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Moving Lab  
– Sketches  
on Unboxing  
European Identity



Research Notes  
apropos The FreedomBus Project

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European Identity

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apropos The FreedomBus Project



Under the high patronage of the European Parliament and



State Premier of Rhineland-Palatinate, Malu Dreyer

#### IMPRINT

##### Authors

Marcin Deutschmann, University of Opole, Poland  
Magdalena Hlawacz, University of Opole, Poland  
Michał Wanke, University of Opole, Poland

##### Reviewer

Dr. Hab. Aleksandra Janik, professor at the Eugeniusz Geppert  
Academy of Art and Design in Wrocław

##### FreedomBus Project Coordinator

Prof. Anna Bulanda-Pantalacci  
Trier University of Applied Sciences, Germany  
Founder of the Cross-Border-Network

##### Graphic Design

Magdalena Hlawacz

##### Photos

Florian Leible  
Michał Przyszlak  
Michał Wanke

##### Proofreading

Oksana Smolnikova

##### Print

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FreedomBus



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# Familiar strangers on the Freedom bus stops

Although the concept of familiar stranger was brought to social sciences by Stanley Milgram to discuss individual social networks and ties, the idea could be re-appropriated for the community life of the contemporary European Union. As the definition of familiar stranger has it: it is a person one frequently observes or meets but does not develop any interaction with. The powerful metaphor fits the concept of 'Freedom bus' perfectly, since the textbook example of a 'familiar stranger' is a person who one knows as a daily co-commuter from the bus stop. Using this parallel, one can examine the familiar yet strange neighboring communities that have been emerging in the EU with the labor migration processes, that meet each other regularly on the 'Freedom bus' stops.

In a way, embarking on the FreedomBus trip for Opole sociologists was a follow-up to the recent study of 'Penelope and Telemach of Opole' conducted in the Opole region, Poland in 2013-2014 as a complimentary venture to the Meeting the Odyssey (founded by the European Commission) project co-realized by the Opole Theatre of Actor and Puppet and certain European theatres. The research was based on a multiple case study – the ethnographies of families of labor migrants from the Opole region commuting and staying on a permanent basis in the western and northern European states. It involved photography as a method and semi-structured interviews. Complementary to the case studies, arts-based workshops (with the creative use of the quotations from the interviews) were carried out with the youth and senior citizens to induce more discussion on the topic of migration and its social consequences.

Drawing on this experience, the research team (sociologists accompanied with fellow artists based in the University of Opole) was ready to carry out a similar study of migration with the shift of the focal point from social ties to the European Identity in the creative interaction. A team of a supervisor and two master's students enrolled in the project in order to investigate it as an educational action and also as a quest for the European Identity (as opposed to an unconditional tribute to the united Europe). We were interested in common creation and experience while reaching solutions individually as a way to pass on ideas and values. We made an inquiry into the art as a public enterprise and the artist identity in this context.

The book constitutes a result of those research activities. As the title says, we wrote apropos the FreedomBus project, assembling our notes to comment and expand on the issues relevant and important to the project organizers and participants. This book is not an independent systematic treaty that would make a historical breakthrough in social sciences. It is meant as an experimental commentary on the otherwise hermetic yet vibrant art project. It is obviously as open ended as it possibly could be, but it still is an art project with art professors and art students participating. It is not exactly a vacuum or a bubble but introducing the sociologists into equation might have not been the worst idea. This is for the reader to assess.

Publishing of this book coincides – purposefully – with establishment of the Moving.Lab association. It sets the agenda for our organization, pointing into the direction of interdisciplinarity and transdisciplinarity or our artistic and scientific work. Neither of these, the FreedomBus project, the research, the book, or the organization would be possible without professor Anna Bulanda-Pantalacci, who plays a pivotal role in this movement. Our Research Notes were made because of her, for her, and apropos her.

Jeliana Filatova. Ukraine. Crimea

Do  
You ?  
think  
SOCIOLOGIST  
Should DRAW



# 1.

## **Beyond the borders. How to teach building relations in the public sphere – an interdisciplinary creative method**

**I**t is not easy to create the responsible and inclusive togetherness in the times when the world displays separatist and exclusive tendencies. As a matter of fact, it has always been a challenge.

It is worth taking up, though, in order to restore common respect for others, and especially for those who somehow differ from us. To that end, we want to show how the FreedomBus project was carried out. The conclusions are drawn from our research conducted within the project (ethnography based on full participation of the researchers in the group life throughout the whole duration of the project). One needs to mention that this account is sociological because of our background, and such is the point of view of ours. We want to go beyond the sociological description of what has happened with the participants during the project as well as the very interesting coexistence and creative process they

all have gone through. The goal is to trigger much broader discussion thanks to conceptualization and contextualization of the works of art they crafted and scrutinized. We would like to ask the questions posed by sociology from the outset. Not for the sake of academic discussion though, but for the very important practical reason: questions about the public or the social matter now more than ever. Questions about the relationships are in the spotlight. Not only have the paradigms shifted – from the individual and the group to the individual within the network; from public to private; from nations and nationalism to quirky identities and multiple ideologies; from obvious to uncertain; from safe to unknown – it is the world that has actually undergone those changes.

For this very reason, we need to develop our concepts, make them vivid, and more importantly, make them work for us and for the readers of this book. We will use the evidence from the artists' craftsmanship to discuss sociology – can it possibly get any better than this?

Planning the project:  
artists and sociologists met  
at the University of Opole



The first moments together  
– attending a lecture in Cracow

## Forming of the group

The group of FreedomBus project participants in fact was a loose network of individuals coming from different backgrounds. More of a *Gesellschaft* than a *Gemeinschaft* in Tönniesian sense, the gathering started as a grouping or a public meeting rather than a community.

Most of the participants had not met each other before the project started. Consequently, they ended up in rooms with strangers, which was a completely new experience for some and obviously had been the reason for concerns. Violation of that boundary of intimacy alone constituted a great challenge for them.

The language barrier was significant at the beginning of the integration process. It was often a source of fear at the first contact. Coming from different countries and speaking English – the language of the project public sphere – with different degree of proficiency turned out to be problematic. A sense of shame that one does not speak English well enough to be engaged in conversations as well as the fear of being judged or excluded for that reason made those people back off a little bit and avoid fully taking part in the social life of the group.

The burden required to enter the public sphere of the project tells us a lot about the present-day Europe which, in fact, consists of multiple individuals with different ways of communication rooted in a variety of completely detached cultures, thus, forming the contemporary Tower of Babel.

**public**

**private**

**nations and nationalities**

**quirky identities  
and multiple ideologies**

**obvious**

**uncertain**

**safe**

**unknown**







Nevertheless, before we left Cracow, everybody had learnt that they were not judged for their English skills – on the contrary, they were being assisted whenever it was necessary. Socializing at the meals and going out together after the official parts of the program was the most important for these issues. It was much easier to overcome shyness and try to talk on such informal occasions. Group processes which took part outside of the official program played an important role here. It was indispensable to create the conditions for such processes to occur (common meals, convenient spaces for working together, common accommodation).



## **Making art in relation to others**

In the era of unprecedented responsibility of the individual to carry out her identity project (in Giddens' sense), it is not only what defines us (gender, race, nation, occupation or class, etc.) but also how we express ourselves (or what the creative challenge ahead of us is). This is why, examining creative expression as such is so relevant for sociologists nowadays.

The project organizers allowed for the complete freedom of creation in the sketchbooks and did not give any guidelines regarding them. Thus, at the beginning some worried whether what they wanted to create would be accepted.

At the beginning of the project, participants hesitated to touch their sketchbooks.

They didn't know what kind of expectations the organizers had about their work, so it was dubious to start before it turned out there weren't any. People started to create their own artistic world only when they didn't care about expectations anymore.



The first attempts of sketching, Cracow



This resembles exactly the cultural logic of the present. No clear instructions, uncertain definitions, yet the ultimate and continuous requirement of self-expression. To this extent, our project became an experiment on the contemporary complicated lives. Of course, one has to keep in mind that both the participants of the project and those of us, urban dwellers, based in the wealthy West are much less occupied by the social positions of ours, and hence the analysis here is limited to those who do not have to get by on the edges of the contemporary stratification systems.

Eventually, the final works turned out to be very different from what might have been expected at the beginning – both stylistically and conceptually. There were two sources of inspiration. First, the ideas behind the project that were discussed in the lectures and then in the field, for example, when visiting the Berlin wall. Second, people and what happened between them. The contact with others is very important in the creative process.

This opens the most important discussion in this book, namely of public and private, formal and informal modes of social existence. How private and public interpenetrate each other. The juxtaposition of the former and the latter is not that obvious by the way, in the times described by Eva Illouz with a telling oxymoron, ‘cold intimacies’.

The work had visibly intensified around two days before the exhibition.

This is exactly why it was so important to provide proper conditions and places where participants could create together and see the works of others. It perfectly displays how meaningful it is to work side by side, and more importantly, how significant is the dialogue in creating individual, and yet common idea, regardless of the area of creating.

# cold inti- ma- cies

## Appreciation as a prerequisite for creative work

The power relations within the project were indeed experimental. Not only were the guidelines loose and undefined, but also the type of guidance the teachers provided to the students was rather partner counseling than lecturing ex cathedra. It was appreciative and not dismissing – exactly the opposite of what Michel Foucault would call discipline and punishment.

In this case, the teacher is a partner – they should evaluate in a positive way and offer kind remarks. Students ought not to sense they are being lectured. They should feel that all the comments result from good-heartedness, and at the end of the day, their work and the decisions they make in the creative act are up to them. This is due to the fact that the creative act is a very intimate process, and the ideas expressed are very personal, yet they undergo public judgment.

This is why it is essential to build a student's self-esteem as well as awareness of the fact that creation is a never-ending process with both the work of art and the artist involved in it to the same extent. In the former case, it means that one can return to a work of art once considered finished and create it further.

Whereas in the latter, it stands for the fact that the artist constantly learns and continuously develops herself. Both of these processes are tightly interconnected as are the undisputed need for appreciation, willingness to develop and motivation to finding new, one's own ways. This cannot be controlling or guiding the student in the direction of the teacher's dreams. It shall be her own way.

That is why the relations with others matter. People are not blank pages, they express their thoughts and take attitudes by contact with others. They need appreciation to talk about themselves without hesitation, which also facilitates efficient artistic work.

Teasing the viewer: purposely hidden  
content of a sketchbook.



Shyness, the need to be alone and have our own space  
– the space where we can hide something or hide ourselves...  
are so important in our life; on the other hand, why are  
we so curious about the things hidden from our view?  
Why do we want to discover the thoughts, feelings,  
and concerns of others?

## Passing the organizers' ideas to the participants

During the first days, not all of the participants believed that the ideas of the project were possible to realize, and that the project itself would make it easier to bring them into life and disseminate. Some of the participants did not even fully get the message behind the project. It was conveyed to them indirectly through the lectures and events such as the visit to the Berlin Wall.

Moreover, so many people from so many different countries coexisting in one place and united by one goal itself constituted the indirect transmission of the idea of togetherness.

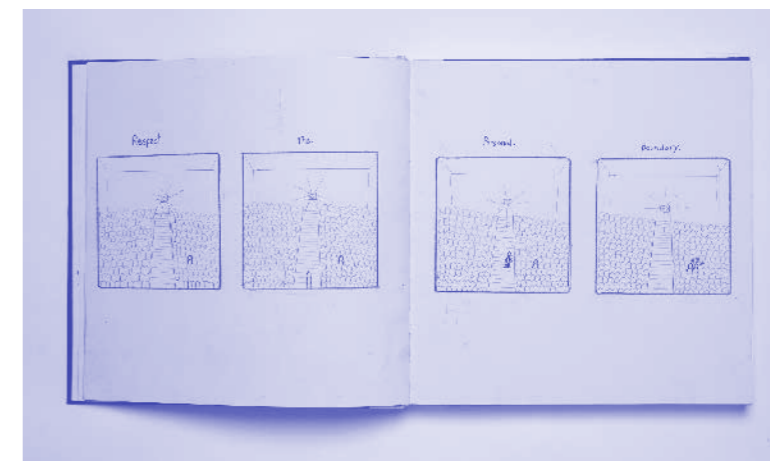
At the beginning, even some organizers had doubts whether the project would succeed. One of the concerns was the possibility of a discord between those coming from the centre of Europe and those from the borderlands, caused by the fact of differences in the background of many participants. Many nations and cultures means many versions of the same history of Europe. On the other hand, biographies of the participants have also to be taken into account – some of them were from multinational families or from families of immigrants. Would the differences in their perception of the world and cultural background become a source of conflict? That was the point of concern of some of the organizers.

In line with the organizers' assumptions, the topics highlighted by the official parts of the programme penetrated into the backstage and made their way into the private conversations and reflections of the participants, which have become the source of inspiration for many of their works. In fact, the project consisted of three parts, with each of them dedicated to a particular issue. The first stage in Cracow was mostly focused on history, covering such issues, for example, as the camps in Sobibor and Majdanek and the ways to commemorate history. It served as the introduction to the further work. In Berlin, during the second stage of the project, the participants did not only listen about history but could also see and feel it. They visited historical places like The Berlin Wall and places of remembrance like Holocaust Memorial. Trier was the venue of the practical work; the main purpose there was to summarise all the participants' experiences collected during the project.



Entering the unknown.  
Visiting the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe,  
also known as the Holocaust Memorial

## Respect. The. Personal. Boundary.



Drawing in one of the sketchbooks:  
*Respect. The. Personal. Boundary.*  
There are some boundaries which are not worth crossing.

The topics explored at all the stages were privatized by the participants and it was visible in their works. Even though the issues were not easy as some of them concerned the conflicts which are still present in the public discourses of specific countries. Nevertheless, they integrated people from those countries who worked on them together. It did not lead to xenophobia or isolation (regardless the concerns of some organizers) but rather to a mutual understanding and building respect towards the others. It's necessary to point out that many works of the participants referred to the topic of boundaries. Not only boundaries as the borders between countries but also as the boundaries of our thoughts, the frames of our minds, and our personal limitations. They noticed that some borders are worth being crossed while others would rather be respected.

At the end, many students turned out to have privatized the ideas behind FreedomBus, and materialized them in the pieces of art which they created during the project. It has been achieved by the organizers without symbolic violence and without giving the answers, just by giving impulses to thinking and to intellectual and emotional work. Hence, it is unnecessary or sometimes even harmful (especially when it comes to the youth) to lecture ex cathedra. It is crucial to give impulses to think independently and critically. A conclusion reached by the student on her own would be more valuable and would naturally become an element of her world and the way of thinking.





## **Boundaries between what is public and what is private**

The most important boundary is the one between the public and the private. Each activity in a project like the FreedomBus seems to be seen as both public and private. Firstly, this is the effect of spending most of the time with other people (who are actually strangers), which inevitably brings about taking up certain roles and attempting to form a certain impression. Secondly, the artistic work which is an expression of private reflections and identities, ends up published at both official exhibitions and consultations among the participants. Of course, the official exhibitions are perceived as far more public than the consultations, but both share the same dynamic: a person (or her artistic externalization) is confronted with an audience, and there is a power imbalance in this interaction. She reveals more than she learns about the anonymous or semi-anonymous viewers. Hence, it has been influencing the participants' ways of working and thinking. Building a sense of consciousness that a certain activity is public and is able to influence others is an important element of artistic education.

Moreover, it is necessary to mention decreasing the distance. It was kept in official situations, although in private situations power structures got visibly blurred. The lecturers were available to students at all times – not only as professors, doctors, or organizers (publicly), but primarily as people, journey companions, and partners (privately). It was possible to talk to them about anything in the form of a relaxed conversation. Under such circumstances, the students learn from the lecturers, and the lecturers learn from the students. Consequently, their worlds don't seem as distant as they usually do.

The skill of public existence and the open-mind constitute the basics of being with others (as opposed to coexisting with others). The question arises – what are the boundaries of the public and the private, and what does the public existence actually mean?





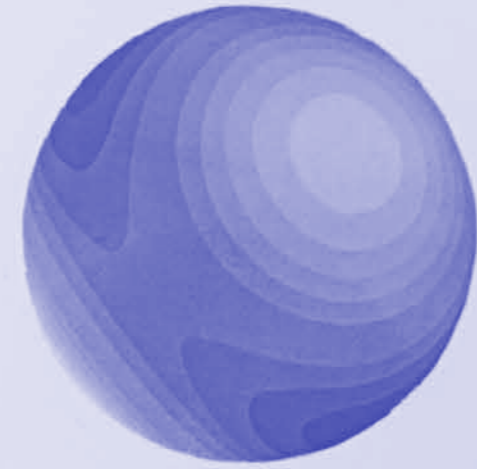
## **Researchers among artists and the artists with the researchers**

One more aspect to be mentioned is the interdisciplinary character of the project. From the beginning of this text, a participant is referred to as an artist. And yet, not all of the participants perceived themselves this way. They study different majors, not necessarily purely artistic, such as landscape architecture, design, or fashion. So different specializations (additionally, studied at various universities) brought about an exchange of completely different experiences. What is more, among them but at the same time together with them, there were also sociologists involved in the project, who, on the one hand, carried out their own research but, on the other hand, fully participated in the program. They created less but thanks to their presence and conversations with fellow participants they have influenced their creative work giving them broader, scientific insight. Furthermore, posing questions about the creative work forces one to think and increases self-awareness.

To shape a community-way-of-thinking about the world and one's role in it does not constitute an easy enterprise. Especially, when it comes to togetherness in the form of coexistence of different cultures, which is heavily questioned nowadays. It is possible though, and the work for the mutual understanding of each other's points of view is crucial here. Creating the right conditions to enable young people to find themselves in the multicultural environment – preferably working towards a common goal (which they should ultimately define by themselves) – and to make them see that they themselves are the other, is absolutely necessary to reconstruct the social public sphere in Europe in the coming years.

Throughout this book, we will add sociological commentary to the artistic and educational work done in the project. This book is as experimental as our involvement in the project was.





EXAMPLE OF TONAL BORDERS



# 2.

## Artist's identity as a public device

**T**he emancipatory trends in the recent developments of human history took us from prescribed social roles and rigid life trajectories of traditional social structures through industrial revolution and urbanization directly to identity projects of the present well pictured in the telling and intuitive *anime* “Ghost in the Shell” by the performative embodiment of one’s being.

Throughout the process of transformation from the traditional to modern societies, we developed various modes of togetherness or publicness. The formality of 18th century social life (of elites) as described and dearly missed by Richard Sennett (1977) was not given once and for ever. The vivid divide of the public or formal and private and informal modes of social interactions has been challenged for quite some time now.

The more mobile we are, the more strangers we meet. Both away from home and in the immediate proximity. Including the bus stop to work, as Stanley Milgram (1972) famously noticed. This is a typical urban experience, not only does one come across many unknown people but also she develops certain relationships with some of them. “Familiar strangers” are those we recognize, share public space with, are aware of, continuously meeting them on the metro platforms, bus stops, shopping the groceries or hitting the gym. We do not know their names nor backgrounds, we only guess their demographics by the visible traits, like gender, age, or economic status. Yet, we do know them.

However, the others are complete strangers. The anonymity of public urban spaces was recognized, for example, in the classical writings of Georg Simmel (1903). There are many consequences of this fact. First of all, we need to develop some kind of official self or formal identity to interact with strangers as well as to simply feature in the public spaces. Moreover, we are indeed challenged to be ourselves. Whereas in the traditional setting it used to be fairly obvious who we were and who we were to become, in the modernity being ourselves has become a task and a challenge. Obviously, we are still constrained by the different social categories we are born into, like gender, social class, or nationality and ethnicity. And yet, never before has there been such an opportunity to challenge them.

Good read: **Richard Sennett’s “The Fall of Public Man”** traces back the issue of being official to the 18th century indicating the shift towards the egocentric, narcissistic focus on ourselves and certain inability to interact with the others in the public space.

**The more mobile  
we are, the more  
strangers we meet.**





Notausstieg

SWT

Zeichenerklärung

ZOK



a concept of hegemonic Western position against the underdeveloped, savage or otherwise inferior modes of human coexistence. It is rather the state of social relations where the society is rationalized to a significant extent. There is the division of labor, human coexistence is a subject to a social contract, people tend to be urban dwellers, and the public sphere is secular. Every society nowadays ranks somewhere between traditional and modern, making the two ends of the spectrum useful categories to grasp many phenomena. German sociologist Norbert Elias (1969) noticed that the shift from traditional to modern society involves what he called the “civilizing process” or social regulation of individual lives by the rules and scripts followed by the individuals in the society. In short, the transformation from traditional to modern involves an individual more than the community.

## **From public to private sphere**

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public life involves the mere yet absolutely crucial encounters as described by Erving Goffman (1956), social exchanges (of resources or communication) as theorized by Georg Simmel (1903), and, last but not least, important social relations requiring not only awareness or contact, but also engagement and emotional involvement (Giddens, 1991). They can be arranged by the criterion of formality from the most official or less involving to the most emotionally engaging and personal.

This multilevel complexity of being with others nowadays is no longer regulated by the institutions of pre-defined social roles within well organized kinship structures where the relations were ritualized, hierarchically structured, and predictable. What we would have called an informal space of family life a hundred or so years ago in any Western society was a cold, very much official setting of an arranged marriage, patriarchal system of power rather than intimate, romantic, warm, pure relationship. The romantic love is a fairly recent concept that undergoes rapid changes and have gone through the utopian stage peaking in the free love movement after 1968 to the regulated again times of rational mating, matching, counselling, and professional guidance or even algorithmic adjusting described by Arlie Russell Hochschild (2012) in her book on *Intimate Life in Market Times*. This historical shift of 'the social', colonizing more and more areas of our lives, was noticed by Norbert Elias (2001) and called the civilizing process. This debate reflexes one of the most important questions for sociology, or the issue of relation of the individual to the group.

All the answers require dismantling of the concept of individual identity first. 'Who we are' always has two facets – referring to us ourselves and to the others. Erving Goffman's (1956) seminal work on the *Presentation of Self in the Everyday Life* not only implicitly describes the aforementioned shift towards the growing importance of socially regulated private spheres of (everyday) life but most importantly, distinguishes between the front stage of official selves and back stage where the former is being laboriously crafted before it is staged in front of the public. The tactical self accounts for the presence of the others and performs herself.

The concept of performative identity is developed in the field of queer theory with Judith Butler's (1990) breakthrough book about the *Gender Trouble* where she argues that there is no doer behind the deed. What matters – both for the individual and for the audience – is the outcome of the performance rather than any essential, assumed self behind it, since it is not accessible and hence it would not matter in the social realm.



Freedom Bus Tripp – part of the work by Adam, one of the participants from Poland, displayed during the final exhibition in Trier. The work consists of the “ongoing performance from the beginning to the end of the project” and his box as a drawer containing various materials he has gathered throughout the project and especially the documentation of one of two stand out performances (the one in Roes and another one during the very exhibition). On top of this, there is a sketchbook where he would comment on and give some insights into the creative process behind.

This might be interpreted as if we lived our social lives with the others just en passant and from time to time performed a meaningful and telling act that would serve as our portfolio for the public. In fact, Adam’s intuition to call all his participation in the FreedomBus project ‘a performance’ may be more to the point. Interestingly, he integrated social theory of Erving Goffman’s to demonstrate how our identities are created in the dialogue between us-for-us and us-for-the-others. The sketchbook serves as an insight into this process – the backstage normally restricted to the public. There is an important factor in using the naked body (obviously private rather than public) for the performance to indicate the sincere and real identity of the performer. Yet, the frame of ‘performance’ makes the claim as if it was something staged, prepared, and hence formal rather than informal. So, no mask (nudity and improvisation) here serves exactly as a mask.

This makes us look at any interaction as at a communication act and a mediated encounter requiring some kind of the staged front. Performance is not unusual, on the contrary, it is the very fabric of the selves we live by (Holstein, Gubrium, 2010) narrating ourselves to the others.







## Negotiating private and public in the FreedomBus project

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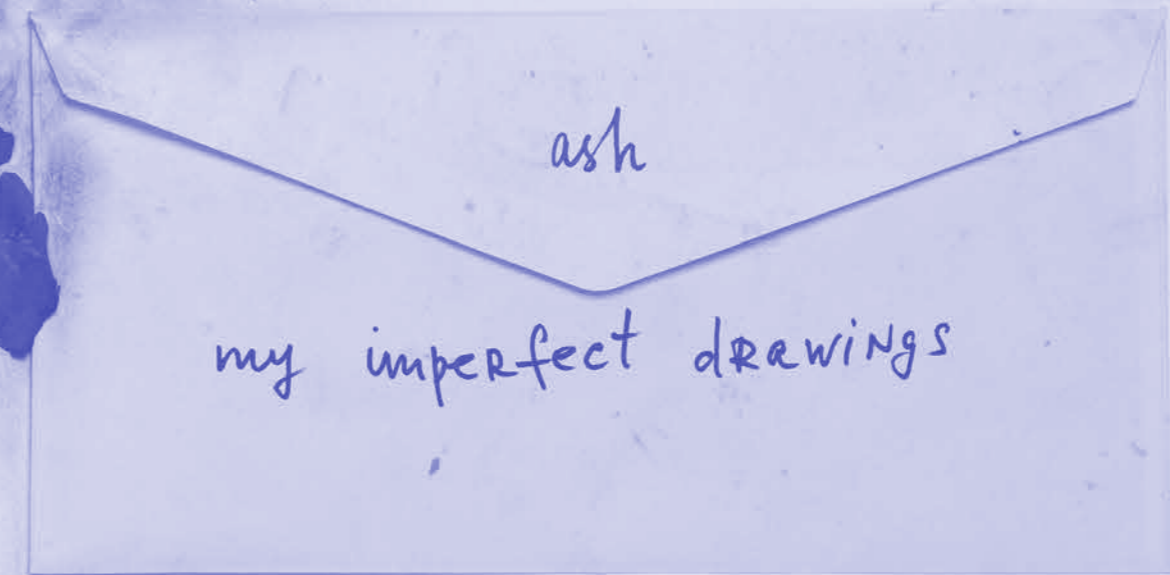
The FreedomBus project experimented with the formal and informal or public and private thoroughly. The project gathered a group of people for a period of 17 days. The participants recruited from different locations, with no prior knowledge of themselves and no acquaintance whatsoever, found themselves in very private situations of sharing a bedroom, bathroom, dining together, etc. Some of the participants initially were shy and disturbed for many reasons: one of them being the very fact of spending substantial amount of time together with strangers; another being the language factor – lack of fluency to express themselves clearly with a threat of being left out on the margins of the social life of the group.

It was apparent from the very start that the participants put on their imaginary masks and continued creating their *ad hoc* identities for the group, trying to form a certain impression of themselves. It is easy to sustain a mask even for a couple of days, but for two weeks and a half it turned out to be next to impossible. The relationships started to change. They seemed more sincere and close with each passing day and there was less effort needed to keep up the appearances. The students started to act more ‘naturally’ and felt likewise about the fellow participants’ behavior. The interactions moved from formal encounters to more emotionally driven relationships. The topics of discussions tended to be more personal or even intimate. A concept of ‘friendship’ started to be raised and prospects of staying in touch after the project would be considered. There were people fond of each other to the degree of romantic involvement, while some animosities or interpersonal conflicts popped up too. All of the above heading clearly in the direction from formal to informal or public to private.



At this time, the artists were working in their sketchbooks which remained on the outskirts of the whole social process outlined above, yet remaining in the very center of it. During the interviews, it was becoming increasingly obvious that the sketchbooks were really important and intimate to the authors. In the case of the FreedomBus project, every participant knew exactly from the very beginning that the work she would have done in the sketchpad would be publicly displayed on the exhibitions in Berlin, Roes, and later in Trier. It changed the whole dynamic. The sketches were made with awareness of the potential audience – many participants kept two books with drafts – a private and a public one. Some would cut and paste the highlights from the unofficial notepad only to feature it as a ‘draft’ in the official sketchbook. This is again in line with Erving Goffman’s findings about crafting one’s ‘front stage’ and ‘back stage’.

At the beginning, bearing in mind that the sketchbook was a part of the project, the young artists were hesitant to work in it. There was a sense of some expectations on the part of the project organizers of what would be the result of the creative process in the sketchbooks. The first work would have turned out to be breakthrough. On the one hand, the sketchbook itself would become more familiar and hence personal, and on the other hand, the expectations of the organizing team would appear to be minimal or rather nonexistent, and so the sketch pads can be freely used by the participants as they please to.

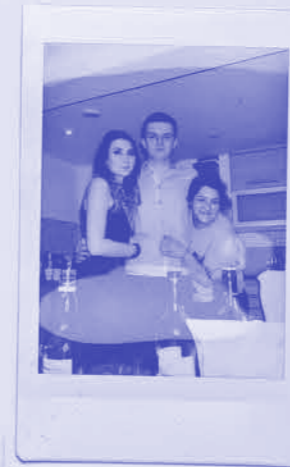




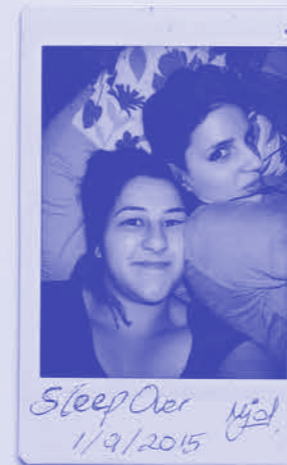
Just  
a  
Quick  
Introduction.  
⇒⇒

This is the second page of the sketchbook of one of the participants, Yusra, Ireland based Syrian, who decided to start her creative work with the introduction of herself. This identity related opener can be understood as communication with the imagined public: "this is me, these are the important social relations of mine that define me". This is the basic social background information that strangers seek in encounters in order to understand the interaction and its frames.

Clearly, the "quick introduction" in a private, personal diary-like sketchbook is not prepared for one's own self only. It is addressed to the broader, relatively unknown audience. It is interesting that the situation of information imbalance (the audience will learn what is there in the sketch pad, but the author will never learn about the audience) yields such an informal or personal introduction. One way to understand it is to account for the genre the creative journal belongs to. It is clearly a diary like a medium, personal by feel. It can be likened to the blogs or contemporary social media feeds, where the infrastructure (or genre) encourages to produce the personal content meant for a public display.



Seeing as I'm here  
with my Uni.  
← The closest two  
Human being to  
me.



← My favorite person on  
earth who so happens  
to be my Cousin.



← The Two Main  
Men in my life.  
Ramon & Omar.

However, the students were still aware that their unfinished work would be eventually exposed to the public and hence judged by an audience. Therefore, the initial privatization of the sketchbook was either way done with a public view in mind (regardless of whether consciously or unconsciously). There were two reference points of that public: the organizer's expectations and the exhibition visitors' reception. The works in the sketch pads were created in the private situations based on private experiences during the project. Still, they were meant to communicate something to the public.

The sketchbooks in a public view on the exhibition in Berlin. The students were well aware of the fact that their personal work in progress would be browsed, evaluated, possibly judged, and talked about. That created a certain imbalance in the control over their creative expressions. On one hand they were free to create but on the other hand exposed to the gaze of the unknown audience.



## **Playing with identities**

In the times of ever increasing prevalence of the surveillance technologies or omnipresent panopticon operated by governments, corporate businesses, including media and the so called social media giants, and even more powerful sousveillance or all the acts of self discipline through monitoring one's self, public and private relations are becoming more and more complex.

The private sphere is so limited, there is no place to hide, really.

Our smartphones, heart monitors, location trackers, smoke sensors, CCTVs, credit cards are all technologies of self-tracking. If one adds to this the discourses of externalizing one's self – selfies, food-porn, sexting, mood-sharing via emojis, or engaging with different types of personality training and enhancement, ranging from psychoanalysis, volunteering, mindfulness and personal coaching, etc. – a landscape unveils the personal matters strictly ruled by the regulations of the late capitalism. Eva Ilouz (2007) points directly to the contemporary capitalism in order to explain the dynamic calling it “Cold Intimacies” to stress how the private is in fact regulated by the external forces and “cold blooded” imperatives of the contemporary market.



**Sousveillance** as opposed to surveillance is the monitoring from the bottom and not from the above. The term was coined to capture all the phenomena connected to personal monitoring (video, but not only) devices carried around by people recording what they face. One popular pattern is to have a camera mounted in one's car to register what happens on the road. A whole genre of short footages from road accidents or otherwise ridiculous events in the streets emerge online.

Not only is the big brother watching us and hence we do watch ourselves, but we literally monitor each other to create a society of constant surveillance, making our mere presence or our gesture of taking a smartphone out of the pocket a potentially spying act on the person on the other side of the little lens on the back of the device.



MIA AND FELIX  
(I FOUND OUT THEIR  
NAMES DURING  
LUNCH) FILM  
EVERYTHING  
AT SOME MOMENTS  
I FELT LIKE WE  
WERE ALL PART  
OF A TV SHOW  
AND DIDN'T  
NOTICE IT

It is interesting and telling that one student (from Germany) used the sketchbook as a diary, a powerful ancestor of self monitoring devices, to talk about the ubiquity of surveillance. It tells a story of the prevalence of mediatization of our public sphere to the extent it is invisible on the daily basis. Yet, our digital presences create more and more layers over the brick and mortar or flesh and blood reality, making it a palimpsest of digitally augmented reality or everyday life.

**sousveillance**

**surveillance**



Paradoxically, the intimate relations (in public spheres) are not private (personal): the so-called ‘reality’ shows, policies of the digital media requesting to use the ‘real’ names just blur the balance between the public and the private but these platforms structure and actually own the private expressions and thus control them.

As is the case with the students’ sketchbooks in the FreedomBus project, we are aware of the audience staring. There is however a great and important difference between contemporary social media users and the young artists we worked with. The latter are engaged in a creative process of playful mediation – they anticipate the audience and instead of revealing themselves, in fact they create themselves. The former are encouraged to mere exhibit just giving away personal details, emotions, impressions, or connections in a micro-celebrity style.

This performative self, created for the public encounters is at a core of matters here. In the times of panopticon, the only way to save real privacy is to act. In other words, there is a need to re-introduce the anonymity of public spaces. Geert Lovink, a media scholar, asked a very important question relevant in the times of colonization of the public sphere with the private lives:

*The question is how to re-imagine anonymity not as an attainable categorical state, but as a way to recoup an energy of metamorphosis, the desire to become someone else* (Lovink, 2011, p. 45).

The self-narratives as the ones the young artists created in their sketchbooks, are the answer to this challenge. As sociologists, James A. Holstein and Jaber F. Gubrium noticed in their book on narrative identity in the postmodern world (“The Self We Live By”, 2000):

*We don’t present ourselves or risk who we are wholesale, in some eternal location, as if our troubles or our achievements could be evaluated or judged once and for all. Each context for addressing such matters provides for a limited moral engagement, the result being that there are few complete heroes or thoroughly tragic figures in the ongoing dramas of self. We deal with each context on its own terms and, in contemporary life, we have considerable choice about the ones in which we immerse ourselves.*

Creative play with various social contexts lets us retain our contextual integrity of ourselves, being free to create ourselves differently in different context or different publics. Once freed from being only one-self or from being constantly encouraged to bare ourselves in the quest for ‘authenticity’, we can rather create. As Lovink remarks:

*We are told to believe there is no true face behind the mask, or rather, told to ask what the mask is hiding, instead of what its wearer is performing.*



**In the times of panopticon, the only way to save real privacy is to act.**



In a series of workshops, the students participating in the FreedomBus project explored different means of artistic expression. The pantomime workshop and ultimately a show involved clay masks, not only a metaphor but an actual experiment in anonymity and creativity in the public space.







FreedomBus  
MOBILE LABORATORY FOR CULTURE AND  
INTERDISCIPLINARY EDUCATION  
30th August to 31st September 2018

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# 3.

## ToolBox

### – researchers on the FreedomBus

**T**he research conducted within the FreedomBus project is not the only one where we touch upon the issues of transcultural differences, conflicts related to them, and the possibilities of integration.

We are particularly interested in the reasons behind fear and prejudices towards those defined as different and the other. Broadly speaking, we are mostly keen on the issues of xenophobia and racism within the new perspective involving culture, nationality, and ethnicity rather than the only notion of race. We try to figure out the sources of the above-mentioned phenomena, on the one hand, and to find the ways to solve those problems and shape the society based on the mutual respect, on the other hand.









## The method – ethnography and the grounded theory methodology

Our study is based on full participation of researchers in the project. With the research team consisting of both students and professors, it was possible to observe the project from two perspectives. We were fully engaged in the activities at all the stages, one of us being the participant while another one being the member of the organizing committee. Before the project started, during the phase of conceptualization and defining the main research problems, we had already had some assumptions about the goals of our study. We came up with them mainly basing on the organizers' declarations as for the origins of the idea and program of the event.

The assumptions are obviously essential to have certain reference points. Truth to be told, neither us nor the organizers and also the participants knew what could and would happen during the project. The freedom – present in the very title of the project and being the fundamental value underlying it – turned out to be a certain issue in the context of the ongoing study. Since nobody knew what to expect, it was very tricky to pose the research questions and to problematize the study accordingly before it actually started. Not only was it a problem but also a great challenge and responsibility, which is exactly why the problems and our assumptions had to be instantly verified in the course of the project.

At the beginning of the project, just after the registration, each participant received a sketchbook from the organizers. They were asked to treat it as their own, personal, artistic diary from the FreedomBus travel. Works from those visual diaries made the research material for this book.









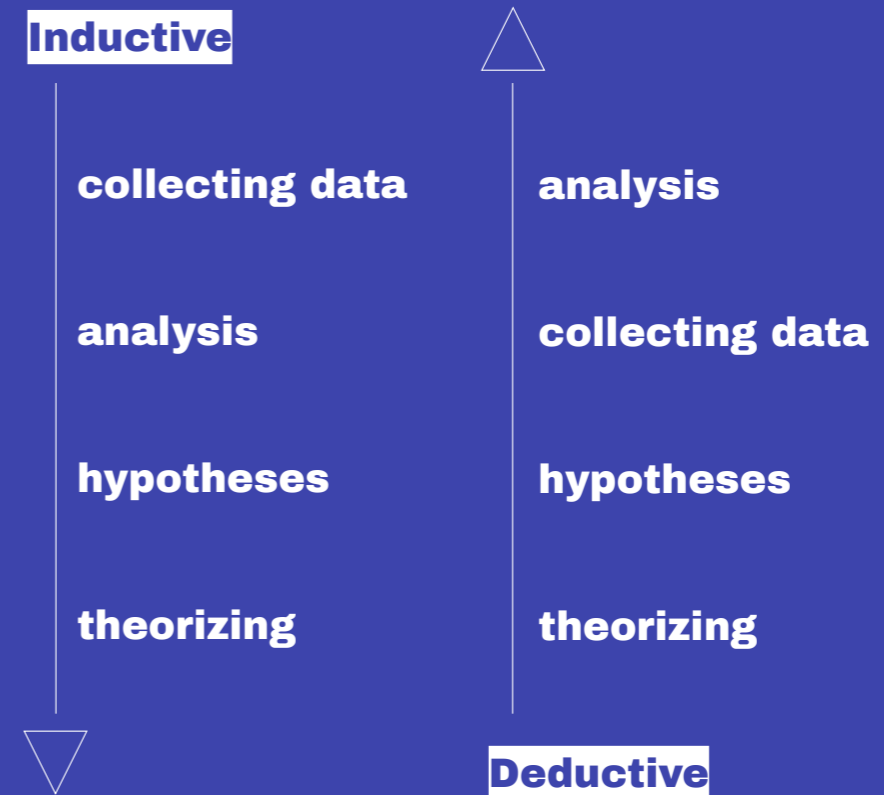
This is exactly why the conducted research was qualitative and based on ethnography, which justifies full participation of the researchers in the FreedomBus project. The first priority task at that stage of the research was to collect as much data of any kind as possible. Hence, the field notes, interviews or photos were taken instantly during the project. The artworks made by the participants were a special type of material collected and used for further analysis. Utilizing the latter makes this study experimental in a sense, because the peculiar type of narrative or the artwork was analyzed in the form of the sketchbooks and boxes they prepared. The sketchbooks were distributed to the participants as a default work-in-progress tool for a three-week trip. They were supposed to work in them instantly and exhibit them at different stages of the project – in Cracow, Berlin, and Trier. The boxes were wooden frames to be used by the participants at the final stage of the project in Trier preparing to show them in the ultimate exhibition as results of their work during the project.

It requires to adopt an understanding approach (applying the verstehen principle) with reference to the participants' works analyzed and interpreted using the contextual knowledge about the project and the authors. It is also facilitated by the social theory thanks to which the analysis can be deeper and understanding more feasible.



In view of the difficulty to define the particular research questions and the specific nature of the project itself, the data analysis will be based on the grounded theory methodology, which differs from the traditional approach. Classical sociological research starts with a theory which underpins the corresponding method, the process of data collection and analysis, and ultimately, either confirms or refutes the assumptions accepted at the beginning. The inference method is deductive in this case. Grounded theory methodology applies the inductive inference with the data collection being the first stage of the research followed by data analysis and the search for the elements, meanings, and structures that might constitute the basis for the theory formulation. It is important to refrain from adopting any theoretical assumptions which would eventually affect data analysis and distort the perspective. Some qualitative researchers believe that defining the research questions at the outset of the research is a mistake. Therefore, this kind of analysis has to be undertaken with the mind open (but not empty!). The analysis is ongoing until there are no more doubts or new essential theory elements. Often, to fill in the data gaps that occur in the research process, the respondents are interviewed one more time. Such a research procedure makes it possible to find new paths as the theory is developed directly from empirical data.

What exactly constitutes the data within the grounded theory methodology? Everything is data – conversations, photos, movies, notes, documents (both private and public), that is to say, data include every record of the reality examined that can be analyzed and help us understand that piece of reality. This makes it possible to make an attempt and construct our reality.



**Two main (ideal) modes of methodologies**

mind  
open  
(but  
not  
empty!)

## The responsibility for the research subjects

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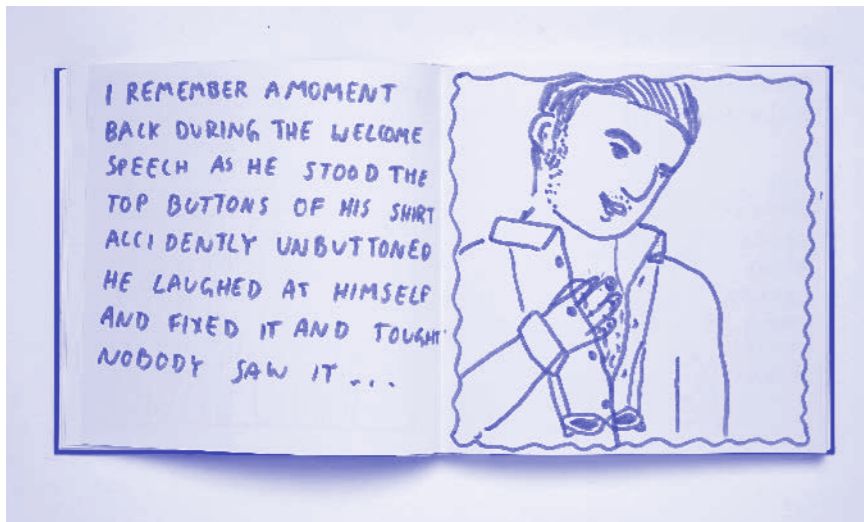
Ethics constitutes an integral part of the sociological research enterprise. It is worth to write a bit more about it, because there are substantial differences in the regulations and the actual research practice in the Western European and Eastern European countries. Professional and academic associations often provide guidelines and ethic codes, adapted to the specificities of their research domains (Polish Sociological Association, 2012, European Commission, 2013: 3, University of Luxembourg, 2017). We had an opportunity to discuss our concerns with the sociologists from different countries and with the artists themselves. Conducting social research in the Western Europe, a written research consent is the default. On the one hand, it proves that the researcher actually contacted the informant, and on the other hand, it protects the anonymity and the information provided by the research subject. It is regulated by law and lack of such documents may lead to questioning the research as not scientific.





A very interesting discussion may follow our decision to analyze the artworks of the participating students. Let us first make a disclaimer that our analysis is just loose notes written apropos the artworks and not really attempt to interpret them. But what if we wanted to embark on a psychoanalytical or deconstructive journey to dissect the works students made?

We obviously obtained an oral consent to use the outcomes of the research for the purposes of analysis. The students knew they were producing artworks for public display. Yet, a very important ethical (and methodological) question arises: if one consent is given (for public display) is it the general public for good? Is it all or nothing?



## How to maintain the contextual integrity of the authors and their public output?

Once the works were given away, have they started to live independently of their creators? Let's just assume they actually imagined the public of the project exhibitions? The niche exhibition halls in Berlin or Trier, a low number of copies of the book printed? Both the book and exhibitions obviously targeted at certain social situations and particular social groups. And what if this integrity of consent and the imagined public is broken. What if a researcher sits down and uses some social theories and concepts to analyze it?

One can always claim – 'it is public anyway'. But sociologists will be quick to add, 'and which public exactly do you mean?'. It is possible to make a parallel to the so-called social networking sites and the audiences there. Once published – the consent is given. Easy, right? But to what extent are we tied to our digital or creative expressions? What are our rights to integrity, our minds, bodies, and mediated expressions?





There are no such regulations in Poland, should the data be acquired anonymously (that is the case for most of the social science research). The code of ethics of the Polish Sociological Association does not regulate it either. The code encourages the researchers to ensure full anonymity to the informants. The researcher is the one who should protect their identity and is obliged to delete all the information that could identify the research subject. The researcher should be the only person who knows who she talked to and discloses this information to the members of the research team only. These rules are based on the trust and assumption that since the research is a part of academic enterprise it must be done honestly. This is a more complex issue and is connected to a general high level of social trust in Poland (Sztompka, 2007; Czapiński, 2006; Czapiński 2008; GUS, 2015, CBOS, 2016). If one required a written consent from research subjects in Poland, especially when talking about sensitive questions, conducting any sociological research would become highly problematic if not impossible at all. The arts students participating in the project were somewhat concerned about our work, namely about us taking field notes. There were concerns about the topics covered by our research, what kind of

Shortly after the start,  
our presence was worked through  
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about 'spies' in the group.

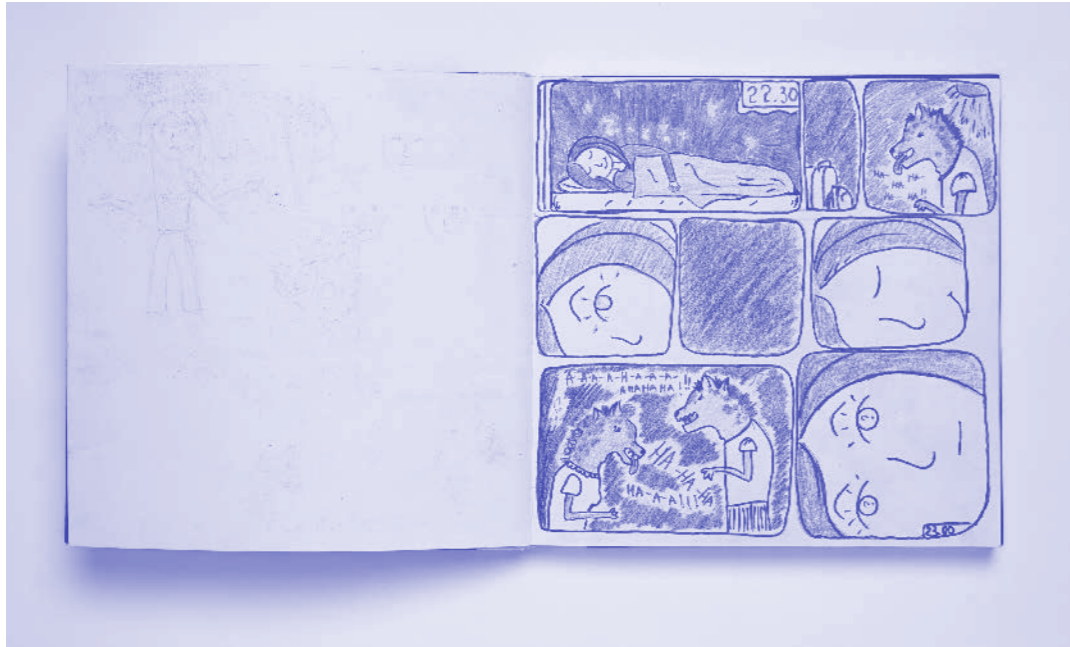
information we acquire, and how we process it. It referred especially to the fact that we were simultaneously members of the group and fellow students sharing stories, lives, hostel bedrooms, and bars. However, it seems to have had no significant impact on the research. Shortly after the start, our presence was worked through with the participants and became a frequent topic of jokes about 'spies' in the group.

The sociologists from Luxembourg cooperating with us during the project stressed the necessity to obtain the written consent from the participants to use the information we collected. However, in line with the Polish standards, in order to avoid interfering with the research informants too much, we decided to obtain only an oral consent not to create a formal relationship between us. Our research is hence based mostly on the observation, conversations (and not interviews) with the participants and organizers, and on the analysis of the art works produced during the project. Namely, the sketchbooks and the boxes processed by the participants of FreedomBus. Obviously, the field notes are a very important source of data for us, which are very personal at times and can well be called autoethnographic.









This is the example of the group life dynamic influencing the creative output. A student could not sleep because of her roommates' laughing. When they finally fell asleep, she just woke up and drew a comic strip about it.

Another ethical problem that occurred during the FreedomBus project is connected to the methodology applied. The group of participants – subjects of the study – was a very specific, temporary gathering created for the purpose of the project only. Most of the participants had not known each other previously. One must add that not all of the students actually participated in the project from the very beginning till the end. Some of them joined in later and some left earlier. As a consequence, those latecomers who joined in Berlin or Trier lacked some foundations and introduction to the topic. Of course, all those students carried out their art projects in the same stream about the same topics but lacked experiences which the others had, and used different sources of inspiration. The temporal character of the group mattered a lot.



Students were looking for answers and so were the teachers.

Conducting ethnographic research, one must obey the rule of not interfering with the research field; and after the data is collected the field should remain the way it was before the study started (Denzin, 2000; Jemielniak, 2012). To put it differently, it is the most important to leave the research field as it was before. It was virtually impossible in the case of the FreedomBus project. A very short time of the group duration was the main factor here. Since we decided on the full participation in the project and insider's observation, there occurred a risk of 'going native', that is the failure to keep distance and maintain scientific objectivity caused by engagement and identification with the group. The greater the freedom of the qualitative data collection, the greater the risk of partiality and bias. There is a great responsibility on the part of the researcher and we managed it by constant contact with the remote supervisor who only joined the team in Trier for the last days of the project. An ongoing counselling took place to create a safety net to prevent immersing of the field researchers too much into the group's life.



## The main assumptions and topics of the research

According to some social researchers, posing research questions at the beginning of a qualitative study is erroneous as is constructing hypotheses (Denzin, 2000; Jemielniak, 2012). However, being human beings we always do have certain assumptions about the reality around us and, more importantly, the FreedomBus project was so rich in research themes and data, that some conceptualization was unavoidable. Hence, considering the limited resources, the concrete goals of the FreedomBus project, and our own research interests, we decided to specify what we would be interested in looking for the data. This decision had a great influence on conducting the research because we had conversations with the participants and the organizers on particular topics. Still, starting our work we did not know exactly what to expect in the field. Our pre-conceptualization was based only on the conversations with the organizers and on the frame-plan of the project. We made some assumptions based on the earlier work of professor Anna Bulanda-Pantalacii, the head of the project.



All the participants received wooden boxes and were given a possibility to create anything they would like to with their use. Also symbolic is that all the boxes were the same at the beginning and completely different after the artistic interference.



Considering all the above, we formulated two basic research questions related to the FreedomBus project and the life of this small community that lasted for 17 days. One must mention that those questions were very ambitious and broad in relation to the size of the project and the capacity of the data we have collected. Nevertheless, the questions must have been formulated to establish a starting point, one that could subsequently be changed and adjusted in the context of the obtained data and discussions we had. Hence, the answers one can find in this book are not definite, nor complete, and obviously yield further research.

The two initial questions that constitute our starting point for the FreedomBus journey are as follows:

- How can the public sphere be rebuilt?
- How a community can be built preserving and respecting the individual?

In fact, both of these are questions about the contemporary Europe, the European Union and its present social condition.

We decided to investigate the European identity and asking questions about its foundations, the actual content and how it exhibits itself in the creative process of the participants. Thus, we made some very basic and working assumptions and organizing concepts to focus on later in our analysis. These concepts were freedom, democracy, Europe, identity. We wanted to learn whether what goes on among the participants of the FreedomBus on the micro scale can be used to make sense of the macro scale of the public sphere of the European Union.









# 4.

## European context of FreedomBus – questioned dream about the united Europe

**I**n our conversations with the organizers of FreedomBus during the journey, they strongly highlighted a political and social context of the project. For the participants artistic activity was important in itself, but it was also an excuse for reflecting on the contemporary Europe, its history, and future.

It's worth to emphasize that the organizers were not drawing conclusions during the project but stimulated the participants' sensitivity, let them find conclusions on their own, and show those conclusions in the artistic form.

We can say that the world we live in has changed. It is not a great discovery nor is it true only for the recent past, but obviously it has important implications for our lives. In the last few years in Europe and in the whole Western World, radical right movements have become powerful again. Racism, xeno-racism, xenophobia, and even fascism have become socially acceptable attitudes.

### **Research diary: August, 31st**

*Prof. Bulanda is extraordinary. She is full of energy and shares it with others. When the girls completely gave up thinking it was the end, because there was no money, she mobilized them to act and supported them so much. Critical moment was a year ago when the project hadn't happened. Both of them were crying then that it was over and they couldn't do anything. But as one of the girls said "for professor Bulanda nothing is impossible". When it turned out that there was no money, she just said that they would do it without it. The girls were surprised and shocked "how can we do it without money"?*

*Profesor Bulanda narrated that this year the project was also on the ropes because of financial problems, but she slammed her fist down on the table, that she had invested so much time, money, and energy that she just can't let it not happen – money could be borrowed. It illustrates how determined she was about FreedomBus.*

European integration became a public issue again when the EU faced a few crises with the refugee crisis on top. Timing was crucial because several countries were waiting for the elections to come and populist politicians used those problems in their election campaigns. Much attraction was drawn by the parliamentary and presidential elections in Poland and the presidential elections in France. Not less decisive was the referendum in the United Kingdom, the same being true with the elections in the United States that had impact on the European attitudes too. Right wing parties won elections in some European countries while in others they have been getting good results and emerged in national parliaments. Consequently, Europe started to break down. In the 2016 referendum, the United Kingdom decided to withdraw from the EU since many countries (like Poland or Hungary) were not eager to fully respect European solidarity and European law. The FreedomBus project couldn't but be affected, guided, and shaped by the above.

**World has changed. It is not a great discovery.**



MANY COUNTRIES - ONE EUROPE

EUROPE - NOT ONLY THE NAME OF THE CONTINENT BUT THE NAME OF A COMMUNITY WITH SHARED VALUES. THE EXISTING VARIETY OF CULTURES IS AN ENRICHMENT FOR EVERYONE AND THERE IS SO MUCH TO DISCOVER AND TO LEARN. YOU HAVE ALMOST NO PROBLEMS CROSSING THE BORDERS AND TO FEEL FREE TRAVELLING AROUND. - BUT NOT EVERYONE SHARES THIS OPINION...

VALUES VARIETY  
COMMON EXPERIENCE  
PEACE HUMOUR  
HISTORY TRAVEL  
TOLERANCE OPEN-MINDED  
UNDERSTANDING

CONFLICTS DIFFERENCES  
RACISM  
LANGUAGE MONEY  
CULTURE RELIGION  
HATRED EXPECTATIONS  
TERROR

The student from Trier shared her reflection about the dreamed Europe: *Many countries – one Europe – not only the name of the continent but the name of the community with shared values. The existing variety of cultures is enriching everyone and there is so much to discover and to learn. You have almost no problems crossing the borders and feel free traveling around – but not everyone shares this option.*

One can search in here for the answer to the question: how to find togetherness in Europe when there are a lot of nations, and a lot of languages, and a lot of conflicting interests? In this work, Europe is presented as a dream where Europe itself as well as its diversity are highly valued by the citizens. It is a dream where people want to talk to each other and learn more, where Europe is a community so there is even something like the European identity which implies curiosity about the others, other cultures, or other styles of life. In this vision, European diversity is not a disadvantage nor a problem, but a base for opening a dialogue. What is common for people with such a perspective is curiosity, tolerance, and understanding.



Two students from Germany present otherness as inspiration. In their work, they mixed nations, colors, and traditions. The models would wear masks that embody totally other cultures. Nation – Inspiration.

#### Research diary, August, 30th

*It seems that organizers emphasized a lot the social and political aspects. Once they said that the main goal of the project was to teach to look at everything critically and be engaged. Two years ago, at the stage of planning the project, it was supposed to tackle the success of Europe, but as it turned out there was a lot more to say because of other events that occur internationally.*

At the very beginning of the FreedomBus project, the organizers planned it as a tribute to the success of the United Europe. Europe, where people of many nations can live together and support each other, where people can travel without borders. Many years before, in 2004, an American scientist Jeremy Rifkin published a book *The European Dream*. He could not possibly know what kind of crises Europe would face in the years to come. In his book, he concluded that Europe was such an attractive place, because it had been reinforced by the human rights rather than built on the economic grounds.

However, the flow of history has changed and at the same time FreedomBus became an answer and an alternative to the right wing, radical moods in the European community. As the result of all those changes, the main purpose of the project has also changed – from paying tribute to Europe to asking a question about the European identity and rebuilding togetherness in the European society. As a foundation for this togetherness, organizers proposed the system of values based on human rights, tolerance, and the belief that the United Europe and peace in Europe are values themselves.







The participants discussed the current political issues too. In her drawing, a sociology student from Ukraine who studies in Opole sketched the political discussion on the bus to Berlin. It was a time of uncertainty because of the anticipated changes in the Western World. The risk of taking over the power by radicals and populists was known already. Participants were afraid about the future of themselves, of their families, and of the shape of Europe in case Trump and Le Pen would win the elections. It was two years before Trump's success in America, and three years before Le Pen's defeat in France.

#### Research diary: August, 31st

Art is not simply about drawing, it is about expressing one's self. If you have something to say, it is not necessarily crucial to phrase it in a form of an ideal illustration, what matters is the idea. If you have something to say to others, you can do it using a poem, music, a book, or a drawing (does not have to be perfect). There are many ways and each of them is different, but the most important is to have something to say. Some of the participants try to distance themselves from their craftsmanship.

Initially, the European Union was an economic alignment and the attempt to keep peace in Europe after the World War II. However, in the following years it has developed into more complex political union, and yet the European identity was non-existent. (Sandholz, Sand Sweet, 1998; Neumann, 1999, Chackel, Katzenstein, 2009). Thomas Risse in his article states:

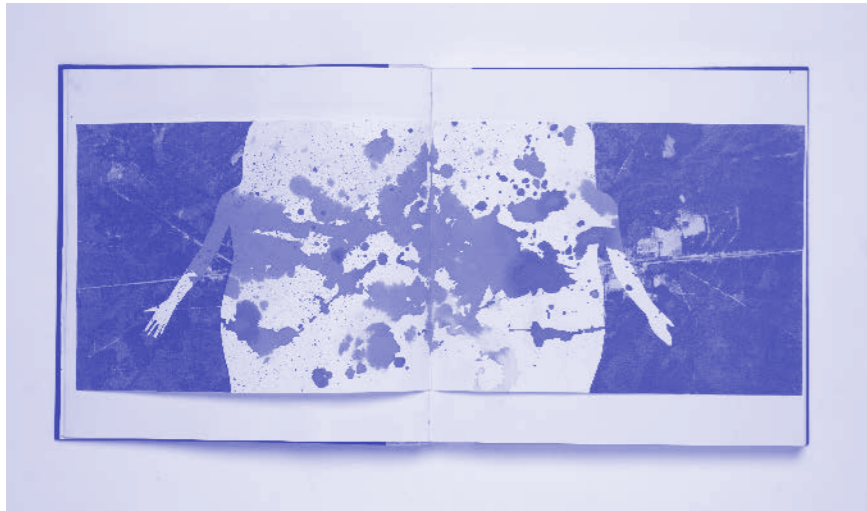
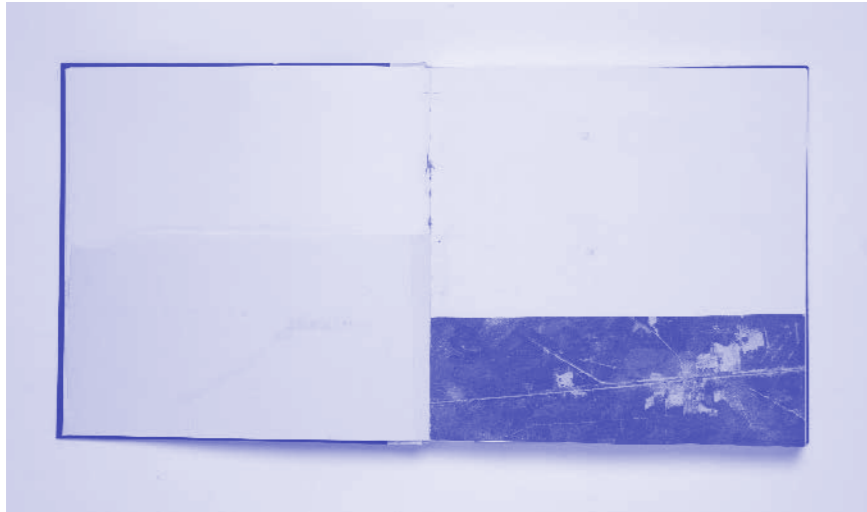
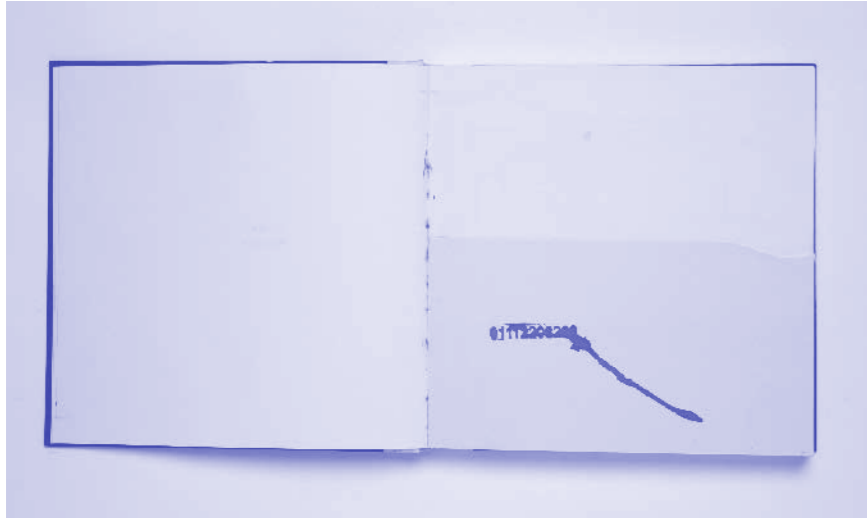
*Several European movements promoting European integration emerged, for example, during the interwar period. They also advocated specific identity constructions, overcoming purely nationalist conceptions. Ideas of these groups became particularly salient during the 1950s and, apart from influencing the first steps toward European integration, found their way into the domestic discourses of various European countries. During the 1970s and 1980s, in conjunction with the increasing significance of the European Parliament, transnational links among political parties were formalized, leading to European-level transnational party organizations. While the influence of these groups on European policymaking has been rather limited, they served the exchange of ideas about European unity (Risse, 2001).*

*Identities refer to shared representations of a collective self as reflected in public debate, political symbols, collective memories, and elite competition to power. They consist also of collective beliefs about the definition of the group and its membership that are shared by most of group members. We understand identities to be revealed by social practices as well as by political attitudes, shaped by social and geographical structures and national contexts*  
(Chackel, Katzenstein, 2009: 4).

So, even if we talk about humanistic values as the European ones and as the ground for the European identity, what does it truly mean? Europe consists of many cultures and points of view. Jeremy Rifkin wrote: *Europe is kaleidoscope of cultural diversity. The Union's inhabitants break down into a hundred different nationalities who speak eighty-seven different languages and dialects, making the region one of the most culturally diverse areas of the world* (Rifkin, 2004). What can unite people in Europe then? What are those values and what is their source? And finally, what is there in the European history common to all the European nations that would establish togetherness for all those people who live in different places, identify themselves with various ethnicities, speak different languages, and are involved in national conflicts that have been present for centuries?

What  
can  
unite  
people  
in  
Europe  
then?

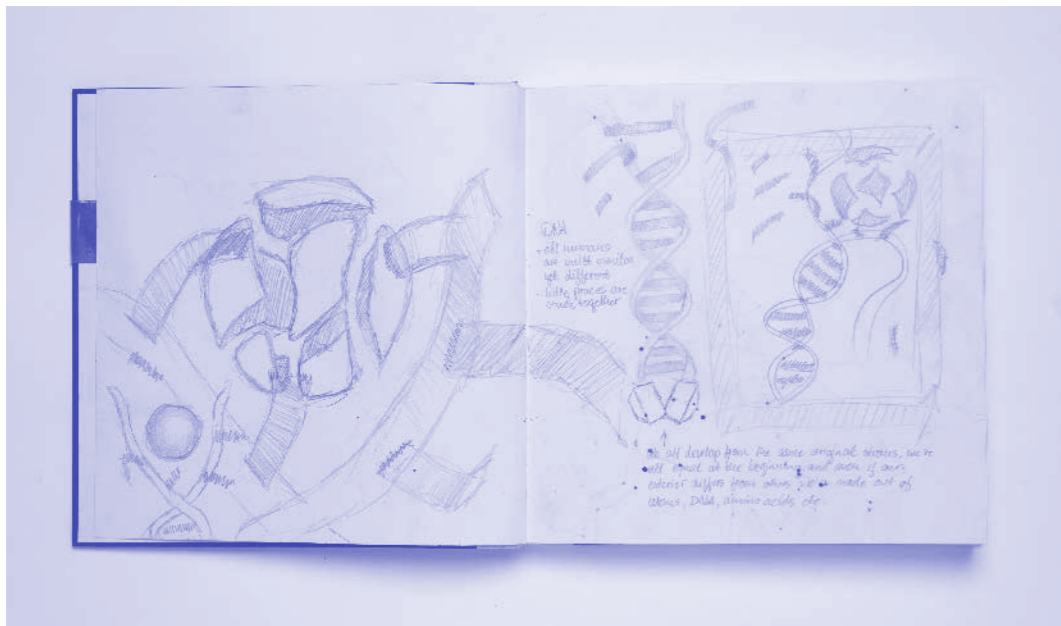




Series of artworks by a Polish student from Jan Matejko Academy of Fine Arts. The work which presents her impressions about the death camps. The number looks like drawn with blood and hiding something behind. In the last piece of art, a woman's pose suggests innocence but she is all contaminated by blood. It's reflection about people who suffer because of war. Political decisions influence people's lives, and a human being who is powerless in face of war's cruelty. Sometimes one has to do things which she doesn't support.

Participants of the FreedomBus project tried to answer those questions in their works. Most of them were artists (but not all of them identified themselves with artists) so the organizers ‘used’ their extraordinary sensitivity and exposed them to some selected flashes from the recent European history.

The first stop of FreedomBus in Cracow, Poland was about the World War II and suffering of people in the camps during the War. The artists saw the ways and possibilities of memorization of arduous history, and they learned about the artists who lived in the camps. We say that they learned from the history about the worst consequences of racism, xenophobia, and hatred. The next stop of the FreedomBus was in Berlin, where participants visited the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe and the remnants of the Berlin Wall. They could learn something more about one of the most known symbols of separation and division in Europe, the one which has become a symbol of unity because of its falling down.



It is one of the sketches by the student from Germany. She presented a wider (but a very simple) view on the same problem. Her point of concern here is not Europe but all people and humanity in general. We, the people, are the same kind, consequently, we are similar biologically, so why are we so divided?

The contemporary situation in Europe and in the World was important for many of the FreedomBus participants. Many of them were in a rebel mood. Rebel against hate, exclusion, racism, xenophobia, and conservatism, and they were also full of doubts about the future of Europe. They talked about politics as about something important for them personally. The possibility of Donald Trump’s and Marine Le Pen’s victories in the elections made many of them concerned about future of theirs and their families. A student asked about the elections in France, commented: *Where are the values of the French Revolution? Where is the Liberty, Fraternity and Equality, because Marine Le Pen doesn’t represent those values.* Somebody else had a family in the United States and was afraid about their future after Trump’s winning. So, they presented values which were close to their hearts in their works. They could find connections and make comparisons between the historical and the contemporary Europe. They were very critical about nationalism and other popular ideologies. What we should mention is that they were also critical about the FreedomBus project and the concept of crossing borders because there are some borders which are not worth crossing. Borders of one’s freedom, personal borders, borders of intimacy and others; on the contrary, there are some borders which yield establishing, because when we are crossing one border, another border is needed to prevent from abuse.

**Research diary, August, 30th**

*I was also talking to a girl from Georgia, who didn't know yet what she would draw there (in her sketchbook), but she said that it's part of herself. When I asked about her participation in the project she said she had participated in many projects before, and she had got a lot from them. Workshops were also very valuable, but equally important was participation in something bigger, meeting with those people, and the social dimension of the project.*

There are still a lot of people who support national movements in France and the same situation is in other countries. Losing elections doesn't make them disappear. They just don't lead country and they are not the most significant part of the public sphere... yet. The question is how can we live in peace with those people and how we can make their minds for more open and tolerant? Even if someone else wins the elections those people won't disappear. They are among our friends, neighbours, colleagues, and we have to communicate and live with them in one Europe.

**They are our friends, neighbours, colleagues, and we have to communicate and live with them in one Europe.**









Relation between the artist and the sketchbook is really fascinating and intimate. Participants of the project received official sketchbooks which were later exhibited in Berlin, Roes, and Trier. It was very interesting to observe how carefully they had been treating the sketchbook – trying not to destroy it, not to touch its innocence – and after that, the process of privatizing those sketchbooks and making them their own. However, participants became friends with their sketchbooks, many of artists had their own, private sketchbooks which were much more intimate and nobody, except the owner, could see them.

#### **Research diary: August, 30th**

*For the artist the sketchbook is very intimate, where he has his/her drawings, works in progress, but also his/her notes. That's why even if somebody let us look into it, probably it would be hard to talk to us about it.*

#### **Research diary: September, 2nd**

*Many people here search for inspiration for their drawings in the surrounding. Some European ideas occur as well, but much less frequently. At the very beginning, not everyone seemed to know what to do with the sketchbooks as the idea behind the project was perceived as fuzzy and confusing, although it was getting clearer and clearer with each passing day. I am pretty sure that completing the first piece in the sketchbook was such a milestone. Then it started to be privatized and became more personal. Inasmuch as the initial attitude towards the sketchbook was based on a certain anxiety that there was this expectation about the given topic, as the time went by it was getting less relevant and the artists started to create what they wanted to.*

#### **Research diary: September, 2nd**

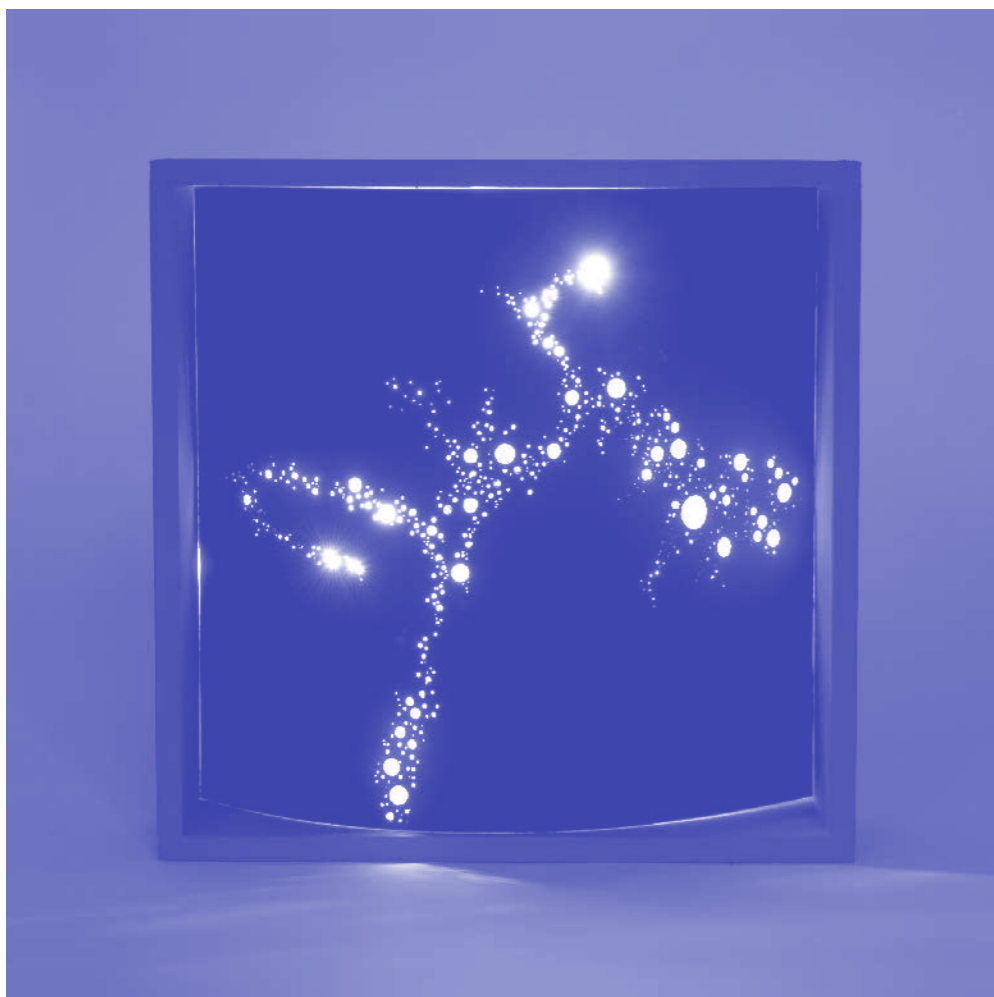
*I asked the girl from London about the causes of Brexit and according to her those were mostly the disappointment with the system and the lack of trust to it. People are poorly educated, often in the public schools. There are vivid class divisions in the United Kingdom. There are many classes and they fight with each other, but the most important division right now is between those who approve of the system and those who do not. People do not believe in the better future. They are often poor and are disillusioned about the future being any better. People have been working for years and yet they will never afford their own apartment, etc.*

There was a very meaningful moment we captured at the exhibition in Trier. A visitor wanted to peek behind the curtain, where a video entitled 'Conflict' about the embeddedness of conflict in the contemporary world was shown. As if there was this assumption that the media coverage is not real enough, misleading, or at least required double checking. If all the troubles of the contemporary world are brought to us by the media representations and all the conflict is mediated, then we learn not to treat it too seriously, knowing that there must be something behind it. Here, one could have a look, browsing our news feeds, we cannot. Jean Baudrillard was right when he claimed that the Gulf War Did Not Take Place (1995). What matters are the media representations, yet they are as ephemeral as the semi-transparent cloth in the Irish/Syrian student's work here.



'Different but one' a work by a German student, a metal sculpture that shows two figures who look similarly but the background suggests they are different. A powerful metaphor of the contextualized nature of perception of the identity and difference. The differences are socially constructed, i.e. the norm is black, the norm is white, while when taken out of context, human beings are naturally the same. A simple touch, a handshake as natural, and simple as it is – when contrasted with the vivid border in the background, appears as 'inter-cultural', bridging, significant reunion. Completely unnecessary if it was not for the contextual differences.





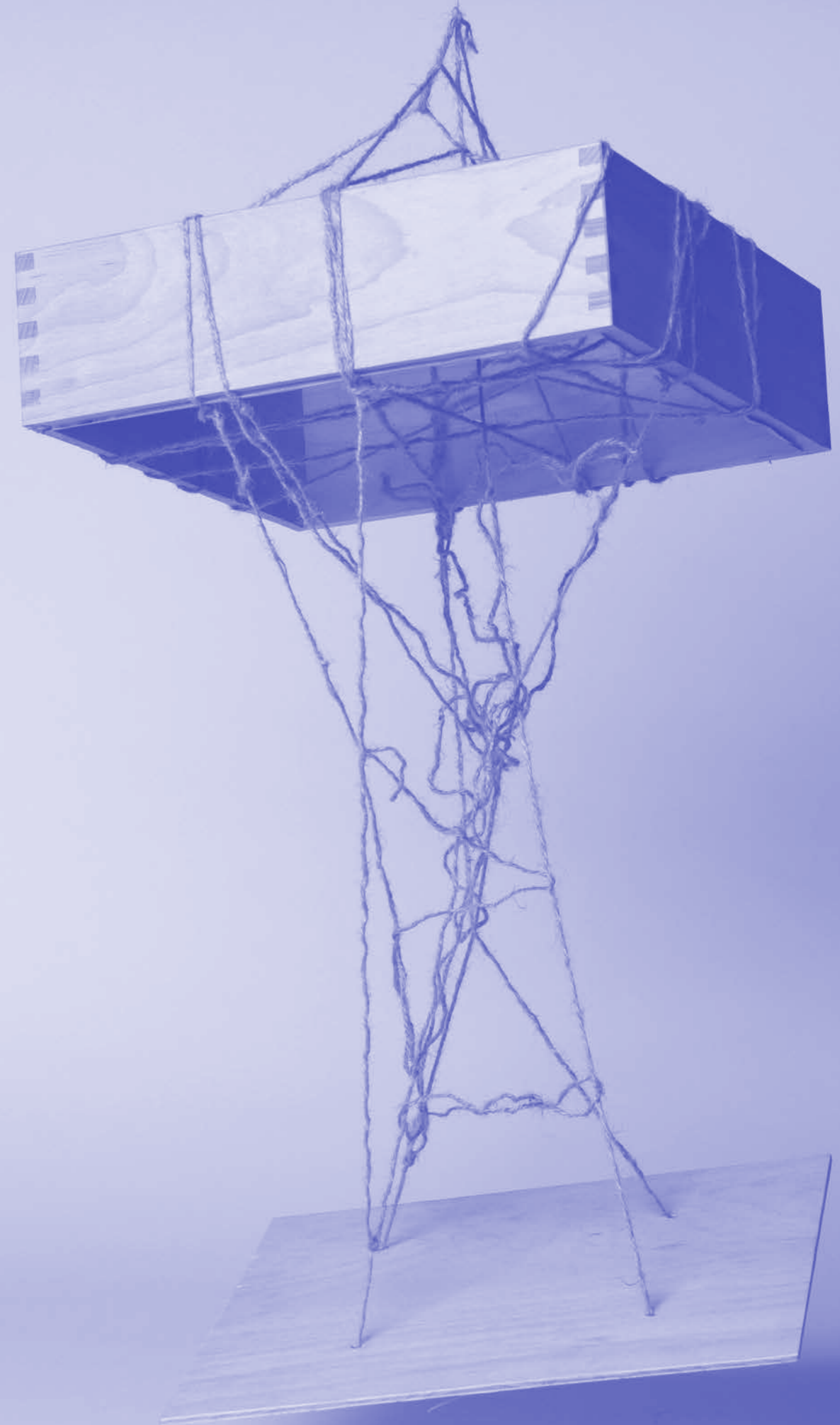
'Swarms' representing people of Europe by one of the German students, understood as a shoal of fish powerful when united and together can be also interpreted as the very weakness of the contemporary EU. The discourse of immigrants 'swarming' at the shores of Europe may be showing a completely different face of the European togetherness – closed and reserved only for the lucky insiders. The water drops symbolizing the individuality of each of the members of the happy swarm also depict the individualist culture of EU, one that struggles to empathize with the outsiders.



"From One Place To Another" is a very insightful piece by an English student who used the concept of postcards, travelling unconstrained to show how easy it is to move from one place to another. The transparency of the cards above highlights this idea. Though, as the author confesses, it also made her realize how privileged she is to be able to cross the borders like this.

This touches upon the most crucial aspect of this project – the participants are rich in cultural capital, are being educated at universities, can afford spending part of summer on art-related activities (as opposed to work), can speak foreign languages. To some extent, this highlights the contemporary strength and the weakness of Europe. We are fine and united on the level of elites, but what about the underprivileged, those who would never be sending either getting postcards from all over the world, those who happen to live in some parts of Europe, tied to their locality and technically free to move around, but practically being 'From One Place To Be The Other', forgotten minorities of traditional heritages, immersed in their communities, not really keen on taking up the 'luxury' of freedom.

“Overcoming borders” represents European borders. The bottom of this work symbolizes the contemporary Europe suspended on strings. It’s difficult to keep it stable, and it’s difficult to stand on it. It’s easy to shake it – even a wind can do this. At the same time, it is connected with the top which represents the past of Europe. It can be read as a metaphor of our continent but also of the contemporary world in general. Zygmunt Bauman’s (1989) theory of postmodernism states that our world nowadays is not clear, there are no explicit instructions how we should live, what we should do, or think. There are no common, general ideas which would be relevant to most of people. Discussion of the Legislators and Interpreters serves well to illustrate this point. Legislators in this work are represented by the top. It is the world of people who know the rules, and paths of their lives are simple. The world of Interpreters (the bottom) does not have clear rules. People of different cultures, with different background, different ideas and ways of life live together in one place. This world is unstable and people have to reconsider their reality everyday and interpret it over and over again.









## Unboxing the European Identity

The idea of the project was to re-work certain issues of the contemporary Europe in the course of a 17-day journey in a group of the European young artists.

The organizers provided the background in the theoretical lectures and workshops as well as a practical framework in the form of sketchbooks and boxes for the final works of art.

The sketchbooks were everyday visual diaries where participants were mixing private notes, sketches of everyday life and such with official, public issues, and ideas of the project. They were more like an excuse for artistic interaction and – probably most importantly – they were instant reminders that behind the relaxed summer trip from Cracow to Trier there was something the organizers wanted the artists to talk about.

Many of those works were difficult to understand without contextual background or description. They might be called the project outcomes – the things exceptionally meaningful to the participants. The boxes made the final result of the project and were directly related to the ideas of FreedomBus, in particular, the idea of Europe open to all, and generally to the value of freedom, tolerance, acceptance, understanding, togetherness, community, crossing the borders and establishing them.

Unboxing is a very recent genre, a product of mass self communication (Castells, 2009) and the consumer culture of capitalism. We used this title for the book and our analysis to emphasize the power of grass-roots, bottom-up movements, referring to the symbolic unviolence of the project, but also to remember that it is all happening in a broader framework of the late modernity. As one of the students noticed:

This trip has made me more aware and conscious of the freedom I have in this world compared to others.

**This trip has made me more aware and conscious of the freedom  
I have in this world compared to others.**

# Symbolic unviolence of FreedomBus

The Moving.Lab association<sup>1</sup> was established as a logical and unavoidable next step after the Cross Borders Network activity concluded recently with the FreedomBus project. It is an organization that gathers artists and people of academia around the idea of creative education. Let us finish the book drawing upon the experiences of the FreedomBus project for the possible future work of the mobile laboratory for interdisciplinary arts and sciences.

One could call the educational method used in the FreedomBus project a *symbolic unviolence*. Reversing the well established concept, introduced under the umbrella of *symbolic power* by French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1984), it is possible to talk about shifting the legitimization of knowledge and meaning making process from a top-down to a bottom-up logic. Bourdieu analyzed education and its power to define the concepts underlying the modern societies. This structuralist view is in line with – for example – telling explanations of the modern nations theorized as products of nationalism (and not *vice versa*) conveying the uniformity and symbolic repertoire of imagined groups (see: Gellner, 1983, Anderson, 1983).

The logic of the FreedomBus method is exactly the opposite. Thus, we call it *symbolic unviolence*, not only to stress the importance of the impulses given to stimulate intellectual and artistic activity, but also to encourage the use of sensitivity and curiosity towards the surrounding reality. It is based on posing questions and letting the students search for their own answers. It is teaching of critical thinking and questioning the world around them.

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<sup>1</sup> [www.moving-lab.eu](http://www.moving-lab.eu)

Unboxing can be deciphered more literally in the context of the FreedomBus project as the artistic and creative application of the wooden boxes. On the one hand, they constituted rigid constraints for the students in their creative process, but also a challenge students were eager to accept. They thought exactly outside the box – expanding they projects well beyond the wooden frames. In a less straightforward sense, the participants thought about the basic idea and indeed challenged it.

It was a marvellous idea to engage with such an inspiring group of artists and exercise sociological craftsmanship in the challenging circumstances of the experimental art/educational project. Not only did we assemble the notes in order to write this book, but first and foremost the relationships we established and reinforced across the disciplines and ways of seeing the world. Not only we do feel like we got up from the armchair\* and entertained the field, but we have a sensation we have discovered a new level of sociological enterprise. Just as the rattan chair, one of the participating artists found somewhere in the streets of Berlin. We were dragged into the art world, immersed in it, and even praised there. We are looking forward to more.



\*The idea of armchair scholarship originated from the critique of anthropologists who would not leave their study rooms and offices and theorize about human lives instead of getting their hands dirty in the field.





**Marcin Deutschmann** is a sociologist working at the Student Careers Center at the University of Opole and a recent graduate of a master's programme in sociology at the UO. His scientific interests mainly concern public discourse, sociology of politics, multicultural and gender issues, and social taboo. In the photo, Marcin is on the left.



**Magdalena Hlawacz** is an artist and an associated professor at the University of Opole. She holds a PhD defended in the Faculty of Painting and Sculpture of the Fine Arts Academy of Wrocław. In her works she investigates relationships between different media: painting, drawing, photography, and printmaking among others. She presented her works around the world. Magda features in the photo on the right.



**Michał Wanke** is a sociologist and an assistant professor at the University of Opole. His research focuses on identity and digital media, migrations, and use of psychoactive substances. He got his PhD from the Jagiellonian University in Krakow. He conducted research or taught at the universities in Afghanistan, Greece, Germany, Israel, Romania, the United States, and Turkey. He teaches the qualitative methods and is responsible for Intercultural Communication master's programme in sociology at the UO.

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