

Imaginez-vous!

As a visible post-WWII 'product' in my sixties, I was sitting there slightly nervous in my chair. It was a public debate in Amsterdam about the 'lost generation'. On stage, a panel of students – all in their twenties – from the Netherlands and other European countries. 'What do we have ahead of us?' asked one, answering: 'Unemployment, crisis, no future!' 'Look at the baby boomers,' added another; 'they have built a welfare society for themselves, and now they are leaving with their golden pensions.' That was the tone of the whole evening.

Contradictory feelings were growing in me. On the one hand, a sense of guilt: facing such an opaque future is not enviable; and we who have been the generation of good fortune – growth, employment, even the 'revamping' in the 70s of our old conservative societies – what do we leave behind? On the other hand, slightly aggressive unease: these were all privileged young people on stage, profiting from Europe and its open borders, from Erasmus and other EU programmes, from the digital revolution.... Why this suffocating atmosphere of powerlessness? *Indignados de luxe*, I thought, trying to comfort myself.

The oxygen came from the generation in-between. 'Stop complaining,' said one man in his forties. 'Create your new utopia. You will never succeed if you think the future in the same terms and models as the past. You have huge challenges? But also new instruments. Use the crisis for change. It is not their, it is your future!'

That was the closing address.

Cycling back home, I could not help remembering some graffiti on a wall in the Latin Quarter of Paris from May 68: *Cours, cours camarade, le vieux monde est derrière toi!* (Run, run, chap, the old world is behind you!).

Yes, we are leaving the old Europe behind us, the Europe of the founding fathers, the Europe of *plus jamais ça*, the Europe of the Berlin wall falling down, the Europe of enlargement.... We are now in a Europe reduced to the euro, a rudderless ship tossed by the waves; a Europe left in bankers' hands, and paralysed by fear.

But if the old world is behind us, there should be a new world somewhere! Can Europe become a new world again, or at least part of it? And what do we want to take with us from the old world?

It is interesting to observe the huge quantity of excellent papers from journalists and political scientists of all types of plumage, analysing endlessly the shortcomings of the EU and the dramatic situation of Europe at large. And then compare this with the very, very few attempts to project into future, to point out possible changes, solutions, ways out. After many long pages commenting on the European disarray, most articles conclude abruptly with a sentence or two about the need for 'new imagination'. That's it!

Then let's go ahead – let's look for new imagination. There are imaginative people even in an old continent: in cities, in universities, in art spaces, in networks and various media; and, yes, even in European institutions. Let's open spaces for the voices of imagination to meet.

That's the ambition of this 'Narratives for Europe' site; that's our tiny contribution to Europe's difficult move into the future. After a few months of experimental and discrete running, the site will start afresh – 'revamped', even – at the very beginning of 2012. A new look, a new dynamic, new narratives.

Indignez-vous! declares the 93-year-old Stephane Hessel in a pamphlet that has become a bestseller throughout Europe. Yes! And also: Imaginez-vous!

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