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► **To cite this version:**

Mateusz Chmurski. Review: Helga Mitterbauer & Carrie Smith-Prei, eds. Crossing Central Europe. Continuities and Transformations, 1900 and 2000. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2017. Pp. 290. ISBN: 9781442649149.. 2019. hal-03746529

HAL Id: hal-03746529

<https://hal.science/hal-03746529>

Submitted on 5 Aug 2022

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**Helga Mitterbauer & Carrie Smith-Prei,
eds. *Crossing Central Europe. Continuities
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Crossing Central Europe. Continuities and Transformations, 1900 and 2000 gathers texts by twelve scholars from Canada, the United States, and Europe to focus on the complex networks of transcultural interrelations in Central Europe from 1900 to 2000. This ambitious and pioneering volume edited by Helga Mitterbauer and Carrie Smith-Prei proposes to defend the thesis that “the Central European networks of artists, writers, and musicians were shaken by the world wars and then wrecked by the Cold War, but that after the fall of the Iron Curtain, memories of the nineteenth century formed a solid base for re-establishing transnational relations” (viii). The book’s theoretical frame is set by the editors in the introduction, which considers “the instability of national borders and the permeability of transcultural identity” (xi) typical of Central Europe. This region is thus decoded as “a fluid structure with blurred edges” (xi). This structure is analysed in the following contributions, which intertwine historical and transnational perspectives on the arts. Assembled in two parts, the eleven contributions to this volume examine transcultural phenomena in the long twentieth century in literature and literary circulation, music and its reception, architecture and interior design, and media. Thus, the book invites us to explore the labyrinth of Central European history in which, in spite of the traumatic history of the last century, cultural exchanges continue to develop across borders. In view of the current socio-political evolution of numerous countries in the region, such a critical examination of the Austro-Hungarian legacy in the long term is the most inspiring, as well as somewhat reassuring, aspect of Mitterbauer and Smith-Prei’s volume.

Fruitfully elaborating on the processual and communicational perspective on Central Europe initiated by the studies of Moritz Csáky and the Austrian school of Central European history, Helga Mitterbauer

Marc Maufort - 978-2-8076-1281-5

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develops the theoretical background of the introduction in Chapter 1 by emphasizing the concept of cultural transfer. The scholar also draws from postcolonial studies and network analysis to expand the initially bi- or triangular model set by Michel Espagne and Michael Werner into a hybrid model of “dynamic networks” in which “processes of cultural transfer occur on the levels of spatial distance, internal difference, time and power” (9). She then explores the concept of “multipolar and potentially endless” (9) exchanges in the case study of Rudolf Lothar’s play, *König Harlequin* (*King Harlequin*, 1900).

The following chapters illuminate the crossing of cultures in Central Europe thanks to numerous interdisciplinary tools, some of which have only seldom been applied to the region’s history. Relying on the concept of “geomodernism” which emphasizes the importance of location and interconnections, Agatha Schwarz and Helga Thorson examine in Chapter 2 the significant role of plurilingual female writers representing the different languages and parts of the Austro-Habsburg Empire, i.e. Grete Meisel-Hess, Terka Lux, Olha Kobyljanska, Nafija Sarajlić, Zofka Kveder. Addressing the “complex notions of modernism, feminism and Jewishness” (37) around 1900 Schwarz and Thorson’s goal is to take into account hitherto “marginalized voices of women in addition and next to the established canonical writers” to “discover common modernist threads in their works across existing political, linguistic, and intellectual boundaries beyond the dominant narratives of national imagined communities” (44).

In Chapter 3, Gregor Kokorz builds on the recent developments of border studies, such as those elaborated by Berg and Van Houtum, to develop a constructionist approach to nationalism and modernization. The critic shows how music problematized the notion of border in the *Vormärz* decades. For example, despite the differing cultural/national backgrounds of his Hungarian or German audiences, Franz Liszt played a kind of music that encapsulated the shared European aesthetics of the time. Thus, music “mediates not only between the national and the international, but also between different ethnicities and conflicting concepts of national identity [i.e. based on language or birth]” (60). Recalling the figure of Chopin (as analysed elsewhere by Jolanta T. Pekacz, Jim Samson and myself), Liszt “represented both the national and the international, but could become a national icon only because he was the admired representative of the modern European world” (57).

Imre Szeman adds to these reflections on the pre-1848 period in Chapter 4 by analysing of Imre Madách's closet play *Az ember tragédiája* (*The Tragedy of Man*, 1862). Unlike similar texts by Goethe, Flaubert, Joyce and Karl Kraus, this work was forgotten for a long time. Examining the relation between a literary genre and political and economic contexts, Szeman argues that this type of play reflected "in both form and content, the ways in which capital made reality ungraspable and unsteady, thereby producing a literary space that mirrored – or, at least, had the potential to mirror – the fantastic form that social relations had taken within capitalism" (96). The political dimension of literary creation and analysis is thus once again underlined through this example of a cultural production that anticipated the traumatic events of the 20th century. Echoing each other, these chapters devoted to the *Vormärz* period reveal its highly inspiring potential to problematize unilateral political and cultural notions. This also recalls Xavier Galmiche's observations on the role of the heroicomic tradition in counterbalancing the formation of more and more rigid and exclusive national communities in the Central European region.

Closing the first part of the volume, Sarah McGaughey completes those observations in Chapter 5 by offering another shift in perspective. As she discusses the representation of the modern kitchen in literature during the interwar period, the critic comments on texts by Franz Kafka, Ernst Weiß, Joseph Roth, Kurt Tucholsky and Jakob Wasserman in an international context. She amplifies discourse analysis with data on how modern aesthetic imagination resonated not only in the arts, but also in everyday practice. However, Central European texts (and contexts) in languages (and milieus) other than German should be taken in account to further reinforce the proposed conclusions.

All in all, the studies of the first part of the volume sketch an inspiring vision of the transcultural circulation networks of the pre-national and pre-totalitarian period. These essays focus on a time preceding the growing exclusiveness of modern national communities. The latter led to world conflicts, which – as the famous quote by István Bibó reminds us – both began in Central Europe. The second part of the volume examines the region's post-totalitarian (yet not solely post-national) realities, which are complicated by the issue of traumatised cultural memory, in the contexts of European integration and globalization after the fall of the Iron Curtain and the late capitalism take-over of Central European countries.

In Chapter 6, Irene Sywenky analyses the peripheral space perception of the Ukrainian city of Lviv (Leopol/Lemberg/Lwów/Lvov) in texts by Zbigniew Herbert, Adam Zagajewski, Stanisław Lem and Iurii Andrukhovych. The poetic notion of “unhomeliness,” Sywenky suggests, captures the mirage location of a bounded cultural identity. However, the concept could be amplified and placed in conversation with the concepts of “phantom borders” (recently explored in Ukraine by Sabine von Löwis) as well as the “toponymic declination” symbolizing the historical volatility of empires and the geographical fluidity of borders. The latter are also expressed from a rhetoric point of view through the addition of linguistic equivalents approaching the form of litany or the antique “ars apodemica” (as theorised by Xavier Galmiche).

In the following chapters, the destabilised, fluid, or “homeless” cultural identities of the region facing local, national and global concerns are set against the transcultural aspects of interconnectedness in Central Europe beyond historical ruptures. By exploring Jewish transcultural collective memory in works by Doron Rabinovici, Julya Rabinowich and Vladimir Vertlib, Sandra Vlasta claims in Chapter 7 that such works exceed chronological and spatial divisions in order to express an “idea of transcultural Europe characterized by migration, exchange and cultural transfer” (164), of which Jewishness is one of the strongest transnational parts. Similar conclusions are formulated by Michael Boehringer through the example of Dimitré Dinev’s work. In Chapter 8, he observes how “post-war Austrian literature played a pivotal role in the creation of the Austrian nation; today, literature has again taken the lead, by rising above national identifications and mapping a transcultural imaginary” (170). This phenomenon gives way to the contestation of “national and originary myths of being” through the fundamental experience of migration and hybridity resulting in “existential homelessness that stands in stark contrast to our desire of a ‘home’” (171). Boehringer’s thesis inspiringly resonates with the conclusions of the newest studies on Polish contemporary literature, despite the fact that symbolic geographical orientation thoroughly shifted – according to Przemysław Czapliński – towards a “shaken map” of references. In a word, the famous quotation from Alfred Jarry’s *Le Roi Ubu*, “En Pologne, c’est-à-dire nulle part” (1896), is still perfectly relevant today. This idea could even be extended to the whole region of Central Europe caught in between more and more numerous points of reference.

“In remixing Russian, German, English and Slovene layers of popular and elitist high culture [...], the Slovene band Laibach reflects the situation of cultural plurality at the beginning of the twentieth century but has also reshaped it in a highly specific and confusing manner” (201), Stefan Simonek states in Chapter 9. His analysis of the intertextual and musical provocative trans-aesthetic montages in the work of the Slovene band Laibach interestingly echoes Gregor Kokorz’s observations on Franz Liszt. However, the logics of cultural production now seem related to those of late capitalism, as detailed by Frederic Jameson. The sudden and often chaotic flooding of late capitalism in the region’s realities is another complex transnational chapter of Central European history that must be taken in account. In other words, as Matthew Miller concludes in Chapter 10 in his analysis of the 2003 film *Donau, Dunaj, Duna, Dunav, Dunărea* by the Vienna-based ex-Yugoslav filmmaker Goran Rebić: “first, [...] reformulations of identity lead to questions of agency; and second, [...] predications of the new Europe cannot remain merely cultural, but also demand translation (*Übersetzung*: a setting over to other banks) into the economic and political tasks faced by the continent” (244). Indeed, if the river can be conceived not only as a geophysical and trans-border connector but also as an open metaphor of the (Central) European future, this figure is also a reminder of the common, transnational ecological and economic basis determining the fate of cultural superstructures. The last chapter of the book by Carrie Smith-Prei is devoted to the Bulgarian-born German author Ilija Trojanow. It suggests committed conclusions through its analysis of the contemporary role of the public intellectual “uncovering the inequity and chaos caused by global confluence, but in a manner that displays cosmopolitan awareness and empathy for the other while not claiming to provide ways out of crisis” (265). In this manner, as the editors state, “the continuities and transformations between and among nations historically belonging to Central Europe since the nineteenth century help us grasp the aesthetic repercussions of globalization in the twenty-first century” (xvi-xvii).

While they are often essentialised to satisfy immediate political, economic or identity claims, transcultural networks and their relevance in transcending historical divisions are effectively explored in this volume. In contrast to the still dominant national historiographical scope of current literature studies in the region, the contributors to Helga Mitterbauer and Carrie Smith-Prei’s collection stress the permeability

of borders and the significance of transcultural circulation observed in Central Europe in the best tradition of openness typical of Austrian Studies. Further research could include transcultural approaches in other contexts, such as the French scholarship quoted in this review. And if the idea of “border-izing” remains one of the main research trends in current analyses of Central European cultures, a common practice in Old Continent scholarship, I would like to conclude by paraphrasing the title of Hastings Donnan, Madeleine Hurd, and Carolin Leutloff-Grandits’s recent volume: today, a sustained conceptualization of migrating borders not only reflects our “moving times,” but proves as necessary as ever.

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