

# Blixal Bargeld

**EUROPE  
CROSSWISE**

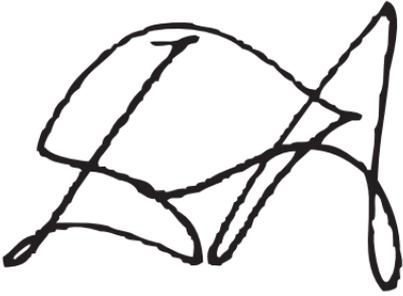
A LITANY

Translation & Afterword by Mark Kanak

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## EUROPE CROSSWISE A LITANY

Translation & Afterword

by Mark Kanak



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# **EUROPE CROSSWISE**

A LITANY



Routine sets in: The individual concerts become blurred in temporal space without lines of geographic separation, now lighter, now darker.... Where were we yesterday? Where the day before yesterday? What day is it today? Warsaw was a week ago, Russia last Wednesday: four days ago. Today's Stockholm, Sunday April 27, show day: "Berns." I ate here once a few years ago, when I had a Swedish girlfriend. It was as geriatric as the Kranzler back then. Since then it's been sold, renovated and, yes: It's impressive. We stay at the "Berns" Hotel, play in the hotel's "Stora Salongen" (chandeliers), eat in "Berns Asian" (not even all that bad), and our changing room is in the "Röda Rumet" (Strindberg's Red Room) in the hotel. A Stockholm of the short distances.

Die Wellen  
 Nagorny karabach  
 Dead Friends  
 Let's Do it a Da Da  
 Weil Weil Weil  
 Unvollständigkeit  
 Tagelang Weiss  
 Rampe / Von wegen  
 Die Befindlichkeit des Landes  
 Sabrina  
 Susej  
 Ich warte

Post-show drinking party with Swedish friends;  
 actors, composers, artists.

Dror Feiler: The Bavarian Radio Orchestra doesn't want to play his commissioned composition, "Halat Hisar / State of Siege" because it's too loud.

The Director is worried about members of his orchestra suffering hearing damage.

Amanda Ooms is now the mother of twins.

Stockholm → Oslo.

Giorgio de Santillana and Hertha von Dechend:

*Hamlet's Mill.*

We need to rest. The driver needs to rest. Parking lot.

A licorice shop with 400 kinds of licorice. Suspicious-looking köttbullar (meatballs).

We played the "Lakkegata Skole" in Oslo in 1983, a building used for art by the Norwegian Art Academy. Supposedly, it closed down after that. Supposedly the roof collapsed. Supposedly, supposedly. There weren't that many people there; Andrew had enough room to shoo the mob through the hall with Molotov cocktails. Power failure.

Minor revolt. We had spirited some of the instruments away from rubbish heaps and building sites, and just left it all behind after the concert. Most of them autographed (→ Akademie der Künste). Nothing exceptional. Legendary. It still gets brought up today.

I often visit Edvard Munch when I'm in Oslo, but you never know if he's at home or not. He often leaves the museum by way of the ladder, disappearing with anti-abortion activists and similar friends of the arts.

Anselm Kiefer's Lead Library, electively either *Zweistromland* or *The Empress* in Astrup Fearnley Museet

for *Moderne Kunst*. A room further on, paintings of two friends: Sophie de Stempel, painted by Lucian Freud, and Isa Genzken, painted by Gerhard Richter.

We are playing late again, time enough for me to have dinner: “Bagatelle,” I’ve been there before; perhaps my first meal at a Michelin-starred restaurant. Quality. Scandinavian-French. Incomparable sea creatures from northern waters: sole from Skagerak, lobster from Kvitsoy, scallops from Tromso. Furthermore: the usual suspects, not only on the menu — truffles, Foie gras, etc., but also on the walls. Andreas Gursky, Candida Höfer, etc. Large setups at the other tables, too: Cleptocrats, international industrialists, etc. And me: With only a little time & a darkening mood. It’s not the chef’s fault.

I receive an oyster baked with spinach as an amuse-bouche, and order fish: I cannot nor do I want to stay long.

St. Aubin I. Cru Clos de la Chateniere, Marc Colin 2005.

My attempts to eat are repeatedly interrupted by a fat woman dressed in a bright orange blouse draped with a silk scarf and a heavy bronze cross on a leather strap. She keeps telling the others about the joys of breastfeeding in a loud voice. The word “breastfeeding” is stressed again and again. “Breastfeeding.” What is she? A professional wet nurse? I already know what a man at her table dressed in a suit with metal buttons does: He’s spoken about military tanks being delivered.

Mostly, however, the “breastfeeder” is blathering on with her nerve-wracking voice; she seems to want to feed the entire restaurant, or at a minimum we are to take note of her ample, orange clad breasts, resplendent with a heavy cross.

After every loudmouthed “breastfeeding” or “you have to get your nipples out...” since “breastfeeding” is integrated in corresponding sentence contexts, she smiles at the men at the table.

Even at dessert I am interrupted again with “breastfeeding, breastfeeding, breastfeeding...”

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TAKK FOR BESOKET

VELKOMMEN IGJEN

“Sentrum Scene,” junkie neighborhood, directly adjacent the Labor Office square, Abreidesamfunnets plass:

Die Wellen

Nagorny Karabach

Dead Friends

Let's Do it a Da Da

Weil Weil Weil

Unvollständigkeit

Tagelang Weiss

Rampe/Von wegen

Die Befindlichkeit des Landes  
Sabrina  
Susej  
Ich Warte  
Oslo → Copenhagen

*Ich bin unterwegs*  
*I'm on the way*  
*in einer Melange aus „Jetlag“ und Alkohol*  
*in a melange of “jetlag” and alcohol*  
*in einem Bus mit hundert Sachen*  
*in a bus at 100 km/hour*

*Ich bin unterwegs*  
*I'm on the way*  
*mit meiner unsichtbaren Eismaschine*  
*with my invisible ice machine*  
*mit meinem unsichtbaren offenen Kamin*  
*with my invisible open fireplace*  
*Sie sitzen neben mir im Flugzeug*  
*they sit next to me in the airplane*  
*Sie liegen neben mir in meinem „King-Size“ Hotel Bett*  
*they lie beside me in my “king-sized” hotel bed*  
*Sie zaehlen nicht als „Excess luggage“*  
*they don't count as “excess luggage”*  
*Sie brauchen keinen „Wake-up-call“*  
*they don't need a “wake-up call”*  
*Von A nach B der Liebe wegen*  
*From A to B because of love*

Von A nach B der Liebe wegen

*From A to B because of love*

Von A nach B der Liebe wegen

*From A to B because of love*

Von A nach B der Liebe wegen

*From A to B because of love*

The hotel in Copenhagen provides material for a lifestyle magazine. An “Ice-bar,” composed completely of ice — is part of the concept. “Just check in with one of our unique Live-life packages; enjoy life in The Wine Room, experience food and wine from all over the world; enjoy the best classical and molecular drinks served in Scandinavia in the Honey Ryder Cocktail Lounge and get a cool experience in the exceptional Absolut Icebar Copenhagen, built uniquely with ice from the Torne-River in Lapland. Even the restrooms are designed to give you an extraordinary experience.”

What, pray, is a “Live-life package”? What are molecular drinks? Whatever.

I can find no indication of how to operate my phone, or instructions of how to do so, in the extremely small room. What do I dial to connect to the reception? It’s usually “9” or “0,” but not here. I find the hotel phone number on a brochure left in the room and dial it on my cell phone. Unfortunately, I reach the central booking office for the entire chain, which isn’t even located in Copenhagen and doesn’t know what number to dial, either. So — down I go, down to the lobby to speak directly to the receptionist:

She is ensconced behind a sort of sideboard, anything else would be too old-fashioned. She looks very Danish behind the shelves of brightly lit packaged sandwiches and soft drinks. When it's my turn — I have to wait a while to speak with her — it takes her a bit to understand my problem. Or rather, she doesn't understand it and considers it *my* problem, which by now is really pushing *my* buttons, somewhat. No matter. No time: I cut off her declaration with a wave of my hand. "I don't really want to discuss this with you. All I want is a reservation for Bo Beck's restaurant for lunch, for one, for now. Can you do that?" "I don't feel like it." "What?" Several curious onlookers have gathered behind us, among them, fortunately, my tour manager. I leave further discussion to him, get into a taxi and call "Bo Beck at Restaurant Partisan" while already on the way there.

A restaurant in a furniture showroom in the North Harbor Docks almost outside Copenhagen. There are four menu choices.

*Chlorophyll*  
*The vegetarian menu*

Magnificent, but not today...

*Brillat-Savarin*

Maybe ...

*Lunch*  
*Two light courses, different every day*

No. I don't need that. I have time.

*The Alchemist*

*The surprise menu*

*Forward mindset with respect for the classic kitchen*

Yep, that's it. Surprise me. More than half a dozen happily and successfully whimsically culinary baguettes arrive in succession, and indeed, I am pleasantly surprised.

I don't know if Bo Beck has studied under Feran Adrià in Roses or if he thought up these techniques on his own, but it works; it's not a bunch of silliness. Even the main courses:

*Poached King crab with hazelnut oil marzipan & cauliflower mosaic*

*Grilled leek marrow with horseradish & flat parsley*

*Raw fried lobster with gelled green peas & cress*

*Lemon sole with soft nuances of tomato & garlic*

*Oxidized mushroom bouillon*

The menu description doesn't begin to convey what he creates and how he presents the dishes. The ingredients glow.

The waiter is unobtrusive and polite. Not even the other diners are unpleasant. The menu is probably too modern for businessmenski. Material for molecular cuisine jokes? Mistake: Cheery.



“El Bulli” is in Roses, in the Gulf of Roses, beautifully situated on a mountainside overlooking the coast. This much we know, but just not the best way to get there.

When we call the restaurant to inquire, we discover that our table is actually reserved for 8 PM, and that no guests are seated after 9. It’s 7 PM. 7 PM! Taxi! Barcelona → Roses: 167 km. Unfortunately, the taxi driver is neither an aficionado of Spanish *haute gastronomie* nor a native of the Gulf of Roses, which turns the drive against time into a nerve-jangling undertaking. We call the restaurant repeatedly and hand the phone to the taxi driver so that he can report his latest position and the nearest street signs. We arrive at the restaurant at a quarter past nine. The taxi ride costs more than the 30-course menu. Inside everyone is cordial, taking great pains to put us at ease. We must make a frantic impression. Everything’s fine, we’re not too late, and are asked if we’d like to see the kitchen.

Of course, we would. It’s true: The number of cooks in the kitchen is about equal to the number of guests, with a magnificent, nearly soundless bustling about: They’re all very young, very international, will probably return to their respective countries after their apprenticeships to hoist the flag of their master in new restaurants. Ferran Adrià is standing alone at the stainless steel island in front and supervises the activity; the succession of courses. The business has electronic organizers with records for each guest, so they know who has been served what at any given

moment, what they liked or rejected. No one ever eats the same meal twice in El Bulli. Ferran Adrià has a second restaurant in Valencia which serves only his greatest hits with the item's year noted on the menu: "Gin Fizz" 1998, "Peas" 2001; here, however, he only prepares the latest program (although "DOCUMENTA KASSEL 16/06 – 23/09 2007 is still imprinted on the menu — just as a memento, as the Maître D assures us). "The latest album" of 2008 is everything that he and his team have developed in the lab during the half-year in which the restaurant is closed.

*yuzu / sake / Kyoto*  
*nori — Trias*  
*spherical olives*  
*tomato cookie*  
*pine kernel & chocolate bonbons*  
*beetroot & yoghurt meringue*  
*rabbit ear crunchie*  
*mint leaf*  
*strawberries*  
*gorgonzola moshi*  
*black sesame sponge cake with miso*  
*flowers paper*  
*cream-LYO*  
*asparagus with miso*  
*razor clams / Laurencia*  
*haricot bean with Joxelito's Iberian pork fat*  
*tangerine flower / pumpkin oil with mandarin seeds*  
*almonds jelly with cocktail of fresh almonds "Umeboshi"*

*anchovy & ham with yoghurt yuba*  
*water lily*  
*peas 2008*  
*sea anemone 2008*  
*gnocchi of polenta with coffee & safran yuba*  
*sea cucumber with mentaiko & rhubarb*  
*“negrito” 2008*  
*game meat canapé*  
*hare juice with apple jelly-cru with black currant marinated*  
*brie stuffed with truffels*  
*“trufitas”*  
*Lulo*  
*Morphings...*

Has Ferran been soaking up inspiration in Japan? The evening is full of Japanese ingredients and consistencies: Yuzu (a Japanese citrus), Nori (sea algae), Moshi (shrimp rice balls), Yuba (soymilk skin), Mentaiko (marinated fish roe) and miso. Flowers pressed in edible papers, sea anemonæ in bonsai garden pong landscapes. As expected: the entertainingly unexpected. No vacuous effects. Also astounding: Almost no meat. A rabbit ear, a bit of ham.... “El Bulli” is the best restaurant in the world; I am on the waiting list for the second best, Heston Blumenthal’s Fat Duck in Berkshire in England. Copenhagen surprised me; from Catalonia — there are after all nearly a dozen restaurants in the same league here — I expected this much culinary inventiveness, this much class.

Everything is new, newly conceived, reinvented backwards, new tastes, new ideas. Just a moment. I've actually already eaten the spherical olives, in Valencia, in the "Greatest Hits" restaurant. That's what made him famous. Doesn't matter. Still good.

A second taxi takes us back to Barcelona. Satisfied.  
Barcelona → Lyon, 7:30 AM

I get on the bus. I, my small suitcase, my garment bag, my computer bag. I'm the only passenger. The others flew yesterday.

After a short chat with the bus driver and a cup of tea I lie down in my berth. We've left Barcelona, are traveling north on the freeway to Francia.

We'll be traveling for about eight hours, so perhaps stop once to eat something, but after the culinary excesses in Barcelona I don't really feel like it.

We drive straight through. Stop to refuel — but otherwise in one stretch. "Hilton Lyon," I've been here before. A modern construction strip on the banks of the Rhone, Quai Charles de Baule. Block after block: hotels, restaurants, casinos. A new pedestrian zone in "Parc de la tête d'or," the park of the golden head. I go into one of the French bistro simulations, order cheese, water, & a "Negroni"; the waitress recognizes me, but the man at the bar has no "Negroni":

Gin  
Sweet Vermouth  
Campari

We are playing at a venue within walking distance,  
“Boulevard de Stalingrad,” last block on the same bank,  
multi-use hall, cultural, new construction.

Die Wellen

Nagorny Karabach

Dead Friends

Let's Do it a Da Da

Weil Weil Weil

Unvollständigkeit

Tagelang Weiss

Rampe / Von wegen

Die Befindlichkeit des Landes

Sabrina

Susej

Ich warte

Without incident.

Lyon → Paris

Paris by train. I want to accept the award for my  
life's work afterwards.

TGV 613

VOITURE 03

PLACE ASSISE 46

OI COULOIR

DUPLEX: EN BAS

Lunch invitation in “Cour Jardin” of “Hotel Plaza  
Athénée,” the award is presented, a cylinder filled with  
quartz crystals —, photos are taken, saffron risotto,

in Bouillabaisse broth, champagne, Alexandre Grauer, “President” of the “Quartz Electronic Music Awards,” nice man.

Before I set out for “Venue” I pass by Guerlain on the Champs Élysées: “Bois d’Arménie” can only be bought here: incense, wood, and a little hint of iris in the head; coriander, rose pepper, and benzoin in the long breath; a heart of patchouli. Faded memories of Indian shops in the 70s. Somewhere, far in the background, a rose. Androgynous. Everything fits.

We have played at “Bataclan” repeatedly since the introduction of volume limits for concerts, in other locations the implementation was worse, stricter, unbearable. It’s OK here. The way the volume is measured here (in decibels, a logarithmic ratio) doesn’t really help. Any orchestra playing fortissimo would exceed the specified limits. Or, as we were able to demonstrate once in the “Élysée Montmartre”: One beat on our metal plates is louder than the French government permits even with the amplifiers turned off. We are not all that loud. We can hear the cell phones in the first row. The dressing room in “Bataclan” is as large as a bath towel and not at all suitable for socializing; I find a seat in a bistro, drink wine and read.

Lewis Hyde: *Trickster Makes This World*

Now and then I autograph a t-shirt, a CD, or an arm. When I get ready to leave, I learn that fans in the restaurant have paid my bill without making a fuss about it.



# **AFTERWORD**



Taking the definition of the word into account, two things specifically interested him about it.<sup>4</sup> A litany is in fact not a literary genre, or specific form, but rather a religious (specifically, Catholic) one that a) is potentially endless, has no “high point” and also no beginning or end, but just runs in a loop, and b) generally, it is a text that is spoken, a verbal text. In approaching the book, it soon became clear that the “Alles Wieder Offen” European Tour in 2008 would be the perfect backbone to the book after all. And as he’d already been in nearly all the scheduled cities before, this too was going to be a repetition in the sense of a litany, namely, the same thing again & again, with the potential that this particular version of it could prove endlessly and especially appealing.

A further aspect that interested him: At the time of writing the book, Bargeld & his wife were splitting time between three different cities at once, namely San Francisco and Beijing, with Berlin in the middle.

4. Litany: In the liturgy of the Catholic Church, the alternating prayer between the prayer leader and the congregation responding with unchanging supplications, a rendered ‘long-winded, monotonous enumeration, repeatedly recited lament, exhortation.’ → *letanīe*, early German *letaney*, *litanie*, *litaney* are borrowed from Late Latin *litanīa*, also *letanīa*, *lætanīa* ‘supplication procession, supplication formulas recited alternately in processions and at mass.’ → Late Latin *litanīa*, in turn, is borrowed from Greek *litanēīa* (λιτανεία) ‘petition, supplication’; to Greek *litanēuein* (λιτανεύειν) ‘ask, plead.’ The development of the present form of prayer began in the early Middle Ages.

In a sense he was already criss-crossing the world; the European tour would add another component to that mix. “I knew that for work with *Neubauten*, I would always need to be in Berlin. And then I would go from Berlin either to Beijing and from Beijing, I would fly to San Francisco, and from San Francisco back to Berlin. And that was my life ... well, until we gave up. Eventually we decided, for various reasons, to give up San Francisco and make it only Berlin.”<sup>5</sup> In light of this, obviously there was a bit of irony in the title: “CROSSwise.”

In talking about the book after it was published, Bargeld wanted to emphasize one thing especially, & if anything should be reiterated, it is that the book is semi-fictional, it is literature, it is “put together”: partly true, partly not, and that the sequence as it is written never actually happened as it occurs in this book. Before embarking on the tour, Bargeld had already known what was awaiting him: sitting in a bus, checking into a hotel, soundchecks, concerts, the bus again, etc., etc., etc. The repetition of the same structure, schema, again and again and again: *a litany*. And again, importantly, the potential that this is also endless in nature, with no “high point,” or “development” — and so the book functions as a loop, created with the hope that after reading the last sentence, you could theoretically turn straight back to page one & just keep reading again, an endlessly revolving door. Oh wait, we’ve said that already, haven’t we ...

5. Interview with the translator, April 13, 2022.



## COLOPHON



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## Being on the road — the ultimate litany

**“I am simply a traveling explorer conducting research, without a commission, specialty, or expertise.”**

In this semi-fictional account, Blixa Bargeld recounts life on tour in 2008 with Einstürzende Neubauten — from Lisbon to Moscow, Oslo to Naples, criss-crossing Europe. Along the way we encounter mind numbing routines, interesting restaurants (good and bad), colorful museums, rocky bus rides, mundane hotels, odd characters & old friends — they're all there. Along with the structure holding it all together, namely, a recurring setlist that is invoked as a litany. In the end the book proves to be a declaration of love for Europe, and in the current dark times we are presently living through, more immediate than ever.



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