In *Imaging and Mapping Eastern Europe*, Katarzyna Murawska-Muthesius analyzes various categories of visuals through which the reader can perceive Eastern Europe and question it as a social, cultural, and political entity. Her main argument is precisely to show how the combination of different images (cartography, travel illustrations, caricatures, and book-cover designs) contributed to the constitution of an Eastern European identity. Studies on artistic productions and practices of Eastern Europe accept variable definitions in terms of the presence or absence of East Germany, and the Soviet Union is almost always excluded. They have multiplied over the past few years, especially in the English-language academic literature.[1] *Imaging and Mapping Eastern Europe* intends to fill a gap by focusing not on the artistic process itself but on the results, and to approach this not through the theoretical and critical text but through the discussion of visuals. This inquiry refreshes our knowledge and places the book alongside the research carried out at the German Historic Center for Art History and also alongside the work of Piotr Piotrowski, both of which the author mentions as particularly stimulating.[2] By placing her work alongside those mentioned above, the author presents an original point of view.

The question of whether “post” has the same meaning in post-communist and postcolonial is raised in the introduction and some illumination is provided through the presentation and detailed analysis of an illustration by Leslie Illingworth published in the British magazine *Punch* in 1958 (p. 5). Produced just after the Soviet reaction to the Hungarian Revolution of 1956, the cartoon juxtaposes the way Great Britain engaged with decolonization with the difficulty the Soviet Union had in holding back its satellites. In the cartoon, communism is presented as a variation of colonialism. The choice and analysis of this illustration in the opening pages of *Imaging and Mapping* reveal the stimulation provided by the visual when analyzing the mentalities, both real and projected, of a given space. Complex theoretical problems are examined from a new perspective by forming a
“iconosphere” (a term used in the book) of Eastern Europe. The book covers a broad chronology range, from the early modern period to the present.

The first type of visual considered is the “map,” which allows the author to begin in the distant past and end with post-communist issues. The geographical dimension is questioned through a medium supposedly driven by scientific rigor. However, Murawska-Muthesius notes the possible affinity with a material that is known for its subjectivity—cartoons—and the first chapter ultimately demonstrates the instability of Eastern European borders as a region. Murawska-Muthesius provides arguments for revising a history that is still too often based on binary oppositions (reality and projection, truth and lies). By revealing the richness of both the cartography whose realities are distorted by the ideology that presided over their production and the caricatures whose ironic value has several levels of meaning, the chapter invites us to question the ideologies sometimes at work in the methodologies using the image.

The second type of visual is analyzed in the second chapter, “The Lure of Ethnic Dress: Eastern Europe in the Traveller’s Gaze.” It is based on different media (drawings, prints, photographs) produced by travelers in the region from the seventeenth century onward and contributes to the idea of cultural identity. This cultural identity is attested on various bases: geographic (images of the Danube), mythologic (image of the fighter), clothing, etc. Here, the book intends to fill a particularly visible gap in works on travel writing: while the publication of sources and the analysis of the literary corpus have been addressed by numerous works, the illustrations they contain have rarely received attention. Some of the visuals come from periodicals, whose readership is also analyzed, notably the issues of The Geographical Magazine (founded in 1935 in London). This is another quality brought about by the rich potential of the visual object: questions linked to the ephemeral voca-

tion of some visuals. The corpus includes several types of images, but the most revealing motif in terms of the permanence and evolution of representations is undoubtedly the Eastern European peasant woman wearing an ethnic blouse. Murawska-Muthesius focuses on this motif during the period 1774–2016 (the final image by the Polish artist Katarzyna Perlak is used on the book cover). By examining almost 350 years of visual production through the relative evolution of certain motifs, this section completes the previous one on maps by revealing, in contrast, a certain permanence of cultural references; Murawska-Muthesius even speaks of the “‘timeless' body of the peasant woman in her white embroidered chemise,” showing that this disparity in the visual message is targeted by the cartoonists who are the subject of her following analysis (p. 130).

The fourth chapter looks primarily at the communist era and focuses on the fascinating subject of caricature and its active role in creating a Western view of Eastern Europe; in this, Murawska-Muthesius examines the works through the lenses of the analyses by Sigmund Freud and Ernst Gombrich. Murawska-Muthesius notes the particular relevance of the medium in the study of visuality and its connection with language and space. She focuses on visuals from Punch beginning after the First World War and finishing (and maybe culminating) during the Cold War. Murawska-Muthesius shows them as a mirror to certain humorous images produced in Eastern Europe, often in reaction to the West, and whose resistance value is questioned through the reconsideration of self-fashioning. In this section, she analyzes a superb drawing by one of the most famous Soviet cartoonists, Boris Efimov, depicting Winston Churchill and suggesting his possible manipulation by Adolf Hitler and Joseph Goebbels. Murawska-Muthesius chose this visual because it represents, in her view, a particularly vivid example of Eastern European responses to the West, far from the clichés of a closed Eastern bloc. She also reminds us, without overstating the case (which is
a strength of this book), of the use of this type of image as an act of defense, or even attack. Regarding these cartoons in general, she notes that these images create one of the most persistent ideas about the representation of Eastern Europeans as a “group of people” (p. 130).

Images reproduced on covers of academic books are analyzed in chapter 5. Given the almost-infinite potential of the subject, Murawska-Muthesius focuses on the past twenty years, partly to limit an infinite corpus and also because during these years the image and in particular the photographic image acquired a predominant place. She also does so because the photographic-based covers of cultural history books coincide with a boom in publications on Central and Eastern Europe. This, of course, involves focusing on the visual rather than the thesis of the book, emphasizing the relationship of the image to the text, and Murawska-Muthesius herself admits that it is difficult to draw precise conclusions. It does, however, allow her to identify some revealing gaps. For example, it allows her to show how the image suggests themes absent from other parts of the media she has been analyzing: political dissidence, minority groups (whether in terms of ethnicity, religion, or sexual orientation).

Thus, the book is focused on various types of images offered by equally varied media to indicate the circulation of visuals produced on and by Eastern Europe. One category that is missing is visuals produced by other cultural spheres (Americans, Soviets, etc.) for Eastern Europe, if such a category is actually possible. Analyzing the production, distribution, and reception of image to propose its meaning is a particularly stimulating challenge. The taboos and possible approaches to the Eastern European collective psyche are thus suggested and reveal the potential of such an approach. The question of the image in Eastern Europe is often understood and analyzed through the prism of its production, distribution, and, more occasionally, reception. The autonomy of the visual, especially when it is a reproducible medium, is thus rarely relativized. The book attempts to show, and this is what I find most fascinating, that this visual world is not detached from the contingencies of its production but has a possible autonomous reception. It does not illustrate political, historical, or geographical reality but sometimes offers viewers another meaning, or even invites them to resistance. Murawska-Muthesius statement confers on this hybridity the interest of her method as an art historian and of her object of study.

Notes


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