Currencies and the Aesthetics of Nationalism: Can the Euro Help Establish a European Political Collective?

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Abstract: A strategic assumption currently divides the literatures on political economy and nationalism: Public interests are either determined by materialist concerns dictated by economic interests or, conversely, by notions of allegiance defined by ascriptive identities. Both notions of public interest have entangled a growing literature on the status of the European Union as a political entity. Attempting to mitigate this divide, some in the EU literature have begun to focus on the Euro as a means of fostering European identity. Yet, too little theoretical or empirical work has been done on the relationship between the Euro and the genesis of a uniquely European identity compared to specific European nation-states’ own histories in developing nationalist identities through currencies. Our paper argues that, while nation-states have historically employed specific imageries through currencies as a means of evoking an aesthetic of specific national identities, the EU, by contrast, must take a different path to mitigate the still persistent nationalist identities within this new political entity. Ultimately, it is our claim that there is a specific relationship between currencies and the aesthetics of nationalism, and that the European Union, as a super-national polity, must engage in a different style of politics that overcomes both the economic interests and the historical legacy of the nation-building strategies of member states (as indeed it has begun to do already in negotiations with the Greek and Bulgarian states). We use empirical evidence drawn from the EU decisions on the physical appearance of the Euro and public opinion data on attitudes toward the Euro to test our theory.

1) Introduction

The introduction of Euro banknotes and coinage in 2002 provided a new focal point for discussions on economic interests in the process of European integration. The creation of a new, supranational currency has had tremendous implications for the functioning of European economies, including the ability of policy makers to pursue national economic policies, and the need for higher levels of policy coordination. Indeed, the adoption of the Euro was an extension, and deepening, of previous efforts at exchange rate coordination under the European Monetary System (EMS) and a culmination of the process begun with the signing of the Maastricht Treaty and the creation of convergence criteria.

But the introduction of the Euro also provoked questions for the ideational side of the “interest-identity problematique” (Risse et al 1999) inherent in the formation of a new supranational state. Both the (potential) role of the Euro in fostering a broader European identity, and the role of identity in promoting (and, perhaps, hindering) the functioning of the broad-based European economic policy, became central to evaluating techniques in fostering political projects towards European integration.
Our paper attempts to develop an analytical approach that allows us to address both the material and ideational positions. The choice of the images used on the Euro banknotes and coins, and the process by which those images were chosen, present an important opportunity to analyze the relationship between currencies and identity-formation. We argue that the combining of these questions should provide leverage for understanding both the effects of currency on legitimating political authority, as well as help to explain the behavior of policymakers and European publics. Policy makers involved with the decision of what images to include appeared hopeful of the positive effects for the Euro and its images on European identity. Moreover, the process by which the images were chosen was often explicit in its desire to avoid negative reactions by the public while still seeking to create a unified public space. Even if the actual effects of currency images on identity are minor, the process by which these images were chosen reveals that policy makers are cognizant of the potential importance of identity questions in selling the euro to their publics.

Traditional approaches to the political economy of currency choice from within political science and economics have emphasized the materialist side of the equation, while scholars more influenced by sociological and historical approaches have emphasized the ideational factors. This situation, however, need not be diametrical polarized. As McNamara (2005) advocates, “Further research is needed to provide a finer grained analysis of the societal and governmental actors who make these dynamics happen. To fully understand how political authority accrues to new institutions, a next step must be to focus on the building (or blockage) of political capacity and legitimacy at the EU level by individuals and groups in Europe” (3). Indeed, recent empirical work (Jupille and Leblang 2007) has begun to address the conditions under which materialist concerns or questions of identity influence national preferences over the Euro. Eurobarometer
polls of European public opinion have consistently included questions relating to the Euro and its perceived effects on national identity among members and potential members. There is much evidence which suggests that, while the arrow of causation between material interests and identity goes both directions, politicians can use issues of identity to further their material interests (Risse et al, 1999).

Yet, despite these prospects, many empirical studies of public attitudes toward the E.U. and monetary integration lack consensus on the connections between national identity and support for European integration. Muller-Peters (1998) finds that feelings of “European patriotism” correlate strongly with positive attitudes toward the Euro, while feelings of “nationalism” are negatively correlated with attitudes toward the Euro. On the other hand, Carey (2002) finds that feelings of national identity are negatively related to support for the E.U. Kaltenhaler and Anderson (2001) find that past economic experiences, in terms of inflation and unemployment, are related to support for monetary union. Marks and Hooghe (2003) find that intense identification with the nation-state does a better job of predicting opposition to European integration than calculations of economic costs and benefits. This result is contingent, however, on the level of consensus within elite attitudes toward integration. When elites are united in support for European integration, strong feelings of national identity parallel support for European integration, but when elites are divided, intense national feelings lead to skeptical attitudes toward Europe. (Hooghe and Marks 2005). This fits in with Risse et al’s story of a lack of consensus allowing for strategic use of national identity. Thus, at the margin, where support for integration and the Euro is most tenuous, the identity aspects of the Euro imagery are most likely to matter.

The question of identity, as it relates to the Euro, then, appears to create two related, but
distinct questions. First, to what extent does the identity content of the euro threaten the process of economic and monetary union, both narrowly related to the euro as well as more broadly for the process of European integration? Second, what role, if any, can the euro play in creating a broader feeling of European identity? Thus, the role of the euro can be conceptualized as having simultaneously both a (potentially) negative and a positive component relating to broader questions of authority.

Providing consistent answers to these two questions, however, remains a challenge for the existing literature. A purely materialist point of view would equally dismiss both questions, but this would be unsatisfactory given the previous discussion. On the other hand, if one takes questions of identity seriously, reification of social and political groups can result, producing deep-seated particularism in conflict with liberal projects of integration (Habermas, 2001). The paradox for ideational debates is thus, the closer the European project resembles historical antecedents of nation states, as it relates to the use of currencies for nation-building, the greater chance the Euro has of helping forge a common European identity, but that implies that the project has a higher chance of failing due to negative reactions from existing connections to current nation states.

In short, if the desire of the policymakers were simply to avoid offending national sensibilities, then any number of the possible choices would have sufficed. This provides a necessary, but not sufficient condition for explaining the eventual choice. Nor does it provide an explanation consistent with our existing understanding of how this choice would serve to engender a broader European identity. In this paper we argue that the need to locate the authority of the E.U., in general, and the Euro, specifically, influenced both the process and outcome of the choice of iconography of the Euro banknotes and coins. Specifically, the choice of the motif of
bridges best achieved the dual goals of providing a touchstone to the European past while setting a psychological foundation for locating authority in a broader European identity.

The remainder of the paper is organized as follows. Section Two discusses the role of nationalism and currencies in the context of a supranational project. Section Three develops our argument relating the question of authority to the historical development of ideas of nationalism. Section Four discusses process of how the unifying theme of bridges emerged from the selection process, in light of the challenges discussed above. Section Five then relates the choice of bridges to the broader question of political authority. Section Six discusses some of the existing public opinion data on the euro and questions of identity and Section Seven concludes and discusses implications of our paper for future research.

2) Currency in the Formation of (Supra)National Identity

Nationalism, as a political project directed at mobilizing affection and allegiance toward a particular nation, relies on symbols as a means of motivating collective identification. These symbols present themselves in many forms, both immaterial (stories, poems, and songs) and material (flags, emblems, and currencies) – each working to construct and affirm mythologies of nations, setting boundaries for these ‘imagined’ communities. Such techniques for motivating attachment to particular civic and ethnic nations have proved successful, but often with dangerous outcomes. In an effort to move past such structures, and the violence associated there in, the European Union has emerged as a substantial political project. But in moving past the nation-state as the focus of affective identities and allegiance, the question for policy makers of

1 For various discussions of nationalism and the use of symbols as a resource for motivation in the modern era, see Liah Greenfeld (1992); Bernard Yack (1996); David Miller (2000); Michael Ignatieff (1993); Rogers M. Brubaker (1996); Maurizio Viroli (1995); and Eric Hobsbawm (1990).
2 B. Andersen (1983).
what binds such a community together still looms.

Central to the politics of the European Union has become the question “Can nationalist techniques of allegiance be applied to the formation of a political collective beyond the nation-state?” That is, is ‘the nation’ as a conceptual tool, crafted by techniques that monumentalize the past, necessary for a stable and functioning political collective, or – as some have begun to suggest – can political collectivity find basis and boundary without the nation-state? As a means of addressing this question, our paper focuses on efforts in the European Union to evoke a collective European identity, without (explicit) reliance on the nation-state as a boundary perimeter to the narration of that identity. Specifically, we examine the Euro as a tool to foster collective identification beyond the member nation-states.

The use of symbols in the formation of national identity proves problematic for EU identification in two unique ways. First, citizens across disparate economic and social backgrounds have continued to voice a highly particularist cultural response to the idea of a European political union, continuing to defend the value of their own unique national identities, as well as policies that increasingly limit social recognition and political inclusion. This lack of affective attachment to the idea of a European political union poses serious problems to the legitimacy of the political project, most significantly, the absence of an engaged and self-identifying demos, a European political people that sees itself as actively participating in self rule. This democratic deficit, many argue, originates in the still strong-standing affectiveness of national political attachments. Thus, efforts to defend the claim that the particularism of a unified European identity might be more advantageous for citizens than the particular identities of single nation-states meets objection in actual citizens’ allegiances. It would seem, then, that some new

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6 Again, see Morgan (2005) and J. Weiler (1999).
symbolism of collectivity would be necessary for the successful evocation of any supranational political order.

Secondly, the use of symbols for the formation of a European collective is problematic by the very employment of such techniques by nationalists. The monopoly on control of symbols has, to the present, been associated with the formation of a collectivity within a nation, and such techniques are directly associated with the practices of establishing those allegiances which now stand in the face of a European political identity.

But whether the European Union need be plagued by these nationalist dependencies is not, as yet, clear. By way of helping clear space for the possibility of the formation of a new European Identity – for the re-establishment of Europe, as this search has come to be called – we here turn to analysis of the Euro and the strengths and weakness that currency may serve in the processes of this new formation.

In the context of previous efforts by 19th century governments use of national currencies to create national identities, Helleiner (2001) draws five possible paths of by which E.U. policymakers could use the Euro to help foster a common European identity. While the choice of images was significant in the 19th century, Helleiner views the images of the Euro as a weak tool for fostering a common European identity, noting that member countries retained individual, national images on the obverse side of Euro coins. Moreover, he views the banknote images as “timid in their invocation of a new European identity” and lacking the sort of concrete images of common historical or cultural touchstones. (6) Helleiner attributes this to a weak level of support for the need for a broader common European identity.

Helleiner, however, does not completely dismiss the connection between the Euro

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7 For a related discussion on this point, see Bader (2007).
imagery and European identity. He acknowledges that the notes did avoid specific, national images and that policymakers allowed all coins to circulate across borders, hoping to create a more cosmopolitan situation. He also recognizes that opponents of the single currency place some weight on the identity aspects of the Euro, quoting an English citizen, “[m]essing about with the currency … is deeply unpopular because, at a gut level, people feel [it is] organic to our national identity – veins and arteries to our consciousness. The Queen's head on our coins … says something reassuring to the average person” (8). Such efforts make obvious he potential disconnect between elite and mass opinion on the common currency. Risse et al (1999) discuss the role of identity at the elite level, but how does one bridge the gap between identity at the elite level with that at the mass level. The marketing of the Euro to the masses implies a need for understanding this connection, both in terms of the choices by elites as well as the reaction of the masses. The explicit inclusion of marketing surveys in the Euro design process underscores this point. Such psychological costs should not be dismissed too easily, either, as even formal models of currency competition have incorporated psychological costs into the broader idea of “switching costs” in network externality explanations for adopting new currencies (cite?). The European Union, however, is in a different position from the nation-builders of the 19th century, in that policy makers are not explicitly building a new nation-state, but rather a supranational entity. Thus, they are not necessarily looking for connections to the past, but also looking forward. This dual requirement requires a more nuanced choice of iconography.

The second channel Helleiner identifies is that national currencies created a common form of communication in the economic realm. Across national borders, individuals will start to think in the common “language” of common prices denominated in the same unit.

Similarly, the third channel comes from the common experiences created by a single
currency. Because the presence of a common currency requires a common monetary policy, individuals will experience (for good or for ill) the common effects of this unified policy. Denied national monetary policy autonomy, Helleiner sees adjustment occurring at a more regional, rather than national, level; potentially weakening the common experience of economic policy as uniquely “German” or “French.”

Fourth, a common currency connected to ideas of popular sovereignty could also challenge existing national identities. A more common, collective sense of control over the common currency could help foster a European identity. (19) This channel, however, raises the important question of how “the people” feel connected to this new currency, especially in the context of an independent European Central Bank. Kindleberer (2004) recognizes, however, that the relationship between identity and trust is bi-directional. While the communal experience of a successful common currency could encourage the development of a common European identity and trust in European institutions, individuals must also have a baseline level of trust to accept the common currency in the first place.

Finally, for the fifth possible path Helleiner draws on the work of Prussian Romantic thinker Adam Müller who viewed the creation of an inconvertible, national currency “as an expression of the oneness of a people.” (20) This was important in creating a deep, psychological bond between the people and the state, a bond that more “cosmopolitan,” metallic currencies would not create.

For Müller, however, this was in the context of an inconvertible currency that would force citizens to focus their economic activity within the nation-state. The Euro, however, is a convertible currency, with potential value as a challenger to the U.S. dollar as an international

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8 The current challenges and divisions along national lines within the EU responding to the global financial crisis might imply that this channel of influence remains questionable.
reserve currency; thus, how this psychological bond would be created is a more complex question than in Müller's original formulation. Helleiner distinguishes between this psychological connection and the effects of the imagery of a currency, but in the context of a convertible currency, the connection Müller envisioned is not available, making the question of the psychological consequences of the imagery potentially more important. For Helleiner, the potential stability and effectiveness of the Euro could, over time, create trust in the currency, which could potentially spillover into other E.U. institutions.

Drawing this bright line between emotion and the imagery of a currency is problematic, however, as one does not experience the images of the currency at a purely aesthetic level, independent from the emotional experience of art.

3) Romantic Politics and the Problem of Authority

Helleiner’s evocation of Müller’s theory of currency raises deep questions regarding the problems of modern identity-formation. Müller’s economic theory relates directly to a broad based political argument within political romanticism as it emerged and developed alongside nationalist European political projects. Müller argued, contra Smithian defenses of free-market capitalism, that an ethical element was central to the ordering of a national economy. For Müller, the state as bounded by a nation, required economic practices that focused on need – and thus order – rather than value and freedom of enterprise. Currency was essential to this project as a tool for employing the symbols of the nation. According to such arguments, nationalized images on currency became an everyday presenting of a national culture, by which states could

9 For discussions of romanticism as a political movement, see Rosenblum (1987) and Beiser (1993).
10 See esp. Müller’s "Von der Notwendigkeit einer theologischen Grundlage der gesammten Staatswissenschaften" (1820).
11 For an historical overview of Müller’s place in German and European economic discourse in the early 19th century, see Tribe (1995), pp 45-6.
establish economic ordering, and consequentially deepen an ethnic national belonging.

The triumph of capitalism, as articulated by classical economic theorists, posed a problem for Müller’s conservative romanticism. Cosmopolitan (and globalized) economic structures led, according to Müller, to the collapse of discrete political orders. Nations, as discrete entities, required ordering. And such ordering depended on the continually celebration and remembrance of a shared historical authority acknowledged by that nation. The aesthetic representation of shared national symbols on currencies became a useful mechanism for reinforcing this conservative notion of authority. The nation’s heroicized past could be concentrated into symbols that became easily-available markers by which to draw ideational boundaries of the nation, mythologizing the past and the authority necessary for maintaining order in the present state.

Problematic for the employment of Mueller’s romantic aesthetics towards current economic problems of EU integration is the developing absence of authority in modernity. Müller, along with many late romantics, focused on feudal systems of political structure rather than democratic nation-states, as a means to acquire order and authority. The triumph of capitalism and liberalism hardly maps on to such efforts. Indeed, as Hannah Arendt, amongst others, has argued, the arrival of modernity (along with capitalism and liberalism) now means “[w]e can no longer fall back upon authentic and indisputable experiences common to us all.” Thus, Müller’s project depends on creating conditions that allow for the grounding of a now impossible authority. Using the organic nation as the basis for political legitimacy, by which elites could establish parameters for a shared historicized experience – a politics of ethnic nationalism – was, for Müller, the avenue to re-enchant politics. But such enchantment depends on the difficult (perhaps impossible, and certainly unwanted) project of purifying the nation so as

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12 For the relationship between romanticism and conservative political ideologies, see Rosenblum (1988).
14 See Weber’s thesis on disenchantment for the classic formulation against this romanticized view of political authority (1978).
to establish such ordering.\textsuperscript{15}

Helleiner’s application of such notions of authority for the purposes of grounding a new European identity takes with it these dangerous anti-capitalist and anti-liberal foundations. An ethical notion of economic and political practices, as Müller’s brand of romantic politics depends on, hardly seems relevant to contemporary problems of non-particularistic integration in the EU. But if authority cannot be determined by a shared past, on what grounds can a legitimate political identity be constructed? As Arendt explains, the problem is how “to live in a political realm with neither authority nor the concomitant awareness that the source of authority transcends power and those who are in power, means to be confronted anew, without religious trust in a sacred beginning and without protection of traditional and therefore self-evident standards of behavior, by the elementary problems of human living together.”\textsuperscript{16} Political authority previously depended on a shared past that could be referenced as the ground by which identities could be defined. Traditions, both as practices and as expressed by symbols, could be employed to reinforce the foundations of this (almost religious) authority. Clearly, this is Müller’s hope. Part of Müller’s argument depends on the assumption that, without a traditional conception of the nation and the authority that binds that nation together, order is impossible.

The EU, by contrast, enjoys a unique set of problems, distinct from the absence of order. As a collection of already existing states, the question is not how to maintain order, and thereby found an authority around which an identity could be aligned. But, rather, how to shift focus towards a new political realm that does not necessarily invalidate the historical identify of member-states and their relationship to each-other.\textsuperscript{17}

If the EU is still to be considered a state, rather than a political alignment such as NATO

\textsuperscript{15} On the history of the employment of conservative romantic political practices, see Jeffrey Herf (1986).
\textsuperscript{16} Arendt (1993) p. 141.
\textsuperscript{17} For a discussion on this point, see Weiler (1999)
or the UN, such questions of authority and identity are centrally problematic. Can the EU employ practices of nation-states to construct a European identity, or must new practices be developed? Part of the problem in deciding between these two strategies would be the pretense of member-states within the multi-state realm of Europe. In order for each state to maintain its own position as state in such a federation, the past histories of these states, and their relationship to other European states, must be preserved. Authority, which in a conservative romantic model depends on the preservation and celebration of past traditions, now must find both past and future foundations. Member states and their histories cannot be ignored as valuable to the project of forming Europe, yet such histories cannot also simply take president over the new state-formation. The current iteration of the Euro, we think, navigates these complexities in a delicate but ultimately successful way. As analysis below should show, the images of the Euro speak to a new idea of European political identity, that neither ignores the past, nor interferes with the possibility of a future for Europe.

4) Analyzing the European Choice

As discussed above, currencies and territorial nation-states have, historically, been tightly entwined. In the current period, however, territorial moneys are increasingly coming under challenges (Helleiner 2002, Cohen 1998), making it unclear exactly what role the euro will or can relate to the E.U. Dyson (1994) raises the concern that “in the absence of a European political order that promotes an effective identification with a single currency, by means of a range of common political symbols and channels for popular participation and influence, a depoliticized monetary policy lacks essential legitimacy.” Kaelberer (2008) summarizes the challenge of navigation that the E.U. faces, noting, “the political community is really a question
of political *association*, rather than identity (Hayward, 2007). It implies recognition, openness to
the claims of others without eliminating distinctness and is factually based on mutual
vulnerability and interdependence.” (25) It is within this context that the choice of the unifying
symbol of a bridge, within the context of the Historical Eras of Europe makes sense compared to
the other alternatives.

Kaelberer, however, is not convinced that there is a need for such feelings, as legitimacy
should emerge based on effective performance by European monetary authorities. However,
while in the long-term, credibility of the Euro will require solid economic performance, it is
unclear whether this is a sufficient, or merely necessary, condition. Deroose et al (2007) found
that public attitudes toward the Euro remained positive for the period 1999-2005, but that cross-
national variation in support was influenced more by perceived economic performance, rather
than actual performance. They conclude that, “to the extent that long-term support for the euro
cannot be secured through output legitimacy alone, euro-area policy makers must turn to the
alternative channels of legitimacy: process, values and inputs.” Thus, if the material legitimacy
of the euro is filtered through feelings of normative legitimacy, the question of how to create this
feeling is significant.

Similarly, Kaelberer (2004) argues that the relationship between currencies and identity
goes both directions; effective currencies can create feelings of identity, but currencies need to be
connected to some feeling of identity in order to be effective. Historically, this connection was
one of affectation for the nation-state. In the modern context, however, this situation has evolved:

*During the modernization process, the relationship between money and identity has increasingly
become abstract. Trust is now generated more thoroughly through institutions than through
affective ties. Contractual and utilitarian considerations can strongly influence feelings of
belonging and collective identities. Current levels of European identity – as part of an evolving
hybrid identity structure in Europe – are strong enough to provide favorable conditions for an*
For this to be the case then, the project for E.U. policymakers is not merely to recreate the actions of their predecessors from individual nation-states, but rather to create a feeling of trust that is consistent with existing national connections and based upon this emerging, hybrid identity.

This new project requires modifying the tools used by nation-builders in the past. We turn now to the design process of the euro to see how these changing needs modify the behavior of policymakers to fit these new requirements, the strategies they use to create this feeling of trust, and how these choices connect to the response of the citizenry.

Just as the European Union itself represents a project somewhere between a nation-state and an international organization (Kaeleberer 2008), the design process of the Euro was a departure from the design process common to currency choices at the national level. Hymans (2004, 2006) notes that the decisions over the Euro design were much more open and communal than most national-level designs. He places these decisions within the broader process of post-modernism as it competed with a more conservative post-materialism. Pointing to national banknotes increasingly including images of nature, women, and abstract images as evidence. Thus, while being a departure in process, he argues that rather than being bland “Money for Mars,” the decision that emerged reflected the attitudes and values consistent with the contemporary time-period. If the design contest had occurred in the 1950s, for example, the prevailing attitudes would certainly have produced vastly different results.

In contrast to the trends in Western Europe, the choice of images in the former socialist countries in Central and Eastern Europe after the end of the Cold War were more in line with the practices of the 19th century nation-builders. Unwin and Hewitt (2001) found that the images in
these nations, which were emerging from the shadow of Soviet domination, tended to reflect historical connections to the 19th century and were dominated by images of male figures. And in some instances, such as Croatia, the choice of the name for the currency was a subject of intense public debate as well.

While Hymans does discuss some of the alternatives, he does not fully exploit the counter-factual of the considered alternatives. It is one thing to describe how the eventual choice fits in to broader trends, but that leaves the causal mechanism underdeveloped. In game-theoretic terms, one needs to layout the possible choice structure that policymakers faced, in order to understand fully the eventual outcome. There exists quite a bit of variation within the broad guidelines established by the EMI, many of which could fit into the category of a post-modern choice. While the final choice was the result of the combination of expert juries, public opinion/market research, and EMI officials, we argue that the specific option that emerged from this process provided the best chance to navigate successfully the competing objectives that E.U. policymakers faced when designing the Euro.

Thus, for analysts to dismiss the iconography of the Euro design as simply being the lowest-common denominator that settles on a bland design that avoids insulting anyone ignores the panoply of options available to decision-makers and removes much of the agency inherent in the design process itself. If one seeks to understand the potential role of the Euro in fostering a European identity, the process by which the images emerged should be as important as the final outcome.

While the broader question of the effect of the Euro on European identity remains contested, it is clear that the symbolic power of the common currency was on the minds of E.U. officials throughout the entire process of creating the new currency. At a meeting of the

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18 81% of banknotes included portraits, of which 92% were male.
European Council in Madrid in December 1995, the Council decided upon the Euro as the name for the currency, rejecting a number of alternatives because of their national attachments. The other options included “ducat,” “ecu,” “florin,” “franken,” as well as attaching “Euro” onto existing names, such as the “Euromark.” Even the design of the currency symbol (€) for the Euro was designed with “two strong parallel horizontal lines ... intended to symbolise the stability of the currency” (ECB 2007a: 10).

In the official pronouncements of the European Central Bank, the design content of the Euro banknotes had to satisfy several different components. Paramount was resistance to counterfeiting, but also included were concerns that the designs be aesthetically pleasing, avoid national or gender bias, and “be acceptable to everyone in the Euro area, if not beyond” (ECB: 18). Thus, even at the earliest design stages, E.U. officials were cognizant of the dual focus, looking both backward and forward.

Even these concerns about national images were bound up in practical/material considerations. Having identical banknotes allowed for easier management of the flow of banknotes, as national central banks that faced a shortage could easily be replenished from abundant stocks in other central banks, while avoiding concerns that such transfers would create the image that one country was “flooding” another country with its national symbol. The common banknote also allowed for greater efficiency and economies of scale, as each denomination would only be produced at certain member banks. (ECB 2008)

While the E.U. eventually settled on a theme of “Ages and Styles of Europe” and the specific design unified around bridges, the possible choices at each stage of the process represented a range of different options. In November 1994, the Banknote Working Group developed a number of different thematic options for the design competition. These included
themes with specific images actual individuals of historical importance (“founding fathers” of the European Union, “great Europeans” from a specific discipline), natural-based themes (landscapes, flora and fauna of Europe), literary themes (poems and narratives, scripts and written works), as well as an explicitly abstract theme. (ECB 2007a)

From these suggestions, the Working Group eventually suggested three themes from this preliminary list. Of the three suggestions—Heritage of Europe, Ages and Styles of Europe, and Abstract Theme and Security—the EMI approved the latter two themes in June 1995 to guide the design competition. A Feature Selection Advisory Group was then commissioned to determine the periods that would define the Ages and Style of Europe. Initially, it was envisioned that the Ages and Style theme would include portraits of ordinary Europeans taken from paintings, drawings, and sketches across the different eras on one side and architectural features on the other side. At this stage, national identifiers were still an option for the design, with up to one-fifth of the design space allocated for nation-specific images (ECB 2007a).

Each central bank was able to nominate up to three designers, who would then submit proposals based upon the established guidelines. In the end, 29 designers/design teams submitted 27 proposals on the Ages and Style theme and 17 designs based on the abstract theme (ECB 2007a). In September 1996, a jury of design, marketing, and art history reviewed the 44 submissions and pared the submissions down to a short list of five choices for each of the two themes. The jury based their decision upon criteria of creativity, aesthetics, style, functionality, anticipated public perceptions and acceptability. Once the short lists were created, the EMI took the extraordinary step of commissioning a public opinion survey, conducted in the 14 member states during mid-October, to gauge public views on the possible design choices (EMI 1996). The survey involved a series of 30 questions that had the respondents judge the submissions on
perception, emotion, and acceptance. The most popular choice from the public interviews (with 35%) had been ranked 4th out of the abstract designs by the expert jury. The second most popular choice (with 23%) was the eventual winner, which had ranked 2nd in the Ages and Style rankings by the expert jury. 76% of those interviewed felt that this design, by Robert Kalina, did a better job of expressing the idea of “Europe,” with only a small number of respondents indicating it reminded them of any particular nation. Moreover, 60% of those in the survey felt that this design inspired “confidence.” Most of the designs were readily identified as being banknotes, although the public interviewees did identify the two abstract designs ranked highest by the expert jury more as pieces of art than means of payment (ECB 2007a).

This point is significant, given our discussion below of the ways in which individuals interact with art. While the jury of design experts were more likely to experience the designs as art, the public individuals were likely to view the designs through the lens of experiencing the images as money and means of exchange.

Once the results were in, the EMI made its decision on December 3rd and presented its final recommendation to the E.U. Council of Ministers during its meeting in Dublin. The winning design, then, was neither the top choice of the expert jury nor the members of the survey group. There was divergence, however, in each group's top choice, but overlap between each groups second choice. The winning design distinguished itself from the other options in that it diverged from existing trends toward the use of images of individuals or purely abstract, post-modern images. While including the architectural designs similar to other submissions in the Ages and Styles of Europe, it was unique in its unifying image of a bridge.

What is lacking in current discussions of the euro images, however, is a theoretical/psychological underpinning (connection) between the images and the goal of creating

19 See Appendix A for images from these submissions.
a hybrid identity that provides a solid foundation for establishing trust in a legitimate authority for the new currency. It is one thing to have a negative guide (avoid national bias/problems), but a different one to have a positive (pro-active), purposive choice to forge identity. The eventual winner was unique in its combination of both the negative goals (no human/real models/guides) as well as the positive choice of bridges. While many other options used arches and other aspects of architectural design, a bridge only appeared once in a single denomination of an alternative submission. While we cannot observe the direct connection between the choice of images and the responses to them, the next section does develop an explanation that connects the images chosen to the project of building trust with this new currency.

### 5) The Political Effect of Images

The images of the Euro deliberately evoke the problem of past identities of European member states with the project of establishing a new pan-European identity. Central here are the seven stages of architectural history that have come to define the collective culture of Europe – that is, Europe’s past. But, more specifically, the Euro is defined by the images of seven styles of bridges. Some reflection on the aesthetic value of this image, as seen through contemporary practices in aesthetic analysis, should give grounding to the value of these images for the difficult project of European integration. Though the language of contemporary aesthetic analysis is not always applicable to debates in political science, we believe such debates offer under-employed resources for articulating the merits for the use of the specific images of bridges in navigating the complexities of establishing a European identity.

Aesthetic analysis relies on the articulation of the object of analysis by way of establishing preconceptions and parameters to which the representation is directed. In the case of
the Euro, that image is a bridge. By common definition, a bridge is that which connects. In the case of material bridges, the connection is between lands that were, before the existence of the bridge, unconnected. But, from a philosophical – specifically from a phenomenological – perspective, how does this connecting occur? Following Martin Heidegger’s reflections in his essay, *Building, Dwelling, Thinking* (1997), we find some means to thinking through this connection and the work the bridge does, both physically and psychologically.

Heidegger argues that there are some buildings in which we dwell, and some buildings that are for the sake of dwelling. That is, there are some buildings which are build for the purpose of our having a space that we can be at home, so to speak, and some buildings that allow us to dwell – allow us to have a sense of there still being a home when we are not there. A bridge is a building of this second type that is not for our being at home, but allows our feeling of being at home to take place. When one is located on a bridge, one is always on the path to or from home, and that path would not exist without the bridge that makes the feeling of being at home possible.

But how does the bridge function to make this feeling possible? Heidegger agrees that the bridge connects. But this is not the sole function of the bridge: the bridge “does not just connect the banks that are already there. The banks emerge as banks only as the bridge crosses the stream. The bridge designedly causes them to lie across from each other. One side is set off against the other by the bridge. Nor do the banks stretch along the stream as indifferent border strips of dry land. With the banks, the bridge brings the stream, the one and the other expanse of

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20 “Phenomenology” is the philosophical discourse of analysis that focuses on perception of objects and central to the experience of objects. Originating in early 19th century philosophical debates in Europe, phenomenology became a central tool in describing modern social and political consciousness. Developed as a school of thought in the early 20th century, phenomenologists made efforts to align first-person perspective with the political project of liberal individualism. For discussion on the history of phenomenology as a tool for conceptual analysis, see Mohanty (1989) and Moran (2000).

21 For an overview of Heidegger’s political employment of phenomenology, esp. as regards aesthetics, see Villa (1995), esp. pp. 219-223.
the landscape lying behind them. It brings stream and bank and land into each other’s neighborhood.” By this, Heidegger means that the bridge causes a focusing – what he calls a gathering – whereby we (the users and viewers) of the bridge reconceptualize our world because of the bridge. That is, the bridge reconfigures what the world is for us.

This is best evidenced if one, looking at a bridge, imagines that the bridge is not there. What happens to the banks and the land and the stream without the bridge? They are not still the banks and land and stream they are in the same way that they are with the bridge. Even such imaginings are difficult, as the bridge is ‘there’, preventing us from actually seeing what the world is without it. According to Heidegger, because the world – as it is now – is not there without the bridge, we prevent ourselves from really imagining the world without the bridge, because – at the moment we are trying to imagine– the bridge is focusing our attention on the world as it is.

That the bridge focuses our eye is easy enough to imagine. But, significantly, Heidegger is claiming that it also focuses our world. The bridge is not simply a means to imagine, but actually changes how the world is:

_The bridge lets the stream run its course and at the same time grants the way to mortals so that they may come and go from shore to shore. Bridges lead in many ways. The city bridge leads from the precincts of the castle to the cathedral square; the river bridge near the country town brings wagons and horse teams to the surrounding villages. The old stone bridge’s humble brook crossing gives to the harvest wagon its passage from the fields into the village and carries the lumber cart from the field path to the road. The highway bridge is tied into the network of long-distance travel, paced as calculated for maximum yield. Always and ever differently the bridge escorts the lingering and hastening ways of men to and from, so that they may get to other banks and in the end, as mortals, to the other side._

Each type and kind of bridge helps to construct a particular point of dwelling in the world. They,
in kind, gather their particular worlds together into ‘worlds.’ Without these bridges, the European
town square, the country village, the metropolitan city and its suburbs, etc. would not be as they
are – that is, they would not be the places they are for our dwelling, for being home.

For Heidegger, this means the bridge builds locations: “Before the bridge stands, there
are of course many spots along the stream that can be occupied by something. One of them
proves to be a location, and does so because of the bridge. Thus the bridge does not first come to
a location to stand in it; rather, a location comes into existence only by virtue of the bridge.” This
is certainly – at first glance – counter-intuitive. Heidegger’s claim is that bridges, as buildings,
construct locations. In gathering – in focusing – our views of the world in particular ways, we the
viewers come to see our particular world as a location. Bridges are unique here in that they make
locations that are now (with the bridge) viewed as once disconnected. But their disconnection
was not apparent and real until the presence of the bridge makes possible their connection.

Such an understanding of bridges may sound abstract, or even unrealistic. But Heidegger
is interested in what bridges, as an example of buildings, do to us (those that live with and use
them). He is conscious that this focus – the work the bridge does for and on us – is not the usual
way to view things: “To be sure, people think of a bridge as primarily and really merely a bridge;
after that, and occasionally, it might possibly express much else besides; and as such an
expression it would become a symbol.” It is this idea, that we can think about what a bridge is –
not simply as a use object – that Heidegger wants to expand on. In thinking about what a bridge
is as a thing, we can begin to reflect on how the bridge acts and works on us, not merely as a thing we use. In this way, Heidegger attests, “we may even be much nearer to that bridge (we
have imagined in this discussion) and to what it makes room for (how it works on us) than
someone who uses it daily as an indifferent river crossing.”
Returning, now, to the image of bridges on the Euro, we can ask, “do these images of bridges work on us in the way that Heidegger claims bridges work?” There is the problem of connecting how actual bridges work on us to how an image of a bridge might work on us. Heidegger opens this prospect with his acknowledgment that the bridge may not merely be a bridge but may also be reflected on as a symbol. But in order to fully appreciate his own purposes here – understanding what a symbol and its work might be – we need to address how symbols work on those who experience them as symbols, and then compare this to our discussion of how bridges work on those who view them. Only then can we evaluate whether, or to what extent, the images on the Euro – aesthetic representations of bridges – may be working to help reconstruct our thinking of the world.

According to Heidegger, art – as an object in the world – is always a ‘thing’.\(^{22}\) This means that, like the bridge, when we notice the art as a thing, it gathers the world around it. But all ‘things’ are not art. This is because “the artwork is something over and above its thingliness” (p. 4). That we recognize something as artwork and not merely as a thing means there is something beyond its ‘thingness’ that works as art. (For Heidegger’s purposes, and ours, it is only through this circularity of thought that we can eventually arrive at what counts as art, in part because what counts as art depends on how and toward whom it does its work). Importantly the work of the art that makes artwork art and not merely a thing depends on a public that is worked on by the art. This work is not merely the reception of art’s expressivity, nor does it depend on mere aesthetic sense. Each of these facets would mean that we – the viewers – would be doing work, interpreting the art, rather than the art doing work on us. (Artwork, for Heidegger, does work on the audience; and all art is not artwork – it is not all working.) Instead, Heidegger argues, “The

\(^{22}\) Heidegger’s most complete discussion of aesthetics (cited below) comes in his essay “The Origins of the Work of Art” (1993).
artwork is indeed a thing that is made, but it says something other than what the mere thing itself is. The work makes publicly known something other than itself, it manifests something other: it is an allegory. In the artwork something other is brought into conjunction with the thing that is made… The work is a symbol.” That is, the work of the art is making apparent something that was not apparent before. For Heidegger, things make themselves apparent; art, by contrast, makes something more than ‘thingness’ apparent.

Art, it turns out, performs this function in two distinct ways: 1) Art asks the audience (the public) to make something apparent beyond the art – this is what Heidegger calls representational art; or 2) art works to make something apparent for the audience – this is an ‘art work.’ The difference here is crucial because most art in the western tradition falls under the first category. Paintings are paintings of some subject that is a vehicle for making apparent something about the subject of the painting. In order for art to work, and not ask the audience to work instead, it must make apparent something that even the audience could not have conceived of before the art worked on them.

Given this review of the two kinds of art, we can now return to the question of the Euro. Are the bridges presented on the Euro representational art or ‘art works’? Bridges themselves – as described phenomenologically – make dwelling possible (something beyond themselves), and as such, would seem to fit more with the model of the artwork. Yet the Euro is characterized by unspecific representations of bridges, asking the audience to think through the symbol of a bridge, without evoking a historical presence of actual bridges (though the Euro does evoke actual styles of bridges from European history). The presentation of bridges on the Euro seems to be the border example between Heidegger’s distinction of art that works and art that doesn’t. As representations of bridges, the Euro would seem to function passively, but because bridges are
the subjects of the art, there is an echo of the activity we would associate with a work of art.

Central to navigating past this impasse may be an exploration of the role or currency as the place for the images of these bridges. Currency being the place these images are presented provides a context distinct from where we usually associate the presentation of art, say of paintings of bridges in museums. In museums, as Heidegger suggests for painting, part of the effect of the presentation comes from the painting being ‘set up’ in a place where the public is asked to engage it. The viewer comes to the art, by choice, and then engages with it outside the normal functions of daily life. The bridge, by contrast shapes those normal functions. What is unique about the currency of the Euro, with its aesthetic presentation of bridges, is that as currency, it becomes part of the daily functioning of life. The images of bridges become images that incorporate themselves into daily practices of commerce. That the bridges are representations than becomes important, because they evoke symbols that demand some recourse of agency from the viewer. But as bridges that symbol has the capacity to evoke the presenting of a new path to thinking about the world that was not possible without them.

The currency then becomes the bridge that makes Europe possible. It is not that European states do not exist or cannot be considered as imagined communities with discrete identities without Europe. But Europe as the union of these member states, requires this act of bridging which puts these member states in relationship to each other as members, thus creating a new idea of Europe as dependent on, but more than, the member states themselves. This phenomenological account of what bridges do (both as structures and as symbols) helps make clear the efficacy of the image. Europe is not Europe without the idea of the bridging of European member states together. The constant presence of such image in the daily lives of Europeans through currency, makes possible a way of imaging what the European Union is,
without relying on conservative romantic notions of authority as grounded in traditions of a shared past.

6) The Euro, Identity, and Public Opinion

Direct empirical tests of the effects of the Euro images on creating a broader European identity remain difficult, as the Eurobarometer series of public opinion polls have started to include questions about the effects of euro on feelings of identity, but not directly related to the euro iconography. At best, the results of these surveys indicate that the introduction of the euro has had a weak, but positive effect on feelings of European identity, and at worst suggest that the euro has had no effect at all. In a survey done in November 2004, 19% of respondents said that since using the euro they had felt “a little more European,” while 78% responded that nothing had changed, and three percent said they felt “a little less European.” Compared to a year earlier, the results for feeling more European had increased two percentage points, responses of no change in identity feelings had fallen two points, and responses of “less European” increasing by one point. Grouped by country, the Irish and the Italians had the highest response rate for feeling more European (34% and 28%, respectively) while the Germans and the Dutch had the lowest rates (12% and 13%). The Germans and Dutch, however, also had the highest rates of respondents saying that nothing had changed, with both at 84%. (European Commission 2004)

Of course, three years is a relatively brief period of time; one would not expect overcoming or modifying feelings of identity to occur overnight, especially when existing nation-states have had generations of indoctrination into national symbols. With only two data points and such small changes, we cannot draw any concrete conclusions as to whether these changes are more than just statistical noise. Nevertheless, demographic variation within the
results are suggestive as well. The age of respondents established no clear pattern, with the highest response rate of feeling more European residing in the 15-24 age range (21%), but the lowest rate (18%) in the next highest age group of 25-34 years old. Education, on the other hand, does appear to matter, as 26% of respondents with 21 years or more of education felt more European, 16% of those with between 16 and 20 years, and 17% of those with 15 years and less responding the same. The next step will be to incorporate demographic and economic variables into a multivariate analysis to gain more traction on the interaction of identity and material interests.

For those that have most recently joined the European Union, however, the potential identity effects of the euro appear even stronger. In May 2008, 53% of respondents in the new member states (NMS) of the E.U. agreed with the statement that, “the usage of the euro instead of the [national currency] will make us feel more European than now.” There was, however, cross-national variation in these feelings, with a strong majority of Hungarians (62%) disagreeing with this statement. In Estonia, a slightly more individuals disagreed with this statement (43%), compared with the 41% who agreed, while in Lithuania the opposite was the case (47%-43%). In every other country, a majority of respondents agreed with the statement. At the same time, 54% of respondents disagreed with the statement that, “adopting the euro will mean that [country] will lose a great deal of its identity.” Only 35% of those surveyed agreed with the statement. Interestingly, once again the Hungarians were on the upper end of those disagreeing with the statement, with 61%. Latvia expressed with greatest concern, with 65% of respondents agreeing with the statement. (European Commission 2008) Given the context of their emergence from the legacy of Soviet domination and their now-achieved aspirations of joining the E.U., it makes sense that the new member states would be more amenable to the
identity effects of the euro (and integration writ large). Nevertheless, the new members appear consistent with the idea that a stronger feeling of a European identity is not mutually exclusive with maintaining connections to their respective national identities.

While the existing Eurobarometer public opinion data on the euro and national identity does not directly connect the images on the euro banknotes, a 2007 Eurobarometer study did ask respondents their opinions on the presence of nation-specific sides to the euro coins. 57% of respondents said that the presence of these specific sides were “a good thing,” while only nine percent said they were a “bad thing.” Surprisingly, 28% responded spontaneously that the national sides were “neither good nor bad,” despite this choice not being an option. Support for national sides being a good thing was highest in Luxembourg (82%), Greece (78%), Finland (77%), the Netherlands (75%), and Slovenia (75%). Agreement with this statement was weakest in Italy, at 31%, although a plurality of Italians were neutral (41%), and only 16% responded that it was a bad thing.

Positive support for the national sides was higher amongst those respondents that were younger and more highly educated. When asked why the national sides were a good thing, more than twice as many individuals said that it was because the images represented the “cultural diversity of Europe,” (65%), rather than liking to see their own country’s image on the coin (30%). This was about the same size as those who said that the variety made the coins more interesting (28%). Younger and more educated respondents were also more likely to indicate that cultural diversity as the source of their support for national sides, while older and less educated respondents were more likely to cite seeing their own national side as their reason for support (European Commission 2007).

The survey also included questions related to desires for greater uniformity or autonomy 23 Numbers do not sum to 100%, as respondents were allowed to make multiple responses.
in the design of the coins. A majority (57%) of respondents across the euro zone disagreed with the statement that the euro coins should have two common sides that did not vary from country to country. This did not translate, however, into a clear mandate for greater autonomy, as only 37% responded that countries should be able to introduce new national sides as often as they wished, with 49% disagreeing. The report does note that in those countries where support for greater autonomy is higher, general support for the euro is lowest, while those countries that have the highest support for the euro tend to be opposed to both greater autonomy and total uniformity.

While not conclusive, these responses are at least suggestive that the public response to the images on euro coins, at least, are consistent with the other public opinion research showing the nuanced relationship of national identity to the broader project of European integration. Feelings of national identity can be both inclusive or particularistic and exclusionary in nature; thus, creating space for E.U. officials to thread the needle of national identity by forging a European identity that is both connected to feelings of the past while building a bridge to a future, collective identity consistent with existing connections to the nation-state.

7) Conclusions

The ECB is currently in the early design phases for the second series of euro notes. The second series will maintain the theme of Ages and Styles of Europe and will maintain many design features from the first series, including the motifs of arches, windows, and bridges (ECB 2007b). Our argument points to the necessity of this continuance. The images currently in use allow for ideational attunement towards the integration of a broader European community, consistent with liberal principles of inclusion, beyond the particularism of the member nation-
As we have attempted to show, the question of legitimate authority is essential to understanding the operation and potential success of a common European currency. Within the euro zone, members have delegated monetary authority to the independent European Central Bank, while authority over other economic policies remain located at the national level or within the more directly democratic institutions at the E.U. level. Thus, the grounding of authority for the E.U. and the euro is more complex than for existing situations of central bank. As Broz (2002) notes, independent central banks are more effective in the context of transparent, democratic systems. This suggests, then, that for relatively non-transparent institutions to operate effectively, not only should they be nested in transparent political systems, but also that citizens will need to view that institution as having legitimate authority to garner their trust.

Relating notions of authority to public trust through transparent economic policies is especially important to the formation of new democratic political entities. Using aesthetic analysis that explains corresponding public reactions helps to address ideational factors that impact and ground the psychological foundations of trust and legitimate authority. Based on the combination of approaches in this paper, we assert that the aesthetics of nationalism as employed on currency negatively effect the formation of supranational political identities. If Europe intends to develop past the current institutional stalemate, the ‘bridge’ should become the central symbol of this new political project. Whether such images succeed in helping to form a pan-European identity will be tested by current proposals for the reformation of political institutions within the EU, including the establishment of a more permanent presidential role in governance (past the rotating six-month position now in place). As the EU begins to act more like a state, the problems of ideational attachment will become more acute. We believe the Euro can have a role
in alleviating potential tensions within these transformations.
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Appendix A – Selected Alternate euro Image Submissions

Top pick by public survey (submission by Maryke Degryse)

Top abstract pick by expert jury (submission by Klaus Michel and Sanne Jünger)

2nd abstract pick by expert jury (submission by Roger Pfund)