We need new stories
Why Fanaticism is all around
by Philipp Blom

The art of talking peace
Interview with peace negotiator
Ram Manikkalingam

A wake-up call for Poland
Yael Bartana at the Polish Pavilion at the Venice Biennial
We are all fanatics!
If you think this statement does not apply to you, we strongly advise you to reconsider – because we simply ARE all fanatics! Everyone is susceptible to group fanaticism, no matter what their education, social background, gender, race or age. Like sex and the longing for security, fanaticism is inherent to humankind.

Fanatismo is a one-off magazine that investigates the causes of fanaticism and why it is important to deal with it. It is published by Castrum Peregrini, a cultural foundation that is based in Amsterdam and active at the European level. During WWII, Castrum Peregrini was a hiding place.

Based on that experience, the foundation believes that freedom without culture and mutual trust is an empty phrase. Fanaticism undermines these core values, which are essential for a free, democratic society.

Elias Canetti wrote in *Crowds and Power* (1960) about the dynamism and power of crowd behaviour. Individuals lose their own will when dragged into a crowd and form one body with their companions, just like in soccer stadiums. A crowd can easily become violent, a capacity which shrewd agitators and populists know how to manipulate in order to obtain their objectives.

According to authors like Elias Canetti, Hannah Arendt and others, the only remedy against fanaticism is an awareness of the fact that we are susceptible to group fanaticism, so that when it happens to us, we can stop and think before it is too late. The WE ARE ALL FANATICS! manifestation presents several occasions to make us think, like the Fanatismo magazine in your hands.

In his sublime contribution to this magazine, the historian and novelist Philipp Blom unravels the origin of fanaticism: the human need for creating personal meaning generates myths, holy texts or ideologies. Believing those stories to be the truth makes us susceptible to fanaticism. Starting from this point of view, Philipp Blom takes us gently along the great themes of humankind throughout history, culminating in a plea for new stories.

The belief in the supremacy of one’s own group and the hatred of outsiders often leads to violent conflict. Ram Manikalingam, founder of the Amsterdam-based Dialogue Advisory Group, hops around the globe from one conflict zone to another: Sri Lanka, Northern Ireland, Iraq, etc. He sits around the table with members of the IRA, the Taliban... and with us, for an interview!

The sociologist Dirk Jansen describes the indicators of dangerous group fanaticism. He explains how the online Fanatismo Awareness Test (FAT) works. In a playful and informative way, the online FAT gives an impression of one’s susceptibility to fanaticism. According to your individual score, the test provides further information in order to raise awareness.

How fanatic are you? Be brave and take the test! Compare your susceptibility with that of others at www.fanatismo.eu.

Visual art and other forms of art are good channels for making us aware of the phenomenon of fanaticism. Strong images with a great impact are the best way to reveal the subtle ways in which nature and culture mislead our will, which is not as free as we might expect. WE ARE ALL FANATICS! includes the exhibition You Are All Individuals! featuring internationally renowned artists. Nina Folkersma, the curator, explains the concept of the exhibition and interviews some of the young artists.

Enjoy reading!

Michael Defuster
Frans Damman
Lars Ebert
Castrum Peregrini
Intellectual Playground
RAM MANIKKALINGAM

Has seen bloody conflicts all over the world. The conclusion of the professional peace negotiator: There is no hope in this world for blind fanatics, he tells Lars Ebert and Michael Defuster. Page 4-7

DO THE FAT

I’m not a fanatic – so you think. But people are easily influenced by crowds, they want to belong to a group, sometimes in spite of their controversial opinions, finds Dirk Jansen. He claims the best instrument against fanaticism is: the FAT, Fanaticism Awareness Test. Page 24-27

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He is a veteran in the peace negotiation business. Ram Manikkalingam has seen conflicts and hardliners all over the world. Back in Amsterdam, where he has his home base with the Dialogue Advisory Group (DAG), he talks about the fact that fanaticism cannot survive.

You have seen conflicts from Iraq to Sri Lanka and Africa. How do you deal with fanaticism?

‘I don’t see fanaticism as purely negative or as something that should be immediately attacked or controlled. There are good and bad things that can come from it. If I was asked to give a definition of fanaticism in the political sense of the word, I would put it this way: it is the pursuit of a goal, to the exclusion of all others. The fanatic expects his goal to encompass not just himself but also other people, even the whole world. The key point is the exclusion of all other goals.’

What are the good parts?

‘We have to admit that individuals who pursue democracy, social justice or scientific findings because they think it is important, are in a way fanatics. They exclude all other goals in their personal lives. That has led to benefits for all of us. In that sense there is a positive side to fanaticism. But if the same individual expects all of society to get in line with his goals and make the same sacrifices – then you start seeing the problems that we face politically.’

Hitler?

‘You could name a whole bunch of people like that, starting of course with Hitler, down to Ayn Rand (author of Atlas Shrugged – ed). You might see the free market as the only solution to our problems, or you might see race, or in the
When does good fanaticism become bad?

‘To achieve something, you really have to be ambitious and single-minded. In a way you have to be a little like a fanatic. But where do you draw the line? I do not take an anti-fanatical view. In our media work at DAG, we talk to people who are in situations of conflict. Lots of them have political goals and are pursuing those to the exclusion of all other goals. They are often willing to sacrifice their lives and that of others. We talk to them and ask: What are your options, why are you pursuing your goals in this way and what are the other possibilities?’

Do they give in?

‘We try to make a distinction between the person and his goal. It is almost a Biblical distinction between the sin and the sinner. I do not accuse a person of being a sinner, but I want to make a distinction between the human being and his political actions. So, I don’t judge a person, but am judging what he is doing. If you manage to respect the other, treat him as an equal human being with whom to negotiate, argue and ask him why he is doing what he is doing, you have a very good conversation – even with someone considered extremely fanatical and willing to kill others in the pursuit of his goals. It is a funny play between the fanatic and his fanatic ideas. I think it is an important distinction, because it often works in what we do at DAG. So, I don’t have the same kind of negative connotation that is often associated with fanaticism.’

Does group fanaticism require a different approach?

‘One of the key factors in group fanaticism is blocking or preventing critical thinking within a group and blocking new information coming in and ensuring it does not enter into the group. This group can be as small as the mob in Afghanistan that recently attacked the UN compound. Another example of a small fanatical group is the right-wing Christian group from the US, burning the Quran. That act fueled the Afghan-Gulf group, taking it out on the UN. Or take the example of the fanaticism of small groups such as the Bush – Cheney administration. I think it is remarkable that only five people made the decision about the Iraqi war. While the US system was full of criticism about the war, they successfully closed off all critical reactions.’

‘Fanaticism in that way sounds like a dead end, wouldn’t you say? Original fanaticism might begin with limiting the goals. When goals are impossible to question, only strategy and tactics are left. But over time, questioning the strategy also stops because the group doesn’t want to challenge the leader. Then finally even tactics cannot be questioned anymore. Over time, the group gets weaker. So, in the long run fanaticism cannot survive, because it blocks out information for correcting the course, to ‘let alone changing it’.

You indicated you see a new role for monarchies, especially the Dutch one?

‘I consider myself a leftist, maybe a Marxist liberal, who believes in equality and also freedom. Generally people on the left are hostile to monarchy. They are republicans, they think monarchy is bad. Few people have power, thanks to their birthright rather than their skills. In Northern Europe – Denmark, Sweden, the Netherlands, Norway – there is a lot of countries that have strong social democracies, strong welfare, strong freedoms. By and large, these Northern European countries have been very successful, probably the most successful experiments in political order in world history. One of the curious things about the experience of democracies is the presence of a monarchy.’

Do we need more kings?

‘I don’t want to make a general case for monarchies. There are lots of monarchies that are quite intolerant. I want to make a specific case and say that, maybe in situations where you have well functioning institutions and democracies, the presence of a monarchy can play a progressive role. Monarchies allow for two things: one, which is slightly Machiavellian, is that since you have an institution which is historically conservative, those who are on the conservative side are symbolically represented by the head of state.’

It sounds so undemocratic...

‘Monarchies have to include everybody in some way or another. Before the Monarch, everybody is equal, so to speak: it doesn’t matter whether you are rich or poor, as far as the King is concerned, you are just a citizen. A monarchy may be able to promote and help tolerance and inclusion. Everybody becomes a subject of the monarch and therefore if you attack or undermine or criticize anyone, you are undermining and attacking the monarchy.’

Are you a fan of Beatrix, the Dutch Queen?

‘Monarchies play a very important role because of their historical position. Of course, it depends on the person. You might get someone wrong for this position. But nevertheless they are institutions, with limits on the monarch room to act. The Netherlands is a good example, with a progressive monarch who is playing an interesting historical role, and I certainly can imagine that Beatrix could do something quite useful in this time.’

Michael DeKleer (b. 1957, Koerkt) is an architect and landscape-architect. He is the managing director of Castrum Peregrini – Intellectual Playground.

Lars Ebert (b. 1976, Heidelberg) has studied theology and worked in the field of arts education. He is co-ordinating the programme of Castrum Peregrini – Intellectual Playground.
WE NEED
A NEW STORY

Although we should acknowledge that it is just a story, it is our only defence against fanaticism.

BY PHILIPP BLOM

Our societies no longer have the same great story to tell as they did when they were Catholic or Protestant, or even Communist or Capitalist. Tired of dogmas, we are sceptical about everything. This is where fanaticism re-enters the scene.

On 20 March, 2011, Terry Jones from Gainesville, Florida, a dapper preacher with a silvery moustache, publicly staged a ‘trial’ of the Quran, which concluded with the work being ‘found guilty’ of spreading an evil message, and culminated in the burning of a copy of the holy book. Ten days later, in an act of mob re-prisal whipped up by preachers at Friday prayers, thousands of Afghans converged on the UN headquarters in Mazar-i-Sharif, dragged UN staff from the compound and killed seven of them, two by decapitation. Other violent protests followed.

Such acts, symbolic or bloody real, are barbaric, the work of violent fanatics. We all agree about this, and this is precisely why it is not easy to write about fanaticism. Speaking about fanaticism usually means speaking against it. There is always something earnest, slightly worrying attached to it. Speeches against fanaticism belong to the core repertoire of Republican and Democratic public ritual in the US and have done so since the French Revolution.

The fact that fanaticism is a bad idea is easily agreed on and gives a warm glow of virtue to speakers and listeners alike. In a variation of the usual opening line, the speaker can declare himself to be fanatically in favour of tolerance, of anti-fanaticism. Deliciously circuitous, it adds the delicate fragrance of sophistication to the glow of virtue.

It is easy for us, perhaps too easy, to condemn fanaticism when it raises its ugly face in outbursts of murderous hatred, and particularly when it raises its head abroad, at a comfortable distance. Fanaticism is for others, for the poor, the uneducated, for religious fundamentalists of all stripes, for the weak and for the downright perversive. You have to go back to the speeches of Adolf Hitler to find anyone using the word ‘fanatic’ in a positive way.

Fanaticism is the refusal to listen. It begins at the point where deduction bleeds into faith, where a person says ‘I believe’, ignoring all evidence, all arguments, and making enemies of all who do not agree. And yet, we all have a point at which we simply say ‘I believe’. I believe all people are equal. I cannot prove this belief because there are plenty of arguments to the contrary; but this is a fundamental value for me on which I will not budge and nobody will convince me of the contrary. On this point, I am not open to rational argument; it is a fundamental intuition which I share with billions of people, but by no means with all. It will always bind me to those with whom I share this intuition, and divide me from those with whom I do not share it. At this level, I am a believer.

Other civilizations do not necessarily share our preoccupation with human rights. Confucian societies, for instance, place social harmony much higher than individual contentment and even in Southern Europe, the persisting extended family demands...
huge sacrifices in personal choice and individual expression in return for a place. Philosophically it is a very difficult task to argue that these ways of organizing the relation between the one and the many is inferior to our own. Like the teachings of Confucius, our own emphasis on individual emotional structure contingent on the history of our societies and our experience as part of them.

Etymologically, a fanatic is a devotee of a faith, a temple in antiquity, an enthusiast much like the revellers following the drunk god in ancient Greece. Holding something sacred means being devoted to an idea beyond argument. We may be willing and able to argue for the virtues of democracy over dictatorship, or for the basic fairness of gender equality, but these are merely strategies growing out of a deeper and ultimately unquestionable Western commitment to human rights, which are based not on a political programme or even on self-interest, but on a fundamental philosophical intuition beyond proof or refutation. This belief is a psychological necessity, the beginning of a common culture, but it is also the place in which a germ of fanaticism lives in everyone.

A true fanatic means a fundamental intuition not only the bedrock, but also the axiom of all thought. Everything must be clipped and bent into shape to conform to the Truth; the world is split into Manichean halves of good and evil; rational argument becomes a mere irrelevance in the face of emotional certainty, of the pressing demands of violent action and slavish submission. The values of the Enlightenment are a specific answer to this threat and they have undoubtedly made our societies freer and more humane than they were before. We are willing to negotiate threat and they have undoubtedly made our societies freer and more humane than they were before. We are willing to negotiate threat and they have undoubtedly made our societies freer and more humane than they were before. We are willing to negotiate threat and they have undoubtedly made our societies freer and more human than they were before.

Our moral instincts in narratives that become manuals for our dealings with the world. We know how to behave and what to think, because we have seen it all before. We have a powerful, profound need for meaning, for grammar, for patterns and rules, a yearning for a larger, common story of trial and transcendence, of a life lived happily ever after. This is not unique to our species. Perhaps it is what Darwin referred to as the instinct to live like brothers. Born only one year apart (Rousseau in 1712, Diderot in 1713), they were both sons of pious and strict artisan fathers in proud provincial towns, Geneva and Langres. Both inherited their fathers' hard work. Both learned how to be men in a world of men, how to behave as men in a world of men. Both learned to take pride in the narrowness of their upbringing, both struggled with religious questions. Rousseau used his escape to convert to Catholicism aged sixteen, a step that also opened French society to him. Diderot arrived in Paris with his hair tousered and hoping to become a Jesuit priest.

Similar backgrounds and questions and an equal enthusiasm for the intellectual life offered no place for a god. 'My heart wants one thing, my head another,' he admitted. What set him apart from Rousseau was the conclusion he drew from this desire, which he understood as a psychological reality whose pull he simply had to learn to live with.

The struggle against his instinctive leaning for a convenient religious and all-embracing world view offered no place for a god. 'God doesn't exist,' wrote the philosopher, 'I believe in it.' This is not simply a return to nature and its creator. He had based his whole work on the idea of a forgiving deity. He believed because he wanted to. The intellectual core of his thought was a psychological necessity, the beginning of a common culture, but it is also the place in which a germ of fanaticism lives in everyone.

Rousseau was the conclusion he drew from this desire, which he felt it and he wanted it, but he still did not believe it. In his novels, Diderot played with his own bafflement. Time and again, the narrator intervenes and speaks to the reader directly, telling her that it is just a story that she is reading, that it is his story. The reader is also in his shoes. The narrator tells us a story, but which is present in everyone, is quite simply the dis-
arranged. Different places and times could necessitate different moral rules, which needed to be constantly renegotiated in an attempt to find the best practical means of personal and com-

munal fulfilment.

Diderot’s most important contribution, however, was his focus on the psychology of thought, his sober and courageous realization that while we may want to partake of a Truth, we must treat this desire as just that. After all, the greatest challenge of philosophy may not be learning to ask the right questions, but learning to live with the answers arrived at by careful and methodical thought, even if these answers are exactly not what we were looking for. These starkly diverging approaches to the need to believe in these stories to a certain extent, invest ourselves in them, be ready to hate the villains and love the heroes, to fear and suffer with them, and to triumph as one of them. At the same time, of course, we are aware that they are just made up, that no woman called Anna Karenina ever existed, that the world is full of narrating act, but quite literally every child can and does lead to reward, that justice is rewarded and vice punished, and personal lessons such as the enduring and trans-
f ormative power of love and the overcoming of deep trauma.

Enjoying and relating to a story, however, is a surprisingly complex operation, for if we are to reap these fruits of our crea-
tive imaginations we need to believe in these stories to a certain extent, invest ourselves in them, be ready to hate the villains and love the heroes, to fear and suffer with them, and to triumph as one of them. At the same time, of course, we are aware that they are just made up, that no woman called Anna Karenina ever killed herself by throwing herself under a train, that the fellow who just strangled Desdemona is really just an actor and that the woman on stage is perfectly healthy but is pretending to be sick, that his disgust with the world, Diderot, who had tried more than once to revive their relationship, was left feeling equally paranoid and was driven from asylum to asylum by his own sus-
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Suspension of disbelief

Here the story of a philosophical friendship and its bittersweet links up with our interest in fanaticism, which we can now re-
phrase with Diderot. If it is really the case that our perception constantly projects order into a chaotic world, if our brains are hardened for pattern and rules, and if we really need stories to plot a path through randomness and give us courage to live on, then we must accept this, too, as an anthropological constant, like the need to have sex, or to make music, or to engage in rit-
ual. We must learn to live with this need, to manage it. Without stories we would not have paths through life. We gain psycho-
logical benefit from stories by learning social lessons such as the idea that moral actions have the desired results, that striving can and does lead to reward, that justice is rewarded and virtue is punished, and personal lessons such as the enduring and trans-

Rousseau’s fanaticism, on the other hand, was based on a cult of sentiment. He himself felt. It is striking how many of our present discussions are still based on unexamined assumptions we have inherited from our religious traditions, a heritage facilitated by Rousseau’s cult of sentiment. So many of our cultural reflexes still betray an un-

thinking attachment to the Christian fear of sensual fulfilment, to the positive value of suffering, and to the idea of an ultimate metaphorical Truth. While the labels are different, the struc-
tures remain the same.

We have replaced religious icons with fashion models whose influence on us makes us hate our own bodies and think little of our own lives, which are constantly found wanting in the face of the unattainable ideal of being eternally young, rich, slim and cool. We chase our bodies with diets where our forebears fasted, we still glorify suffering in our unhealthy victim cultures and in the martyr figure of the suf-
f ering genius, we still see history as steering towards a final apocalypse or paradise, in our blockbuster films — the most pervasive way of cultural, identity-shaping narrative. The sight of a naked body is still deemed more obscene than the sight of gratuitous torture, one of the most resonant arguments in our debates about cloning, genetic engineering, abortion, stem cell research — a conclusion is still that we must not play God, must not in-

terfere with the sanctity of creation. Why not, if the original job was done so inadequately, causing so much unnecessary suffering? It is deceptively easy to condemn fanaticism in others, to remain insulated from funda-
mental questions by the sense of superiority that comes easily to those who are in their own eyes, their own private estimation, rich-
er, more powerful and more sophisticated than others. But we all base our moral ideas on unreasoned intuitions: we all need that suspension of disbelief to turn those intu-
ions into plotted guides to living in the world. We all have a glim-
mer of fanaticism in us, not enough, perhaps, to blow ourselves up at a bus stop, to decapitate an aid worker or even to burn a book holy to others, but more than enough to make our own cultural contingencies, the values that our societies are built on, seem magically like the only natural and eternal way of doing things.

We have internalized the argumentative rules of enlightened discussion, the fact that every statement must be backed up by evidence, that we must question every ideological premise and bow to the better argument, but we do not apply these rules to our cultural reflexes. They remain shallow and often, as in po-

litical discussion, the exclusion of the underlying philosophical argument inevitably results in endless and emotive squabbling over statistics.

In a civilization that prides itself on its ethos of tolerance, an accusation of fanaticism is the ultimate slur and it is levelled
by preference on those who draw attention to the irrational be-
liefs in our world. Richard Dawkins, a British evolutionary
biologist and Christopher Hitchens, an English-American author
who both claim that we would be better off without religion, are
often referred to as ‘fanatical’ or ‘fundamentalist’ atheists. This
goes against the fact that our very productive everyday scepti-
cism teaches us that the burden of proof should be on those
who demand we believe in a fantastical and often contradictory
story about our world, and not on those who do what everyone does in
daily life: trust their senses.

Not to believe a fantastical story about real things can never be
fanatical. To believe it, on the other hand, may require a drop
of the poisonous draft of determined denial on which true fa-
antics intoxicate themselves. It recalls Rousseau’s answer to his
religious doubt, namely to postulate a higher truth because the
alternative would be too painful and too difficult. Faced with
the same questions, Rousseau’s former friend Diderot (1713-1784)
was deeply moved by this with this pain and to alleviate it through friendship, art, and erotic love. It is echoed and
complemented by the work of the late Richard Rorty, whose
own thinking gave central importance to solidarity and to irony
as a means of making our lives liveable and to alleviate it through
together as part of our societies. Suddenly, two different sets of cul-

mural reflexes are confronted with each other. This is a
challenge of disbelief and Diderot’s irony. This is a
faith for a world after the Enlightenment, and it is difficult. We
must believe in our story, not like a child believing in a fairy-tale
and the fairness at the bottom of the garden, but like a grownup
reading a novel. We must cultivate a more aware, more dynamic
relationship to the suspension of disbelief; we must never give in
to our yearning for sense. We need to tell a story and be
involved in it while acknowledging at the same time that it is just
a story, that premises and protagonists may be modified and are
never quite universal. We must practice the art of the suspen-
sion of disbelief, of entering and leaving this suspense almost at
will, while never collapsing into it. This is a hard discipline, a kind of ‘Zen or the Art of Mental Maintenance’, and Diderot was right to be sceptical about its
potential to be embraced by all. It is only the only defence we
have against fanaticism, which lives in every corner not reached by
what David Hume so beautifully called ‘the calm sunshine of
the mind’. To the degree in which we succeed in illuminating
the shadowy corners of our instinctive attitudes and magnifying
our personal and collective narrative we will be able to build a
society in which Christians and Muslims, atheists and motorcycle
lovers can identify elements of a common story. To the degree
in which we succeed in doing this, fanaticism will have no place
in our societies, and in our lives.

Irony and scepticism

Our paired sects no longer have the same great story to tell as
did when they were Catholic or Protestant, or even Communist
or the messianic and evangelical brand of Capitalism that is
still prevalent in the USA. We no longer have one story because
religious dogmas, all ideologies and all shining paths to historical
synthesis have failed us and we have become sober towards
ideals. As a defence mechanism against messianic seductions of all kinds,
we have retreated into a deep and passive scepticism towards the
world. Irony has slipped into first place before the suspension of disbelief
and has left us bewildered, because if everything is ironic,
if nothing truly matters, then there is no reason to behave one way
and not another. Postmodernism taught us that.

This is where fanaticism re-enters the scene, not only in its
pure, extremist form, but in its more subtle, more pervasive
variation as the unthinking insistence on cultural reflexes, on
cultural styles. While our wealth seduced our high culture into a
frozen smile of unrelenting irony, the immigrants who helped
to create this wealth, many of them from Muslim countries, have
frozen smile of unrelenting irony, the immigrants who helped to
create this wealth, many of them from Muslim countries, have
frozen smile of unrelenting irony, the immigrants who helped to
create this wealth, many of them from Muslim countries, have
It was meant to be a purely private refuge, King Ludwig’s eccentric castle in Bavaria. Outsiders were not permitted to enter the fantasy castle. Today it is one of the biggest tourist attractions in Germany. The tourist horde has wrapped itself around the aristocratic dreams like a huge suffocating blanket.

A sensational sight it’s not – sooner a bit banal. In the village of Hohenschwangau, nestled deep between the snow-covered hills of Bavaria, a Japanese tourist sits at a table of one of those fast food stands called an ‘Imbiss’, this one specialized in sausage. When you look a little closer though, you realize that the Japanese man in his mid-40s is doing his best to avoid having an ‘ordinary’ afternoon. Instead of wearing a neutral winter cap, he sports a cap topped by a Mohawk made of fleece. He is also not eating an ordinary Bratwurst, but a traditional Bavarian Weisswurst out of a porcelain pot.

The Japanese tourist is not the only one to come up with unusual ideas today. When he finishes his sausage and starts the climb upward, he can join a steady stream of other tourists. They shuffle up the hill in all shapes and sizes, colours and ages. Some of them sit packed together on horse carts; most walk. They all have ludicrous caps on their heads.

The visitors have come for Castle Neuschwanstein (New Swan Stone Castle), the second-favourite tourist location in southern Germany after the Dachau concentration camp. Once at the top of the hill they are given a number, where they wait patiently in the courtyard until told they can enter the castle.

The common depiction of powerful masses of people, so goes the tradition since the cultural pessimists of the 1930s, is mainly one of screaming, imposing hordes. The Revolt of the Masses and Crowds and Power are the fearsome titles of the books. You don’t picture a tourist with that. If there’s one crowd that has successfully presented itself as superbly insignificant over the past decades, it is the tourist crowd. Tourists just shuffle along, take a picture or drink from their water bottles. Yet, you could ask yourself whether this Japanese tourist in Hohenschwangau is actually so insignificant. This man at his well-trodden tourist location between the hills represents, you could even say, nothing less than the convergence of the greatest contradictions of contemporary culture.

The tourist pays a visit to King Ludwig; the symbol of uniformity encounters the symbol of the eccentric lone wolf. As if that’s not special enough, he eats a regional dish, the mark of ‘authentic tradition’, and wears a cap with a Mohawk, a hairstyle that once stood for political radicalism. Crowds have a lethal hate of everything that is ‘the other’, writes Elias Canetti in the book Crowds and Power. In Neuschwanstein, there is no mistaking that the opposite is to be observed. Tourists are not interested in mediocrity; they want something striking, something ‘authentic’ for their photograph. They have booked a trip to see the eccentric, to see ‘the other’.

The tourist in Neuschwanstein is by no means unique in that regard, naturally. If there is anything that characterizes
In castle hall stands a statue of the young King Ludwig II of Bavaria; in 1846, he was the commander of this castle. He built it so that he could retreat into a world of dreams. Ludwig saw himself as a Lohengrin, the mythical ‘Knight of the Swan’ to whom Richard Wagner dedicated an opera. His legend is abroad everywhere in the castle, in the wall paint- ings, in a room designed as a grotto. The Neuschwanstein sanctuary was never completed, however. Before Ludwig could live out his dreams, he was arrested. According to the diagnosis, he was men- tally ill. He was deprived from the throne and died shortly thereafter.

His gota bustling as an eccentric began only after his death (in 1886). Once the nobility lost their position, Ludwig began to appeal to the popular imagination. In literature and art, he was presented as a sensitive hero who was not interested in such banal affairs as money and ambition but lived for art and beautiful dreams, an aesthetic who was supplanting by the rise of the democratic, vulgar masses. In 2011, more than a century after his death, everything is different. However. You are no longer allowed to go into rooms alone. Outside, in the courtyard, you are as- signed to a group of roughly 50 people; each year some 1.3 million visitors are guided through his bedroom. Such a radical reversal of course only possible thanks to the mechanism of mass culture. The debts that Ludwig left behind after his death were so tremendous that tourists had to come in order to pay them off. You might indeed wunder whether these tourists actually now know where they are – and why they have come here. Has the Japanese with the Mokc cap ever listened to Wagner? The reasons for their visits have be- come extremely varied. One thing is certain, however: the greatest appeal of this Bavarian castle is no longer the historical personage of Ludwig anymore, or the depictions of him in high culture. Most of what is on view here is famous via a roundabout way, thanks to the amuse- ment industry of the United States – in particular, Walt Disney. Disney managed to what Wagner may also have secretly wanted: he brought fairy tales to the masses, but then stripped of every dark side. For there is also another side to the story – and it’s not purely economically driven: the simple fact that 100 years ago, this village was still weighed down by the no galling traditions, nor do you need any background knowledge; everyone has their own interpretation of the mythologi- cal paintings that Ludwig once commis- sioned for himself. The presence of tourists in the king’s bedroom signifies the ultimate victory of mass culture. The tourists at old Ludwig’s castle are like the fans of a pop star: they hanker after the exotic, but only because it actually ties in with their own longings. We look at a product of German neo- Romanticism, but we see Disney, dream, Visconti’s or the one from our own dreams. Neuschwanstein, visitors are dubbed up a bite-sized experience of ‘eccentricity’ on a well-worn carpet within a timeframe of 35 minutes. But afterwards they can do whatever they want with it – the Japanese can forget the experience, the American can buy a velour sweater, and the Belgian can still make a modern play about Ludwig II later on.

Tourists are therefore by no means insignificant. They are part of the most powerful crowd of the present age. Liberat- ing and suffocating at the same time.

It’s easy to make such criticisms: it has become today.

Martin Schoonenboom is a correspondent from Berlin for the Dutch newspaper de Volkskrant. This text is an adaptation of an article published on 20 May 2010 in the Dutch newspaper de Volkskrant, as part of the series ‘De moderne massasmannen’ (The Modern Man in the Crowd).

In former times, no one was allowed in here, but some 60 million visitors have already been in this small room by now. For a few euros, everyone can enter the king’s home. There are no class differences, no galling traditions, nor do you need any background knowledge; everyone has their own interpretation of the mythologi- cal paintings that Ludwig once commis- sioned for himself. The presence of tourists in the king’s bedroom signifies the ultimate victory of mass culture. The tourists at old Ludwig’s castle are like the fans of a pop star: they hanker after the exotic, but only because it actually ties in with their own longings. We look at a product of German neo- Romanticism, but we see Disney, dream, Visconti’s or the one from our own dreams. Neuschwanstein, visitors are dubbed up a bite-sized experience of ‘eccentricity’ on a well-worn carpet within a timeframe of 35 minutes. But afterwards they can do whatever they want with it – the Japanese can forget the experience, the American can buy a velour sweater, and the Belgian can still make a modern play about Ludwig II later on.

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The rise of new fighting fundamentalists in Northern Ireland

BY HENRY MCDONALD

Whenever thought that 1998’s Good Friday Agreement did end the fierce and fanatical violence in Northern Ireland, was wrong. The IRA’s agreeing to a ceasefire only created space for the Real IRA. They have history on their side.

Dublin playwright, wit, raconteur and celebrity drunk, the late Brendan Behan, once observed that the first item on every Irish political agenda is a split. That division, factionalism and bloody feuding was part of the Irish DNA. And Behan would have known that all too well, given that he was a member of the IRA as a teenager joining its ill-fated Nazi-backed bombing campaign in Britain at the start of the Second World War.

Since Behan’s adventure, which ended with him being imprisoned in a borstal, McKeever’s close allies created their own faction of the Real IRA, some even referring to themselves as Óglaigh na hÉireann (Soldiers of Ireland) and waited their chance to rekindle the armed struggle.

Having regrouped, re-armed and re-activated their paramilitary units the Real IRA started a new offensive. It climaxed in 2009 with the murder of two British soldiers outside a military barracks just hours before they were to fly to Afghanistan. Less than 48 hours later the Continuity IRA (a smaller even more hardline faction which is aligned to Republican Sinn Fein) murdered the first ever officer serving in the Police Service of Northern Ireland.

Since then the Real IRA’s campaign of violence has been more off than on. There have been sporadic bomb attacks on the regional headquarters of MI5 (the domestic British secret security services); car bombs left outside court houses in Derry and Newry; grenade attacks on military bases in north Belfast and dozens of so-called ‘punishment shootings’ against what the Real IRA deem as ‘anti-social elements’, mainly young criminals and car thieves, in working class nationalist areas of the north of Ireland. The latter is designed to build some support within these communities as the Real IRA offers a short circuited alternative ‘justice system’ aimed at delivering brutal and swift retribution against criminals in these areas.

One of the key targets of the Real IRA and its off-shoots since Omagh have been Catholics prepared to join the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI). Like the IRA at the start of the Troubles in 1969-70, the Real IRA seeks to portray Catholic recruits as ‘traitors’ to their nationalist roots and agents of British rule. So far the attacks (which included blowing off the legs of a high profile Catholic police officer in a booby trap car bomb) have not deterred young Catholics from joining the PSNI – a political setback for dissident republicans in their campaign to stop the normalisation of Northern Irish society.

The targeting of Catholic police recruits and the wounding of either the British or American governments overseeing the discussions. Gerry Adams and his core supporters in Sinn Fein were prepared to sign up to the ‘Mitchell Principles’, but a minority faction within the PIRA were deeply suspicious. Clustered around the man in charge of the PIRA’s huge arsenal of illegal weapons, Michael McKevitt, these recoiltrantrant republicans regarded Senator Mitchell’s pre-conditions as a trap. They argued that once the IRA and Sinn Fein accepted these principles the Irish republican movement would surrender its historical right to wage war until the entire British presence in Ireland was gone.

This fraction broke away from the majority who backed the leadership on the ‘Mitchell Principles’. Led by McKevitt they formed a new armed group whose aim was to thwart the talks that led to the Good Friday Agreement in 1998. What shortly became known as the Real IRA began an intense campaign of car bombings and mortar bomb attacks across Northern Ireland. It was designed to unnerve unionists and drive them back into the nationalist lager where they would be unwilling to share power with Irish nationalists. As a strategy it failed given the historic agreement in Easter week of 1998 and its massive endorse by the electorate on both sides of the Irish border in May of that year.

Following this major political setback the Real IRA endured an even greater propaganda disaster when one of their car bombs exploded in the centre of Omagh, a market town in Co. Tyrone. The deaths of 29 men, women and children in August 1998 provoked widespread revulsion and forced a rethink amongst some in the Real IRA. McKevitt sued for peace and declared a ceasefire in the weeks after the Omagh massacre. It seemed the Real IRA would be the shortest of any of the IRA’s ever to come into existence.

However, Irish republicanism’s penchant for splits and divisions should not have been underestimated. Some of McKevitt’s close allies created their own faction of the Real IRA, some even spouse that they would be unwilling to share power with Irish nationalists. As a strategy it failed given the historic agreement in Easter week of 1998 and its massive endorsement by the electorate on both sides of the Irish border in May of that year.

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dozens upon dozens of young men suspected of drug dealing and car theft in their communities tells us something extremely important about the replicating nature of violent Irish republicanism. Nowadays Sinn Fein politicians elbow each other out of the way to get to microphones and recording studios in order to condemn the actions of the Real IRA. However, despite the fact that the Real IRA and its allies have little or no support compared to Sinn Fein, the dissidents have one weapon in their PR arsenal—history.

Despite decommissioning most of its terror arsenal (a large section of which was provided by Colonel Gaddafi in the 1980s) the Provisional IRA failed to decommission its past. Sinn Fein still exalts the PIRA armed campaign just gone by morally and intellectually. Whether they like it or not the mainstream, now purely peaceful republican movement is creating retrospective space for the Real IRA and other groups to survive. Because those who left the Provisionals back in 1997 or have joined up ever since to the anti-ceasefire republican cause can argue that they are only doing what the PIRA was doing very recently. Moreover, they can point out with some justification that Northern Ireland remains within the UK and as such there is an unfinished business in violently resisting the status quo. The so-called ‘dissident republicans’ have a cold hearted but consistent logic on their side. They can contend that if it was good enough for the PIRA from the 70s to the early 90s then it is good enough for the PIRA from their side. They can contend that if he wasn’t a normal bloke we can ignore his case and say it’s an anomaly. So, in a weird, unsettling way, I feel he’s right. We are all him, we must be— he is us, stripped to our essence.
EVERYONE IS A FANATIC

A beleaguered human being easily falls prey to extreme group behaviour

BY DIRK JANSEN

Everyone is susceptible to group fanaticism. Certainly nowadays, when many of the old certainties are crumbling, how great a chance you have of succumbing to the spell of fanaticism becomes clear in the Fanaticism Awareness Tool: a self test.

At a time when many certainties have fallen away, the study of fanaticism is extremely topical. History teaches us that people who are uncertain and looking for something to hold onto are susceptible to fanatical views. And nowadays the certainties of our world are under wholesale pressure, due to the rise of other economies, religious violence and digital communications.

To begin with, we must determine that group fanaticism is present at all times. It becomes visible when a soccer supporter attacks the police, or when people withdraw their savings en masse because of a rumour on the Internet that a bank is about to fail. A group casts a certain ‘spell’ to which practically every person is susceptible.

Just to be clear, the concept of fanaticism by no means must always have a negative connotation. This is evident from such vernacular expressions as ‘he’s really fanatic about his work’, but always have a negative connotation. This is evident from such behaviour. For, as Elias Canetti writes in his book Crowds and Power (1960), striving to be part of a group is a deeply human motive. Along with Hannah Arendt, Canetti has written much about the interaction between groups and individuals.

But when does healthy group behaviour turn into objectionable group fanaticism? This can happen when an individual so much wants to belong to a group that the group’s ideas are less important for him than being a member of it. In other words, it becomes group fanaticism when an individual rejects notions that differ from the group’s opinion (one dimensionality); when he or she carries out the group’s mission and recruits new members; and finally, when the individual is prepared to use all means, including (verbal) violence, in order to realize group goals.

Canetti writes in Crowds and Power that a group has such great appeal to an individual because it offers security and identity. This works best when a person feels unsafe, insecure and/or unjustly treated. Contemporary researchers like Ervin Staub and Philip Zimbardo likewise describe this human mechanism. They point to the far-reaching influence that a ‘total situation’ can have on an individual and indicate how the feeling of being treated unjustly comes into the picture. In such situations, a group casts a spell that can be casted by a group.

One morning in 1927, the chemistry student Canetti, known as an intelligent and serious young man, was having breakfast in Vienna. Outside, a commotion arose. Angry workers were advancing on the Palace of Justice to protest the acquittal of the murderer of their comrades. As it passed, the crowd swept the student along with them. It seemed as though the crowd temporarily had taken over his will.

The content of this viewpoint is of secondary importance. With group fanaticism, an external enemy is often created by condemning the characteristics or views of that enemy. In short, you could describe group fanaticism as the human trust of seeking the security of a group or a crowd, especially under uncertain or inflammatory conditions. The views prevailing in that group are less important than the wish to participate.

The ‘spell’ of a group

A vibrant example of group fanaticism is given by Elias Canetti in his autobiography The Torch in My Ear (1980). He vividly describes the spell that can be cast by a group.

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Canetti writes: ‘That was probably the scariest part: you saw and heard people making a strong gesture that supplanted everything else, and then these very people seemed to disappear from the face of the earth. Everything gave way and invisible holes opened up everywhere. But the coherence of the whole was unbroken; even if you were suddenly alone somewhere, you felt how it pulled and tugged at you. That was because you heard something everywhere you went, there was something rhythmical in the air, a guileful music.’

Later in the afternoon, Canetti came to his senses. The mob had set fire to the Palace of Justice and the police had shot 90 workers.

Conditions for group fanaticism

If you are searching for conditions in history in which uncertain or inflammatory situations are described, it is interesting to look at revolutions. Take, for example, the French Revolution of 1789 and the German Revolution of 1919.

The French Revolution is an extreme example of a transitional situation. The old regime had been overthrown, the new was still seeking an identity. There no longer were any clear, broadly accepted standards and structures. On the one hand, this led to oceans of freedom, on the other, to a totalitarian reign of terror under Robespierre where no one’s life was safe.

After the French revolution came an intermediate period, in which many changes were tried out, but in which there still were no new social views that could be shared as a matter of course by the majority of the population. There are many analogies to be found with our era, but actually the situation most resembles the revolts now occurring in North Africa. There, established elites have to step down after a long period in power and seldom it
is clear what will come in their place. In general, such periods are restless, turbulent and, seen from the point of view of the citizenry, threatening times in which much injustice occurs.

The German Revolution of 1919 took place after the First World War. For the Germans, the loss of the war was unexpected and incomprehensible. The returning soldiers felt badly treated and considered the peace treaty deeply humiliating. The revolution of 1919 by Leftist factions was knocked down by the leadership of the Socialist party with the help of the army. Then followed a period of political unrest and impotence in the form of the Weimar Republic. It was a period in which there was little agreement on social views. Sebastian Haffner, a journalist from that time, described the Weimar period as an era of spiritual emptiness, which was filled with spectacular, adrenaline-pumping events, such as the Berlin Olympic Games. In addition, youth culture predominated. Little value was placed on experience and acquired insights. Parties, loose sexual morals and living life to the hilt were the most important social ingredients. The state was clear-cut, left versus right, belief in the future, in the making of history. That strong sense of clarity is gone. Now the effects is the erosion of our certainties. Our shared confidence in the necessity of growth, in the shaping of nature, in the levelling effect of markets, is disappearing. These changes are becoming the way for new ideas, other ways of thinking and solutions. They also evoke uncertainty, the fear of imminent upheavals and the need for security and certitude.

The spirit of our time
Revolution is taking place in our own, globalizing age now that forces outside the Western world are attacking the West’s economic and cultural position of power. Some are doing this through violence, others through economic measures. One of the effects is the erosion of our certainties. Our shared confidence in the necessity of growth, in the shaping of nature, in the levelling effect of markets, is disappearing. These changes are clearing the way for new ideas, other ways of thinking and solutions. They also evoke uncertainty, the fear of imminent upheavals and the need for security and certitude.

The weak spirit of this day and age
Our daily actions are to a large extent guided by things we take for granted. Without having to think about it, we choose a certain view or solution because it is already rooted within us, as something we accept without questioning. Yet our age is characterized by a scarcity of such certitudes.

We are coming out of a period of when things were relatively clear-cut, left versus right, belief in the future, in the making of society and nature. That strong sense of clarity is gone. Now there is mainly uncertainty. There is an anguish because so many choices have to be made: ‘Quo Vadis’, agony of choice. The present period offers fertile ground for group fanaticism. In such an interim period, citizens seek certainty and security in a group situation, in a movement. Or for instance, in the safely detached solidarity of Facebook or other Internet communicaties.

Group fanaticism means losing control
Unrest and uncertainty will continue for a while with very little grip on these processes. Therefore it makes more sense to look at why an individual succumbs to group fanaticism. Often, people who participate in group fanaticism regret having done so later on. After a while, they get the feeling that things have happened without being consulted. As if they temporarily had no control over their own lives. Canetti describes this feeling as a form of being under a spell that cunningly gains mastery over you. You could also say that forces of which you are not directly conscious have got the upper hand over conscious, rational forces. Group fanaticism turns out to have huge unconscious or half-conscious components. We feel a growing embarrassment that we had lost control of our powers of reasoning. For we prefer to say of ourselves that we go through life as clear-thinking, rationally-behaving people.

From this perspective, it is indeed disturbing to learn that scientist Ap Dijksterhuis indicates that only a fraction of our actions take place on the basis of conscious decisions. Evidently, it’s all about the relation between the influence of unconscious forces on our actions and the influence of conscious forces. A stronger awareness of the things that relate to group fanaticism could help in strengthening our rational powers. An awareness of your own inclinations helps you to minimize your own vulnerability.

With this conviction in mind, the Stefan Zweig Genootschap collaborated with Castrum Peregrini to design the Fanaticism Awareness Tool (FAT). The starting point in developing the FAT was that unconscious and half-conscious motivations play a large role in the allure of group fanaticism. Your individual resistance increases when you see the chance of dealing with it more rationally. You can find the FAT online at www.fanatismo.eu.

Dirk Jansen (Amsterdam, 1945) is a sociologist and founder of the Stefan Zweig Genootschap Nederland, which concerns itself with fanaticism, European cultural solidarity and contemporary forms of humanism.

For further reading on this subject, please see:
Sebastian Haffner, Defying Hitler: A Memoir (Wiederheld & Nicolson, 2002)
Anton Ziglerveld/Peter Berger, In Praise of Doubt: How to Have Conversions Without Becoming a Fanatic (Harper Collins, 2009)
Ap Dijksterhuis, Het slimme Onbewuste, Bert Bakker 2007
Hannah Arendt, The Origins of Totalitarianism, 1962

Do the FAT
WWW.FANATISMO.EU

You got the magazine. You’ve read the article. Now find out the truth.
Islamophobia in Europe is no longer an exclusive right-wing hobby, especially in Austria. Karin Liebhart looks at the political campaigns of populist parties and their handiwork of cultural and racial hatred.

In Austria, the notion of ‘Islamophobia’ is closely connected with the controversial debate on Turkey’s potential EU membership. A broad discussion on the topic of Turkey’s probable entry into the EU started in 2002 and focused on Islam, not least because the majority of Muslims living in Austria originate from Turkey. Austria’s population of eight million people includes an estimated 350,000 to 400,000 Muslims (nearly 4% of the total population). Turkish migrants that are at the core of the integration debates in Austria, which can be characterized by critical shortcomings. Discussions on xenophobic issues, for instance, often tend to be reduced to problems emanating from religion. Particularly right-wing populist parties, like the Austrian Freedom Party (FPÖ), contribute populist rhetoric and stereotypical images to the anti-Islamic discourse, which more or less follows the model of anti-Semitic discourse. Muslims are similarly made scapegoats, responsible for everything to be criticized from a ‘modern’ perspective: anti-democratic attitudes, the everything to be criticized from a ‘modern’ perspective: anti-democratic attitudes, the everything to be criticized from a ‘modern’ perspective: anti-democratic attitudes, the everything to be criticized from a ‘modern’ perspective: anti-democratic attitudes, the everything to be criticized from a ‘modern’ perspective: anti-democratic attitudes, the everything to be criticized from a ‘modern’ perspective: anti-democratic attitudes, the everything to be criticized from a ‘modern’ perspective: anti-democratic attitudes, the everything to be criticized from a ‘modern’ perspective: anti-democratic attitudes, the everything to be criticized from a ‘modern’ perspective: anti-democratic attitudes, the everything to be criticized from a ‘modern’ perspective: anti-democratic attitudes, the everything to be criticized from a ‘modern’ perspective: 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The photographic series Sons 1-5 by Danish artist Daniel Svarre (b. 1976) are individual portraits of young men hanging out in suburbia. The photos have been taken with long exposure and depict the seconds where the individuals turn their faces away from each other and towards the viewer. It is during these seconds that the eyes of the group meet the viewer and the world around them. The portraits thus at once define both the group and the individual, and the division between the group and the surrounding society.

The work Sons 1-5 derives from Daniel Svarre’s interest in the aesthetic and psychological consequences of belonging or not belonging to a group and how this relationship is constructed visually. A recurring motif in his work is the masculine group identity. Male groups can offer solidarity, a safe haven and confidentiality, but at the same time these groups can seem aggressive and excluding. Svarre’s work reflects on the one hand the intimacy and closeness of a group, and on the other hand the feelings of desire and anxiety related to the stereotypical ideas of ‘I’, ‘we’ and ‘the others’.

Daniel Svarre is participating in the exhibition You Are All Individuals! at Castrum Peregrini, Amsterdam.
PORTUGAL, POOR LOVE

Why there is an almost total lack of fanaticism in an eight hundred years old civilization

BY WALTER HUGO MãE

What is the secret behind the completely nonviolent revolution in Portugal in the seventies? Is it that the Portuguese are people of infinite patience who refuse to obstinately fight for any of their ideas? Soccer sometimes seems the only topic where the country can show some fanaticism.

The proud definition of Portugal as a country of mild habits indicates a coherent nation that hardly ever goes to extremes. In one of his famous poems, the poet Jorge Sousa Braga laments that despite his being only twenty-two years old, Portugal makes him feel as if he were eight hundred. Braga is not criticizing an agedness that supports a conservative and retrograde mentality here; what this poem exposes is weariness, a kind of disengagement or inertia that reduces the rhythm of the community to a slow movement, to the point of carelessness. The eight hundred years of Portuguese history would seem to suggest that such a distant past inevitably imposes itself upon the present in which we are living and largely defines the future, not only in a way that is logical but also in a way that is defeating, weakening the citizenry and leading to resignation.

Portugal’s age doesn’t make it eminently old; it makes it exhausted, weary, with little hope and few convictions except for those of a certain self-punishment. As a young contemporary, Jorge Sousa Braga doesn’t accept the blame - and indeed, this has been a common sentiment amongst young people over the last decades: they are eager to be liberated from this burden and claim the freedom that they perceive others have abroad.

Eduardo Lourenço, one of our greatest thinkers, speaks of a Portuguese hyper-identity, a maturity of the country and its people that can lead us to a crisis. As if doomed by an impasse, Portuguese maturation leaves us without knowing what to do next, what to conquer next, because everything has already been conquered and excessively lost.

The Portuguese hyper-identity – which will always be the accumulation of an infinitude of references that define us as well as confine us – can justify our immediate future, our minor objectives. As if the purpose of our people were already fulfilled, accomplished, and we were lacking only the courage to end the journey.

During the forty-eight years of last century’s fascist regime, the Portuguese were exposed to a castrating philosophy that imposed religion, nationalism and family as superior and unquestionable values. The philosophy of ‘God, Motherland and Family’ was publicised as a method to achieve kindness. It was an unquestionable dogmatic formula with which life could be simplified, and anguish or revolution avoided.

The mixture of the state with religious beliefs and family intimacy easily led to a community of watchful people, repressed, frightened of differences, new ideas or any kind of fracture: from managing the common destiny to the expectation of transcendence.
and a sense of the injustice perpetrated by Lisbon, the capital city that centralises power and ignores the problems of the rest of the country. It’s said by its supporters that ‘Portugal is Lisbon and the rest is landscape’. Futebol Clube do Porto, was able, through its current president, Jorge Nuno Pinto da Costa, to capitalise on the rivalry between the north and the south, Porto and Lisbon, transforming the players into a kind of soldiers fighting for the identity of a place, fighting to dignify a whole region. With this symbolism in mind, the spirit of soccer fans turns into extremism fuelled by hate that periodically evolves into instigations of vandalism and violence at the beginning or end of essential games.

With this passionate mixture of sport with regionalism, and discussions about the unbalanced distribution of wealth in the different areas of Portugal, the fans of the major soccer clubs are perhaps the crowds who are closest to fanaticism in Portugal today. With no other argument than considering each other as foreigners, hate operates among them, while newspapers talk about the trail of destruction that is always left behind.

Passion, no love
It is said that Benfica has more than half of the Portuguese people as its supporters (something I believe to be no more than a myth) and it is said that if Benfica were to be champion, even the Gross Domestic Product would increase, Benfica as the champion would make the Portuguese community a happy nation – or demonstrably happier – and that fact would be reflected in the rate of national productivity.

The notion of a national identity centred in the capital city as fundamental to the equilibrium of life and finances is questioned with doubts – and a lot of irony. Once again, there seems to be a difficulty regarding being able to disagree, changing, to rethink, to be different from what one had been, or started out to be. With slogans like ‘Porto is a Nation’, soccer interferes in politics to reinforce the self-esteem of players and fans and create tensions that can transform the game into a symbolic gesture far greater than what would be expected.

However, in practice, submerged in the mild habits and traditional benevolence of the country, soccer also largely fits in with the laissez faire, laissez passer of its people. Representing a sort of popular anaesthesia, soccer can still be amalgamating, and for a large majority, particularly men, it is still the main topic – if not the only topic – about which they can socialize every day. A limited socialization or primitive socialization.

The Portuguese feel a passion for Portugal, but maybe it’s not so mature that, as we say about couples, it is already love. Love is always more intricate, more defined, but almost impossible to comprise in brief approaches. That kind of maturation – and we’re talking about eight hundred years of history – halts but doesn’t end affection. Pure fanaticism is perhaps a privilege of passion with a certain naivety, where everything is a bit more advanced. We’ll see until when.

Walter Hugo Mie has published poetry and novels, edited anthologies and translates from Italian and Spanish. He is included in Best European Fiction 2010.
The fierce hate of the fans of two rival soccer teams divides the Polish town of Łódź. Widzew versus ŁKS means war and sometimes fatal casualties. Calling your opponent a ‘Jew’ is an insult between the fans. But is this language meant to be anti-Semitic?

Last January, a young man died in a pitched battle involving 300 supporters of Łódź’s two main soccer teams. Within a few days the police had rounded up 24 men as possible suspects, including the president of one team’s supporters’ club. As is customary in Poland with deaths outdoors – car crashes, heart attacks, pedestrian accidents – the exact spot of this young man’s last seconds on earth was marked by wreaths and candles; and in this case too by insignia that read ‘People of Honour.’

This ‘honour’ is strange. To say so is no disrespect or coldness to the deceased man. How does the word, as it was used here, strike his parents or siblings? For the word to work as its users intended, it has to oppose something, namely, a kind of dishonour, and here we touch on the dark underside of Łódź soccer culture.

Kilińskiego Street
You’ll see what I mean if you walk down Kilińskiego Street, the long thoroughfare that cuts straight through the middle of Łódź, dividing east from west. If you are to the west of it, you are in the territory of ŁKS, Łódź Sports Club. If you are to the east of it, you are in the territory of Widzew, one of Poland’s most prestigious teams. Kilińskiego is the front line, where you will see the greatest amount of soccer graffiti – and much of it looks very like anti-Semitism. Because in Łódź this is how you chip away at your enemy team’s honour. You call them Jews. One side represents the other in graffiti as the Star of David, or even as the Star of David in a gallows. You will even see the occasional ‘Juden Raus!’ You are just like the Jews, the graffiti says. You are weak. You are in the gutter where you belong, and we will crush you.

This graffiti can disturb the unprepared visitor. Foreigners arriving in Łódź for the first time see it and feel they have got off the train at the wrong station. Last year, a group of US academics visited the English faculty in Łódź University on a short cultural exchange; at a faculty reception, an American lecturer in her mid-fifties wept as she described the graffiti she had just seen through her taxi window. For her, among other things it showed that history could repeat itself all over again. The room went quiet. Part of this quietness was embarrassment. It seemed to many Poles in the room that she was missing the point. Perhaps history could repeat itself all over again, and if it should, maybe that graffiti would be remembered as part of the whole horrible process, but the graffiti itself has other purposes.

Monoculture
Łódź grew from a few small villages into a huge textile-producing city over a hundred and fifty years ago, becoming known as ‘The Manchester of Poland.’ That is a misnomer today, because most of the textile mills have now closed. The people who once ran and staffed them were Polish, Jewish and German. In fact Łódź is one of Europe’s best examples of a modern multicultural city. Or it was. In 1939, 34% of the population was Jewish, 10% German. The Widzew and ŁKS soccer teams were themselves created by a group of citizens who reflected the ethnic mix of the city. By 1945 all that had changed. The Jews and Germans had gone, and the city was swept into a monoculture that, until then, it had never known.

Twenty-three years later, those Jews who had survived the war and remained in Poland faced insult on top of grievous injury. The year 1968 means different things to different people: in the West, anti-war protests, civil rights marches, student barricades, sit-ins. In Czechoslovakia, it meant the Prague Spring. In Poland, the Communist government grew nervous, and to divert attention from itself it began a process of scapegoating, shifting blame for failures in the Communist system to Jews in positions of authority. In national and local government, in schools, universities and hospitals, Jews were sidelined or fired.
on the flimsiest of pretexts, and encouraged to leave the country. Many of them did. Compare the 1968 and 1970 staff lists aged to leave the country. Many of them on the flimsiest of pretexts, and encouraged disappearance of Jewish names. This of any Polish university and see the sud-
overt use of racist language began. ’In the early 1990s the fight moved from
of graffiti on the walls or posters it was
Communism, so if there was some kind
Andrzej Rostocki, sociologist: ’Before
But of course the hate is still there.
Perhaps this is a result of habit: seeing
the visiting US lecturer mentioned above.
Marcin sees his fellow students as a
Marcin and publishes research on the Jewish history
Andrew Tomlinson (Bedford, for like Fire productions, US.
Lódz ’Jews and gentiles dislike this
’Look at that professed lack of interest in or knowledge about the Jews them-
noticed that this contemporary ignorance about Jewish people allows other kinds of ignorance to speak through us. A his-
tory of story-telling does its work under the
If the fans know next to nothing about Jews, why is this next-to-nothing so wholly negative?
Children learn from the walls, and the teaching is unmistakable. Jews are bad. Wherever Jews are, the best we can do is pity them. The Jews are not the graffiti’s direct object of attack, but a dangerous circular logic makes the whole thing work as an insult. If the Jews are not a worse kind of human being, why would anyone use them to express hatred for opposing fans in the first place? ’The same kind of logic works with the 1968 purges: It was a cynical scapegoating exercise to divert attention, but why did the Communist government choose to scapegoat the Jews in the first place? ’That in the first place’ is the problem. Who was the first to use the word’Jew’ in such a way? Someone who had learned from his parents what scum the Jews actually are.

‘The Coloured Tolerance’ Education can help here. It has to be astute, careful, and alert to psychologi-
cal defences (the kind of defences shown by soccer fans when they know they are speaking on the record). It has to teach a history that is scrupulously objective yet able to instil empathy for people differ-
ent from oneself. It is up against another history, largely unwritten, thus so power-
ful: the hand-me-down stories about the Jews. Good teaching would bring this second history out into the open, into debate in the classroom itself, allowing students to inspect and question it for themselves. Whatever, it is slow work.
Outside the classroom, fresh graffiti in Lódz is removed. Several years ago, young people, journalists and town counc-
men have a more sophisticated attitude towards it than did the visiting US lecturer mentioned above. Perhaps this is a result of habit: seeing that graffiti, having to get used to it, de-
ciphering its undercurrents. Jews understand themselves not as direct objects of hate but as useful tools for the soccer fan. But of course the hate is still there.
The journalist and former dissident Adam Michnik recently gave a promo-
tional reading from his latest book, Against Anti-Semitism. During the ques-
tion and answer session that followed, Michnik said that Lódz’s soccer-fan graf-
fiti cannot be classed as outright anti-
semitism. The fans’ avowed hatred is for the opposing team, not the Jews. The
The internationally acclaimed artist Yael Bartana (Israel, 1970) is selected to represent Poland for the Venice Biennial in June 2011. She will show the complete ‘Polish Trilogy’, including the third and new film entitled Zamach (Assassination). Nina Folkersma, curator of the exhibition You Are All Individuals, talks to the artist about her new film.

Yael Bartana’s films have been described as critical yet undeniably poetic reflections on the complex relationship between the individual and society. In a borderland between reality, fiction and propaganda, Bartana focuses on ceremonies, public rituals and social diversions that are intended to reaffirm a collective or national identity.

In the first film of the trilogy that will be on show in the Polish pavilion in Venice, Mary Koszmary (Nightmares, 2007), we see a young man, portrayed by the left-wing Polish critic and activist Slawomir Sierakowski, entering the dilapidated Olympic Stadium in Warsaw. He climbs a podium and delivers a compelling speech, inciting three million Jews to return to Poland. His monologue is permeated by great optimism, suggesting that in order for Poland to be fully accepted by other Europeans, the country must embrace tolerance and multiculturalism and welcome back its Jews. His sole audience is a small troop of young, patriotic scouts bearing Polish flags who stencil the field with the following sentence, ‘3,300,000 Jews can change the life of 40,000,000 Poles’.

While Bartana’s early films mostly dealt with the history of Israel and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, she has recently increasingly staged her films, and proposed utopic narratives for new chapters of history. Four years ago Bartana started working on the ‘Polish Trilogy’, a project that addresses contemporary anti-Semitism and xenophobia in Poland, the longing for the Jewish past among liberal Polish intellectuals, the desire among a new generation of Poles to be fully accepted as Europeans, and the Zionist dream of returning to Israel.

The fictional movement created by Yael Bartana has an unexpected political impact in Poland

BY NINA FOLKERSMA
blood-red flag with a new symbol has been erected. People are cheerfully building a new set of speeches in honour of the movement and its leader. My idea is to create a sort of conflict within these speeches. I invited different speakers, some of them are real people and some are actors. In fact, there are only one or two actors, the rest are actual activists or politicians, which makes the speeches very real."

Did you write the speeches yourself? ‘Some of them I worked out together with a writer, others are written by the speakers themselves. I was hoping to have the Minister of Culture of Poland participate in the film, but he cancelled the day before, unfortunately. Maybe he didn’t trust the project enough or maybe he was just too busy. In any case, I’m trying now to complicate the story. The trilogy about Poland deals with Zionism and the ghost of the Holocaust. In the final part I’m trying to give a voice to the ghosts that were killed. It’s going to be a strange and little bit psychic movie. On the one hand it will be very real, but on the other hand I will try to disturb it and have a more strange atmosphere. I always try to complicate things and make them weird.’

Even though he didn’t participate in the film, the Polish Minister of Culture is very supportive of your project. He actually selected your work to represent Poland at the upcoming Venice Biennial. ‘It was a democratic process: every artist could apply and there was a committee of fourteen people that went through the applications. The committee selected my project and then two days later the Minister of Culture signed that he approved their decision. That is very fast, normally it takes him a month to sign.’

Are all reactions to your work this favourable? ‘My work does provoke people. It provokes fanatic people, both from the Israeli and the Polish side. I think it scares them because they take it very real and one to one, as if tomorrow I’m sending three million Jews back to Poland. And from the Israeli side it’s scary because it goes against the Zionism ideology. I mean, there are different streams within Zionism, but one of them is that all Jews should be in Israel. So it goes against that stream.’

Your work is getting more and more real. The fictional movement that you created, the Jewish Renaissance Movement in Poland, is starting to have a real impact. ‘It’s now in a transition from fiction to reality. In a way it also becomes more real because the Minister of Culture accepted my project to represent Poland in Venice. This created a new reality to the movement. Suddenly I was confronted with real issues. Is such a movement actually possible? What does it mean? Next year we will have the first congress of the movement, which they have somehow dealt with their past and their guilt, but in Poland people are still quite ignorant. They see the Holocaust as a tragedy of the whole of occupied Poland, so they perceive themselves as victims. The separation of the Christian and Jewish communities increased the feeling that what was happening to the Jews was not really of interest to the Poles. Poland is a very Catholic, very nationalist country, and very anti-Semitic.’

Do you still feel it is anti-Semitic? ‘Yes it is, very much so. I’m not talking about the young generation. There is a very lhs generation that is much more open and that wants to have a change in Poland. That is actually my main motivation of working there. But they are still a minority. The majority of the Polish people is very nationalist, very racist. The left is very small, like in Israel. Maybe that is the similarity. Along with the fact that Poland and Israel are both very traumatised nations. I started the project a few years ago to provoke a new discourse about the situation in Poland today, trying to change and open up the mentality of people.’

You just finished filming the third part of your trilogy. What happens in this final part? ‘Zamach (Assassination) is about the assassination of Sierakowski, the leader of the Jewish Renaissance Movement in Poland, the man who asked the Jews to return to Poland. Mary Koszmary (Nightmares, 2007) was the first film, and Mary Wieza (Wall and Tower, 2009) answers the call of Sierakowski, the leader of the fictional Jewish Renaissance Movement in Poland. In the same propagandist style the film shows how a group of young traditionally dressed Jewish pioneers return to Warsaw. At the spot where in World War II the Warsaw Ghetto was located, the young people are cheerfully building a new country undisturbed by fascist policies. Bartana hints in this film at the Zionist dream, with heroic imitations of Sierakowski, the leader of the fictional Jewish Renaissance Movement in Poland, the man who asked the Jews to return to Poland, the Jewish communities increased the feeling that what was happening to the Jews was not really of interest to the Poles. Poland is a very Catholic, very nationalist country, and very anti-Semitic.’

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Fanaticism has always existed. Not all individuals, however, have a fanatic temperament. Indeed the vast majority does not. While it is nice to have 450 million Europeans engage in their own introspection to find out whether they harbor a fanatic streak, I am afraid that won’t solve the problem. Most fanatics do not think of themselves as fanatics, but as holders of the threatened truth. Even in front of a mirror, they won’t see their own fanatical image. Furthermore, fanatics are not totally committed to their fanaticism, while the non-fanatical majority is often passive, lukewarm, and not quite focused on possible threats. Fanatics reach out globally. Moderates tend to stick within their own narrow horizons.

Fanaticism, in my view, occurs when a psychological pre-disposition encounters a fertile external context. Two crucial emotions underpin the fanatical predisposition: a deep fear of the other because of who he or she is, is not ‘doers’, and a strong resentment (as a result of having been humiliated). The greater the fear, the more stringent one gets, until one reaches the ultimate equation: I kill preemptively for fear of being killed.

Resentment is born from the belief that those same ‘others’ have deprived ‘me’ of what is mine, thus threatening my own fragile status over which I already have so little control. In his Nazi Germany and the Jews, Saul Friedlander addresses both terms brilliantly by wondering early on, just how terrified the Nazis must have been the Jews to want to destroy them, and how humiliated they must have been at Versailles to engage in such a fanatical road.

Fanatics thus subscribe to a zero-sum vision of the world, and as long as they hold on to it, they cannot be convinced to act differently. What the ‘other’ has is by definition something that has been taken from ‘me’ or that ‘I’ should be receiving. And this zero-sum vision of the world is further aggravated when it is coupled with a fear of degeneration through the loss of one’s values, identity, worldview, and even wealth. Those who today subscribe to a fanatical misunderstanding of Islam embody these feelings of lost purity. Fanatics are above all convinced that their threatened worldview contains the only ‘good’ absolutes (‘my’ God, ‘my country’, ‘my tribe’, ‘my culture’, ‘my traditions’, ‘my law’, etc).

Fanatics have a masonic streak, and when they pretend to compromise, it is just that, a pretense. Finally, repression is vital in the mind-set of a fanatic. The ‘others’ have to be re-educated, restrained, silenced, eliminated, and even this is never enough for the enemy is always invisible and ever changing. In brief, fanaticism is a language with the simplest of grammars, built around a very clear definite article: ‘The’, preceding any group identity, followed by all sorts of horrible and immutable characteristics.

Group fanaticism needs a fertile external terrain. Deep economic crises strengthen the zero-sum attitude in front of a shrinking pie. Massively stagnant societies foster personal and collective humiliation. The lack of political hope completes the list. Fanaticism also needs a fertilizer. Closed teleological (with or without God) intellectual worldviews allow it to flourish. The simpler the answers to complex problems, the more appealing such projects will be. Let us not close our eyes to the radical Enlightenment or to ultra-liberal economists. We have our own fanatics.

Can fanaticism be nipped in the bud? A few simple measures might help. Teach everyone not to put a definite article in front of any group or identity, including its own. Make it a principle that all groups adhere to the same internal transparency that they expect of the wider democratic whole. Convince moderates to perceive moderates in other groups as more natural allies than extremists in one’s own tribe.

In the same way, we should rethink our national histories in a critical light, treating the present with the same moral standards as the past. After all, if across Europe all countries managed to delve into their black Holocaust pasts, surely they can do the same by delving into the grey quid of their current mind-sets and prejudices... and without waiting for others to do it fast.

Think of these suggestions as a hygienic ‘washing of hands’; not in Pontius Pilate’s sense, but in our rediscovered medical wisdom as the best weapon against deadly infections.

Diana Pinto (b. 1949) is a historian and writer who lives in Paris. She is the author of a transatlantic autobiography, Entre deux mondes, (Odile Jacob, 1991) and has written extensively on the post-1989 Jewish presence across Europe.
Enrique Marty is one of the shooting stars of the contemporary art scene. His paintings, videos, watercolours and sculptures, read as an exploration of the human soul, often giving way to a fascination for the dark side of our psychology. Stefanie Müller, curator of Kunsthalle Mannheim, talks to Marty about his fascination for the phenomenon of crowds and fanaticism.

The impact of the work of the Spanish artist Enrique Marty (b. Salamanca, 1969) varies from devilish or ambiguous amusement to shock or terror. His oeuvre has often been compared to the gloomy paintings of Francisco Goya or the sinister installations of Jake and Dinos Chapman. For Marty, however, shocking the viewer is not a goal. The cruel, the surreal and the ridiculous mainly serve as tools with which he tries to cause a state of extreme awareness of what can’t be seen immediately. All of this results in a highly dramatic but also vital oeuvre in which the viewer discovers the dark side and the magic of our so-called normal life.

Marty’s unique signature has drawn a lot of international attention, with exhibitions at the Reina Sofia Museum in Madrid, the Venice Biennial, the Gemeentemuseum Den Haag and a much acclaimed solo show at the MUSAC in Leon (Spain). In November 2010, Marty had his first solo exhibition in a German museum (Kunsthalle Mannheim), for which he created a large-scale installation of 80 individual sculptures of young men in camouflage and an expansive wall painting, entitled Fanatics. Part of this work is on show in the exposition You Are All Individuals.

Your work is extremely captivating and at the same time alienating. The excessive realism, the grotesque iconography - it is hard to evade the visual intensity of your art works. Do you want to ‘convince this world that it is ugly, sick and hypocritical’ – as the famous painter George Grosz put it?

‘Work because I need to communicate and at the same time it’s my way of dealing with the world. I want to create a confrontation with the audience, and I want to talk about the social, but I don’t want to be a social painter. I’ve seen a lot of artists who have worked against the system, and the system just sucked them in. I am more connected to a subtle approach, to using symbols in different layers. I want to show something that attracts attention, because I don’t really think that art should be so cryptic that something disappears. Like in the theatre, you need some kind of dramaturgy, because art shouldn’t be boring, because art should also be there for normal people not accustomed to art.’

Fanatics is your largest sculptural work until now. For this work, you installed an impressive amount of 80 smaller than life-sized clones that appear to progress through the space as an anonymous, uniform mass of pilgrims. What was the starting point of this work?

‘Specifically for the Fanatics, I was thinking of doing something coinciding with the worldwide collapse of the economy. The economic crisis started a couple of years ago, and I decided to start working on it as a reaction against what I was thinking, of the people just working towards a war. I’ve been working on the Fanatics for maybe two years in total, simultaneously working on other stuff and gathering a lot of background information.

In the past few years, I’ve been completely amazed and thinking a lot about...’
the phenomenon of crowds, of people and how they tend to be a crowd. At the same time, I’m completely obsessed with the phenomenon of people forming a line. It’s incredible how people feel a magnetic link to be joined together and create a mass. It was Carl Gustav Jung who said that there is a collective mind and that the intelligence of the crowd is much lower than in a single person. It’s as if the intelligence were divided up between all the people of a crowd.

As Buitheil said: “I’m a fanatic against fanaticism.” And I completely agree with him. Fanaticism is very destructive for society and for the human being, for the individual, for everyone. A crowd is very easy to control because the mass is more controllable than a single person. That’s why religion, politics or sports are created to control the individual more easily.

With what kind of ideology, radical notion or impassioned conviction are these Fanatics obsessed? Is this mass movement evoked by political, sociological, ideological, or religious blindness?

I tried to create a character in order to develop a symbol of uniformity, of the crowd, of the line worshipping ahead towards nothing – it’s ambiguous. I can show you millions of images of this phenomenon of crowds. I’ve collected a lot of quite ridiculous documents of people receiving a pop star at the airport, of children in a religious trance, which is like hell, people in religious self-punishment, really injuring themselves … of marines training in North America … of parades of Spanish children in religious clothes, several thousand boys and girls.

I have also collected a lot of communist propaganda photos and pictures of pilgrims all looking the same: hundreds of men in line all staring at the same spot, all walking in a similar manner in the crowd. ‘They are all worshipping something, but what?’ They are hypnotized because they are in the crowd and they just follow the group. It’s the same as supporting a soccer team. You are part of a group, the group protects you. As an individual, you have to make your own decisions and be responsible for them. If you are part of a crowd, you are not responsible. I wanted to create an image of an archetype of fanaticism, combining religious, military, even sports references.

I thought about the fact that you have depicted yourself in multiple ways as a ‘fanatic’. Why did you make yourself the leader of these clones?

I used my own face for different reasons. Firstly because – maybe it sounds crazy – but it is the most anonymous face I could find, with the fewest connotations for me. I’m also not using any other person as a model in this case, because someone might complain about calling him a fanatic (laughs). I can use my own face more easily because, at the same time, I feel like a fanatic in different ways. I also wanted to bring out the fact that each of them corresponds with one state of my own sometimes fanatical, sometimes happy, sometimes unhappy mind.

Why did you dress the Fanatics in identical soldiers’ uniforms?

I thought about using different kinds of uniforms or just dressing them in the same way. At a certain moment, I was quite convinced of dressing them in typical suits, like the ones bankers and politicians wear. Then I thought of religious clothes. But it didn’t work because there are too many connotations. Finally I tried out simple clothes, trousers and T-shirts, and painted them in neutral grey. While I was working on the faces, the idea of the camouflage pattern came to mind, because the military look is quite strong and at the same time camouflage is not only military. More important, however, is the fact that they are wearing socks, but no boots and no weapons. It’s totally contradictory and ridiculous at the same time – they disappear because they are not individuals, they are part of that crowd. Now they sometimes look like just one body, like one big monster.

The figures all move in the same direction – they are marching toward a dramatic endpoint. When I saw the work for the first time, they virtually walked into emptiness. In Kunsthalle Mannheim there will be a large, extensive wall painting in the exhibition space.

Among all my ideas about the Fanatics, I always imagined there being something weird at the end of the line, like a guillotine or a hole, where you commit suicide by jumping like the lemmings. In the end, it’s more powerful that the viewer himself can imagine what is happening there. But instead of letting the crowd fade into nothing, it is prolonged on the walls. The idea is to have the first fanatic, the first sculpture, almost touching the wall. And I regard the painted prolongation as a line of its own thoughts. I always think of the wall paintings as ghosts, as thoughts that are so strong that they adhere to the walls like symbols.

In your watercolours, which you have done as studies, one sees an endless chain of figures whirling about each other…

‘It’s like a monster, like an obsessive and repetitive thought that is so attached to your brain that it cannot be removed – like violence, sexual obsession, killing, religious obsessions, really stupid obsessions. Art portraits of existing soldiers inspired me; at other times I used posters as homage to Goya or other painters. There is also a guillotine that represents my own obsession with it. The Fanatics carry the guillotines in the same way as the angels in the Sistine Chapel carry the cross. Some of them are wearing a camouflage outfit like the sculptures, others look like kings with golden crowns – being Spanish, it’s quite strong to combine kings and guillotine.

The installation will be a mental space divided into an outside space and an inside space, into your relation with the world and your relation with yourself. I want to put the viewers in front of a very real representation of what they see in the newspapers every day and don’t care about. When you put the same picture in a museum or an art gallery, everything changes.’

Stefan Müller (b. 1979) studied Art History and Archaeology in Heidelberg and has been curator for sculpture and new media at the Kunsthalle Mannheim (Germany) since 2005. This interview is an adaptation of an interview conducted on August 13, 2010 in Salamanca.
There is a famous scene in the film Life of Brian (1979) by Monty Python in which Brian, who is born on the same night as Jesus Christ and by a quirk of fate is seen as the Messiah, is trying to get rid of his disciples. Looking over the crowd of followers from his window, he shouts: “You don’t need to follow me. You don’t need to follow anybody. You’ve got to think for yourselves. You are all individuals.” Whereupon the crowd replies: “Yes, we are all individuals!” – except for one individual who discreetly raises his arm and says: “I’m not.”

We know the dangers of a mass that blindly follows its leader. We are aware that groups are closed, repressing and potentially violent. We are also aware that groups have the tendency to be hostile to outsiders, or even more so, to deliberately create an external enemy so as to guarantee the unity and stability of its own group. On the other hand, how susceptible are we to the appeal of the mass? Becoming part of a group means safety, a shared identity and solidarity. In these fearful uncertain times, that is a reassuring thought. Society is on the verge of falling apart because of the continuous pressure on the individual and his or her responsibilities. We are in need of common ideals. Together we are stronger. Aren’t we?

The exhibition You Are All Individuals! brings together existing and new works of Yael Bartana (Israel, 1970), Daya Cahen (The Netherlands, 1969), Köken Ergun (Turkey, 1976), Enrique Marty (Spain, 1969), Daniel Svarre (Denmark, 1976) – five contemporary artists who look into the relationship between the individual and the crowd. Why are some people more vulnerable to group formation than others? When does group behaviour turn into fanaticism? At what point do we speak of a dangerous and threatening mass and when of a revolutionary collective movement? Working in different media - photography, sculpture, painting, video and sound work – the five participating artists share a fascination for national ceremonies, patriotic acts and other rituals that are intended to reaffirm the collective identity of crowds or countries. They examine the complexities of indoctrination, faith and conviction and hope to inspire their viewers to reflect upon the power of the crowd and the individual.

Exhibition at Castrum Peregrini

You Are All Individuals!

Köken Ergun

The issues surrounding the Islamic headscarf are represented in an aesthetic way in the work Untitled (2004) by Köken Ergun. We see the artist trying out different ways of wearing the headscarf until he eventually bursts into tears. According to Ergun, the work is a direct reaction to an incident that occurred in Turkish politics. Since the 1970s the headscarf has been a political football in the discussion on the separation between religion and the state in Turkey. This reached an all-time low when the Turkish president failed to invite any (headscarf-wearing) women party members for the annual celebrations on The Day of the Republic, in order to avoid a confrontation between the secular and the religious.

Daya Cahen

Fascinated by mass psychology and indoctrination, Dutch artist Daya Cahen (1969) has been making work in Russia for some years now. In 2010, Cahen went to Cadet School Number 9, a unique military academy in Moscow, where girls age 11-17 learn how to become the ideal Russian patriot and the ideal Russian woman. We see girls doing their hair, cooking, ironing, marching and learning to use weapons. The film Birth of a Nation (2010) reveals various aspects of their personalities while simultaneously posing the question of how all those aspects can be seen independently of one another.

You Are All Individuals!

Curated by Nina Folkersma

Castrum Peregrini

Herengracht 401, Amsterdam

May 7 – June 12, 2011
Opening: Friday May 6, 20 hrs
Wed – Sat, 14 – 18 hrs

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Kutluğ Ataman (ECF Routes Award Laureate 2011) - Mesopotamian Dramaturgies / Journey to the Moon (2009)

Castrum Peregrini, a hiding place during the horror of the fanatic persecution by the Nazis in WWII, saved the lives of a group of young Jewish and dissident friends. Their dealing with European cultural heritage and their artistic activities while underground brought about a firm belief in personal development through friendship and culture. Only in that light could freedom be possible and only through the conscious and guided development of free spirits could people become immune to the threats of fanaticism. The message of this group in hiding is topical as ever. Political and economic upheavals around the globe testify to the urgency of our need to keep thinking about what is inherent to humankind: fanaticism.

PHOTO: SIMON BOSCH

From left to right: Lars Ebert, Gisèle d’Ally van Waterschoot van de Gracht, Frans Dammann, Michael Defuster
Diversity: The art of thinking independently together.

Malcolm Forbes