabaret, because in our small society someone is always the target. In Zurich I enjoy acting in front of an impartial, neutral audience.

*Do you see Liechtenstein and Switzerland as two different countries, or more as a cultural region?*

Oh, to me there are big differences! I see the two

countries as different. The political and social structures are completely different. Liechtenstein society is very, very small and still strongly shaped by the Trinity of God, the Prince and the Fatherland. I would not call it a unified cultural region. My wife, however, disagrees with me on this point.

*But you find it quite natural to work together with Swiss people in Liechtenstein.*

Yes, of course. Just as the Swiss work together with me in Switzerland.

*Do you like the constant back-and-forth between Switzerland and Liechtenstein?*

I find the change of perspective refreshing and interesting; it suits me. But it's also because the plays are so different. In Liechtenstein I act in plays that are related to local history, or in political cabaret. In Switzerland the plays are more contemporary. That's how I learned to switch between different roles quickly, which is very important. I am satisfied.

*You and your brother, the writer Matthias Ospelt, enjoy an outstanding reputation as Liechtenstein nationals in Switzerland. The NZZ wrote about you: "Privileged land on the Rhine, with citizens like the Ospelts!"*

The review referred to the cabaret. It was probably influenced by the bigger neighbour's derision toward little Liechtenstein, but it also showed great respect for our work as cabaret artists. In Liechtenstein, on the other hand, we were accused of airing the country's dirty laundry in public. Also, cabarets weren't as big in Switzerland at that time. Today someone like Simon Enzler, as a Swiss and Appenzeller, can keenly observe his own people. Cabaret in Liechtenstein worked well, precisely because the society is so small. That is the main difference between Switzerland and here. ─

Translated from the German by Thao Duong and Marcy Goldberg

The actor and cabaret artist Ingo Ospelt grew up in Vaduz, Liechtenstein and lives in Uster, Switzerland.

Roswitha Feger-Risch lives and works as an art historian and freelance journalist in Vaduz, Liechtenstein.