

ARTISTS:
PERJOVSCHI, NASTAC, BEJENARU, NEMES

FORWARD

*Curator Jenny Brownrigg visits
Romania and discovers four
contemporary artists whose work
maps a shift in territory and identity*

02 04 06 08 10 12 14 16 18 20 22 24 26 28 30 32 34 36 38 40 42 44 46 48 50 52 54 56 58 60 62 64

MAP/Issue 5/Spring 2006



discuss.

Program

Change the color of bulbs in the café to orange

Audience's Concept: Change the light bulb in the café to orange so they match the chairs and give a better sense of co-ordination and overall ambience.

Talk with artist P e r H ü t t n e r about the current Martha Rosler show in ICA on telephone line

Time: 3:00pm-5:00pm

Place: Corridor, Chair 1

Audience's Concept: The artist should always be in the show, and talk to the audience!

Meeting and talking with artist Antony Gormley

Time: 4:00pm-5:15pm

Place: Table 2(Bar, Upstairs)

Meeting and talking with artist Lia Perjovschi

Time: 3:30pm-5:30pm

Place: Bar/ Upstairs: Table 1

Audience's Concept: talk with artists. Art communication but we want to know more about the process of creation. And we want to hear what artists think about our world!

Lecture by artist Lia Perjovschi

Time: 3:30pm-6:00pm

Audience's Concept: we want lecture!

Bicycle music performance by Andy Cox

'We are post-modern ex-communists'

Dan Perjovschi

The clock in University Square, Bucharest, has a unique, built-in countdown marking the days towards a landmark decision in the country's fortunes. The deadline is set for January 2007, the month Romania hopes to join the EU. First, the country must at least strengthen administration systems, tighten border controls and eradicate corruption in the judiciary system.

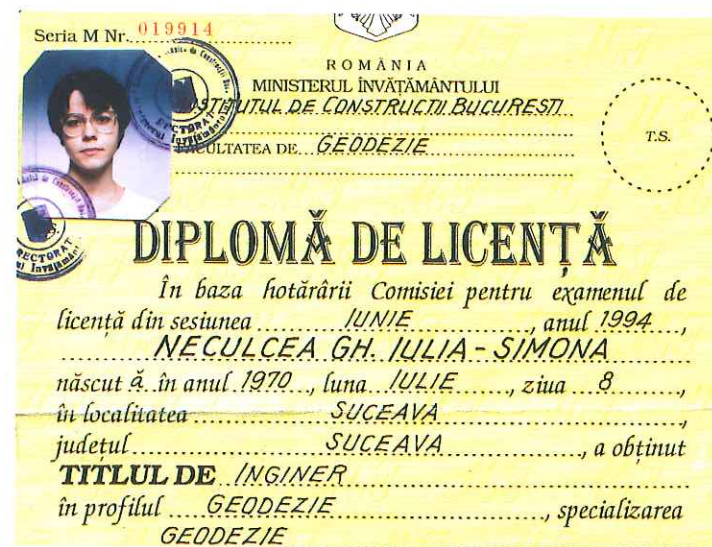
During 50 years of communism, one party decided everything for the Romanians. There was repression of religion, suppression of media and information, a dearth of books and magazines, loss of all private land and housing,

limits to travel, lack of personal choice – for example, the Dacia was the only brand of car to buy – and the nation was isolated from any outside influences. Since the revolution in 1989 and the execution of Nicolae Ceausescu, the country's leader for 21 years, the past 15 have seen a slow and at times traumatic transition, as Romania has moved from communism to democracy. Ideas of territory and identity are still shifting: even the currency is in flux, with old and new banknotes circulating jointly until the end of last year. But re-definition is occurring and a new country emerging.

Against this backdrop, the changing identities and preoccupations of four Romanians who are actively shaping a Romanian contemporary art scene – curator Simona Nastac (born 1970, Suceava); artist and curator Matei Bejenaru (born 1963, Suceava); and two artists, Dan Perjovschi (born 1961, Sibiu) and Ioana Nemes (born 1979, Bucharest). All have had other occupations before retraining in order to work in their chosen field of contemporary art.

Nastac's initial degree was in engineering, before becoming one of the first curators in Romania to train internationally in curatorial studies, completing her masters degree in 2004 at Goldsmiths College

to meet, talk and



in London. Bejenaru was an electronics engineer before becoming an artist. He then set up the artist group Vector, evolved the Periferic Biennial, (approaching its 7th edition in May 2006) and began lecturing at the 'George Enescu' Art University, all in his hometown of Iasi, in the north-eastern region of Moldavia.

Dan Perjovschi has worked in Scotland twice – in 2004 as 'Artist in Residence to Festival City (unofficial)' at the Collective Gallery, Edinburgh and in 2005 with his commissioned work for Threshold Artspace, Perth and *Map* magazine. He was a product of the art system in place during the communist regime, following the approved path. His talent was identified at the Pioneers (the equivalent of our Boy Scouts) when he was five, and he clocked up 17 years in art education, finally graduating at the age of 22. After the collapse of the dictatorship, Perjovschi spent a decade completely re-inventing himself as a contemporary artist, through a self-instigated process that he calls 'dis-education'.

Nemes, the youngest of the four, was involved in sport, playing handball for nine years until a knee injury led her to the radical decision of applying to art school. She graduated in 2002 from the Art University of Bucharest's photo-video department, and is currently one of a number of emergent artists in Romania, along with Ciprian Muresan (artist and co-editor of *Version Magazine* www.versionmagazine.com/muresan), Vlad Nanca (www.2020.ro) and Florin Tudor (www.exapes.org) all of them making vital projects and work on a local, national and international platform.

Nastac, Bejenaru, Perjovschi and Nemes share a desire to address the social, personal, economic and geographical context and agendas of Romania in terms of questioning the framework of the art system and its production, as well as analysing notions of territory and identity.

In the early 90s, following the fall of communism, Romanian artists looked to performance art as a way to re-claiming ownership of their bodies from the state. In 1993, Perjovschi questioned former concepts of nationality by having the word 'Romania' branded on his shoulder. The tattoo followed a period of three years (1990–3) during which Perjovschi had become a councillor at the Ministry of Culture – a surprising fact in light of the political stance in his art – believing he and others could change the visual arts for the new society. (Perjovschi

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later viewed this period as lost, having decided that artists cannot be administrators). Unlike the Scottish artist Ross Sinclair – who in 1994 had his back tattooed with 'Real Life', to mark a lifetime's commitment to his project, Perjovschi had his own tattoo removed ten years later. He had come to believe that his identity was no longer dependent or reliant upon that of his country.

Perjovschi is better known for his cartoons, which act as a tool for social critique. His practice re-invented itself because of the changing conditions of Romanian society: 'Around me was an emerging country – from the way people looked at themselves to how they looked at each other. How could a nice drawing mirror this violence?'

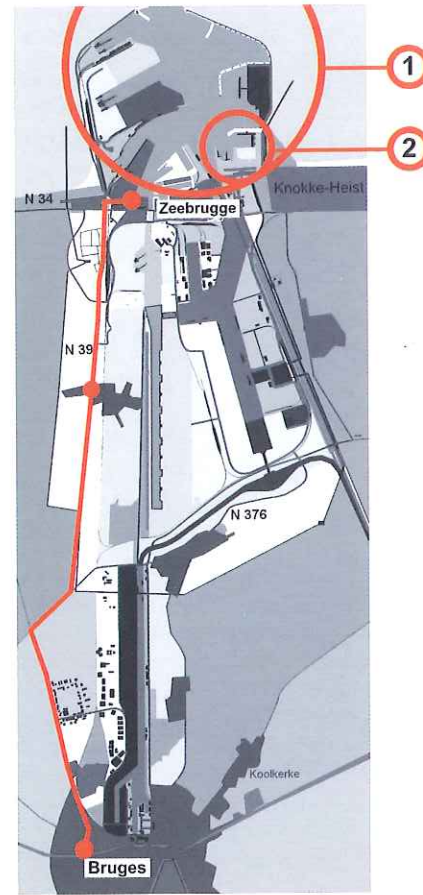
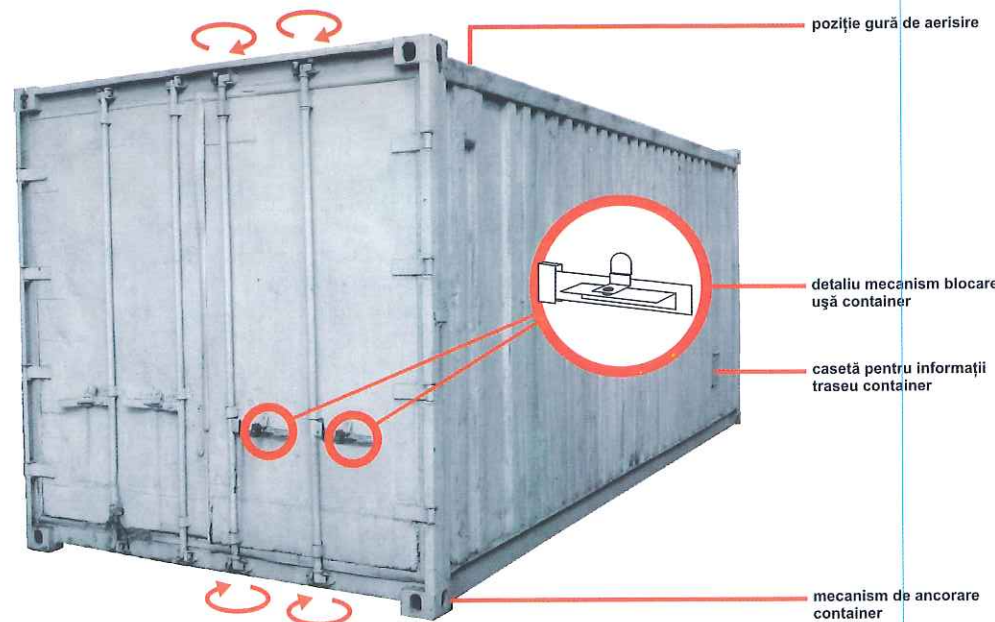
Taking on the role of commentator, Perjovschi lodges reports about the space and time in which he finds himself, through a form of cartoon that he refers to as 'naked drawing' – a great analogy as nothing can be hidden. Having formerly felt himself to be defined by the state, Perjovschi is often preoccupied with how he as a Romanian artist is defined by the international art system. One drawing, addressing the curator/artist relationship, shows the curator attempting to shape the amorphous artist. Perjovschi comments that although he has never moved from Bucharest in the past 15 years, curators have virtually altered his geographical location by labelling the shows in which he appears *Artists from East Central Europe*, then *Artists from East Europe*, *Artists from South East Europe* and finally *Artists from the Balkans*.

Matei Bejenaru is also aware of geographical positioning, living and working on what he calls 'the periphery of a periphery' in Iasi, a town which is 245 miles from Bucharest. As an artist and curator, he operates to construct a climate where contemporary art can be produced, experienced and sustained, in a city which he says lost everything in the last century. As a lecturer at the local art academy he sees himself as the 'Trojan Horse amongst those trapped in tradition', smuggling in ideas of contemporary art to an educational institution that still adheres to a conservative remit. Bejenaru works tirelessly to deliver contemporary art on a local as well as international stage. He has, for example, established the Periferic Biennial (www.periferic.org), which began as a series of performances and then festivals. *Periferic 6* (2003), curated by Anders Kreuger, colonised spaces in Iasi, including the disused Turkish baths and four local history museums.

Bejenaru's art project *Travelling Guide* successfully subverts the language and purpose of the tourist guide format intended for the affluent western traveller, who acquires new territories through personal passage. Bejenaru's guide is intended for the hidden Romanian traveller, the illegal immigrant worker, providing information on the possible routes to take through border controls, ports and stations into western Europe. The information provided is exhaustive, from computer-generated and hand-drawn maps of routes and terminals, to instructions on 'accessing' a container for travel or

RIGHT AND BELOW
Matei Bejenaru, illustrations from
'Travelling Guide', 2005

FAR RIGHT
Ioana Nemes, 'The Wall Project', 2001



acquiring a National Insurance number, to general advice on what to expect on arrival.

The introduction to *Travelling Guide* includes the surprising fact that this hidden worker is actually the linchpin of the current Romanian economy: 'ex-patriots' make 'a more significant contribution to the budget balance than the foreign investments' (IDEA magazine, No 21, 2005). Bejenaru is ambivalent on the question of whether his hand-book is actually in use, preferring to see its function as one that purely locates and maps a situation, revealing an otherwise concealed terrain.

For her engineering degree, Simona Nastac specialised in geodesy, a branch of applied mathematics concerned with determining the size and shape of the Earth through the position of points on its surface and the variations of its gravity field. With such a qualification she could have worked in topography, cartography, global positioning systems or geographical information systems. She says her choice of this field of study was prompted by a sense of confinement: 'I was fascinated by journeys and uncharted territories, as a utopian way of escapism from the Orwellian world I was living in'.

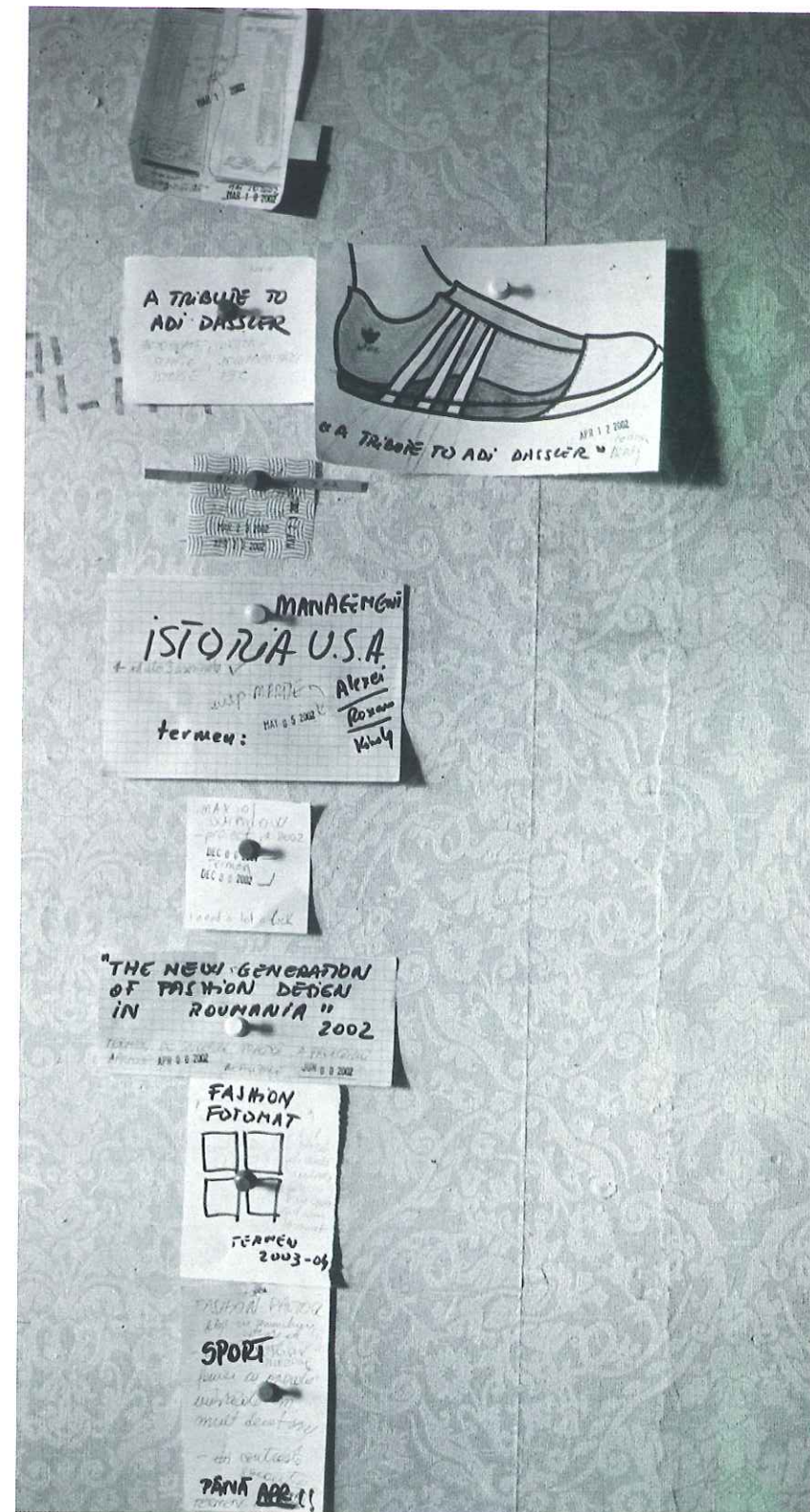
After the fall of communism, Nastac travelled to Athens, Budapest and Saint Petersburg and discovered examples of

classical, western, modern art, and diverted to study art history. She came into contact with contemporary art only during her last semester at Bucharest Art University in 2001. Following subsequent stints as an attendant in a private gallery in Bucharest and an exhibition reviewer for art and culture magazines, she set up the contemporary art web magazine *www.e-art.ro* with Raluca Voinea, Eduard Constantin and Madalin Geana in 2003. This has created a platform for the encounter of Romanian and international contemporary art.

'Critical theory or the contemplative perspective are no longer enough, especially in a society like Romania undergoing transition,' says Nastac. 'A more complex knowledge is required to create a platform for developing and contextualising contemporary art in relation to both local and international audiences.' For her, as for Bejenaru, the answer is to prioritise function over aesthetics, through an analysis of institutions and education, in order to 'produce a territory that will enable art production'.

This approach is most apparent in the recent collaborative project *IDEA London* (Institute for the Development and Exploration of Art, London / www.idealondon.co.uk) developed with fellow-students from her MA in curating at Goldsmiths College, London. Effectively operating as squatters in the ICA, London, the group questioned the institution's activities and strategies to come up with alternatives.

Nastac has continued this proactive approach in terms of applying it to the bastions of art production in Romania. Her current, on-going



'Critical theory or the contemplative perspective are no longer enough'

research project *ART tbc* seeks to reflect on the conservatism of current art education at Romanian art universities, and seeks to build a platform among students for future transformation. In the first stage, she is inviting students to fill in questionnaires that address critical areas of learning, teaching and assessment. These, she hopes, will then be analysed by focus groups. The outcome will be a timely critique of one of the core institutions that facilitate art in Romania, with many members of the Bucharest contemporary art community currently debating the role, purpose and physical positioning of another, the National Museum of Contemporary Art (MNAC), located in the east wing of Ceausescu's former palace, re-named Palace of the People.

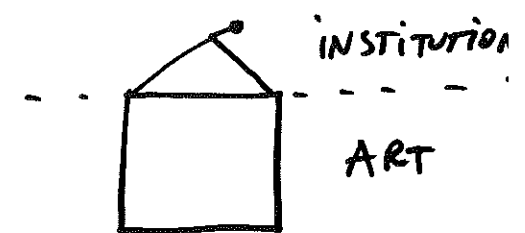
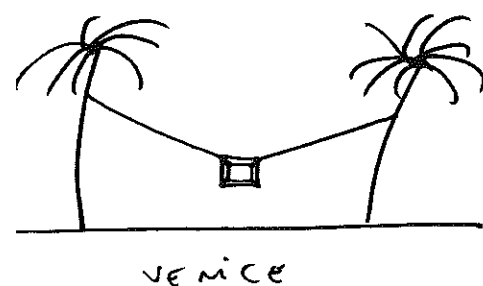
Rather than analysing society or an institution, Ioana Nemes has narrowed her focus to a study of her own art production. The *Wall Project* began in 2001 and is ongoing, taking place on a wall of the apartment Nemes shares with her family. The right-hand side of the wall is devoted to ideas for projects; the left-hand side is designated as an area to which they can be moved when they become reality. In an effort to discipline herself and to work more efficiently, she documents the wall when any change takes place. In the CD project *Self-Interview* (2005), Nemes refers to herself as, 'a utopian and useful machine to produce inefficient artworks... there is no clear demand from the public so these are inefficient products as I still produce them'.

With his tag 'We are post-modern ex-communists', Dan Perjovschi ironically describes Romanians as staking their personal and national identity on a double negation, existing in the nebulous after-life of two movements – modernism and communism. Communism had allowed for no future; as the present was set, there was only the opportunity to look to the past. As Romania finally begins to look forward to becoming part of the European Community, these four contemporary practitioners are concerned with understanding and negotiating the space in between. [Turn over for more Dan Perjovschi cartoons]

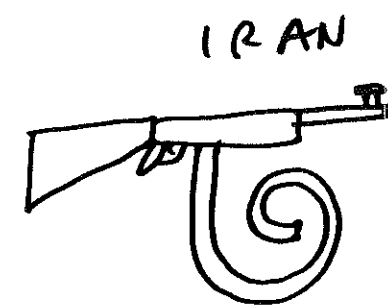
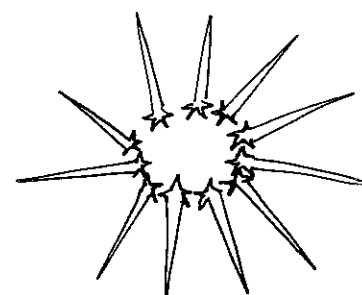
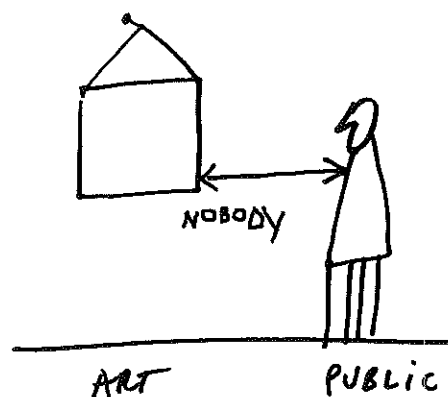
M Jenny Brownrigg is curator of exhibitions at University of Dundee and visited Romania in October 2005 with *Visiting Arts*. She is one of five appointed curators, along with Simona Nastac, of the '2nd International Biennial of Young Artists, Art is Always Somewhere Else', to be held in Bucharest in October 2006, organised by META Cultural Foundation in partnership with Goethe Bukarest Institute

BELOW
Map commissioned Dan Perjovschi to make new work based on the word 'map' for its summer issue, 2005. That collection of nine cartoons illustrated his view of the world. Threshold, a space dedicated to new media art, saw them and was inspired to commission more, in collaboration with Map. Based in the foyer of the Perth Concert Hall which opened in October 2005, Threshold launched 'From Our Own Correspondent' in December 2005. This group of 100 new drawings (see selection below) casts a critical and humorous light on the art events Perjovschi visited throughout the year. They are part of Threshold's permanent collection.

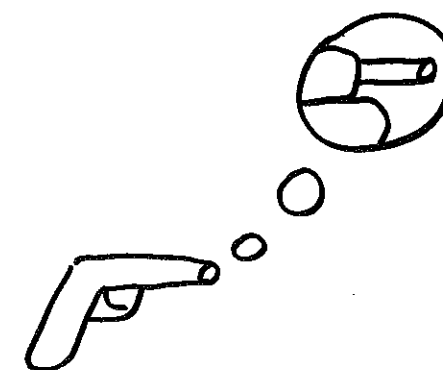
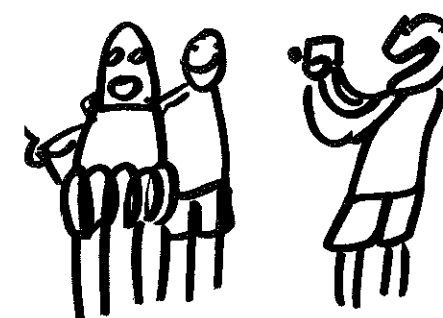
Venice



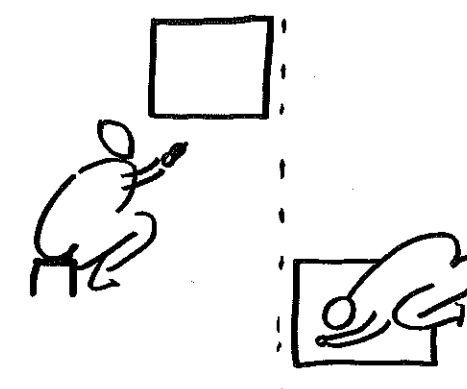
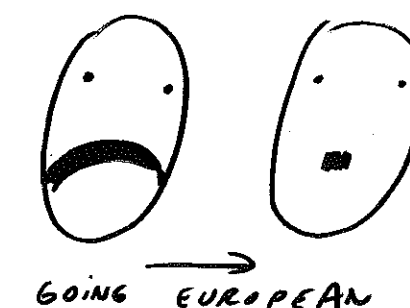
Paris



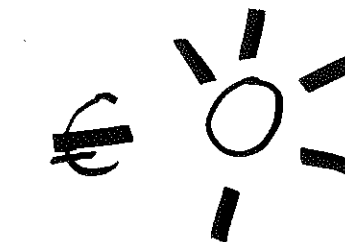
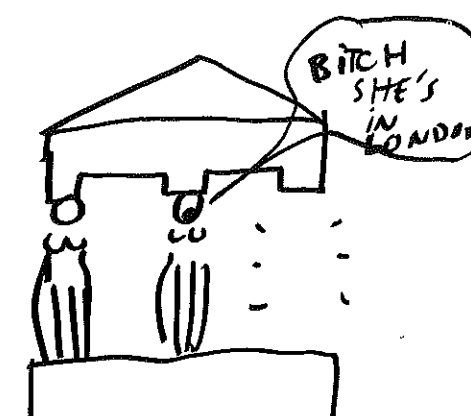
London



Istanbul



Athens



Cologne

