

The Year of the Euro

*The Cultural, Social, and Political Import
of Europe's Common Currency*

EDITED BY

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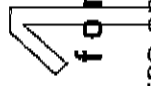
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∞ This book is printed on acid-free paper.

For our respective mentors,

Juan Linz & Suzanne Berger



Money for Mars?

The Euro Banknotes and European Identity

JACQUES E. C. HYMANS

Puzzling Pictures

On January 1, 2002, the euro became a reality in the daily lives of European citizens. Though from a narrow economic perspective the arrival of euro cash was of little consequence (Eichengreen 1998), European statesmen declared the moment to be a transcendental step forward in the history of European unification. As European Commission President Romano Prodi put it: "70 millions of European citizens, the euro notes and coins in their pockets are a concrete sign of the great political undertaking of building a united Europe. . . . So the euro is becoming a key element in people's sense of shared European identity and common destiny" (Prodi 2002).

The very public link European elites such as Prodi made between the tangible euro and a nascent European identity shows that today the construction of Europe is occurring not only through the market but also through marketing (Berezin 2000). Critical to this marketing drive, as with any other, are the intangibles of aesthetics and symbolism. The iconography—in other words, the values, themes, and concepts represented by artistic motifs (Panofsky 1982)—of the euro is the most direct of the various ways in which the new currency could assist in the construction of a European identity (Helleiner 1998, 2002, 2003; Risse 2003). On the other side of the coin, many European elites believe that inculcating a broad-based European identity may be necessary to underpin the long-term stability of the euro as a financial instrument (cf. Kaelbler 2004). The euro can be likened to a new car model: whether people "buy" it will depend not only on its relative price and how well it absorbs shocks, but also on whether people like how it looks and what it says about them.

In spite of the important political stakes involved, the euro's iconography has generated little scholarly attention. By contrast, various journalistic commentators have heavily criticized the physical appearance of the new banknotes.

As Fareed Zakaria put it in *Newsweek*, "The currency looks as if it has been designed for a *Star Trek* episode about some culturally denuded land on Mars—not for the home of Socrates, Charlemagne, Martin Luther, Notre Dame, the Uffizi, Bach, Beethoven, and Mozart" (Zakaria 1999). The purpose of this chapter is neither to support nor to contest such aesthetic judgments, but rather to render explicit the message that the euro banknotes send and to explain why and how the euro came to look as it does. The answers I find to these questions suggest that whatever one thinks of the aesthetic value of the euro notes, in choosing this iconography the EU has maximized its chances for political success.

The Euro in Historical Perspective: The Nature of National Currency Iconography

A first tactic for understanding the iconography of the euro is to place it in historical context. How does the iconography of the euro compare with that of the European national banknotes that preceded it? To answer this question, we can turn to a comprehensive data set I built of the human figures on the banknotes produced since the nineteenth century by the central banks of the first fifteen members of the EU, including East Germany (Hymans 2004). Of course the data set's focus on human figures limits direct comparison with the euro banknotes, for one of the principal features of the euro banknotes is precisely the absence of human figures. This is a striking design choice whose meaning the chapter will address later. But the data on human figures on national banknotes can nevertheless help us better to understand the euro's iconography, for human figures, when present, generally serve as excellent proxies for the overall values messages of the banknotes containing them.¹

What values messages have been sent by national European banknotes in the past, and how have these messages varied across space and time? My theoretical expectations for the iconographic evolution of European banknotes are influenced by the work of Ronald Inglehart (1997) and John Meyer and his associates (1997). Despite some important differences, Inglehart and Meyer can be interpreted as both arguing for two broad shifts in the nature of European (and world) values over time. First, Inglehart and Meyer both trace an overall trend toward an ideology of equality, or, in other words, the dispersion of legitimate social power and initiative—from the state to society, and then to the individual. A currency iconography that mirrored this trend could be expected to shift from depicting actual or metaphorical actors who embody the state, to actual or metaphorical actors who embody social groups such as economic classes,

and finally to non-state actors who stand only for themselves as individuals. Second, Inglehart and Meyer both trace an overall trend in the perceived meaning or goals of life: from the devotion to tradition, to the modern quest for material goods, and then to the postmaterialist or postmodern idea of quality of life. A currency iconography that mirrored this trend could be expected to shift from depictions of mythical or quasi-mythical figures from antiquity, to depictions of modern or contemporary figures engaged in real-world political, economic, or social pursuits, and finally to depictions of modern or contemporary figures involved in cultural or scientific endeavors. (Hymans 2004 offers a more precise statement on coding.)

The following two tables demonstrate European national currency iconography's broad conformity to these theoretical expectations since the beginning of central banks. First, table 1.1 shows the secular change in the locus of actorhood. This table shows that indeed there has been a secular shift from the state to the individual as the locus of actorhood. Depictions of the state start out clearly dominant in the pre-1920 period and subsequently decline smoothly. In the 1920s there is a boom in depictions of society; this then fades away with the dramatic rise of depictions of individuals beginning in the 1950s. The results of the chi-squared test show that we can reject the null hypothesis that the row and column data are unrelated.

Table 1.1 A Secular Change in the Locus of Actorhood?

Epoch of Currency Issue	Actors			Total N
	State	Society	Individual	
Pre-1920	418 (80%)	49 (9%)	56 (11%)	523 (100%)
1920–1949	355 (53%)	171 (36%)	51 (11%)	477 (100%)
1950–1979	116 (45%)	39 (15%)	101 (39%)	256 (100%)
1980–00	53 (35%)	11 (7%)	89 (58%)	153 (100%)
Total N	842 (60%)	270 (19%)	297 (21%)	1409 (100%)

Source: Hymans (2004: 13).

Note: Pearson's chi-squared (6): 364.808; $p=0.000$

The next table, table 1.2, shows the secular change in the perceived meaning or goals of social life. This table shows that indeed there has been a secular shift in the nature of goals represented by currency images. The use of classical images (representing devotion to tradition) starts out dominant and then gradually vanishes. The use of historical images (representing materialist objectives) begins strongly in the 1920s; it subsequently holds its ground in percentage terms down to the present day. This persistence represents a minor anomalous finding for the Inglehart-Meyer hypothesis, which would expect representations of materialist goals to decline in the more recent period. Meanwhile the use of modern or contemporary cultural images (representing postmaterialist objectives) begins strongly in the 1950s and then soars in the current period. The results of the chi-squared-test show that we can reject the null hypothesis that the row and column data are unrelated.

As might be expected, the two trends identified above are highly correlated with each other. Sixty-five percent of statist images also feature classical themes; 56 percent of societal images also feature historical themes; and 69 percent of

Table 1.2 A Secular Change in Life Goals?

Epoch of Currency Issue	Goals			Total N
	Traditional (Classical)	Materialist (Historical)	Postmaterialist (Cultural)	
Pre-1920	402 (77%)	91 (17%)	30 (6%)	523 (100%)
1920-1949	239 (50%)	211 (44%)	27 (6%)	477 (100%)
1950-1979	45 (18%)	131 (51%)	80 (31%)	256 (100%)
1980-00	3 (2%)	69 (45%)	81 (53%)	153 (100%)
Total N	689 (49%)	502 (36%)	218 (15%)	1409 (100%)

Source: Hyman (2004, 14).

Note: Pearson's chi-squared (6): 535.726; $p=0.000$

individualist images also feature cultural themes. Overall, 61 percent of the images boast this correlation, whereas a Cohen's kappa test finds that only 39 percent would have been expected from random chance. The probability of this occurring by chance is 0, and the kappa score is 0.41.

A qualitative look at the data reinforces the notion that the evolution of European national currency iconography has proceeded in accordance with the expectations of a Meyer- and Inglehart-influenced perspective. There have been iconographic leader and laggard nations, but in general the trends have been pan-European in scope. No EU banknotes except Luxembourg's have featured iconography as static as the American dollar's "dead presidents." Consider some of the more popular images from different epochs:

- In the period before 1920, some of the most popular images include female symbols of states in flowing robes, such as Great Britain's "Britannia," Sweden's "Svea," Germany's "Germania," Austria's "Austria," Italy's "Italia" and "Roma," and Portugal's "Lusitania." Other popular images are classical gods such as Minerva-Athena (featured on banknotes from Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Greece, Netherlands, and Spain) and Mercury-Hermes (featured on banknotes from Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, Spain, and Portugal).

- In the period 1920-49, while classical gods and mythical female symbols of states remain strongly present, they now compete for space with materialist depictions of state and society—whether in the form of modern statesmen or generic representations of what can be termed the "classes and the masses." As examples of the latter, many banknotes from this period try to depict the national everyman or, even more frequently, beautiful young women in typical "national garb." This is the case for all the Irish banknotes, and also for several of the Austrian, Greek, and French banknotes. Moreover, some of the most popular images in this period are of class representatives. Sometimes the class represented is the working class, such as the dock and industrial workers featured on some French franc banknotes from 1917 until the early 1950s. Sometimes it is the bourgeoisie—Germany's money notably sported portraits of various burghers by artists such as Albrecht Dürer and Hans Holbein from the 1920s until 1989. Most often it is farmers and peasants, who were featured on mid-century banknotes from Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, and Portugal. Then, in the period 1950-79, we observe the rise of the individual as actor, and particularly individual contributors to high culture: painting, sculpture, architecture, poetry, the novel. A small sample of such figures includes

composers such as Giuseppe Verdi (Italy) and Johann Strauss (Austria), writers such as Friedrich von Schiller (East Germany) and Jonathan Swift (Ireland), painters such as Jens Juel (Denmark) and Ignacio Zuloaga (Spain), and also a smaller number of scientists including Isaac Newton (Great Britain), Christiaan Huygens (Netherlands), and Pedro Nunes (Portugal). Finally, in the period 1980 to the present, individual cultural figures consolidate their dominance, but there is continuing change in the types of cultural achievers that are depicted. This is something that is not captured in the quantitative data presented above. The initial postmaterialist moment was clearly not the end of history. For instance, the most recent period sees a rise in the number of female non-state cultural contributors on the banknotes. Whereas in the entire data set through 1949 there were no images of females out of a total of fifty-one images of cultural figures, on banknote issues from 1950 to 1979 there were two females out of a total of seventy-six cultural figures (3%), and on note issues from 1980 to 2000 there were ten out of a total of seventy-eight (13%). The trend line toward inclusion is clear. Indeed it appears that by the turn of the twenty-first century it was virtually *de rigueur* for money to depict at least one female non-state historical or cultural figure. This was the case in Austria, Denmark, East Germany, France, reunified Germany, Great Britain, Ireland, Italy, Spain, and Sweden. Germany even featured women on four of the seven banknotes of its *deutsche mark* series issued in 1989.

The impact of feminism on European currency since 1980 shows that iconographic evolution had been continuing right up to the introduction of the euro. Indeed, below I argue that one can make a strong case for understanding the euro banknotes as a yet further evolution, one that seemingly pushes beyond the merely "postmaterialist" toward the "postmodern."

The Message of the Euro

In some respects the euro banknotes offer quite conventional identity symbolism. For instance, the circle of stars from the European flag appears on both sides of each banknote. On the back of the notes there is also that typical identity marker, a map—depicting Western and Central Europe (notably with vague boundaries on the east, but clearly demarcated boundaries to the south). Also, the very name of the money, "euro"—featured prominently on both front and back—has self-evident identity resonance.

But in other important respects, the euro banknotes' iconography is very different from that of most other currencies. Most strikingly, they feature no human figures at all. Moreover, the euro banknotes show ideal-typical—not actual—examples of styles from different chronological eras in European architectural history. On the front we find ideal-typical representations of windows, archways, and doors. According to the European Central Bank (ECB) website, these symbolize "the European spirit of openness and cooperation."

In several respects, then, the euro represents a clear departure from the iconography of most current national currencies. How can we understand it? One obvious hypothesis is Zakaria's "Money for Mars" idea: that unlike national banknotes, the euro's iconography means absolutely nothing—and that this was no accident. To explain the euro's supposed meaninglessness, some have pointed to the absence of truly European collective memories or *lieux de mémoire* (Gillard 1999). But this purely cultural argument is weak, for it is important to recall that there were no truly national collective memories before the creation of nation-states. Just as preexisting cultural material, such as the Joan of Arc story, became "nationalized" with the rise of the nation-state, so too could they today be "Europeanized." Thus, other observers, more plausibly, have claimed that the problem is more political than cultural, as European nation-states proved unwilling to allow the EU to compete overtly with them for citizens' loyalties (Helletner 2002; Cohen 1998). To borrow from the jargon of EU studies, one might call this the "intergovernmentalist" hypothesis (Moravcsik 1998).

But there is also another plausible way to interpret the euro's iconography, which sees the euro as a further step down the same iconographic road the national currencies had been traveling—one, therefore, that reflects the general European zeitgeist more than the particularity of the EU as an international institution issuing its own money. Indeed, judging from the pattern of the past, European currency iconography was ripe or even overdue for a substantial shift to a new equilibrium.

Commentators from different political persuasions have noted that Europe appears to be embracing a "postmodern" vision of its future (see, for instance, Kagan 2004; Cooper 2004). A simple extension of the Meyer-Inglehart perspective would expect that Europe's new, postmodern vision should be accompanied by a new, postmodern currency iconography. Just what "postmodernism" is, of course, is a hotly contested and still evolving notion. Inglehart, for instance, is ambiguous about whether postmaterialist and postmodern goals are the same. Nevertheless, it is possible to delineate some of the broad outlines of postmodern thought (Bauman 2002; McHale 1987). What, then, might a postmodern banknote look like? For starters, it certainly would not celebrate "Great Men

and Masterpieces" of culture or anything else. Moreover, the contemporary twist of replacing the "Great Men" with "Great Women" seems little more than a variation on a theme. For the new era is calling into question the whole notion of ranking artists and cultural emanations as "high" or "low" (Peterson and Kern 1996). Thus, authors of children's literature are today deemed as worthy of our respect as the masters of the sonnet. But even to celebrate "lowbrow" authors on banknotes would be somewhat antithetical to the new ethos, for to celebrate some means not celebrating others, and the postmodern perspective strongly rejects any standardized metric for talent or mastery. Given this, a postmodern currency iconography would probably abandon the celebratory banknote altogether. Indeed, it might even go further and abandon the past practice of transmitting *any* literal, unmistakable message. Abstraction gives the consumer room for personal interpretation, and this is in line with the postmodern rejection of cultural "author/ity" in favor of a radical democratic vision of author and reader jointly producing the meaning of "text." Karen Cerulo has found such a trend toward abstraction in her study of national flags and anthems (Cerulo 1995).

Like it or not, it is this postmodern ideational context in which European identity entrepreneurs have to operate as they pursue their dream of constructing a European "demos." Indeed, not only the EU, but also nation-states eager to retain their own relevance are faced with the difficulty of adjusting their discourse to the new, postmodern era (Soysal 1994). In terms of banknotes, the Netherlands offers one clear example of a postmodern European national currency iconography. Until the 1920s, Dutch gulden offered the typical diet of Mercury, Minerva, and women swathed in flowing robes. In the 1920s these classical images began to cede their place to political and social figures such as Queen Emma, a Zeeland farmer's wife, and Rembrandt's portraits of burghers. In the 1950s cultural figures came into vogue, and banknotes now pictured Rembrandt himself, Erasmus, Grotius, and others. But then, in the late 1970s, rather than simply updating these images by introducing popular or female cultural figures as other European currencies did, the Dutch made a radical choice: they issued a series of notes with *natural*, not human figures. So the 50-gulden banknote featured sunflowers (not the national flower, which is the tulip); the 100-gulden banknote featured a water-snipe bird (not the national bird, which is the stork); and the 250-gulden banknote featured a lighthouse (not a windmill). Thus the Dutch retired the notion of the "celebratory" banknote. Then, beginning in 1989, the Dutch moved in an even more radical direction. A new banknote issue banished *all* figurative representation in favor of a complex set of abstract geometric designs. With these banknotes, the postmodern spirit was

definitively in place. In sum, the Dutch example provides important contextualization for understanding the euro. In particular, it substantially weakens the notion that the euro's iconographic difference necessarily signals iconographic emptiness.

It is true that the euro's design is much less bold than its Dutch cousin. The officially sanctioned values messages of the euro banknotes are plain vanilla versions of emerging contemporary values: diversity, represented by the various "ages and styles of Europe"; transparency, represented by windows; and communication, cooperation, and a forward-looking spirit, represented by doors and bridges. In some ways, the euro banknotes are even downright modernist: they represent human constructions, rather than natural scenes or abstract shapes—and these constructions are arranged in a quite literal hierarchy of worth from the oldest structures (the 5-euro banknotes) to the newest (the 500-euro banknotes). However, the images depict not man's triumph over nature, but harmony between the man-made and natural worlds: the doors and windows provide a frame for natural sunlight; the bridges and their reflections in the placid water beneath form perfect circles. There is a clear family resemblance between such images and the lighthouses featured on the recent Dutch 250-gulden banknotes.

More subtly, precisely the same aspects of the euro banknotes that the "Money for Mars" perspective scoffs at, the postmodern perspective embraces. The choice to obscure any original models there may have been for the depicted structures is clearly in tune with the current tendency to reject the old "masters and masterpieces" approach to culture. If life is about the quality of experience, then whereas a depiction of the Eiffel Tower would suggest the superiority of the quality of life of Parisians, the depiction of relatively unremarkable structures suggests the inherent worth of everyone's life experience. In short, the iconography of the euro can be understood as reflecting the highly egalitarian idea that Europe is all around us—but is nowhere in particular. Alexandre Lamfalussy, former president of the European Monetary Institute, has himself echoed these points:

In Dublin . . . which is the outside north-western edge of Europe by whatever definition you take, look around and you will find at least four or five of these styles at every street corner. And then take all or any of the other member countries and you will find exactly the same thing. Now there is a European identity, but that doesn't mean that you have to stick it to a specific monument that is a symbol of everything. (Lamfalussy, quoted in Barker-Aguilar 2002, 89)

The second subtly postmodern aspect of the euro is the choice not to depict human figures. In their place on the front of the banknotes stand open doors and windows with sunlight shimmering through them. This imagery clearly intends to draw the viewer into the image and, symbolically, into Europe. Thus, although the scenes do not literally contain human figures, in fact they invite the holder of the banknotes to picture himself or herself as part of the scene. In this way the "people-less" euro banknotes can in fact be seen as a further step toward the ordinary individual as the locus of social actorhood. Parenthetically, this postmodern evolution has already been taken to its logical extreme by the artist and provocateur J.S.G. Boggs, who draws extremely convincing renditions of banknotes with his own face on them—then uses them as a medium of exchange (see Wechsler 1999).

Of course, the ultimate test of the degree to which the euro's iconographic choices are in tune with the contemporary zeitgeist lies in the marketplace. Later in the chapter I will discuss the European public's strongly favorable reaction to the new euro banknotes. Another important marketplace, as stressed above, is in the international society of states. In this arena, too, the euro's new iconography has already won some converts. Bosnia and Herzegovina, for instance, has retained the designer of the euro notes, Robert Kalina of the Austrian National Bank, to develop their new banknote series. The first banknote he produced, the 200-KM (*konvertibilna marka*) note, features the Nobel prize-winning author Ivo Andrić on its face, and an arch bridge that featured prominently in one of Andrić's novels on its reverse. The resemblance between the (people-less) Bosnian arch bridge and those featured on the euro banknotes is striking. Launching the new banknote on May 15, 2002, the Bosnian central bank governor Peter Nicholl explicitly stated that the new KM design is hardly accidental and in fact signifies Bosnia's desire to create a currency "with strong links to the euro" (Central Bank of Bosnia and Herzegovina 2002). In short, the euro's initial reception both inside and outside the EU gives reason to believe that the euro's iconographic choices will prove to have been harbingers of the future, rather than anomalous deviations from overall historical trends.

European national currency iconography since the nineteenth century has reflected broad cultural shifts in the perceived locus of actorhood and in the nature of life goals. In stark contrast to the American dollar, for instance, European banknotes have not merely offered a long procession of national leaders. Even so, the euro's iconography does not simply repeat the celebration of cultural contributors that had become standard for recent European national banknote issues. Therefore it is possible to argue, as several commentators have done, that the euro's iconography is a historical aberration resulting from the unique political problems facing a supranational currency. But the study of Eu-

ropean banknotes gives reason also to entertain an alternative perspective—that the euro's iconography represents a further evolution in line with historical trends, and that in particular it can be seen as part of European society's evolution toward a postmodern sensibility. Of course, these two interpretations need not be entirely at odds; indeed, as the next section on the process of designing the euro will demonstrate, certain particularities of the EU institutional framework actually proved conducive to the euro's making a progressive iconographic statement.

The Euro Design Process

This section investigates how Europe went about the task of designing the euro banknotes. The analysis in this section generally supports the notion that the euro reflects the ongoing European cultural shift toward postmodernism. The uniqueness of EU politics certainly mattered to this outcome, but not in the way that most commentators assume. Far from producing a euro "denuded" of meaning, the EU's atypical institutional configuration actually lent itself to the creation of a new currency iconography in tune with emerging contemporary attitudes.

The euro design process occurred in four primary phases, beginning in 1992 and concluding with the final selection of the euro designs by the European Monetary Institute (EMI) Council on December 3, 1996. First, the EMI's Working Group on Printing and Issuing a European Banknote, comprised of the chief cashiers and managers of the printworks of each of the national central banks, developed the basic design framework. Second, the EMI launched a competition among experienced banknote designers, and a jury of independent design experts short-listed ten of these proposals. Third, an EOS Gallup marketing survey in each of the member states tested public receptiveness to the short-listed designs. Fourth, the EMI Council made the final selection. The middle two steps in particular were rather unusual for a banknote design process, and they had a major impact on the final appearance of the euro banknotes. This section reviews each of these phases in turn, paying close attention to the implications of the process for the evaluation of the competing hypotheses mentioned above.

Phase 1: The Bankers

There can be no doubt that national central banks played a key role in the euro banknote design process. Their evident importance suggests that there is more than a little truth to the accusation that the euro notes "look like money

designed by a committee of bankers" (Hayter 2001). But in fact, the choices the bankers made were both directly and indirectly affected by the cultural zeitgeist. Moreover, the unique institutional features of the EU opened much more space for input from outside the confines of the banks than had been typical of national banknote design processes.

Article 105a of the Maastricht Treaty assigned the ECB exclusive control over the emission of euro banknotes.² But long before the ECB came into existence, in 1992 representatives of the national central banks formed the Working Group on Printing and Issuing a European Banknote. The ECB only took over its functions in 1998, more than a year after the banknote designs had been chosen. Ironically, the president of the Working Group for its entire existence was from the Bank of England.

As previously mentioned, one plausible hypothesis for the "look" of the euro is that the member states, while admitting the material benefits of Europe, were reticent to allow it to compete with them for the emotional loyalty of the masses. The centrality of the national central banks in this process certainly did infuse a good deal of national sensibilities into the debates over the euro's iconography. But it would be easy to exaggerate the strength of the bankers' national sentiments as opposed to other concerns. For one thing, according to this logic one might have expected an insistence that euro notes retain *national* symbolism. But the mere cost of returning used banknotes to their original issuer for destruction and reprinting was enough to convince the EMU participants, with the notable exception of Great Britain, to prefer a wholly "European" design (Mori 2000, 40–44).³

In addition to rejecting the idea of maintaining national symbolism on the euro, the EMI governors specifically requested that the Working Group, in the words of its chairman Alex Jarvis, "get something that captured what Europe was all about" (interview with author). To this end, the group, assisted by a panel of experts in design and art history, considered many possible design themes. Themes considered included classical symbols of Europe such as, for instance, the mythological bull that carried Europa across the Bosphorus straits (Vigna 1996), and political symbols of Europe such as the founding fathers of the European Community (Mori 2000). Soon, however, the group settled on the theme of European cultural contributors. It is significant that the Working Group could quickly agree on the superiority of depicting non-state individuals who had made cultural contributions—the very sort of postmaterialist, individualist iconography that had become standard for European national currencies. It is clear that the Working Group members saw this as a comfortable choice in tune with the times, while for instance Europa and her bull were not

But it subsequently failed to draw up a universally acceptable set of artists and scientists, and the reasons for this failure are very instructive.

First, the group found itself stymied by the problem of "national bias." For example, to honor Cervantes as a great "European" novelist could be interpreted as favoritism toward Spain. This is precisely the kind of problem of EU decision making that "intergovernmentalist" hypotheses foreground. But "national bias" was not the only identity minefield awaiting the Working Group. Shakespeare, for instance, was ruled out because his play, *The Merchant of Venice*, was deemed anti-Semitic. Mozart suffered a similar fate because of his Masonic leanings, evident in *The Magic Flute*. And Leonardo da Vinci was mixed because of fears that some would object to his purported homosexuality. Second, the group found its task further complicated by the perceived need to accord equal pride of place to women and men. Because of these difficulties, the group ended up reluctantly abandoning the goal of producing euro banknotes featuring "European" cultural icons (see Mori 2000, 47–51).

Thus, rather than interpreting the absence of Mozart, Leonardo, and Shakespeare as simply the sorry consequence of the stranglehold of self-regarding nation-states over the euro design process, it is more accurate to view their absence as the product of a more general desire to avoid offending any significant segment of the European public. This desire, which some might term "political correctness," is a contemporary reality for national authorities as well as those in Brussels and Frankfurt. Indeed, in the mid-1990s even the Banque de France pulled a planned 100-franc banknote featuring the Lumière brothers, after it objected that they had supported Vichy. The note ended up featuring Paul Cézanne—but not before the bank had to discard Henri Matisse as well, after it was pointed out that he had always opposed the very concept of money (BBC News 2000). In short, the difficulties encountered by the Working Group represented a mere amplification of the experiences of decision makers at every level of governance in Europe today.

With its initial preference for cultural heroes stymied, the Working Group with help from external experts proposed six broad design themes to the EMI Council, which in turn approved two of them: "ages and styles of Europe" and "abstract/modern." The rejected themes included "European flora and fauna" and "European technological development" (Jarvis interview). Reflecting the difficulty that the Working Group had had in choosing one or another concrete European symbol, the design briefs for both of these themes were very broad. The "abstract/modern" theme was left almost completely unspecified. Meanwhile, the "ages and styles" theme also gave designers free rein, apart from the EMI's insistence that neither the depicted architectural features nor the people

be identifiable, and also that there be equal numbers of females and males (Mori 2000). The loose definition of these two themes, a product of the bankers' inability to reach a consensus among themselves, opened up the process to a significant input from the designers' own sensibilities. Indeed, the paradoxically progressive effects of the EU's institutional weakness are a constant theme of this process-tracing analysis.

After choosing the two themes, the EMI then organized a competition among experienced banknote designers—mostly employees of the national central banks—which began in February 1996 (European Monetary Institute 1997). The design competition was a crucial innovation of the euro banknote design process, as compared with the national banks' in-house design processes. Though clearly the rationale for the competition lay in institutional realities—the absence of a central EMI banknote design staff, and the existence of multiple national banks each with its own in-house designers—the competition had the effect of confronting the EMI with a whole spectrum of visions of Europe, many of which were far more adventurous than the bankers could have conceived.

In sum, while the Working Group was already somewhat attuned to the spirit of the times, the EU's unique institutional features led the bankers to give freer rein to the naturally much more progressive-minded designers.

Phase 2: The Designers

In December 1996 the graphic designer Robert Kalina of the Austrian National Bank was named the winner of the euro banknote competition.⁴ His design was chosen from the original forty-four design proposals submitted to the competition jury. The statements of both Kalina and his peers on the jury strongly reinforced the notion that the euro's iconography reflects a moderate postmodern sensibility.

As noted earlier, Kalina's bridges and open doors and windows officially symbolize European openness, cooperation, and communication—values clearly in line with the contemporary zeitgeist. In fact many of the proposed designs explicitly embraced similar ideas, but the jurors and the EMI governors particularly appreciated the clear, simple, "almost naïve" symbolic language that Kalina employed to express them (Jarvis interview).

In press interviews, Kalina also voiced the more subtly postmodern interpretations of the euro banknotes that were outlined above. First, he emphasized his desire to depict a Europe that is all around us, but nowhere in particular. As he put it to one journalist, "The idea was to create a feeling of commonality, of belonging. I worked hard so that either an Italian or a Frenchman could look at

the Gothic windows on the 20 and say, 'That could be here in France,' or 'That could be here in Italy.' It was very difficult to make each universal" (Schmid 2001). Second, Kalina underscored the novelty of his decision to do without human figures. He stressed that the much-remarked absence of any human figures on the euro banknotes was his choice, not the bankers': "In my view, anonymous portraits would be senseless and without value, so I chose to use none at all" (Caspar 2001). The bankers might have been content to return to the stereotyped images of happy workers and peasants that had graced mid-century banknotes; but the designer, with his keen sense of contemporary tastes, refused to indulge them.

Kalina's design was only one of dozens of design proposals that were submitted to the euro competition, and as noted above, many of these proposals sounded similar notes. So why was Kalina's proposal selected over all the others? To answer this question, we need first to take a close look at the competition jury. This jury was formed because, faced with forty-four design proposals, the bankers recognized that they needed help. Therefore, they recruited a jury of independent design experts to produce a short list of successful designs. The existence of this jury was another institutional innovation that nudged the euro's iconography in a progressive direction.

Each national central bank (except Denmark's, which had opted out of EMU) nominated three jurors, and the EMI chose one of the three. The result was a group of fourteen jurors that struck a balance between eminent graphic designers, advertising and marketing executives, and scholars of art history, communications, and psychology (European Monetary Institute 1997). The jurors were not Brussels or Frankfurt insiders and moreover were generally strangers to each other. This was not a rubber-stamp mechanism.

The jury met at the EMI in Frankfurt for two days in September 1996, in conditions so secretive that one juror felt he was under "high surveillance" (Caron 2002). Three representatives of the EMI were also present, but they did not have a vote. Indeed, one juror was very critical of the EMI's hands-off approach, which he felt had led to chaotic proceedings. The jury's instructions were to draw up two short lists: five of the twenty-seven submissions under the "ages and styles" theme, and five of the seventeen submissions under the "abstract/modern" theme. The national provenance of the submissions was not divulged to the jury, and indeed all the jurors I spoke with said they really could not discern it. As the British juror Nicholas Butler put it, "Design is an international language." The official criteria for selection were "creativity, aesthetics, style, functionality, likely public perception, and acceptability (in particular the avoidance of any national bias and the achievement of a proper balance

between the number of men and the number of women)" (European Monetary Institute 1997). Most of the jurors I interviewed indicated that they had looked for designs that were both pleasing to them and that they felt most people would like, rather than searching (as the bankers had) for a design that they felt few people would dislike. Here again, the institutional process pushed the euro's iconography beyond where it might have gone if the issue had been solely left up to the bankers.

Different jurors offer different accounts of precisely what went on in the jury chamber, but the overall outlines of the story are clear. The primary cleavage in the jury was between what can be termed a progressive or postmodern viewpoint, and a conservative or postmaterialist viewpoint. The postmodern viewpoint was generally espoused most strongly by the jurors who were also working designers. These jurors—along with much of the design community they inhabit—considered the Dutch banknote designs as ideal, and they tended to envision something similar for the euro (for one paean to the Dutch banknotes, see Quinlan 2001). As the French juror and designer Gérard Caron has written:

My choice had at first been for proposals that were really original. Certain proposals were veritable revolutions in numismatic art: abundance of colors, original and daring page layouts—especially in the 'abstract/modern art' theme. Then Europe would really have made a statement and there would have been a "before" and an "after" the euro in the world of banknotes. The dollar itself would have appeared as a note from an 'old continent'! The choice would have been audacious, courageous. (Caron 2002)

If Zakaria cannot even believe that the Kalina banknotes are from this planet, one wonders to what galaxy he would ascribe Caron's first preference. As Caron makes clear, to contemporary designers abstraction is anything but a safe choice devoid of meaning. Much of the design community actually holds a strong preference for abstraction. As one of the more eminent designers on the jury told me, "I don't like the idea of having people [on banknotes]. It's too traditional . . . really old-fashioned." This juror did appreciate the symbolism of Kalina's banknotes, in general finding them "in between—not modern and not traditional." But he would have strongly preferred a "more advanced" design such as that which appears on the Dutch notes—a design that, in his view, Europeans could "be proud of."

A smaller group of jurors, however, was definitely not swept away by the idea of fomenting a "revolution in numismatic art." The Italian juror and nu-

mismatist Guido Crapanzano, for instance, endorsed a design proposal that featured a series of idealized historical personages including children—and probably would have preferred a banknote series celebrating identifiable European cultural heroes if that had been permitted (Vigna 1996). But Crapanzano knew he was swimming against the tide, not only of the jury room but also of contemporary history. For in his opinion the general quality of banknote design has been declining for two decades now, as designers have implemented their preference for the "new" at the expense of "tradition." In particular, he told me bluntly with respect to Dutch money, "as banknotes (these are very bad."

Faced with this struggle between the progressive/postmodern and conservative/postmaterialist camps, several jurors—notably some from the field of advertising and marketing—sought to fashion a compromise position. They found it in the moderate postmodernism of the Kalina notes, as well as other submissions with a similar tone.³ From the designers' perspective, the Kalina notes were certainly far from ideal, and indeed they even had some basic technical flaws (Aasvestad 1999). But marketing and communications experts such as the Austrian juror Angelika Trachtenberg stressed the effectiveness of the Kalina banknotes' symbolism and disagreed with the designers' belief that the public was ready to accept something much more unfamiliar and abstract. Caron eventually accepted the compromise and has praised the banknotes as easy to use, as symbolically universal, and as stylistically relatively progressive (Caron 2002). On the other side, Crapanzano still refused to endorse the compromise, because he felt even the Kalina banknotes were too infused with the cult of "newness" to suggest real value, calling them "paper, not money."

Thus, in the end, because the EMI had to hold a competition among designers, and because in addition it chose to recruit designers to appraise the proposals, it simply could not avoid a dose—however tentative and watered down—of the international design community's postmodern sensibility. This is how the Kalina banknotes, and others sharing that overall normative thrust, were chosen for the next test, a "public consultation survey" conducted by the EOS Gallup organization.

Phase 3: The Marketing Survey

The consultation of public opinion was yet another way in which the EMI attempted to ensure that the euro banknotes would capture the spirit of the times, and another way in which the euro design process was clearly more open to outside input than typical national processes (though, interestingly, the Dutch central bank also relied on opinion surveys; see de Heij 2002). The Working Group

entrusted the EOS Gallup organization with the task of gauging the reactions of both ordinary people and "professional cash handlers (e.g., bank cashiers, retailers, taxi drivers)" to the short list of designs. The survey took place in October 1996 in all EU countries except Denmark (European Monetary Institute 1997).

A Princeton University student, Alicia Barker-Aguilar, obtained a copy of the final report on the survey and passed it along to me (EOS Gallup 1996). The report studies the cognitive perception, emotional impact, European identity evocation, and overall acceptability of the various proposed banknote series. Overall, the European public strongly preferred the "ages and styles" theme to the "abstract/modern" theme; 53 to 28 percent, respectively, with 15 percent feeling both were appropriate and 3 percent feeling both were inappropriate. Moreover, all national samples except those of Luxembourg and Austria strongly preferred the "ages and styles" theme. This finding tends to confirm what the marketing experts on the jury had argued—that the avant-garde tendencies of the designers were too far in advance of public tastes.⁶ Among the five "ages and styles" entrants, design option "B" (which was the Kalina design) was preferred overall, and it was among the two top choices in every national sample (EOS Gallup 1996).⁷ The respondents particularly appreciated the Kalina design's "evocation" of Europe; 76 percent of respondents felt that it successfully evoked Europe as a whole. This was a substantially higher score than any other design proposal: the three next banknote series on this dimension scored, respectively, 71, 65, and 60 percent. It should be noted, however, that the Kalina banknotes were not the overall public favorite. When all ten banknote series were considered together, there was one "abstract/modern" proposal—proposal "G"—that scored substantially higher than the Kalina proposal: 35 to 23 percent overall. This design (whose exact form I have not yet identified) was also among the top two preferred designs in every survey country, whereas the Kalina design was among the top two in only eight of the fourteen. The third-place design was among the top two in six of the fourteen. This finding suggests that the public might in fact have been able to stomach a design more adventurous than the one the bankers ended up choosing. But because of the strong general public preference for the "ages and styles" theme, it cannot be said that the EMI Council refused to endorse the public's will.

Phase 4: Final Selection and Rollout

As indicated above, the final selection of the winning design was a matter for the EMI Council to decide. Indeed, throughout this entire process, the EMI Council

had been careful not to commit itself to endorsing the end result. So, when the culminating meeting took place in December 1996, the Council was provided with not only the ten short-listed designs and the ratings of those designs by the jury, the public, and the Working Group, but also with all the forty-four originally proposed designs. The EMI's governors therefore were in a position to undo all the work of the jurors and the pollsters, and instead to pick something to their liking. But although the governors had this power, they did not use it. The whole affair went remarkably smoothly. Part of the reason for this was that the governors themselves generally liked the Kalina design, though in fact they liked many of the designs. More important, however, they were convinced to endorse it by the evidence of favorable ratings from the jury, the technical experts, and the public. Indeed, even those few governors who were not pleased by the Kalina entry were won over by the favorable reports of the pollsters. Thus, in the formal vote almost all of the EMI governors placed Kalina's design either first or second on their ballots, with only one or two placing it third (Alexandre Lamfalussy, quoted in Barker-Aguilar 2003).

Upon making this decision, the governors communicated it to the Euro-peak Council that was meeting in Dublin at the time—a matter of politeness, given the ECB's treaty mandate over the production of banknotes. The European Council expressed its appreciation, and it urged the EMI to release the draft designs to the public. As then-EMI Secretary-General Hanspeter K. Scheller recalls, technical banknote experts had been worried that an early release of the draft designs would give the counterfeiters a head start, but the EMI "was also sensitive to the wish to inform the general public at an early stage, with a view to giving some visible substance to the preparation for a single currency." So it released the draft designs, minus their security features. The marketing of the euro—and of Europe—had begun.⁸

In summary, the Banknote Working Group organized a process that represented a significant departure from the typically musily practices of national banknote design. Although banknotes have always reflected the spirit of the times, the unique features of the euro design process—the design competition, the independent jury, the measuring of public opinion—help explain why the euro pushed the iconographic envelope more than most national currencies had. In short, the EU's institutional weakness actually helped it to latch on to the new cultural wave.

Of course, the euro could have made a much bolder statement. The Kalina design was merely halfway along the spectrum from postmaterialist to postmodern. If done right, a bolder statement might even have been popular with the mass public, as the EOS Gallup surveys discovered. Perhaps we can expect

the next series of euro banknotes to move in that direction. Of course, there are still some individuals, not least in the ECB itself, who hope that Europe will be (in their view) "brave" enough to celebrate historical personages on the next series of euro banknotes. But the process taught Working Group chairman Alex Jarvis, for one, that the traditional masters and masterpieces motif—his initial preference—may well not be the one most suited for our time. Jarvis has come to appreciate the value of what he calls "a note for the people, of the people," and he is convinced that if the next euro design process is at least as open to outside voices as the last one was, the euro will continue in a progressive iconographic direction. Indeed, Jarvis hopes the ECB will institutionalize regular consultation with members of the public on what designs and themes they would like to see on future euro banknotes.

One measure of the ECB's continuing commitment to transparency on this issue is a traveling exhibition displaying all the submissions to the euro design competition, which first opened at the ECB building in Frankfurt in September 2003. Holding such an exhibition of rejected banknote designs is rare, and it is certainly rare that it would occur so soon after the actual banknotes were released. The mounting of the exhibition clearly reflects the ECB's confidence that it organized and managed the competition fairly and well. But on a deeper level, the exhibition itself can be seen as part of the postmodern message of the euro. As suggested previously, a postmodern currency iconography would not instruct the citizenry in one "correct" way of envisioning their collective identity, but would rather open space for each of them to envision it as he or she pleases. The exhibition does just that, introducing multiple visions of Europe for the viewer to ponder. And it does more: it introduces the viewer to the philosophical notion that Europe can mean different things to different people, and indeed that its plasticity may well be its greatest strength.

Implications

This chapter has offered a two-tiered, macro- and micro-historical explanation for why and how the euro came to look as it does. First, on the level of macro-historical trends, I have argued that the euro's iconography can be understood as the logical next step in the secular trends of banknote design over the past century. These trends can be summarized succinctly as moving along two axes: the perceived locus of social actorhood, and the perceived nature of life goals. The perceived locus of actorhood has shifted over time from the state, to society, to the individual; the perceived nature of goals has shifted over time from tra-

ditional, to materialist, to postmaterialist. Careful consideration of the euro's iconography suggests a further push beyond these, to a postmodern sensibility that departs from the by-now stale celebration of cultural "masters and masterpieces." Second, on the level of micro-historical process tracing, I have argued that a complex interaction between bankers, designers, and the mass public produced this postmodern iconographic tilt. The bankers, though certainly not cultural Neanderthals, might well have preferred a euro that resembled the French franc or the German deutsche mark. But the weakness of EU institutions led them to adopt a euro design process that was much more responsive to the concerns of outside interest groups, the design community, and the mass public than had been typical of the national banks. Thus the EU's institutional weakness paradoxically became political strength. The euro banknotes that it produced are less money for Mars than they are money for the twenty-first century.

What are the implications of this case for the general effort to sell the notion of a European identity to the mass of citizens? The attempt to promote a more emotional identity tie to Europe has generally been met with skepticism among academic commentators, at least for the short to medium term (see, e.g., Smith 1992; Cederman 2001; Kaelberer 2004). Clearly, the euro's iconography can make only a minor difference toward this end. But on the other hand, the fact that the EU was able to agree on a relatively progressive iconographic statement that found broad public favor suggests that the general academic skepticism about the European identity project may be ill-founded.

The roots of this skepticism can, in many cases, be located in certain generic assumptions about the nature of collective identities. Among these assumptions are the following: that identities emerge and evolve gradually over time; that the values associated with identities in different nations differ profoundly; and that identification with one collectivity precludes identification with others (for more on this, see Hymans 2004). But in the case of European currency iconography, rather than slow secular evolution, we find punctuated equilibrium. Rather than deep-rooted national differences, we find rapid international diffusion of iconographic norms. And rather than nations jealously preventing any affective appeals by the EU, we find them encouraging such appeals. The evidence of this case is thus quite discordant with the typical assumptions about collective identities. Perhaps the patterns found in this case are anomalous; or perhaps they are representative of more general truths about the nature of collective identities in Europe. But even though the findings at this stage are limited to the case of currency, they bode well for the future of the euro, already the primary symbol of the nascent European imagined community.

NOTES

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1. In the data set, 1,174 of 1,368 banknotes feature at least one human figure for a total of 1,409 figures. The banknotes without human figures mainly fall into one of three exceptional categories: the period before 1920 when banknote printing was still in its infancy, hyperinflationary periods when there was no time for careful attention to banknote design, or when there were very small denominations, which did not require the anti-counterfeiting protection that human portraits historically provided. Obviously the euro banknotes do not fall into any of these categories, yet they too are devoid of human figures, and so this is a major puzzle to be explained.

2. Euro coins, by contrast, remain the province of the national mints. This different institutional configuration produced somewhat different iconographic results. This chapter does not cover the issue of coin iconography. For a quite thorough official description of the euro coin design process, see European Commission (2000). One attempt to get behind the scenes of the coin design issue is Barker-Aguilar (2003).

3. Britain made its participation in EMU contingent on the possibility of retaining a portrait of the Queen. So 20 percent of the banknotes' surface area was reserved for a "national feature." But when the likelihood of British participation faded, so too did the "national feature." There is, however, still space to add such a feature if the British ever changed their minds about EMU (Mori 2000).

4. The Working Group might have worried about the "national bias" involved in selecting banknotes drawn up by a designer of one nationality; Austrians, proud of the victory by their favorite son, have taken to calling their euros "Kalinás" (Deutsche Welle 2001).

5. It is interesting that the jury appears to have preferred to short-list designs from a narrow band along the conservative-progressive continuum, instead of trying to select the best designs from different points along that continuum. In essence, it was maximizing the power with which it had been entrusted, while minimizing the significance of the public opinion survey that was to follow it.

6. Indeed, when polled by the Dutch national bank, even the famously progressive Dutch public has indicated its general preference for the environmental themes of the 1970s Dutch guilder banknotes over their more starkly geometric 1990s replacements (de Heij 2002).

7. Note that the various series are simply identified by a letter of the alphabet, but information gleaned from interviews and deductive logic indicate that option "B" was the Kalina design.

8. After the designs' selection, they underwent substantial revision. Some of the more contentious issues revolved around the inclusion or not of small islands—as well as overseas French *départements*—on the European map, and the recognition that some of Kalina's "ideal-typical" bridges and doorways actually had real models and therefore had to be changed. But these are details that hardly any consumer would notice.