

REVIEW OF M. CERETTA AND B. CURLI (EDS.),  
*DISCOURSES AND COUNTER-DISCOURSES ON EUROPE.*  
*FROM THE ENLIGHTENMENT TO THE EU,*  
MILTON PARK, ROUTLEDGE, 2017

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This is an ambitious book. The fact that it is a collective effort does not diminish its scope, which we can read not so much in the title of the book, as in the title of the preface by the two editors: *Rescuing Europe from Its Rhetoric*.

Which rhetoric? First of all, the discourse which makes Europe the daughter of the Enlightenment, the fruit of a progressive project for the advancement of a more open society. The book not only criticizes the idea of a direct relation between the idea of the European unity and the Enlightenment, it also emphasizes the conservative aspects of the European project, from the reactionary thinkers of the early Nineteenth century to the Cold War. This conservative trend is often overlooked but it has left its imprint on the European institutions in a variety of aspects that the book richly explores. In a nutshell: even though Spinelli and Rossi's early approach still had something of the Leninist Spinelli had once been, the unification of Europe has never had the style, or the self-representation, of a "revolution". The second rhetoric the book explores and partially discards is the one implicit in the discourse of an European identity: a word which has become crucial in the political language of the last decades. In fact, if defining a European unique "personality" was difficult at the beginning of the integration process, it has become even more difficult after the fall of the Berlin wall, and the unification of two half-continents that a whole millennium had kept persistently divided.

The great majority of the 11 essays in the volume converge in this critical approach.

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The first part of the book, *Thinking and Regretting Europe*, could also be defined an archaeology of the concept of Europe particularly in the French thought, with the essays by Patrizia Delpiano, Manuela Ceretta, Giuseppe Sciara. It shows that the Enlightenment authors were rarely interested in the continent as such, and the brevity of the anonymous entry *Europe* in *Encyclopédie* (written by Louis de Jaucourt and his team) could, at first sight, be considered an evidence for that. In saying this, however, the authors are not inspired by the anti-Enlightenment attitudes so current in cultural studies, on the contrary Patrizia Delpiano rightly criticizes some stereotyped approaches that tend to read Enlightenment as the matrix of all evils. Rather, the essays show that the great thinkers of that age thought more in cosmopolitan than continental terms, that they should be considered universalists rather than Europeanists. The opposite is true for a later and generation, that of reactionary thinkers. Here the book refers not so much to *Christianity or Europe*, the only historical and political essay by that great poet and thinker, Novalis, as to the idea of Europe proposed by some French political phillosophers in the same period, particularly by that often surprising thinker, Louis de Bonald. In Ceretta's analysis he prefigured an idea of Europe that is more similar to the one we have seen developing in the last decades.

The second part of the book is centered on the discourses about Europe in more specific areas, from the military, to energy, to political institutions. Here I was particularly interested by Barbara Curli's essay on the nuclear policies and rhetoric of the early period of European integration. The conception, dominating at the time on both sides of the Iron Curtain, which opposed the "bad" nuclear to the "good" nuclear, exerted an evident influence. But another aspect was also relevant: the modernist attitude that relied on technoscientific progress more than on political institutions. Two slogans, "On behalf of the Europe of tomorrow", "not the Europe of Charlemagne, but that of the Twentieth Century", synthesize this rhetoric. Finally, Curli shows that in that the pioneers of Europe shared an approach to energy policy that in later and apparently more "integrated" stages is nowhere to be seen.

The third part of the book is centered, with a variety of approaches, on *Communicating Europe*. Belluati and Cepernich discuss, in a rightly problematic essay, the idea of an European media space. Is a media space possible, one may wonder, in a cacophony of languages? Umberto Eco's notorious joke "La lingua europea è la traduzione" emphasizes that European unity is made of diversity, but also reminds us the weakness of a common space based on such an imperfect medium as translation. Also in this third part, an original perspective is offered by Di Peri and Zardo on the perception of Europe on the part of Tunisia after the "Arab" spring, or we should more

correctly say the Tunisian spring. In this essay we see that Europe may be perceived as a unit by other parts of the world more clearly than by itself.

I could not touch all the themes treated in this rich collection, and I apologize with the other authors: Marco Di Giovanni, Paolo Caraffini and Filippo Maria Giordano, Giovanni Finizio and Umberto Morelli, Maria Cristina Camotto and Rachele Raus, Michelangelo Conoscenti. Only two final remarks. The first: European “identity” remains a big and elusive problem for many different reasons. One of the most serious is that the identities that are more and more part of our political landscape are generally tied to heroic and conflictual myths, be they national, or revolutionary, or nostalgic of a real or more often imaginary past. Europe does not have foundation myths, the history of its integration is even boring. Moreover, it has a history of conflict, yes, but internecine ones. Is a discourse of unitarian identity possible in these conditions? Or is an alternative rhetoric possible, not based on identity?

Second and final. Was really Bonald’s idea of Europe so similar to ours? The Europe as he conceived of it had been destroyed by the Reformation. His Europe was more similar to a rather dreamlike going back to the Middle Ages. The Enlightenment’s representation of the continent was probably more articulated and interesting than one may think. Let us go back to the *Europe* entry in *Encyclopédie*, by Jaucourt, himself a Protestant: “il importe peu que l’Europe soit la plus petite des quatre parties du monde par l’étendue de son terrain, puisqu’elle est la plus considérable de toutes par son commerce, par sa navigation, par sa fertilité, par les lumières et l’industrie de ses peuples, par la connaissance des Arts, des Sciences, des Métiers, et ce qui est le plus important, par le Christianisme, dont la morale bienfaisante ne tend qu’au bonheur de la société. Nous devons à cette religion dans le gouvernement un certain droit politique, et dans la guerre un certain droit des gens”. In this expression only seemingly minor of the Enlightenment (but Jaucourt’s immense work has recently been reconsidered), we find a partially realistic, partially utopian, idea of Europe based on “droit politique” and “droit des gens” which I find more similar to a possible idea of a unitarian Europe than that of Bonald.