

Introduction

Once again it seems appropriate to provide an issue of *spacesofidentity* with some introductory remarks. This issue is the first of two special issues to include articles based on papers given at the “Sustaining Studies of Central European Cultural Diversity” workshop held at York University in Toronto on October 28-29, 2005.¹ This workshop was part of a much larger, and ongoing, initiative to “internationalize” York, in this case in the direction of “Central Europe.”²

As readers are no doubt only too aware, the past two decades have seen repeated attempts to reassert a Central European cultural space, a shared European culture incorporating and building on a Central European “core” that with the establishment of the EU in 1992 and then with each ensuing enlargement has become both more insistent and more problematic. Some academics, such as Dina Iordanova, have chosen to counter such discourse on its geographic (and implicitly economic) plane by engaging in border skirmishes, as evident from the title of Iordanova’s latest book, *Cinema of the Other Europe: The Industry and Artistry of East Central European Film* (London: Wallflower Press, 2003). *Spacesofidentity* has taken a slightly different tack, as laid out very nicely in the first article in this issue, Adrian Ivakhiv’s “Stoking the Heart of (a Certain) Europe: Crafting Hybrid Identities in the Ukraine-EU Borderlands.” While the name of the journal is sometimes unfortunately misinterpreted as supporting retrograde nationalist forms of identity politics (particularly in the new Europe), the articles here engage at the level of conceptualization by querying and deconstructing the insistence on territoriality itself.

For this reason the “Sustaining Studies of Central European Cultural Diversity” workshop was held in conjunction with the 2005 celebrations in Austria of a number of key events: 60 Jahre II. Republik, 50 Jahre Staatsvertrag, 10 Jahre EU-Mitgliedschaft.³

2005 wird Österreich erstmals diese großen Jahrestage seiner jüngeren Geschichte nicht mehr in einer Randlage, sondern im Herzen eines größer gewordenen Europas feiern. (<http://www.oesterreich2005.at/>)

What better way to celebrate this new-found Euraustrian centrality than to gather together scholars interested in the intersections of history and culture that have emerged out of the pan-European “spirit” thought to have emanated from a “Central European” cultural space, and not interested in recouping these terms but rather in recognizing how unworkable history has rendered them. The articles here interrogate the idea of centrality that “Europe” seems inevitably to entail and that is part of what is reasserted in the “new” Europe, which is increasingly taken to mean solely the now 25-member EU over which Austria is currently presiding. Scott Spector and Andrew Gow open the series by providing a historical perspective, addressing the persistence of the Habsburg Jewry in cultural theory and of Yiddish and other Central European cultural markers in North America, while Cornelia Szabó-Knotik and Karen Virag focus on contemporary constructions of Central European identity from opposite sides of the former East-West divide: Szabó-Knotik from the Austrian and Virag from the Hungarian. They explore how Austria and Hungary have been renegotiating their relationship to Europe in public and for the public, and uncover the manifold contradictions these renegotiations had to articulate.

All of the essays aim at opening up possibilities of re-imagining a Europe that is not definable by cores or borders – decentering Central Europe as a first step to establishing a basis for genuine diversity.

Susan Ingram
Special Issues Editor

ENDNOTES

- 1 The program is available at http://www.ccg.ca/york/adds/Events/file_culturaldiversityprogramoct14_1.pdf.
- 2 For more information, see <http://international.yorku.ca/global/index.htm>. In addition to York International, I would also like to acknowledge the generous, cooperative support of the Canadian Centre for German and European Studies and the Division of Humanities at York, the Austrian Trade Consul in Toronto and the Austrian Cultural Forum in Ottawa, all of whom made it a pleasure to organize the workshop.
- 3 <http://www.oesterreich2005.at/>. Discussion of these celebrations can be found at <http://oesterreich-2005.at/>. For readers unfamiliar with Austrian history: the Austrian state treaty was signed on May 15, 1955, in Vienna in the Schloss

Belvedere by the four Allied occupying powers and the Austrian government. As a result of the treaty, the Allies quit Austrian territory on October 25, 1955, a free, sovereign and democratic Austria was "re-established," as the anonymous author of the Wikipedia entry on the Austrian state treaty not uncontentiously puts it, and October 26 came to be celebrated as the Austrian national holiday (called the Day of the Flag until 1965).