2013

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Katarzyna Murawska-Muthesius
Birkbeck College, University of London, k.murmut@gmail.com

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Mapping Eastern Europe: Cartography and Art History

Murawska-Muthesius*
*Birkbeck College, University of London

Abstract
This paper compares maps of Eastern Europe, beginning from the map of Slavic lands by Josef Pavol Šafárik of 1842, and it claims that cartographic imagery has played a significant role in the legitimisation of the region’s collective identity. It argues that the adoption the map as a tool of art history, in order to spatialise and quantify the understanding of art, cannot bypass the postmodern critique of the map. It reflects on the overlap between the approaches and methods of critical cartography and critical art history, as well as on the mutual benefits of the visual turn in cartography and of the spatial turn in art history.

Résumé
Murawska-Muthesius démontre que les images cartographiques de l'Europe de l'Est, de l'Europe communiste, et de l'Europe post-communiste ont joué un rôle significatif dans la légitimation de l'identité collective de cette région. Ce faisant, elle examine les similarités entre les approches et méthodes de la cartographie et celles de l'histoire de l'art, et réfléchit sur les avantages et dangers du visual turn de la cartographie et du spatial turn de l'histoire de l'art. Elle soutient que l’adoption de la carte comme outil historique dans le but de spatialiser et quantifier notre compréhension d’art ne peut faire l’économie d’une critique post-moderne de la carte telle qu’elle fut développée par la Nouvelle Cartographie au milieu des années 1980.

* Dr Katarzyna Murawska-Muthesius is Associate Lecturer in History of Art in the Department of History of Art and Screen Media, Birkbeck College, University of London. Her publications include: Borders in Art: Revisiting Kunstgeographie, 2000; Graphic Arts in Central Europe, Centropa 2004, and Bohemianism outside Paris: Central Europe and beyond, Ars, 2012; From Museum Critique to the Critical Museum (with Piotr Piotrowski, forthcoming Ashgate).
This paper focuses on the wider strategies of turning space into an image, and on the politics of representing and classifying space, past and present. It focuses on shifting cartographic regimes applied to maps of Eastern Europe, including the maps of art, and it argues that the adoption of the map as a tool of art history, in order to spatialise and quantify our understanding of art, cannot bypass the postmodern critique of the map which has developed under the banner of the New Cartography from the mid-1980s.

The writings by J. B. Harley, Denis Wood, Denis Cosgrove, and many others have challenged the map’s time-honoured claims to scientific neutrality, revealing instead its kinship with art, as well as its inherent relationship with power.1 As forcefully argued by J.B. Harley in one of his most radical texts, far from presenting a neutral and objective record of reality and from translating three-dimensional reality onto a two-dimensional surface according to scientific rules, maps constitute a highly subjective, densely opaque, immensely biased and selective interpretation of this reality, which has to be disassembled, simplified and reassembled while using a set of cartographic codes. The map discriminates, reinforcing the empowered and marginalising the disempowered:

the distinctions of class and power are engineered, reified and legitimated in the map by means of cartographic signs. The rule seems to be “the more powerful the more prominent.” To those who have strength in the worlds shall be added strength in the map. Using all the tricks of the cartographic trade – size of symbol, thickness of line, height of lettering, hatching and shading, the addition of colour – we can trace this reinforcing tendency in innumerable European maps.2

Since the 1990s maps have been further theorised as texts, social documents, cultural artefacts, graphic representations and signifying devices, as well as unmasked as tools of imperialism and nationalism, which both facilitate and justify expansion and control. By drawing and naturalising the boundaries, past and present, they have been said to turn history into nature, fixing identities, and excluding the other.3

Maps of Eastern Europe are no exception to this rule, on the contrary they prove the primary role of the cartography in the creation of the notion of the “region” of Eastern Europe, at the beginning of the 20th century, as a distinct geographical, historical and geopolitical unit, and as a separate cultural space, detachable from Western Europe, and attachable to Asia.4 One of its primary features, however, is its persistent spatial indeterminacy. The boundaries of Eastern Europe have never been fixed and, depending on the positionality of the cartographer, its space could either loom large between the Baltic in the north, Mediterranean in the south and the Ural mountains in the east, bridging Europe and Asia, or, it could also shrivel down to a strip of the “lands-in-between” that are sandwiched uncomfortably between Europe’s West and East. The notorious spatial uncertainty of the region has been matched by the equally unstable lexicon of names, generated by western discourse since the beginning of the twentieth century. Its most tenacious qualifying adjective “Eastern” was displaced after 1989, freely and arbitrarily, by the terms “Central,” or “East Central.” This seemingly unsolvable linguistic confusion, or rather battle for signification over the region’s geographical bearing is further complicated by an astonishing assortment of other names given to it throughout.


the whole span of the twentieth century, beginning with the allegedly innocent “New Europe” of the Versailles origins, to a blatantly instrumental cordon sanitaire. It soon resorted to increasingly metaphorical signifiers, such as, “marchlands,” “shatter zone,” “the belt of political change,” “the devil’s belt,” “the other Europe,” as well as to direct indicators of political affiliation, such as “Communist Europe,” “Post-Communist Europe,” revoking occasionally the old denomination of the “New Europe.” Both the names and the maps have been instrumental in projecting the collective identity of the region, the homogeneity of its physical features, but also the notion of its inherent transitoriness and immaturity, as well as implying submissiveness, impurity and danger. Deprived of stable boundaries as parameters of identity, be it geographical, ethnic or linguistic, the region appears to be a perfect case in the point of post-structuralist indeterminacy, testifying that indeed there is nothing outside the text, and that the map precede the territory.

The text below compares different visual regimes employed to represent the cultural and political entities of “Eastern Europe,” Communist Europe and Post-Communist Europe, beginning from, and focusing on that most remarkable map, entitled “Slavic Europe” and dating from 1842. What follows is informed both by my experience as a “mapmaker” – as a contributor to John Onian’s World Art Atlas as well as by my research on the western construction of this region. The text argues that it is the maps and the cartographic imagery which have played, and are still playing, a significant role in the legitimisation of the Eastern European collective identity. Examining the ways of mapping art in Eastern Europe, the text reflects also on the overlap between the approaches and methods of critical cartography and critical art history, that is on the mutual benefits and perils of the visual turn in cartography, and of the spatial turn in art history. I am going to start from the latter.

It should not come as a surprise that the interrogation of the neutrality of cartography has been inspired not just by post-structural thinkers, such as Barthes, Foucault and Derrida, but also by the methods and insights generated by Art History and Visual Culture. In another of Harley’s seminal texts, “Maps, Knowledge and Power,” the opening chapter on theoretical perspectives openly declared the adoption of the method of iconology, by saying: “My aim here is to explore the discourse of maps in the context of political power, and my approach is broadly iconological.” Notably, Harley quoted both from Erwin Panofsky’s iconology and from W. J. T. Mitchell’s re-definition of it from the positions of post-structuralism and Marxism-inspired inquiry into the ontology of the image. From Mitchell, with whom Harley shared the radical deconstructionist outlook and scepticism toward the neutrality of cultural pronouncements, he borrowed the affirmation of the socially constructed nature of visual representation, which justified his classification of maps as belonging to the “broader family of value-laden images.” It seems, however, that in spite of the obvious kinship with Mitchell’s inquiry into the politics of the image, it was Panofsky’s description of the progressive stages of image analysis which proved most influential on Harley’s thinking about “the symbolic dimension” of the map as a picture. Harley kept returning to Panofsky’s method many times over the period of his most intense production of the theoretical statements about

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1 Harley, “Maps, Knowledge and Power,” 278.
5 On the issue of naming the region, see, among others, Gordon East, “The Concept and Political Status of the Shatter Zone,” in Geographical Essays on Eastern Europe, ed. Norman J.G. Pounds (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 19630, 1-27);
7 There is a growing interest in the proximity between cartography and art, initiated by David Woodward, ed., Art and Cartography: Six Historical Essays (Chicago and London: Chicago University Press, 1987). In a wider perspective, for the significance of geography for history of art, see the seminal book by Thomas D’Costa Kaufmann, Toward a Geography of Art (University of Chicago Press: Chicago and London, 2004).
12 Harley, “Maps, Knowledge and Power,” 278.
maps, adapting it for the use of the New Cartography by displacing the contents, theme and the intrinsic meaning of an artwork with the signifiers, topography and the ideology of space. Thus the first level of Panofsky's ladder, the recognition of the “primary or natural subject matter” would be translated by Harley into the primary task of the recognition of conventional cartographic signs; the second step, identifying of the picture’s ”secondary or conventional subject matter,” – would be aligned by him with the recognition of the topographical identity of "real place" represented on the map; and, finally, the last stage of Panofsky’s image interpretation which aims to decipher its broad symbolical values as cultural symptoms of its times - would decode maps as “a visual metaphor for values enshrined in the places they represent”, or, in Harley’s parlance as “ideologies of space.”

Panofsky’s method, criticised for its adherence to the notions of intrinsic meaning and given contexts, as well as for its indifference to social relations and politics,11 might appear entirely out of tune with Harley’s postmodernist critical approach, unveiling the map as an instrument of power-knowledge, but it must have appealed to him precisely for its promise to identify a deeper meaning behind every aspect of an image and to link it to other cultural manifestation of the time. Indeed, he went into great lengths in order to accommodate what he considered a useful methodology into his own scholarly apparatus. As he wrote in 1990: “The question: ‘what did the map mean to the society that first made and used it?’ is of crucial interpretive importance. Maps become a source to reveal the philosophical, political, or religious outlook of the period, or which is sometimes called the spirit of the age.”

But, even if obviously seduced by the interpretive powers of iconology, seemingly capable of unveiling the totality of hidden meanings conveyed by images of the past, Harley would nonetheless adapt it for the use of his Critical Cartography by positioning the orthodoxies of iconology alongside other methods of cultural hermeneutics, such as discourse analysis and social theory, and in this way by filtering its approaches through the prism of his own radical alertness to the mechanisms of power and social discrimination. He continued:

An iconographical interpretation can be used to complement the rules-of-society approach. While the latter reveals the tendencies of knowledge in maps – its hierarchies, inclusions and exclusions – the former examines how the social rules were translated into the cartographic idiom in terms of signs, styles and expressive vocabularies of cartography.12

In the same way in which the New Cartography looked back into the discipline of Art History, filtering its old methods through critical theory, the use of the cartographic practices by the new strand of Spatial Art History, would also benefit from internalising the critical reflection about the mechanisms and perils of mapmaking.13

There is no region named as Eastern Europe on early modern maps of the continent which focus on representing dynasties and kingdoms, and pay due tribute to the rulers who commissioned them.14 As argued by Larry Wolf, it was the Enlightenment which invented the concept of Eastern Europe, constructing it as Europe’s...
Other. Even if no regular map of Eastern Europe as a separate space was made in the eighteenth century, it is significant that the emerging hierarchy of the civilised versus non-civilised was visualised on the patterns borrowed from cartographic imagery. A striking example is provided by the allegorical print, chosen as a frontispiece in the memoirs of the French astronomer Chappé d’Auteroche, who travelled from Paris through the whole Europe to observe the transit of Venus in Siberia in 1761. The engraving, entitled “Carte Générale: La France et l’Empire, la Pologne et la Russie,” was made by the French artist Jean Baptiste Le Prince, who accompanied the astronomer on his journey, producing a series of orientalising representations of everyday life in European and Asiatic Russia (Fig. 1). The cartographic element of the image consists of the journey’s graphic itinerary, complete with cities and major rivers, which is inscribed prominently on the curtain at the background. It leads from Paris to Mainz, Strasbourg and Vienna, and further to Warsaw, St Petersburg and Moscow, ending in the most remote town of Tobolsk in Siberia. If the itinerary serves as an index to confirm the real presence and the empirical status of the observations, the message of the map is conveyed by its figurative part, through the allegorical juxtaposition of the stately personifications of France, the Holy Roman Empire to the humble figures of Poland and Russia. In stark contrast to the first two figures, imperial, brightly lit, draped in sumptuous classical attire and displaying the royal insignia – the figures of Poland and Russia, pushed to the back and cast in shadow, are marked as diffident, insecure and powerless. Stripped from any emblems which could testify to their actual royal status as the representatives of the ancient Kingdom of Poland and the powerful Russian Tsardom of Catherine the Great, they are dressed in quasi-ethnic costumes and hold military weapons, suitable for low-ranking soldiers, such as a bow and a halberd: one is sitting directly on the ground, and both of them look up to the western sovereigns, who seem entirely oblivious of their presence. It is not difficult to see that the spatial configuration of the personifications of France, the Holy Roman Empire, Poland and Russia is heavily indebted to the common theme of the cartouche iconography in the 17th century maps, in which allegorical figures standing for Asia, Africa and Americas bow to the authority of Europe, always shown as reigning supreme and presented as the queen of the world.

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16 The image was published as “Carte Générale: La France et l’Empire, la Pologne et la Russie,” in Jean Chappe d’Auteroche, Voyage en Sibérie (Paris, 1768), and it was republished on the cover of Wolff’s Inventing Eastern Europe, with a short discussion on frontispiece. See also Kimery Rorschach, with an essay by Carol Jones Neuman, Drawings by Jean-Baptiste Le Prince for the ‘Voyage en Sibérie’ (Philadelphia: Rosenbach Museum & Library, 1986), cat. no. 33.
17 For examples, see, for instance, Michael Wintle, The Image of Europe: Visualizing Europe in Cartography and Iconography Throughout the Ages (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Rodney Shirley, Courtiers and Cannibals, Angels and Amazons: the Art of the Decorative Cartographic Titlepage (Houten: Hes & De Graaf, 2009).
By juxtaposing the disempowered monarchies of Poland and Russia to the enthroned figures of France and Germany, the print adapts the established cartographic code of the geopolitical hierarchy of the world onto the internal hierarchy of Europe, contributing in this way to the emerging discourse of Eastern European backwardness.

If in Le Prince’s map, its cartographic component acquired meaning from the allegorical scene, along with the vanishing of the cartouche imagery, the ideological message would be conveyed by the very language of the cartographic sign system. By the early 19th century, the spatial hierarchy of Europe, and, to be precise, of its Eastern peripheries, has changed almost beyond recognition. The Polish and Lithuanian Commonwealth was swallowed by the expanding empires of Prussia, Russia, Austria, completing the process of disappearing countries of this region from the map. The Kingdoms of Hungary and Bohemia had become parts of the Habsburg Monarchy in the 16th century; Bulgaria and Serbia and many smaller principalities, such as Moldavia, Walachia, had fallen prey to the Ottoman Empire throughout the Middle Ages. Before the Austria-Hungarian compromise of 1867, the eastern peripheries of the political maps of Europe were uniformly covered by the vast overflowing territories of the Great Empires. The nineteenth century, however, was also the period of an increased effort to assemble an encyclopaedic body of knowledge about the world and its inhabitants, to describe, measure, and classify all the aspects of nature and culture, including languages, ethnicities and races. Even if the underlying principle was the justification of the occidocentric hierarchy of civilisations and the imperial conquest, it did re-introduce the subjugated nations of eastern parts of Europe to the ethnographic maps and atlases. A part of this process was the discovery of Slavic Europe. As if the disappearance of the old Eastern European nation states from the map was to be compensated by the emergence of the Slavic myth, which to a large extent was created by the Slavs among the Eastern Europeans themselves.

And, importantly, one of the most powerful visual manifestations of this myth was again a map, an unprecedented map, a modern ethnographic map of Slavdom, offering the first image of the region, defined on the basis of the shared Slavonic languages, and delineating an imagined linguistic community, the world of Panslavism (Fig. 2). The map, named as Slovanský zeměvíd (survey of Slavic lands) and published in 1842, was painstakingly compiled by Pavol Jozef Šafárik, a Slavonic philologist, who spent many years collecting local maps and establishing original Slavic names of towns and villages, fitting them into his taxonomy of Slavdom. Born in Slovakia (then part of the Kingdom of Hungary), educated in Jena University in Germany, active in Novi Sad in Serbia and then in Prague, Šafárik was one of the first modern scholars who significantly contributed to the establishment of Slavic studies, and whose work, to borrow from Seton-Watson, “had a very direct

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21 Among the ethnographic maps of Europe which distinguish the spatial realm of Slavic Europe which, composed of many ethnic and linguistic identities, breeds often with lengthy explanations on “physical ... intellectual and moral character of nations,” including a distinct “Slavonic variety,” see Gustav Kombot, “Ethnographic map of Europe, or the Different Nations of Europe, traced according to race, language, religion, and form of Government,” in A.K. Johnston, National Atlas, Edinburgh [1843] 1856. See also “Survey map of Europe with ethnographic borders of individual states” in Heinrich Berghaus, Physischkulturischen Atlas, Gotha, 1848. There are separate maps of Slavic Europe in 19th-century historical atlases, such as “Karte der Slavischen Länder nach der Mitte des XVII Jahrhundert,” in Joh. Val. Katschot, Hand atlas zur Geographie und Geschichte des Mittelalters (Berlin: E.H. Schroder, 1843) and “Die Völker und Reichs der Slaven zwischen Elben und Don bis 1125” (The Peoples and Empires of the Slaves between Elbe and Don up to 1125) in Karl Spruner’s Historisch-Geographischer Hand-Atlas zur Geschichte der Staaten Europa’s von Anfang des Mittelalters bis auf die neueste Zeit (Gotha: J. Peters, 1846). On the 19th-century discovery of Slavic Europe, see, among others, Ezequel Adamovsky, Liberal Ideology and the Image of Russia in France (c.1740-1880) (Brem: Peter Lang, 2006). Maps of Slavs belong to the genre of 19th-century ethnographic maps, where the principal criterion of inclusion was the shared language. The discovery of the Slavs formed the part of this large post-Enlightenment process, and there was a need to build up suitable regimes of representation which would both put the Slavs on the map of mankind, as well as finding a suitable place – and meaning – in a wider order of things. “Easternness,” always an ambiguous cultural bearing, never desirable and anxiously avoided, had not been a major defining feature of the Slavic world. Indeed, in the early historical atlases, maps of Slavs were classified as belonging to “Northern Europe” (which included Scandinavia, Poland and Russia: Spruner, “Die Völker und Reichs der Slaven zwischen Elben und Don”, 1846. Note the fact this map is visibly pointing northwards, breaking its upper frame in a most prominent way.

22 On Šafárik’s map, see Josef Hrásky, “Vznik a poslání Šafářkova Slovanského Zeměvídů,” in eds Hana Hynková, with Josef Hrásky and Luboš Rehalček, Slovanský Národní  (Prague: Češkoslovenská Akademie Věd, 1951), 218-88. I am following the Slovak spelling of the Slavonic philologist name, which is rendered in Czech publications, as above, as Pavel Josef Šafárik.
political hearing upon the whole development of the Slav world." The map, initially meant to accompany Šafárik’s earlier book, *Slavonic Antiquities* of 1837, was eventually published five years later in his *Slovenský národopis* (Slav Ethnography), which contains the basic data on individual Slavic languages, as well as the collection of folk songs.

The map shows the Slavs as a unified “single body,” uniformly green, covering a vast area of Europe, and clearly distinguished against the non-Slavic peoples of the Balkans, such as Hungarians and Romanians, and of course against the Germans. The green colour has been chosen to delineate Slavonic lands including Russia – hence the map spread far into the East reaching the river Volga. Non-Slavic ethnic groups, however, are excluded, not only the Germans, but also Hungarians, Romanians and Estonians, all of them marked in contrasting colours, as being “the Other.” Colour is clearly loaded with significance – and as discovered by Josef Hůrský, studying Šafárik’s papers, the philologist has chosen green for its association with hope. The map does not distinguish between West Slavs, East Slav and South Slavs, although the map’s legend does follow this well established taxonomy. The physical features of the territory – apart from rivers and larger mountains, are deemphasised Šafárik is obviously not keen on those anthropographic theories which would associate the Slavs with uniform planes, or marches – and in fact a chapter on the Slavic landscape in his *Slavonic Antiquities* is subdivided into: mountains, rivers, and cities. The Slav enclave of Lusatia within Saxony is clearly shown, and the map makes clear that many Slavs are at home in parts of Germany and of course within the Austrian Crownlands. Obviously, what counts is the unity and the vastness of the territory occupied by the Slavs, as well as their sheer number, 80 million in total, as summed up in the book. In contrast to the uniformity of the green, all political borders, in red contours, appear as artificially imposed on the ethnographic map, resembling scars on the Slavic body, at variance with the ethnic borders.

Significantly, Šafárik’s map was, both literarily and metaphorically, superimposed on that of *Mitteleuropa*, produced in multiple separate sheets for the use of the Prussian army by Daniel Gottlob Reyman, which at that time was greatly respected for its exceptional accuracy. By moving the point of view towards the east, and by translating all the German names into their Slavic version (mostly into Czech), thus laying bare the Slavic roots of the territories it covered, the map turned into a “counter-map,” participating in the battle for signification to subvert the emerging cartographic power, and the rising threat of a newly emerging notion of *Mitteleuropa*, perceived by the Slavs as directly linked with a threat of a Germanic hegemony.

The omnipresence of the Slavic language demonstrates that the history and culture of the

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Slavs, even if deprived of their own archival records – and hence ignored by Kant and by Hegel, is preserved, in the truly Herderian spirit, in language. To borrow a term from Gayatri Spivak, this map constituted the first “strategically essentialist” attempt to forge a Slavonic collective identity, united by language, folk-culture, and by the Herderian mission of spiritual regeneration of the whole of Europe.20 It was an act of cultural resistance to the imperial policies and the denigration of the Slavs as barbarians by Western philosophers and historians. As argued by Hans Kohn, Šafárik “wished not only to be a scholar but the prophet of the national awakening of his race, which he glorified, stressing apologetically its unique character and mission.”29 Šafárik’s map proved immensely successful. It was used by many subsequent ethnographic surveys, such as the one by Karl Sprunner, or Heinrich Berghaus,30 thus establishing the cartographic codes for mapping Slavic Europe on the terms of the Slavic mapmaker, re-inscribing the West’s other as the Slavic Self. The book, translated straightaway into Polish and Russian,31 with the map neatly folded at its back in an inconspicuously Baedecker manner, made also a huge impact on its Slavic readers, breeding an imagined community of the Slavs, as well as instigating the wave of ethnic pilgrimages across Slavic countries. As reported by Kohn, one of the leaders of the Illyrian movement Stanko Vraz, wrote from Zagreb to Prague: “When I brought a copy of this map, the local patriots and even the non-patriots almost tore it out of my hands. All of them cannot get over the fact that the Slav nation is spread so far. The map arouses more patriots here than a whole literature could do.”32 Even if Šafárik’s map had

come came about before the establishment of art history faculties in universities, it, arguably, introduced a “spatial turn” which affected the whole discipline of Slavic studies, helping to change it from an almost “exclusively linguistic and philological enterprise,” into a much broader Slav antiquarianism, including archaeology, and later on art history as well.33 Finally, to restate the political aspect of the map, it was interpreted as a powerful script of cultural resistance against the Germans already by its contemporaries, seen as a rallying call that led to the First Slavic Congress in Prague in 1848, which concluded with Šafárik’s speech.34

Could we say then, that Šafárik’s map, by giving the voice to the oppressed, transgressed the limitations of the map as an instrument of power, showing its potential as a vehicle of resistance? There is no straightforward answer. The contrast between the emerald green of the Slavs and the orange – chosen for Hungarians – might suggest that Šafárik subscribed here to Herder’s erroneous prophecy about the unavoidable disappearance of the Hungarians, who would not be able to preserve their linguistic identity in the surrounding sea of Slavic-speaking peoples.35 Inclusion is always and inevitably related to exclusion.

Despite the initial enthusiasm, Panslavism soon lost its electrifying power, when it was turned into a political tool of the voracious Russian empire. In a series of comic maps of Europe, composed of caricatural personifications of nation states, and produced between mid-1850s and the outbreak of WWI in many different variations and languages, a recurring trope is the failure of Panslavism, strangled from within, and the absence of the nations of Eastern Europe on the European scene (Fig 3).36

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30 Hruski, “Vznik a poslani na Slofavnka Slovajskho Zemliva.”
36 One of the most popular series “Comic Carte of Europe for 1870” was designed by an otherwise little known French cartoonist Paul Hado, see Murawska-Muthesius, “Mapping the New Europe,” 9-10.
It was this absence which was to constitute the most powerful discourse of submission and surrender as the essential features of both Slavic Europe and Eastern Europe, which were based on the anthropo-geographical and geopolitical explanations of the specificity of Eastern European geo-physique that were in turn seen as conducive to specific racial types and political systems. Notoriously described as deprived of natural geographical boundaries, and composed of marshes and steppes, Eastern Europe was said to remain naturally accessible to penetration both from East and West, unable to resist the invader. The discourse was forcefully articulated by Halford Mackinder, the “father of British Geopolitics.” His small hand-drawn map of Eastern Europe, published in his groundbreaking text “The Geographical Pivot of History,” of 1904, was instrumental in setting one of the most persistent regimes of truth about the region (Fig. 4).37

Surprisingly, Mackinder’s map turned out to be one of the first cartographic images of Eastern Europe as a separate space, framed and named, harking back to both to Herder and to the Enlightenment, and originating the regime which still dominates not just geography and history books, but also art history, poetry, films and novels. It keeps associating Eastern Europe with “slow-flowing rivers” and quoting Michael Bradbury, “endless invaders who, from every direction, have swept and jostled through this all too accessible landscape.”38

A breakthrough in the cartographic regimes applied to the eastern parts of Europe came during WWI, when the body of the “New Europe” as a novel political entity was carved from the territories of the fallen empires during the Peace conference in Versailles. The New Europe excluded Russia, one of the oppressors, absorbing instead all the countries liberated from imperial subjugation, including both Slavic and non-Slavic ones. A totally new code was needed, a new image which had to abandon the rhetoric of vastness, horizontality, and cultural affinity stemming from the shared linguistic basis, to generate a new common denominator for this array of states of Europe. And again, it was the cartographic image which lay at the core of the new discourse:


38 On the discourse which produces Eastern Europe as a victim of its geographical position between empires, as a space condemned to be “colonized,” either “made to be subjugated,” see Katarzyna Murawska-Muthesius, “Welcome to Slaka: Does Eastern (Central) European Art Exist?” Third Text 16/1 (2004), 25-40.
famous "redrawn map of Europe," laboriously conceived at the Trianon table, and bringing into existence a bunch of 'small states' in the middle of the continent.39 Slavic vastness shrivelled to a narrow belt of Zwischeneuropa (Fig. 5). Although intended as emancipatory, restoring sovereignty to the oppressed nations in tune with the Wilsonian principle of self-determination, this new formula which visualised the whole cluster of those small states, crowded uncomfortably one on top of another within in narrow stretch of land separating Germany from Russia. Above all, it initiated a new discourse on the essential smallness and the "newness" of the region, stressing homogeneity and instability of this region, as well as its separateness from the main body of Europe. It prompted an enduring cartographic trope of mapping the middle of Europe as a single vertical portrait, squashed, framed and separated from the rest of the continent. This code was soon naturalised into the most suitable way of understanding this part of Europe, and has been endlessly repeated until the beginning of this century, disseminating the same message of inherent political instability and inherent narrative of fragmentation.40

The Cold war era and the metaphor of the Iron Curtain brought yet another generation of maps and aggressive cartographic diagrams in the western media. The discourse of submission returned to the forefront, and a plethora of thematic maps and related images in history books, illustrated magazines and films, almost obsessively emphasised the separateness of the Iron Curtain countries, repeatedly evoking the notion of emptiness, the sense of loss and of utter horror associated with the space both trapped behind, and defined by, the Iron Curtain (Fig. 6).41 The Oxford Atlas of European History, in the comic-like sequence of the history of Europe from 1914 to 1950, by using a colour code asserts the lack of sovereignty of Eastern European countries, which are left colourless, not only while under occupation, but, in principle, as testified by map of post-Versailles Europe (Fig. 7). Sovereign or not, the cartographic regime fixes Eastern Europe as colonisable territories, deprived of their own identity, as empty envelopes to be framed and “completed” by successive colonizers.42

It was the moment when the axiological cartographic codes converged with the dominant narratives of Western art history. During the period of the Cold War, it systematically avoided the topic of Eastern European art, in contrast to the steady production of history and geography books.43 As if the region had too much history, but was deprived of art. This notion of domination and

40 Ibid., 13-15.
41 Murawska-Muthesius, "Iconotext of Eastern Europe."
42 Ibid., 60-62.
43 On this issue, see the introduction to Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann, Court, Cloister and City: The Art and Culture of Central Europe, 1450-1800 (Chicago and London: Chicago University Press, 1995); also Murawska-Muthesius, "Welcome to Slaka," 36-40.
passiveness, as well as that of absence which may be said to hark back two thousand years or more, when Eastern Europe found itself outside the Roman Empire, permeates the whole set of the thematic maps, which illustrate the spread of culture in German historical and art-historical atlases, produced in the 1950s, such as Hans Zeissig’s *Neue Geschichts- und Kulturatlas*, and reprinted well until the end of the millennium.44

Culture in general, and art history in particular, were defined there from the position of the mapping Self, that is as spread almost exclusively from West to East. It was associated with the traces of Roman influence, with the adoption of western terms for institutions, such as universities, with the spread of Gothic style (Fig. 8) and with the translation of the Bible into vernacular languages. It excluded Orthodox churches, coffin portraits, wooden synagogues, and, curiously, it actually omitted capital examples of western imports, such as the Italian Renaissance into royal residences in Hungary and Poland (Fig. 9).45 In response to the imperialist claims of German and Viennese art history, art historians in Poland and Czechoslovakia de-emphasised Germanic influence, focusing rather on the relationship with Italy, France, and Netherlands.46

Figure 6

Figure 7

Figure 8

The Fall of the Wall, paradoxically, strengthened the parameters of the old discourse, accelerating and intensifying the production of difference. Numerous encyclopaedias, new history books, and new atlases have been mobilised in the attempts to fix the sliding meaning of the Other Europe.47 In recent thematic maps of the globe from tabloid pages and websites which warn against global


45 Ibid.


47 Murawska-Muthesius, "Welcome to Slaka."
dangers to humankind, Eastern Europe has appeared, almost invariably, in its old guise, not only separate from Western Europe, but marked as a space of "impurity and danger," of environmental pollution, emitting alarming levels of carbon dioxide, and contaminated by HIV.48

This was also the time, when a significant community of artists, curators and art historians, joining other engaged intellectuals, entered the battle for signification for the repositioning of the image of Eastern Europe. And the medium of the map played again its role. The most striking one was the East Art Map project of the Slovenian art group IRWIN, initiated in 2001 (Fig. 10). It aims to reconstruct "the missing history of contemporary art, art networks, and art conditions in Eastern Europe from the East European perspective." It is now published as a book, but, initially it functioned online, its website repeating the slogan "History is not given. It has to be constructed."49 A neat black interactive cube on the website, standing for the "East bloc"; opens itself with a click of the mouse, pouring out names of artists and PDF essays about them. The closeness of the archival box is surpassed by an expanding cosmographic vision of a new galaxy of stars and planets which, as if put into motion by a Bing-bang, are spreading ad infinitum into the space of the global art world.

The East Art Map has been devised, similarly to Šafárik’s Slovanský zeměvid, as the map of resistance. Interestingly, it transgresses any cartographic predetermined codes as it dispenses entirely with the region’s boundaries, and constructs its image as performance, from the set of dots and links between them. Instead of a fixed image it presents a network of spatialised data, in constant motion. Are there any hierarchies and exclusions in operation at this point? Inevitably, the positionality of the mapmakers, their agendas and aims, determine the image. Only avant-garde artists have been granted entrance to the cube and to the constellation of stars; the only links that matter are those with the West, ignoring the rest of the globe, and thus reproducing the old occidocentric fallacy.

As asserted by Denis Cosgrove, "Mapping is always a performative act, a spatial activity incorporated into the creation and communication of individual and group identity."50 Space, as much as history, is not given, and remains under the continuous process of construction.

49 IRWIN, East Art Map: Contemporary Art and Eastern Europe (London/Cambridge, Massachusetts: Afterall Books and MIT Press, 2006); www.eastartmap.org. The map was recently debated at the symposium East Art Map: History is Not Given. Please Help to Construct It, University College London, 3 June 2012.