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**MEMORY – RECOLLECTION – DIFFERENCE:
PLURALITY AND HETEROGENEITY AS
THE SIGNATURE OF CENTRAL EUROPE**

I

In an investigation much acclaimed in its time, *Cosmopolis: The Hidden Agenda of Modernity* (1990), Stephen Toulmin focuses on the criteria that have a lasting influence on the modern discussion. I would like to shortly paraphrase, and at the same time continue, one of the lines of thought proposed by Toulmin. Since the sixteenth century, Europe has been marked by two tendencies: on the one hand, by growing pluralisation of the world we live in, and on the other, by the concepts of homogenisation, willing to overcome pluralisation. The pluralisation discloses itself, e.g., in the relevance of orality that constantly includes ambiguities, which were expressed in the essays of Montaigne, to refer to the example. Pluralisation also revealed itself in the differentiation of confessions in the times of the Reformation. The increase of textualisation or the unifying Counter-Reformation measures are indicative of homogenising tendencies, but especially the strengthening of the national narrative is. Benedict Anderson, in his book *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (1983), has already focused on the relationship between the textualisation in the administrative area and the strengthening of the modern (national) state.

The objective of such efforts was to create a clear and homogeneous cultural, religious or socio-political space. However, since the nineteenth century, especially in the decades around 1900, the era of the 'classical' modern age, the meaning of the orality – that is, the experience of the pluralistic, heterogeneous world – increased again and caused a crisis (Jacques Le Rider, *Modernité viennoise et crises de l'identité*, 1990) that became a certain criterion of the modern age and, consequently, of the post-modern age (Jean-François Lyotard,

La condition postmoderne: rapport sur le savoir, 1979) and the decades of globalisation. Also the ‘language’, in the literal and figurative sense, was perceived as increasingly brittle, ambiguous. Friedrich Nietzsche’s exaggerated characterisation of the state of mind described and criticised as *décadence* is constantly used to describe this situation, perceived as ‘collapse’, and its immediate consequences in the social and aesthetic-literary area; it also plays an important role for Robert Musil, as a mark of ‘featurelessness’ or lack of character of the modern people that is imbued with ‘a proliferation of the details at the expense of the whole’.¹

What characterises every literary decadence? – asks Nietzsche. – The fact that the life no longer dwells in the whole. The word becomes sovereign and springs forth from the sentence, the sentence reaches over and obscures the meaning of the page, the page gains life at the expense of the whole – the whole is no longer a whole. But this is the parable for each style of decadence: every time the anarchy of atoms, desegregation of the will, ‘freedom of the individual’, morally said, – extended to a political theory, ‘equal rights for all’. The life, the same vitality, the vibration and exuberance of life suppressed in the smallest shape, the rest poor in life. Paralysis, toil, numbness or hostility and chaos everywhere: both jumping more and more in the eyes, in ever higher forms of the organisation one rises. The whole is not alive anymore: it is put together, calculated, artificial, an artefact.²

Already in 1892, before Leopold von Andrian (*Der Garten der Erkenntnis*, 1895), his friend Hugo von Hofmannsthal, one of the foremost representatives of Viennese literary modernism, repeatedly expressed the state of such pluralisation, the feeling of shatteredness of the living world and of the self, in his early writings:

We experience so much, so fast and so consecration-free indistinctly. We are not a confident gender, but we feel too many things; we also talk too loud, too fast and about too much; we are not healthy enough for grace and all too poor in inner music.³

¹ Robert Musil, *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften*, ed. Adolf Frisé (Reinbek b. Hamburg, 1983), 607.

² Friedrich Nietzsche, ‘Der Fall Wagner (1888)’, in *idem*, *Sämtliche Werke. Kritische Studienausgabe in 15 Bänden*, ed. Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari, vol. 6 (Munich, 1980), 27.

³ Hugo von Hofmannsthal, ‘Ferdinand von Saar, “Schloss Kostenitz”’, in *idem*, *Gesammelte Werke in zehn Einzelbänden*, vol. 8: *Reden und Aufsätze I: 1891–1913*, ed. Bernd Schoeller and Rudolf Hirsch (Frankfurt a.M., 1979), 141.

A few years later (1906) he wrote:

But the nature of our era is ambiguity and vagueness. It can rest only on the Sliding and it is aware of the Sliding. Whereas other generations believed in the Solid.⁴

Already in 1893, as a result of these ambiguities, Hofmannsthal summarised:

We have, so to say, no roots in life and we paint lucid, shrewd and thus day-blind shadows, among the children of life around.⁵

Yet, Hofmannsthal believed increasingly during his life that poetry, writing and literature have the utopian role to restore the unity with life or with the social reality. In 1910, the young philosopher György (Georg) Lukács, in the renowned modernist Hungarian journal, the *Nyugat* [The West], took a firm stand against this relativism and ‘impressionism’ that became a characteristic criterion of the aesthetic consciousness:

The loss of the stability of things was accompanied by the loss of the stability of the self; the loss of facts was accompanied by the loss of values. There was nothing left but moods. Within an individual human being and between people there were only moods of equal rank and equal importance. ... Each unambiguity was removed, since all was only subjective; the assertions ceased to mean anything. ... In this world everything tolerated everything else and there was nothing that could exclude anything. ... But the more subjective and momentary-oriented something is, the more problematic is its communicability. In reality, only something common can be communicated, but this art wanted to communicate at any cost the moment of the individuality of the artist, the incommunicable. Everything impressive was thereby accidental. ... So everything has become the art of the surface, the surface hiding nothing behind.⁶

However, unlike Hofmannsthal, Lukács saw a solution to the problem in the increasingly philosophically well-grounded leftist Actionism. The signatories of the manifesto of Czech Modernism, which was

⁴ *Idem*, ‘Der Dichter und diese Zeit’, in *ibidem*, 60.

⁵ *Idem*, 175.

⁶ Georg Lukács, ‘Die Wege gingen auseinander’, in Aranka Ugrin and Kálmán Vargha (eds.), ‘*Nyugat*’ und sein Kreis 1908–1941: Anhang, ‘*Magyar Csillag*’ 1942–1944 (Leipzig, 1989), 66.

probably conceived in Vienna in 1895, in the Czech language, by Josef Svatoopluk Machar and František Xaver Šalda, had supported political engagement in a similar way.⁷ Consequently, less than ten years later (1922), Robert Musil characterised the modern age around 1900 not as one that would be determined only by a style of a single generation but as a collection of many ‘style generations’. Musil thought it right, in one of his essays, which was almost literally taken over in the fifteenth chapter of the novel *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften* (*The Man Without Qualities*),

to speak of style generations, instead of a generation’s style. We took part in the thing so many times, each time was there a new generation there, claiming to have a new soul and declaring that it should now find the corresponding style for this new soul. But it had no new soul, only something like an eternal mollusc in itself that fits no shell entirely; also, never a recently developed one.⁸

II

The experience of such a brittle, heterogeneous living world owed itself not least to the big socio-economic transformation processes: it was a consequence of modernisation. The increasing ‘vertical’ differentiation of society and the acceleration of life contributed very significantly to the deep-reaching complexity of the living world. The new production method based on the division of labour caused an abrupt proliferation of goods whose value was increasingly measured not by their usefulness; rather than that, the goods became independent and have assumed a life of their own. The first to speak in this context was Karl Marx, about the fetishism of commodities. According to Walter Benjamin, a similar process also concerns the arts through the technical reproduction or respective reproducibility of artworks. Also, the development of new means of communication that accelerate transportation, e.g., including inner-urban areas

⁷ ‘Die tschechische Moderne – ein Manifest’, in Květoslav Chvatík (ed.), *Die Prager Moderne. Erzählungen, Gedichte, Manifeste* (Frankfurt a.M., 1991).

⁸ Robert Musil, ‘Stilgeneration und Generationsstil [4. Juni 1922]’, in *idem, Gesammelte Werke*, i: *Prosa und Stücke. Kleine Prosa. Aphorismen. Autobiographisches*, ed. Adolf Frisé (Reinbek b. Hamburg, 1983), 665–6; Musil, *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften*, 54–6.

(through trams, busses), or the invention of communication technologies that reduce the time distance in the message exchange to a minimum (e.g. pneumatic post, telegraph, telephone), have certainly contributed to the improvement of living conditions, but also accelerated the ever more rapid, almost simultaneous experience of impressions of various provenances that people have been exposed to. This has led to a continuous experience of pluralities, heterogeneities, that is, of a fragmented living world, which, as was already mentioned, was described by the writers and intellectuals of the decades around 1900 as disorientation and uncertainty of identity. This also was the cause of the neuropathological phenomena and nervous disorders reported time and again. Max Nordau, a Paris correspondent of the *Neue Freie Presse* and one of the most prominent critics of the new phenomena of modernity, reprimanded the literature and art of his time, inspired in this respect by the Italian physician and psychiatrist Cesare Lombroso, as an ‘emanation’ of a nervous disease, and especially saw a ‘stay in a big city’ as a grave danger:

An inhabitant of a big city, even if the richest, surrounded by the most stunning luxury, is constantly exposed to most unfavourable influences that diminish his vitality far beyond the inevitable extent. He breathes the air made pregnant with the effects of metabolism, he eats shrivelled, contaminated, fake food, is in a constant state of nervous excitement, and one can with no strain compare him to an inhabitant of a swamp area.⁹

Nordau clarified his findings a little later:

Each and every line we read or write, each human face we see, every conversation we have, each image we see passing in a glimpse out of the window of an express-train carriage, sets our sensory nerves and our brain into action. Even the unconsciously perceived small vibrations during the train ride, the constant noise and changing vision of the big-city streets, our stress on the continuation of the communication about the observed events, the constant expectation of the newspaper, the postman, the visitors, all that provides work for our brain.¹⁰

A wealth of similar contemporary observations could in fact be mentioned, and even Sigmund Freud feels compelled to mention it not

⁹ Max Nordau, *Entartung*, vol. 1 (2nd edn Berlin, 1893), 65.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*, 72.

least in the context of a modern big city, diagnosing the freely suppression of sexual drive, the actual root cause of 'nervousness', that is the neuroses and psychoneuroses of his time.¹¹ Georg Simmel, a sociologist, argued similarly. The typical reaction of the modern big city dweller against the most heterogenous external stimulus would be, among others, *blasé*, meaning 'blunting against the differences between things', indifference, 'mutual strangeness and repulsion', but also, 'development of personal particularity', all these being the characteristics of the situation encountered by residents of cities around 1900.¹² Walter Benjamin, following Charles Baudelaire, stylised it into a typical representative of the modern age the *flâneur*, who moves through the heterogeneous urban life inhabited by masses of people, unimpressed by the influences of such new stimuli.¹³

III

The inventory of the modern age around 1900, increasingly influenced by heterogeneity and fragmentation, bore first of all another aspect of special importance for the cities of the central European region: the increasing cultural, linguistic and religious heterogeneity of the region could become problematic and even threatening there, which now became more visible in the cities and in the daily experience. Due to an increase, mostly economically induced, in immigration of inhabitants from big multicultural and multilingual regions during the decades around 1900, the cities were compressed into microcosms

¹¹ Sigmund Freud, 'Die "kulturelle" Sexualmoral und die moderne Nervosität (1908)', in *idem*, *Das Unbehagen in der Kultur. Und andere kulturtheoretische Schriften*, introd. Alfred Lorenzer and Bernard Görlich (7th edn Frankfurt a.M., 2001), 113–15. For more on the 'nervousness' of the time, encountered in the labour environment, see Joachim Radkau, 'Nationalismus und Nervosität', in Wolfgang Hardtwig and Hans-Ulrich Wehler (eds.), *Kulturgeschichte heute* (Geschichte und Gesellschaft. Sonderheft, 16, Göttingen, 1996), 284–315, esp. 286.

¹² Georg Simmel, 'Die Großstädte und das Geistesleben', in *idem*, *Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 7: *Aufsätze und Abhandlungen 1901–1908*, 1, ed. Rüdiger Kramme, Angela Rammstedt and Otthein Rammstedt (Frankfurt a.M., 1995), 116–31.

¹³ See Walter Benjamin, 'Der Flaneur', in *idem*, *Das Paris des Second Empire bei Baudelaire*, in *idem*, *Gesammelte Schriften*, i, pt. 2, ed. Rolf Tiedemann and Hermann Schweppenhäuser (3rd edn Frankfurt a.M., 1990), 537–69; Walter Benjamin, 'Der Flaneur', in *idem*, *Das Passagen-Werk. Aufzeichnungen und Materialien*, in *idem*, *Gesammelte Schriften*, v, pt. 1, ed. Rolf Tiedemann (2nd edn Frankfurt a.M., 1982), 524–69.

reflecting the traditional ‘horizontal’ linguistic-cultural plurality of the macrocosm of the Central European region. Thereby, more or less, almost all cities of the region were affected, whether it was Vienna, the fourth largest city of Europe around 1900, or Lvov (Lwów/Lemberg/Lviv), Lodz (Łódź), Chernivtsi (Cernăuți/Czerniowce/Czernowitz), or Trieste. In other words, characteristic to all cities was their being defined by profound so-called ethnic, linguistic and cultural, and, mostly, religious differences. Clearly, one must keep in mind that the concept of ethnicity was a construct (‘invention’) of the nineteenth century, which became the basis for artificial, differentiating argumentation – first, in the context of national narratives. Werner Sollors therefore rightly speaks of the ‘invention of ethnicity’.¹⁴ Such culturally repeatedly-coded cities consequently exhibited not only a socio-cultural memory but a large number of memory levels. This meant, i.a., that also the uncertainties caused by the ‘vertical’ socio-economic differentiations influenced by modernisation – here, in the density of the urban environments – were strengthened and intensified by an additional ‘horizontal’ differentiation of the heterogeneous urban population. With regard to migration and mobility as the causes for rapid population growth of the cities, Walter Benjamin made a remark of ‘emigration as the key to the big city’.¹⁵ It is only a side note here that such a situation could certainly contribute significantly to creativity, but many art producers and cultural actors may unexpectedly, consciously or unconsciously, merge elements from originally different contexts, from diverse *mémoires culturelles*, into something new. Robert Ezra Park pointed out to this phenomenon already in the 1920s, whilst attributing such creative potential to the city immigrant, especially Jewish immigrant, illegal border crosser, who had to remain a ‘marginal man’, a ‘cultural hybrid, a man living and sharing intimately in the cultural life and traditions of two distinct peoples’: ‘He was a man on the margin of two cultures and two societies, which never completely interpenetrated and fused’.¹⁶

¹⁴ Werner Sollors, ‘Introduction: The Invention of Ethnicity’, in *idem* (ed.), *The Invention of Ethnicity* (New York and Oxford, 1989), IX–XX. See further *idem* (ed.), *Theories of Ethnicity: A Classical Reader* (New York, 1996).

¹⁵ Walter Benjamin, ‘Zentralpark’, in *idem*, *Gesammelte Schriften*, i, pt. 2, 672.

¹⁶ Robert E. Park, ‘Human Migration and the Marginal Man (1928)’, in Sollors (ed.), *Theories of Ethnicity*, 165.

Park remarkably gained the first experiences for the development of his theory of the 'marginal man' in 1905, during a study trip through the former pluricultural Danube kingdom, that is, through a part of Central Europe. He 'experienced a lot more of interesting and fruitful things than during an equally long period of time before and after'.¹⁷ Such an inventory of decades around 1900 is of course not only of historical relevance. It may actually also help to contribute to the explanation of processes and conditions our own presence is concerned with. Except that today we are dealing with tightly media-networked communication forms surrounding the world and with a global mobility and migration, which may be the cause of social and individual insecurities, and lead to similar reactions and defence strategies as a hundred years ago.

A distinguishing feature of the Central European region and, within it, the historical Habsburg monarchy was in fact the multitude of nations and communities, with their polyglossia and pluriculturalism. The defining characteristics or the consistency of Central Europe, however contradictory this may sound, was and is indeed its heterogeneity and plurality. It means that the differences have been, and still are, a defining criterion of the region. Central Europe is a region in which the boundaries that separate and, simultaneously, connect, build important criteria that are verifiable empirically and through daily experience. With such concrete, empirical surveys one could support, i.a., the theory of Yuri M. Lotman, according to which every culture is defined as a sign system, as a semiosphere, and principally by heterogeneities and by borderline situations:

The focal points of the semiotifying ... processes are, however, on the border of the semiosphere. The concept of the border is ambivalent: on the one hand it separates, on the other, it connects. The boundary always borders with something and consequently belongs simultaneously to both neighbouring cultures, to both contiguous semiospheres. The border is always bi- or multilingual. It is a translation mechanism, of texts transmitted from another semiotics.

¹⁷ Michael Makropoulos, 'Robert Ezra Park (1864–1944). Modernität zwischen Urbanität und Grenzidentität', in Martin Ludwig Hofmann, Tobias F. Korta and Sibylle Niekisch (eds.), *Culture Club. Klassiker der Kulturtheorie* (Frankfurt a.M., 2004), 50.

A little further on, Lotman says:

In fact, is the entire area of the semiosphere covered with boundaries on various levels ...¹⁸

Central Europe is not reduced only to the countries and nations of the historical region in the narrow sense, namely to those of the former Habsburg Empire, in whose twelve officially recognised nationalities there are more languages and cultural configurations or multiple religious faiths that in turn indicate its situation from beyond their actual political demarcation, borderline situations being part of everyday experience. But must Central Europe be historically, politically or geographically uniquely tangible or is Central Europe, as Milan Kundera put it, not just ‘a non-intentional unity’?¹⁹ Even under such an aspect of non-intentionality, Central Europe has indeed proved itself a practical, imaginary ‘reference space’²⁰ for posing historical, economic or cultural-historical questions. This is determined by analogous structural or cultural conditions, but from age to age to a different extent and density, so it seems appropriate to understand Central Europe not simply as a region within Europe with a specific geographical or political containment. Central Europe is much more a reference room to grasp with, at times a more narrow and at times a wider framework, depending on the question asked or on the perspective taken to approach the given phenomenon. Is Central Europe, in this aspect, only a linguistic construct or a semantic means of command? Central Europe, in my opinion, remains at least in this respect, an established epistemological instrumentarium, a heuristic approach, which we come across here, with which it is possible to analyse and explain both differences as well as very specific structural analogies, cultural configurations, socio-cultural and socio-economic processes. Such processes are certainly also in Western and Eastern

¹⁸ Jurij M. Lotman, *Die Innenwelt des Denkens. Eine semiotische Theorie der Kultur*, ed. Susi K. Frank, Cornelia Ruhe and Alexander Schmitz, trans. Gabriele Leupold and Olga Radetzka (Frankfurt a.M., 2010), 182, 184.

¹⁹ Milan Kundera, ‘Einleitung zu einer Anthologie oder Über drei Kontexte’, in Chvatik (ed.), *Die Prager Moderne*, 22.

²⁰ Rudolf Jaworski, ‘Ostmitteleuropa als Gegenstand der historischen Erinnerungs- und Gedächtniskultur’, in Johannes Feichtinger *et al.* (eds.), *Schauplatz Kultur – Zentraleuropa. Transdisziplinäre Annäherungen* (Gedächtnis – Erinnerung – Identität, 7, Innsbruck, 2006), 65–71.

Europe in constant interaction, they are at present in a performative global exchange, but may nevertheless, especially when it is about a specific content or cultural forms, be perceived as independent. Should Central Europe beyond a specific location only be a useful expedient, so is it a very workable model that may be used in this respect to view not only specific, daily palpable cultural analogies and similarities, but also differences, contradictions, with the crises, and conflicts resulting from them, in a broader context, noticeable and liable as they are to an in-depth reflection.

To live between the East, which has never existed, and the West that has existed too much. It means to live in the centre, when this centre is the only real country anyway. Only that this country is not fixed.

This is how Andrzej Stasiuk aptly describes a not-‘fixed’ Central Europe, which is ‘more like an island’, and which is exposed to ‘the incessant change of weather’.²¹ I have already pointed out several times the ambiguity of Central Europe’s openness being set on. With referenhcce to the aspect of differences as a certain constraint in the region, I have made a distinction here between an endogenous and exogenous pluralism or heterogeneity.²²

I understand under endogenous pluralism the according historical *longue durée* in the regions, the differences or heterogeneities existing

²¹ Andrzej Stasiuk, ‘Logbuch’, in Juri Andruchowytsch and Andrzej Stasiuk, *Mein Europa. Zwei Essays über das sogenannte Mitteleuropa* (Frankfurt a.M., 2004), 141.

²² See Moritz Csáky, *Das Gedächtnis der Städte. Kulturelle Verflechtungen – Wien und die urbanen Milieus in Zentraleuropa* (Vienna, Cologne and Weimar, 2010), 66–87; *idem*, ‘Le Problème du pluralisme dans la région mitteleuropéenne’, in Miklós Molnár and André Reszler (eds.), *Le Génie de l’Autriche-Hongrie. État, société, culture* (Paris, 1989), 19–29; Moritz Csáky, ‘Historische Reflexionen über das Problem einer österreichischen Identität’, in Herwig Wolfram and Walter Pohl (eds.), *Probleme der Geschichte Österreichs und ihrer Darstellung* (Wien, 1991), 29–47; Moritz Csáky, ‘Pluralité culturelle et identité: Critères d’une auto-reconnaissance sous la Monarchie des Habsbourg’, *Les Temps Modernes*, xlviii, 5 (550) (1992), 154–70; *idem*, *Gedächtnis – Erinnerung – Differenz. Pluralität und Heterogenität als die Signatur Zentraleuropas*, in Catherine Bosshart-Pflugger, Joseph Jung and Franziska Metzger (eds.), *Nation und Nationalismus in Europa. Kulturelle Konstruktion von Identitäten. Festschrift für Urs Altermatt* (Frauenfeld, Stuttgart and Vienna, 2002), 25–49; Moritz Csáky, ‘Eine Region der Kontraste und kulturellen Vernetzungen: Das Paradigma Zentraleuropas’, in Hartmut Krones (ed.), *Multikulturelle internationale Konzepte in der Neuen Musik* (Vienna, Cologne and Weimar, 2008), 49–68.

for centuries. In fact, over the ages one could have spotted here a variety of nations, cultures, languages, customs or religions; and the three monotheistic religions, Christianity, Judaism, and Islam are still present here in various manifestations. However, such plurality does not build divided, static co-existing entities, they are rather always in a reciprocal, dynamic exchange process. The boundaries here are clearly not only places that divide, but also, and equally, in the sense of Homi K. Bhabha, hybrid ‘third spaces’, wherein an ongoing process of negotiations and ‘translations’ of differences is taking place. Boundaries are characterised by facilitating approaches, receptions and entanglements of different signs, cultural codes or symbols. At first, boundaries allow for creative processes involving the production of a (cultural) added value. Beyond its solid historical-geographical or topographical form, the boundary is also a cultural studies paradigm that implies, reflects and explains mobility. A concrete result of this is not only the fact that mobility is the characteristic inherent feature of this region, but also that here these specific socio-cultural configurations – though also the very general ones – do not show any homogeneous or holistic values, but are ‘fluid’, ‘separated’, which means that they run without fixed, linear, separating external barriers. Hugo von Hofmannsthal indicated this fact several times, although in connection with his ideologically motivated Austria-related concepts that are to be met not without criticism and scepticism: Austria, especially towards the east, had ‘fluid boundaries ... ready to receive’, and this was also the very constitutive criterion of the Austrian history, ‘which is difficult to write because it is the history of fluid boundaries’.²³ And even after the collapse of the Habsburg Empire he states: ‘This old universal monarchy had only fluid boundaries’.²⁴ Such findings certainly correspond not just with a nostalgic pathos; they rather locate the monarchy in a broader Central European context with equally open borders, and simultaneously anticipate the categories of contemporary cultural-semiotic and cultural-scientific argumentation. Because of this ‘border-openness’, the social groups and individuals orientate themselves here at the same time in various, similar or interwoven cultural fields. In his literary alienations, Joseph Roth

²³ Hugo von Hofmannsthal, ‘Die österreichische Idee [1917]’, in *idem*, *Gesammelte Werke*, 9: *Reden und Aufsätze II: 1914–1924*, 456.

²⁴ *Idem*, ‘Bemerkungen [1921]’, in *ibidem*, 474.

made the former monarchy that determined particular boundaries of the whole life into a leading figure of his argumentation, whether in the description of a peripheral province, whose remoteness unexpectedly dominates the centre, or when calling hotels permeable places, or, in general, when describing the hotel as a place where its inhabitants feel both strangeness and closeness. And, there was more to it: Roth is also transferring this metaphor of the hotel in his story *Die Büste des Kaisers* (*The Bust of the Emperor*) indirectly to the former monarchy. Much like a hotel with many rooms, in which many 'strange' guests are lodged, the monarchy – and, in a figurative sense, the whole region – is 'a big house with many doors and rooms, many types of people'.²⁵ Despite the continual experience of boundaries that has characterised the region, such permanent encounter with heterogeneities also created an intelligible-to-all 'meta-space', in a figurative sense, a 'text' that could be read and decoded, a text with different signs and symbols, for example concerning a similar architectural shaping of cities or certain behaviours in everyday life. Count Morstin, around whom the story of Roth entwines, travelled once a year from his eastern Galician homeland to Vienna and experienced there both the similarities as well as various differences, the unfamiliarities, the boundaries of the region:

When he travelled back and forth through the centre of his diverse homeland, especially those very specific characteristics suited him which repeated themselves in their ever-same and yet colourful way at all stations, kiosks, in all public buildings, schools and churches of all crown lands of the kingdom. Everywhere the policemen wore the same feather hat or the same clay-coloured helmet with golden knob and the flashing double eagle of the Habsburgs; everywhere the wooden doors of the k. & k. [imperial & royal] tobacco shops were painted in black and yellow diagonal stripes; everywhere the customs officers wore the same green (almost blooming) lanyard on bare sabres; in every garrison there were the same blue uniform blouses and black saloon pants of the infantry officers sauntering on the parade, the same red pants of cavalymen, the same coffee-coloured skirts of the artillery; everywhere in this big and colourful realm every evening at the same time when the clocks of the church towers struck nine, the same curfew was announced, consisting of cheerful sounding questions and

²⁵ Joseph Roth, 'Die Büste des Kaisers', in *Joseph Roth Werke*, vol. 5: *Romane und Erzählungen 1930–1936*, ed. Klaus Westermann, introduction Fritz Hackert and Klaus Westermann (Cologne, 1989), 675.

wistful answers. There were the same cafés everywhere with smoky arches, dark niches in which chess players squatted like strange birds, with buffets with full-colour bottles and sparkling glasses, which were administered by busy, blonde female cashiers. Almost everywhere, in all the cafés of the empire, sneaked with already a bit shaky knees, upward-stretched feet, serviette in the arm, the head waiter with sideburns – a distant, humble image of the old servants of His Majesty, the high gentleman with sideburns, owning all the crown estates, policemen, customs officers, all tobacco shops, all the barriers, all the rail stations and nations.

Nevertheless, there were also significant varieties, differences, boundaries which were perceived:

And in every country different songs were sang; and in every country the farmers wore different clothes; and in every country one spoke a different and a few different languages. ... Like any other Austrian in his time, Morstin loved the stable in the perpetually mutable, the familiar in the change and the reliable amid the unfamiliar. So the strange would be native, without losing its colour, and so had the homeland the eternal magic of the strange.²⁶

Multiple identities in such situations were therefore not an exception but the rule. These were people who, in line with the sarcastic-ironic perspective of Jaroslav Hašek, became like a ‘grocery store’.²⁷ In such a ‘mixed’ situation, according to the argumentation of Friedrich Umlauft, a Vienna geographer of the second half of the nineteenth century, also historical memories become ambiguous, there is a variety of memory levels to consider, if one wants to show the history of such a ‘contrast’-driven region:

That is why the Austrian history also flows out of the history of Germany, Hungary and Poland together, similarly to tributary streams that sooner or later join into a large river bed, which then channels the captured water jointly.²⁸

Umlauft anticipates a perspective here that absolutely corresponds to the *histoire croisée*, the ‘shared history’ or the call for ‘entangled

²⁶ *Ibidem*, 656–7.

²⁷ Jaroslav Hašek, *Die Abenteuer des braven Soldaten Schwejk* (2nd edn Berlin, 2011), 732.

²⁸ Friedrich Umlauft, *Die Oesterreichisch-Ungarische Monarchie. Geographisch-statistisches Handbuch mit besonderer Rücksicht auf politische und Cultur-Geschichte für Leser aller Stände* (Vienna and Pest, 1876), 2.

histories', for histories of entanglements and confusion.²⁹ Similarly, Walter Benjamin argued and called for the recognition of various possible histories over an unambiguous universal history:

The multiplicity of histories is similar to the multiplicity of languages; the universal history in the modern sense can still only be a kind of Esperanto.³⁰

Umlauf's plea, however, also corresponds to an almost post-colonial perspective, which, for example, was demanded later by Edward Said for the history of the Palestinians:

There are many different Palestinian experiences that cannot be summed up in a single historical narrative. That is why one would have to write parallel stories of the communities in Lebanon, the Occupied Territories, and so forth. This is the central problem. It is virtually impossible to imagine a single writing of history.³¹

I understand under exogenous plurality the externally applied 'global', especially pan-European, factors that became decisive for the region. On the one hand, small-scale, sub-regional mobility held the region on the move: one thinks in the pre-industrial era about the seasonal agricultural workers who would migrate from one area to another following the harvest to earn their living, or about population shifts to one and the same manorial system, which could be sub-regional or quite expanded geographically, or about the permanent exchange within the familiar area, in the sector of goods and services or at the communication level of messages. This being the case, on the other hand, Central Europe was equally covered by cyclical trans-regional mobility – for instance, immigrants from the Holy Roman Empire in

²⁹ Michael Werner and Bénédicte Zimmermann, 'Penser l'histoire croisée: entre empire et réflexivité', in *idem* (eds.), *De la comparaison à l'histoire croisée* (Paris, 2004), 15–49; Sebastian Conrad and Shalini Randeria, 'Einleitung. Geteilte Geschichten – Europa in einer postkolonialen Welt', in *idem* and Beate Sutterlüty (eds.), *Jenseits des Eurozentrismus. Postkoloniale Perspektiven in der Geschichts- und Kulturwissenschaften* (Frankfurt a.M. and New York, 2002), 9–49.

³⁰ Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften*, i, pt. 3: *Anmerkungen der Herausgeber*, 1238. See *ibidem*, 1235, 1240.

³¹ Salman Rushdie, 'Über die Identität der Palästinenser. Ein Gespräch mit Edward Said', in *idem*, *Heimatländer der Phantasie. Essays und Kritiken 1981–1991* (Munich, 1992), 214.

the Middle Ages or new settlers and colonisers in the areas re-conquered by the Ottomans in the early modern period. Similarly, the dynamic cultural transfers must be recalled here: the Spanish influences from the time of Counter-Reformation, which was among the conditions of the Baroque that deeply influenced the region until the nineteenth century,³² the Italian influences, not least in the field of architecture or music, which affected the ‘Viennese Classicism’, the French ones, in the time of the Enlightenment, but also the Ottoman influences, whose traces lastingly influence the everyday life of some nations, for example concerning eating habits, clothing (Hungarian shepherd costumes, Polish Sarmatian clothing), in the music (military music), or at the reception of architectonic elements, especially in Hungary at the end of the nineteenth century.

IV

What seems important to me are the conclusions arising from such a situation. It is clear that the Central European region is characterised by dense differences, but at the same time by synchronous and, historically speaking, diachronic interactions. If one grasps those differences as different communication forms, in a figurative sense as languages, then ‘multilingualism’ is a significant criterion of the region. Clearly, language does not reduce itself into the mere act of speaking, it finds and constructs contents, that is, ‘texts’, that among other things are based on contents of recollection and memory. Those are demonstrated here, within the regional ‘multilingualism’, in various shapes, thus not unique but ambiguous. The groups within the society and individuals make use of this ‘multilingualism’ and therefore not only identify with the language, with the (cultural) text, but with several languages and texts, with ‘earlier or later unions of different inflows’ or ‘tributaries’, as Friedrich Umlauf meant it. Even if the language communities and ‘national’ cultures, as those in the nineteenth-century Austria were called, may indeed be perceived unambiguously, their boundaries still remain fluid, they meet and affect one another constantly, dynamically, and unite – within a ‘third space’ (Homi K. Bhabha) – into a hybrid mixed states, which in turn

³² See Xavier Selles-Ferrando, *Spanisches Österreich* (Vienna, Cologne and Weimar, 2004).

may have continuous repercussions for their origins and thus expel those into borderline situations.

Such complex processes may be illustrated and empirically explained on various levels. For example, Lotman refers to a continual change of fashion. For Central Europe, especially rewarding is the reference to food and eating habits. Dishes can be borrowed there from various socio-cultural contexts and be, so to speak, a 'circulation of social energy' in the entire region, and also beyond. Therewith, Central-Europeans certainly experience a more or less perceptible change; a special new configuration of dishes is created, compared to its creation in each cultural context of its origin; they experience a 'blending', a hybridisation, in that, for instance, each time they adjust to a different 'taste' that is conditioned socially and culturally. Thus, the Viennese goulash soup is borrowed from the 'Hungarian' context: through its specific new, cultural preparation method there is a noticeable change in comparison with the original recipe. The situation is very similar with the preparation of dumplings. They are popular in distant parts of the region, and different preparation methods are used. Even the preparation of the same dish in the same cultural context differs and corresponds to the 'art' of those who prepare it. Preparation of dishes from a raw state into a cooked state is a dynamic, performative process, owed to the entanglement of many elements; hence, the ingredients and their end product may in this respect be characterised as a hybrid, as the specific elements melt into one and the same entity within the same dish, but can be still distinguished – by their different taste – as individual elements, as Walter Benjamin stressed in his *Gedanken zu einer Analyse des Zustands von Mitteleuropa* [Thoughts toward an analysis of the condition of Central Europe]:

The basis or the *conditio-sine-qua-non* of each whole taste is about distinguishing the particular tastes of one or more substances from the mixture. The real mixture must then be composed so that one or more substances that are supposed protrude with their distinct taste, rise into a taste summit above the total taste.³³

Dishes are touchable with sight, one can partly touch them with the fingers, smell them and breathe their aroma, one tastes them when

³³ Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften*, iv, pt. 2: *Kleine Prosa, Baudelaire-Übertragungen*, ed. Tillmann Rexroth (Frankfurt a.M., 1991), 922.

one puts them into the mouth, and enjoys them while consuming them. Traces of various elements are to be found in dishes, and the consumption of the dishes makes those traces detectable by the senses as ‘symptom[s] of closeness, as far as it may be, of what it [they] leave behind’.³⁴ The dishes can also turn into places of remembrance and, in the sense of Marcel Proust, may cause involuntary memories (*mémoires involontaires*), as the ‘madeleine’ for the young Marcel in the novel *A la recherche du temps perdu*, the senses initially exhibit enraptured ‘traces’ that evoke memories of past experiences, people or places in the act of sudden ‘awakening’ (Walter Benjamin). The relevance accorded to foods as realms of memory reveals itself also through the fact that they were taken into the national narrative of the nineteenth century and nationally coded or instrumentalised, as the *gulyás*, borsch (*barszcz*), *Wiener Schnitzel*, *bigos*, and *żurek*, or *knedliki*. ‘Like the wine’, said Roland Barthes, overlooking his homeland, ‘the beefsteak in France is a basic element and it is even more nationalised than socialised’.³⁵ Thus, apart from their generally material, that is, biological utility, dishes also experience a very different, extremely emotional appraisal. Both in the preparation as well as in the final product ‘dishes’ do not only reflect cultural processes but also vividly illustrate them.

In this context, Lotman’s semiosphere is recalled again:

Semiotic systems are in constant motion. Change is the law of existence of the semiosphere. It is changing as a whole, and is constantly changing its internal structure.³⁶

Such a finding enables, in particular, to draw conclusions for the provision of collective and individual identities. Firstly, they are not static, but form a dynamic process; they are altering, changing, and define themselves again and again. Secondly, it suggests that the alignment of individuals and groups is possible simultaneously on multiple orientation propositions, as it seems to be the rule that multi-polar or multiple identities are dominant in life. In contrast, numerous historical accounts of an opposing stance are certainly addressed and thematised abreast, especially by national histories,

³⁴ Benjamin, *Das Passagen-Werk*, 560.

³⁵ Roland Barthes, ‘Beafsteak und Pommes frites’, in *idem, Mythen des Alltags*, trans. Helmut Scheffel (Frankfurt a.M., 1964), 37.

³⁶ Lotman, *Die Innenwelt des Denkens*, 203.

to recover a heterogeneity of Central Europe, over and over again, from the perception of the nineteenth century, i.e., from the time when the politically competing 'nationalities' of the region strived to achieve the national autonomy in the cultural and political sphere. Such historical accounts admittedly not only describe the processes of nationalisation, but reinforce them by hiding or marginalising certain other detectable phenomena, such as the fact of multilingualism or the multiple identities. This is how such historical accounts consciously or unconsciously start serving the national narrative, which as a holistic concept is oriented at homogenisation. Pluralities, heterogeneities, ambiguities, vagueness or multiple identities should be removed, through the exclusion of these 'strangenesses' or inclusion of 'strange' elements in their own national context or, possibly, made invisible. Identity will therefore primarily be possible only in a national context, one has to first of all acquire a distinctively individual national identity that is embedded in a national collective. Also memory and recollection, which are especially relevant for the constitution of identity, are now exploited nationally. Recollection, to which societies or individuals are directing themselves, is occupied with irrefutable national contents. Through school education, through public demonstrations and celebrations, through anniversaries or not least through the erection of monuments, recollection of the past is instrumentalised nationally, a clear national memory is implemented and strengthened. This namely means that new incontrovertible national boundaries will apparently be constructed in a region determined by pluralities and heterogeneities, in which different, complementary recollections can be detected or made possible within fluid boundaries that are penetrating each other, and that these boundaries should negate or eliminate this variety that results from a multi-coded memory.

Also the historical reconstruction of memory and reminiscence in the recent decades, partially without making itself explicitly aware of it, again, always followed such preferences, in that it differentiated between, e.g., French, German, Italian, Austrian or Danish realms of memory, which were each based on an underlying national memory, which therefore those could and should be remembered exclusively nationally.³⁷

³⁷ Moritz Csáky, 'Die Mehrdeutigkeit von Gedächtnis und Erinnerung', in Georg Kreis (ed.), *Erinnern und Verarbeiten. Zur Schweiz in den Jahren 1933–1945* (Itinera, 25, Basel, 2004), 14–15.

Meanwhile, especially in the German-speaking area, a number of studies have been conducted, which attempted to introduce a whole number of inquiries that the program started by Pierre Nora tried to transfer onto non-national and non-religious societies, of course not escaping the danger of associating the memory and recollection sites with any content, without reflection and inflationarily. Among others, two volumes undertook to present the realms of memory of the Greek and Roman antiquity,³⁸ the memory sites of the GDR were commemorated,³⁹ and recently a volume was published on ‘the Medieval World: the realms of memory of a millennium’.⁴⁰ ‘The memory sites of Christianity’⁴¹ were received not without criticism, because here partially contents were addressed that are not mandatory for all Christian denominations. The gaze over Europe owes its opening to an initiative of scholars: a multi-volume endeavour regarding European realms of memory⁴² in fact transcends the national framework; however, it remains to be seen whether it is still not written according to the national pattern of European unity, with areas being excluded and included.⁴³ Meanwhile, one tries to appeal to the transnational perspectives by applying a comparative approach between national or at least state societies, e.g., in the realms of memory of Eastern and Central Europe,⁴⁴ or as part of the endeavour termed ‘Transnational realms of memory: North- and South-European

³⁸ Elke Stein-Hölkeskamp and Karl-Joachim Hölkeskamp (eds.), *Erinnerungsorte der Antike: Die römische Welt* (Munich, 2006); *idem* (eds.), *Die griechische Welt: Erinnerungsorte der Antike* (Munich, 2010).

³⁹ Martin Sabrow (ed.), *Erinnerungsorte der DDR* (Munich, 2009).

⁴⁰ Johannes Fried and Olaf B. Rader (eds.), *Die Welt des Mittelalters: Erinnerungsorte eines Jahrtausends* (Munich, 2011).

⁴¹ Christoph Markschies and Hubert Wolf (eds.), *Erinnerungsorte des Christentums* (Munich, 2010).

⁴² Pim den Boer et al. (eds.), *Europäische Erinnerungsorte*, vol. 3: *Europa und die Welt* (Munich, 2012).

⁴³ See Moritz Csáky, ‘Einleitung’, in *idem* and Johannes Feichtinger (eds.), *Europa – geeint durch Werte? Die europäische Wertedebatte auf dem Prüfstand der Geschichte* (Bielefeld, 2007), 9–17. See also the programmatic contribution of Johannes Feichtinger, ‘Europa, quo vadis? The invention of a continent between transnational claim and national reality’, in *ibidem*, 19–43.

⁴⁴ Burkhard Olschowsky, Ivan Petránský, Attila Pók, Andrzej Przewoźnik and Matthias Weber (eds.), *Erinnerungsorte in Ostmitteleuropa: Erfahrungen der Vergangenheit und Perspektiven* (Munich, 2011).

perspectives'.⁴⁵ Particularly noteworthy are German-Polish realms of memory planned to be described in five volumes that emerged from a research project, under the said heading, by the Centre for Historical Research, Berlin, of the Polish Academy of Sciences.⁴⁶ A very critical approach to memory research that sometimes still remains nationally oriented is described in a two-volume anthology of a Luxembourg research group.⁴⁷ Especially the contribution of Michel Margue includes a very critical reconstruction of national realms of memory.⁴⁸ Indeed, Luxembourg has always been a linguistically and culturally more dynamic, more hybrid communication space that was once, historically seen, exposed to a national monopolisation; however, as a mixed-culture area, it still evades the uniquely coded national memory.

V

Compared with an interpretation attempting to present the fact of the emergence of nations and the national differences resulting from a political and socio-historical perspective, I would like to suggest looking at the aforementioned 'contrasts' (Friedrich Umlauf) of the Central-European region, including the national heterogeneities and pluralities, not from this particular but from a different, namely cultural, perspective, and to subject it to a purely historical and a scientific cultural analysis, i.e., as free as possible of national-ideological

⁴⁵ Bernd Henningsen, Henriette Kliemann-Geisinger and Stefan Troebst (eds.), *Transnationale Erinnerungsorte: Nord- und südeuropäische Perspektiven* (Berlin, 2009).

⁴⁶ Hans Henning Hahn and Robert Traba (eds.), *Deutsch-Polnische Erinnerungsorte*, vol. 3: *Parallelen* (Paderborn, 2012). Also, see Robert Traba, 'Die andere Seite der Erinnerung. Über das Gedächtnis in der historischen Erfahrung Ostmitteleuropas im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert', *Historie – Jahrbuch des Zentrums für Historische Forschung Berlin der Polnischen Akademie der Wissenschaften*, 2: *Historie erinnern, Historie erzählen* (2008/2009), 11–21; Kornelia Kończal, 'Deutsch-polnische Erinnerungsorte: Wie die deutsch-polnische Beziehungsgeschichte neu konzeptualisiert werden kann', in *ibidem*, 118–37.

⁴⁷ Benoît Majerus, Sonja Kmec, Michel Margue and Pit Péporté (eds.), *Dépasser le cadre national des "Lieux de mémoire". Innovations méthodologiques, approches compartives, lectures transnationales/Nationale Erinnerungsorte hinterfragt. Methodologische Innovationen, vergleichende Annäherungen, transnationale Lektüren* (Comparatisme et Société, 9, Brussels and New York, 2009).

⁴⁸ Michel Margue, 'Lieux de mémoire au Luxembourg, lieux de mémoire en Europe', in *ibidem*, 9–22.

handicaps. I am referring to a concept of culture that is possibly comprehensive and that includes the overall life-world references. This opens the possibility not only to present the realms of memory, which means not only to reconstruct them historically from whatever perspective, but to subject them to a deconstructive procedure by pointing out to their fundamental ambiguity. With this, it will also be clear that there is no single dominant prescriptive memory that has been close to the national ideology since around the nineteenth century when the national memory was alleged to be constitutive, but that ‘realms’ as media of memory that may be remembered differently, and in fact this is how they are remembered. Such understanding will eventually lead to the realisation that living with differences, that is, with boundaries and with concomitant continuous crises and conflicts cannot be simply marginalised or excluded, but must be respected and accepted as real conditions.

Such processes are visible especially when their contexts, their ‘fields’ (Pierre Bourdieu), or rather, their ‘framings’ (Erving Goffman) are taken into consideration and consequently, and thus, as Bronisław Malinowski suggests, are understood culturally as ‘an extensive context of human behaviour’.⁴⁹ In this sense, culture is something comprehensive,

which consists of utilitarian and household goods, the constitutional rights and obligations of various national groups, from human ideas and skills, from beliefs and customs.⁵⁰

Culture is thus a dynamic, performative process of ‘behaviours’ being negotiated anew. To behave in a mutually understandable manner means nothing else but to communicate with one another. It is, as Zygmunt Bauman said, an understanding of culture as a ‘spontaneous process that is free of administrative or executive centres’.⁵¹ I therefore propose that culture be understood as an ensemble of cultural elements, signs, symbols and codes, with which individuals

⁴⁹ Bronisław Malinowski, ‘Eine wissenschaftliche Theorie der Kultur (1941)’, in *idem, Eine wissenschaftliche Theorie der Kultur* (2nd edn Frankfurt a.M., 2004), 47.

⁵⁰ *Ibidem*, 74–5.

⁵¹ Zygmunt Bauman, ‘Gesetzgeber und Interpret: Kultur als Ideologie von Intellektuellen’, in Hans Haferkamp (ed.), *Sozialstruktur und Kultur* (Frankfurt a.M., 1990), 479.

communicate with one another in a verbal and non-verbal context. In a figurative sense, culture can be understood as a communication space, as a space of ‘multilayer and often contradictory social process(es), ... a dynamics of social relations’,⁵² wherein, through placing and rejection of elements, permanent life-worlds are constituted and at the same time balances of power are negotiated. Thus, culture is a communication space with permeable boundaries, where newer elements are continuously added, others lose significance to be reinterpreted and removed. Thus is culture a web of clues, of linguistic or mimetic behaviours and expressions, that is, of meanings, by which individuals and social groups are trying to orient themselves in a comprehensive social ‘space’. Culture as a communication space is dynamic, performative, not ‘authentic’ and hence, mixed; culture is a hybrid and therefore is ambiguous.

I am a hybrid – Krzysztof Penderecki recently said in an interview. – My family is from the *Kresy* [historical eastern Poland]. My paternal grandmother was Armenian, my grandfather – a Polonised German. ... My father came from Ukraine. He was an Orthodox ... For example, I always had an inclination towards Orthodoxy, on the other hand I was fascinated by Western culture, with its rationalism, but also with its art of expression of complicated feelings.⁵³

It means that if the deliberations of Walter Benjamin or Theodor W. Adorno are followed, what is perceived as authentic tradition, a binding tradition, a fixed cultural heritage, is an artificial construct, and this is why the recourse on such a tradition may correspond to a catastrophic misjudgement: ‘There is a tradition that is a disaster’,⁵⁴ because it only reflects the cultural position of the ruler and not of the many ruled.

Culture as a communication space includes a decisive refusal to an essentialist, holistic vision of culture, as that of a national culture. Cultural communication spaces are sign systems that can be much

⁵² Doris Bachmann-Medick, *Cultural Turns. Neuorientierung in den Kulturwissenschaften* (Reinbek b. Hamburg, 2006), 289.

⁵³ Mieczyslaw Tomaszewski, ‘Der Schaffensweg des Krzysztof Penderecki’, *Silesia Nova. Vierteljahrsschrift für Kultur und Geschichte*, v, 1 (2008), 53.

⁵⁴ Benjamin, *Das Passagen-Werk*, 591; Theodor W. Adorno, ‘Über Tradition’, in *idem, Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann, vol. 10: *Kulturkritik und Gesellschaft I: Prismen. Ohne Leitbilder* (Darmstadt, 1998), 310–20.

more regarded as ‘texts’ which may therefore be ‘read’ and interpreted anew, and are not comprised in themselves, or unambiguous. Hence, culture as a communication space proves to be fluid and dynamic, as a continuously varying hybrid process, exhibiting fluid, volatile transitions compared to other communication spaces. One may think of, e.g., ongoing, dynamic changes of a specific language with its neologisms, meaning assignments or word changes where borrowings are being added continuously from other specific languages. Certainly, such a dynamics relates to non-verbal communication. The same characters and symbols may be found in different cultural contexts, letting the idea of uniformity appear as obsolete. The relevance of non-verbal communication is evident; in everyday life, it is much more common than the specific language communication. Individuals or groups communicate daily with road signs, with traffic lights and with their different colour signals. They are orientating within a city by having a quiet dialogue with the alignment of streets and squares, with street names or buildings, churches, palaces and department stores, with monuments or sculptures attached to the buildings. What it means is that people ‘read’ the ‘text’ of the city, and communicate with various signs pointing to something – e.g., a tower that gives them security and which they search to have in their field of vision incessantly. In a crowd, people try to orient themselves through direction and pace of those coming up; one re-evaluates constantly anew, dodges, or, when it rains, tries to align their own umbrella with those of the others, to avoid collision; one accelerates their own pace or ponders choosing another way to proceed faster. Non-verbal, mimetic expressions such as looks, gestures, different postures accompany each verbal communication. It can be also supported by sounds, such as the ambiguous *aha* which is typical for different languages of Central Europe. Designers of the authentic national culture who only know their ‘either ... or’ have always had problems and difficulties with such ambiguities with the ‘either-and-or’. Signs or symbols occurring in several communication areas must be reinterpreted, rewritten, coded nationally and clearly included into one’s own ‘imagined national context’, as for example the double eagle or the double cross. The double cross with its originally universal meaning, bringing the nations together, has become a representative national symbol of the Slovak nation in its national emblem; in the Hungarian national emblem, on the other hand, it acts as a symbol of the Hungarian nation, which is

different from the Slovak nation. Something similar is happening to folk music, for example to folk songs that the well-known Carinthian Grenzlandchor performs in German and uses as a symbol of the German Carinthia. The melodies, kept throughout in a minor key, are admittedly mostly of Slovene origin, so if they are exploited as a confession of Germanness, they remain, in spite of their national coding, dominated by a distinctive Slavic tone.

Individuals or groups may communicate in two or several 'languages', thus finding themselves in different or multiple communication spaces and through this, they burst the communicative boundaries open. Therefore, a specific language is not the primary differentiating feature, as specified in the national ideology. True, individuals or groups can be placed within a relatively homogeneous linguistic context in different communication spaces correspondent with different social classes, also within an inner one, possibly through a multilingualism marked by sociolects. Words borrowed from various concrete languages can be found in the so-called macaroni sentences, that is, in sentences where words from various languages are used; some such may be traced in literary products of the region until the end of the nineteenth century, including novels and short stories of the Hungarian writer Kálmán (Koloman) Mikszáth.⁵⁵ The German-speaking Croatian writer Wilma von Vukelich clearly illustrates the nature of this mixed colloquial language, that was spoken around 1900 in the Slavonian capital Essek (Osijek):

The Esseker German ... was no language at all, it was a language mixture that can barely be reproduced and that is spoken and understood only by those who were born and grew up there. It is an idiom with swallowed final syllables, consonants and vowels, no pure tone, but everything as if in a fog. There is no sentence in which not at least a few foreign elements were mixed; no trace of syntax, grammar, or orthography. What is called a language there, is a conglomeration of the Hernals German and the Wuerttemberg-Hessian elements of the Swabian peasant, imported by Viennese artisans still at the time of Maria Theresa and the blessed Emperor Joseph. In addition, the Bohemian, with numerous jargon terms planted by the music sergeant of the 78th [regiment] that originate

⁵⁵ György Eisemann, 'Der Leser als Übersetzer. Deutschsprachige Elemente in Werken von Jókai und Mikszáth', in Károly Csúri, Zoltán Fónagy and Volker Munz (eds.), *Kulturtransfer und kulturelle Identität. Budapest und Wien zwischen Historismus und Avantgarde* (Vienna, 2008), 207–13; Csáky, *Das Gedächtnis der Städte*, 289–92.

from the vocabulary of Jewish peddlers, and the underworld lingo of the drifters and traveling journeymen who took their way through Budapest, Prague and Munich; the Serbian impact of the indigenous population of the lower parts of towns, the corrupt official German and Croatian of the military frontier, the bad style of the local German newspapers and a wrong stage pathos of immigrant theatre troupes from Olomouc and Pressburg [Bratislava].⁵⁶

Such description of German may be similarly applied to other urban environments and their languages, for example to the polyglot ornamentation of the Vienna everyday language, which the linguist Maria Hornung had in mind:

Such a variety of foreign-language influences is not noticeable in any other dialect of a European big city but here. It is remarkable how Vienna has coped with processing and comprehending, then and now, all those influences, just to consider the huge influx from Bohemia that started in the second half of the past century and lasted until WWI. ... A look into a Vienna telephone directory shows a wealth of foreign names: those Czech, Slovak, Polish, Hungarian, Croatian and Italian and Friuli family names have nothing foreign to them, and their holders, like the others, speak an unaltered Viennese dialect.⁵⁷

The peripheral borderlands did behave similarly, as Chernivtsi, the polyglot city of Bukovina. Gregor von Rezzori, who spent his youth there, reports about a linguistic ‘gibberish’ of his nanny Cassandra who spoke both languages:

Romanian as well as Ruthenian, but both equally badly – which is, however, the usual case in Bukovina. She mixed both languages and mingled chunks from all the others into it, of those we used around. The result was that absurd gibberish only I could understand. ... The main part of this idiom was the never proper and fully learned German, whose gaps were filled with words and phrases from a couple of other tongues spoken in Bukovina.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Vlado Obad (ed.), *Wilma von Vukelich, Spuren der Vergangenheit. Osijek um die Jahrhundertwende* (Munich, 1992), 95.

⁵⁷ Maria Hornung, ‘Sprache’, in Peter Csendes, Ferdinand Opll and Friederike Goldmann (eds.), *Die Stadt Wien* (Österreichisches Städtebuch, 7, Vienna, 1999), 85.

⁵⁸ Gregor von Rezzori, *Blumen im Schnee. Porträtstudien zu einer Autobiographie, die ich nie schreiben werde* (Berlin, 2007), 56–7.

Such language interferences and interactions are thus no arbitrary inventions, but they reflect the social and cultural reality of everyday life. They are evidence that people and groups are located at such 'internal boundaries' in multiple communication spaces, and identify themselves with those.

VI

Culture as a communication space is constantly a hybrid, meaning an ambiguous blend. The particular elements, signs and symbols are interwoven but not in a way that they become invisible and disappear. Viewing Central Europe, this means that the differences, as the multiculturalism theory says, have never been fully destroyed but remain visible, and can at the same time get entangled and enter into a hybrid hotchpotch situation. Hybridisation also results through an interaction with elements of other cultural spaces, which likewise represent hybrid cultural 'semiospheres'. In such an aspect, Central Europe appears as a region of competing and overlapping communication spaces, one where memory and reminiscence are not obvious, either, but, in a sense, also a hybrid, meaning ambiguous. The individuals and groups can share common experiences here and can commonly, in unison, recollect important events. They remind themselves of them in different communication areas, perhaps also in very different ways. However, they may remind themselves of those, likewise, in different ways. That means that different recollections may be had not only by those who belong to different communication spaces, but also by those who stay within the same socio-cultural context. Thus, also history as a reminiscence of the past may be so far ambiguous, since as a collective historical event, it yields not only a binding recollection and a binding historical interpretation, but multiple memories, histories, or 'authentic' stories. The thing is that remembering the past does not mean that events from the past are brought out easily and so can be repeated; rather than that, the memory proceeds selectively, always choosing new things from the events, updates those, forms them into something new, lively, and adds them to the concrete experience of the present. Hence, through the memory, as the update of the memory contents, the past respectively becomes (the) present. In contrast to the mentioned Proust-like *mémoire involontaire*, it is mostly about the *mémoire volontaire* here, steered, i.e., through

a specification of topographical or metaphorical places of remembrance. But even here recollection is not secured or explicit, as otherwise postulated by the national ideology. For, according to the different social contexts, meaning different cultural communication spaces wherein individuals are located, or according to a certain temporal distance, not only recollections may change, but thus such altered recollections may unexpectedly also alter the places of remembrance as the predefined media for the memory content. It means that with the change of the signifier, also the signified may change. We observe this phenomenon with numerous monuments that lose any originally-prescribed meaning upon lapse of some time or because of a forever-varying perspective. Or, the monuments are completely neglected, because, as Robert Musil puts it,

the most striking thing about monuments is namely the fact that one does not notice them. There is nothing in the world which would be so invisible as monuments. They are undoubtedly placed to be seen, to really attract attention; but at the same time, they are impregnated with something against attracting attention ... whilst the job of the most of ordinary monuments is to generate memories in the first place, or to attract attention ...; and monuments fall short of this main profession.⁵⁹

Such insights result in keeping memory and recollection in constant ambiguity and cause that particularly in a region that is full of differences and heterogeneities, the creation of an explicit, homogeneous memory always creates a danger of implementing power structures that seek to cut out or eliminate cultural differences, against the experience of a pluralistic reality. The construction of national places of remembrance is an example of such attempts. Because of the experience with the cultural spaces of Central Europe, culture studies analysis should not strive so much for historical reconstruction of such places of national remembrance, which only consolidates constructed, ‘imagined’ national differences. Rather, it should try and deconstruct such specified places of remembrance as something ‘liquid’ (Aleida Assmann), something never unique, in which, like in a palimpsest, one can trace numerous memory traces. The realisation that Central Europe is a region with many different competing and

⁵⁹ Robert Musil, ‘Denkmale’, in *idem*, *Gesammelte Werke*, i: *Prosa und Stücke*, 506–7.

overlapping communication spaces would be an opportunity not only to perceive, describe or tolerate cultural differences, or even boundaries, in Lotman's meaning, but also to acknowledge the differences as an equality of the different. As opposed to thinking in diversities, cultural differences are not homogeneously closed units; they are rather heterogeneous in themselves, subjected to outwardly permeable and performative changes. The medievalist Michael Borgolte has attempted at convincingly deconstructing the picture of Mediaeval Europe dominated by Christianity, which meant that the values of Europe are traceable not only in Christianity but equally in Judaism and Islam. Thence, he created

a consciousness of difference and diversity that would never again allow to be covered or wiped out referring to an enticing unity.⁶⁰

In a similar way, cultural and scientific analysis of heterogeneity and plurality of Central Europe could expose the diversity of memories and ways of reminiscence through which this region is strongly influenced. To live with such diversity also means that people within such heterogeneity must reorient themselves again and again, in that their identity is not something constant but always indicates a performative, process-like character, with all the uncertainty, crises and conflicts that are inherent with such processes. In the light of such findings, one could perhaps describe Central Europe as a laboratory in which there are certain processes visible already in the past that are not only of a European importance but rather, in an analogous manner, become globally relevant for the present.

trans. Tristan Korecki

⁶⁰ Michael Borgolte, 'Wie Europa seine Vielfalt fand. Über die mittelalterlichen Wurzeln für die Pluralität der Werte', in Hans Joas and Klaus Wiegandt (eds.), *Die kulturellen Werte Europas* (Frankfurt a.M., 2005), 163; Michael Borgolte, *Christen, Juden, Muselmanen. Die Erben der Antike und der Aufstieg des Abendlandes 300 bis 1400 n. Chr.* (Munich, 2006).