Stoking the Heart of (a Certain) Europe: Crafting Hybrid Identities in the Ukraine-EU Borderlands

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Borders and boundaries have always played an important role in maintaining social order. There have always been centers and margins, cores and peripheries or frontiers, at least since the agricultural revolution, and with the intensification of human population density, margins and borderlands have tended to be ever more strictly managed, policed, and controlled, even while they have retained a mystery and fascination for those viewing them from afar (Baud and Van Schendel 1997). Talk of borders and border crossers, diasporic hybrids, creative creoles, mestizos, and other boundary defiers who traverse such liminal spaces has blossomed in the era of postmodern discourse (Anzaldua 1987; Calderon and Saldivare 1991; Gilroy 1993; Hicks 1991; Bhabha 1994; Clifford 1994; Lavie and Swedenburg 1996; Brah and Coombs 2000; Rosaldo 1995; Chambers 1990). Indeed, such metaphors shuttle around today as quickly and fleetingly as intellectual discourse allows (Kaplan 1996; Clifford 1997; Ballinger 2004). While these terms are often applied to the U.S.-Mexican border and to other frontiers of the (formerly) First World-Third World interface, scholars have not as readily applied them to the borders of the growing European Union or the borderlands in which it carves itself out from the receding Soviet-era 'Second World' (Vereni 1996; Wilson and Hastings 1998; White 1999; Kurti 2001). It is true that the postcolonial situation has lent such writing a particular force and poignancy in other parts of the world; but it is also true that the post-Soviet sphere shares many of the contours of postcoloniality (Ryabchuk 2000; Moore 2001).

The EU's eastward expansion lends itself to this kind of border interrogation, as it raises questions of the 'Europeanness' of the new and

the not-quite 'Europeans' who may or may not be admitted into the 'club,' and in the process it uncovers complex histories of ethnic mixing alongside the better known histories of population displacements, ethnic purification, and imperial domination. Countries acceding towards EU membership agree to abide by the Schengen Acquis, the 1985 agreement by which member states abolish visa checks at their common borders, while harmonizing their external (non-EU) border controls. This generally results in a 'harder' or more rigid external border vis-à-vis non-EU states and citizens. With Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and the Baltic republics all EU members now, Europe's new Schengen border runs down the middle of the continent's largest mountain chain, the Carpathians, the Balkans to the south of them, and a forested and agricultural band of land running to the north. Inhabitants of non-EU regions of this Euro-borderland in such countries as Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova, and Romania fear that the stricter border regime will present a serious setback to the economic development of their communities, which are already marginalized within their respective nation-states (Batt 2001; Jordan and Klemenčić 2003; Suli-Zakar et al. 2001; Kiesielowski-Lipman 2002; Kuus 2004). Such boundary issues graft themselves onto previous geographies of sameness and otherness within which these regions of East Central Europe are historically enmeshed: the geopolitics of the Cold War-era division of Europe into rival blocs, much earlier constructions of Latin and Byzantine civilizations, and more recent constructs of 'Mitteleuropa,' 'Central Europe,' and so on (Okey 1992; Neubauer 2003; Himka 2002; Johnson 2002: 3-12; Miller 2003; Zayarniuk 2001).

This article will explore the ambivalent position of these borderlands, specifically the Ukrainian-EU borderlands, by examining a few of the ways in which their marginality – and ostensible centrality – are being refigured and contested within cultural and artistic discourses. We will begin by examining claims by specific locales within this part of the world to being the 'heart' or 'center of Europe.' Countries to the east of the EU boundary, including Ukraine, have expressed a strong desire to be admitted into the 'real Europe,' and claims to being or containing Europe's geographical center can be seen as part of this effort to refigure the marginal status of these nations. While the idea of a specifically *geographical* center of Europe may ultimately rest in the realm of the undecidable, the prospect of competing centers of Europe in some of the continent's most 'backward' areas lends itself to satirical exposition. In its quest for a nominal center of Europe, Stanislaw

Mucha's documentary *Die Mitte* (*The Center*), like his previous *Absolut Warhola,* portrays the Slovak-Polish-Ukrainian-Belarusian-Lithuanian borderlands as brimming with such 'centers,' most of which happen to be textbook cases of near-total marginality. In this article, I will compare the lighthearted Euro-borderland discourse of Mucha's films with the longer-standing Polish tradition of romanticizing the life and folkways of the *kresy* (borderlands), a tradition emblematized, in recent years, by such groups as the avant-garde theatrical collective Gardzienice.

The second part of the paper then focuses on an artistic collaboration which took place in the summer of 2004 as part of Ukraine's officially designated 'Year of Poland.' The *Immersions* exhibition, held at one of Kyïv's leading centers for contemporary art, had as its goal an 'immersion' into the myth and imagery of the border identities shared by the participants, all Polish-born artists identifying, to some extent or other, with the cultural and religious traditions of Poland's eastern borderlands. That this exhibition and related events associated with the Year of Poland in Ukraine – with its slogan "Poland and Ukraine together in Europe" – took place in the same year as the so-called Orange Revolution testified to the desire on both sides of the Polish-Ukrainian border to 'europeanize' Ukraine. Through the Orange Revolution, Ukrainians in effect took their most significant step toward 'Europe' since the 1991 proclamation of independence. Of neighboring nations, it was Poland that came out as the most ardent supporter of these developments. Through a close analysis of the *Immersions* exhibition in context of the cultural politics of contemporary Ukraine and its relationship to Europe, and to Poland most especially, I will show that nomadicism and hybridity – the rather rootless terms of border discourse floating freely in intellectual culture around the world – occupy deep and tangled roots in this part of East Central Europe. The metaphor of 'roots' suggests a kind of essentialism which is at odds with much latter-day scholarly discourse, not to mention with such a notion as 'nomadicism.' In examining this exhibition, however, I will argue that roots, however deep they may be, need not be pure at all. Rather, they may embody a kind of 'original hybridity,' a messy, rhizomic entanglement which, in its undecideability, better represents the travails of human identity than do the national or ethnic differences that are solidified by borders in the first place. There may, in other words, be neither a clearly identifiable 'center' nor a pure 'heart' of Europe, but that is not to say that there are not multiple centers, hearts,

and even 'souls' of a certain Europe uncovered in the process of immersive investigation.

BORDERLAND IMAGINARIES:
DE/RE/CENTERING EUROPE, OR, HOW TO STRETCH A CONTINENT

Let us begin by exploring the question of what it might mean for a place to be, or to claim to be, the center of Europe. One could reasonably argue that if any place feels it must make such a claim, it couldn't possibly be what it was claiming to be. Paris may be the cultural capital of France, but no self-respecting Parisian would dare claim it to be such. Europe has its business centers, industrial centers, creative and leisure centers. Zurich, Amsterdam, and cities along the Rhine pride themselves on being at the 'heart' or center of Europe, pulsing its industrial, creative, or intellectual juices to the body of the continent. But when it comes to specifically geographical claims about centricity, the matter becomes empirical, and this requires a definition of what constitutes Europe.

A simple internet search for the '(geographical OR geographic) (center OR centre) of Europe' shows us that such centers exist all over. In the summer of 2005, such a search would have revealed some 1620 web sites pointing to Poland in connection with such a site, 1360 to Germany, 1290 to Slovakia, and so on, with at least a dozen countries coming in at over 800 returns:

Poland	1620
Germany	1360
Slovakia	1290
Lithuania	1180
Hungary	1180
Czech Republic	1050
Russia	1050
Ukraine	1020
Romania	1000
Austria	966
France	940
Belarus	826

with others such as Latvia, Estonia, Switzerland, and Croatia trailing not far behind. Some of these references to a 'center of Europe' clearly refer not to the continent of Europe but to the European Union, or perhaps

to the *idea* of Europe, to which Brussels carries the most legitimate claim as being its current political center. The modern idea of Europe emerged only in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries as part of the process of secularization and consolidation of transnational elites (Wilson and van den Dussen 1995; Davies 1998: 7-8). In a sense, as the European Union has expanded in recent years, 'Europe' both expands, shrinks (in a McLuhanesque sense), and transforms. Claims by countries like Slovakia, Lithuania, and Ukraine to be 'the center of Europe' are intended to serve as reminders (1) that Europe is not only the European Union, (2) that the historical region of Central Europe, or East Central Europe, or some other way of registering the countries formerly known as 'Eastern bloc' Soviet 'satellites,' is in some sense as essentially European as any other, and (3) that they desperately want to be taken as European, not wanting to be left out of what seems (for now) a good thing.

But insofar as cultural and political considerations can be left out of the picture, we must still admit that the 'continent,' rather than the idea, of Europe is not at all a continent, since its landmass is contiguous with that of Asia. Geographical texts, especially non-European ones, continue to refer to a Eurasian continent and to Europe as a subcontinent. Europe's eastern boundary is historically taken to be the Ural Mountains, but as anyone who has traveled in mountainous regions knows, mountains do not begin at a single point in space. The convention of ending Europe at the Urals, in any case, seems to have been first suggested in 1830 (Davies 1998: 8). Europe's southeast boundary has always been a little up for grabs, with either the Ural or Emba rivers serving as possible boundaries, continuing with the Caspian Sea, and either the Kuma and Manych rivers or the Caucasus mountains as possibilities, and onto the Black Sea, the Bosporus, the Sea of Marmara, and the Dardanelles. The southern, northern, and western boundaries may seem more straightforward, but even if the Atlantic Ocean is taken to be Europe's western edge, a series of islands, from the British Isles all the way to Iceland, is usually judged to be part of Europe. Yet Iceland is much farther away from the European landmass than the nearest points of Africa and Asia.

In any case, there is a history of identifying 'centers of Europe,' and this history has left its marks on the landscape. In 1775, the royal Polish astronomer Sobiekrajski took what might be the most obvious method of identifying the four 'corners' of the continent – its four furthest points – drawing lines between them, and ascertaining where those lines crossed.

Taking the four corners to be Cape Porsanger in Norway, Cape Matapan in Greece, Cape St. Vincent in Portugal, and the easternmost point of the Ural Mountains, Sobiekrajski determined that the center of Europe was found in the Polish village of Suchowola.

Other candidates arrived soon enough. In the 1900s, German geographers concluded that the center of Europe rested on their soil, near a church in the Saxon capital of Dresden. The claim was later used to buttress the Nazi assertion that Germany was the "heart of Europe." In the 1880s, however, geographers of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, in the process of mapping the empire's territory and determining fixed points from which to measure altitude, laid a historical marker in the Subcarpathian town of Rakhiv. The marker's Latin inscription is well worn, has been painted over, and is therefore impossible to know in its original. Yet during Soviet times, the marker was touted as the center of Europe by Soviet scientists. Today it is translated in tourist guidebooks as reading:

> Constant, precise, eternal place. The center of Europe was determined very precisely, with a special apparatus produced in Austria and Hungary, with the dial of meridians and parallels. 1887. (Champion 2004)

Despite its popularity among locals on Ukrainian web sites and on Centre of Europe tours, the rock's veracity remains dubious: an earlier transcript of the same marker was recently translated by a team of classics professors to read

> Main fixed point of exact height-leveling carried out in Austria-Hungary in connection with the European measurement of meridional and parallel degrees. 1887. (Champion 2004)

Across the border in Kremnica, Slovakia, a rock is marked "Center of Europe," though this one, apparently, appeared only in the 1990s. And so on. (The film *Die Mitte*, discussed below, shows dozens of such places claimed to be the center of Europe.)

The most high profile claim of recent years, and the most geographically authoritative one, it would seem, is the one announced in 1989 – the same year as the fall of the Berlin Wall – by the National Geographic Institute of France (IGN), which was determined to be located at 54 degrees 54 minutes North latitude and 25 degrees 19 minutes East longitude – a point in Lithuania near the village of Purnuskes, some 25 km north of Vilnius. The IGN made this calculation according to a sophisticated method which worked out the continent's "center of gravity" – the idea being that "if you carved out a cardboard

map of Europe and balanced it on a pin," here is where the pin would have to be (Champion 2004). Lithuanians were thrilled by the announcement, and in 1991 Lithuanian sculptor Gintaras Karosas initiated the idea of a Park of Europe (www.europosparkas.lt), which would describe the geographical center of the European continent in the language of art. The Park is now an open-air sculpture park spread out over 55 hectares, and includes works by artists from over 70 countries, including such big known quantities as Sol LeWitt, Dennis Oppenheim, Magdalena Abakanowicz, and others, as well as a tour complex complete with arts center, restaurant, and a post office which gives out a special Center of Europe stamp. Last year the Lithuanian government unveiled a white granite monument with a crown of golden stars to mark the spot and celebrate Lithuania's link with Europe.

The "Center of Europe" in Rakhiv, Ukraine (© Jennifer Dickinson)

ROAD MOVIES INTO THE HEART OF AN
UNKNOWN CONTINENT

Against this background of geopolitical maneuvering, microgeopolitical repositioning (by the small, new states uncovered in the meltdown of the Soviet bloc), and artistic revisioning, Stanislaw Mucha and his film crew set out to make a film about these various centers of Europe. *Die Mitte* followed on the heels of the celebrated documentary *Absolut Warhola*, which also followed a quest into the heart of what turned out to be a stranger continent than viewers might otherwise expect. *Absolut Warhola* and *Die Mitte* are both documentaries in a light-comic and self-reflexive vein, which combine the genre of ethnographic film with that of documentary road movie. The road movie, whatever else it may be about, is the genre in which geopolitical centers and peripheries are discursively most in evidence: we go on the road to get away from the center, the place where we make our livelihood. And the road, it almost always turns out, is full of surprises, unexpected and unpredictable twists and turns, life changes, or revelations. The characters met along the way, because they are real characters, are ethnographic showpieces – Andy Warhol's 'long-lost' cousins (lost to a North American audience, while it was he who was long-lost to them), or the various denizens of the out-of-the-way places claiming to be the 'center of Europe' in such countries as Austria, Germany, Poland, Lithuania, Ukraine, Slovakia, and Belarus. *Absolut Warhola* took viewers into what the film perceptively called the 'Ruthenian Bermuda Triangle' between Poland, Slovakia, and Ukraine. To be precise, it was filmed mainly in two places in eastern Slovakia: the village of Mikova, from which Andy Warhol's (or Andrijko Warhola's) parents came, and the town of Medzilaborce some five miles away, in which the world's second largest Andy Warhol Museum is now located. The film riffs on the playful tension between what we know about Warhol as an artist – pop icon and MC of New York's glamorous art scene of the 1960s and 70s – and what we see of these people here, hillbilly types, unemployed drunkards and likeable grandmothers and grandfathers living in a godforsaken-land and clueless, for the most part, as to what the possible meaning of the many pairs of shoes were that Warhol used to send them over the years.

Where *Absolut Warhola* sought the homeland of perhaps the most American of American artistic icons in the least Westernized, most 'backward' corner of Europe, in *Die Mitte*, Mucha has decided to go all out in a quest for the heart of this mysterious Europe. The film crew visits

some of the 83 'centers of Europe' Mucha claims to have come across in his search. These include villages and countrysides with plaques or monuments noting their geographic Eurocentrism, townspeople with legends to sell, and debates over the ways the 'Center of Europe' has changed people's lives and whether or not things are better now than before the fall of the Wall. In the process, Mucha and his crew *create* a landscape – a broadly spread 'center of Europe' that is *all* borderland, and whose denizens seem more decentered than centered, and always a little perplexed to find themselves such a center of interest. This is a marginal Europe, made of marginal places and marginal people, all, of course, claiming to be the center, even if they (and we) rightly sense the irony in these claims. At least, it seems, during the era of command-control economies, a general state of subsistence was provided by the state, with some tourist enterprises (as in the Rakhiv area of western Ukraine) supported by virtue of the fact that Soviet citizens could not venture farther west. But industrial development policies had led to the relative depopulation of many of these regions, leaving behind a relatively older-age population and many socially disadvantaged groups, including the highest concentration of Roma in Europe. (*Absolut Warhola* includes a lengthy segment in which local Roma complain about not being allowed into the Warhol Museum – "it can all collapse, for all we care!", one of them exclaims.)

What lurks beneath both films is an understanding that what these places wish to be – the center of Europe – eludes them precisely because they (or many of them) are found on the wrong side of a civilizational fault-line separating the 'real' Europe from the wanna-be Europe of these eastern borderlands (on the effects of EU expansion on these areas, see, e.g., Boratynski and Gromadski 2001; Batt 2001, 2002, 2003; Jordan and Klemenčić 2003; Löwenhardt 2002; Mungiu-Pippidi 2004; Wallace 2001; Wallace, et al. 2001). But the films remain on the surface: they show us appearances, not seeking beneath them to any 'essence' of what these lands or their people may harbor. The films are deconstructive and anti-romantic, and while they give us some sense of who the border-dwellers are and evoke a sense of our common humanity with them, they provide little historical context or understanding of the situations that makes these places and people what they are. Essences are, of course, dangerous fictions; yet, as I will attempt to show in what follows, they may not be entirely fictitious nor even entirely as wrong-headed as we might often think.

R O M A N C I N G   T H E   *K R E S Y*

Where the Polish-born Mucha takes a lighthearted approach to the eastern borderlands of what some Poles consider to be Greater Poland, others of his countrymen approach with deeper passions. There is a longstanding tradition by Poles of mythologizing these eastern borderlands, or what in Polish are known as the *kresy*, or *kresy wschódnie*. This term refers to the eastern provinces of what was once the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, or *Rzeczpospolita*, and during the interwar period of the twentieth century, the eastern provinces of Poland itself. In places they were heavily populated by Poles, with cities such as Lviv (Lwów) and Vilnius (Wilno) being almost two-thirds Polish and one-quarter Jewish in 1921, according to census data, and some 40% of the total population claiming Polish descent. Over the course of the ten years between 1939 and 1948, most of these Polish inhabitants were deported or resettled to Poland, Germany, and eastern regions of the USSR, as the *kresy* were taken over first by the Soviets, then by the Germans, and then again ceded to the Soviet Union in the aftermath of World War II. Passions can still run high among survivors of these deportations and their descendants, as they do among Ukrainians and others who faced similar deportations and resettlements (Kiesielowski-Lipman 2002; Hann 1998; Snyder 2000). A website dedicated to *Kresowiacy*, Poles born in the *kresy*, still refers to these as the "lands of our forefathers" and to Ukrainians, Swedes, Tatars, and Turks as "invaders" (www.kresy.co.uk).

A more xenophilic approach to the *kresy* has been taken by a series of artistic groups and movements. Nineteenth century Polish romantic writers and artists often portrayed Ukraine as a space of freedom, a maritime-like expanse of steppes and open horizons, full of energy and possibility and ripe for acts of individual heroism and self-realization (Zadencka 2002). Spiritual and metaphysical values were connected to the borderlands by Romantic-era writers, including Adam Mickiewicz, early twentieth century artists such as Jacek Malczewski (1854-1929), Witkacy (S. I. Witkiewicz) (1885-1939), and Stanislaw Wyspianski, and, more recently, Tadeusz Kantor and others. The posthumous careers of artists such as Eugeniusz Mucha and the self-made Lemko-Rusyn folk painter Nikifor (Epifan Drovniak) have surged as the 'arts of the borderlands' have become fashionable over the last three decades. The mystically inclined theatre of Jerzy Grotowski and the rural expeditions of theatrical experimentalist Juliusz Osterwa have together given rise to

a school of performance dedicated precisely to reviving and recovering the cultural uniqueness of the borderland areas. The theatrical troupe Gardzienice is emblematic of this phenomenon. Relocating to a small village outside Lublin in the mid-1970s, Grotowski protégé Włodzimierz Staniewski and his group of countercultural wanderers developed a theatrical practice based on a modus operandi involving regular expeditions into remote rural areas, spirited and sustained interaction with the oldest representatives of ethnographic and indigenous cultures, including the trading of songs, stories, and rituals, and capped by performances of Gardzienice's hybrid fusion of cultural elements distilled into a starkly bodily and intensely theatrical performance genre. Gardzienice's travels took them to Roma, Lemko, and Góral cultural enclaves in eastern and southern Poland, and later to Hutsul communities in the Ukrainian Carpathians, Lapp and Gott communities in northern Scandinavia, and much farther afield. Following a Romantic nostalgia for authenticity, Gardzienice sought fragments of behavior that hearkened back to times in which people lived in closer proximity with nature, and in which culture was more intimately fused with the rhythms of agricultural and ecological time (Staniewski 2004). But theirs was not an ethnocentric nationalist quest; in its eclecticism and worldliness it was *post*-nationalist, a kind of universalist depth psychology of the performative body. Gardzienice, in turn, spawned a generation of artists and theorists pursuing similar goals: these include the Muzyka Kresów Foundation founded by one-time Gardzienice member Jan Bernad; the Pogranicze Foundation, established in Sejny by Gardzienice actor Krzysztof Czyżewski and working at the borderland of Polish, Ukrainian, Jewish, Lithuanian, and Russian cultures; the Teatr Wiejski Węgatjy, a northeastern Polish spin-off of Gardzienice; the Song of the Goat theatre company; the Studium Teatralne in Warsaw, and others. Roman Pawlowski (2002) has written that Gardzienice gave the "first voice to the culture of peripheries," pioneering an interest in regionalism, folk music, and "the culture of earth, wood and stone" that has spawned a broader fashion for cultural diversity in contemporary Poland.

Today this interest in the cultural diversity of the Polish borderlands is expressed in the opening statement found on the Culture page of the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs and its embassies abroad, where we are told:

> With the dawning of European integration, Polish culture has a noteworthy opportunity. After the fall of the Berlin Wall, some look to this part of the

> continent with hope, expecting *ex Oriente lux* – an injection of revitalising exotic power and fresh inspiration. [. . .] Polish culture, in which the memory of a 'Republic of Many Nations' is still alive, is a 'borderland culture' which appeared in the very heart of Europe. It joins the traditions of East and West – the mysticism of Orthodoxy with classical Latin, the living cult of the icon with the Jewish Hasidic tradition, the baroque mythology of the Sarmatians with picturesque folk culture. In Poland, at the crossroads of Europe, there arose a specific weave of cultural traditions which artists and writers continually refer to. (Poland Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2005)

The reference to "*ex Oriente lux*" oddly echoes the title of an exhibition that was organized by artist and curator Jerzy Onuch at Warsaw's Pracownia Dziekanka art center in 1985. That exhibition featured the work of several young Polish artists connected by an interest and an identification with Poland's Byzantine Orthodox, Ukrainian, and Belarusian eastern borderlands. In addition to Onuch, an ethnic Ukrainian, the artists included Leon Tarasiewicz, Mikołaj Smoczynński, Anna Płotnicka, and Jan Gryka. Nineteen years later, the latter four artists, now much more established, were joined by two others in an exhibition curated by Jerzy (Yuri) Onuch, who by this time had become director of the Centre for Contemporary Art at the University of Kyïv-Mohyla Academy in Ukraine's capital.

EXCAVATIONS AND BURROWINGS BENEATH BORDERS:
THE *IMMERSIONS* EXHIBITION

The *Immersions/Zanurzenie/Занурення* exhibition is, in many ways, all that Stanislaw Mucha's documentaries are not. This exhibition took place at the Centre for Contemporary Art (CCA) in Kyïv in the late spring and early summer of 2004. The CCA is one of a series of art centers which owes its survival in large part to the initiative of billionaire financier and Eastern European philanthropist George Soros. Housed on the grounds of a seventeenth-century Jesuit-modeled monastic academy, which was reopened in 1992 as Ukraine's first and most high-profile private university, a bilingual English-Ukrainian one, the gallery sits next to a bookstore selling Orthodox Christian books and icons and adjacent to a large courtyard separating the gallery building from the university proper. This conjunction of history and contemporaneity, Orthodoxy (and tradition more generally) and modernity, invests the gallery space with a conflux of meanings that found particular resonance during the month and a half between late May and early July. With 2004

marked out as the 'Year of Poland' in Ukraine, the gallery hosted an exhibition of works that called attention to some of the diverse and hybrid identities that make up not only Poland today, but the space of East Central Europe as a whole. With an intent to examining these identities, let us take a brief tour through some of the immersive spaces between the pictures at this exhibition.

To get to the gallery, a visitor passes through a gallery entrance leading from the well-trafficked Podil Square dedicated to Ukrainian Renaissance philosopher Hryhorii Skovoroda, and enters a courtyard, which is invisible from the street. During the *Immersion* exhibition, one had to pass through an additional entranceway to enter the gallery from the courtyard: this was a twelve-foot-deep chamber framing the doorway, constructed by artist Leon Tarasiewicz out of wooden planks painted with a gold-colored acrylic stucco compound which appears to bleed and drip, like egg yolk or beeswax, down the inner walls. One of Poland's best known art stars, Tarasiewicz has shifted over the years from painting semi-abstract juxtapositions of light and dark evocative of the Białowieźa woods of eastern Poland (he lives nearby) to paintings that bleed off the canvas altogether, taking over the space of the gallery and beyond – in effect becoming paintings in space, with their aggressive color and thick painterly texture transforming the environment into

Leon Tarasiewicz – entrance to Center for Contemporary Art

which they are sculpted. With this current work he appears to have returned to his cultural roots in the Polish-Belarusian borderlands east of Białystok. Tarasiewicz's construction makes no secret of its resemblance to Orthodox and Uniate Catholic churches in the villages of the Transcarpathian areas of western Ukraine and southern and eastern Poland. The immediate impression, to those familiar with such architecture, is that one is entering a hybrid space, at once religious, the humble folk spirit of Byzantine peasant religiosity, yet also a space out of place, grafted on like a strange growth of nature, with its hive-like interior, to the solid permanence of the gallery's white stucco exterior.

With its location in Kyïv, the construction echoes the city's famous Golden Arches (*Zoloti vorota*) of Kniaz' (Grand-Prince) Yaroslav's eleventh-century city. In this transitional space, street sounds become muffled into silence and a subdued golden-brown light takes over, ushering visitors into the building itself. Entrances, doorways, arches, and thresholds constitute a recurrent theme in the exhibition. Some of these are deep, some rectangular, others oval-arched, all preparing the visitor/participant for another stage in the journey of 'immersion.' If the gallery has been turned into a quasi-sacred space here – at least a sacred space for art – it would seem fitting that we 'leave our sins at the door,' as would have been the custom upon entering a church. Having entered the gallery foyer, we have the choice of walking forward into the gallery proper or wandering rightward into the outer vestibule. The latter option extends the transitional space into a set of larger archways constructed (or modified, rather) by Anna Myca, alternating with the panels and installations making up Jan Gryka's 'Krykhty' (Crumbs), a multi-layered exhibit which invites us to replace those 'sins' we may have left at the door with communion in the artist's alternative and interactive universe (more on that in a moment). Myca's contribution is a site-specific reworking of the archways in the corridor-vestibule, through the laying on of graphite stucco layers and color making evident what seems to (now) appear 'natural' to the walls themselves, in the same way that an Inuit artist is said to bring out the 'nature' or 'soul' of a piece of rock in the process of carving it. This can be thought of as a form of reverse archaeology by which something of the hidden, or possible, history of the structure is recovered from beneath the layers of paint that have otherwise clothed it in a kind of historical amnesia.

This quasi-archaeological thread continues with Gryka's 'Krykhty,' a multi-media exhibit of works documenting the artist's several-year long project centered around the making and dissemination of bone-like

'crumbs' made of a doughy, communion-like mixture of water and flour. (Communion in the Byzantine liturgy consists of wine-soaked bread, not the dry wafer used in the Roman Catholic mass, but Gryka seems to have found an easy medium between the wafer and the vine.) The exhibit covers a disparate range of forms and materials: ten panels showing chessboard-like tables of these 'crumbs'; a card catalogue-like series of boxes containing more of these (and calling to mind some of the mock-archaeological object collections of American artist Mark Dion); a six-hour video documenting the artist's making of the 'crumbs' and piecing them together in jigsaw-puzzle-like layouts on a table (suggesting the questions 'what is it that is being created? what is revealing itself in the creation?'); a series of photographs of models and of the artist himself wearing the 'crumbs' as forms of jewelry hanging from necklaces; and an iconostasis-like wall of photographs of people whose invitations to Gryka's exhibitions included these 'crumbs' along with the offer of participating in the ongoing 'performance' by documenting their own use of them. In the process, the creative act of making these sustenance-giving, communion-like pieces of oneself becomes an archaeological exhumation of the bones of some nameless, no longer legible collective event (the traumas of World War II and the Holocaust suggest themselves, though Gryka keeps the interpretive lens wide open), which in turn becomes a form of mysterious, yet playful, solidarity disseminated through the participants of Gryka's private mythology.

Leaving behind this outer vestibule, we walk into the main part of the gallery, which consists of a series of five clearly delineated rooms, two branching off in each direction from a central room which has been given over to the work of Mikołaj Smoczyński. Upon entering this first room through another threshold-doorway, we are confronted by an ensemble of materials in stark black, white, and grey tones lit in austere yellowish light from two lamps overhead which result in sharp oval shadows on the walls. On either wall in the 'near' part of the dimly lit room hang what appear to be parts of Orthodox three-armed crosses, with wire-like rope dipped in black oil spun around or hanging off a few of them, black oil staining the wall and two pails of shiny black oil (one with a steel container of oil atop it) spaced on the floors beneath them. (These are in fact remains of stone crosses recovered from an Orthodox cemetery in Lublin.) Here and there pieces of black pipe or other material emerge from the broken walls. The central and dominant part of the installation hangs at the far wall, facing the incoming viewer: with its high ceiling and oval arch-shaped top half, this wall has been given over completely

to a massive piece of grey-white canvas which had apparently been glued to the stucco walls but the top half of which has now been torn down, revealing the paint-stripped wall behind it and resulting in a massive egg shape of torn canvas and stucco. Canvas, the archetypal and foundational *prima materia* of Western painting since the Renaissance, is thereby deconstructed (along with the surface of the building's wall), its guts turned inside out, revealing a grotesque yet fertile emptiness, richly allusive in its egg-like shape and in its reference to those recovered yet broken crosses, black oil still dripping from them. This is work-in-progress on the deconstruction/recovery of a haunting presence/absence at the center of the exhibition, and, figuratively, of the world. If Tarasiewicz's entranceway was the entry into a sacred space (of art), then this central chamber represents the passion at the heart of it – the passion of history, of the artistic process, of Christ and his church split and broken into Byzantine East and Catholic West, perhaps even of Poland, which frequently invoked its own Christ-like 'crucifixion' during the historical partitions of the late eighteenth-nineteenth centuries. Such are a few of the interpretations that have been brought to Smoczyński's austere but wrenchingly evocative work; we need not choose among them, it is enough to register that they might occur for viewers. In a Derridean or Buddhist negative-theological sense, they remain 'cinders' of some unmentionable event, a suggestive and unencompassable, witnessing emptiness (Derrida 1991; Coward and Foshay 1992).

Half-way down each of the side walls of Smoczyński's room are openings through which two solar disk-like abstractions are visible as if through tunnels. These initiatory images invite viewers into, respectively, the 'blue room' and 'orange room' of works by Jerzy Nowosielski, the oldest of the artists represented in this exhibition and one of the most famous of twentieth-century Polish painters. Cavern-like in their austere lighting, the two rooms complement each other, the orange room containing a blue dividing wall on which one of the solar abstractions, "The rising sun," faces the incoming viewer, while the blue room includes an orange dividing wall featuring a setting sun-like "Abstraction." The choice of colors here may seem curiously prescient, or at least politically astute: two of the invitations to the exhibition featured Nowosielski's solar images in each of these colors, with the orange being close enough to yellow for the pair to suggest the dawning and setting of the Ukrainian flag's yellow and blue, but orange enough to resonate with the rising movement of pro-Yushchenko sentiment that was just starting

to grow at the time the exhibition opened. Perhaps picking up on this, the Polish journal *Polityka i Kultura* titled its review of the exhibition "Pomarańczowe Zanurzenie w bezgranicznym niebieskim," or "Orange immersion in boundless blue" (Wors 2004).

Nineteen other paintings by Nowosielski hang in total on the walls of the two rooms, making these the only "traditional" gallery walls of the exhibition. But even these paintings on walls become oddly twisted inside out, turning the rooms into something akin to a temple, the images reflecting and referring to another world beyond. In this twilit world hidden meanings suggest themselves only to disappear again in a surrealistic 'cloud of unknowing' (to recall the work of Medieval mysticism that Nowosielski may or may not have been familiar with). A recurrent theme in Nowosielski's works is the female figure with her back turned toward us or with her eyes closed, blindfolded, or covered with her own hands or with large black goggles – recalling, of all things, the bizarre images of 'grey' UFOs made popular in ufo-logical abduction literature and science-fiction films. All are signifiers of blindness and inner vision, mysteries hinted at, revealed (perhaps) to the portrayed figures but not to us, who remain viewers only of their second-order representations.

These references to a hidden world are made all the more explicit in a series of three paintings which carry the title "Villa dei misterii," named after a room excavated at the ruins of Pompeii which may have been used for initiatory religious ceremonies. Here are the same blinded female bodies, semi-clothed, engaged in mysterious exercises, in rooms into which we can peer through doorways, archways, and other transitional devices which echo the very architecture of the CCA gallery. In effect, this echoing between the architecture interior to the paintings and that of the gallery places us all into Nowosielski's alternative world: we walk from room to room, voyeurs beholding mysteries that are mere signifiers of other mysteries beyond the visible works themselves. What or who is being watched here, the females of Nowosielski's world, or us, caught in a dialectic of blindness and insight, presence and absence, recognition and puzzled, voyeuristic fascination? The paintings in turn are lit by light entering in through arches from the hallway outside, with some appearing to emanate their own light in the twilight of the rooms. Arches, doorways, and windows present themselves all around: some of these are in Nowosielski's paintings, others are quite real (in the rooms of the gallery), while still others, equally 'real' but closed, filled-in parts of the wall, are mere

reminders of former windows in the gallery building. Nowosielski's painting of a goggled female "Swimmer" (*Plavchykha*) hangs in one of these arched, filled-in not-quite-windows. The effect of the past haunting the present is finally manifest in two unmarked, unnamed, and unsigned images visible, not painted but 'unhidden,' on the walls themselves – semi-restored icons from the old monastic building brought back to a half-life, one of them the Holy Trinity, the other the Mother of God standing on the globe of the earth. (Nowosielski, in fact, began his career as an Orthodox and Greek Catholic church iconographer, and the iconographic nature of his works remains palpable when set next to these two actual, if barely visible, icons.)

Transitioning again out of Nowosielski's blue room into the easternmost room, we enter the most immersive of the halls, Anna Płotnicka's literal baptismal immersion into FAITH, HOPE, and LOVE, the three words written in glass (in Polish and Ukrainian) on a central square in the floor and portrayed in three images screened on the far wall. These images portray Płotnicka submerging her face, respectively, into water, oil, and red wine, while apparently speaking the words Віра/Wiara, Надія/Nadzieja, and Любов/Miłość. The topmost of these is a video record showing the artist's face repeatedly submerged and raised, bubbles and spit exiting her mouth, water dripping like tears (and at times mixed with tears) from her upraised face, which becomes at once microcosm in an egg-like concave bubble and macrocosm which gazes intently, and iconically, at us. This is in fact the only room with any sound, that of the projector, with the muffled voices of visitors from other rooms replacing Płotnicka's own unheard (but seen) mantric syllables 'faith, hope, love.'

At the opposite end from Płotnicka's installation, in the westernmost room (on the other side of Nowosielski's orange room), we find a single sculptural installation by Mirosław Maszlanko. This is an 'architectural' work made up of thousands of stems of dried grass pasted together with beeswax to create a hive- or cocoon-like enclosure that appears at once natural, as if made by giant insects or birds, yet somehow not out of place in this dimly-lit cloister, filling up and 'inhabiting' more than half of the room. Like many of Maszlanko's works, it is made from natural materials collected near his home in the countryside east of Warsaw, where the artist has become conversant with the properties of grass, beeswax, and other such materials collected at various times of year. Creating the piece took twelve consecutive ten-hour days, beginning by marking out a circle on the far wall of the room,

anchoring blades of grass to the wall with wax, and then slowly, scrupulously adding a layer at a time, building out into the room to create the cocoon-like work. Gallery employees have commented that the work appears 'alive,' changing its shape according to temperature, humidity, and other variables; while visitors have commented on the church spire and space capsule-like appearance of the final product. The lighting, coming from two panels on the lower walls across from the 'anchored' end of the 'growth,' provides the walls with shadows like charts of stellar constellations. With the smell of beeswax and grass, the room becomes an odd mixture of the natural and the post-technological, an ambient presence that hovers above us benignly at the same time as it suggests the trajectory of a flight outwards beyond the thick architecture of the gallery. (Its elongated tip points a little off-center in the general direction of a barely visible trap door in the opposite wall, painted white like the rest of the room.) While the other works immerse the viewer, this one suggests a release into weightlessness, history and art having become hollowed out into a soothing organic smoothness, a "becoming-nomad," as Deleuze and Guattari (1987) might say. Or, alternatively, as one enters further into the deeper recesses of the exhibition the works become immersive in the sense of a return to the elements: the simple triplicity of Płotnicka's water, oil, and wine in the gallery's east, or sunrise, wing, and, in the west, the simplicity of natural form in Maszlanko's return to the grass (and beeswax), elements of a nature that returns as ever to a land haunted by historical catastrophes, collective memories and their perpetual burial, upheaval, re-interment, and regeneration. In the end, it is grass that grows over the charnel grounds of history; and, in this sense, where Płotnicka offered a reimmersion into the elemental constituents of identity, Maszlanko's vehicle offers a release into the weightlessness of nature. In the architecture of the exhibition, the two complement and complete each other as the two wings (supplemented and propped up by Nowosielski's halls of mysteries) branching off from the central Passion of Smoczyński's deconstructed cross/egg/canvas.

Through immersion, then, comes release. One could read each of the artists' contributions as an immersion into the quest for personal identity (Gryka's, in particular, appears an obsessive pursuit of an individualized symbol), but it is the collective nature of the exhibition that speaks more clearly. From the very first moment, at Tarasiewicz's gateway, the equation of art as secular individual creation is interrupted. Rather than the sacred being merely the quirk of an

individual artist, here the boundary between the sacred and the secular is placed in abeyance, just as the individuality of the artists themselves has been blurred by the curatorial arrangement of the space into a more collective presence. The exhibition becomes an alchemical echo chamber, its topography (rooms, transitions, lighting arrangements) echoing the various archways and liminal spaces of the works themselves (notably Nowosielski's and Myca's), with their alternatively stark and dim church-like lighting adding to the quasi-religious effect of collective 'immersion.'

Gallery director Yuri/Jerzy Onuch's curatorial notes make clear the exhibition's intent to delve into and, in some measure, to excavate the Byzantine Slavic tradition shared, to one degree or another, by the seven artists. Although it is not mentioned directly in the notes for the exhibition, two of the seven artists are children of Greek-Catholic Ukrainian or Lemko families forcibly resettled from southeast Poland in the wake of the Polish-Ukrainian conflict during World War Two, two others are Belarusians (from Orthodox Christian families), another is Orthodox from the ethnically mixed (Polish-Ukrainian) Chelmschyna province, a sixth is the grandson of an Orthodox priest, and the last, Nowosielski, is the son of a Lemko father and a German mother and himself a convert from Greek Catholicism to Byzantine Orthodoxy. But the immersion here is less into a particular religious tradition than into a past that is more polychromatic, tangled, and hybrid than most recent representations of Poland have suggested. This is the past of the multiethnic Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, the *Rzeczpospolita* of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, in which Roman Catholics constituted (in 1660) less than half of the population, and of the many geopolitical magnetic shifts which have barreled through these parts of Central and Eastern Europe before that time and since, with the partitions of Poland between Russia, Prussia, and Habsburg Austria, the nationalist Risings and insurrections, the two great wars and population resettlements which followed them, the Communist takeover and its collapse and transformation. Resonant with the federative 'Jagełłonian Concept' of Poland championed by Piłsudski and his followers in the early decades of the twentieth century, this is a Poland of blurred boundaries and borderlands, memorialized as the *kresy* – the Poland of Adam Mickiewicz, Poland's part-Jewish poet laureate, whose most famous poem *Pan Tadeusz* begins by intoning 'Lithuania, my homeland,' of Czesław Miłosz (also self-identified as a Lithuanian), and of Bruno Schulz (a Polish Jew born in what is now Ukraine). Indeed, as Kate

Brown (2004) shows in her recent 'biography' of a village in the Ukrainian *kresy*, it was the modernist state-building and social engineering of the last hundred and fifty years (by imperial Russia, the Soviet Union, Nazi Germany, parliamentary and nationalist Poland, and even independent and Communist Ukraine) that dismantled the "confusing mosaic of cultures" to be found in these borderlands, turning one area into Ukraine, another into a homogeneous-seeming Catholic Poland, and so on. Before that, pluriculturalism was a fact of life here.

The exhibition, then, is haunted by a series of absences, or ghostly presences, intertwined in a dialectic of expectations and unexpected emergences: that of Orthodox and Byzantine tradition, with its iconographic brilliance, re-emerging in a Poland that has recently been figured all too often as a purely Catholic space; that of the history of this space itself (the Mohyla Academy) and its place at the boundaries of the East and West, both now and in its seventeenth-eighteenth century incarnation; and that of the Western, post-Renaissance art-historical tradition, which is here explored, interrogated, and turned inside out, most directly in Smoczyński's deconstructed canvas-wall. The exhibition suggests something of the Yin-Yang-like interpenetration of Catholicism and Byzantine Orthodoxy, and of Ukraine and Poland specifically, with Poland looking less 'pure' and more hybrid than one would expect, but, in turn, with Ukraine also becoming less pure in its difference. And with Maszlanko's quasi-natural installation, Płotnicka's elemental submergences, and Smoczyński's wood, canvas, and oil constructions, nature and culture are similarly shown to be interwoven, one grounded in the other and vice versa.

Onuch's notes refer to another hidden personage inspiring the show, that of Kasimir Malevich, the prototypical 'Russian avant-gardist' whose Suprematist abstractions epitomized the revolutionary proto- and early Soviet attempt to go 'back to zero' – itself a very modernist form of mystical transcendence – yet who was in fact a Polish Ukrainian Kyïvan who, in his final years, depicted peasants (then on the verge of Stalin's forced collectivization) in a style reminiscent of Orthodox iconography and folk art. Onuch reminds us that Malevich's prototypical modernist "Black Square" was placed by him in a corner of a room, beneath the ceiling, where in the East Slavic world hang religious icons. What is excavated in the modernist effort to return to zero, it turns out, is haunted with traditional significance; and what is uncovered in the archaeological efforts of the *Immersions* exhibition is equally suffused with tradition, but a very impure and hybrid one.

Onuch himself, who sometimes goes by the Ukrainian name Yuri and sometimes by the Polish Jerzy, is perhaps consciously injecting his own position into this figuration of Malevich's centrality.[1] Like Malevich, Onuch is both Pole (though by birth, not descent) and Ukrainian (by descent rather than birth). Having first established himself as a Polish artist before moving to Canada and subsequently to Ukraine, where he took up the mantle of director of the George Soros Centre for Contemporary Art (the connection with that other East Central European 'cosmopolite' providing an interesting resonance), he is both modernist (and a 'westernizer,' according to his Ukrainian detractors) and traditionalist, his own works as an artist revealing a preoccupation with that Byzantine-inspired sense of religiosity. Since his curation of the "*Ex Oriente Lux*" exhibit in Warsaw in 1985 through to his 1993 exhibition "The Steppes of Europe: Contemporary Art from Ukraine" (at the Ujazdowski Castle Centre for Contemporary Art in Warsaw) and later Kyïv-based shows including "Brand 'Ukrainian'" and "Immersions," Onuch has attempted to portray Ukraine as a fertile, uncharted *terra incognita* at the borders of Europe – an 'Ukrcultgeozone' that is divided between Central European and Eurasian cultural paradigms (Onuch 2003), which harbors spiritual potential that can revitalize Western art, but which also must negotiate the postmodern minefields of economics, national 'branding,' and the vicissitudes of the artistic marketplace (Onuch 2002). In this context, identity is at one and the same time a Bakhtinian dialogue over meanings, a Warholian façade, and an immersion in mysteries that even the most hermetic artistic archaeologist cannot fully unravel.

Mikołaj Smoczynński's deconstructed crosses, Immersions exhibition.
(By permission from Centre for Contemporary Art, University of Kyiv-Mohyla
Academy, Kyiv)

Mikołaj Smoczynński's deconstructed canvas, Immersions exhibition.
(By permission from Centre for Contemporary Art, University of Kyiv-Mohyla
Academy, Kyiv)

Jerzy Nowosielski's orange and blue rooms (respectively). By permission from Centre for Contemporary Art, University of Kyiv-Mohyla Academy, Kyiv

Photo by Anna Plotnicka. Center for Contemporary Art at NaUKMA in Kyiv, Ukraine

Installation by Miroslaw Maszlanko. Center for Contemporary Art at NaUKMA in Kyiv, Ukraine

CONCLUSION: IDENTITY SPACES OF EAST CENTRAL EUROPE

The larger reality shaping this exhibition, then, is a dialogue over the meanings of the identity spaces of East Central Europe, that borderline territory whose overall contours have largely been shaped on geopolitical chessboards in faraway capitals. Recent scholarly writing on this region has tended to take a distanced, macro view which highlights the ways in which such constructs as "Eastern Europe," "Central Europe," and "East Central Europe" (capitalized or not, with or without a "/" separating or joining the east and the central) have served the purposes of broader geopolitical agendas, whether those of Western European intellectuals or of Tsars and Politburo chiefs (e.g., Woolf 1994; Dupcsik 1999). This tradition of geopolitically motivated generalization continues today in discussions over whether and to what extent different nations qualify to become part of the European Union – in other words, qualify to be recognized as truly "European." The claims of being "the center of Europe" and my own (or Stanislaw Mucha's) deconstructive poking at such claims does little better, one might argue. A more regionally based "entrepreneurial" strategy can in many ways be a more fruitful one. In the 1970s and 1980s, Polish, Hungarian, and Czech writers such as Milan Kundera, Czesław Miłosz, Gyorgy Konrád and Danilo Kiš tried to carve out a "Central European" space by which their countries could be eased out of the Russian/Soviet orbit once and for all, if only in imagination; in some ways, no doubt, they may have contributed vitally to the movement that led to the fall of the Berlin Wall.

The *Immersions* exhibition, however, avoids both the pretext of a distanced, geopolitical gaze and the more overt strategic interventions of the Central Europeanists. Instead, it digs into a more immersive *depth* dimension, an archaeology or genealogy of what one might, with caveats, call the 'soul,' in the post-Jungian sense of that word, that is, of identity writ deep. Not content with the romantic nationalist quest for the ethnic purity of the Polish, Slavic or other 'soul,' the exhibition ventures into the more hybrid, entangled and 'primordially impure' realities of East Central European identities. Smocyński's three-armed crosses and Płotnicka's baptismal founts point to the ever-renewing process of what postmodern analytical psychologist James Hillman has called "soul making," a process that is individual yet also shared, intersubjective, ongoing and never completed, a process in which histories of blood and belonging, war and resettlement, attraction and

repulsion, have been mingled into identities created in the margins of empires (Hillman 1975; Casey 1991).

In the post-Socialist space of East Central Europe, there are several figures which might fit the qualifications of the nomadic and hybrid identity type being alluded to here: black market traders and economic refugees, eking out a living crossing borders at night or with questionable documents; Carpatho-Rusyns, whose recent entry into history as "Warhol's nation" or as Magocsi's new nationality (Magocsi 1993, 1999; Hann 1995; Ziac 2001) may be carved out of the same historical bedrock as that of the Ukrainian nation, but which has been forged in the more recent geological grinding of national borders in their Subcarpathian homeland; or the hybrid ethnics who refuse to partake of the ethnic purifications of what was once Yugoslavia; or, of course, the Roma, Europe's Gypsies, being everyone else's 'other.' The most genuinely nomadic, however, may be those designated by the simple term *tuteishyi*, the word for those who are simply "from here," even if that "here" changes in relation to the "theres" which have shaped and defined the territory of East Central Europe over its many imperial and political-economic realignments. In today's East Central European borderlands, where new and contested nations and ethnicities – Belarusians, Carpatho-Rusyns, Lemkos, Poleshuks, Romas, Montenegrans, Bosnians, and others – are ever emerging, what remains constant is the ebb and flow of identity formation, a process of gelling and destabilizing without necessary end-point or *telos*.[2] The *tuteishyi* represents the not-quite-named, the proto-ethnic (that is, proto-'Rusyn,' '-Poleshuk,' '-Kashub', '-Roma,' et al.), a person of "no fixed address" – if "address" is understood in the Lacanian sense of being called or hailed as such by the outside world – who is uncertain as to whether s/he is a nationality, ethnicity, or part of some other substance (religious denomination, et al.), but who is defined by the place in which s/he remains (and moves) while empires, armies, time-zones, and global economic forces move in and out of range. Like the old Bukovinian in Yuri Illienko's (1970) film *White Bird with a Black Mark* (*Bilyi ptakh z chornoyu oznakoyu*) who keeps several clocks each showing different times – Rumanian, Polish, German, Soviet – so as not to have to change the clock every time the borders change, so these proto-ethnicities define themselves by their hybrid and marginal location amid broadly contending force-fields. Like the nomad and the *mestizo* celebrated in the writings of postmodern and postcolonial writers, the *tuteishyi* remains placeless in a larger sense, yet rooted enough in his or her own space

(Tarasiewicz's forests, Maszlanko's fields), mobile in the tracks and paths carved out through earthy meanderings in the interstices of nations and empires.

This is perhaps also the space of the artist who is and is not identifiable as the representative of a collective group, and whose role is to not simply deconstruct the categories which ossify around emerging (or long emerged) nations and states, but to somehow turn these inside out, revealing their deep and messy underpinnings, their myth-laden, symbol-saturated, yet fractal, hybrid, and unstable foundations. Identity here arises through a paradoxical intermingling of a feeling of 'home place' and of the sense that any such 'home' ever shifts in the wake of larger movements and power shifts. What persists are the signs, symbols, rituals, and hybrid meanings in which these artists, among others, re-immerse themselves, with some hesitation, to continually *become* themselves. In that reimmersion, it may be that Ukrainians, Poles, Rusyns, and others rediscover connections that seemed to have disappeared on the surface, severed by fences and borders, but which re-emerge like fungus in the undergrowth. This immersive depth texture is what is missing both from the quests of outsiders (such as Mucha) to find the (absent) "center of Europe" and the attempts by insiders (who are always outsiders and marginals) to claim that center for themselves. The center, the *Immersions* artists seem to be suggesting, is found by immersing oneself in depth, individually and collectively, and it is a process that carries no guarantees of success or even of safety. That it can take place under the signs of Polish-Ukrainian friendship (and under the patronage of George Soros), in a year in which such friendship helped propel the most dramatic political revolution Ukraine has seen since the beginning of its independence in 1991, is a sign that vital conversations and (perhaps) alchemical identity processes are being carried out which make the borderlands of East Central Europe a lively center of life and of art.

A revalorization of these borderlands not as *someone's* borderlands – Poland's *kresy*, Russia's Pale of Settlement, or even as the "steppes of Europe," as Onuch had previously dubbed the whole of Ukraine – but as their own heterogeneous mosaic can also shed helpful insight on the nature of identity itself. The center of Europe, defined thus, is not a *pure* space, perhaps not a space at all, it belongs to no one, it shifts and recedes in our vision. Perhaps, in the end, there is no 'Europe' aside from the invitation to immerse oneself in dialogue and exploration over a possible future that allows for and encourages such dialogue.[3] In this

sense, the contributions explored in this article can be seen as part of a process of democratization which constitutes Eastern/East Central Europe as part of the European space of conversation, the space of a Europe without a constitution, but with practices in which history and desire, past and future, weave complicated dialogic threads beneath and across the borders that constitute the modernist space of sovereign nation-states and the late-modernist space of trade barriers and boundaries. Europe, in this sense, has clearly spread eastward.

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ENDNOTES

1   Tarasiewicz, in an interview, draws in a much wider net of kindred artists emanating from "the Great Lithuanian Duchy" who "laid the foundations of contemporary art." His list includes Malevich, Marc Chagall, Andy Warhol, Aleksandr Rodchenko, Mark Rothko, Barry Newman, and Jan Lebenstein (Ostrovska-Liuta 2004).

2   E.g., on Poleshuks, see Woolhiser (2003); on the Roma, see Petrova (2003).

3   This is in tune with Markus Reisenleitner's programmatic piece on "Tradition, Cultural Boundaries and the Constructions of Spaces of Identity," which opened the first issue of this journal, where Reisenleitner urged a view of Central Europe "as an object of constant negotiation" and "as a field of contestation and negotiation that produces plural identities" (2001: 12).