There are two questions that have guided the thoughts presented here. The first can be formulated as follows: Does it make sense to talk about a Central-European philosophy? Or to use an expression of Enzo Melandri's, is there a Central-Eastern European manner of conceiving philosophy? The second question is the immediate and perhaps inevitable complement of the first: Why does our reference to Central-European philosophy seem so distant and dated? In other words, whatever the value and importance of Central European philosophy, it now seems past, concluded and irrelevant. If there ever was a Central European philosophy, it was an experience now finished. Those who wish to contribute to contemporary progress in philosophical reflection must use other tools, other ideas, other philosophies and other books. Perhaps some insight or some telling quotation is still to be drawn from Central European philosophy, but today we have more up-to-date tools and we frame problems better.

Such opinions are fortunately still rare, at least in the best of the so-called continental European philosophy. They are not rare, however, in analytic philosophy and especially in those circles in which philosophical enquiry comes closest to the concerns of the contemporary sciences.1 I am thinking, for

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1 [Simons 1992], 2 remembers that the division between analytic and continental philosophy "did not exist at the turn of the century and only became clearly apparent after the Second World War". See also [Dummett 1988]. With reference to analytic

example, of areas such as cognitive psychology or artificial intelligence. However much these may be new areas of enquiry, in rapid and frenetic development, which on the admission of their principal exponents have not yet been given definitive conceptual and categorical organization, one cannot accept the iconoclastic frenzy which dismisses anything published more than ten years ago, an attitude which almost seems part of their genetic code. The search for the new and for the advancement of knowledge is also of interest to those who have no disdain for books that might appear somewhat frayed and down-at-heel. One may even find that certain apparently innovative areas of research have something to learn from the old ideas developed by Central Europe. The fact that this philosophical cycle is now concluded may indeed permit us to focus more closely on their reasons without committing the same mistakes, if mistakes they were.

In short, I shall attempt to answer two questions: “to what do we refer when we speak of Central European philosophy?”, and “why did it seem so distant and dated?”.

In answering these questions, I must first show that Central European philosophy ceased not only for ‘geographical’ reasons (i.e. historical or political) but also and perhaps principally for a quite specific philosophical reason. A reason, one would do well to remember, which is inherent in all contemporary enquiry. My hope and wish is that by identifying this theoretical node in the historical experience of Central European philosophy, we may able to deal with it more effectively in the contexts in which it re-emerges today.

Let us begin with the first question: To what do we refer when we speak of Central European philosophy?

In order to give a sufficiently exhaustive answer, or, which is the same thing, in order not to pay excessive homage to prejudice, I shall adopt a somewhat roundabout approach. Firstly, the question obviously only makes sense if its complements are admissible. A Central European philosophy will only have its own distinctive features if one can equally speak of a European and non Central European philosophy and more in general of a non-European philosophy.

It is equally obvious that there are interests, mentalities, styles of writing and contingencies of the most disparate kinds that distinguish among the philosophical doctrines developed in the various polis of the world. Our question has nothing to do with the localist conceit that finds expression in museums of philosophy, [Simons 1992], 3, notes: “Yet the history of philosophy of the fourth century B.C. and the seventeenth century A.D. is much better known than that of the years which have shaped our contemporary concerns... Husserl was writing about universal grammar decades before Chomsky, Reinach had a theory of speech acts long before Austin, Bolzano anticipated Tarski and Quine in several quite technical concepts”.