

'Music makes sense'



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Music has always been at the core of my work. From there new ideas emerge. "Automatic for the People" by REM is an album that I can listen to again and again. While writing this essay, its songs make me fly like a butterfly.

I have traveled across borders through Europe, Syria and Lebanon since the 1980s and met many young people and their teachers. Inspired by those encounters, I wrote the English-language book 'Multiple Choice Identity' about the history of Europe from 1900 to the present. The story consists of facts and fiction, illustrations, drama and humor, stories from eyewitnesses, and most of all, music.

'And I said hey hey hey, what's going on?' (Four Non Blonder).

The past 100 years WWI, WWII, the Cold War and the present (1989-) were historical, economic, technological, ideological and philosophical turning points. All this time music served as a sense-opener, a source of knowledge, a way of communication, creation, action and reflection. This was also the case for the youngsters in the book, the novel and the film, who reacted differently on the music.

All these experiences were described in the book *'Multiple Choice Identity'*, expressed in songs (a Spotify playlist), articulated in the novel *'Smoldering Fire'* and depicted in the film *'l'Europe c'est moi'* through a personal voice-over of Europe.

In the book and the novel, the story is told in part through text messages from 9 young people / 'ghostwriters,' whom I met during my travels. They represent the youth of today. They react to events, to so-called 'survival theses', to music and to each other. The survival theses relate to resistance, (un)health, modern slavery, war and violence, differences between rich and poor and climate change.

These are the youngsters with their favorite music:



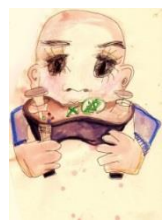
Django: jihadist
from London
Hip hop and Deathcore



Irina: aesthetic/ empathic
youngster from Rome
Pink Floyd, avant garde
Dance and Trance



Monique: hedonistic/
narcissist girl from Amsterdam
Rock, pop, R&B and Dance



Thomas: neo-nazi from Berlin
Heavy metal and Rammstein



Sandis: avatar and putinist from Riga
Techno and electronic music



Iqbal: moslima from Damascus
Arab music and Hip hop



Hakan: activist from Istanbul
Heavy Metal and Metallica



Christine: critical activist from Oslo
Hip hop



CHillak: alternative youngster
from Ljubljana
Punk and Postpunk

'With a little help from my friends', the reader can survive through these survival theses and develop what I call a "multiple choice identity", a flexible, active, creative and empathetic identity.

I am especially indebted to Howard Gardner for multiple intelligences and to Mary Helen Immordino for emotional learning, We feel, therefore we learn. My visit to Harvard is still an important inspiration.

'The war that never ended': World War One

The story begins at the To-Gatherland Festival 2022, and from there the youngsters go back in time and find themselves in the trenches of World War I. They must survive.

WWI is called "the music war", because music was used as a weapon. In the trenches at night, the soldiers sang songs and the opponent's national anthem. They were singing so out of tune that their enemies didn't sleep a wink. Sometimes the British placed a record player in the trench to listen to the latest songs from Paris such as "*It's a long way to Tipperary*" and "*Over There*".

The neo-nazi in the group, Thomas, was enthusiastic about '*Der Her hat alles in der Hand*' and martial music as '*Der Kaiser hütet Euch*'. He's still feeling a 'Reichsbürger' and dreams about a coup in the future. At the same time Christine, CHillak and Irina liked anti-war songs like '1916' from Motörhead and 'Battle of Passchendale' from Iron Maiden. Hakan was very much inspired by PJ Harvey's song 'The glorious land' about the battle of Gallipoli in 1915.

Even in our time, more music is still being made about WWI, such as:

- '*Lament*' by Einstürzende Neubauten
- '*One*' by Metallica about a badly wounded soldier
- '*Let England Shake*' by PJ Harvey.
- '*Thunder without frequencies*' by The Gathering

During the Interbellum, upbeat music such as the blues, the Charleston and jazz returned. People could dance again in the roaring twenties. Both ladies' hairstyles and skirts became shorter. Young women drank alcohol, smoked and wore makeup. For Irina, CHillak and Christine it felt like a revival of 'La Belle Epoque'. Monique just wanted to 'dance till the music stops', but soon the party was over due to the Crisis of 1929.

'The broken mirror': WWII

Thomas experienced his finest hour when fascist soldiers were marching in the streets, chanting *Heil Hitler Dir!*, 'and *Vorwärts! Vorwärts!*' and singing '*SS Marschirt in Feindesland*'. The music echoed violence, hatred and arrogance, because music would make fascist man decisive, dynamic and strong. It was the harbinger of the Holocaust. Via radio, the music of Richard Wagner and Anton Bruckner was distributed to the 'Herrenvolk'. All music was equalized ('Gleichschaltung') and non-German and especially Jewish music was banned. According to Thomas, music had to be connected only to the German people. Jewish composers were later found in Hitler's private record collection though! Sandis supported Stalin through songs as '*Forward youth for communism*', while Christine, CHillak and Irina sang: '*War what it's good for , absolutely nothing!*'. -4-

Music was also played by victims and even in the concentration camps. Johnny and Jones made songs in Westerbork such as the '*Westerbork Serenade*', and in Auschwitz during performances and executions. At a party in Auschwitz, the dancer Margarita shot several SS soldiers during her dance (see the film 'L'Europe c'est moi'). She finally wanted to determine how to die!

Modern music provided the echo of WWII. Irina was impressed by Pink Floyd's "Final Cut" and Thomas by Rammstein's "Zeitgeist". In the song "Deutschland", Rammstein used horrible images from the concentration camp! Monique especially enjoyed the song '*Trees got a Canadian*' about the liberation.

'Let's have a party': The Cold War (1945-1989?).

Two types of music emerged during the Cold War. 'Let's have a party' had a different meaning on both sides of the Iron Curtain. Thus in the group of youngsters Sandis and CHillak came to be contrasted with Monique and Christine. After the war, songs about that liberation became hugely popular in the Netherlands such as '*Herrijzend Nederland*' and '*Nederland is vrij*'.

(PS I was born a "Cold War Kid" in 1950).

Eastern Europe was, nicely put, under the wings of communism and only came out from under it in the 1980s. Loyalty to the party and the leader was paramount and all Nazi or Allied influences were nullified.

In the West, rock 'n roll broke through the dark clouds of the Cold War in 1955. For Monique it was a wake-up call for dancing, a matching outfit and a new lifestyle with 'Cocacolarisation'.

Sandis disagreed, because there was also rockmusic in Russia. However it didn't sound like rock because the heavy beat was missing and the accordeon and the violin were used.

Furthermore America and Western Europe interacted over democracy, science and technology, agriculture and industry, fashion and music. But nevertheless, tensions escalated during the Cold War and resulted in the construction of the Berlin Wall in 1961 and the Cuba Crisis in 1962. Bob Dylan thought things would go completely wrong and wrote '*A hard rain's gonna fall*'. For Christine, Irina and Hakan Dylan's lyrics descibed, what was going on in the world.

Out of the blue The Beatles provided a musical 'big bang', which could be heard worldwide. Millions of young people and also Monique could identify with the smart, sassy and disarming 'boys next door' with strong and creative songs like '*I feel fine*', '*Rain*', '*Help*', '*I am the walrus*' and '*Yesterday*'.

Their music was brilliant and innovative and was popular even behind the Iron Curtain.

Young people increasingly demanded their place in society and they did so with protest songs like Bob Dylan's '*Blowing in the wind*' and Jimmy Hendrix's '*All along the watchtower*'. Youngsters no longer felt alone. In the sixties, young people demonstrated en masse against inequality and the war in Vietnam. It wasn't just about music, but also about 'talking in titles'. For example '*Who'll stop the rain*' by Creedence Clearwater Revival was actually about napalm. The youngsters were disagreeing more and more about what was going on. For example Christine, Irina and Monique walked along with the demonstrations, singing '*Blowing in the wind*'. CHillak and Sandis were living in the communist Eastern Europe and were not allowed to listen to Western music and to join the street fighting men. -6-

Sandis and Thomas wanted none of that, because they were positive about the Vietnam War against communism.

The Cold War was still frozen over. Like yesterday I remember it was freezing 20 degrees in Berlin and our bus broke down in the middle of an intersection in East Berlin. All around the bus were GDR soldiers with machine guns. Repairing the bus took forever, but when we drove again it felt like liberation.

In the 1970s, "*the times were a-changing*" during 'The Thaw' and in England, the Punk Revolution broke out in 1976, with a raw, direct and aggressive music by Sex Pistols with '*Anarchy in the UK*' and The Clash with '*London calling*'. I had to get used to it at first, but then the punk feeling sank in. In the group of youngsters CHillak was the most susceptible to this new trend and became a real punk with spiky hair and black leather clothes.

There was more new music like the symphonic and spiritual music of Genesis and Pink Floyd. Irina internalized it deeply. The German band Kraftwerk expressed modern technology electronically with synthesizers, drum machines, and vocoders in songs like '*Autobahn*' and the vibrating '*Radioactivity*'. Monique liked to dance on the steady computer beat.

Most young people loved dancing to the nice rhythms and sounds of disco music. Disco was a kind of 'Big Mac Music', that fitted perfectly into Western consumer society.

However a new phenomenon was the terrorism of the Baader-Meinhof group that targeted war criminals from WWII and the Vietnam War. Like many young people I had my doubts and I wrote '*The Ulrike Meinhof Ballad*' with the line '*Is it heroism or just shedding blood*'. Christine had the same feelings about the failed 'Widergutmachung' of World War Two.

Fortunately the Cold War produced wonderful music such as the brilliant song *'Heroes'* by David Bowie, *'Berlin'* by Fischer Z, *'Blackened'* by Metallica and *'Dancing with tears in your eyes'* by Ultravox. These were the favorite songs of Christine, CHillak and Irina.

The soundtrack to the film *'The Wall'* became "*All and all we're just another brick in the wall*" by Pink Floyd. In the Netherlands, the pop group Doe Maar sang *'The Bomb'* and Klein Orkest *'Over the Wall'*, which fused words, feelings and music. Monique liked the melodies and the lyrics very much. In the end, music tore down the Berlin Wall brick by brick.

'Don't you forget about me', Sandis said, because during the Perestrojka modern music was also popular in Russia and later in 1991 AC/DC performed for 150000 people! So under Putin: *'Hell ain't a bad place to be'*.

In 1987 I was in Berlin when Nena played *'99 Luftballons'* close to the wall. During the Stones' performance a thick cloud of smoke drifted over the wall. There was panic in GDR, because people in East Berlin thought it was a poison gas attack.

Like Monique, I was "flabbergasted" when the pop band Abba made the song *"The visitor"* about the Stasi in the GDR. Their music was subsequently banned.

The dark clouds of the Cold War had also brought doomsday thinking for Hakan and CHillak with Heavy Metal and New Wave. Music reacted more and more directly to social developments regarding unemployment, environmental pollution and economic growth.

Nevertheless or perhaps because of this, the eighties were a flourishing period in modern music and comparable to the sixties. The Heavy Metal scene became leading with aggressive rhythms, heavily amplified electric guitars and dark tones.

Black Sabbath with *'Paranoid'*, Led Zeppelin with *'Stairway to heaven'*, ACDC with *'Whole lotta Rosie'* and Hawkwind with *'Silver machine'* captured the spirit of the times.

This was also done by New Wave and the Kafkaian Joy Division, named after a women's barrack in a concentration camp. The music was 'dark and gloomy' and Ian Curtis' vocals sounded dead. The rushed rhythm consisted only of drums. It was an expression of the 'Weltschmerz' with more ominous songs like *'She lost control again'* and *'Love will tear us apart'*. Other brilliant 'lows' were 'A Forest' by The Cure and *'Land of confusion'* by Genesis about the threat of nuclear war.

'Crisis! What Crisis?!': 'It's the Crisix'

'The story of scattered life can only be told in bits and pieces' (Rainer Maria Rilke) also typified the "roaring nineties" and the first decades of the 21st century. The spirit of time was creatively and intensely expressed by the band Nirvana featuring Kurt Cobain on the CD *'Nevermind'*: *'Here we are now entertain us'*. For CHillak Grunge smelled like teen spirit and it was also the echo of the punkspirit. Resistance to racism was played by Rage Against the Machine in *'Killing in the name of'* and by Pussy Riot with a punk performance of less than a minute. I was completely blown away when I saw RATM playing at Pinkpop in 1993.

By now the music is maybe a little less focused on society, but protest songs are still there: *'Where is the love'* by Black Eyes Peas, *'Fuck you'* by Lilly Allen and *'Mr. Cab Driver'* by Lenny Kravitz.

Like Irina, I sometimes wonder what music would sound like in heaven. The answer was provided by the atmospheric music of Sigur Rós on their third album ().

Through the Crisis of 2008, the stalled Arab Spring that made me write *'Circle of the square'*, the great wave of migration of 2015 that inspired me to write *'Refugee in me'* and the corona pandemic of 2020 to 2022(?), it became increasingly clear that we had ended up in a 'perfect storm'. I would like to call it 'The Crisix', consisting of:

1. Resistance to the virus 'Manipularia' including fake news, corruption, disinformation and transgressive behaviour.
2. (Un)health
3. Modern slavery and migration of 65 million people
4. Violence and terrorism with '*sympathy for the devil*' '*Hey, Hey, Rise Up*', Pink Floyd.
5. Inequality and globalization: '*To be is to buy*'
6. Climate change. '*Blah, blah, blah*' (Greta Thunberg).

So society and music, as well as the musical identities of the youngsters, became more and more fragmented. The youngsters firstly reacted dazed and confused, but furthermore found their own flexible and creative way as 'multiple choice identities'. But not for all youngster it was a feast. For example the friends of Thomas used 'battle raps' aggressively during riots and Sandis liked Putin more and more when he invaded Ukrain.

Each youngster had its own music and sometimes mixed it with other styles. At dancefestivals they sometimes did dance together and to gather.

Thomas used Deathcore, Heavy Metal and Drillrap to attack democracy, although for Hakan Heavy Metal was a positive vibe of the power of democracy.

As you already know, for Monique music was for dancing such as R&B with superstar Beyoncé and rap like 'Shirak UHUH van Ronnie Flex, Yssi @ Lil Kleine. Irina liked Dance very much, played by Dutch DJs as well as the sustainable music of Sigur Rós. The IT-freak Sandis listened to techno and Christine to Hip hop. To her it was not only music, but also a way to resist in the transnational cultural movement Black Lives Matter. Kendrick Lamar and Beyoncé sang the song '*Freedom*' against racism and Iqbal felt it was about her.

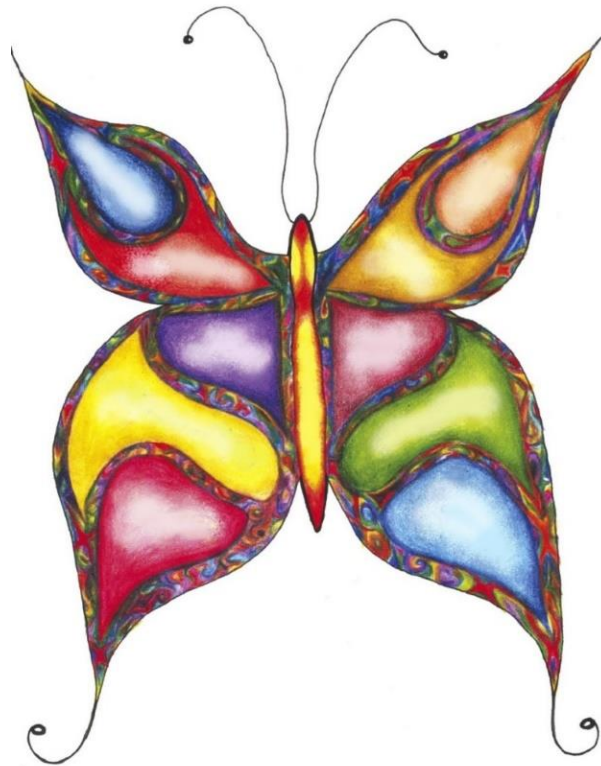
CHillak and Christine enjoyed the energetic and exciting Postpunk from Fontaines DC and Idles in order to cope creatively with the 'Crisis'.

After the fall of the Wall, a new world order seemed to have emerged, but it turned out to be a world disorder. Was I no Cold War Kid anymore? 'The perfect storm' was predicted for a long time, but nothing was done about it. These were missed opportunities, but the bill was presented in these days. Despite that, there was still resistance, such as by Faiza Ouhlasen of Greenpeace, who was captured by the Russians. Her photo with help on her palm went all over the world. I wrote the song *'Faiza sometimes'* for her. For me a dream came true when I made the CD *'The Musical History Tour'* with The Gathering, including my songs *'Every day is like thousand years'*, *'The Golden age'* and *'Anachrone circles'*. 'The Gathering themselves had previously made the wonderful song *'Strange machines'*.

Underway I wrote *'Passenger in time'*:
'Passenger in time searching the unknown
Passenger in time over there is my home
My feet are on the ground, stand up to violence.
Can't you hear the sound the sound of silence' (2009)

Despite all these problems music still made sense, although the future would not be like it was before. Music could solve problems through action, creation and reflection. Christine's and CHillak's slogan was *'Nobody's gonna take us alive'* (Muse), protesting against racism, modern slavery and climate change and listening to Hip hop and Postpunk. It gave them a lot of positive energy. Irina believed in Mother Earth and reflected on the ambient music of Sigur Rós. For Hakan Heavy Metal was a wake-up call for *'It's education, stupid'*. He and Irina were still inspired by Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young and the beautiful song *'Teach your children well'*. Monique kept on dancing with music of Beyoncé, mixing R&B, funk and Hip hop. The wait is for a new musical Big Bang and new musical mixes.

Now it's about your time to fill the butterfly's wings with your own choices, values, music and solutions and to feel free and fly away!



*'When the four corners of this cocoon collide. You'll slip through the cracks hopin' that you'll gather your wit, take a deep look inside
Are you really who they idolize?*

*To pimp a butterfly
(Kendrick Lamar)*

The book *'Multiple choice identity'* is for €19,90 and the novel *'Smoldering fire'* for €18,90 available (including VAT and shipping costs via w.kratsborn@planet.nl or PayPal via Wim Kratsborn, naming your address).

The film *'l'Europe' c'est moi'* is available for free on YouTube!



Wim Kratsborn (1950-) studied master's degree in history at the University of Groningen. From 1971 to 2012 he worked as a teacher of history and social studies at Hanze University of Applied Sciences Groningen. Since the 80s he participated in European educational networks such as ETEN, CiCE and EUROCLIO.

In 2006 he became project leader of his own innovative educational and international citizenship project To-Gather in 9 European countries, Syria and Lebanon. During his travels he was inspired at all places by (young) people, historical places and current events. A highlight was his visit to Harvard and meetings with Howard Gardner ('Multiple Intelligences') and Mary Helen Immordino ('We feel and therefore we learn').

After his retirement in 2012, he continued with To-Gather and created the book 'Multiple ChoiceIdentity', the novel 'Smoldering fire', the film 'l'Europe c'est moi' and songs. He's also working as a director, painter, sculptor, educational designer, composer and musician.

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'In the year 2025 To-Gather is still alive'