SENSUOUS UNITY OF ART AND SCIENCE

THE TIMES OF RUDOLF II

Bartholomeus Spranger *ALLEGORY OF THE REIGN OF RUDOLF II*, 1592

JAAN VALSINER, EDITOR

Sensuous Unity
of Art and Science

The Times of Rudolf II

A Volume in History and Society:
Integrating Social, Political and Economic Sciences

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of Art and Science

The Times of Rudolf II

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PART III: GROWTH OF IDEAS

SERIES EDITORS PREFACE

As any editor knows very well when a person starts writing a book it is essential to anticipate who will be the possible reader of those pages. In this case this excellent and challenging book matches very well with the main objectives of this series. This is to say, to build integrated new knowledge through connections between history and its neighboring social sciences and to overcome the well-known deficit of publications of interdisciplinary research on the highest level,

In this vein, to deal with historical issues and problems, as this book does, it is not only to describe the past providing a narrative full of specific details, places, and names, but to offer new and complex causal explanations about past issues. It is important to mention that these explanations usually refer to situations and events which are very different of the present ones. Thus, history is counterintuitive and historical accounts refer to situations very different to the present ones. The Italian historian Carlo Ginzburg has referred to this mentioning that "The task of the historian is just the opposite of what many of us have been taught to believe. The historian must destroy our false sense of proximity to the inhabitants of the past because they come from societies very different from our own. The more we discover about their mental universes, the more we should be shocked by the cultural distance that separates us from them."

But this important conclusion should not prevent the idea that the also the present itself could be very counterintuitive. I mean that important aspects of the present social, political, and cultural affairs appear as expectedly normal from an intuitive point of view, but they are not at all. Very often present events are full of unexpected and counterintuitive situations. Precisely historical scenarios provide some similarities which could help to understand them. Of course, this understanding has nothing to do with the essentialized way history is usually consumed. In other words, the past

is a foreign country, according to the seminal idea from Lowenthal, but the visit to that country could provide insightful examples to understand our own present countries. Let us to unpack some of these matters.

   This book refers to a number of issues which show very clearly this basic but essential difference between the past and the present. Let us refer to some of them. First, the book is about the intellectual, artistic, political, and scientific context during the kingdom of the emperor Rudolf II. This is to say, this work analyzes a past political world where there were no nations, but empires. This political scenario is very difficult to imagine nowadays because the very existence of nations states is conceived by most citizens as an almost natural state of affairs. As a consequence, to be a citizen of a particular nation state is very often conceived as something immutable. But this is something rather recent in the history of the world. It started in the middle of 19th century and since then it has been fully interiorized by most of the inhabitants of the planet. Before this date the world was divided into empires, which used to have a metropolis and a number of territories under its control. Those territories used to have different types of identities, but not necessarily national ones because the nation state did not exist yet. In this context religious identities were much more powerful than national and local ones and this is an issue very much related to this book. Thus, the emperor Rudolf II was educated in Spain by another emperor, his uncle Philippe II, in a very rigid and repressing catholic environment. For example, a specific and very meaningful example of the orthodox catholic mentality of Philip II, particularly in the second half of his life, was the design and the construction of the *El Escorial*. This building was erected as a commemoration of the victory of the battle of Lepanto against the Ottoman Empire precisely in the day of the Saint Lawrence. According to the tradition, this saint was tortured and roasted to death because he decided not to renounce to his catholic faith. Thus, the structure of the building is based on the gridiron where Saint Lawrence was burned. As various historians of the architecture have indicated, the building is very difficult to classify because it is not a palace, nor a castle. As a matter of fact, it has a religious motivation. Officially his name is the *Monastery of San Lorenzo del Escorial*. But it was not the typical religious building. In fact, it was used as a private living place for Philippe II and his family, but not as a royal court for the nobility. As a matter of fact, the dorm of Philip II was directly connected with the church. In this way, he could follow every day the Holy Mess from his bed. For sure Rudolf II not only visited the oppressing atmosphere of the *El Escorial* but he also received an intense influence of this dogmatic catholic indoctrination where sexual issues, scientific debates and undogmatic thinking were not well received at all. A superficial but meaningful sign of the years Rudolf II spent in Spain

was the fact that he used to dressed black robes most of the times, as his uncle Phillip II also used to do.

But surprisingly, as this book analyzes in a very detailed and profound way, Rudolf II developed an extremely tolerant environment where sciences and art experienced a flourishing development. This was in real contrast not only with the education he received but also with the situation in the Spanish Empire, where he was educated, as Philip II decided to interrupt most of cultural, artistic, and scientific exchanges with institutions from foreigner territories, even closing the *Spanish College* in Rome. Therefore, all the advances reached in the times of Rudolf II were unexpected and contradictory. How was possible that a person educated in such a conservative environment paved the way to the development of liberal arts and the growth of science? I think the analysis of how conflicts and unexpected events are sometimes essential for both the present and the past is one the merit of this creative book.

In this vein, I write this prologue in the context of a decreasing pandemic and, at the same time, an increasing state or war. Both issues raise questions which are related to some central issues considered in this book. Particularly, how contradictory and unexpected reality can be and how difficult is for human beings to detect and to admit conflicts and unexpected events as part of this reality. Pandemic and war are concepts that current generations—at least in the western world—knew only its theoretical meaning but not its real one, much less its everyday implications. Thus, in the last one year and a half we have come to know first-hand that some concepts, when they pass from mere written expression, and therefore intangible and purely theoretical, to the sensitive zone of phenomenological experience, become first touching, then aggressive and finally desperate. And this is how we, as human species, have been and to some extent still are now. Locked in limited spaces as the only defense against something that surrounds us, but we do not see, that threatens us and at the same time we cannot locate and yet conditions all our actions, social contacts, and affections, until we feel helpless, disoriented, and vulnerable, especially vulnerable. There are already numerous reflections that have been developed to account for all this state of affairs. This is due to the urgency of societies to give meaning to everything new that is happening to us, which is not easy, but also to the need of the cultural industry to generate new intellectual products that can be quickly consumed by the citizens. More often than not, these sometimes-hasty predictions have focused on the consequences that the pandemic and the war will have on our societies. Some of these reflections have a particular relation to this book which is deeply related the existence of conflicts and paradoxical and unexpected situations.

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Mario Carretero
Buenos Aires, May 2022
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SENSUALITY OF GENERALIZED KNOWLEDGE

Jaan Valsiner

The Emperor did not trust anybody. And he was right—the complex power structure which he was born to inherit was a trap for his personal liberty. The very top ruler of the empire—the owner of castles, titles, and lands—was not to be free. In his all-powerful role he always had to watch out. As his properties were up to be grabbed for one's economic and narcissistic benefits by his competitors who were many—beginning from his own brother. The role of the Emperor was complex. His courtiers were well versed in the art of intrigues, and the Emperor understood that. Leading an empire—especially one that is moving towards its breakdown—is a thankless public role. Melancholy was the way to deal with it. And art and science was a remedy.

The Emperor was deeply intelligent—he appreciated the people who could create something new—alchemists, astronomers, painters, engravers, goldsmiths, musicians and poets. In the course of three decades, he created an environment for these artisans to develop their work in an ambience of tolerance of various faiths. He could buffer the community of creative people from the normative intolerance of extreme ideological creeds of the church and power aspirations of the landowners. The aspiring courtiers must have been in constant frustration as the Emperor did not show up in his administrative office but went to visit his favorite artist in his studio to discuss philosophies behind the allegorical images.

The Emperor was Rudolf II (b. 1552, d. 1612, reigned 1576–1612), the country was the Holy Roman Empire, and the town was Prague. From 1583

to his death in 1612 Rudolf II assembled in Prague a remarkable community of artists and handicraftsmen and supported their creativity—often to the disadvantage of the state treasury. Yet the longer-term benefits for the European cultural history were profound for the following centuries. The Holy Roman Empire could be considered at the time an analogue of our present European Union—and in contrast to the latter was by far more supportive of arts and sciences.

The Emperor's own inclinations had a crucial role to play here. Being the Emperor has the advantage of continuity of one's policies, even when resources are scarce. Fortunately for Europe after the 16th century Rudolf II's policies were productive tor development of new ideas, rather than re-dividing resources on battlefields. To avoid wars is a token of wisdom for any politician, and Rudolf excelled in that through his indecisiveness and disinterest in becoming a war hero. His social presentations in allegoric armored scenes were efforts of imperial propaganda. Rudolf would take a painter's brush rather than a sword in his hand—yet no presentation effort of any art-loving monarch has dared to paint the portraits of their beloved wives, pets, or court painters. Rather it has been the latter whose portraits of the former now give us a visual impression of the rulers in art museums.[1]

Rudolf II felt deeply into art, knew it, and understood its psychological impacts. In early 1600s he was reported to spend hours feeling into thepainting he received as a present (Figure 1). As thematic paintings of the time it was the story presented via visual images—rather than the affordances of the depicted images themselves. The meaning of the erotically appealing naked body went then—as it does now—far beyond the possible beginnings of arousal to the highly complicated psychological complexities about which the allegorical pictures were supposed to inform the viewer.

Of course, nobody can reconstruct Rudolf's dialogues within himself and with the Ancient Greek mythology of the canvas, we can only know that he was deeply dedicated to his encounter with this painting, and with art in general. Instead of wanting to govern he wanted to know—and art as well as his contemporary science was the means towards that goal. Our interest in this book is similar—we want to know how the art and science in Rudolfine era set the stage for further development of knowledge creation

The goal of this book is to locate the birth pangs of psychology—the study of the *psyche*—in the Renaissance unity of art and science. The historical period 1583–1611 in Prague was a particularly productive for all Europe in its intellectual advancements in art and science. It was facilitated by the special personality of the Holy Roman Emperor Rudolf II who during his reign made Prague the capital of the Empire where the major artists, scientists, architects, and alchemists came together in the service of the Emperor and formed a unique context of interdisciplinary synthesis of ideas that enhanced European philosophies, sciences, and arts in the following

Figure 1

Tizan's Danae

Source: Version from 1569 that was presented to Rudolf II, now in *Kunsthistorische Museum*, Vienna, .

centuries. While the history of art in and astronomy in the Rudolfine era has been amply covered, the impacts of the intellectual atmosphere of the era on psychology, philosophy, social ideologies, and aesthetics has remained scarcely investigated. The volume includes analyses of history of ideas in psychology, sociology and other social sciences that received the impetus of the political situation of Rudolfine Prague with religious tolerance and decline of the political power of the Holy Roman Empire.

That tolerance was important—and it could be viewed as a delicate balance that existed, sometimes challenged, between 1583 and 1618 in Prague. Its opposite- intolerance—is the usual state of affairs that kills people on battlefields and arts and sciences in any society. The focus in this book is on the societal context of late 16th century Prague where arts and

sciences creatively intertwined with each other under conditions of relative freedom from military and political turmoils.

NOTE

1. The exception to the artistic creation by monarchs came in the 18th century when Friedrich II of Prussia (1712–1786) was the author of over 100 musical pieces that have retained their prominence in history of music.

PART I

THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND: RUDOLFINE PRAGUE AS AN OASIS OF ART AND SCIENCE

THE POLITICAL CRADLE FOR RUDOLF II

Tensions in the Holy Roman Empire

Jaan Valsiner

History is always interesting. As the project in this volume—started by focus on art—expanded, it became important to inquire into the sociopolitical frame around the remarkable artistic and scholarly freedom that was made possible by the unique character of the Emperor—Rudolf II. Yet the role of one person—even an emperor—depends on the wider historical context and social politics of the era. What Rudolf II did for his own pleasures in the power position of the Emperor was made possible by the special historical conditions of his Empire in the 16th century.

Intellectually it was an era of opening to arts and sciences—we could poetically call it the first "Prague Spring" that brought to European art and science major breakthroughs emerging from the context of religiously orthodox political system. Politically the Rudolfine era was that of juggling different political and religious ideologies between two historical events—that of Augsburg Settlement of 1555 and the beginning of the Thirty Years War in 1618.

In the case of the "Prague Spring" of 1583–1612 this context was a truce—temporary and fragile as it was—between the Catholic and Protestant ideologies within the conglomerate of states, cities, and churches that made up the super-society we call the Holy Roman Empire. The beginning of this period of this relatively peaceful coexistence can be located in

the Peace of Augsburg in 1555, and its end in 1618 marked by the third de-fenestration in Prague that led to the Thirty Years War. The Augsburg Settlement led to the agreement that different political units of the Empire could elect either Catholic or Protestant faiths to guide their societies. Yet other streams of European religious thought—Calvinism, Anabaptism and Judaism—were left out of that settlement.

This interim period was not free of frictions and skirmishes between the Catholic Protestant religious beliefs and social practices which sometimes erupted into local violence in different parts of the Empire that included the lands between the Mediterranean and the Baltic Seas. Yet it was a period of relative stability in the center—which meant Bohemia with Prague made the capital of the Empire in 1583. This peaceful state in the center made it possible for arts and sciences to thrive in the particular epistemological enclave that Rudolf II created in and around his court where religious differences were not emphasized and the common interest in knowledge was shared by all.

EUROPE IN THE SECOND HALF OF THE 16TH CENTURY

Europe in the 16th century was politically as heterogeneous as our European Union five centuries later. It contained centralized—but politically weak—governing body of the Emperor and his court. This was the setting unique for the Holy Roman Empire. Since its beginning of—variously considered to have started in 800 or 962—the political structure had always been loose and under binary power control by the religious (the Pope) and military (the aristocratic landowners) establishments, with cities often serving as bases for economic underwriting of various military campaigns. Until its very end (in 1806) the Empire stayed such loose conglomerate of various interests and military powers, and with electable status of the Emperor.

In the practices of such elections, it was the Habsburg line of aristocracy that dominated the history of Emperors—yet the status remained electable (in contrast to France where it became hereditary). Yet the basic feature of the emperorship—that of being elected to keep together the highly variable set of power (and land) holders goes back very far into the history of Germanic tribes. Yet the exact power relations between the elected emperor and the actual power (that means—land) owners was always under negotiation. The Empire was never more than a formal conglomerate of many autonomous subunits that at times clashed with one another for economic or religious reasons.

The Social Structure of the Governance

The Empire had no democracy, but it did include selective representation of different power holders who would elect the Emperor.[1] The electability of the Emperor was available to the highest level of the three-part hierarchy of influential actors, with the second level having some role in the political persuasions for the top, and the third layer having to find creative ways to bring their concerns to be heard. The imperial election system developed steadily since the eighth century. In 1489 was the *Reichstag* (Diet) became formally divided into three chambers—*collegia*

The top layer of the political power belonged to the group of Electors (*Kurfürsten*). The rules for election were set up in the Golden Bull of 1356 in the form of the role of *Kurfürsten* (electors) of which there were seven (later in 17th century increased to nine), and on the basis of their majority vote the Emperor could be elected. The *Kurfürsten* role became hereditary— which consolidated their local power and continuity in the politics of the Empire. They needed to be well versed in European affairs—starting from learning and operating in all four of the "imperial" languages—German, Latin, Italian, and Czech.

Electing the Emperor involved a hierarchical election system. Within the hierarchy of three *collegia*, the role of "important persons" *(reichsunmittelbaren Personen)* could be distinguished. The first two levels were authorized personally to participate in Emperor's meeting occasions— Imperial Diets (*Reichstagen*). Aside from *Kurfürsten* —who played the key role here as they—and not any others—had the direct electoral power to make an emperor, there were others in the Diet. From the 14th to the 17th century the seven *Kurfürsten* who could elect the Emperor belonged to the two subgroups of the clergy—including three archbishops (of Mainz, Trier, and Köln) who represented three areas and two religions. The second subgroup included four landowners of the highest rank (King of Bohemia, Count Palatine at the Rhine, Elector of Sachsen, and Margrave of Brandenburg). The power of the landed top aristocracy was slightly in the majority over the religious power holders. Under the Emperor there was a clear hierarchy of personages who could partake in the governance of the Empire by their voting rights. The participants also included various other influential landowners (*Reichsfürsten*) and the imperial bishops on the side of the religious establishment. Third, there were also those who were represented at *Reichstagen* as collective entities—corporations. The second group were the aristocracy and representations of imperial towns (*Reichsstadt*), as well as the imperial estates and abbeys (*Kloster*). The college of imperial towns (*Reichsstädtekollegium*) evolved from 1489 onwards. Main cities involved were Regensburg, Nürnberg, Augsburg, Köln, Aachen, and Frankfurt. This *collegio* contributed greatly to the development of the