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1 This paper represents a slightly revised version of a lecture given to the Association of Slovak Art Historians in Bratislava, Slovakia, on June 12, 2001. Some of the arguments were already presented in a session of the Historians of German and Central European Art held at the Annual Meeting of the College Art Association of America in Chicago on March 1, 2001. An expanded version in German was delivered as a Plenary Lecture (*Abendvortrag*) at the *Humboldt-Universität*, Berlin, on June 28, 2001. The German version will appear with fuller notation and some illustrations in the publication of the conference on the occasion of which the lecture was given, *Ostmitteleuropäische Kunsthistoriografie und der nationale Diskurs*. I have therefore kept annotation to a minimum here.

2 Kocka, Jürgen: *Das östliche Mitteleuropa als Herausforderung für eine vergleichende Geschichte Europas*. In: *Zeitschr. für Ostmitteleuropa-Forschung* 49, no. 2 (2000), pp. 159-174.

3 Habermas, Jürgen : *The Postnational Constellation. Political Essays*. Ed. by Max Pensky. Cambridge/Mass.: Polity 2001. The definition quoted here comes from Pensky, Max : Editor's Introduction. In: *Ibid.*, p. xiii.

4 By M. Bartlova; her paper is forthcoming in the publication of the conference volume *Ostmitteleuropäische Kunsthistoriografie und der nationale Diskurs*.

In a recent essay the German historian Jürgen Kocka spoke of *Das östliche Mitteleuropa als Herausforderung für eine vergleichende Geschichte Europas*, East Central Europe as a challenge to a comparative history of Europe.² This paper takes up Kocka's challenge, and briefly outlines how Central Europe – not just East Central Europe – also presents a challenge to reconsider some basic assumptions about the history of art of Europe in the early modern period. Dealing with Central Europe provokes rethinking about some of the approaches to geographical, historical, and questions of genre as they are usually employed. Although the observations here pertain to the period from the late 15th to the beginning of the 19th century, similar arguments can probably be made about other periods as well.

These issues were brought into sharp focus by an international conference of art historians held in Berlin in late June 2001 to discuss *Ostmitteleuropäische Kunsthistoriografie und der nationale Diskurs*. The gathering of scholars from many different lands to present a variety of intellectual approaches and to air different views in itself spoke for the vast changes that have occurred since 1989. Many topics concerning the history and art of the region have been highly contested only recently. In fact, before 1989 a scholarly conference of this sort would have been difficult to imagine. Since then more than a decade has passed that has been filled with controversy, conflict, and warfare that even continues in some parts of Europe. Nevertheless, perhaps this passage of time has been needed to create circumstances in which opinions can be freely voiced and exchanged. Previously unimaginable changes have occurred, that need to be digested. The political divisions that cut Europe in half have disappeared. The Soviet Union no longer appears on contemporary maps, nor do other European states such as Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia. In their place newer states, including Slovakia and Moldova, have come into being. NATO has expanded to the east, and newer nations aspire to join it, and the European Union. At the same time countries belonging to the European Currency Union are adopting the EURO. The European Parliament and other common European institutions are attempting to be strengthened.

These new circumstances, along with concurrent tendencies towards globalization instead of division, have provoked many responses from scholars and intellectuals. The German philosopher Jürgen Habermas for instance has described the present situation as one which has constituted a postnational constellation. While it may seem paradoxical to talk about a postnational constellation as pertaining to a period in which new nation-states have emerged, »postnational« means that the simultaneous process of

globalization of markets and of economic processes generally, or modes of communication and commerce, of culture, and of risk, all increasingly deprive the classical nation-state of its formerly assured bases of sovereign power, which it depended on to fulfill its equally classic functions: to secure peace internally and defend its borders abroad, to set fair conditions for a domestic market economy and to exert what influence it can on domestic markets via macroeconomic policies, to raise taxes and allocate budgets to assure the maintenance of a minimum social standard and the redress of social inequities, etc.³

Habermas defined some of the challenges that this situation poses, and offered some guidelines to response that history may provide. One of them is that learning from past experiences of European history, even the reasons for conflict, may offer a decentering of perspectives. Whether or not one accepts Habermas's descriptions, or agrees with his point of view, the author certainly agrees with his universalist perspective. Coming from North America, this paper thus offers its own decentered perspective of the historiography of art in East Central Europe.

Habermas reminds us of some lessons that history may teach us, but there is another side to the coin. In *Das östliche Mitteleuropa als Herausforderung für eine vergleichende Geschichte Europas*, Kocka suggested that the fundamental changes from 1989 to 1991 not only dramatically altered history, but that they also changed historical scholarship. This transmutation was obvious in the Berlin conference, where no scholar from East Central Europe felt obliged to pay more attention to Marxist-Leninism than as a historical relict or phenomenon of ideology, in contrast with the restrictions that governed public expression until 1989. Previously unimagi-



5 Kaufmann, Thomas DaCosta: *Court, Cloister and City: The Art and Culture of Central Europe, 1450-1800*. Chicago, London: Chicago UP 1995. A revised version of this book appeared in German as: *Höfe, Klöster und Städte. Kunst und Kultur in Mitteleuropa 1450-1800*. Köln, Darmstadt: DuMont 1998. This book can be consulted for the arguments, references, and illustrations to which reference is made here.

6 This idea had been utilized for instance by Hempel, Eberhard: *The Pelican History of Art, Baroque Art and Architecture in Central Europe. Germany, Austria, Switzerland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Poland*. Harmondsworth: Penguin 1965.

nable discussion was heard, in which for example racism and Leninism were compared in the same paper.⁴

What Kocka says about the study of history could be applied to scholarship in art history, too. This essay therefore deliberately plays off his essay. *Court, Cloister and City* had already made a similar argument,⁵ stating that the way we see or understand things must have changed in response to recent events. The attitude with which we look back to works of art made long ago, must in some way have been affected by the momentous changes which have occurred in Central and Eastern Europe, and therefore offers different views of Central Europe in response to these changes. One American historian of Eastern Europe has decried the present-mindedness and supposedly opinionated nature of my observations, but it is worth noting that they are consonant with Habermas's plea for universalism, as well as with Kocka's point of view that historiography is inextricably involved with history and the historical standpoint of the historian. And although Kocka does not cite *Court, Cloister and City* (*Höfe, Klöster und Städte*), this essay expands its arguments.

Court, Cloister and City suggested some reasons why the early modern period may provide a good focus for discussion. Habermas's description of a postnational constellation seems to call into question the relevance of the national in our present historical situation. But while evidence from the early modern period has heretofore served to provide material for the construction of later national discourses, more accurate consideration of this period – such as that undertaken by the recipient of this *Festschrift* – even makes any definition of the national quite problematic, particularly when one attends to earlier time periods. The realms that existed in the region before the 19th century were hardly nation-states, but dynastic dominions, or in the case of Hungary, Poland, and the Holy Roman Empire, multi-national, not to mention multi-cultural entities. Another striking fact is that many important rulers of these realms actually had roots that originated outside the region, and yet at the same time reigned over territories that extended throughout, and beyond, the borders of the lands of East Central Europe, as they are usually conceived. In the 14th and 15th century the Luxemburgs, on the thrones of Bohemia and Hungary, and the Holy Roman Empire extended their dominions to Brandenburg; in the 15th and 16th century the Jagellonians from Lithuania ruled lands from the Bohemian mountains to the Black Sea. The Habsburgs, who governed large swatches of the entire region, had their origins in Switzerland; and in the 18th century the House of Habsburg was titularly headed by a ruler from Lorraine, which had then ceased to belong to the Holy Roman Empire. From the 16th to the 19th century, the Habsburgs had expanded their rule into the Italian peninsula. In meaningful ways, then, this period can be called prenational, if by national is meant, as Habermas implies, an association with the classic nation-state.

Let us be clear: the argument is not that nations may lack a need to define themselves, to find their identity in ways that may cause them to associate themselves with past cultural productions. But even if this remains a current practice, the question abides how justified it is as a scholarly procedure, rather than an anachronism. Many such attempts to associate present situations with past histories are merely claims, and indeed can be contradicted by the facts of history. The problem persists that many national claims may in fact be in conflict with those of other nations. For these and other reasons the regional concept of Central Europe has undoubtedly seemed salutary, because it points to a broader perspective.

Yet one challenge that Kocka inadvertently also raises is expressed in the very title of his essay, and in response, of that of this paper: the notion of East Central Europe which reinforces the scholarly differentiation of »*östliches Mitteleuropa*«, meaning Europe between the Elbe and the Bug. According to this definition »*westliches Mitteleuropa*« implicitly refers to Germany. But if we try to think beyond the national borders which have in fact existed only since 1871, Germany and Central Europe can be treated as one, and West and East Central Europe only form parts of a whole. As Kocka remarked, among other effects of the opening of the East Block and the consequent changes in European circumstances since 1989, eyes have been opened to regions east of Germany, and within Germany to the so-called *neue Bundesländer* as places that were shut off for too long from the west, except for those who lived or originated from there. Historical and geographical connections have thus only recently become a lot clearer. As historians have come increasingly to recognize, many common traits exist throughout the region: the histories of the German-, Slavic-, and Magyar-speaking lands and peoples are linked together. The histories of their arts are also inextricably intertwined.



The acceptance of the distinction of East Central Europe, as opposed to Central Europe, appears to have occurred in the wake of the Second World War. During the Cold War the division of Europe, and as most acutely felt, especially the division of Central Europe into two parts, seemed to make an ensuing separation of Central Europe into two parts have some sense. This division may have served scholars in the past, and still serves perhaps for scholars in Germany, who as Kocka suggests may rarely look to the east, as well as those in Germany's eastern neighbors, who have previously not been comfortable with the idea that their histories were positively as well as negatively connected with the Germanic (not to mention Jewish) past. The division could thus not only serve a Cold War-mentality, but also other purposes on both sides of the ethnic border. It could help to support an effort to determine or define a German history separate from a Czech, Slovak, Hungarian, or Polish history, for example. Thus East Central Europe could be utilized by German historians and distinguished scholars from Germany's eastern neighbors. The ›other‹, as the term goes, could be comfortably fashioned on both sides.

But however practical, an acute problem exists with the definition of East Central Europe in historiography as being more or less the region of the Austria, which is usually left out, or at least does not very well fit in either side. It thus seems no accident that in the Berlin conference the Austrian participation was very limited. Could it be that national thinking leaves out one of the most problematic conceptions represented by Austria, that of Austria-Hungary, which continued the ideal of a multinational realm or federation even in an age of the universal state? This is not to say that the rump state of *Deutsch-Österreich* did not have – and as current Austrian politics indicate, still has – its own questions of identification in the twentieth century.

The challenge of East Central Europe therefore seems first of all the challenge that the concept of Central Europe presents to a more restrictive definition. Rather than considering East Central Europe as something separate, *Court, Cloister and City* represented one response, and deliberately took up an older idea of Central Europe.⁶ It included Austria along with the rest, touching on the histories of art of the Germanic, Slavic and Magyar lands.

Here a brief recapitulation in the form of an empirical survey, encapsulated by a sequence of examples from the 15th to the 18th century, may suggest why this broader, and non-exclusionary notion of Central Europe, not East Central Europe, is justified. Not only dynasties, but the arts joined the region. Artists, styles and patterns of patronage also circulated throughout the entire region from the 15th to the 18th century. It is for instance more than likely that the family of Albrecht Dürer came from Hungary; Albrecht's brother, Hans, along with other members of his Nürnberg workshop, most notably Hans von Kulmbach, worked in Kraków. The phenomenon whereby Germanic artists such as Veit Stoß or the Vischers got employed in or sent works to Jagellonian Poland is well known. Moreover, later indigenous German artists and architects, such as Matthias Pöppelmann also worked in various places: Pöppelmann came from Herborn in Westphalia, but worked in Dresden on the Elbe, and in Warsaw, on the Vistula; Franz Anton Maulbertsch, from Langenargen on Lake Constance, worked in Dresden, but painted many pictures in Austria, Bohemia (and Moravia), Slovakia, and Hungary.

A related, converse, phenomenon is less familiar: although they may have been German-speakers, masons and architects who had been trained or worked in Prague spread their designs throughout Central Europe. This is familiar from the 14th and 15th centuries, when the Luxemburgs ruled as far as Tangermünde, and the ideas of the Parlers where consequently spread throughout their domains. But in the early 16th century artists who had been active at the Jagellonian royal residence in Prague, who had belonged to the *Bauhütte* of Benedikt Ried, were responsible for buildings not only in Bohemia, but also in Silesia, Lusatia, and Saxony. Other, similar phenomena, apply to the 18th century. The great sculptor known as Master Pinsel probably came from Germany. But the comparison of his works with those of Matthias Bernhard Braun suggests that he was schooled in Bohemia. He worked however mainly in the region of what was then Lwów, now in the Ukraine.

Similar patterns of connections can be found for courts and cities throughout the era. Prague has seemed a linchpin for many developments, a truly international center, which transcended local, and even regional constraints, especially during the reign of Rudolf II, who established his court there. Because of the central role of Rudolfin Prague, Prague can be considered the one authentic Central European artistic metropolis before the 18th century, an international center, with German, Swiss, Italian, and Netherlandish artists whose works served as models for creation from Peru to India. In the 18th (and 19th) century Vienna played a simi-



lar role. Artists and architects active in Vienna created models for the arts not only in Central Europe (both East and West), but for parts of Spain, Italy, and even in some instances (as in Ouro Preto and Beijing) for models extending from Brazil to China.

In Central Europe itself, the activities of itinerant Netherlanders and Italians throughout the period and the region point out another way in which common, cosmopolitan characteristics could be spread. These and many other painters, sculptors and architects also helped circulate artistic ideas. To speak of Italians: in the 15th century Florentine masons, sculptors, and painters were present in Hungary, in Moravia, and by the end of the century in Poland. In the 16th century Florentine stuccoists and sculptors, as well as masons, were active in Bavaria, Bohemia, in Silesia, and again in Poland. In the 17th century their presence was felt throughout the region, and in the 18th the time had come when even the greatest Italian frescoist of the day would leave perhaps his greatest masterpiece in Germany: Giambattista Tiepolo in Würzburg.

The continuing Italian presence suggests broader way of thinking about these issues, and also suggests how the argument can be expanded. Kocka has argued that dealing with Central Europe opens up questions of a comparative nature, and points the way to a transnational history with European intentions. Kocka spoke of mental mapping, and its relation to history. But issues of the division of history according to geographical borders have a broader significance. The discussion of East Central Europe touches on wider problems than those of German or other nations' self-reflection. The question of self-identification and self-definition is a broader one.

But the challenge posed initially by the concept of East Central Europe is a bigger one. If we consider the political, social, and artistic connections that actually existed in the early modern period, then any map of history which stops at the Alps and the Rhine is clearly inadequate. Much as the definitions of Central Europe, or at least East Central Europe, need to be rethought, the geography of northern European, in general of European art, needs to be redrawn.

The history of Dutch and Flemish art represents an exemplary problem. Until 1648 the northern Netherlands were *de jure* part of the Holy Roman Empire, and the southern Netherlands were both *de jure* and *de facto* part of it until the 19th century. Austrian Habsburg archdukes including Rudolf II's brothers Ernst, Mathias, and Albrecht as well as his grand-nephew Leopold Wilhelm served as governors of the southern Netherlands for significant stretches of the late 16th and 17th century. The Austrian Habsburgs resident in Vienna ruled Flanders and Brabant directly from 1715 until the French Revolution. Many links also exist between artists who were born in the Low Countries and the art of Central Europe – Spranger in Prague, Tilman van Gameren in Poland, Hubert Gerhart and Adriaen de Vries in various places in Germany, to name but a few. Conversely artists from Central (and even Eastern) Europe – Michael Sittow from Tallinn, Hans Memling, Nicholas Knupfer, Jan Boeckhorst, Govaert Flinck from Germany – were notable presences in the low countries.

Problems of periodization are also called into play when geography is questioned. A comparative perspective, that takes Central Europe into account, also opens up to interrogation some of the period terms still used to organize materials in art history. In the instance of Dutch and Flemish art and architecture of the Early Modern Period, these are encompassed by such terms as ›Northern Renaissance‹ or ›Northern Baroque‹. Can one really discuss the ›Renaissance in the north‹ without taking into account those places outside of Italy in which monuments are found which were in fact made by Florentines, Venetians, and other Italians, and which moreover closely resemble what was produced in Italy, in quality and form, and whose content carries what we mean by ›Renaissance‹? Outside of Italy, Hungary saw the first appearance of Italian Renaissance art, and that art was often of high quality, and made by Florentines. Mathias Corvinus's court also had its complement of Humanists, and contact with some of the major figures and ideas of what is usually called ›the Renaissance‹, namely Alberti and Filarete, of whom the king owned manuscripts. Krakow also had high quality Italianate, Florentine work. The importance of Prague for what has been called northern mannerism should by now be evident, and similar points can be made for the idea of a baroque outside Italy. Churches, cloisters, courts, and cities of Central Europe can not be ignored without giving a very partial and skewed vision of the European situation as a whole.

To be sure, it might be argued that Central Europe is not the home of the sorts of places nor the sorts of objects that are usually studied when, mainly ignoring the 18th century in any



7 This question is further discussed in Kaufmann, Thomas DaCosta: *The Place of Art. Reconsidering the Geography of Art* [tentative title]. Chicago, London 2003 [forthcoming]. For the role of Netherlanders cf. also Kaufmann, Thomas DaCosta: *Die Kunstmetropole Antwerpen und ihr Einfluss auf Europa und die Welt*. In: Borggrefe, Heiner/ Lüpkes, Vera/ Huvenne, van Beneden, Paul Ben (Eds.): *Hans Vredeman de Vries und die Renaissance im Norden*. München: Hirmer 2002, and in Kreslins, Janis et al. (Eds.): *A Cultural History of the Baltics* [tentative title]. Stockholm 2003 [forthcoming].

8 This is another topic of my ongoing research, as represented by Kaufmann, Thomas DaCosta: *The Artificial and the Natural: Arcimboldo and the Origins of Still Life*. In: Newman, William et. al. (Eds.): *The Artificial and the Natural*. Cambridge/Mass.: Univ. of Chicago Pr. [forthcoming], and in a book in progress: *Before Caravaggio: Arcimboldo and the Origins of Still Life*.

9 I have discussed these topics in *The Place of Art*, and in Kaufmann, Thomas DaCosta: *Acculturation, Transculturation, Cultural Difference and Diffusion? Assessing the Assimilation of the Renaissance*. In: De Jonge, Krista/ Ottenheim, Koen (Eds.): *Eenheid en Tweespalt*. Leuven: Leuven UP s.a. [forthcoming].

event, art historians talk about baroque art in the north, largely meaning the Low Countries, and occasionally France. Especially in reference to the example of the Netherlands, the definition of what is art also usually refers exclusively to the media of painting and the graphic arts. But if we look more broadly, to the place of Netherlandish art in a broader scheme, and particularly in Central (and Eastern) Europe, then what really seems important in terms of the effect of Netherlandish art on 17th- and early 18th-century art and taste elsewhere in Europe involves sculpture and architecture. From the Van dan Blockes in Danzig c. 1600 through De Vries and Gerhaert to Memhart in Oranienburg and Van Gameren in Warsaw and Thomas Quellinus in St. Petersburg, Dutch and Flemish sculptors and architects were especially prized. Some of their importance has been illuminated in a recent exhibition, *Onder den Oranjeboom*, which demonstrated the overwhelming significance of Dutch and Flemish artists for the North German Protestant courts, and our Dutch and Belgian colleagues have begun to pay more attention to sculpture and architecture. A less restricted view of Europe would extend the vision to Denmark, Sweden, and the Baltic littoral, in all of which Netherlanders also had a leading presence. This of course implies a shift of emphasis in relation to what is usually taken into accounts of Flemish and Dutch art; but it has always seemed to me very peculiar that the physical setting, including the splendid and well preserved building of the low countries, and its abundant sculpture in wood, stone, and bronze, in north and south alike, has been until recently largely ignored, in favor of the relatively cheap, and mass produced pictures of peasants, landscapes, and portraits, no matter what price they fetch today.

This essay has raised questions of the interpretation of Netherlandish art,⁷ but mention of Italians shows that a similar argument could be made for Italy as well. It would be informative to reconsider how interconnected phenomena in Italy are with developments in Central Europe. This is exemplified by the simultaneous, and interconnected emergence of the genre of independent panel painting of still life north and south.⁸

In any case, as Georg Kubler once said, artistic geography does not follow borders of political geography. Instead of an art history formed by national distinctions – French, Dutch, Flemish or Belgian, or one formed by traditional style histories – consideration of Central Europe may bring other sorts of issues into focus. A more complete view of the history and geography of art may cause us to formulate other sorts of questions. These might not only involve such older topics as the definition of Central Europe as a *Kulturlandschaft*, but a whole variety of issues. These include such questions as the role of artistic regions and provinces, the idea of centers and peripheries, and how art as related to or carried from one area to another. Such conceptions come into play as the following: cultural transfer, export and import, accommodation, and assimilation.⁹

The conclusions to be drawn are both personal, and general. Personally, I wish to emphasize that I have never thought of Central Europe as something that should be considered as a separate area for specialized study. Although I have worked much on this area, I have never thought of myself exclusively as a specialist in Central Europe, in the way that scholars tag themselves by their specialities. Speaking more generally, I think it would be a mistake if we regarded this region in the way that some other special interest groups may claim their territories. I have always thought that the study of art in Central Europe ought to be understood to complement, and to complete a view of what was being done elsewhere in Europe, and the world. Central Europe is not to be treated apart from the rest of the world, but to be integrated into a more complete picture of European, of western art. Conversely, a more adequate picture of the traditional areas of concern of the history of art also has to include Central Europe.

The final challenge to the historiography of art in Central Europe, then, is not only for others to think about Central Europe, and to reconsider broader issues in the light of the developments in and connections with the region. Dealing with Central Europe should cause a more general rethinking about the geography and history of art. The final challenge also calls for scholars, and more generally people, from Central Europe to consider how Central Europe may be related to a broader picture of Europe, and of the world.

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