



Eurozine Editorial

Europe talks to Europe: Towards a European public sphere?

Introduction

The European integration project has made the discussion about transnational spaces for cultural and political debate acute. Can there at all be a common Europe without a pan-European public sphere, where potentially common values and ideas can be formed and transnational political institutions can find their legitimacy?

The public space or sphere, *die Öffentlichkeit*, is by no means constituted by media alone, but newspapers, journals, television, and radio (digital or not) are among its most important manifestations. In this context, the lack of a European public space is manifest. Not so long ago, Timothy Garton Ash confessed that if he wants to reach "the widest European intellectual audience, the best way is to write an essay in the *New York Review of Books*." Is this the only option?

This focal point draws heavily upon talks and lectures held at the 17th Meeting of Cultural Journals, which took place in Tallinn, Estonia, in May 2004. The title of this conference was "[The Republic of Letters? Cultural Journals in a European Public Space](#)". The ideal of a "transgressive", intellectual media space is clearly visible in the everyday practice of today's cultural journals. Here, political, philosophical, and aesthetic ideas are spread from language to language, within and without transnational publicistic networks. However, their insight might be great and their outlook wide, yet cultural journals are small. They constitute an important (counter)part of the public sphere, but they are too limited in outreach to form the broad and solid basis of a discursive space in which a European identity can emerge or be constructed. Or are they not? Is there really an in-built conflict between main-stream media and cultural journals or are there opportunities for cooperation? How can transnational media contribute to the construction of a public space that crosses national borders, and more specifically, what role do the cultural journals have in this context? What role could or should they play? Do we need new forms of internationally launched media or is it rather the established national ones that are best suited to build the basis for a transnational space for aesthetic, cultural, and political debate? Finally, what can we learn from historic and contemporary attempts to create transnational cultural forums?

These are all questions that in one form or the other are touched upon in the contributions from the *Eurozine* conference as well as in the additional articles included in this section. No common language, no common history, no common experience, says the sceptic. How could anything common come out of that? On the other hand, asks the optimist, hasn't Europe always constituted a common space for communication and debate — at least since the Enlightenment? Problems and deficits, but also possibilities...

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