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04

N°04 / September 2024

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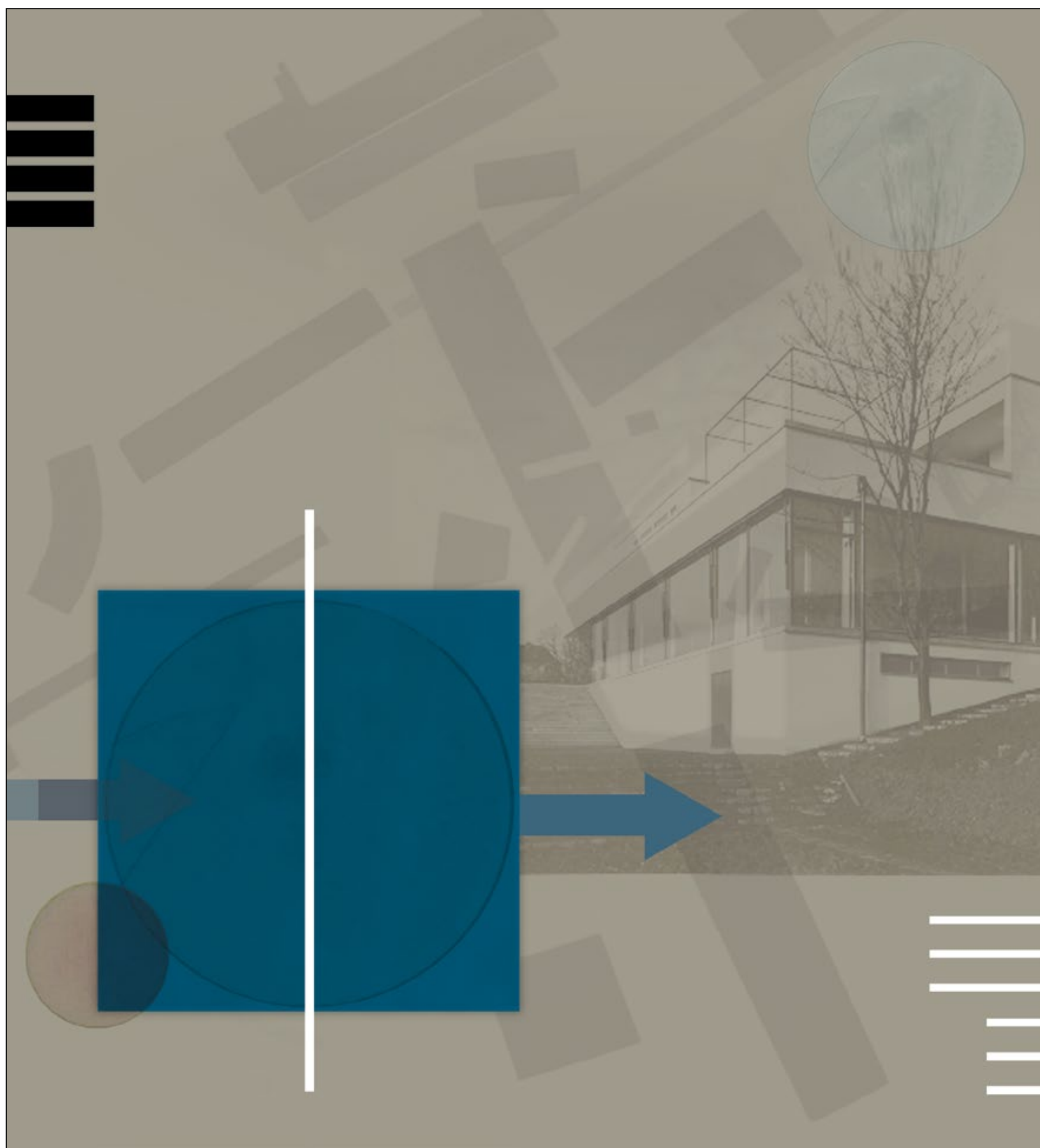


MASARYK UNIVERSITY PRESS

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Published by Masaryk University, Žerotínovo nám. 9, 601 77 Brno, Czech Republic
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Editorial office / Masaryk University, Faculty of Arts
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Arna Nováka 1, 602 00 Brno, Czech Republic
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ISSN 2695-1428 (online)
Journal © Masaryk University, 2024

Journal Web Page / https://www.arteastcentral.eu

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# Editorial:
## Narratives and Interpretations

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**Keywords**

performance; guardians; Vratislav Effenberger; theory of the avant-garde; modernism; Ukraine; mystetstvoznavstvo; art history and theory; Hryhorii Pavlutskyi; folk art; Ruthenia

**https://doi.org/10.5817/AEC2024-4-1**

# **Editorial:** Narratives and Interpretations

## Matthew Rampley

The common thread tying together the articles in this issue of the journal is the question of narrative and interpretation. Each of them deals with a different topic, from folk art to performance art in the 1970s, but they all deal with questions about the kinds of narratives and interpretations that have been deployed by art historians in relation to their respective topics.

The journal opens with Katalin Cseh-Varga and Kornélia Deres's discussion of performance art in Hungary and Czechoslovakia in the 1970s and, in particular, the various ways in which its history has been narrated. When, after 1989, the art of East Central Europe became much more accessible to international scholars, performance art was a focus of particular interest. Narratives of art under socialist rule homed in on the artist's body as a site of resistance to conditions of political repression. However, this account, which was bound up with a heroization of the male artist, offered a partial interpretation of its subject. For, as Cseh-Varga and Deres argue, the work of performance artists – they take as case studies the Hungarian Tibor Hajas and Karel Miler from Czechoslovakia – had a much wider and richer range of interests. The explanation for this, they contend, is the rule of 'guardians' and 'gatekeepers,' theorists who worked with the artists in question and who played a disproportionate role in shaping the meaning of their work in the art historical memory. Petr Rezek, for example, a philosopher who had a particular concern with phenomenology, enjoyed close relations with Miler and other performance artists, and played an important part in ensuring that a phenomenological lens was prominent in the reception of their work.

Cseh-Varga and Deres's article highlights the deep ties and interconnections between theoretical work and art-making in Hungarian and Czechoslovak art in the 1970s and 1980s, and their emphasis on 'gatekeepers' can be seen as part of a wider study of the infrastructure of art, the network of 'actors, philosophies, media, and spaces' which, they contend, are only now beginning to be investigated in depth. In one sense, the phenomenon of the 'gatekeeper' is a familiar figure in art history. The image of many artists is often heavily shaped by one or two scholars, who often enjoyed a personal acquaintance with them, who act as figures of authority and even, in extreme cases, exert a kind of monopolistic proprietorial control over the legacy of the artist in question. Cseh-Varga and Deres point to the distortions that can arise out of such a phenomenon, but one could take their analysis still further, for the guardian role assumed by some commentators can inhibit critical judgement. The guardian ends up being an advocate for the artist, defending their reputation from any adverse view.

In the case of the art of East Central Europe, such gatekeeping arguably plays a deeper role than elsewhere. Not only is the interpretation of individual artists subject to the 'guardianship' of certain scholars, in addition, communities of scholars can adopt a protective stance towards 'outsiders,' art historians from western Europe and North America, who offer their own interpretations of artistic practices of the region. The discourse of post-colonial and

decolonial criticism is then mobilised to rebut accounts of the art of East Central Europe originating from outside the region, viewing them as imposing an epistemic regime that forces Hungarian, Polish, Czech or Ukrianian art, for example, into alien interpretative frameworks. Cseh-Varga and Deres do not address this phenomenon, for this lies outside the scope of their study, but their article, in addition to offering an alternative way of approaching performance art, opens up 'guardians' and 'gatekeepers' as the potential subject of a more wide-ranging historiographic study.

The second volume of the journal included a number of translated texts as part of a goal to introduce primary writings to broader audiences. This volume continues this practice, starting with the translation of 'The Concept of the Avant-Garde,' taken from the book *Reality and the Poetic* by the Czech theorist Vratislav Effenberger. It is commonly assumed that discussions of modernism and the avant-garde in socialist states consisted merely of the rehearsal of the nostrums of socialist realism. Until the early 1950s this was undoubtedly the case, but after 1956 and Nikita Krushchev's famous speech denouncing Stalin and Stalinism, the cultural and artistic environment slowly changed. Theoretical reflection was still heavily inflected by Marxism, yet the intellectual environment was considerably more diverse than traditional images have acknowledge. In Czechoslovakia, the 1960s saw a gradual loosening of censorship controls, culminating in the so-called Prague Spring of 1968. Effenberger's text was a product of that changing situation, and, with its references to contemporary American art as well as art criticism and modernist art practice in France, it illustrates the extent to which writers in Czechoslovakia were engaged with wider international currents. His book was published at the same time that the fate and the meaning of the avant-garde was being debated elsewhere. Yet where many authors, such as Renato Poggioli and Peter Bürger, were fast concluding that the avant-garde had reached its demise in a capitalist society that had reduced it an aesthetic commodity, Effenberger held out the hope that an avant-garde impulse was still relevant and viable. He was sensitive to the dangers of 'avant-gardism,' by which he meant the circulation of stylised avant-garde practices stripped of any critical content. Yet he held to the idea that an avant-garde was still viable, provided it was embedded in an ideological programme.

In 'Shifting Paths in the Study of Art in Ukraine,' Dariia Demchenko outlines some of the debates that have been taking place in Ukraine over the nature of art history as a field. The ostensible prompt for her discussion is a conference that was held early this year commemorating Hryhorii Pavlutsky, who played a central part in the establishment of art history in Kyiv in the 1880s. Demchenko indicates convincingly that he saw himself as Ukrainian, for he was a member of the Nestor the Chronicler Historical Society, a Ukrainian-language scholarly association founded in 1873 named after an eleventh-century monk from Kyiv.[1] He also wrote extensively on topics in Ukrainian art and, as such, Pavlutsky can be seen as a formative figure in the creation of a specifically Ukrainian art historical voice. Yet consideration of Pavlutsky raises other questions which, as Demchenko shows, bring to the fore the degree to which he become a totemic figure, a prism through which wider questions of Ukrainian identity are debated. This is evident from the fact that the collective memory of Pavlutsky emphasises his interest in art historical scholarship in France and Germany.

1) Oleksii Tolochko, 'On "Nestor the Chronicler",' *Harvard Ukrainian Studies*, 29: 1–4, 31–59.

His translation of works from French is undisputable evidence of his engagement with contemporaries in France, yet other connections are slightly more tentative. Participants at the conference suggested that Pavlutsky has absorbed some of the ideas of Alois Riegl and Aby Warburg. The idea of a connection to Warburg is speculative and the evidence is tenuous, as Demchenko herself recognises, but the idea of reference to Riegl is more convincing. He was widely read in the Russian Empire, and his analysis of ornament, starting with *Problems of Style* (1893), was authoritative and influential, and coincided with Pavlutsky's own work on ornament in Ukraine. The specifics of this issue are less important, however, than the symbolic importance attached to the very idea of French and German aesthetic and art historical ideas playing a role in the formation of Ukrainian discourses on art. For the possibility of this intertwining serves as a tool of Ukrainian self-definition and helped loosen the sense of a dependence on Russian culture and intellectual life.

As Demchenko shows, this concern over the presence of a distinctly Ukrainian discourse is most in evidence in the debate over the meaning of *mystetstvoznavstvo*. This term, based on the Ukrainian term for art, *mystetstvo,* (мистецтво), as opposed to the Russian *isskustvo* (искусство), was first coined in Tsarist Russia, and was a rendering of the German *Kunstwissenschaft*. The various connotations of the latter term, which included not merely empirical study of art but also aesthetic and methodological reflection, were lost in the 1930s, and *mystetstvoznavstvo* was subordinated to the demands of Marxist orthodoxy emanating from Moscow. Ukrainian art historians were provincialized; opportunities for international travel were severely limited and they were reduced to the status of local experts, subordinate to universities in Moscow and Leningrad. As such, Demchenko points out, many Ukrainian art historians are keenly aware of the fact that historical discourse functioned as one more instrument of Soviet colonial rule. Yet trying to 'decolonise' Ukrainian art history has its own share of problems. Trying to reclaim *mystetstvoznavstvo* from its colonial heritage has at times degenerated into sterile debates over the formulation of precise definitions, at the expense of more productive discussion of current and future thematic, methodological and theoretical possibilities. In many respects, Demchenko's article indicates, the centenary commemoration of Pavlutsky was more revealing about the present in Ukrainian scholarship than about the achievements of a scholar working at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

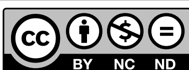
Pavlutsky's final major work, unfinished on his death in 1924, was on folk art and ornament, and it reminds us that while the heyday of the folk art revival in Central and Eastern Europe was in the beginning of the century, it remained a topic of concern after the First World War. This conclusion is underlined by the collection of texts on the same topic by authors in interwar Czechoslovakia. Although Czech social elites prided themselves as members of an advanced, modern, industrial society, folk and vernacular cultures were still considered important enough to warrant an extensive body of scholarly analysis. This was particularly the case after 1918, when Czechs found themselves in a new state that included extensive regions in Slovakia and Sub-Carpathian Ruthenia that were underpinned by a primarily agrarian economy. The inequalities of this arrangement, and high-handed Czech attitudes towards the 'less developed' Slovak and Ukrainian parts of Czechoslovakia, have

been extensively analysed.[2] Yet what is of more significance here is that folk art assumed a renewed significance, as part of the project of identifying a shared Czechoslovak cultural identity.

The authors chosen here convey a sense of the different lenses through which folk art was viewed in the 1920s. They range from romantic and enthusiastic promotion of the aesthetic qualities of folk art through to more sobre discussions of the social production of folk art (including the role of gender divisions) and of the genealogy of folk-art forms. The authors selected also include Karel Teige, more usually associated with theories of modernist architecture and, subsequently, Surrealism. Teige was not, in fact, commenting on folk art itself, but rather with its absorption in bourgeois society and the reasons for its popularity. Advocates of the folk-art revival may have thought they were articulating the basis for a new national culture but ultimately, Teige argues, they were looking in the wrong place if they wished to find the folk art of the present and the future. For rather than searching in the countryside and its village and hamlets, they should be turning their gaze to the city, where the popular, vernacular, art of present was to be seen. Teige mentioned Josef Čapek's book *The Humblest Art*, which had been a serious attempt to plot the continuities and transitions from rural to urban vernacular.[3] Yet with one or two exceptions, this project did not ever develop any further. Analysis of urban popular culture became channelled into the discussion of kitsch, even under state socialism, while rural folk art became a subject for ethnographers. The essays collected here are thus monuments of a brief moment when folk art, its meanings and origins, could be of equal interest to modernist art critics, ethnographers and art historians.

2) See, for example, Mary Heiman, *Czechoslovakia: the State that Failed*, London and New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009.

3) Josef Čapek, *Nejskromnější umění*, Prague: Štorch-Marien, 1920.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# articles

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# Constructing Czechoslovak and Hungarian Performance Art History: Guardians and Narrative Shifts

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## Abstract

During and after state socialism, issues of identity and ideology, as well as stratified meaning and criticism of culture in Central and Eastern Europe, were thoroughly explored in performance artworks. Despite extensive historizations and theorisations of regional practices, no research has focused on how the related body of ephemera was shaped through interpretation, exhibition, criticism, and academic work. The essay argues that the building of narratives in Central and Eastern European performance art was the duty of intellectuals and networkers, that we call guardians. Therefore, through exploring narrative shifts of performance art, the essay examines the role of guardians in the processes of shaping interpretations, discourses, and canonical understandings, while actively engaging in creative practice. Tracing historical encounters of performance as theory and artistic practice, the focus is on the creative and discursive processes of knowledge formation with examples from Czechoslovakia and Hungary. With the help of the case studies, the essay outlines a research method, which combines performative creativity and interrelationality and, therefore, can open up ways of discovering multiple perspectives, hegemonies, and fluidity of narratives, while addressing how historical knowledge has been created and (per)formed in and outside of Central and Eastern Europe.

## Keywords

performance art; Petr Rezek; László Beke; historiography; Tibor Hajas; Karel Miler; phenomenology; Buddhism

**https://doi.org/10.5817/AEC2024-4-2**

# Constructing Czechoslovak and Hungarian Performance Art History: Guardians and Narrative Shifts[1]

**Katalin Cseh-Varga / Kornélia Deres**

## Methodological Introduction

On 18 May 1980, the Hungarian artist Tibor Hajas (1946–1980) performed his piece *Vigil* (*Virrasztás*) at Bercsényi College in Budapest. At the time of the event, Hajas was already known as a poet, conceptual artist, and video and performance artist, and he later became a key reference point for Hungarian performance art. Most of his works focused on the body as a raw material to be (trans)formed, and they explored the mediated experience of presence and consciousness. In *Vigil,* the performer's body oscillated between agency and vulnerability as he performed various movements and interacted with the environment. Unlike many other pieces by Hajas, it was performed in front of large audiences.[2] Both in terms of symbols and materials, the performance used various elements, including a pool of water on the ground, a German shepherd puppy, and the blindfolded Hajas, who destroyed a glowing light bulb and dropped it into the water. Later, two assistants – István Csömöri and János Vető – injected Hajas with a sleep-inducing drug and carried his inanimate body back and forth across the floor, while the performer's pre-recorded voice echoed out from loudspeakers.[3]

*Vigil* turned out to be one of the last performances by Hajas due to his sudden death in a car crash in the summer of 1980. Nevertheless, in looking at early reactions to *Vigil* and at the later interpretations which emerged around Hajas's oeuvre through research articles, essays, exhibitions, and roundtable discussions, it becomes apparent how the image of Hajas as a heroic artist ready for self-destruction changed over the decades. It developed, first, into that of an active countercultural actor in the paralysing atmosphere of late socialist Hungary, and then, ultimately, he assumed the guise of a theoretically self-conscious artist engaged in Buddhist philosophy. These shifts were intertwined with changing dynamics in the interpretation of the material and discursive remnants of his life and oeuvre through acts of elimination and prioritization. Hajas's case is just one example of how event-based art in settled state socialisms has gone through various turns in perception, very often including the shift from a narrative of countercultural art and political opposition to one of subversive

1) This essay is partly the outcome of the Hertha-Firnberg project T 1074-G26 Behind the Artwork. Thinking Art Against the Cold War's Polarity (supported by the FWF. Austrian Science Fund).

2) See the photo collection at Artpool: https://artpool.hu/kontextus/eset/e800518.html; and János Vető's slide show: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_BRBZkaDBnI

3) See Tibor Hajas, 'Virrasztás. Performance (forgatókönyv és fotók)' [Vigil. Performance (Script and Photos)], *Bercsényi*, 2, 1980, 17–23.; Annamária Szőke, 'Műleírás: Virrasztás' [Description: Vigil], *C3 Video Archive and Media Art Collection Catalogue*, 30 November 1998, http://dokumentumtar.c3.hu/lindex.php?l=hu&id=1496&mid=1090&dokumentacio=1&dosszie=0&kiallitas=1; András Müllner, 'Saját hangra?' [A Voice of One's Own ?], *Apertúra*, Autumn 2010, https://www.apertura.hu/2010/osz/mullner/

art and its uneasy co-existence with the cultural directives of the regimes. For this reason, it is important to examine closely how narrative changes influence the understanding of performance art in Central and Eastern Europe. In order to observe and analyse these discursive frameworks, this essay investigates practising artists whose work aligned closely with broader intellectual currents (in the case of Hajas, Zen Buddhism) and art theoreticians whose thinking was inspired by an involvement with (performance) art practice. By focusing on the interconnection of intellectual and creative-performative elements of Central and Eastern European performance art, on the side of both artists and thinkers, an *interrelational turn* in today's art historiography emerges. This turn is motivated by a methodical impulse in art historical research to carefully elaborate on 'glocal' (ie. global and local) socio-cultural contexts, motivations and ideas that were the driver of art production in the Cold War's split worlds. This focus on the interrelation of these elements also includes an interventionist discussion of shifting and persistent views in art history writing.

This essay is an appeal to art historians and performance studies scholars to consciously integrate multiple angles and contexts in the investigation of their historical subjects and conduct an examination which builds on performance art's reflexive, questioning attitude. Histories of performance art can combine various layers of performativity. In this context, 'performativity' means a form of enactment, an action that transforms its subject and changes everything involved in a circle of action and reaction. This can lead to the redefinition of semiotic and hermeneutic dichotomies in the what (subject), the how (method), and the why (question) of their research.[4] A focus on performativity helps to build on an embodied, transformative, process-based, and participatory understanding of both artistic and research practice where creation and reception cannot be separated entirely. Artists' and intellectuals' archives, if studied closely, preserve a dynamic, non-linear history which is in part carried by the bodies and minds involved in previous performances.[5] Performance art, when practised, has the potential to generate radical, embodied responses to lived reality, just as it has the potential to make critical comments on the production of history. Critical commentary, alongside such radical and embodied responses, has the potential to impel art historiography towards critical awareness and a productive non-linearity.

Alongside performance, the late 1960s in Central and Eastern Europe saw the emergence of institutional critique and creative, immersive models of cultural institutions. One example could be the work of the Polish art historian, critic, curator, and organizer Jerzy Ludwiński, who introduced the Museum of Contemporary Art (Muzeum Sztuki Aktualnej) in Łódź as an open system that negated a 'formal and hierarchical organizational structure' and introduced a liaison between scholars and practising artists who mutually enriched, influenced each others' works.[6] In line with such developments, the conduct of art historical research and writing changed as well. Michael Hatt and Charlotte Klonk wrote in 2006 that it was during

4) Cf. Erika Fischer-Lichte, *Ästhetik des Performativen,* Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2004.

5) Kata Krasznahorkai, 'The Storming of the Authoritarian Archive – Doing Performance Archiving as an Artistic Act,' in Sandra Frimmel, Tomáš Glanc, Sabine Hänsgen, Katalin Krasznahorkai, Nastasia Louveau, Dorota Sajewska and Sylvia Sasse, eds, *Doing Performance Art History,* 2020, Open Apparatus Book I., not paginated, https://doi.org/10.17892/app.2020.0000.

6) Magdalena Ziolkowska, 'Introduction,' in *Notes from the Future of Art. Selected Writings by Jerzy Ludwinski,* Magdalena Ziolkowska, ed., Eindhoven: Van Abbemuseum Public Research #01, 2007, 9–11 (here 10).

the 1970s when art history started accepting that artworks are strongly determined by the political, social, economic and cultural circumstances under which they emerged.[7] What we propose in the present essay is *a fruitful combination of performative creativity and interrelationality*. Performative creativity feeds from the embodied processing of intellectual thought and history writing, while, by 'interrelationality,' we mean the careful examination of the theoretical, cultural, social and political contexts under which performance artworks came into being. The methodological framework that grows out of this combination promises a simultaneous and contrasting investigation of historical context, intellectual backgrounds, friendships, performance art histories, material remains, archival work, and a live history told by guardians and their close circles. Under the term 'guardians' we mean key figures who were the primary actors involved in shaping and introducing theories, histories, and sometimes even the aesthetics of performance art, and inscribing them into canons of art historiography and criticism.

The proposed method can be seen as an encouragement for scholars to absorb performative creativity and to engage more deeply with the history of ideas and intellectual currents' presence and the infiltration of ideas in the field of performance art. The method we propose can perhaps be also seen as an attempt to write (performance) art history in a format different from the North Atlantic paradigm, as described by James Elkins.[8] Performativity in art history erodes rigid disciplinary frames and may be an inventive step beyond barriers of positivist art history and canonized narratives. Additionally, we aim to give readers an insight into how narratives of performance art history changed over time and how researchers can be aware and attentive and position themselves within (or against?) past and currently trending narratives. As narratives are dominant interpretations and theoretical frameworks in the history of art which define the position of Central and Eastern European performance art in state socialist regimes (like the framing of performance art during state socialism as politically oppositional, clandestine or isolated), we need to look beyond publications that may cement such framings. Scholars of the history of the art of the period and the region should challenge these narratives with reflection and a multifocal, creative investigation that integrates the study of archival materials and oral history interviews with the activation of performance art's archival remains.

The present essay is a preliminary and not entirely completed testing ground for this methodical approach. First and foremost, our intention, with this method, is to disclose processes of historicization by going back to performance art's intellectual triggers and to reactivate them for past and present creativity and interrelationality. The key concern driving our historiographic and methodological revisions to twentieth-century cultural histories is the wish to understand the motivations behind the histories presented or written by guardians

7) Michael Hatt and Charlotte Klonk, *Art History: A Critical Introduction to Its Methods,* Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006.

8) '... scholars who are familiar with the protocols, narratives, forms of argument, modes of citation, standards of evidence, historiographic precedents, publication standards, conference etiquette, use of theory, sense of neighboring disciplines, range of references, current interpretive methods, principal scholars, and modes of employment and advancement, of what I call North Atlantic art history.' James Elkins, 'Afterword,' in Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann, Catherine Dossin and Béatrice Joyeux-Prunel, eds, *Circulations in the Global History of Art*, Farnham/ Burlington: Ashgate, 2015, 203–229 (here 210).

and disclosing these motivations as creative projects, while simultaneously disclosing artistic projects as intellectual endeavours.

Therefore, this study acts within a methodological framework that is transparent about archival hurdles, narrative detours, hierarchies in performance art itself, untold stories, and silenced evidence. Taking up the thoughts of Amelia Jones, we argue that revisiting historicizations of performance requires a closer look at the circumstances under which a performance came into being and how changing circumstances affected its interpretation. Jones meditated on a performance art history that is inclusive of discrepancies and continuities in regard to historical detail and transforming memories and histories.[9] Building on Jones's concept, we take each step in the construction of narratives into account, including the situation from where (and by whom!) observations and investigations were made and (hi)stories were (re)told in order to take a potentially different path.

This article investigates the ways in which Eastern and Central European performances were (and are) treated and written about, both in the past and the present. This focus enables the establishment of a critical understanding of how accounts – and the image of art and culture under state socialism – have been formed through practices of selection and narration over time. We will challenge these narratives with creativity coming from practising artists' intellectual involvement and art thinkers' artistic engagement expanded by a close up into the historic material related to both.

The essay first provides a short historical overview of performance research narratives in Central and Eastern Europe, in particular, Hungary and the former Czechoslovakia including the methodological challenges of how these narratives have been shaped. Over the course of the 1970s and 1980s socialist Hungary experienced fluctuating, nuanced political control over art. It developed a socialist modernity that leant both towards the capitalist world and towards the Soviet Union.[10] This oscillation and a permissive cultural politics allowed for relative artistic freedoms and cooperations. In Czechoslovakia, a pluralist culture flourished during the 1960s, lasting until the end of that decade when so-called 'Normalisation' swept the country after the Soviet invasion of 1968, ending the 'Prague Spring' reforms by the Czechoslovak government.[11] After that, most nonconformist art, including performance art, went 'underground' and existed, but was no longer officially supported.[12] The essay focuses

9) Amelia Jones, 'Unpredictable Temporalities: The Body and Performance,' in Gunhild Borggreen and Rune Gade, eds, *Performing Archives / Archives of Performance*, Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum Press, University of Copenhagen, 2013, 53–72.

10) Edit Sasvári, 'Autonómia és kettős beszéd a hatvanas-hetvenes években' [Autonomy and Doublespeak in the Sixties and Seventies], in Edit Sasvári, Sándor Hornyik and Hedvig Turai, eds, *A kettős beszéden innen és túl. Művészet Magyarországon 1956–1980*, Budapest: Vince Kiadó, 2018, 9–17; Sándor Hornyik, 'A szocialista realizmus reformja. A keleti, szovjet típusú modernizáció és a nyugati modernizmus találkozásai,' [The Reform of Socialist Realism: The Meeting of Eastern, Soviet-Type Modernization and Western Modernism], in *A kettős beszéden innen és túl. Művészet Magyarországon 1956–1980*, 113–135.

11) '... the Party's first secretary by a fellow Slovak, Gustav Husák [...] presided over a harsh political crackdown that would set the tone for the two decades following the invasion, years that came to be known as normalizace—a term that captures the mixture of ironic resignation, boredom, and often despair that characterized the 1970s for many people, in particular for the writers, artists, and other intellectuals who had taken advantage of the newly creative public life of the 1960s.' Jonathan Bolton, *Worlds of Dissent. Charter 77, The Plastic People of the Universe, and Czech Culture under Communism*, Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 2012, 12.

12) Andrea Bátorová, *The Art of Contestation. Performative practices in the 1960s and 1970s in Slovakia*, Bratislava: Comenius University, 2019.

on two case studies: the various, transforming past and present interpretations of works by the Budapest-based artist Tibor Hajas and the Prague-based artist Karel Miler (1940-). These artists have been chosen here as exemplary for their common featured interest in Zen Buddhism. Central and Eastern Europe, from the 1960s well into the 1980s, was particularly rich in artists and performers with intellectual and philosophical interests: the Polish artist Maria Pinińska-Bereś had an ambivalent relationship with Western feminist theory,[13] while members of the Romanian Sigma Group (formerly Group 1+1+1) were enthusiasts of cybernetics, bionics and psychology.[14]

One main task of this essay is to examine the performative character of historical narratives, which is dominated by various acts in and outside the archives such as structuring, taking side notes, exhibiting ephemera with comments and individual interpretations, building discourses, and/or (re)circulating knowledge. The construction of narratives of Central and Eastern European performance art was traditionally regarded as the 'duty' of intellectuals and networkers who were close to the respective art scenes. For this analysis we have picked two figures who in the 1970s and 1980s interpreted the work of Hajas and Miler, and were close to the people and sites of Hungarian and Czech performance art: over the course of the 1970s and 1980s: László Beke (1944–2022) and Petr Rezek (1948–2022). These two, whom we describe as 'guardians' of performance art, and will be discussed in greater detail in this essay, created a circuit of discursive paths and knowledge production that was often neatly connected to performance artists and their dematerialised artwork. Accordingly, we analyse the role of guardians in the processes of shaping interpretations, discourses, and canonical understandings, while actively engaging in creative practices. The essay outlines how Beke and Rezek influenced the field by creating narratives and intertwining them with contemporary performance practices. Interference between critical and creative work can offer a new understanding of guardians' vital role in historization processes. The closing part of the essay will summarise the advantages of narrative revision and a multifocal context-bound analysis in alignment with the investigation of discursive and creative practices. The interrelational approach is not only a multiperspectival method, but one which can access historical works of performance art as frameworks for the history of ideas in the arts and as grounds on which researchers can critically retrace and reconstruct how (political) systems shape historiographies. The challenge of this essay is to make these pivotal elements visible and to begin working on them.

13) Agata Jakubowska, *Sztuka i emancypacja kobiet w socjalistycznej Polsce. Przypadek Marii Pinińskiej-Bereś* [Art and the Emancipation of Women in Socialist Poland: The Case of Maria Pinińska-Bereś], Warsaw: Wydawnictwa Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, 2022, 12.

14) Attila Tordai-S., 'The Sigma Experience,' in Marta Dziewanska, Dieter Roelstraete and Abigail Winograd, eds, *The Other Trans-Atlantic: Kinetic and Op Art in Eastern Europe and Latin America,* Warsaw: Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw, 2017, 181–196 (here 182).

## Narrative shifts in Central and Eastern European performance art: Tibor Hajas and Karel Miler

The historiography of the exceptionally intense and active event-based art scene of the 1970s and 1980s in Central Europe has gone through various narrative turns in recent years. Throughout the 1990s and well into the early 2000s, most of the performances that had taken place in the state socialist setting were regarded as acts of rebellion, or at least as subversions of the Cold War status quo and the regulative regimes behind the Iron Curtain. One of the first comprehensive volumes on event-based art during and after state socialism, *Body and the East: from the 1960s to the Present* (1999), kicks off with a sweeping and isolating statement: 'art in the East, particularly in the sixties and seventies, acquired a special utopian dimension, resulting in the emergence of a special type of bohemian artist marked by a heroic individual stance.'[15] While the often critical attitude of performance artists towards hierarchies cannot be completely denied,[16] a shift can certainly be observed towards more differentiated narratives of 'oppositional' performances.[17]

The process of narrative shifts that affected East and Central European art in general affected performance art too. According to Maja and Reuben Fowkes, in the 1990s, interpretations of Eastern European art tended to respond primarily to the West, while the next decade was marked by looking at local art histories, which then started to expand towards transnational connections.[18] While *Body and the East* stressed how limited the international connections of (performance) artists in state socialisms were, there is currently a boom in publications, conferences, and research projects proving the opposite.[19] Knowledge of event-based art practices in Cold War decades has become more dispersed, and currently focuses more on (border-crossing) collaborations, uncovers archival as well as research gaps, and revisits

15) Zdenka Badovinac, 'Body and the East,' in *Body and the East: from the 1960s to the Present*, Cambridge and London: The MIT Press, 1999, 15–16.

16) Corinna Kühn, *Medialisierte Körper. Performances und Aktionen der Neoavantgarden Ostmitteleuropas in den 1970er Jahren,* Cologne: Böhlau, 2020.

17) See for instance the following books on the complex counterdiscourses articulated by female Polish artists' body-reliant works: Karoline Majewska-Güde, *Ewa Partum's Artistic Practice: An Atlas of Continuity in Different Locations*, Bielefeld: transcript, 2021; Jakubowska, *Sztuka i emancypacja kobiet w socjalistycznej Polsce*.

18) Zsuzsa László, 'On East European Art: Positions we can stand behind and speak from – Interview with Maja and Reuben Fowkes from Translocal Institute,' *mezosfera.org*, October 2017, http://mezosfera.org/on-east-european-art-positions-we-can-stand-behind-and-speak-from/.

19) See e.g. Antje Kempe, Beáta Hock and Marina Dmitrieva, eds, *Universal – International – Global: Art Historiographies of Socialist Eastern Europe*, Vienna and Cologne: Böhlau, 2023; Beata Hock and Anu Allas, eds, *Globalizing East European Art Histories. Past and Present*, New York and London: Routledge, 2018; Jérôme Bazin, Pascal Dubourg Glatigny and Piotr Piotrowski, 'Introduction: Geography of Internationalism' in Bazin, Dubourg Glatigny and Piotrowski, eds, *Art beyond Borders. Artistic Exchange in Communist Europe [1945 – 1989]*, Budapest and New York: CEU Press, 2016, 1–28; Bojana Videkanic, *Nonaligned Modernism. Socialist Postcolonialist Aesthetics in Yugoslavia, 1945–1985*, Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2020; Caterina Preda, *Art and Politics in Modern Dictatorships. A Comparison of Chile and Romania*, London/New York/Shanghai: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017; *ARTMargins*, Special Section: Artists' Networks in Latin America and Eastern Europe, 1: 2–3, June-October 2012. See also the following research projects and conferences: *Resonances: Regional and Transregional Cultural Transfer in the Art of the 1970s*. Artpool Art Research Center Budapest / Comenius University Bratislava / Academic Research Center of the Academy of Fine Arts Prague / Piotr Piotrowski Center for Research on East-Central Europe at the Adam Mickiewicz University, 2021–2024; *Die globale DDR: eine transkulturelle Kunstgeschichte (1949–1990)* conference, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen and Technische Universität Dresden, June 9–11, 2022; *Socialist Exhibition Cultures. International Exhibitions in the Socialist World, 1950–1991*, 2021-, research project and workshop series, https://socialistexhibitions.com/.

materials published by performance art's gatekeepers. It looks for genealogies of embodiment and it complicates the relationship between experimental non-conformist aesthetics and the state, with its socialist ideology-in-practice.[20] The most recent narrative turn's challenge is perhaps a methodological one that is currently mapping the (documented and untold) circumstances under which artworks were produced and relates both artworks and their context of production to the previous and present trends in historiography.[21]

Following this challenge, it seems crucial to stress 'the importance of an artwork's specific spatial and political context (its situation).'[22] Under the aegis of the term 'interrelationality,' Amelia Jones suggests 'that we need to look at each project individually as it enacts and affects specific bodies within the complexities of its unfolding over time in particular spaces.'[23] The present histories of performance art in state socialisms are the outcome of multiple perspectives and research approaches that exist in the field of Central and Eastern European Studies. We suggest a thorough analysis of the evolution of how evidence, on which histories and narratives are based, was previously made, considering the position(s) from where those observations and investigations were made. The following paragraphs reveal the transformations of narratives in the case of the emblematic performance artists Tibor Hajas and Karel Miler.

Regarding *Vigil*, for example, the previously-described performance by Hajas, one of the first respondents was the art historian and critic Lóránd Hegyi, who argued that the piece powerfully expressed a sense of 'existential loneliness.'[24] In 1980, the Hungarian art historian and networker László Beke interpreted Hajas's artistic practice as a metaphor for life: through various flashes and glowing images the discrepancies of art and the absolute and even the battle between good and evil could be seen.[25] This narration of Hajas's works as an existential search in a world of lies was strengthened by most posthumous exhibitions, notably the 1987 event at the Museum of St Stephen in Székesfehérvár and the 1997 exhibition at the Ernst Museum of Budapest. In 1990 the Anderson Art Gallery in the US opened a retrospective on Hajas's works under the title *Nightmareworks*, which sought to connect Hajas's practice to those by Western European and US-based artists (e.g. Viennese actionists and Chris Burden) thereby strengthening the narrative of a confrontational activist whose pivotal works sought to grasp freedom in a world of limitations.[26] Furthermore, in 2005, the Museum Ludwig in Budapest hosted an exhibition dedicated to Hajas's oeuvre titled *Emergency Landing*

20) For instance, Maja Fowkes, *The Green Bloc: Neo-Avant-Garde Art and Ecology under Socialism*, Budapest and New York: CEU Press, 2015; Emese Kürti, *Screaming Hole. Poetry, Sound and Action as Intermedia Practice in the Work of Katalin Ladik*, Budapest: acb ResearchLab, 2017; Katalin Cseh-Varga, *The Hungarian Avant-Garde and Socialism: Art of the Second Public Sphere*. London, Oxford, New York, New Delhi and Sydney: Bloomsbury, 2023.

21) This challenge has been recognized by other scholars too: *What is to be Done? Methodological Challenges to Art Historical Research in Central and Eastern Europe*, conference, ICMA – The Institute for Multidisciplinary Research in the Arts, 'George Enescu' National University of Arts, Iasi, October 12–13, 2023.

22) Jones, 'Unpredictable Temporalities,' 63.

23) Jones, 'Unpredictable Temporalities,' 68.

24) Lóránt Hegyi, 'Erdély – Hajas – Legéndy – Pauer. Alternatív művészet és a művészet státusza' [Erdély – Hajas – Legéndy – Pauer: Alternative Art and the Status of Art], *Bercsényi 28–30*, 2, 1980, 9.

25) László Beke, 'A performance és Hajas Tibor' [Performance and Tibor Hajas], *Mozgó világ*, 10, 1980, 98–112.

26) John P. Jacob, 'Recalling Hajas,' in *Nightmare Works: Tibor Hajas*, Steven High, ed, Richmond, VA: Anderson Art Gallery, 1990, https://www.c3.hu/~ligal/CafeHajas.htm.

(*Kényszerleszállás*), which also stressed the position of the performer within the Kádár regime as a lonely and conscious offspring of the Viennese actionists and the happening actors in Cologne and Düsseldorf.[27] This account can be seen as exemplifying the above-mentioned phase of turning towards the West for interpretative frames. The reading of Hajas's artistic practice offered a story of a pure artist who wanted to break away from all ruling traditions and socialist compromises, while presenting the 'physical and intellectual risks of freedom without self-interest.'[28]

However, back in 2005, at a conference dedicated to Hajas's oeuvre held at Eötvös College in Budapest, Csaba Marczinka gave a paper on the influence of Eastern philosophies and metaphysical works on Hajas's texts, claiming that Hajas should not be regarded as a politically oppositional artist or as a *samizdat* poet, but rather as a metaphysical writer.[29] This shift in perception was strengthened by more recent interpretations and exhibitions such as *On the other side of in-between existence* (*A köztes lét túloldalán*) staged in 2019 at the Ferenc Hopp Museum of Asiatic Arts in Budapest, which offered a new narrative layer embracing Hajas's connection to both Eastern philosophies and meditation practices.[30] In fact, *Vigil* used many motifs of the circulation of body, soul, and death which seemed to have been inspired by Buddhism. In addition, earlier pieces by Hajas also showed a clear commitment to this topic, such as the photo action series *Tumo* (1979)[31] and the performance and photo documentation work *Chöd* (1979). Both terms come from the book *Tibetan Mysteries* (*Tibeti misztériumok*) and they refer to body and meditation practices.[32] Hajas's interest in Buddhism originated from a 1944 translation by the Hungarian 'philosopher Béla Hamvas who re-edited the 1935 edition of *Tibetan Yoga and Secret Doctrines*, a book which introduced Hungarian readers to the entire belief and dogma system of the Tibetan Buddhist Lamaism.'[33] Reinterpreting the original edition, Hamvas's Hungarian version emphasized two Tibetan mysteries: the practice of inner fire development (Tummo) and a drastic visualization practice on the ego's liquidation (Chöd).[34] These were terms and practices that underpinned Hajas's works between 1978 and 1980.

According to Béla Kelényi, curator of the 2019 exhibition, in *Chöd* Hajas reinterpreted a specific meditation technique during which the ascetic offered his own body to otherworldly

27) Veronika Baksa-Soós, 'Kényszerleszállás. Hommage à Hajas Tibor' [Emergency Landing: Hommage à Tibor Hajas], *Catalogue of Ludwig Múzeum*, Budapest, 2005.

28) Károly Szűcs, 'Test és kép' [Body and Image], *Balkon*, 6, 2005 (URL: http://www.balkon.hu/archiv/balkon05_06/02szucs.html).

29) See: https://archive.org/details/hri_htk_mp3/20051022-hajas-szekcio2.mp3

30) See Gabriella Schuller's review of the 2019 exhibition: Gabriella Schuller, 'Hajas és Hamvas' [Hajas and Hamvas], *Balkon*, 4, 2019, 10–14.

31) The photos of Tumo show Hajas's body with prepared and painted symbols, as well as various medical tools such as a suture needle, gauze bandage, infusion lines, and injection needles.

32) These aim at terminating attachment to the body and the ego, and letting the soul escape the body. 'A closer look into Hajas's intellectual interests at the time and his private relationship with performance artist János Szirtes reveal the organic connectedness of *Vigil* to the blurred line between those who are alive and those who are dead.' Cseh-Varga, *The Hungarian Avant-Garde and Socialism*, 123.

33) Cseh-Varga, *The Hungarian Avant-Garde and Socialism*, 123. An American anthropologist Yelling Evans-Wentz originally authored the book, but did not understand Tibetan and therefore worked with three translators.

34) Csaba Králl, 'A halál kikényszerített közelsége: Interjú Kelényi Bélával' [The Forced Proximity of Death: An Interview with Béla Kelémyi], *Színház*, June 2019, 17–19.

creatures as a bloody feast, cutting himself off from life as material delusion.[35] For instance, the performer drank blue paint and then vomited; then, his body, deprived of agency, was put in a pose of utter vulnerability. Meanwhile, a textual montage of Hamvas's *Tibetan Mysteries* could be heard from a tape recorder. Besides *Chöd*, '*Vigil* also has to be understood in this Buddhist context of the separation of body and soul, the first intense experience of which Hajas underwent while in prison at the age of 19: "I can imagine that a person's final moment in life may be longer than his entire life. I have come close to this myself. For this reason, I am interested in this, and in its preparation, much more." The performance invited its audience to observe and perhaps join in the metaphysical journey of Hajas's tightrope walk between life and death.'[36]

Unlike Hajas, the Czech artist, art historian, and translator Karel Miler belonged to performers in Prague's vibrant action art scene of the 1970s, who, until recently, have not received much close attention. Indeed, even with the 2014 publication of Pavlína Morganová's seminal book *Czech Action Art*,[37] this situation has not changed much: for a long time, Miler was regarded as 'just' a name in a long list of other Czech and Slovak experimental artists such as Petr Štembera, Jiří Valoch, Jiří Kocman, Alex Mlynarčík, Jan Mlčoch, and Stano Filko. While these personalities became part of the canon of East and Central European performance history, Miler was apparently restricted to what his photo-performances suggested, which was silence. Interestingly, this silence may continue even with the aim of historicizing and reconstructing narrative turns, for in 1979 Miler quitted his artistic activity in order to devote himself strictly to academic and curatorial work at the National Gallery in Prague.[38] Five years ago he refused to participate in interviews regarding his performances based on the argument that 'his background is Zen Buddhism which communicates with silence.'[39] The extant photographs of Miler's actions should talk for themselves, however, they should also be open for (respectful) interpretation.

When looking at Miler's photo-performances, one can see the following: carefully composed scenes with minimalistic action frozen in a single image, or in a series of images. The body's position in relation to its surroundings is crucial: either a geometric composition or how the artist's body is detached or immersed into its urban or natural environment can be seen. In *Identification* (*Identifikace*) (1973) Miler is captured when, curled up in a ball, he falls from a pile of concrete panels stacked several metres high, and is relentlessly pulled downward. In the background and on the periphery, socialist-style housing blocks known from Eastern European folk republican scenery can be recognised. Or, the action *Sun – Sun* (*Slunce – Slunce*) (1979) that explores the relation between the Sun, body and Earth in a series of four photographs could be picked out. In it, the artist demonstrates humans,' and perhaps their souls,' movement of the body on a vertical axis between celestial bodies.

35) Králl, 'A halál kikényszerített közelsége,' 19.

36) Cseh-Varga, *The Hungarian Avant-Garde and Socialism*, 123.

37) Pavlína Morganová, *Czech Action Art: Happenings, Actions, Events, Land Art, Body Art and Performance Art Behind the Iron Curtain*, Prague: Karolinum Press, Charles University, 2014.

38) Luba Kmeťová – Adam Drda, 'Ukončete to, radím vám! / s Karlem Milerem hovoří Luba Kmeťová a Adam Drda' [End it, I advise you! Luba Kmeťová and Adam Drda in conversation with Karel Miler], *Revolver revue*, 109, 2017, 37–69.

39) Pavlína Morganová, email to K. Cseh-Varga, 22 April 2019.

The first reflections on Miler's photo-actions were often presented as conversations with close colleagues, and were frequently circulated in semi- or unofficial publication formats. In a 1979 interview with Karel Srp, Miler mentioned his philosophical approach to the spoken word and explained how it influenced his art.[40] The Czech philosopher and art theorist Petr Rezek also documented his talks with Czech artists in his book *Body, Object and Reality in Contemporary Art*. 'A meeting with action artists,' an essay in the book on the work of Petr Štembera, Jan Mlčoch and Miler, is a phenomenological interpretation of their performances as dreams.[41] It is an example of the fruitful liaison of performance theory and practice, which will be touched upon in the second part of this essay. A 1978 article by Helena Kontová and Jaroslav Anděl revisited the use of the photographic medium in contemporary Czechoslovak art, investigating the reasons why Miler explored the potentials of photography in processual art.[42] This selection of early reflections on Miler's actions shows a richness of perspectives mostly produced by an intimate circle of friends and colleagues that spilled out at the time into internationally recognized magazines, such as *Flash Art*.[43]

From the mid-1980s until the mid-1990s, there was a pause in scholarly investigation of Czech action art of the 1970s. Almost in line with the identity-seeking wave of East and Central European art described by Maja Fowkes, there was a recognisable urge to catalogue experimental art across the Czech and Slovak lands, often with a focus on how these actions reacted to the politics of state socialism. The first retrospective exhibition of Karel Miler's work between 1970 and 1980, held in Prague City Gallery in 1997, consciously brought the socio-political background of performance into the discussion.[44] The historicization of the 1990s (and early 2000s), no matter how comprehensive it attempted to be, rarely addressed the intellectual influences, international networks, personal and existential difficulties, gate-opening friendships, or artistic inspirations in detail.

In the past few years, research approaches have become more differentiated and researchers have started addressing the actors, philosophies, media, and spaces Miler was connected to in the 1970s. This has included a topography of the venues where he undertook and displayed his actions, an in-depth exploration of photography's connection to performance including thorough references to Zen Buddhism and phenomenology, and a reconstruction of how Miler's work actually appeared in *Flash Art*. But, in aiming to understand how his photo-performances came into being, an even broader view is needed, in which sources and their presentation and performances are in dialogue with each other. An interrelational approach would also include the status and reception of Zen Buddhism in 'normalised' Czechoslovak culture, the knowledge of contemporary art and philosophy which circulated in the Prague National Gallery's offices where Miler worked,

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40) Karel Srp, *Karel Miler: možnosti, Situace č. 2 (příloha Bulletinu Jazz)* [Karel Miler: Options, Situation no. 2 (Annex to the Jazz Bulletin)], Prague, 1979.

41) Petr Rezek, *Tělo, věc a skutečnost v současném umění* [The Body, Object, and Reality in Contemporary Art], Prague: Jazzová sekce, 1982, 97–102.

42) Helena Kontová – Jaroslav Anděl, 'ČSSR fotografija' [Photography in the ČSSR], *Spot,* 11, 1978, 7–29.

43) Perhaps the most prominent analysis of Czech action art's international distribution through the art magazine *Flash Art* is *Networking the Bloc* by Klara Kemp-Welch. See: Klara Kemp-Welch, *Networking the Bloc. Experimental Art in Eastern Europe, 1965–1981*, Cambridge, MA and London: The MIT Press, 2018, 369–383.

44) *Karel Miler, Petr Štembera, Jan Mlčoch: 1970–1980, 25. 11. 1997 – 25. 1. 1998*, exhibition curated by Karel Srp, Prague: Prague City Art Gallery / Old City Hall), 1997.

the organisation of the artist's photo archive, and understanding of the points at which intellectual impacts shaped Miler's actions.

As much as it may be tempting to follow current trends in the internationalisation of socialist culture or regarding artists ignoring the political setting of their home country, neither Hajas nor Miler can be separated from the politicised realities of state socialisms. Despite the intentions of some of the guardians of performance archives, or the wishes of the artists themselves to be viewed as apolitical subjects, most East and Central European performers had to leverage a life and culture dictated by the state. To achieve such a twist in approach, the image of what socialist culture (and politics) was actually like must be redefined. With his photo-performances, Miler practised the general behaviour of Czechoslovak people 'who showed little interest in public life and politics' and simply did not want to get involved.[45] Due to his intractable behaviour, Miler was even removed from his academic staff position, although he was able to rejoin the National Gallery as an art historian and curator.[46] Subversion may not be completely erased from the narratives on performance art during state socialism, but it has to be nuanced by individual life stories, artistic techniques, and transcultural influences.

Hajas's immersion in the mediated and re-edited Hungarian versions of Buddhist texts was combined with a radical practice of self-harm along with a conscious use of technical media as means of deconstructing presence through splitting the agonising or unconscious body and the objectified recorded voice. This split between the body and consciousness must have been in dialogue with his personal experience with the Hungarian socialist authorities and their repressive strategies, as in 1965 he was imprisoned for 14 months and then permanently banned from every college and university in Hungary.[47] The accounts of Hajas's works were determined by various guardians (László Beke and János Gát, for example) who prioritised certain interpretative frames (for instance, existential battles and performative meditations) over others (such as the questions of gender).

As has been shown here, discovering the various narratives of an artist's performances and reflecting on these narratives' knowledge-making processes can shed light on the changing understanding of the memory and afterlife of state socialist regimes and their regional art scenes. Today, we already recognize the permissive-repressive nature of real existing socialism and its complex political bargaining processes, socialist realism and internationalism received differentiated scholarly attention, yet, we do not know much about the processes shaping knowledge and theoretical work in the arts.[48] This was primarily the work of guardians who had their fair share in (performance) art production and history. A focus on guardians' archival, intellectual and creative work can offer a different angle on, and insights into state socialist culture. On the one hand, through examining cases of performance art, the following questions can be asked: what discourses of bodies were possible? how much

45) Bátorová, *The Art of Contestation*, 153.

46) Pavlína Morganová, 'There Would Be No Kovanda without Miler,' *Revista ARTA*, 20–21, 2016, 27.

47) Annamária Szőke, 'Életrajz' ('Biography'), *C3 Video Archive and Media Art Collection Catalogue*, 30 November, 1998. (URL: http://dokumentumtar.c3.hu/lindex.php?l=hu&id=1496&dok=cv&dokumentacio=1&dosszie=0&kiallitas=1).

48) An exception may be the work of Nancy Jachec: *The Philosophy and Politics of Abstract Expressionism, 1940–1960*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000, and Jachec, *Europe's Intellectuals and the Cold War. The Society of European Culture, Post-War Politics and International Relations*, London, New York and New Delhi: I. B. Tauris, 2015.

were these bodies monitored? and how invisible and visible restrictions of the past and the present can help us to present a more nuanced image of state socialisms? On the other hand, through studying the narrative shifts pertaining to performance art, agencies, hegemonies, and discursive-creative practices of historization can be closely monitored.

## Guardians and Creators of Narratives: László Beke and Petr Rezek

Speaking of performance art's narratives and their turning points over the past decades, it seems essential to identify those who stand behind various narratives. Who were the narratives' primary sources? How did they determine the most appropriate historiographical interpretations of past performances? We will continue examining the formative voices in Central and Eastern European performance art of the 1970s and 1980s. We go back in time to the first interpretations of Hungarian and Czech works of performance art and will identify and elaborate on the entanglement of theory and art practice.

We argue that in Central and Eastern Europe it was often intellectuals who responded first to performance pieces, and that their publications are the key works upon which future narrative production rests.[49] Critics, artists, art historians, friends, and family members, the so-called guardians, not only create narratives, but they ensure that the archives and memories of past performances from the 1960s onwards are being kept intact. While this essay considers gatekeepers, advocates, and caretakers alike to be guardians, there are slight differences among them. Gatekeepers dominate the (past) discourse and history of performance art, and their publications remain the primary references for the region's action-based art. Advocates similarly promote certain narratives, and often have impressive networks which they can use to share their knowledge, yet their international visibility is lower than that of gatekeepers. Caretakers are the often overlooked actors who care for archival remains (the remnants of past performances), and also produce mostly local theoretical notes on performance art; as such, they are the key primary contacts in accessing ephemera[50] Tracing guardians' biographies, motivations, collection procedures, and intimate relationships with the making of performance art *per se*, can lay the foundation for a critical and non-linear genealogy of performance art history in the region.

Besides reconstructing the path of how performance art history's narratives shifted from a politicized subject to an analysis of regional or transnational exchanges, a thorough look into archival strategies and guardians' histories may offer something even more substantial. During the 1960s, 70s and 80s, the intellectual production around / with / in performance art was characterized by diversity, and the ways it was documented and theorized often existed hand-in-hand with the artistic production. Many figures of Central and Eastern European art

49) This interview conducted by the Hungarian art historian and networker László Beke, for instance, represents an important attempt to understand and contextualize the first Hungarian happening of 1966: 'Beszélgetés Szentjóby Tamással: Hangszalagra vette Beke László, 1971. március 11-én' [Interview with Tamás Szentjóby: Taped by László Beke on 11 March 1971], *Jelenlét*, 1–2, 1989, 252–262.

50) The role of archival caretakers is often taken on by the former, often likewise artistically active partners of artists who passed away. In Central and Eastern Europe we have seen a number of examples in which archival caretakers are women, as it is the case for artist Zofia Kulik who produced a series of films on her work in and with the KwieKulik archive entitled *Cultivating the Archive*.

were forced to leave the path of officially promoted aesthetics and to act as active promoters, organisers, and creators of experimental tendencies. One can see a fusion of roles and openness on the part of guardians towards new form and experiment. The two exemplary cases of Petr Rezek and László Beke will help demonstrate here the entanglement of *thinking* and *doing* performance during the 1970s. We have already seen that both Beke and Rezek played substantial roles in shaping the understanding of Hajas's and Miler's oeuvre, and we will disclose their input in inspiring the original performance aesthetics and show that they were performing actions themselves.

Petr Rezek was not only an early witness to performances by Štembera, Miler, and Mlčoch in the 1970s, he was also their collaborator, who even provided a location for Miler's retrospective in 1977.[51] Rezek, an expert in phenomenological psychology and phenomenology, was close to the existential phenomenologist Jan Patočka, who studied directly from Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger. In the 1970s Rezek provided a theoretical armature for the work of a number of intellectually highly sensitive artists. Rezek regularly visited the offices of Štembera and Miler, who in the 1970s worked at the National Gallery in Prague.[52] It seems that these personalities formed an intellectual hub and were constantly looking for chances to exchange and broaden their knowledge. He turned his conversations and notes with the three performers into a thorough analysis of their actions, in which he combined his expertise in philosophy, psychology, and aesthetics.[53] Additionally, he produced self-published volumes on contemporary art both from Czechoslovakia and abroad. The *samizdat* publication series, published between 1978 and 1984 and consisting of 40 issues, demonstrates Rezek's comprehensive knowledge of contemporary international art trends.[54] The themes he touched upon in the series stretch from Fluxus to artist books and body art. His information network can be compared to that of László Beke, since between 1976 and 1981 he gave mostly unofficial lectures on American pop art, conceptual art and minimal art which were most likely transferred into the aforementioned *samizdat* series and other publications.[55] Rezek's 1976 book *Philosophical Notes on Recent Art*, with a lengthy chapter on Czech action art, was officially published in 1982 as *Body, Object and Reality in Contemporary Art*. This important monograph offered an in-depth investigation of the body's role in contemporary art – an interest triggered and intensified by his direct encounters with the Czech action artists.[56]

51) Pavlína Morganová, 'Bytové výstavy: médium neoficiálního umění sedmdesátých až osmdesátých let' [Apartment exhibitions: a medium of unofficial art from the 1970s until the 1980s], *Sešit pro umění, teorii a příbuzné zóny*, 25, 2018, 72–97.

52) Kemp-Welch, *Networking the Bloc*, 373.

53) Rezek, *Tělo, věc a skutečnost v současném umění*, 95–102.

54) This publication series was basically a reader with summaries and translations on art styles, genres, -isms and personalities usually inaccessible to general audiences in Czechoslovakia of the time due to political restrictions. Topics included: Vito Acconci, artist books, Joseph Beuys, Body Art, John Cage, conceptual art, Fluxus, Happening, Dick Higgins, Christo, Milan Knižak, Land Art, Minimal Art, Hermann Nitsch, Performance, Frank Stella and Donald Judd, Wolf Vostell, Andy Warhol. Self-publications like these were usually circulated in small circles, thus expanding the public spheres offered by the respective socialist regimes. The series can today be found at the Research Centre of the Czech Academy of Fine Arts, Prague.

55) Petr Rezek, 'Phenomenology of Pop Art,' in *Hot Art, Cold War – Southern and Eastern European Writing on American Art, 1945–1990*, Claudia Hopkins and Iain Boyd Whyte, eds, London and New York: Routledge, 11–28.

56) Rezek, *Tělo, věc a skutečnost v současném umění*, 1982.

While Rezek himself, to the authors' knowledge, was not involved in the physical practice of performance art, his philosophy greatly benefited from working and thinking together with, for example, Štembera and Miler. This article has already approached the work of Miler as comprised of meditative, rather static, poses that resonated with his leaning towards Zen Buddhism and phenomenology and the (art) thinkers around him who boosted Miler's minimalistic performances. Although Štembera, like Miler, was passionate about these philosophical currents, his actions exposed the vulnerability of the body more explicitly.[57] Štembera's actions were less static and showed more nudity, although both artists explored similar terrain, including humans' ambivalent relationship with nature. Mlčoch's enactments were similar to those of Štembera, involving photography and a relentless treatment of the body in terms of how much it can take. Despite all the formal differences between Miler's, Mlčoch's and Štembera's actions, Rezek interpreted their meditative and highly expressive event-based art in the same light. There was mutual inspiration, too, as Czech action artists incorporated much of phenomenological thinking into their works. As much as Rezek can be described as an experimental and open philosopher, Miler, Štembera, and Mlčoch, whose work will be explored in more detail below, can also be characterised as intellectually active and practising artists. Like Rezek, they extracted interpretations of these intellectual currents into their own performances.

László Beke was even more intensely involved in embodied art practices next to his role as a guardian who theorised it. While Rezek's name rarely pops up as a reference for understanding the origins of Czech performance art, Beke is a recurring citation in discussions of Hungarian experimental art, including performance; like Rezek, though, Beke also had solid transregional and international connections. In the 1980s, Beke represented a major voice in theorizing performance art in Hungary through analyzing various works by Hajas. In addition, Beke connected the origins of the genre especially to Hajas as the initiator of performance art in the country.[58] Beke offered a narrative according to which Hajas differed from other media artists precisely because of the conscious and radical symbiosis of media forms and life praxis in his work. In addition, Beke called attention to the uneasy ethical interconnection of artistic practice and theoretical interpretation.[59]

Besides being an active critic of contemporary Hungarian performance art, Beke was actively involved in planning, executing, and theorizing art productions from the 1970s onwards.[60] The complexity of all the cultural roles Beke took on is evident in the term 'project artist' that was used to describe him, a term that not only pays tribute to the degree to which

57) This is confirmed by Hana Buddeus, who also reports that Miler attended several of Jan Patočka's lectures. See Buddeus, *Zobrazení bez reprodukce? Fotografie a performance v českém umění sedmdesátých let 20. století* [Display without Reproduction? Photography and Performance in the Czech Art of the 1970s], Prague: UMPRUM, 2017.

58) László Beke, 'A performance és Hajas Tibor,' 98.

59) Beke, 'A performance és Hajas Tibor,' 101 and 110–112.

60) Piotr Piotrowski, *Artysta miedzy rewolucja a reakcja. Studium z zakresu etycznej historii sztuki awangardy rosyjskiej* [The Artist Between Revolution and Reaction. A Study in the Ethical History of Russian Avant-Garde Art], Poznań: Adam Mickiewicz University Press, 1993; László Beke, 'CONCEPT ART AS THE POSSIBILITY OF YOUNG HUNGARIAN ARTISTS,' in Felipe Ehrenberg, Terry Wright and David Mayor, eds, *HUNGARIAN SCHMUCK*, March/April 1973. We can also reference the KEMKI Central European Research Institute of Art History's 2023 acquisition of László Beke's archive and a recent event exploring his creative-discursive engagement: World-Famous World-Archives – László Beke 80. Presentation and Discussion, KEMKI, Budapest, May 23, 2024 (URL: https://kemki.hu/en/events/details/59-World-Famous_World-Archives_Laszlo_Beke_80).

he was embedded in the drive of conceptual art, but which highlights Beke's organisational and creative skills too. [61] Beke made meetings and exhibitions happen, collected and shared artworks, and promoted artists abroad: 'Beke proactively built his connections and turned them into events.'[62] Yet, he did more than that: he also became an initiator and participant of artworks involving his own body. The creative experience of doing performance refreshed the discourses Beke implemented at the time. A couple of briefly explained examples of Beke's artistic involvements can prepare the terrain for analysing the impact of these performances on the Hungarian networker's writings.

Beke opened the second edition of the Szürenon exhibition series with a performative intervention in which he cooperated with photographer László Haris.[63] Prior to the exhibition's opening, Haris took a snapshot of Beke at the site of the show while he was reading the script he had prepared for the opening. Besides the photograph, an audio-recording captured Beke's voice too. The photograph was developed into a life-size photographic reproduction of the critic. On the day of the opening (15 September 1979) the life-size photograph was installed in the exhibition hall with a hidden loudspeaker. At the scheduled time of the opening speech Beke appeared in front of his photograph – wearing the same clothes he had worn on the day the photograph was taken. He cleared his throat to give a sign to the technician, who started to play Beke's recorded voice. Beke looked puzzled, turned around a couple of times, and realised that there was no need for him to give his speech since his role had already been taken. He then left the exhibition hall.[64]

This was not the only occasion on which Beke collaborated with artists or organised performances or actions himself. Seven years earlier, in the summer of 1972, he was the main initiator of the now iconic meeting of Hungarian, Czech, and Slovak artists at the Chapel Studio in Balatonboglár near the vacation area of Lake Balaton. Beke staged handshakes between the participants of the artists' meeting, made a dictionary installation of Czech, Hungarian, and Slovak words, and as a highlight of the get-together, realized a rope-pulling performance among all the artists.[65]

61) György Galántai, 'Hogyan tudott a művészet az életben elkezdődni? Adalékok a boglári történethez' [How could Art Begin within Life? Additions to the History of Boglár], in Júlia Klaniczay and Edit Sasvári, eds, *Törvénytelen avantgárd. Galántai György balatonboglári kápolna műterme 1970–1973* [Illegal Avantgarde: György Galántai's Chapel Studio in Balatonboglár 1970–1973], Budapest: Artpool-Balassi, 2003, 43–90 (here 70).

62) Katalin Cseh-Varga, 'Immaterial Countercartographies. Approaches to the Conceptual Art of Gábor Attalai,' in Elize Mazadiego, ed., *Charting Space: The Cartographies of Conceptual Art*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2023, 77–98, (here 84).

63) Szürenon was an iconic exhibition series of experimental and independent art in Budapest. The name 'Szürenon' is the equivalent of 'sur et non' which stands for a group of Hungarian artists who turned away from surrealism and non-figuration. Ottó Mezei, 'A Szürenon és kisugárzása' [Szürenon and its Radiation], *Ars Hungarica* 19: 1, 1991, 65–83. See also László Haris, *Cage Action, Documentary Photographs No. 1–7,* Budapest: Ludwig Museum, 1973/2012 (URL: https://www.ludwigmuseum.hu/en/work/cage-action-documentary-photographs-no-1–7).

64) Sándor Szilágyi, *Neoavantgárd tendenciák a magyar fotóművészetben 1965–1984* [Neo-Avant-Garde Tendencies in Hungarian Photo Art 1965–1984], Budapest: Új Mandátum Kiadó, 2007, 100.

65) 'Cseh-szlovák-magyar művészek találkozója Beke László szervezésében.
1972. Augusztus 26–27' [Czech-Slovak-Hungarian Artists' Meeting organized by László Beke, 26–27 August 1972], Balatonboglári Kápolnaműterem (URL: https://artpool.hu/boglar/1972/720826b.html). See also, Katalin Cseh-Varga, 'Language Paths: Methods for a New Cultural Geography of (East-Central) Europe,' *Sešit pro umění, teorii a příbuzné zóny* 35, 2023, 12–40 (here 39).

In 1978, artist Dóra Maurer '(...) involved Beke in a new variation of her photo interaction series (for one, two, or more cameras) (KCsV and KD: entitled *Parallel Lines. Photo-action with László Beke (MD170)*). Beke was asked to walk on one side of the street and Maurer on the opposite side was trying to follow the path and the pace of his movement with her camera.'[66] The list of Beke's actions, mostly as an organiser or collaborator, is long and deserves close attention, especially in terms of the way this participation shaped his scholarly work.

The link between *thinking* performance and *doing* performance can be the basis of a creative-discursive approach to art historical research. Such an approach, that is inspired by the radical and direct spirit of the use of body in the creation of art, can track down missteps in performances' cultural memory, its canonization, and labeling. A method that investigates the effect of practising art, theorising art, and putting historical material and context next to it, allows a complementary and critical view of narratives and their turns. In the next section we will explore the outcome of the amalgamation of performance and discourse in Beke's and Rezek's involvement with performance art practice. What happens when performance's directness and unveiling enters the sphere of art critique and theory? What knowledge will be produced? How is that knowledge different from, for example, a reductive framing of (past) performances as political commentaries?

## Guardians and Performance Practice

When investigating the histories of performance art, scholars are usually concerned with artists' creations and analysing their formal and contextual qualities, such as interpreting a performance's straightforward or more subtle political connotations. However, doing this excludes an important component of knowledge production concerning the history of performance in East and Central Europe, namely its milestones in historicization and narrativization. Furthermore, scholars and historians of performance art, perhaps even beyond the region, only rarely focus on how performers influenced the work of intellectuals in a creative sense, or how art critics, art historians, and theoreticians were inspired to test out experimental theory formats through the impact of artistic currents. The cases of Beke and Rezek both show that critical or intellectual work, and artistic work, were often two sides of the same coin.

This section of the essay takes the previous section (aimed at proving that interconnections existed between *thinking* and *doing* performance) a few steps further because it aims to disclose how Beke and Rezek internalised the creative and engaging nature of performance in their writings. The discourse which these theorists built on the art they experienced and promoted has a methodical foundation in performance's potential for shaking up the status quo. By reconstructing the interconnections of enactment and intellectual production, art history can not only open up towards non-positivist working mechanisms, but may also show ways to leave or reform a binding, North Atlantic academic frame that involves disciplinary hierarchies, canons and methods developed and practised in the Western hemisphere. This

66) László Zsuzsa, 'Dictionaries of Friendship: Transnational Artistic Dialogues in First Person Plural,' *ARTMargins Online*, 22 February 2024 (URL: https://artmargins.com/dictionaries-of-friendship/).

essay's hypothesis is that through revisiting performative modes of knowledge production, it is possible, on the one hand, to recognise socialist life and culture as aesthetically and theoretically inventive. And on the other hand, to consider developing dynamic academic practices for historical / historians' work based on the combination of *thinking* and *doing* – both science and art. A glimpse into László Beke's archive and writings helps discover the points at which the production of knowledge of relatively underground art and its practice met and influenced each other. Trying out all sorts of creative exercises in producing documents and knowledge naturally led Beke to process-based art, and made him a partner in and initiator of performances. Opening an exhibition with a minimalist action, as in the case of the 1979 Szürenon show, could be mentioned next to the football training sessions Beke organised for Hungarian artists, which he himself participated in, to prepare for a non-realised match between Hungarian and international artists in 1972 at *Documenta 5*.[67] Drafts, plans, and photographs document his creative involvement, while more analytical texts disclose how he was able to accommodate both his creative and theoretical ambitions.

An avalanche of activities in which he took part in art productions started, perhaps, with his 1971 conceptual art collection project *IMAGINATION* (*ELKÉPZELÉS*). Building on the practice of artistic collaboration, he sent out a call to Hungarian artists and poets to submit artworks that documented ideas and artistic concepts.[68] By activating these artists, Beke not only de-materialised and criticised the concept of art institutions, but also authored an accompanying text with theoretical and creative reflections. These reflections are mainly meditations on the execution and stratified meaning of all 31 de-materialised artworks that now form part of the collection.[69] For example, the painter László Lakner submitted in an 'art package' exercises to *IMAGINATION* – his set of artworks touched upon events that are inevitable.[70] One of Lakner's artworks is a series of instructions for viewers about spelling out certain letters put next to each other. If someone starts spelling out 'tuk' repeatedly and loudly in Hungarian without pausing, between 'k' and 't' another sound will appear (namely 'ö'). According to Beke and Lakner, one cannot prevent this from happening. Another component of Lakner's 'art package,' belonging to the genre of conceptual art with components meant to be enacted, is his 'material-poem in a nose and tongue language' ('*anyagvers orr- és nyelvnyelven*') which consists of a cigarette butt and clove wrapped in a small plastic bag. The instruction on the 'ready-smell-object' says: 'Throw away after smelling once.' Lakner's ready-smell-object is basically an item that calls for action in which the actor will most probably be unable to

67) For more information, see: Katalin Cseh-Varga and Kristóf Nagy, 'The Anti-Football of the Hungarian Neo-Avant-Garde. Crossing Art into Immateriality,' unpublished paper delivered at *The Deep Flows of the Running Sea* Conference, Olomouc, April 2016; Kristóf Nagy, *Interview with László Beke*, Budapest, April 8, 2016; Katalin Cseh-Varga, 'The Art of Contact. Exchange, Immateriality and Ambition,' unpublished paper delivered at the *Exhibitions as Sites of Artistic Contact during the Cold War* Conference, George Enescu University of Arts, Iasi, November 2019.

68) László Beke, *ELKÉPZELÉS. A magyar konceptművészet kezdetei. Beke László gyűjteménye, 1971* [IMAGINATION. Beginnings of the Hungarian Conceptual Art. Collection of László Beke 1971], Budapest: Nyílt Struktúrák Művészeti Egyesület OSAS – tranzit.hu, 2008.

69) László Beke, 'Az 'ELKÉPZELÉS'-ről' [On IMAGINATION], in Beke, *ELKÉPZELÉS*, ix-xviii.

70) László Lakner, 'TUKTUK-folyamatos nyelvmozgatás a laryngális K és a kakuminális T hang között/ 6.12.1970. budapest' and 'anyag-vers orr- és nyelvnyelven/ 5.4.1971. budapest' [TUKTUK-continuous tongue movement between a laryngeal K and a kakumal T sound/ 6.12.1970 budapest] and [material-poem in a nose and tongue language/ 5.4.1971. Budapest] in Beke, *ELKÉPZELÉS*, 102–103. The artwork package consisted of four pieces, two of which are discussed in this essay.

differentiate between smells. Those smells will fade with time. The text on *IMAGINATION* proves how close Beke was to the sphere of artistic creation, and how he resonated with the often critical approach of artists and poets responding to a call made by an art historian. He did not judge the artworks, but instead viewed himself as a collaborator in producing a text that was genuinely creative.

Beke's enthusiasm for conceptual art expanded in the early 1970s to happenings and fluxus and drove him to seek to understand their essence. Beke interviewed the fluxus artist Tamás Szentjóby on numerous occasions. Not only is there a clearly discernible experimentalism and fluidity in their conversational language, but in a 1973 interview there seems to be an agreement between Szentjóby and Beke that according to the spirit of fluxus, life itself has to be direct and progressive in order to be artistically effective.[71] Although Beke did not follow the radicalism of Szentjóby, who was the initiator and participant of the first Hungarian happenings , he did act/think on the grounds of performance, and therefore produced an art history that in its early years was neatly connected to art production.[72] In the case of Beke, the scholarly work formed part of his artistic projects and, as a consequence, could be defined as a conceptual artwork that included both theoretical considerations and practical-creative enactments.

Petr Rezek's involvement with performance art also had its origins in artistic collaboration and, more specifically, in his friendship and collegial relationship with Karel Miler. It was through Miler that Rezek befriended Štembera and Mlčoch.[73] His first meeting with them was captured in the essay 'A meeting with action artists' that was initially included in 1976 in *Philosophical Notes on Recent Art* and was then reproduced several times thereafter.[74] The fact of republishing also highlights that 'A meeting with action artists' is regarded as a fundamental text in the genealogy of Czech performance art, and that it constitutes a solid, recurring element of this art form's narrative making. Rezek belonged to those intellectuals who could only imagine thinking of contemporary art in close proximity to artworks and the artists: '(…) in my opinion, there can be no asking even general questions without analyzing the individual art-pieces.'[75] For the philosopher, the critical observation of art involves a position of responsibility and not a simple one-to-one transmission between an artwork and its spectators / participants / recipients.

A philosophical confrontation with (performance) art is, based on the core message of Rezek's *Body, Object and Reality in Contemporary Art*, the preparation of the artwork for a deep immersion, and this understanding confirms performance to be an intimate connection of bodily and sensual experiences. Rezek wrote: '(…) the critical feat also takes place on the spiritual plane and also makes claim to relate the whole as it happens in a piece of art.'[76] This was Rezek's point of departure in seeking to understand and become immersed in the performances of Miler, Štembera and Mlčoch.

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71) László Beke in conversation with Tamás Szentjóby, *TELEX/1*, 29 March 1973.

72) László Najmányi cited in 'Oral History Kürti Emesének. Beszélgetés Najmányi Lászlóval' [Oral history to Emese Kürti. Interview with László Najmányi], *Wordcitizen's Virtual Home*. Budapest, November 3, 2011.

73) Rezek, *Tělo, věc a skutečnost v současném umění*.

74) Rezek, 'Setkání v akčními umělci,' in ibid, 95–102.

75) Ibid, 174. Translation from Czech into English by Marcela Bubelová.

76) Ibid, 175.

The 1976 forerunner of *Body, Object and Reality in Contemporary Art* contains a chapter that did not make it into the 1982 monograph. That chapter is entitled 'A Philosopher's Worries.' In it, Rezek basically expounds his impressions of performers, their embodied practices, and the performances' inner meaning in a meditation about how the analysis and interpretation of ephemeral artworks requires creativity, and can even be regarded as an act of co-production.[77] Karel Miler's static poses and his body's physical connection to urban or natural surroundings (for example, by posing against a wall or lying in a grassy field) in connection with the artist's leaning towards Zen Buddhism, immediately link the intellectual/spiritual mindset with the embodied expressions. Here, the interconnection between philosophy and making performance becomes obvious.

In 'A meeting with action artists,' Rezek was not concerned with asking artists direct questions about the way they performed or what the goal of their performance was. His intention was rather to grasp performance as it 'stands.' The essay starts off with a mental game on narration, and documents and explains the difficulty of retracing intentions and reasons as the background of such an abstract artform as event-based art.[78] Rezek's own wording goes like this: 'If Mlčoch said that he climbed a mountain and took photographs on the way, he differs from a tourist in that he did nothing else. He neither luxuriated at the nature, nor watched a sunset. Neither rested, nor hardened himself. / It'd taken me two whole years before I understood this strange way of narrating. Just two years ago I met Jan Mlčoch and Petr Šembera through Karel Miler thanks to my lecture on the interpretation of dreams ([Four lectures from phenomenological psychology and psychopathology, Prague, 1975]).'[79]

This latter connection between the performance artists and Rezek is one potential foundation of their creative-discursive cooperation: Miler, Mlčoch, and Šembera asked the philosopher with a psychoanalytic background to activate this knowledge when interpreting their art actions. 'A meeting with action artists' is thus based on this liaison of a multidisciplinary philosophical approach and the subversive nature of the performances. Rezek's interpretation followed the model of the Swiss psychoanalytic psychiatrist Medard Boss. Unlike Freud, Boss regarded dreams not as placeholders, but as objects towards which the dreamer is open. According to this model, dreams are media that open up potentials. The subject of interpretation are the ontological phenomena that the dreamer encounters.[80]

'A meeting with action artists' includes an interpretation of Jan Mlčoch's dream. In reality, this dream was an often-referenced action by Mlčoch from 1974 that had the title *Suspension – Great Sleep* (*Zavěšení – Velký spánek*):

> I am in the attic of a huge house, which was most probably a farmhouse or a villa. Two men accompanied me here. We carried a rope and other things. The attic is covered with dust, there are many different cables and boxes – it seems that not long ago craftsmen worked here. The two men approach me, they are only a few years older than me. One of them covers my eyes, the other one ties my wrists and ankles together with a bandage. At the end, they pour liquid wax into my ears – I lie

77) Petr Rezek, *Filosofické skici k umění poslendí doby* [Philosophical Notes on Recent Art], Prague: samizdat, 1976, 40–48.

78) Rezek, *Tělo, věc a skutečnost v současném umění*, 95–96.

79) Ibid, 97.

80) Ibid.

> on the floor. A rope is tied around my arms and legs and the men pull me up in the air. After a few minutes I give the men a sign that I feel pain in my arm. They quickly let me sink toward the ground.[81]

In Rezek's interpretation, the attic is a part of a building that 'closes' it in the direction of the sky. In the attic, both the roof and the outside are close. The attic is, further, a place that has no habitants and lies beyond the actual living space. It can be read as a forum of secret games, because through its segregation from the house it offers a space to hide – both for humans and animals. This definition of the attic is, according to Rezek, important in understanding the act of hanging.[82] The separations as seen in the case of the attic itself, are through the hanging of Mlčoch pushed to extremes. The body loses its connection with the ground. *Suspension – Great Sleep* as Mlčoch's dream is an attempt to position the body, and through it, the mind outside of physical space and to cut the performer off from any tangible point of reference. This aim is apparently working, up until the protagonist complains about pain: 'Up to that moment it is possible to be nowhere, that is to not relate to any one thing and to nearly merge with the rest of the world.'[83] Rezek ends his philosophical meditations on *Suspension – Great Sleep* with an ontological-structural analysis that should be part of each dream interpretation.

Rezek's engagement in the practice and respective sensual and mental meanings of performances gave the Czech action artists intellectual backing. Beyond that backing though, Miler, Mlčoch, and Štembera initiated a dialogue with a philosopher, a productive conversation which was sustained over the years.

While the growing burden of Czechoslovakia's period of Normalisation that is reflected in performances expressing the limitations of body and mind cannot be excluded, we have focused here on something else, namely, the development of creative acts that can, in thinking and doing performance, create new sensitive connections to reality. Rezek's analysis of the body's state of suspension saw the bottomlessness of Mlčoch's performance as a way to free oneself from social, cultural and mental burdens. Rezek closes 'A meeting with action artists' as follows: 'The three artists mentioned that what they do is art. If I spent now some two years thinking about their actions, it is because this statement – it is art – has the exact appellative character as a dream we had years ago, one we hadn't understood and which to this day calls for an interpretation, for deeper understanding.'[84]

## Conclusion and Outlook

László Beke and Petr Rezek, like many of their intellectual contemporaries in Central and Eastern Europe, developed through being involved in performative practices and through their collegial friendships with performance and conceptual artists. Beke and Rezek were involved in artistic projects as organisers and practitioners, but were among the first art

81) Ibid, 98.

82) Rezek, *Tělo, věc a skutečnost v současném umění.*

83) Ibid.

84) Ibid, 102.

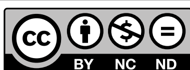
thinkers to theorise regional performance art, while connecting it to larger contexts and trends. These early discourses on Hungarian and Czech performance art departed from an organic entanglement with performance and in liaison with philosophical and intellectual currents crossing physical borders. As both Beke and Rezek substantially contributed to the historicization of performance, their original perspective on this subversive and radical artform was overshadowed by changing narratives. These narratives often came from, and were shaped by, guardians themselves, as in the case of Beke. Although the motivations and aims of presenting the Central and Eastern European milieu of the 1970s was problematic from the beginning,[85] a discussion of narratives in comparison with their discursive and creative trigger points and transforming inputs was not in the focus of Cold War art historiographies. With this gap the field fails to recognize a ((performance) art) history of socialism the subject of which is genuinely creative, open to renewal and reflection, and is written on the grounds of theory.

Understanding the importance of performance both as a research subject and as a research practise, a future step of the current research should be to retrace how the narrative of a politicised Eastern and Central European experimental art experienced the now-accepted view of the region's connectedness to the rest of the world and the state socialisms' own stake in cultural progress. The early 1990s were the first moment of reflection on the previous few decades of art. In 1993, Beke wrote about Hungary as 'a country where for several decades everybody was accustomed to political opinion being expressed in art in an indirect, abstract or ironical manner.'[86] It is particularly interesting to think about how this image of performance art changed over the decades, or how radical embodiment's projected heroism outlived recent research. Even guardians' view of their own role in the performance art scene or their positioning of event-based art fluctuates over time following discursive turns, new research trends, and (personal) motivations.[87] Appropriation and reappropriation in collecting, (re)-forming, and performing knowledge are key parts of these historization processes. Therefore, what a future research project should do is to work with the performativity of these narrative shifts and pave the way for how performance could be elevated to a fruitful disciplinarily-unbound container for historical research.

85) Katalin Cseh-Varga has discussed the topic of ambition in this context before; see Katalin Cseh-Varga, 'The Art of Contact,' Exhibitions as Sites of Artistic Contact during the Cold War,' in Cseh-Varga, ed., *Art Exhibitions in Cold War Europe: Sites of Contact and Exchange*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, forthcoming.

86) László Beke, 'POLYPHONY: The Consonance of Politics, Society and Art?,' in Suzanne Mészöly and Barnabás Bencsik, eds, *Polifónia. A társadalmi kontextus mint médium a kortárs magyar képzőművészetben. 1993. november 1 – 30. Hely-specifikus művek és installációk. / Polyphony. Social Commentary in Contemporary Hungarian Art. November 1 – 30, 1993. Site-specific works and installations,* Budapest: Soros Center for Contemporary Arts, 1993, 93–94 (here 94).

87) 'In the late 1990s, Piotrowski began to concentrate more intensely on what the essence of the NET that you had organised was. He started to investigate its activity and the mutual relations between artists from Central Europe and other peripheral areas such as South America. It seems obvious today that these places are significant for art, but that wasn't the case back then.' Adam Mazur, 'The Criterion of Attitude: A Conversation with Jarosław Kozłowski,' in Agata Jakubowska and Magdalena Radomska, eds, *After Piotr Piotrowski: Art, Democracy and Friendship*, Poznań: Adam Mickiewicz University, 2019, 21–34 (here 29).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art east/central

04 / September 2024 / [35—65]

# Avant-Garde Theory in the 1960s

## by Vratislav Effenberger (1923–1986)

Translated by Matthew Rampley

### Abstract

Vratislav Effenberger is remembered primarily as the heir to Karel Teige from the 1950s and, as such, the leading representative of Surrealism in post-war Czechoslovakia. The editor of Teige's collected writings, as well as of anthologies of Surrealist texts, he wrote numerous articles on contemporary art and culture, with a focus on the legacy of relevance of Surrealism in the 1950s and 1960s. This text consists of a translation of a chapter from his only book-length theoretical study, ***Reality and the Poetic*** (1969), in which he offered an interpretation of the history of the avant-garde as well as a theoretical elaboration of avant-garde aesthetics. The translated chapter is prefaced with an introduction that provides a historical and intellectual background to Effenberger's work, including discussion of his marginalization by the socialist authorities as well as emphasis on key concepts in his work.

### Keywords

Surrealism; avant-garde; Prague Spring; Paris; André Breton; Marxist aesthetics; dialectics; creative imagination

**https://doi.org/10.5817/AEC2024-4-3**

# Avant-Garde Theory in the 1960s

## by Vratislav Effenberger

## Introduction

### Matthew Rampley

The text translated here is a chapter from a longer book, *Reality and the Poetic: On the Developmental Dialectic of Modern Art* (**Figure 1**), by the poet, essayist and cultural theorist Vratislav Effenberger (1923–1986). It was published in 1969 and was Effenberger's longest sustained historical and theoretical study. It tries to make sense of modernist and avant-garde practice in Czechoslovakia, but frames it with a wider discussion of American and European art.[1] The chapter 'The Concept of the Avant-Garde' explores a number of themes, such as the role of aesthetic value and ideology, the art market, taste, the relation between the avant-garde and socialist revolutionary politics, the place of the individual artist in the avant-garde as a broader collective phenomenon, and the consumption of avant-garde art. A recurring central preoccupation is with how to describe and interpret the idea of the *history* of the avant-garde, and, as such, it is concerned with questions of historiographic method. The chapter and the book of which it is a part was written against the background of the dominance of historical and dialectical materialism (Effenberger refers to it as *vývojová teorie* - 'developmental theory') in socialist Czechoslovakia. Thus, while it was ostensibly about the past, the book was also about the present for, as Effenberger made clear in the introduction, 'the historiography of art can only be an active cultural agent if it helps us form a perspective on *contemporary* questions of artistic creation.'[2] It is a densely argued text that can sometimes be difficult to follow, and it is not helped by Effenberger's contorted style of writing. He often relies on overly complex sentence constructions that pile subordinate clause onto subordinate clause, in a manner that can only be rendered with difficulty in English. Yet despite such challenges it presents to the reader, it repays careful attention as a document of the history of art theory and criticism in Czechoslovakia in the 1960s and because of its analysis of the dilemmas and contradictions of the avant-garde.

## Effenberger: biographical background

Before we consider the details of the text, it is useful to ascertain who Effenberger was, for outside of the current-day Czech Republic, he is little known. His relative anonymity can be attributed to the fact that he wrote almost entirely in Czech and, as with so many other Czech writers, his work struggled to gain international recognition. Equally it can be put down to

1) Vratislav Effenberger, *Realita a poesie: k vývojové dialektice moderního umění*, Prague: Mladá Fronta, 1969.

2) Effenberger, *Realita a poesie*, 12.

**Figure 1: Front cover Vratislav Effenberger, *Realita a poesie: k vývojové dialektice moderního umění*, Prague: Mladá Fronta, 1969.**

the fact that much of his writing remained unpublished in his own lifetime, suppressed by the censorship of the socialist authorities.

Effenberger is known primarily as the most prominent advocate and representative of Surrealism in post-1945 Czechoslovakia. He was born in the provincial town of Nymburk in Bohemia but moved to Prague in 1932. After finishing high school in 1944, he was employed as a laboratory assistant at the Baal film cinema company. In 1946 he moved to the Czechoslovak Film Institute. At the same time, he enrolled at the Academy of Chemical and Technical Engineering, while also studying history of art and aesthetics at Charles University in Prague. He never completed his education in chemistry but graduated at the latter institute under the supervision of Jan Mukařovský, one of the leading members of the Prague Circle of linguistic and cultural theorists. Subsequently, Effenberger endured a career of official suppression and marginalization that was typical for many intellectuals under socialist rule. Deemed subversive because of his intellectual interests, he was sacked in 1954 from his job at the Film Institute and compelled to work in the Brewing and Malting Research Institute in Prague. Four years later, he was sacked again and had to work at an underground coal gasification plant in Březno u Chomutova in north-western Bohemia. In 1966, in more auspicious times, he was allowed to resume working at the Film Institute and then, two years later, was appointed a researcher at the Arts Faculty of Charles University. This promising turn of events came to a brutal halt in 1970 when, in the wake of the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia and suppression of the Prague Spring two years earlier, he was relieved of his university position and sent to work as a translator in the government information service bureau. In 1975 he was then required to work as a nightwatchman for two years. Along with other notable representatives of Czechoslovak culture such as Václav Havel and the philosopher Jan Patočka, he was one of the 242 signatories to Charter 77 criticising the government for its abuse of human rights and, like them, was then subject to state harassment.[3] The same year that the charter was drafted, 1977, he was forced into early retirement and then led a twilight existence until his death in 1986, writing numerous texts but not being permitted to publish anything.

Effenberger's oeuvre embraced a diverse range of material and encompassed literary as well as theoretical and historical writings. He was also a significant poet.[4] Of the academic works that appeared in his own lifetime, the first was a short monograph on Henri Rousseau that appeared in 1964.[5] Later, in 1969, he published *Reality and the Poetic* and, in the same year, he edited (**Figures 2 and 3**) two anthologies of Surrealist art and writing.[6] In 1984, a volume of short filmic / theatrical scripts was published in exile in Toronto (it was republished in Czechoslovakia in 1991), which have drawn some degree of interest, primarily because they are difficult to categorise.[7] He also gained prominence as editor of the oeuvre of Karel Teige, who had died in 1951. This included a volume of late unfinished texts by Teige on Cézanne and

3) See Jonathan Bolton, *World of Dissent: Charter 77, the Plastic People of the Universe and Czech Culture under Communism*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012.

4) His collected poems were published posthumously as *Básně I & II* [Poems], Prague: Torst, 2004 and 2010.

5) Vratislav Effenberger, *Henri Rousseau*, Prague: Státní nakladatelství krásné literatury a umění, 1964.

6) Vratislav Effenberger, *Surrealisticko východisko (1938–1968)* [The Surrealist starting point, 1938–1968], Prague: Československý spisovatel, 1969; *Výtvarné projevy surrealismu* [The artistic expressions of surrealism], Prague: Odeon, 1969.

7) *Surovost života a cynismus fantasie* [The cruelty of life and the cynicism of fantasy], Toronto: '68 Publishers, 1984.

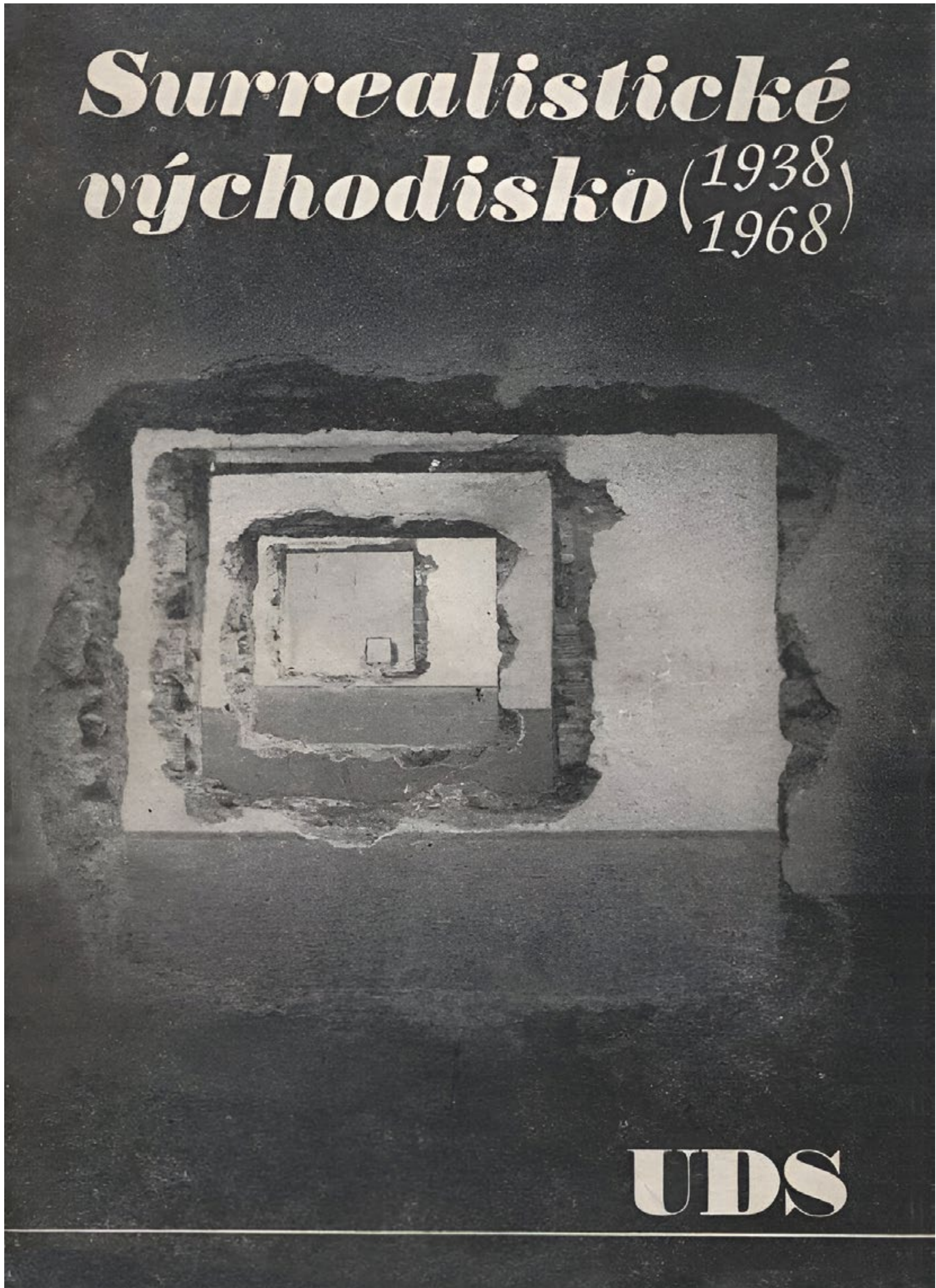


Figure 2: Front cover of Vratislav Effenberger, Stanislav Dvorský and Peter Král, eds, *Surrealistické východisko 1938–1968* [The Surrealist starting point], Prague: Československý spisovatel, 1969.

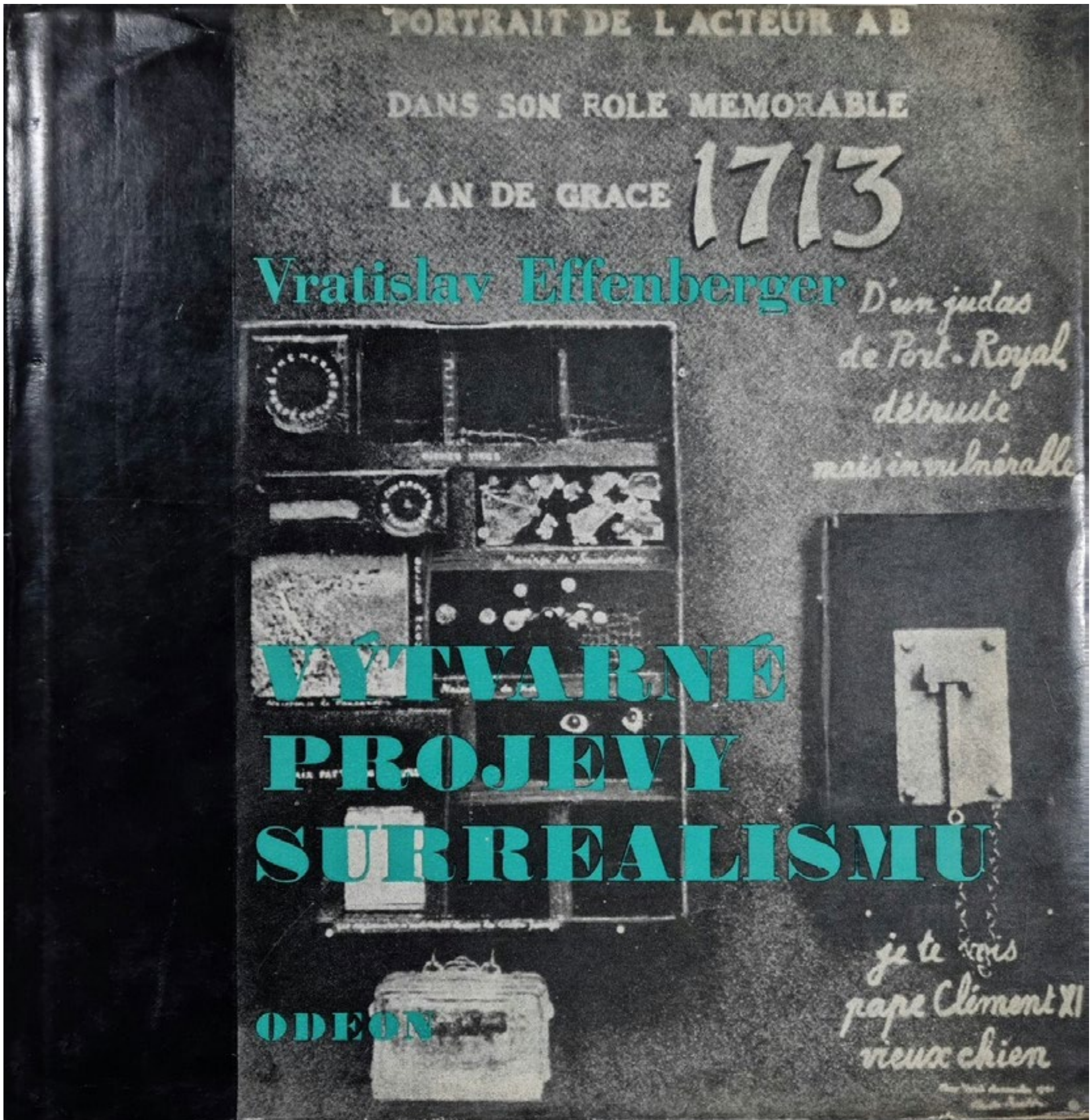


Figure 3: Front cover of Vratislav Effenberger, *Výtvarné projevy surrealismu* [Artistic expressions of Surrealism], Prague: Odeon, 1969.

Cubism, as well as the first two volumes of a projected three-volume edition of the selected writings of Teige, published in 1966 and 1969.[8]

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8) Karel Teige, *Vývojové proměny v umění* [Developmental transformations in art], ed. Vratislav Effenberger, Prague: Nakladatelství československých výtvarných umělců, 1966; Teige, *Výbor z díla I: Svět stavby a básně* [Selected works I. The world of building and poetry], Prague: Československý spisovatel, 1966; *Výbor z díla II: Zápasy o smysl moderní tvorby* [Selected works II. Sruggles over the meaning of modern creative work], Prague: Československý spisovatel, 1969. The project was cancelled in the wake of the Normalization of the 1970s. The final volume was not published until 1994 as Teige, *Osvobozování života a poezie: studie ze čtyřicátých let* [Selected works III. The liberation of life and poetry: studies from the 1940s], Prague: Aurora, 1994.

The suppression of Effenberger's writings ensured that even in the Czech Republic he never achieved widespread recognition. He also lacked the international network of contacts that kept many other Czechoslovak dissident intellectuals in the public eye.[9] 'The Concept of the Avant-Garde' was translated into German in the early 1970s as part of a planned larger edition of his work, but it never came to fruition and the translation has since disappeared.[10] Consequently, this English translation is the first rendering in any language other than Czech.

## Cultural Politics and Totalitarianism

How might we interpret the text? In socialist Czechoslovakia, the avant-garde had long been viewed with suspicion by an official cultural apparatus that imposed Socialist Realism as the only acceptable cultural practice. However, Effenberger's book exemplified the loosening environment in Czechoslovakia that followed the death of Stalin in 1953 and, more importantly, Nikita Krushchev's 'Secret Speech' of 1956 that denounced the cult of personality and dictatorial rule of his predecessor. From the later 1950s onwards there began a process of critical reflection, in which, under the banner of Marxist humanism, many official cultural and political doctrines were revised and scrutinized by philosophers and political theorists.[11] State-imposed attitudes towards Socialist Realism and the avant-garde were also brought into question. Yet we can place this exploration of the meaning of the avant-garde in a larger international context, for, from the later 1950s, it became a subject of increased reflection. In 1959 the Italian literary critic Mario de Micheli, for example, published a survey, *The Artistic Avant-Gardes of the Twentieth Century* (published in Czech five years later).[12] In 1962, a better known study on the same topic, *Theory of the Avant-Garde* by the Italian literary theorist Renato Poggioli, was also published in Italian and then, the same year as Effenberger's book, in English translation.[13] The culmination of this process, perhaps, was Peter Bürger's *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, first published in 1974 and undoubtedly the most internationally influential study of the history of the avant-garde.[14] Such works had in common a sense that modernism and the avant-garde had reached a point of exhaustion or crisis. The paradigm of the 'new' seemed to have become exhausted – what Bürger later referred to as the 'ageing of modernity' – and the avant-garde had lost its critical function.[15] Although Effenberger was concerned

9) Vratislav Effenberger, 'Roman Jakobson and the Czech Avant-Garde Between Two Wars,' *American Journal of Semiotics* 2: 3, 1983, 13–21.

10) I am grateful to Šimon Wikstrøm Svěrák for this information.

11) On Marxist humanism see Jan Mervart and Jan Růžička, *Rehabilitat Marxe! Československá stranická inteligence a myšlení poststalinské modernity* [Rehabilitate Marx! The Czechoslovak party intelligentsia and the thought of post-Stalinist modernity], Prague: NLN, 2020. See, too, Mervart and Růžička, 'Czechoslovak Post-Stalinism: A Distinct Field of Socialist Visions,' *East Central Europe*, 48, 2021, 220–49.

12) Mario di Micheli, *Umělecké avantgardy dvacátého století* [The artistic avant-garde of the twentieth century], Prague: Státní nakladatelství krásné literatury a umění, 1964.

13) Renato Poggioli, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, trans. Gerald Fitzgerald, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1969.

14) Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, trans. Michael Shaw, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984. Originally published as *Theorie der Avant-Garde*, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp. 1974.

15) Peter Bürger, *Das Altern der Moderne: Schriften zur bildenden Kunst*, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2001.

with reclaiming the avant-garde, he also recognized, like Bürger and Poggioli, its failings. He warned of the danger of avant-garde art degenerating into an empty play of signs, into 'avant-gardeness,' in other words, the adoption of the formal language and strategies of the historical avant-garde, but with none of its ideological commitments. These wider connections will be explored later but despite the emphasis on the wider context, it is still useful initially to approach his book, and this chapter, as a response to a specifically Czechoslovak situation.

The Nazi occupation of 1939 led to suppression of the vibrant artistic environment that had flourished between the wars. The Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia did not bring about a complete collapse of avant-garde culture, and significant artistic groups either continued working or were set up.[16] Of these, the most significant was *Skupina 42* (Group 42), a loose grouping of writers and artists that was established in 1942. Nor did the Nazi suppression of modernist culture occur immediately or uniformly. Nevertheless, modernist culture ceased to play a significant role in public life. Intellectual figures who resisted the occupation, such as the Marxist literary critics Eduard Urx (1903–1942) and Bedřich Václavek (1897–1943) were killed by the Nazi regime and others who had not managed to escape into exile embarked on a kind of inner emigration.

The situation changed at the end of the Second World War when, in the brief period between liberation in 1945 and the Communist assumption of power in February 1948, there was intense reflection on the state of Czechoslovak culture and society and, in particular, on the fate of modernism. On the one hand, as the art critic Jindřich Chalupecký noted, it was difficult to avoid the sense that modernism and the culture that had spawned it was exhausted. In a lengthy article reflecting on the present, 'The End of the Modern Era,' published in 1946, he noted that the major achievements of modernism – he cited, as examples, Joyce's *Ulysses*, Eliot's *The Wasteland*, Cubism, atonal music and Stravinsky's *L'histoire du soldat* – all lay in the past.[17] Modern science had produced the atom bomb, and leading representatives of modernist culture, from Heidegger to Ezra Pound, Salvador Dalí and Louis-Ferdinand Céline, had been supporters and enables of fascism. Yet despite such pessimism, Chalupecký believed it was possible to revitalize contemporary culture. In that same year he published a short pamphlet, *A Great Opportunity*, that spelled out a programme for the systemic reorganization of art and design education and exhibitionary practice to that end.[18]

Many sought to recapture the spirit of the avant-garde. It was in this context that Effenberger came to public attention, with his first theoretical articles on film production and practice.[19] He had met the Surrealists Karel Teige and Vítězslav Nezval during the war, and quickly became a member of the circle of intellectuals and artists associated with Teige, and garnered critical attention as a young Surrealist poet.[20] Yet the critical climate was fraught. In the period

16) A major collection of literary and theoretical texts by Skupina 42 was published as Zdeněk Pešát and Eva Petrová, eds, *Skupina 42: antologie*, Brno: Atlantis, 2000.

17) Jindřich Chalupecký, 'Konec modern doby' [The end of the modern era], *Listy* 1, 1946, 7–23.

18) Jindřich Chalupecký, *Veliká příležitost: poznámky k reorganisaci českého výtvarnictví* [A great opportunity: observations on the reorganisation of Czech creative culture], Prague: Výtvarný odbor Umělecké besedy, 1946.

19) Vratislav Effenberger, 'Studie o filmu' [A study of film], *Kvart* 5:1, 1946, 59–64; 'Problémy filmové kultury' [The problems of film culture], *Blok* 1, 1946–47, 317–18.

20) He is mentioned, for example, in Ludvík Kundera, 'Na okraj poesie mladých surrealistů' [On the edge of the poetry of young surrealists], *List Sdružení moravských spisovatelů* 2: 9–10, 1948, 18–20.

following the Nazi defeat, the Communist Party, still not in power, expended considerable energy in its attempts to shape the field of cultural politics in order to lay the groundwork as a prelude to the planned acquisition of social and political hegemony and, ultimately, control.[21] In the 1930s Teige had become entangled in the antagonisms between the Surrealists and the Communist Party, culminating in (**Figure 4**) *Surrealism against the Current*. In 1947 he re-established the Surrealist group, with Effenberger becoming a member, but his prior criticisms made him a target, and after the Communist coup d'état in February 1948, he was relentlessly hounded by the government and its representatives.[22] Dismissed as an exemplar of bourgeois cosmopolitanism, he died prematurely of a heart-attack in 1951, his death celebrated on the pages of the journal *Tvorba* with a notorious article accusing him of being a Trotskyite subversive.[23] Effenberger's association with Teige meant that he was accepted as his intellectual heir and unofficial head of the Surrealists in Prague, but he was consequently also identified as an enemy by the state and marginalised, although it was another three years before he was forced out of his position at the Film Institute.

The brief three years of public intellectual debate about the role and possible futures of modernism and the avant-garde were thus abruptly interrupted, and the hopes of reviving interwar modernist culture, albeit in altered form, were dashed. Socialist Realism was officially imposed by the government and dissenting cultural figures, including, most scandalously, the philosopher and critic Záviš Kalandra, who was executed in a show trial in 1950.[24]

The recent publication of transcripts of debates and surveys conducted in the 1950s by members of the Surrealist group, in which Effenberger played an active role, indicates that Surrealism had far from disappeared, but the members of the group were forced underground.[25] Indeed, the restrictions placed on the activities of Effenberger and other Surrealists may have contributed to the extended significance enjoyed by Surrealism in Czechoslovakia, long after it had given way, in France and elsewhere, to other artistic concerns and interest. Faced with the official state aesthetic of Socialist Realism, Surrealism was an unintended beneficiary of events, for in the eyes of many it provided an obvious focus for dissident practice.

21) Alexej Kusák, *Kultura a politika v Československu, 1945–1956* [Culture and politics in Czechoslovakia, 1954–1956], Prague: Torst, 1998. See, in particular, '1945–1948: Kultura a komunisté' (pp. 143–227).

22) Shawn Clybor, 'Socialist (Sur)Realism: Karel Teige, Ladislav Štoll and the Politics of Communist Culture in Czechoslovakia,' *History of Communism in Europe* 2, 2011, 143–67.

23) Mojmír Grygor, 'Teigovština: trockistická agentura v naší kultuře' [Teigovinese: Trotskyite agency in our culture], *Tvorba* 20: 44, 1951, 1060–1062.

24) Jaroslav Brouček, *27.6.1950 - poprava Záviše Kalandry* [27.6.1950 – the execution of Záviš Kalandra], Prague: Havran, 2006.

25) František Dryje, Šimon Wikstrøm Svěrák and Ladislav Serý, eds, *Hádky v kompasu: Surrealistické ankety, 1951–1986* [Quarrels in the compass: surrealist inquiries, 1951–1986], Prague: Památník narodního písemnictví, 2023.

**Figure 4: Front cover of Karel Teige, *Surrealismus proti proudu* [Surrealism against the current], Prague: Prague Surrealist Group, 1938.**

## Surrealism after the War

Its major exponents had produced their most important work in the 1930s, but in the era of revisionism in the later 1950s and the 1960s, it became once more a subject of serious study, with Effenberger playing a significant role.[26] Interest was evident not only in academic publications but also in exhibitions, of which the most significant, perhaps, was *Imaginative Painting, 1930–1950* staged in 1964.[27] Official attitudes were still hostile; the exhibition was closed down and its catalogue was pulped, but the revived interest in Surrealism could not be suppressed. The following year the art history journal *Umění* (Art) featured a special issue on Surrealism and the issues raised by the exhibition. A central question was whether Surrealism (and the interwar avant-garde more generally) was merely a historical episode or whether it still had contemporary relevance. An implicit answer was provided by contemporary New Wave cinema in Czechoslovakia where Surrealist motifs and practices persisted, long after they had disappeared into the history books elsewhere.[28]

The 'rediscovery' of Surrealism was, however, one instance of the wider exploration of interwar avant-garde legacies. In 1961 the first volume appeared of a multi-volume edition of the interwar Marxist literary and cultural critic Bedřich Václavek (1897–1943) that continued into the 1970s.[29] Five years later an edition appeared of the interwar aesthetic writings of Jan Mukařovský (1891–1975) the most internationally prominent member of the Prague linguistic circle between the wars, who had enjoyed close relations to the artistic and literary avant-garde.[30] The chronological range of the edition was telling; not only did it foreground, once more, the interwar period, it also explicitly excluded his later work from the period after 1948, when he had publicly endorsed the Communist régime. We can view Effenberger's editions of Surrealist texts and the writings of Teige in this light, too.

An influential interpretation of the return to the avant-garde has been Hal Foster's analysis of the American neo-avant-garde of the 1950s and 1960s in terms of the Freudian thematics of deferral, following. For, as Foster claims, 'one event is only registered through another that recodes it; we come to be who we are only in deferred action (*Nachträglichkeit*) ... historical and neo-avant-gardes are constituted in a similar way, as a continual process of pretension and retension, a complex relay of anticipated futures and reconstructed pasts ...'[31] Duchamp, for example, only became 'Duchamp,' Foster notes, as a 'retroactive effect of countless artistic responses and critical readings' leading to his elevated status in the 1960s as an emblem of

26) Anja Tippnerová. *Permanentní avantgarda? Surrealismus v Praze* [A permanent avant-garde? Surrealism in Prague], Prague: Academia, 2014, 71–79.

27) Věra Linhartová, ed., *Imaginativní malířství, 1930–1950* [Imaginative painting, 1930–1950], Hluboka nad Vltavou: Alšova jihočeská galerie, 1964.

28) On the return of surrealism in the 1960s see Jonathan L. Owen, *Avant-Garde to New Wave: Czechoslovak Cinema, Surrealism and the Sixties*, Oxford: Berghahn, 2011.

29) The volumes included Bedřich Václavek, *Tvorba a společnost* {Creative work and society], Prague: Československý spisovatel, 1961; *Literární studie a podobizny* [Literary studies and portraits], Prague: Československý spisovatel, 1962; *O lidové písni a slovesnosti* [On popular poetry and literature], Prague: Československý spisovatel, 1963; *Kritické stati z třcátých let* [Critical essays from the 1930s], Prague: Československý spisovatel, 1975; *Juvenilie* [Juvenilia], Prague: Československý spisovatel, 1978.

30) Jan Mukařovský, *Studie z estetiky* [Aesthetic studies], ed. Květoslav Chvatík, Prague: Odeon, 1966.

31) Hal Foster, 'Who's Afraid of the Neo-Avant-Garde?' in *The Return of the Real: The Avant-Garde at the End of the Century*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996, 1–34, here, 29.

the avant-garde. This logic applied no less in Czechoslovakia than in the United States, France and elsewhere, and it is notable that in 1969 Jindřich Chalupecký staged a retrospective exhibition in Prague on Duchamp at the Václav Špála Gallery in Prague.[32] Foster's emphasis on temporal delay *intrinsic* to the construction of historical meaning is an important element in the understanding of the reception of the avant-garde, but it runs the risk of flattening out the task of analysis without attention to the specifics of each individual case. In Czechoslovakia, the attention to the avant-garde tradition was also an attempt to 'fan the spark of hope in the past,' as Walter Benjamin put it, an attempt to recover a lost object or to 'wrest tradition away from the conformism that is working to overpower it.'[33] Benjamin would never have imagined that it was the culture of socialist Czechoslovakia that was the prime agent of such oppressive conformity, but the analogy still holds, and the memory of the interwar avant-garde still fulfils the same function in the contemporary Czech Republic.

## Effenberger and Definitions of the Avant-Garde

If we turn to Effenberger's text itself, it seems that at first sight, it draws no distinction between the avant-garde and modernism. As examples of the avant-garde, he lists Surrealism, Cubism and Impressionism, and then, later, Joyce, Kafka and Proust, none of whom would fit the description of the avant-garde familiar from Bürger's analysis, for example. Yet Effenberger raises two issues that give a sense of how he does, in fact, distinguish between the modernism and avant-gardism. The first, as he states from the outset, is that 'avant-garde' is not an inductively generated concept based on synoptic assessment of the range of empirical works of art deemed 'avant-garde.' Rather, it is a theoretical impulse, a tendency towards destabilization or transgression, that can take on different guises (Effenberger uses the term 'concretizations') at different times, and that can also assume different ideological positions. It is for this reason that it can be a contradictory phenomenon – this is the sense in which Effenberger refers to its dialectical development – and he observes that scientific and artistic avant-gardes can often be at ideological variance. Effenberger frequently refers to 'ideology' in the text, but although he relies on a conceptual framework that is heavily shaped by the terminology of Marxist analysis, it is far from clear that he is applying a Marxist interpretation of the word. As with 'dialectical,' which he often uses loosely merely to denote internal contradiction, 'ideology' means little more than 'a belief in the possibility of a unified conception of the world and a belief in the possibility of the social and psychological realization of ideological ideas.'[34]

Earlier in his book Effenberger argues that Romanticism was the precursor of the avant-garde. Following a theory of Romanticism derived from Roman Jakobson and Teige, he identifies two tendencies in Romanticism: one that was revolutionary and emancipatory,

32) Ibid., 8.

33) Walter Benjamin, 'The Concept of History,' in Benjamin, *Selected Writings IV: 1938–1940*, trans. by Edmund Jephcott, edited by Michael Jennings and Howard Eiland, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003, 391.

34) Šimon Wikstrøm Svěrák, 'Vratislav Effenberger's conception of the role of imagination in ideological thought,' *Studies in East European Thought*, 2023. Published online: https://doi.org/10.1007/s11212-023-09594-2.

and another, conservative and constructive.[35] Yet he distances himself from the common view, asserted by Teige, for example, that this difference could be mapped onto a political distinction between 'left-wing' and 'right-wing' impulses.[36] The avant-garde is ideologically underdetermined. He notes, 'The characteristic nonconformity of the avant-garde, in its original meaning, is thus brought about by the *principle* of exploration, and never by exploratory *values*, because the latter are determined solely on the basis of the theoretical programme of a specific movement or of a theoretical programme of supplementary interpretations.'[37] Only in its individual instances does the avant-garde take on specific characteristics, and we can view Effenberger's broader motivation for analysing the avant-garde in this light, since he is concerned with foregrounding precisely those individual practices – of which Surrealism was the most important for him – that could be used to prise the concept of the avant-garde from the grip of the dead hand of official culture.

His second observation is that while 'avant-gardeness' is conceptually under-determined, it is absolutely vital that its individual manifestations should be the vehicles of specific programmes. He acknowledges that there is a tension between the quasi-anarchic impulse to transgression and the requirement that it be attached to a particular programme. Nevertheless, if the latter is absent, he notes, the avant-garde is absorbed into 'the aesthetics of modern art' and 'turns into decoration.'[38] By 'decoration' Effenberger is not referring here to the long-established modernist invective against ornament. Rather, he is merely pointing to the aestheticization of the avant-garde, and the danger of its degeneration into empty signifier. He notes that there was a 'flood of absurd, irrationalist art, "anti-theatre," "non-drama" and "anti-books",' in which avant-garde gestures of 'destabilisation' had been stripped of their ideological baggage.[39] Strikingly, he draws comparisons with contemporary America. Even though beatnik novels and Pop Art were very different from the kind of practices in Czechoslovakia that Effenberger had in mind, they, too recognized the need for a conceptual programme, for 'no artistic work will last any time on the basis of aesthetic intention alone, if, rather than wishing to be mere decorative production, it aspires to having some extra-aesthetic impact.'[40]

Effenberger's judgement has commonalities with those of Bürger and Poggioli, yet there are two important differences. The first relates to the question of ideology. For the crisis of the avant-garde is not merely a problem of aestheticization and commodification, it is, for him, fundamentally a crisis of *ideology*. For if ideology is the crucial element that helps prevent the avant-garde lapsing into mere 'avant-gardeness,' he argues that the crisis lies in the fact that since the onset of the Second World War, moral and epistemological relativism and the loss of a sense of historical meaning – the collapse of metanarratives, to cite a more recent author –

35) 'The dialectical spirit of Romanticism combined, from the start, destructive and constructive tendencies, hope and, at the same time, resignation, élan and weariness, life and death, short-lived moments of revolutionary consciousness …' Effenberger, *Realita a poesie*, 134.

36) 'The differentiation of Romantic artists, philosophers or scientists into the two wings of leftist and rightist romanticism that prevailed in the ideas of the interwar avant-garde (Karel Teige) can be understood as only an approximate explanation. The revolutionary and constitutional elements, one subversive and the other constitutive, are mixed together in all cases in the development of the Romantic movement …' Effenberger, *Realita a poesie*, 134.

37) Effenberger, 'The Concept of the Avant-Garde,' 56

38) Effenberger, 'The Concept of the Avant-Garde,' 59

39) Effenberger, 'The Concept of the Avant-Garde,' 64

40) Effenberger, 'The Concept of the Avant-Garde,' 62

means an abandonment of the belief in the *possibility* of ideology, understand as some or other conceptual or normative scaffolding essential to any avant-garde practice.[41]

Set against this pessimistic picture is the second difference that stems from Effenberger's commitment to Surrealism, specifically, the creative imagination and its constitutive role in ideology. For the latter is not an empty structure. Instead, 'ideology' is part of the *dialectic* of thought that is structured by systems of signification but is also in a dynamic with the creative imagination. For Effenberger, informed by the writings of André Breton, the imaginative creation of poetic images was understood to be an expression of the unconscious, analogous to the process as that which produced dream images. Effenberger was not explicit about the *source* of the imagination, but he appeared to regard it as a quasi-anthropological constant. An ideology thus may be a structure of thinking, values or beliefs, but it is always being generated and regenerated due to the dynamic activity of the creative imagination. The avant-garde may be currently endangered by a crisis of ideology, but as Effenberger suggests towards the end of the chapter, that crisis may be just a transitional stage, a prelude to an ideological reconfiguration.

We might view this as the last vestige of a romantic humanism, but in the final part of his book, Effenberger turns the imagination into a tool of political polemic. For in a section titled 'Reality and the Poetic' he turns to the concepts of causality and temporality, and attacks crude dialectical materialist models of history:

> Some Marxist theorists have deepened their view that development in science, just as in art, leads ineluctably to human social and psychological liberation, from lower forms of cognition and organization to higher ones, from the kingdom of Necessity to that of Freedom. However, during the past century, the outcomes of this idea of development have not shown themselves to be too convincing. Every attempt to analyse the mutual dependence or the dialectical relations in the historical dynamic of scientific and artistic cognition, which should have revealed the *secret of developmental necessity*, has unfortunately always been a supplementary interpretative construction ...'[42]

For Effenberger it was precisely in the 'unfathomable relations, the obscure mode of thinking about its own nature and creative intentional values,' that the avant-garde, and above all, Surrealism, challenged the straitjacket of dialectical materialism. His reading of the avant-garde is thus not merely reflection on a past cultural episode, but also an attempt to interrogate the concept of history that had governed how its significance had been hitherto understood.

41) Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984.

42) Effenberger, *Realita a poesie*, 277.

**Vratislav Effenberger**

# The Concept of the Avant-Garde

Originally published as 'Pojem avantgardy' in Vratislav Effenberger, *Realita a poesie: k vývojové dialektice moderního umění*, Prague: Mladá fronta. 1969, 162–184.

Translated and edited by Matthew Rampley

If we speak of Impressionism, Cubism, Surrealism, these concepts comprise, from a certain moment, something more than the sum of creative works based on collectively recognized principles. They become concentric models of theoretical thinking that, at certain points of contemplation, exhibit an autonomous existence more or less independently of the concrete work they refer to. They are not just historically definable concepts, they often become theoretically independent when subject to interpretative analyses, such that it is difficult to give them a fixed profile. The ability of creative work to inspire theoretical or ideological contemplation, which can only be realized in the form of critical conflicts – whether they evolve out of the work in question or annexe it for some other system of ideas, in order to amplify and develop the work's emotional impact – grows out of the expressive character of the point of view evident in the collective awareness of the artistic tendency the work fulfills. Although it must be admitted that the author's own confession and self-interpretation are a negligible obstacle for the skilfully guided interpretation of the philosophical, aesthetic, sociological or psychological transplantation of their work (Ernst, Miró etc.), creative affiliation to a certain ideological current nevertheless presents a much more powerful foothold than any other documentary material, because it is the intersection of different imaginitive and intellectual individualities, jointly creating broader communicative possibilities and the potential intervention of certain spiritual currents.

Examples of a special creative type, not immediately belonging to any avant-garde movement, but yet strongly influencing the expressive morphology of the avant-garde (James Joyce, Marcel Proust, Franz Kafka etc)[43] are testament to the fact that it is precisely ideological elements that shape the directions of art and, consequently, the history of the avant-garde, too, and that the absence or vagueness of specific ideologies amongst such authors makes it difficult to assign their work to any theories of development, even though their work, given its features, would otherwise belong to them. Even the term 'avant-garde' was not adopted from the military lexicon inappropriately. It is clear from the history of avant-garde movements that the formative impulse of the artistic vanguard is primarily resistance to conservative stabilization, from which an ideological programme only arises in a causal context. This process is most often latent, however, and it is not infrequently subject to divergent influences of which the theory of development accepts only those in keeping with its concept of causal continuity, or transposes them interpretatively to this end. For this reason, it is not difficult to

43) See the chapter 'Absurdnost v umění a povaha dadismu' [Absurdity in art and the nature of dada], Effenberger, *Realita a poesie*, Prague, Mladá fronta, 1969, 15–22.

counter one concept of causal continuity with another one, different from the one rejected, by laying emphasis on another logical series, to which the interpretation of the creative or developmental process in question can be subordinated.

From an ideological point of view, the analysis of avant-garde movements is complicated by the fact that they do not devise mutually complementary or commensurable plans. It is only in exceptional and, for the most part, extreme moments that progressive scientific, social, artistic and philosophical conceptions found common concepts of progress, even if they had the prerequisites for the deepest affinity. It has been stated more than once that the scientific or political avant-garde is closer to conservative artistic and philosophical stagnation than to the intellectual conquests of a different order from its own, and that many artists and philosophers surrender to often reactionary points of view in other areas of opinion that otherwise seem most closely related to their own.

The reciprocal relation between the avant-gardes of the spirit and of science is overlaid and overshadowed by the need of rebellious experimenters for confirmation, support and cultural adaptation of their conquests through reference to authorities generally acknowledged in other cultural fields. Freud tested his socially disruptive discoveries on Shakespeare and Leonardo, while Surrealist experimentation did not interest him at all. The studios of the Cubist revolutionaries were decorated with reproductions of canvases by Ingres, as André Salmon testified.[44] This need for cultural adaptation never ceases to be retrograde, considering the heuristic tendencies of avant-garde thought, even where this traditionalist and conservative style leads, one way or another, to remarkable conclusions, when, at the same time, it means a distinct rebuttal of the original, traditional point of view (for example, Dali's interpretation of Milllet, or of the Modern style, etc).

The chronology of the avant-garde movements as definable systems of thought and spheres of inspiration cannot, in a historical sense, be clearly identified in spatial, temporal or causal terms. The development of French Impressionism dates from the beginning of the 1870s, while German Impressionism, which only appears twenty years later, is not just a different version or mere indication of the influence of the School of Paris; rather, it is to a great degree inspired by the powerful tradition of Symbolist painting. Paul Fechter recalls that at the end of the century the rising German art industry laid greater emphasis on the decorative, and this factor was not without an indirect effect on part of the German Impressionist, Secessionist and Expressionist avant-garde, which led to a sharp distinction between existential demands and progressive artistic work.[45]

The core of avant-garde activity and the individual stages of its development are most frequently identified with the highly variable, ambiguous and vague concept of the *Ecole de Paris*, which merely emphasizes that Paris is the axis of modern European cultivated education or, to be more precise, the Parisian 'artistic Republic of free spirits.' However, this School of Paris, which encompasses modern artists of all nationalities living in Paris, as well as authors outside of France, whose work shares certain characteristics with that in Paris, or is directly influenced by it, also comprises what are, in relation to the history of the avant-garde

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44) André Salmon, 'Die Offenbarung Seurats,' *Das Kunstblatt*, 6: 10, 1922

45) Paul Fechter, *Der Expressionismus*, Munich, Piper, 1914. Editor's note: Effenberger erroneously refers to Fechter as 'Fechner.'

movements, highly disparate elements (unofficial and official art). Furthermore, an array of avant-garde directions (Expressionism, the Secession, Futurism, Dada, Constructivism) arose outside of France and passed it by without any substantial direct influence.

The concept of the artistic avant-garde as a set of ideologically concretized values also includes reference to established critical and theoretical praxis, in which the artwork being assessed is extricated from the ideas of the tendency of which it is a part (even if, historically, it was part of it), and the individual artist is placed in opposition to this conceptual affiliation, which is seen as having a disparagingly and degradingly uniform character. Several avant-garde movements are understood, in the light of this distinction between an artistic tendency and the creative individual, in terms of the tradition of the schools of the old masters. The artistic tendency is viewed as a zone of inspiration, brought about by second-rate epigones, whereas excellent artistic individuals generally achieve their significance by, in some sense, opposing or outgrowing the tendency that they were fulfilling. This singling out of the individual, this endowing of artistic expression with aesthetic autonomy, is undoubtedly appropriate for levelling out an inconveniently stratified terrain. Ascertaining influences and inspirations can effect a new critical point of view in an interpretation, just as long as it is not just a statement of the dehistoricizing and absolutizing impulse of formal aesthetics. Although forming an interpretation, in and of itself, is the inalienable right and natural necessity of any critical activity, it can only be inspiring and fruitful if it maximizes, from the start, the consistencies of the work being scrutinized. If, for example, the painting of Max Ernst is set up in opposition to his participation in the Surrealist movement merely in order to highlight its artistic values, then this interpretation would not come close to Ernst's actual work and imagination, which had such a significant involvement in the development of Surrealism. The difference between the old concept of the master school and the nature of avant-garde movements is not merely a matter of their differential scope, which sets the belief in aesthetic autonomy apart from a much more comprehensive and dynamic stance and ideology. Instead, it represents a fundamental difference in concept and structure of inspiration, a difference in style of thinking, in which questions of individuality and originality are addressed otherwise than has hitherto been the case. Ozenfant once acknowledged, when it came to the relation between the artist and artistic -isms, that the methods of Picasso, Braque, Léger, Metzinger and Gleizes were completely at odds, and yet Cubism existed. If we strip away wholly external aspects and focuses on what is referred to as uniform opinions, which in reality are only secondary and epigonal expressions, the question of the relation between the artist and the artistic tendency continues to be a complex problem of individual and collective consciousness. Their dialectical connection demands that one assess, first of all, the nature of individuality inasmuch as it appears as the only possibly creative state of mind in the given circumstances capable of accepting and transmitting inspiration and therefore endowed with creativity and invention. Where it is possible and necessary to take the power of invention and invention as the supreme manifestation of a person's mental abilities, the assumption of creative individuality is the necessary initial condition for inquiry into possible forms of concretization and values of the creative process.

In this context C. G. Jung proposes the term 'individuation,' which he links to the ideas of 'self-realization,' because he seeks a conceptual distinction between such individuation and

individualism. 'Individualism' is the deliberate emphasis on perceived unique qualities in opposition to collective considerations and interests, whereas 'individuation' corresponds to a deeper understanding of collective human destiny. The unique qualities of the individual cannot be grasped as an alien aspect of his or her essence or parts, but rather as a mixing ratio or gradated differentiation of functions and faculties that are actually universal. After all, universal factors can only exist as individualized forms. It is in this same sense that Ozenfant says of individuality or, rather more, individuation, in lyric that 'It is the wellspring of our modern freedom of invention, a mighty effort always signed by a single name.'[46]

Can this inspiring and inventive capacity for individual conception in artistic creation be decisive in the formation of a specific movement? To what extent, under what conditions, and in what sense? In answer to this question E. Tériade states that innovators, before others, sense new needs that go against deep-seated ideas in a certain milieu. They find the most effective way of revealing the insufficiencies of the present. If this emphasizes the powerful dependence of movements on individual creative personalities, it is, conversely, necessary to admit that some progressive individuals find themselves on common paths of inquiry and in common conceptual spheres, even though they have not become fully assimilated to the current that they are jointly working on. The thinking of Cézanne would not have had an impact on the Impressionist movement, and it would hardly have been able to foster its refreshing innovative quality, if Impressionism had not introduced a youthful and free élan into painting.[47]

In his book on André Breton, Julien Gracq comes to a similar view, articulated, in his case, using Surrealist concepts, when he likens the Surrealist movement to a closed and isolated order or idea, a phalanstery surrounded by magical walls.[48] He sees in Breton's mentality a plural narcissism, a leader of the movement rejuvenating everyone, the founder of a religion.

The occult character of Surrealism demanded by Breton in the *Second Manifesto of Surrealism* can only emphasize how set apart avant-garde collectives are, and this gives them an almost magical effect, but it did not create this avant-garde exclusivity on its own. If the occult existed as a basic phenomenon of the artistic and scientific avant-garde, and if, at the same time, it was connected to the need to overcome itself in passing on the developmental impulse, it also modified the individuality of those who gave it all its content and meaning. Breton, who we can consider proficient in this question, acknowledges this in *Communicative Vessels*.[49]

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46) Amédée Ozenfant, *Foundations of Modern Art*, trans. John Rodker, New York: Dover Books, 1952, 6.

47) E. Tériad, 'Documentaire sur la jeune peinture III: Consequences du cubisme,' *Cahiers d'Art* 5: 1, 1930, 17–27.

48) Julien Gracq, *André Breton, quelques aspects de l'écrivain*, Paris: José Corti, 1948.

49) 'Does such and such a great captain fully realize his victories; does such and such a great poet (the question has been asked for Rimbaud) seem to have been completely aware of his visions? It is unlikely. The very nature of the "one," whether he be acclaimed a genius, a simpleton, or a madman, is absolutely opposed to that. This being must become other for himself, reject himself, condemn himself, abolish himself to the profit of others in order to be reconstituted in their unity with him. [ … ] Perhaps it is fitting that there should be shaped, in the most tormented periods and even against their will, the solitude of a few whose role is to preserve in some corner of a hothouse what cannot have any but a fleeting existence, in order to find much later its place in the center of a new order, thus marking with a flower that is absolutely and simply present, because it is true — a flower in some way axial in relation to time — that tomorrow should be linked all the more closely with yesterday for having to break off' in a more decisive manner with it?' André Breton, *Communicative Vessels*, trans. Mary Ann Caws, Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1990, 134 and 137–8.

Here it was already determined that, externally, two components are characteristic of avant-garde movements, each of which is fundamental to the extent that neither is conceivable without the other: the programme and the group. Without a programme, a movement would not have become avant-garde, and without organization into a group, an avant-garde idea would not be transformed into a movement. When we look at the historical material, these two components are clearly interdependent, as is the manner of their emergence and their further development. If the nature of the ideology and worldview of the latter inclines to transform every avant-garde formation into an integrative system, with a basic tendency to submit the meaning of the entire history of the human mind to its own conceptual parameters, then it is understandable that every avant-garde movement becomes, to some extent and in a certain sense, what religious sects used to be. Here, conceptual integration has, it seems, deep psychological and mythological roots. A characteristic sign of a sect is the suppression of individual qualities in the name of the idea of higher integration. We encounter this tendency towards authorial anonymity not only at the stage of the manifesto ('Boccioni, the futurist,' 'Jaroslav Seifert of Devětsil') but also in conformity in the means of expression. The pictures of Picasso and Braque from certain Cubist periods are mutually indistinguishable, just like the works of Carrà and de Chirico from the period of metaphysical painting. This expressive conformism is more something more than mutual influence, even if it is demonstrably about two independent delimited individuals. It is the deliberate suppression of the individual, the sectarian service to an idea. The Surrealists, who, ultimately, brought avant-garde ideology to its most extreme consequences in different ways, even considered the suggestion of Man Ray that they adopt a collective brand, a kind of seal of the movement, which would have replaced the name of the author, so that they could counter the danger of forgery.[50] This tendency was not possible without a very deep connection to the scientific and philosophical intensification of modern life, with an influence that grew into the magical power exercised by modern psychological systems – Marxism and psychoanalysis.[51]

*Development theory* – pressed into service by tendencies to integration at a stage when artistic programmes were transformed into world views in a most pervasive manner – is predetermined by a principle of discovery and a prospective ideological model in which, from a certain historical perspective, a final resolution of current contradictions can be seen, in the widest possible sense, almost as if the ancient myth of paradise lost would be fulfilled by it.

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50) 'Somehow, discoveries do not belong to their discoverers, and for this reason it is inappropriate to have too much in mind the question of priority, which painters too often ask of the historian.' Louis Aragon, *La peinture au défi*, Paris: Librairie José Corti, 1930, n.p. G. Hugnet cites Eluard's declaration, that 'it is necessary to delete the reflection of personality so that inspiration come jump out of the mirror,' and he adds: 'Poetry is the restitution of a gigantic voice that resonates for everyone. It is not a more or less elegant social game, but rather the tragic game of the anonymous, constantly murdered, mediocre pride of the individual. Names do not have any significance here, and they are not interesting, except when they are confirming the testimony of a real process. If I do not try to ascertain who signed this especially beautiful woman (no other adjective can be used) that I recently met in this street, that was so empty and suddenly so unique … how wouldn't I desperately wish to surprise, on the table of my awakening, the book that killed its author, so that poetry would be able to find an apology, once and for all, for the fact that it was written?' Paul Éluard, *Petite anthologie poétique du surréalisme*, Paris: Jeanne Bucher, 1934, n. p.

51) In his monograph on Freud, Ernest Jones notes that when he was getting ready, at the beginning of the 20s, to undergo an operation, Freud handed out his own signet rings to his own closest collaborators, which in the event of his death would transfer the authoritative power of his science to the circle of his successors. Jones, *The Life and Work of Sigmund Freud*, New York: Basic Books, 1957.

One of the first signs of the formation of a developmental theory of modern art was Meier-Graefe's *History of the Development of Modern Art* (1904) mentioned before. Here all its basic features can be found together, and they will be deepened and amplified in subsequent stages:

> Art forms the most powerful bond between the external world and the world within us ... It binds, communicates and exceeds all the other human capacities for communication because its nature and forms succeeds in shutting out all the distracting incidental noises ... Art even achieved the correction of a mass current, admittedly quite unconsciously and more negatively than creatively. Today, it shows us the superficiality of the current classicism that was a fashion. Almost everything that went beyond the portraits was dispensable. The typical forms of the Empire proved to be obstacles to art that served the expression of humanity. If one were to keep to the official paintings of the School of David, a miserably hollow period would emerge ... With Gericault and Ingres, on the other hand, the contemporary, freed from all conscious formalism, is the best, and in this way, Goya achieves his originality, in which he renounces all compromises with the backward-looking current of the times and shapes the awakening sensibility of a new world. [52]

These are the first symptoms of the identification of avant-garde tendencies with the principle of development, which can be seen today in the way that the interpretative impulse also makes use of historical material. This approach shows itself at its most suggestive above all in the fact that it indicated the very real path towards objective criteria used in the construction of the integrative systems of opinion that all avant-garde tendencies were heading towards by the end of the 1930s. The principal of discovery suggested the principle of liberation, initially just in the creative context, then later in the much more extensive domain of the human mind. Amédée Ozenfant, one of the leading representatives of the Purist artistic renaissance, finds that Rimbaud dared to emancipate poetry from the influence of the laws of prosody, and Mallarmé did not hesitate to go much further in subverting normal syntax, grammar, language in the pursuit of lyrical exaltation.

In *The Character of Modern Evolution*, from the period when Dada and Surrealism intersected, when he tried to set out guidelines for the defence of the modern spirit, Breton considered the three final stages, Cubism, Futurism and Dada, to be the threefold component of a broader movement, whose sense and significance was still not clear, and he tried to discern in these developmental changes the emergence and take-off of an idea that was awaiting a new impulse so that it could continue on its curved trajectory.[53] As has already been noted, Guy Mangeot observes in *The History of Surrealism* the multi-faceted process of this single developmental necessity in the liberation of eroticism in de Sade, of dreams in Nerval, of words in the case of Mallarmé, humour in Jarry, form in Apollinaire, and of the object in Picasso.[54] It lets the human mind, indeed humans in general, be led to a state of

52) Julius Meier-Graefe, *Entwicklungsgeschichte der modernen Kunst: Vergleichende Betrachtung der bildenden Künste, als Beitrag zu einer neuen Aesthetik*, Stuttgart: Hofmann, 1920, II, 232 and 234.

53) André Breton, 'Les charactères de l'évolution moderne et ce qui en participe,' in Breton, *Les pas perdus*, Paris: Gallimard, 1969, 148–74.

54) Guy Mangeot, *Histoire du surréalisme*, Brussels, René Henriquez, 1934.

receptive and heightened perception suitable for the pure expression of ideas, so that a space can be created, clear of any compromises in the face of life's illusions.

The interpretative dynamism and the integrational intention of development theory are substantially reinforced by conscious or unintended analogy with the development of technology and other discoveries of civilization. Technological progress, which suddenly invaded the sweet slumber of the nineteenth century, could not but tempt one to look at the evidence of analogous processes in the history of the mind and cultural forms. Such certainty affected development theories in art to the point where science itself expressed its initial doubts about the conclusiveness of those of its results that were obtained over and above the empirical domain, without them thereby being any less true. But until then, this analogy is powerful and unshakable in the sense of an integrative finality, in the sense of the universal completion of human history, and until when modern art also converges with Marxism.

It is indisputable that the principle of creative discovery is an anticonservative critical and revolutionary principle that originally, perhaps, was mostly confined, in its negative and provocative aspects, to 'shocking the bourgeoisie,' to overwhelming the public, approaching new methods of artistic invention with extreme skepticism. The artistic avant-garde could only become a true avant-garde when it was capable of transgressing existing aesthetic convention, which, at the end of the day, was never a fixed code of recognized criteria and values. Convention consisted, and up to the present continues to do so, of extremely diverse and elastic concepts and methods. It thus comprises some or other basic approach to the work of art rather than individual ways of evaluating it. For the artistic vanguard to be able to transgress such convention, and for it to be able to realize its exploratory mission, it could not limit itself to merely aesthetic considerations, for with them it would never have broken through aesthetic convention. It instead had to oppose contemporary aesthetics with its mind on certain ideological preconditions that could have nothing in common with aesthetics apart from the fact that, ultimately, they would inevitably capitulate to it, one way or another, either as a wreck or as a victim. If the aesthetics of autonomy ultimately always authorized these discoveries, incorporated them in its systems, and expanded the scope of aesthetic awareness with them, the avant-garde mission of these discoveries was thereby fulfilled, and other tendencies assumed the character of the avant-garde, struggling with another ideological structure. But that struggle never bypassed aesthetics, if it was not to lose its avant-garde significance.[55]

The history of the avant-garde is thus in this sense the history of conflicts between general aesthetic awareness and a new ideological system of creative thinking that came to re-establish such awareness in order merely to cultivate it and then submit and fulfil its mission through it. The characteristic nonconformity of the avant-garde, in its original meaning, is thus brought

55) It matters equally little if some artist, in whose oeuvre there has been, until now, an element of critical conflict, is 'bought' by public recognition and is subjected to the full glare of official approval. If he loses himself – and there exist the most propitious circumstances for this and, ultimately, the truly compelling silence of the new situation contributes to it – there just happens what has almost always happened in the history of art, he fulfils his individual destiny. The problem of creative art carries on without his involvement, for his mode of expression has reached a stable form, it presents a completed and closed set of values. It expanded, maybe, the basis of aesthetic awareness, but at the same time became a constitutive part of it. The power of inspiration that set him against aesthetic conventions will go on to be valid elsewhere, even in opposition to him, enrichened, for example, by the viewpoint he opened up.

about by the *principle* of exploration, and never by exploratory *values*, because the latter are determined solely on the basis of the theoretical programme of a specific movement or of a theoretical programme of supplementary interpretations. For this reason they are relative values, and can never be applied to the concept of the avant-garde in general. Avant-garde nonconformism is consequently determined by the concrete contents of the ideological presuppositions of a *specific* avant-garde movement that come into conflict with conservative thought and, in the domain of aesthetics, only resonate through their consequences.

The awareness of a connection between the avant-garde and programmes of social revolution (with their political formation) nevertheless has, wherever artistic thought comes into contact with political praxis, a sequence of moments that lead, on the one side, to an anarchic Romanticism, and, on the other, to the energetic requirement that art should serve concrete political goals. This basic contradiction, which has shown itself to be insuperable up to the present day, does not include, however, those elements of social utopianism that have encumbered the greater part of the 'aristocracy of the soul' that feels rather abandoned in its exclusive perspectives. Carrière, whose work cannot, even from afar, be assigned a place in the avant-garde work of his time, wrote enthusiastically about the socialist element in the thought of Gauguin, called for a new cathedral that would be a common place for everyone, a new artistic focal point for general liking. That prince of symbolic mysticism, Gustave Moreau, dreamt, above his museum of curiosities in the Rue Larochefoucauld, of an artistic communism of public monumental art.[56]

The relation of the artistic avant-garde to the revolutionary reconstruction of society arose in the very same questions of evaluation that had the necessarily revolutionary and reconstructive character in avant-garde conceptions. The determining factor in this relation was the resistance to so-called bourgeois values, which it equated with academic conservatism and which represented a quite distinct and stable model of values. This resistance, which made possible or, ultimately, suggested a similar distinctiveness of values to the avant-garde, was the decisive agent of this relation. This process of evaluation, carried over into theoretical considerations, too, was at base an ideological critique, one that stemmed from an ideological system. From there it led to profound shifts in significance between theoretical and ideological contemplation, from which was derived an unavoidable and logical symbiosis of artistic and political revolution. Thus, the permanent, critical, character of the avant-garde, which felt itself to be the most advanced outpost of all progressive tendencies, was overshadowed by the premise of general harmonious advanced development:

> Neither economic circumstances nor development have kept in step with the avant-garde. The laboratory inventions of artists in the West have been of no use to anyone. Established as a requirement and for the benefit of everyone, they reach only a tiny minority of the audience, spectators, readers – and, eager to make life fulfilled and thriving, they turn to a life that is fettered, threatened and tormented.

56) Wilhelm Hausenstein, *Die bildende Kunst der Gegenwart: Das soziale Element in der Kunst der Gegenwart*, Berlin, Stuttgart and Leipzig: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1923.

> Revolutionary consciousness, which is the expression of this realization, is never a rebellion against art, but against such a life. Against the rational and clear spirit of invention and the new pure terrain, art is dominated by rebellion, the subconscious and the cruelty of its revenge.[57]

The revolt against the art of a certain society becomes here a struggle against the society itself, for the meaning of avant-garde outbursts is to achieve ever deeper and more penetrating symbolizations, reaching those locations in the mind where everything is symptomatic and thus the image, thrown at prevailing aesthetic conventions, is, in a most essential way, like a bomb thrown at the government representative and thus, in its latest phases of consciousness, like the Marxist fight 'against the exploitation of human by human.'[58] The revolutionary spirit and programme of the avant-garde can only merge with the ideology of social revolution, however, when both are set by a common sense of opposition and ideological conflict. If this tension is released by the outbreak of a real revolution, and if this sense of conflict is dissolved by a new revolutionary or, especially, post-revolutionary order, the assumed symbiosis loses all its harmonizing potential and the old contradiction between the tendencies to constitutional order and ferment show themselves in new inconsistencies and conflicts, and especially, too, in new personal forms. How these new clashes are held depends on entirely external circumstances.

The intellectual seriousness involved in the adoption of new thinking in avant-garde concepts, which originally mostly scared rich conservative circles, gradually brought about the modernization of *snobbery*. Seriousness became here a badge of intellectual capacity. Although snobbery was found most frequently in close proximity to the avant-garde and was emphasized as being an essential constitutive component, in reality its meaning is that of an unclear psychosocial problem, the multifaceted nature of which has often been recognized (for example, Karel Teige, *The Marketplace of Art*[59]) every time as a necessary evil that has to be taken into account and dealt with, until conditions have improved for the development and distribution of culture, education and artistic creation. It has gone unnoticed, however, that hidden deep inside this problem is the question of the initial approach of the uninformed consumer who possesses the prerequisites for a more fruitful interest that sooner or later will overcome the stage of snobbery. Here, too, is voiced the external need to label oneself and to identify with a movement, which plunges the consumer, passing through a first dilettantish stage, into fierce emotions and superficial affectation. In the interim they have a merely passive will to self-identification. Yet, while in other, earlier, cycles, there was nothing to stop this dilettantish figure from becoming permanent, it was precisely the conflict-ridden nature of the avant-garde movement that laid the preconditions and requirement for an active type of consumer, because the latter becomes the critical co-creator of the work and the movement inasmuch as they are compelled to take up, develop and verify opinions that come up against

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57) Jiří Honzl, 'Sovětská a naše divadelní studia' [Soviet theatre studies and at home], *Země sovětů* 2: 6, 1933, 92.

58) Editor's note: Effenberger does not refer to any particular source here. However, the well-known idean of the 'exploitation of humans by humans' arose in circles around Henri de Saint-Simon in the 1830s. See Vincent Bourdeau, 'Les mutations de l'expression 'exploitation de l'homme par l'homme' chez les saint-simoniens (1829–1851),' *Cahiers d'économie politique* 75: 2, 2018, 13–41.

59) Karel Teige, *The Marketplace of Art*, trans. Greg Evans, Helsinki and Prague: Rab-Rab Press and Contradictions / kontradikce, 2022. First published as *Jarmark umění*, Prague: Živé umění, 1936.

unprepared ground and unyielding solutions on all sides. This aspect of the psychosocial problem of snobbery is far from exhausting its most essential aspects, which were and are manifest in the promotion and distribution of avant-garde work where they touch on its critical function in relation to social reality. It is often not easy to discern their compatibility with the original inspiration and intention of the creative act.

Only snobbery awakened the interest of the art market in the non-conformist avant-garde. It was a secondary but no less significant diktat of the art market which, in the 1910s and 1920s, penetrated into the genetic sources of the historic golden era of the avant-garde of the beginning of the century and valorized their legends. One more light shone out above the magical light of images and poetry, one more magnetic force added itself to the values that had been decided on. And it was not only the magnetism of material interests, it was also the emotional significance of the respect that their reality awakened: success. If artistic creation is not realized by means of the written poem or the painted image, but rather by real books, exhibitions, magazines and theatres etc., then the publicity for them cannot avoid securing the financial means that artists on their own have increasingly less at their disposal. Given the necessity of such material resources, disparate external influences penetrated into avant-garde creation. Market speculation became more attentive to avant-garde nonconformism. Its social revolutionary ideology could be attributed to a sympathetically attractive bohemianism (Picasso), or, depending on the circumstance, restrained in the most diverse ways.

The ideologists of the interwar avant-garde were conscious of this situation as a danger which art did not, 'until the new state of affairs,' have the power to remove. In 1936 Karel Teige wrote in *The Marketplace of Art*:

> … there is no reason to think that the present-day avant-garde, which the conservative audience considers to be crazy, won't one day be well exhibited and promoted on the rue La Boétie in Paris, that it won't find a way into the salons of bourgeois buyers … the bourgeoisie can appropriate the artworks that grew out of the fire of revolt, out of anti-bourgeois hatred, as soon as the situation on the art market comes about when such works can be profitably converted into cash.[60]

The fact that the ideology of the avant-gardes saw here merely the consequences of the commercialization of all human values of a faulty society is a symptom of the nature of their criteria, which related to the revolutionary transformation of every aspect of the world. When formulated in this way, however, the question of the promotion and distribution of avant-garde work that this ideology encountered bypassed an important moment that separated out ideological concepts and ideas from aesthetic ones, an extremely elastic division cutting through not only the galleries of art dealerships but also that socially vague area from which the moderately independent and liberal outlets such as the *Cahiers d'art*, Skira editions, and so forth, emerged. Neither the best organised propaganda of the Rue de la Boétie nor the exceptionally cultivated nature of Skira touched the reality that what was originally avant-garde and non-conformist work only ever entered into commercial transactions as spoils, but never in the form of the spoils of commercialism, but rather as aesthetic spoils. The avant-garde work of art had first to be aesthetically stabilised before it could tread the path towards

60) Teige, *The Marketplace of Art*, 43–44.

the heights of the market. Yet even if such aesthetic stabilization is not to be understood in a demeaning or pejorative sense, it presents, in relation to avant-garde ideology, a *different category* of concepts and values, a category that is alien to the interests and concerns of the artistic vanguard, precisely in tending towards the stabilization of values, whereas it is their interruption and transgression that gives the avant-garde its sense and name. Only here does aesthetic production, stripped of its relative and serious ideological content, enter the realm of aesthetic autonomy: it begins to belong to the aesthetics of modern art, it loses its avant-garde potential, its developmentally conflicted nature, which has already just become just a historical reminiscence without which it would have lost its historical significance. Its original non-conformity was made to conform for the purposes of aesthetic evaluation, the creation of aesthetic awareness, a consequence of the aesthetic environment in which it turns into decoration with the emblem of completely different modalities than those from which it was created.

A few findings follow on from this fact and they are tightly connected as much to the history of the avant-garde as to the situation of contemporary art. The most important one is that if we trace the growth of its influence, in the years after the second war, on the evolution of neo-abstraction, formalist aesthetics is an accompanying manifestation of the crisis of ideologically significant communication. Its emphasis on autonomous values is not a display of opposition to figurative expression. Rather, it is an aversion to the concrete in the deepest sense, which, in resigned acceptance of its ideological significance, endeavours, intentionally or not, to become a decorative mark of social or cultural privilege. This aesthetic approach acknowledges beauty in terms of perfection, without regarding it as essential to inquire into its definitions or the questions of its creation and meaning. It feels itself as being gifted with its own distinctive capability that it refuses to defend. The ideological view of this issue considers beauty and perfection to be disputable and, at the end of the day, to be contentless concepts, because they are, as such, indeterminate. It turns its attention to the conflict between creative work and its social and psychological meaning, and it denies (or does not assume) aesthetic autonomy or the aesthetic as an absolute, for the latter necessarily lacks critical potential, and thereby any link to living reality. If these two basic approaches to the question of art, as indicated here, have persisted from time immemorial to the present alongside each other, with greater or lesser degrees of distinctiveness, while also being contaminated by overlapping or encroaching on each other in the most varied forms, they have not ceased to be antagonistic principles that validate the normative and revolutionary elements of the history of art. The conflict between them shaped the history of the artistic avant-gardes as a history of ideological revolutions and aesthetic norms, whereby it became an adventure of the spirit and, at the same time, an inevitable constitution of a new aesthetic order, which, the next avant-garde outpouring inevitably overcame. From the moment when the ideological component of this antagonism was shaken up under the influence of more essential historical foundations, this antagonism was interrupted, and the history of the avant-garde came to an end.

The tendency towards autonomous abstract formal aesthetics is necessarily ahistorical. In the moments when it informs interpretative study, we often come across formal comparison between current artistic phenomena and earlier, completed, stylistic cycles. In Miró the

updating of the Baroque is made an absolute, aspects of the Secession are descried amongst the leading representatives of contemporary creative work, without such comparison transgressing its formalist limits. The Surrealist conceptions of Max Ernst can be set aside as well as his own creative inputs, and then he can be freely compared to Hieronymus Bosch, just as *le douanier* Rousseau can be to Uccello. From that point, however, there can arise further fruitful interpretations, which, in return, have an impact on the avant-garde or themselves *become* avant-garde. However, if this is the case, it is only insofar as, or in the sense that, they give up the tendency to become autonomous, for the latter does not let them develop and complete their ideological mission.

If modern aesthetics investigates the nature of the artistic avant-garde and how the avant-garde can even be identified, then it cannot be an inquiry into anything other than novel aesthetic values. However, ideological critique sets them beyond the reach of aesthetic evaluation and, ultimately, in opposition to its tendency to sort and order things. Because these questions and answers are not set on the same level, they cannot avoid more or less obscured or conspicuous confusion. 'Where does art begin and end?' Waldemar George remarks in response to the question in the survey by Massat:

> The works we despise today may tomorrow raise a voice that none of our contemporaries would assume. It is better to err than to adopt an accepting or passive point of view out of cowardice or opportunism. – The *authenticity* of a work of art eludes every definition and, with its coils, slips past any interpretation. It is something that is experienced. It cannot be measured.[61]

This crisis of avant-garde concepts is above all an ideological crisis, and it is deeply rooted in the much wider and more penetrating crisis of human consciousness and cognition that appeared in politics, just as in science and philosophy, from the 1930s onwards. At the same time, the growing sense of crisis in one image of the world has strengthened the entry of formal aesthetics, which emphasizes the artistic freedom of creative work and classifies ideological approaches according to the 'literary content' of painting. Although Miró the Surrealist sharply rejected, more than once, the formalist interpretation of his work, formalist aesthetics has been indulgently reprieved by Surrealism and positively valued on the basis of its 'pure artistic values.' It is only here that it comes to that formalism of which Surrealism was accused by its Marxist opponents, although here, in reverse, Surrealism is blamed precisely for its formalist insufficiency.

The *irreal* progress of avant-garde concepts was merely an outward sign of a deeper mental process which, in the face of exhausted and waning approaches, turned to deeper and more real sources. It was irreal only in relation to conventional forms of 'realistic' artistic expression. In relation to recognized and, until then, unspecified forms of human intellectual activity, conventional 'realistic' expression was, conversely, irreal. Here is the source of the eternal lexical quarrels about the terms 'reality' and 'realism.'

At present there is a tumultuous upswing in the aesthetics of creative miserabilism and poetic absurdity, under the most diverse titles, whose number increases almost daily. It is not difficult to recognise in them a passive reception of the concretely irrational components

61) Waldemar-George, *Aujourd'hui: art et architecture* 32, 1961, n.p.

of the pre-war avant-garde, especially Surrealism. The difference is that in Surrealist work the concretisation of the irrational was not, at least in its most essential parts, the main intention and meaning of the Surrealist movement, but rather, merely a contribution to an objectifying investigation, a sort of interim product of research into hidden mental processes and emotional forces, aimed above all at orientation amongst the possibilities of free forms of life. In his book *Amour fou* André Breton showed, in relation to the creative process in Giacometti, following the individual phases of the sculptural composition of a female figure, how capable unconscious artistic desire was of influencing not only the way he arranged the work, but also the random discovery of the subject that this composition was leading to from the start.[62] The resulting irrational appearance of Giacometti's figure was less important in comparison with this objectification of random chance, by which this unconscious desire was materialized. The finished Surrealist work was then actually just a document of this process of objectifying an inspiring materialization, to which the Surrealists turned all their attention. It is in this process of objectification, seeking its most sensitive and concrete psychological and philosophical space in the material of art, above all, that the ideological intent of Surrealism finds it place. Its philosophical and social mission has only just been capable of being realized, in the sense that the irrational has ceased to be irrational, and that the value of human nature, unfamiliar until now, has been understood dialectically, by which a path leads to the rediscovered world of a new consciousness, whose socially revolutionary character Surrealism strove to realize from the very beginning.

The irrational concrete form of miserabilist production that now almost dominates the art market, takes from the concrete irrationality of Surrealism just its external, absurd appearance. It will only end with a truly Surrealist intervention. Devoid of any ideological aim, it remains in the domain of autonomous aesthetics, which Surrealism encountered everywhere, since it expressed itself in recognisable artistic media, but it passed it by and went beyond it, at least in its most forceful intentions. If resistance to any particular ideology is also ideological, but just a retreating, exhausted ideology (for art can never cast off its communicative function since it would otherwise inevitably become commercial design), then it is necessary to add that any artistic work that subscribes in one or other way to Surrealism only superficially, in the sense that it is limited to aesthetic appearance or to its own creative form, is secondary or of no significance in terms of the principles of artistic development, because it is not a dynamic transformative medium in the service of the understanding of human being, but rather the reproduction of aesthetic facts.

If the phenomenological and anthropocentric nature of the avant-garde collapses, then the avant-garde *per se* collapses, even though there is a constantly increasing number of artists who would gladly join groups and 'make avant-garde art.' This tendency has been mostly brought about by the additional success in galleries and the market of the pre-war avant-garde and yet, amongst the incomparably smaller number of creative agents with no commercial interests, it has been brought about by the involuntary need 'in some way' to address the amorphous nature of the expressive functions, as well as communicative insignificance. The fact that irrationalistic work palpably lacks any ideological basis precisely today can be demonstrated by the emphasis that representatives of Pop Art in American society lay on its critical function

62) André Breton, *L'amour fou*, Paris: Gallimard, 1937.

exactly as does the Zen-Buddhism of the American beatniks. The pop-artists and the beatniks want to be the ideological opposition to a prospering rational life, a material prosperity whose price is the suppression of mental potency. However problematic, naive and, above all, maybe just superficially attractive both these forms of opposition seem to be, they are no less evidence of the fact that aesthetic intention alone will never be enough for artistic creation, if it seeks to be not mere decorative production, but aspires instead to achieving some extra-aesthetic impact. Evaluation of this kind of work does not rest with the analysis of the artistic questions and creative moments in it. Instead, it begins with critique of its ontological and gnostic intent, for only then is it possible to find the criteria for orientation, without which every judgement is just interpretative whimsy and 'scientific lyricism.'

This is why the contemporary inflation of irrealist and irrationalist art, acknowledging or denying that it formally profits from Dada and Surrealism, is exclusively regulated by the complex laws of the art market, which, as a special sorting organism, has in fact replaced the task of criticism and theory in this field. The image that most often offers the concept of the avant-garde is a historical once. The theory of art usually defines it as a historical phase from Impressionism to Surrealism, regardless of the evolutionary logic it finds in it. In the last twenty years since the Second World War there has been no movement that did not return to some phase of the avant-garde in one or other form, either directly (Neoabstraction) or through contamination (Abstract Expressionism). Some of the more recent impulses seek for a source of inspiration in Dada, Surrealism and the Bauhaus (Pop Art, Op Art, Happenings, Lettrisme, Concrete Poetry).

While all these postwar tendencies are often designated as 'avant-garde' because they are evidently inspired by concepts that could find a place in history, their avant-garde nature is disputable, when taken into consideration more precisely. This development certainly has a deeper cause than can be explained merely as a lack of creative initiative, implying an era of stagnation following on from one of violent tumult. It has been demonstrated more than once that there has never existed in the history of art a truly stagnant era, for in every such era active elements of ferment have been sooner or later revealed to be newly emerging out of broader concepts. Decay and growth occur in history at the same time, even if differing intellectual standpoints arrive at different results when these elements are assessed.

The increasing complexity of sociological and psychological inquiry together with the shocks in the political history of the second third of this century have markedly complicated the ontological and noetic questions that the history of the avant-garde from Impressionism to Surrealism has had to answer. New images were opened up before it, they placed it before new civilizational facts, but all these new elements only touch the surface of human consciousness. The conquest of the air that inspired the Futurists to the destruction of theatres at the beginning of this century, had the same impact, in the order of the human mind, as the conquest of space fifty years later, which, for all its dizzying qualities, remains external to the human imagination, at least in its immediate effects. However we assess their significance, the fact remains that the way in which these new elements are reflected in contemporary art is incomparably feebler than the influence of Dada or Surrealism. As if here the development of the avant-garde had reached certain basic questions of artistic creation, such that it was

enough merely to designate an approach for them to be gradually specified and modified far into the future.

The previous pages indicated the kind of historical factors that made Surrealism into a highpoint in the development of the avant-garde movements, from which point it became its own philosophical domain, a specific kind of ontological and noetic problematic with its own history and development. In the same way that *psychoanalysis* also ceased to be a movement, this movement also became a broad base, split into different cognitive systems, and yet the principles of the original movement persisted in these systems, in a superior, more up to date, albeit differentiated, form. We ascertain an identical development within *Existentialism*, whose long-lasting co-existence with Surrealism is linked to the coincidence of their ambivalent relationship to Marxism and their inclination towards the Romantic models of mentality (Baudelaire, Rimbaud, Hölderlin). As Surrealism evolved, just like Existentialism, a crisis of direct social engagement became visible, the result of which was that the merging of philosophical and artistic questions with aspects of practical social and political activity was gradually transferred to another order of comparison. The Romantic element of Surrealism represented by the interrelation of freedom, love and the poetic is not, in its revolutionary impulse, reduced to a programme of social or political praxis, but is conceived rather as the most profound dynamism of the creative life forces. This, its current alignment, is not a retreat from concrete to abstract concepts, in the philosophical sense of ones that are dematerialized (it was never deterred from formulating a position in questions of political praxis). It is instead an inclination to find concrete expression in models of another kind, in which social and political activity is one of the surface forms of conflict determined by forces shaped at a deeper level, that gain their legitimacy from them. In a similar way the speculative ideas of Heideggerian Existentialism arrive at the conceptual categories of the old philosophies, where the current moments of crisis of the European spirit appear as surface spasms of an originary and unchanging essence, that can only be viewed without resignation once it has been understood.

The spheres of Surrealist and Existentialist thought, which can be differentiated using a sufficiently incisive method similar to the way that imaginative and formally speculative contemplation can be distinguished from each other, have shared points of contact in an introverted ontological investigation, although in the introversion of different types, in which there is a revalorization and rehabilitation, in the context of contemporary thought, of ancient myths and their dynamic principles, without which the present crises of consciousness are not only inexplicable but also completely depressive. The most important feature of this direction in Surrealism is the fact that, gradually, the old opposition between the objective and general, and the subjective and individual, collapses, for it replaces the principle of identity with that of analogy. Was it the anti-naturalistic forms of art after Impressionism (Cubism, Expressionism, Surrealism) that reawakened the most ancient instincts, or do the most ancient instincts, awakened by the earthquakes of modern science in the system of the human consciousness and the unconscious, merely illustrate, through artistic creative work, their new development at the foundations of contemporary life? In *The Twilight of Images*[63] Germain Bazin detects in the dogma of the Māyā the Vedic analogue of relativity, the same counterpart to the macrocosmic,

63) Germain Bazin, *Le message de l'absolu: de l'aube au crepuscule des images*, Paris: Hachette, 1964.

static, cosmos based on observation, an essential cosmos eluding anything other than abstract symbolization, identical to what modern science exposes by way of pure reasoning; a bivalent system, expressed by Bohr's concept of complementarity.[64]

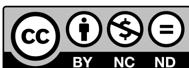
In the history of the avant-gardes a *new discursive space* slowly formed out of the fierce battle of ideas in what until how had been labelled art and the poetic, a discursive space in which the possibility of unity in the conceptual and terminological apparatus of art theory is as small as it is desirable, where a unified methodology, which remains a constantly unobtainable goal, gives way increasingly clearly to the dialectical relations between individual conceptual systems, and where the history of art, itself until recently still the domain of the most stable values, displays changing systems of different interpretative models. This change in the meaning of artistic work is clearly fundamental. The life of a work of art, whether an image or a book, is not fulfilled by the fact that it has been created to be a suggested source of specific value –the validity of which could never be reliably secured – or so that it could or ought to be in itself the most effective form of the liberation of supreme intellectual powers. Its real life is only fulfilled in the way it is received, the critical and theoretical interpretations that can made of it, and the character of those it is able to prompt. It is only thus that it fulfills its highest task, since it contributes to the cultivation of consciousness and to the sorting of minds, which is essential for all living creative thought.

If, today, the greater part of critical activity retreats before the flood of absurd, irrationalist art, 'anti-theatre,' 'non-drama' and 'anti-books' to some kind of wise position, equally far from anywhere else, it can consequently easily be accused of passivity or sterility. Yet these accusations change nothing about the crisis of criteria that is emphasized with increasing frequency, and that has been going on in art since the first avant-garde movement opposed the positivist doctrine of beauty with the principles of discovery and evolution. Since then, the history of the avant-garde can be considered the history of a crisis in the evaluation of artistic creative work, for it only evolved at moments of crisis when its earlier mode of evaluation failed and a new one emerged. This state of crisis may seem to be provisional and capable of being constantly overcome anew, but in forms that differ from a renewed positivist idea consisting of the conviction that there is a universal solution to all questions in art, a viewpoint carried forward to its most rigorous conclusion by the discipline of socialist realism, with consequences, however, that are well known. *This* crisis of evaluation, which is essentially the protracted agony of positivism in art theory and its methods, will inevitably persist in its present elementary forms for as long as the pressure of the inner necessities of artistic creation and the interest of the public retains a hold – less and less willing to take patient note of rhetorical commentary instead of clearly defined opinions – and compels discursive renewal as the sovereign form of critical evaluation and thus a relaxation of the developmental dialectic, but this time free of obsolete universalist violence that condemns that dialectic to sophistic playfulness.

Even if history changed the conditions underlying the premises of the artistic avant-gardes, in the most comprehensive sense, this does not also mean that the dynamic forces that gave avant-garde movements their critical potential collapsed with them. These forces

64) The Māyā is the game of relations or, rather, the tensions between appearance and essence, between a superficial knowledge of the world, which penetrates our senses, and that other space that reveals to us a method that yogi call introversion, the pure knowledge of the soul.

certainly continue to exist today in certain forms and in some current parts, but they can only appear when they are allowed a *real* space for discourse and polemic, which represents a unique form of *active culture*. Active culture which, as a mode of cultural existence, brings about sophistication and cultivation, epitomizes, with its escalation of critical, conflicting potency, the basic precondition for permanent hygiene of the mind, which neither suffocates nor deadens, but is instead capable of awakening and developing new conceptions in human cognition in novel psychological and social situations, which today, perhaps at a rudimentary stage, are preparing to make hitherto unknown and unsuspected transitions from the avant-garde system to new formations, for which the sum of avant-garde developmental contributions has created latent preconditions and which, in their totality, may be able to contribute to more realistic forms of conflict and agreement over conceptions of the world. Thus, it is not entirely unlikely that the shaking of some basic certainties into which avant-garde creative thought has entered is merely a symptom of some fundamental shift in existing notions, the initial stage of some new way of looking at the counter-problems of humanism, the contours of which are as yet unknowable. If the history of human thought, - and the legendary times of the avant-gardes testify to this - is a chain of crises in the evaluation of human orientation, then even this present crisis, which seems to be more hopeless than others, cannot be the last, and the knowledge of it cannot be an admission of failure. What will awaken from our present skepticism will surely be stronger than all the arguments of hopelessness.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# Shifting Paths in the Study of Art in Ukraine

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## Abstract

A significant conference ***Ukrainian art theory and history at the crossroads of intellectual traditions*** took place at Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv on March 14 and 15, 2024, jointly organized by the Department of Art History at the University and the NGO Centre for Historiography and Theory of Art. This event commemorated the centenary of the death of Hryhorii Pavlutskyi (1861–1924), who held the distinction of being the first professor of art theory and history at the Imperial University of St. Vladimir in Kyiv. The conference considered Pavlutskyi's role as an art historian and theorist and examined the major directions and trends in Ukrainian art theory and history from the late nineteenth to the early twentieth centuries, as well as the current state of art history and theory in Ukraine.
This paper assesses the significance of Pavlutskyi as an art historian, and also as one of the important actors in the history of Ukraine in the early 1920s. It then focuses on three main themes of the reviewed conference: (1) intellectual exchange; (2) the influence of various political ideologies on Ukrainian art historical writing and (3) the juxtaposition of art history and the Ukrainian concept of ***mystetstvoznavsto*** (art scholarship) as two different disciplines.

## Keywords

Ukraine; art theory; intellectual history; Ukrainian historiography of art history; museum studies; Eastern European studies

**https://doi.org/10.5817/AEC2024-4-4**

# Shifting Paths in the Study of Art in Ukraine

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## Introduction

In March 2024 a conference was held at Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv on the topic of *Ukrainian Art Theory and History at the Crossroads of Intellectual Traditions*, commemorating the centenary of the death of Hryhorii Pavlutskyi (1861–1924) (**Figure 1**), a prominent figure in Ukrainian art historiography and one of the founders of the Kyiv art historical school. As a professor of art theory and history at the Imperial University of St. Vladimir (now Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv) **(Figure 2)**, Pavlutskyi made significant contributions to how the field was conceived. Until he began teaching there, the official course curriculum primarily focused on the history of antique art. Pavlutskyi, in contrast, expanded its scope by teaching a comprehensive history of art, covering periods from the Ancient World to the nineteenth century. This article examines his impact as it was discussed at the conference, but before doing so, it is useful to understand the historical context in which he was working.

## Art History in the Russian Empire

In 1804, Russian Emperor Alexander I signed the General University Statute, which regulated the university education system in the empire. According to this document, courses on 'The Theory of Fine Arts and Archaeology' were already available within the department of literary sciences at universities.[1] However, it was only in the mid-nineteenth century that departments of art theory and history started to appear in the Russian Empire. The first of these was the department at the Imperial Moscow University (today, Mikhail Lomonosov Moscow State University), established in 1857. It was headed by the archaeologist Karl Hertz (1820–1883), who, in his inaugural lecture had already defined the interdisciplinary nature of the discipline: 'The history of art must come into contact with many sciences; indeed, it constitutes one of the essential parts of universal history, the history of literature, and philosophy.'[2]

Within six years, in 1863, the first department of art theory and history was opened in Ukraine, in the Imperial Kharkiv University (today, Vasyl Karazin Kharkiv National University) and, in 1875, the University of St. Vladimir. The head of the department of the latter was Platon Pavlov (1823–1895), who up to 1888 was its only professor. In developing the course,

1) Universitetskiy ustav (5 noyabrya 1804) [The University Statute (5th November 1804)], *Letopis Moskovskogo Universiteta*, http://letopis.msu.ru/documents/327.

2) Oksana Storchai, *Mystetska osvita v Kyivskomu universyteti (1834–1924)* [Art Education at Kyiv University (1834–1924)], Kyiv: Shchek, 2009, 115.

**Figure 1: Hryhorii Pavlutskyi (1924).**

Source: *Ukraina* Art Journal / Wikimedia Commons.

**Figure 2: The Imperial University of St. Vladimir, Kyiv (1911).**

Source: Gudshon and Gubchevsky Studio / Historic Postcard.

Pavlov relied on existing programs from the departments of Moscow University and Imperial Academy of Arts (today, Russian Academy of Arts), as well as universities in Western Europe, primarily Germany, which was one of the first to introduce the history of art into university teaching and prepare textbooks for the discipline.[3] He divided his course into two parts: the theory of art, and the history of art from the ancient world to the early nineteenth century. However, even with Pavlov's arrival, the history of art had not been fully taught to students; Pavlov's course lacked a clear structure, as it remained optional for students, and the topics were taught selectively.

It was only with Pavlutskyi that there was significant reform in the teaching of art history at the university level. He was the first in the empire to teach a holistic history of art, from Greco-Roman antiquity to the present.[4] To aid his students, Pavlutskyi translated Charles Bayet's *A Brief History of Art* and added his own chapters on the history of art in the Russian Empire in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.[5] Moreover, in Ukraine, Pavlutskyi made perhaps the greatest efforts to institutionalize art history as a discipline. As he noted in his

3) Storchai, *Mystetska osvita v Kyivskomu universyteti,* 118.

4) Ibidem, 178.

5) Charles Bayet, *Précis d'histoire de l'art,* Paris: Maison Quantin, 1886.

text 'On the Benefit of Art and Art History' (1909), the devaluation of art history and even its non-recognition as a part of historical science was commonplace in the Russian Empire at that time. Against the common view that art exists only for the sake of temporary pleasure, he argued forcefully that 'art is a mirror and an abbreviated chronicle of its time,' and thus the science that studies it is necessary for historians, artists, and 'any developed person.'[6]

In 1911, the Ministry of Public Education issued a circular that restricted the teaching of art history at universities. The discipline was not to be taught in its entirety and scope, but only in a limited way. In response, Pavlutskyi published a memo in defense of art history. In particular, he advocated its mandatory teaching to history students. The professor emphasized that art history should not be perceived as 'fun for Privatdozenten,' but rather as an opportunity for students to develop seriously in this field: 'if there is a Master's exam for art historians, then there should be a school for them.'[7]

As for Pavlutskyi's research interests, he began his academic career in classical philology and considered himself a student of Julian Kulakovskiy (1855–1919), a doctor of Roman literature and professor at the Imperial University of St. Vladimir. Pavlutskyi's students would later emphasize their teacher's 'historical-philological approach to art, for which artists so often reproach art historians.'[8] It was only in the late 1880s that Pavlutskyi turned to the study of classical art and 'published articles in the 'University News' on topics such as 'On Greek Scenography, Greek painted vases, Phidias, metopes, etc.'[9] Later, in 1897, he received a doctorate in art theory and history, defending his dissertation on *Genre Subjects in Greek Art up to the Hellenistic Era* at the University of Yuryev (now the University of Tartu, Estonia). It is worth noting that almost every art historian of the Russian Empire at the end of the nineteenth century, for example, began their research journey with Greco-Roman antiquity. That is why, in the programs of art history, the section on the history of the plastic arts of Greece and Rome was usually the most extensive.[10] Hence, Alexander Brückner, professor of the Russian History Department at the University of Dorpat, argued at the *Third Archaeological Congress* in Kyiv, that history of art, emerged as a separate discipline organically from classical archaeology.[11]

Greece and Rome were thus often an important starting point for researchers, after which they shifted their focus to the study of Byzantine or Rus' art. This is due to the fact that both states, even during the time of the Russian Empire, were key elements in constructing its 'great past.' Accordingly, a rather strong school of Byzantine studies developed within the

6) Grigoriy Pavlutskiy, 'O polze iskusstva i istorii iskusstv' [On the Benefit of Art and Art History], *Iskusstvo i Pechatnoye Delo* 11–12, 1909, 9. The idea of the inseparable connection between culture and art can be found in virtually every text by Pavlutskyi. He synthesizes this idea particularly in his presentation at the annual ceremonial meeting of the Nestor the Chronicler Historical Society: 'On the Connection between Art and Culture' (1900).

7) The full text of Pavlutskyi's memo is available in Storchai, *Mystetska osvita v Kyivskomu universyteti,* 329.

8) Fedir Ernst, 'Grigoriy Grigorievich Pavlutskiy,' *Sredi Kollektsionerov*, 5–6, 1924, 58.

9) Ernst, 'Grigoriy Grigorievich Pavlutskiy,' 58.

10) Storchai, *Mystetska osvita v Kyivskomu universyteti,* 128.

11) Alexander Brückner, 'Kakiye mogut i dolzhny byt ustraivayemy, pri universitetskom prepodavanii arheologii, prakticheskiye uprazhneniya i zanyatiya?' [What practical exercises and activities can and should be organized during university teaching of archaeology], in *Trudy Tretyaho Arheologicheskogo Siyezda v Rossii* [Proceedings of the Third Archaeological Congress in Russia], vol. 1, Kyiv: Imperial University of St. Vladimir Press, 1878, 39. Alexander Brückner (1834–1869) was a professor of the Russian History Department at the University of Dorpat (now University of Tartu). Mainly his research was focused on the intellectual and cultural connections between the Russian Empire and Western Europe.

empire, which was interrupted by the onset of the revolution. So in Ukraine, the study of Byzantine art was particularly developed in Odesa and Kharkiv.

Indeed, medieval Rus' holds an important place in historiography not only in Russia but also in Ukraine, as both claim the status of the 'heir' to the medieval state.[12] The study of the art of medieval Rus' was actively encouraged through the focus on its cultural heritage. For example, Pavlutskyi himself identified the starting point of his new interest as the 11th Archaeological Congress held in Kyiv in 1899.[13] The purpose of such congresses was to draw the attention of local scholars to their historical and cultural heritage. The Historical Society of Nestor the Chronicler played a major role in organizing the Archaeological Congress in Kyiv. Subsequently, it created the Commission for the Description of Antiquities of Ukraine, of which Pavlutskyi was a member. The main task of the new organization was to study church and secular architecture in Kyiv, Podillia, Volyn, Chernihiv, and Poltava governorates. Pavlutskyi consequently published the collected materials in the compendium *Antiquities of Ukraine: Wooden and Stone Temples of Ukraine* (1905).[14] In general, Pavlutskyi was the first to consider Ukrainian art as a distinct subject of research, and published numerous articles on the topic This included contributing to the six-volume *History of Russian Art*, edited by Igor Grabar (1871–1960), for which Pavlutskyi authored two chapters: 'Ancient Stone Architecture' and 'The Baroque of Ukraine.'[15] In the latter, he was the first to coin the term 'Ukrainian Baroque,' which defines a distinct style formed by the interaction between Baroque and the 'wooden architecture of pre-Mongol Russia.'[16] Thus, he noted, 'Ukraine created its own Baroque, borrowing all its constituent forms from the West, but transforming them in its own way; it created something new, which cannot be found in this form in the West, something certainly unique, and often beautiful.'[17]

In addition to his own research, Pavlutskyi played a significant role in Ukrainian art history as a promoter of Western ideas and methods, particularly those of contemporary French and German authors such as Eugène Müntz (1845–1902), Albert Dumont (1842–84), Charles Bayet (1849–1918), Wilhelm Lübke (1826–93) and Jakob Burckhardt (1818–97). These authors' works formed the basis of the recommended reading lists for his university courses. As Mykola Makarenko noted in the introduction to Pavlutskyi's posthumously published *History of Ukrainian Ornament* (1927), it was primarily due to his engagement with ideas abroad that Pavlutskyi developed his approach to historical and artistic research. In particular, 'the direction of his activity was mainly shaped by the collections in Paris and Berlin.'[18] In this

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12) For more on the role of medieval Rus, or more precisely, its construct as 'Kyivan Rus' and its influence on Ukrainian art historical writing see Illia Levchenko, 'The Nation as a Framework for Art Historical Writing,' in Stefaniia Demchuk, Illia Levchenko, eds, *Entangled Art Historiographies in Ukraine*, New York and London: Routledge, 2024, 203–222.

13) Afanasiev, 'Doslidnyk Ukrainskoho Mystetstva Hryhorii Pavlutskyi,' 15.

14) Ibidem, 16.

15) Pavlutskiy, 'Drevneyshee kamennoe zodchestvo' [Ancient Stone Architecture] in Igor Grabar, ed., *Istoriya Russkogo Iskusstva* [History of Russian Art], Moscow: Izdatelstvo I. Knebel, 1910, I, 143–330, and 'Ukrainskoye Baroko' [Ukrainian Baroque] in Grabar, ed., *Istoriya Russkogo Iskusstva* [History of Russian Art], Moscow: Izdatelstvo I. Knebel, 1911, 2, 337–416.

16) 'Ukrainskoye Baroko,' 346.

17) Ibidem, 407–8.

18) Mykola Makarenko, 'Hryhorii Hryhorovych Pavlutskyi' in Hryhorii Pavlutskyi *Istoriia Ukrainskoho Ornamentu* [History of Ukrainian Ornament], Kyiv: Printing House of the Ukrainian Academy of Sciences, 1927, 3.

regard, the time he spent in 1893 studying classical antiquity at the Sorbonne under the guidance of archaeologist and art historian Maxime Collignon (1849–1917) was especially important.

## A Mediator between Western and Eastern European Art Historiographies

It was in order to reflect on the legacy and achievements of Pavlutskyi that the conference was convened. The first section, on 'Ukrainian Art Theory and History at the Crossroads of Intellectual Traditions,' focused on bridging Ukrainian and Western European perspectives in art historiography. The speakers in this section emphasized cross-cultural exchange and the active participation of Ukrainian scholars in discussions on art and culture elsewhere in Europe.

Two other papers by Illia Levchenko and one by the current author compared the scientific approaches of Pavlutskyi to those of Aby Warburg (1866–1929) and considered the possibility of a direct or indirect connection between the theories of these researchers. In 1904, Pavlutskyi published an article in which he sought to determine the origin and role of *putti* images in the interior of churches in Volyn and Podillia provinces (now in northwestern and southwestern Ukraine) (**Figure 3**).[19] Specifically, he analyzed the ways in which the image of the *putto* migrated from antiquity to the Baroque period. As Demchenko and Levchenko pointed out, there were echoes, in Pavlutskyi's theory, of Warburgian concepts such as *Nachleben der Antike* (survival of antiquity) and *Bilderwanderung* (the migration of images). One example is in the way that in Pavlutsky's characterisation, *putti* resemble the figure of the nymph that Aby Warburg was repeatedly interested in; both are figures devoid of individuality, moving through time and space.[20] They do not so much exist on their own, but rather as iconographic types. In Warburg, the nymph is in constant motion, fleeing from the gods. Hence, as André Jolles, an art historian who closely worked with Warburg and was a part of his intellectual circle, wrote in a letter to Warburg, she always brings life and movement; she crosses tranquility, cutting through it.[21] The nymph has an indeterminate identity; as a symbol she can appear anywhere, at Christ's feet or at Herod's banquet. Putti also rarely appear alone. Most often, *putti* occupy space like a swarm. It was due to this quality, Pavlutskyi noted, that they became popular in the Baroque era precisely 'as figures convenient for the decorative filling of space.'[22]

Pavlutskyi defines the main characteristic of *putti* as their ludic quality.[23] In other words, while the nymph is the embodiment of movement, the *putto* is the embodiment of play. And

19) Grigoriy Pavlutskiy, *O derevyannyh reznyh izobrazheniyah puttov v yuzhno-russkih tserkvah* [On Representations of Putti in Wood Carvings of the Southern Russian Lands in the 17th and 18th Centuries], Kyiv: Historical Society of Nestor the Chronicler, 1904.

20) For more on the comparison of putti and Ninfa as 'images of the images' see Bertrand Prévost, 'Direction–dimension : Ninfa et putti,' *Images Re-vues*, Hors-série, 4, 2013. DOI: https://doi.org/10.4000/imagesrevues.2941.

21) Ernst Hans Gombrich, *Aby Warburg: An Intellectual Biography*, London: Phaidon, 1970, 113.

22) Pavlutskiy, *O derevyannyh reznyh izobrazheniyah puttov v yuzhno-russkih tserkvah*, 10.

23) Ibidem, 7.

**Figure 3: Eighteenth-century Wooden Putti Sculptures.**

Source: Hryhorii Pavlutskyi, *On Representations of Putti in Wood Carvings of the Southern Russian Lands in the 17th and 18th Centuries*, Kyiv 1904.

it is this playfulness that, for Pavlutskyi, was definitive when he sought the first *putto* in art. The first one he named was the Boy with a Goose. Children were, of course, depicted earlier, but for Pavlutskyi this particular boy embodied the playfulness and childish boldness that every *putto* possesses. Conversely, the temporary 'death' of the *putto* in the Middle Ages he attributed to an absence of playfulness, which was then rediscovered later.

The reactivation of antiquity and the establishment of connections between it and other eras were generally popular themes for many art historians at the end of the nineteenth century. Accordingly, Pavlutskyi's interest fitted completely into the spirit of his time. Highlighting the shared methods and ideas of Pavlutskyi and Warburg, and suggesting (in) direct connections between the two researchers, in turn, expands our understanding of the intellectual horizons of the Kyiv school of art history. In fact, there is no direct reference to Warburg in Pavlutskyi's works. As a result, we cannot say with certainty that he had read the German scholar. Yet, he was well aware of the works of contemporary German art historians, and as Sergei Ghilarov has pointed out, nearly all the literature that Pavlutskyi references in his dissertation is in German.[24] Even if Pavlutskyi and Warburg were not in direct contact, the figures of Burckhardt, Müntz and Reinhard Kekulé von Stradonitz (1839–1911) were frequently cited in both scholars' works. Burckhardt was a popular and scholar at the time, frequently

24) Sergei Ghilarov, 'Pamyati G. G. Pavlutskogo' [In Memory of H. H. Pavlutskyi], *Studii mystetstvoznavchi,* 4, 2015, 85.

cited across Europe and Russia, but the figures of Müntz and Kekulé are more intriguing in this context. Müntz's name first appears in Pavlutskyi's 1897 dissertation, meaning that by the time he wrote his article on putti, Pavlutskyi was already familiar with his work. Müntz, a professor of art history at the École des Beaux Arts in Paris, corresponded with Warburg and, as Michela Passini has noted, he was one of Warburg's most cited contemporary authors.[25] In preparing for his lectures, Pavlutskyi used Müntz's book *Art During the Renaissance* (1888), in which the French author examined art in connection with politics, economics, religion, fashion and other social and cultural factors.[26] It is clear that he was also influenced by Burckhardt's *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy* (1877–78), and Müntz himself described his work as 'essentially the history of civilization, rather than just the history of art.'[27]

Kekulé was an archaeologist and director of the collection of antique sculpture and vases at the Berlin Museum, who had taught Warburg at the university of Bonn, and it was in his seminars that Warburg first came into contact with the idea of the *Pathosformel*.[28] Kekulé was one of the most influential archaeologists of his time, so Pavlutskyi, in his aforementioned dissertation, frequently cites Kekulé, although more often in a critical vein. For example, he criticses Kekulé's tendency to fill in the lack of factual data for certain period by drawing comparisons with 'analogous' facts from later periods.

Yet caution has to be exercised in suggesting that Kekulé was a link between Pavlutskyi and Warburg, for his work differed significantly from that of Warburg. Kekulé's concept of antiquity was quite different from that of Warburg. Nevertheless, Pavlutskyi's references to Kekulé are revealing about the intellectual world with which he was engaging, of which Warburg was also a significant member.

At the centenary conference Petro Kotliarov of Taras Shevchenko National University drew attention to the similarities between Pavlutskyi's theory of the action of 'will' in art and the concept of 'artistic will' (*Kunstwollen*) of Alois Riegl (1858–1905).[29] In his *History of Ukrainian ornament*, for example, Pavlutskyi asserted that the primary driver in art was not external (political, economic, or social) but internal (spiritual, individual) factors. Pavlutskyi acknowledges that art lives 'by will, not chance.' In other words, it is the internal impulse of will and inspiration that plays a decisive role in the development of art. Similarly, Riegl wrote about this same autonomous impulse in his work *Problems of Style: Foundations for a History of Ornament*.[30] Pavlutskyi himself doesn't provide an explanation of what 'artistic inspiration' and 'will' actually meant. Kotliarov did not provide any direct concrete evidence of connections between Pavlutskyi and other art historians. Moreover, the key phrase Pavlutskyi used, 'will, not chance' (*волею, а не свавільством*), could equally have been taken from Viollet-le-Duc,

25) Michela Passini, 'Eugène Müntz: un interlocuteur français d'Aby Warburg' [Eugène Müntz: A French interlocutor of Aby Warburg], *Images Re-vues,* Hors-série 4, 2013, 3.

26) Eugène Müntz, *Histoire de l'art pendant la Renaissance*. Paris: Hachette, 1888.

27) Passini, 'Eugène Müntz,' 3.

28) Georges Didi-Huberman, *The Surviving Image,* University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2017, 17.

29) Petro Kotliarov, '"By the Will, not Chance": Hryhorii Pavlutskyi's 'History of Ukrainian ornament' (1927)' in Stefaniia Demchuk, Illia Levchenko, eds, *Entangled Art Histories in Ukraine,* New York and London: Routledge, 2024, 52–71.

30) Alois Riegl, *Stilfragen : Grundlegungen zu einer Geschichte der Ornamentik* [Problems of style: foundations for a history of ornament], Berlin: G. Siemens, 1893.

who used it in his book *Russian Art*, which was originally published in 1877 and then translated into Russian in 1879.[31] In this work, Viollet-le-Duc devoted considerable space to Russian ornament and its formation through the interaction of Byzantine, Iranian, Scandinavian, and other artistic influences. Riegl's study, *Problems of Style*, in which he introduced the concept of *Kunstwollen*, was published 16 years after Viollet-le-Duc's book and is the more likely source (Pavlutskyi was preparing his work on the *History of Ukrainian Ornament* for publication in the late 1920s). There are no direct references to Riegl in Pavlutskyi's text. However, Riegl was a well-known figure among art historians in the Russian Empire. For example, in the *Archaeological Journey through Syria and Palestine* (1904), Nikodim Kondakov conducted a critical review of Riegl's *Problems of Style*.[32] In 1906, Kondakov's student and, by then, a professor at Kharkiv University, Yegor Redin, published an obituary dedicated to Riegl.[33]

In general, when discussing the possibility of intellectual connections between art historians in Kyivan and those elsewhere in Europe, we must consider a peculiar system of references. Often, authors omitted or did not mention other scholars, their texts, ideas, or concepts. This makes it difficult to directly answer the question: 'Did Pavlutskyi read Riegl and Warburg?' Nonetheless, we know that Ukrainian art historians were not isolated from their Western counterparts. For example, in the 1910s, there were Russian translations of Adolf von Hildebrand's (1847–1921) *The Problem of Form in Painting and Sculpture* and Heinrich Wölfflin's (1864–1945) *Classic Art*.[34] It is also worth recalling that the artist Mikhail Nesterov (1862–1942) referred to Pavlutskyi as 'a great admirer of Ruskin' even though no direct citations of Ruskin appear in Pavlutskyi's works. [35] Thus, in cases where there are no direct references, but the text suggests certain similarities, these instances provide fertile ground for deeper research and attempts to reconstruct the intellectual landscape of both Western and Eastern Europe.

## Ideologies and Ukrainian art historiography

Another important topic of the conference was the influence of ideologies – political, national, and others – on Ukrainian art historical writing and its authors directly. When discussing Pavlutskyi, can we even identify him as a Ukrainian? The answer is that he more likely thought of himself as Ukrainian than not. This identification is not solely based on his contributions to the formation of Ukrainian art history as a discipline or his emphasis on Ukrainian art and its identity. It should be noted that from 1907 onwards, Hryhorii Pavlutskyi was a member of the Ukrainian Scientific Society, which required that speeches, meetings,

31) Hryhorii Pavlutskyi used Viollet-le-Duc's book translated in russian by art historian Nikolay Sultanov: Eugen Viollet-le-Duc, *Russkoye Iskusstvo* [Russian Art], trans. Nikolay Sultanov, Moscow, 1879.

32) Nikodim Kondakov, *Arheologicheskoye puteshestviye po Sirii i Palestine* [Archaeological Journey through Syria and Palestine], Saint-Petersburg: Izdaniye Imperatorskoy Akademii Nauk, 1904.

33) Yegor Redin, 'Alois Riegl,' *Vizantijski vremennik* 13: 1, 1906, 496–497.

34) Adolf Gildebrand, *Problema formy v izobrazitelnom iskusstve i sobranie statey* [The Problem of Form in Painting and Sculpture and Collected Essays], trans. Nikolay Rozenfeld, Vladimir Favorsky, Moscow: Musaget, 1914.; Genrih Wyolflin, *Klassicheskoye iskusstvo* [Classic Art], trans. A. Konstantinova, Vera Nevezhyna, St. Petersburg: Brockhaus and Efron, 1912.

35) Mikhail Nesterov, *Pisma* [Letters], Leningrad: Isskustvo, 1988, 165.

and other activities be conducted exclusively in Ukrainian.[36] But it was during the late 1910s that Pavlutskyi most clearly expressed his pro-Ukrainian stance. Between 1917 and 1920, Pavlutskyi's public activities took precedence over his scientific and pedagogical work. As his student Fedir Ernst remarked, Pavlutskyi 'was full of love for Ukraine.'[37] During this period, Pavlutskyi made significant contributions to the development of Ukrainian educational institutions, including the Kyiv Academy of Arts and the Kyiv Archaeological Institute. He also held several administrative positions at the Mykhailo Drahomanov Higher Institute of Public Education, where he continued to teach art history. This took place during the time of the Ukrainian National Revolution (1917–1921) when the Ukrainian national movement emerged as a new political actor, and sought to establish a state for a nation caught between the Austria-Hungary and Russian empire.

In 1919, Pavlutskyi coauthored an 'Explanatory Note on the Project of Organizing the Historical and Philological Department of the Ukrainian Academy of Sciences.'[38] In the section on Ukrainian art, he wrote that researchers had already 'firmly established the existence of a distinct national Ukrainian style throughout the territory inhabited by the Ukrainian people, from the Don to the Carpathians.' He concluded: 'The artistic movement … has awakened in the citizenry a lively interest in their native antiquity, in everything that manifests national creativity. Now the history of Ukrainian art has become a work for the people themselves and has acquired their special affection and love.'[39]

However, by the end of 1919, Ukrainians had lost all hope of political independence and fell under Soviet rule. This period in Professor Pavlutskyi's intellectual biography was highlighted at the conference by Olena Liapina. Pavlutskyi's attempts to establish an independent Ukrainian higher education system were in vain: universities were disbanded, and their management was eliminated. For example, in 1920, during the educational reform carried out by the Soviet government, Kyiv University was formed by merging the Imperial University of St. Vladimir, Kyiv State Ukrainian University, Kyiv Higher Women's Courses, the Teachers' Institute, and other educational institutions of the Drahomanov Higher Institute of Public Education was founded. At the same time, art history as a discipline was marginalized. According to Liapina, in 1921 the Provincial Department of Vocational Education demanded the removal of the 'History of Art' course from the curriculum of the Drahomanov Institute and the introduction of social science disciplines instead (such as 'The Soviet Constitution,' 'Soviet Policy in Education,' 'The History of the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party and the Russian Communist Party'). However, this change was not implemented.

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36) Andrii Puchkov, *Mizh Navihatsiynymy Shchohlamy: Profili Ukrainskyh Mystetstvoznavtsiv* [Between Navigational Masts: Profiles of Ukrainian Art Historians], Kyiv: Dukh i Litera, 2018, 150–1.

37) Ernst, 'Grigoriy Grigorievich Pavlutskiy,' 59. Ernst (1891–1942) was an art historian. As he himself claimed, he was inspired for research in the fields of the Ukrainian art and cultural heritage directly by Hryhorii Pavlutskyi, his professor in the Imperial University of St. Vladimir. Up to the 1930s, Ernst conduct teaching and scientific activities in Kyiv. From 1933 to 1941 he experienced three arrests and was executed for 'German espionage.'

38) Dmytro Bahalii, Ahatanhel Krymskyi, Hryhorii Pavlutskyi and Yevhen Tymchenko, 'Poiasniuiucha Zapyska do Proiektu Organizatsii Istorychno-Filolohichnoho Viddilu Ukrainskoi Akademii Nauk' [Explanatory Note to the Project of Organizing the Historical and Philological Department of the Ukrainian Academy of Sciences] in *Zbirnyk Prats Komisii dlia Vyroblennia Zakonoproiektu pro Zasnuvannia Ukrainskoi Akademii Nauk u Kyivi* [Collection of Works of the Commission for Drafting the Bill on the Establishment of the Ukrainian Academy of Sciences in Kyiv], Kyiv: Printing House of the Ukrainian Academy of Sciences, 1919.

39) Ibidem, x.

During this period, Pavlutskyi remained in Kyiv and took on several administrative roles at the Drahomanov Higher Institute of Public Education. He served as vice-rector for academic affairs, actively participated in setting up the institute, and, by 1922, was likely appointed director of the institute's library while also heading the Museum of Fine Arts. At the same time, he continued to teach art history and was one of the few teachers at the Drahomanov Institute to conduct their courses in Ukrainian. It is also noteworthy that Oleksandr Ohloblyn's collection includes an interesting anonymous document titled *List of Professors and Lecturers of the Drahomanov Institute (with characteristics)*. [40] The document says of Pavlutskyi: 'He is one of the few old professors who is fully on the Soviet platform. He is actively working in the field of higher education reform.'[41]

Although Liapina describes this characterization of Pavlutskyi's relationship to the new Soviet system as an 'exaggeration,' such fluidity of political identity was not uncommon at the time. Another speaker at the conference, Pavlo Zolotukha (Bohdan and Varvara Khanenko National Museum of Art) illustrated this with the example of the art historian Serhii Hiliarov.[42] Hiliarov, a student of Pavlutskyi, worked as an employee at the Museum of Art of the Ukrainian Academy of Sciences. During the German occupation of Kyiv (1941–1943) he even served as its director. Zolotukha, who has undertaken archival research, including examining Hiliarov's lectures at the Kyiv Art Institute and records of interrogations conducted by the State Political Administration of the Ukrainian SSR in 1933 and during 1945–1946, emphasised that Hiliarov generally sought to avoid public declarations of ideological certainty, although he did so when compelled to in specific circumstances. This deliberate ambiguity allowed him to continue his research activities under different political regimes.

In Pavlutskyi's case, it was perhaps this adaptability that allowed him to continue his pedagogical and scientific activities (particularly in Ukrainian) and, most importantly, to establish an independent historical and artistic school in Kyiv. This group includes figures such as Hiliarov, Ernst, the historian of Asian art Vsevolod Zummer (1885–1970), the ethnographer Danylo Shcherbakivskyi (1877–1927) and Dmytro Antonovych, an art historian and minister of arts (1918–1919) during the Ukrainian People's Republic of 1917–1921.[43] The situation was quite different at the University of Kharkiv, where there was a school of Byzantine studies led by Fedir Schmit. In her discussion of the topic at the conference, Maryna Domanovska (Vasyl Karazin Kharkiv National University) pointed out that although Kharkiv had a prominent center for Byzantine studies, its development was curtailed in the 1930s due to the arrest of Schmit and his students. Schmit was first arrested in 1920 on suspicion of involvement with the

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40) Oleksandr Ohloblyn (1899–1992) was a Ukrainian historian, archivist and a president of Ukrainian Academy of Arts and Sciences in the US (1970–1989), founded by Ukrainian emigrated scholars.

41) *Spysky lektoriv VINO im. M. Drahomanova u m. Kyievi* [List of Professors and Lecturers of the Drahomanov Institute in Kyiv], The Central State Archive of the Highest Authorities and Government of Ukraine, 3561, box 259, folder 18.

42) Serhii Hiliarov (1887–1946) was an art historian. He conducted teaching activities in several Kyivan institutions. From 1919 he joined the Arts Museum of Ukrainian Academy of Sciences (today – Bohdan and Varvara Khanenko National Museum of Art), where he became one of the founders of a graduate school. Beside that, Hiliarov made a series of attributions in the museum. One of them – the diptych 'Adam and Eve' (1530) by Lucas Cranach the Elder, which then was selled by the bolsheviks on the auction in Berlin in 1929.

43) Zummer was head of the Department of Art History in Baku State University (Azerbaijan) in the 1920s. Antonovych (1877–1945) was also one of the founders of the Ukrainian academy of fine arts in Kyiv (1917) and the Ukrainian Free University in Vienna (1921), where he also held the position of rector.

National Centre, a pro-monarchist political organization, which existed from 1917 to 1920. He was accused of preparing and signing the 'Appeal of Scientists of Southern Russia to Scientists of Western Europe' (1919), which was essentially a call for military help to Anton Denikin, leader of the anti-bolshevik forces in southern Russia, against the 'destructive advance of the Bolsheviks.'[44] He was sentenced to three years' imprisonment with community service.[45]

By 1932, Schmit's relations with the communist authorities had deteriorated even further, and he was accused of 'deviating from Marxism.'[46] His affiliation with the Byzantine studies school also became a point of reproach (and threat) to his students. Finally, in 1934, Schmit was arrested again, this time for charges including 'nationalist propaganda,' 'leading cells of a pro-fascist organization in humanitarian scientific institutions in Leningrad,' and 'involvement in the fascist organization of Russian and Ukrainian nationalists—the Russian National Party.'[47] In 1937, he was executed as an enemy of the people.

## Theory, History of Art and *Mystetstvoznavstvo*

The last section of the conference, titled 'Ukrainian Art History and *Mystetstvoznavstvo*: Past and Future,' carried a somewhat provocative title in the Ukrainian context. While the concepts of art history and *mystetstvoznavstvo* are often used interchangeably in the Ukrainian context, the conference organizers insist on distinguishing them as two different approaches to the study of art. In particular, they emphasize the year 1937, marking it as the upper limit of the conference. At that time, following the Resolution of the Council of People's Commissars of the USSR 'On Scientific Degrees and Titles' No. 464,[48] some Ukrainian higher education institutions started offering qualifications in *mystetstvoznavstvo*. According to the organizers, this 'marked the end of the first stage of the development of the science of art in Ukraine and the emergence of Soviet *'mystetstvoznavstvo'* on new methodological principles.'[49]

However, this periodization, where a new stage is dependent on 'new' terminology, seems problematic. If we are talking about the destruction (for example, institutional) of the previous science of art, it begins much earlier than 1937, and the popularization of the term *mystetstvoznavstvo* plays a role only as one element of the colonial policy of the Soviet Union. First, the term itself existed in the Russian and Ukrainian contexts back in the times of the Russian Empire. So, *mystetstvoznavstvo* is a literal translation of the Russian term *iskusstvovedenie*, which, in turn, is an analogue of the German *Kunstwissenschaft*. It should be noted that in imperial times, the term was rarely used, mainly as a translation of the German one. For example, in volume nine of the 'Russian Encyclopedia' (1914), *iskusstvovedenie*

44) Oleksii Nestulia, 'Ponad Use Vin Stavyv Istynu' [Above all, he valued the truth], in Nestulia, *Represovane Kraieznavstvo* [Repressed Local History], Kyiv: Ridnyi Krai, 1991, 38.

45) Ibidem.

46) Ibidem, 49.

47) Ibidem, 50.

48) Since then, and to this day, some Ukrainian higher education institutions have continued to offer qualifications in *mystetstvoznavstvo*.

49) *Ukrainska teoriia ta istoriia mystetstv na perekhresti intelektualnyh tradytsiy* [Ukrainain art theory and history at the crossroads of intellectual traditions], *Events* [Facebook page], n. d., https://www.facebook.com/events/1306054649998862/ (URL: accessed 1 November 2024).

is mentioned as a discipline 'mainly of German science,' separate from art history, which studies 'monuments of art history in their artistic essence.'[50] At the same time, the titles of university departments and academic degrees of that time in the Russian Empire generally referred to 'Art Theory and History.'

The terms *mystetstvoznavstvo* and *iskusstvovedenie* gained popularity with the advent of Soviet power. In the 1920s, after the reorganization of the Ukrainian Academy of Sciences, the departments of world and Ukrainian art, headed by F. Schmit and Oleksii Novytskyi[51] respectively, continued to operate.[52] However, in 1922, by order of the Main Committee for Professional and Specialized Education of the People's Commissariat of Education of the Ukrainian SSR, a scientific research department of *mystetstvoznavstvo* was established.[53] One of the key tasks of the new structural unit, according to its head, Schmit, was the development of an art theory that 'would correspond to communist statehood and could serve as the basis for the state-artistic policy of the Ukrainian SSR.'[54] To continue its existence under Soviet rule, art history also had to survive its own 'revolution,' and to 'rebuild itself fundamentally.'[55] In Soviet historiography, the October Revolution of 1917 is often defined as the moment of the birth of the science of art. For example, Ivan Vrona, the rector of the Kyiv Art Institute, wrote in his article 'Pressing Issues of Art Education' that only 'after the revolution, in connection with the new materialist Marxist view of art and its productive and socio-practical tasks in modernity,' does the real problem of building art education in Ukraine arise.'[56]

It is clear that in this way, the Soviet authorities forcibly created a break in the continuity of the discipline. In addition, the emergence of the 'new science of art' undoubtedly served as one of the components of the colonial policy of the Soviet Union. This topic was analysed in depth by Stefaniia Demchuk and Illia Levchenko in their article 'Decolonizing Ukrainian Art History.'[57] They argue that the main consequences of this policy was that Ukrainian researchers focused on studying Ukrainian art, avoiding theoretical problems.[58] Furthermore, until the 1950s, it was possible to obtain a degree in *mystetstvoznavstvo* only in Moscow or Leningrad, as there were no opportunities for study abroad.[59] All this aimed at provincializing Ukrainian

50) Sergei Adrianov ed., *Russkaya Ensiklopediya* [Russian Encyclopedia], Saint-Petersburg: Deyatel, 1914, 9, 78.

51) Oleksii Novytskyi (1862–1934) was an art historian and archaeologist. His research focused on Ukrainian and Byzantine art. He was one of the key figures involved in preserving Ukrainian cultural heritage, promoting its significance, and advocating for the return of artifacts to Ukraine from museums and archives, particularly those in Russia.

52) Mariia Sichka, *Diialnist Kyivskyh Mystetstvoznavtsiv u 1920 – 1930-ti roky: sotsialno-kulturnyi aspekt* [Activity of Kyiv Art Researchers in the 1920s – 1930s: Socio-Cultural Aspect], Kyiv: Borys Grinchenko Kyiv Metropolitan University PhD Dissertation Thesis, 2017, 43.

53) Iryna Khodak, N'aukovo-Doslidna Kafedra Mystetstvoznavstva: Pochatkovyi Etap Diialnosti (1922–1924)' [The Scientific Research Department of mystetstvoznavstvo: the initial stage of activity (1922–1924)], *Studii mystetstvoznavchi,* 2, 2014, 110.

54) Ibidem.

55) Ivan Vrona, 'Nazrili pytannia izo-mystetskoi osvity' [Pressing Issues of Art Education], *Mystetsko-Tekhnichnyi Vysh.,* 1, 1928, 41.

56) Ibidem.

57) Stefaniia Demchuk and Illia Levchenko, 'Decolonizing Ukrainian Art History,' *Nationalities Papers,* vol. 52: 5, 2024 (DOI: 10.1017/nps.2024.58).

58) Ibidem, 13.

59) Ibidem.

art history. The Soviet authorities instrumentalized *mystetstvoznavstvo* as a key part of colonial policy in the field of education.[60]

Serving as an umbrella term for art history, art theory, and art criticism, *mystetstvoznavstvo* essentially deformed each of the three domains and it displaced previous modes of art historical inquiry. Consquently, Demchuk and Levchenko have argued that denunciation of the term is a necessary first step towards decolonizing knowledge.[61] Yet if we are talking purely at a terminological level, we cannot say that *mystetstvoznavstvo* 'replaced the theory and history of art.'[62] Rather, the concepts coexisted. Despite the renewal of scientific degree titles in 1937, there was no strict analogous renewal of the names of academic departments. For example, the Department of Art History continued to exist at the Kyiv Art Institute. In 1959, it was transformed into the Faculty of Art History and Theory. In other words, the actualization of the term, by and large, had limited significance. Thus, in the discussion about *mystetstvoznavstvo* and art history, the main problem is not so much in the formation of a specific Soviet Newspeak[63] and, through it, a concrete colonial impact, but, rather in the formation of a new approach to scholarship and science in general. With the advent of Soviet power and the implementation of reforms in higher education, all inquiry into art was constrained within the framework of Marxist-Leninist methodology.

Here is how Schmit, then Director of the Institute of Art History in Leningrad, wrote about this in his article 'The Study of Art in USSR 1917–1928': 'In art history that meant a fundamental revision of ideas as to the character both of Byzantine and of Russian art…An art historian can, when being unscientific, limit himself to the study of the style and meaning of a work of art without raising the questions as to who made it or who it was made for. To such a person, art becomes an abstraction; he can construct aesthetic categories and artistic qualities, and can talk of creative genius and the like. If, however, the art historian has set for him the task of always raising the questions to what social group an artist belongs to and what social stratum has the artist been working for (the art historian is not expected to go further), then abstract art disappears like a phantom and every work of art becomes a sociological document. Looked at in this sociological way, neither Byzantine nor Russian art seems any longer to represent a uniform style but rather a complex of very heterogeneous currents, which are not "more beautiful" or "more artistic" one than another but belong merely to the evolution of different social strata.'[64] It is in the applied nature of *mystetstvoznavstvo*, its fundamental sociological character, Schmit writes, that its key difference from 'European' scholarship lies.[65] In other words, what was at stake was a common field of inquiry – the scholarly study (or 'science') of art, as in the 'West,' but with different approaches; *mystetstvoznavstvo* was thus more an aggressive deformation of the previous, imperial, conception of the study of art rather than a full replacement of it.

60) Ibidem, 12.

61) Ibidem, 20.

62) Stefaniia Demchuk and Illia Levchenko eds, *Entangled Art Historiographies in Ukraine,* New York and London: Routledge, 2024, 6.

63) Demchuk and Levchenko, 'Decolonizing Ukrainian Art History,' 11.

64) Theodor Schmit, 'The Study of Art in the U.S.S.R. (1917–1928),' *Parnassus,* vol. 1, 1, 1929, 8.

65) Ibidem, 9.

The term *mystetstvoznavstvo* continues to persist in the field of Ukrainian study of art, sparking debates about its relevance and appropriateness. While it might seem to be merely a struggle over terminology, debates are, in fact, part of an attempt to open a broader discussion about the nature of Ukrainian art scholarship. To what extent has it broken free from Soviet influence, how aligned it is with contemporary approaches to study of art elsewhere, globally, or is it, perhaps, forging its own versions of art historical methodologies developed in western Europe and North America? Unfortunately, debate about *mystetstvoznavstvo* has yet to prove productive, since it often fails to move beyond terminological disputes, for the issue of terminology proves to be a particularly sensitive subject for Ukrainian art researchers.

In independent Ukraine today, the historical connotations of the term *mystetstvoznavstvo* are practically absent, and it resists any attempt to give it a clear interpretation. For example, in the special issue of *Text and Image*, four definitions of *mystetstvoznavstvo* were provided: a superior theoretical science that surpasses art history; connoisseurship; connoisseurship combined with a national art-historical narrative; a colonial tool that introduces a different paradigm of knowledge.[66] This lack of clarity, notes Demchuk, prevents easy translation of the term into English. It is not the same as *Kunstwissenschaft*, even if the term is a literal translation of the German. Nor, she says, is it the same as Soviet-era *mystetstvoznavstvo*, as the latter lacks 'Western art historiography' and modern historical methodologies.[67]

Looking at such a contradictory array of definitions and idea, one might ask whether there is any point in fighting over something that is divided against itself? In its multitude of meanings, *mystetstvoznavstvo* practically means nothing anymore. And there is little sense in any attempt to 'restore' the concept, to return it to its 'Soviet' meaning and thereby highlighting its colonial function, because in that case, *mystetstvoznavstvo* turns into a kind of empty signifier or a scapegoat, the destruction of which is supposed to resolve the existing conflict between approaches to the study of art in Ukraine. However, the problem with scapegoating is that the scapegoat is always a substitute, a redirection of force, and never the true component of any crisis.

The conversation about the present should thus begin, instead, with the state of art history education in Ukraine, and to better understand this, it is useful to take a comparative glance at the two departments of art history in Kyiv: in (1) the National Academy of Fine Arts and Architecture (NAFAA) and (2) Kyiv National University (KNU), which produce entirely different specialists. In fact, the department of art history in NAFAA did not undergo any radical changes after Ukraine gained independence in 1991.[68] It remains the same Soviet-style institution, merely adjusted to a national mode. Students there are more focused on studying cultural management, while the history and theory of art are secondary.[69] However, the Art History Department in KNU is completely different. It was re-established in 2014, a year that

66) Demchuk and Levchenko, 'Decolonizing Ukrainian Art History,' 18–9.

67) Stefaniia Demchuk, 'Gombrich, Ukraina ta Insha Nauka pro Mystetstvo' [Gombrich, Ukraine Another Science of Art], *Text and Image: Essential Problems in Art History* 2: 14, 2022, 48. DOI: 10.17721/2519-4801.2022.2.05.

68) Lada Nakonechna, 'Istoriia reform Natsionalnoi akademii obrazotvorchoho mystetstva ta arkhitektury' [The history of reforms of the National Academy of Fine Arts and Architecture], *Kurbasivski chyrannia,* 12, 2017, 3–4.

69) Taras Berezyuk, 'Pro Mystetstvoznavstvo, Istoriiu Mystetstv, Infrastructurnu Obumovlenist' [On Connoisseurship, Art History, Infrastructure Conditionality], *Text and Image: Essential Problems in Art History* 2: 14, 2022, 32. Ibidem, 35.

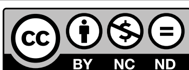
can be said to mark a truly new stage for art-historical writing in Ukraine.[70] This beginning coincided with the so-called Revolution of Dignity and the activation of the decommunization process, which sparked a wave of interest in modern theory and methodology of art research. This is probably why the KNU's department has distinguished itself from the outset by its attention to theoretical and interdisciplinary research.

However, the situation between the departments is so tense that they practically refuse to recognize each other, with scholars at the NAFAA accusing their colleagues at KNU of consists only of trained historians, while, conversely, those at KNU criticise their counterparts of isolating art from historical contexts. The situation that allows for mutual hostility of approaches is, of course, also a consequence of the colonial policy of the USSR. 'Positivism,' the 'connoisseurship' approach to art, and the current entrenchment of the art-historical education system were caused not by carelessness, but by the deliberate destruction of previous traditions. In short, continuous ruptures are the main reason for the current crisis. Thus, the 'discussion of *mystetstvoznavstvo'* is not really a discussion about 'right' and 'wrong' terminology, even if this is its ostensible focus, but rather a debate about the entire methodology of art research in Ukraine, and even its decolonization.

## Conclusions

The figure of Pavlutskyi allows one to connect various stages of the Ukrainian study of art. He stood at its origins, contributed to its institutional strengthening, and even after the change of political regime, continued to teach in higher educational institutions until his death in March 1924. However, the tradition formed by Pavlutskyi and other lecturers from imperial times was curtailed by Sovietization. It seems that from this moment, the paths of art history in Ukraine begin to diverge and increasingly distance themselves from each other. Nevertheless, today, when discussion about decolonization has become central to Ukrainian academic discourse following Russia's full-scale invasion on February 24th, 2022, there is a significant opportunity for them to be brought together again through a productive dialogue and setting a common vector towards a global context, not just a Ukrainian one.

70) Demchuk and Levchenko, 'Decolonizing Ukrainian Art History,' 17.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# The Question of Folk Art in the Interwar Period

Four Texts by:

**Sergei Makovsky** (1877–1962)
**Drahomíra Stránská** (1899–1964)
**Zdeněk Wirth** (1878–1961)
**Karel Teige** (1900–1951)

Translated by Sky Kobylak

## Abstract

The processes of modernization in Europe led, in the early twentieth century, to an increasing degree of interest in the status of folk art. If it represented a superseded stage of social and cultural development, what role did it have in modern society? The four texts here illustrate the different kinds of ideas that circulated in Czechoslovakia the interwar period, and they testify to the fact that it remained a continuing subject of fascination. The authors, ranging from the Russian art critic Sergei Makovsky to Karel Teige, one of the leading members of the Czechoslovak avant-garde, deal with a range of issues, to do with the nature creativity in folk art, the role of women as makers, the relation between folk and high art, and the commodification of folk art in modern urban life. The texts are prefaced with an introduction that outlines the broader context of debate in which these texts belong.

## Keywords

folk art; gender; society; avant-garde; craft; creativity; progress; conservativism

**https://doi.org/10.5817/AEC2024-4-5**

# The Question of Folk Art in the Interwar Period

## Introduction

Marta Filipová

Is conservatism a distinguishing feature of folk art, or can folk art contain some genuinely inventive quality? This was one of the questions that preoccupied the four writers featured here, who, from strikingly different positions, consider the role, place and meaning of folk art in the contemporary society of interwar Czechoslovakia.

In the early twentieth century, a time when folk art was seen as disappearing from its traditional locations in the countryside, it became a focus of interest for many commentators. Some still felt it had contemporary value, some rejected it as outdated and irrelevant to modern society. The four views translated here represent this scale and its nuances. Simultaneously, they show that authors who engaged with the topic came from a range of positions and comprised not only ethnographers but also art historians and leftist art critics.

One of the reasons for turning to folk art through these translations is historiographical. The predominant interest in the art of interwar Czechoslovakia (and many other new states of Central and Eastern Europe) has for a long time turned to the avant-garde, international exchanges and embrace of socially and politically progressive ideas in art, architecture and design.[1] More recently, however, attention has also been paid to tendencies that may be labelled more conservative, historicising and resisting change.[2] They range from efforts to identify regional modernisms and a return to figurative expression to the implementation of traditionalist forms in architecture. Whenever folk art of the first half of the twentieth century became a matter of concern for art historians and not ethnographers, it has been mostly interpreted through the lens of urban modernism, and it has been dismissed, following the outlook of the avant-garde. Some interest has been devoted to folk art as an inspiration for modern artists and to folk art as a curiosity showcased to international audiences on various occasions, but not many scholars have stepped beyond such constraints of primitivism and exoticism in art.[3]

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1) Krisztina Passuth, *Les avant-gardes de l'Europe Centrale, 1907–1927*, Paris: Flammarion, 1988; Steven A. Mansbach, *Modern Art in Eastern Europe: From the Baltic to the Balkans, ca. 1890–1939*, Cambridge University Press, 1998; Ryszard Stanislawski and Christoph Brockhaus, eds, *Europa, Europa. Das Jahrhundert der Avantgarde in Mittel- und Osteuropa*, 4 vols., Bonn: Kunst- und Ausstellungshalle der Bundesrepublik Deutschland, 1994; Timothy O. Benson, ed., *Central European Avant-Gardes: Exchange and Transformation, 1910–1930*, Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, and Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002.

2) Beata Hock, Klara Kemp-Welch, and Jonathan Owen, eds, *A Reader in East-Central European Modernism, 1918–1956*, London: Courtauld Books Online, 2019; Beate Störtkuhl and Rafał Makała, eds, *Nicht nur Bauhaus – Netzwerke der Moderne in Mitteleuropa / Not Just Bauhaus – Networks of Modernity in Central Europe*, Oldenbourg: De Gruyter, 2020; Hubert F. van den Berg and Lidia Głuchowska, eds, *Transnationality, Internationalism and Nationhood. European Avant-Garde in the First Half of the Twentieth Century*, Leuven, Paris, Walpole: Peters, 2013; Peter Baeckström and Benedikt Hjartarson, eds, *Decentering the Avant-Garde*, Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2014; Shona Kallestrup et al. eds, *Periodization in the Art Historiographies of Central and Eastern Europe*, New York - London, Routledge 2024.

3) Winter, Tomáš et al. *Jdi na venkov! výtvarné umění a lidová kultura v českých zemích 1800–1960* [Go to the countryside! Fine arts and folk culture in the Czech lands, 1800–1960], Řevnice: Arbor vitae societas, 2019; Hana Dvořáková, Magdalena Juříková, Helena Musilová and Vít Vlnas, *Pražská Pallas a Moravská Hellas 1902: Auguste Rodin v Praze a na*

The purpose of the following translations is therefore to show the breadth of intellectual concerns about folk art that went beyond pure rejection in the name of modernism. The main focus of the texts is Czechoslovakia of the interwar period, a time when the new state was formed and presented as a modern democracy of progressive art and culture. Yet similar tendencies could be detected elsewhere in Central and Eastern Europe, and Czechoslovakia serves as an example of the discussions of folk art in a society undergoing crucial political and cultural transformation. Questions such as where folk culture and heritage belong, does folk art even exist in the modern day and why we need to be concerned about it, drove enquiry in Czechoslovakia and beyond. Apart from texts like those presented here, conferences took place across Europe. In 1928 Prague, for instance, hosted the first congress on folk art, organised by the French art historian Henri Focillon and attended by international scholars.[4] Such exchanges suggested that folk art was regarded an important and relevant subject.

## Folk art and political geography

'Folk art is far from being banal,' claims Sergey Makovsky in his text 'The Folk Art of Subcarpathian Ruthenia,' and he was not alone in identifying noteworthy aspects in folk art that had relevance even for contemporary culture and society. Makovsky (1877–1962) was a Russian art critic who helped to organize various art exhibitions. Amongst them was the exhibition *The Art and Life of Subcarpathian Ruthenia* which he put together for the School Department of the Uzhhorod Civil Administration. In Prague, the exhibition opened in 1924 with objects that Makovsky selected and photographed in Subcarpathian Ruthenia.[5] This region, now in western Ukraine, became part of Czechoslovakia as a result of negotiations between Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk, the American President Woodrow Wilson, and Rusyn-Americans during the First World War. This alliance was meant as a temporary solution to the postwar turmoil and Subcarpathian Ruthenia was promised prompt autonomy. This, however, did not happen until 1938. Even though many books and articles on the region were published, it kept its status as a somewhat mysterious, unexplored land, especially from the point of view of the Prague authorities.[6] Several exhibitions were therefore organised to change the lack of awareness of the region and its culture. This included Makovsky's *Art and Life of Subcarpathian Ruthenia*.

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*Moravě = Prague Pallas and Moravian Hellas 1902: Auguste Rodin in Prague and Moravia*, exhibition catalogue, Prague: City Art Gallery, 2022.

4) Henri Focillon, ed., *Folk Art: Artistic and Scientific Works from the First Congress on Folk Arts, Prague, 1928*, Paris: Duchartre, 1931, I, vii–xvi. See, too, Christopher S. Wood, 'Introduction,' *West 86th A Journal of Decorative Arts, Design History, and Material Culture* 29: 1, 2023, 97–120.

5) Michael Selivatchov, 'Folk Art of the Carpathians Through the Eyes of Serge Makovsky,' *The Ethnology Notebooks* 155: 5, 2020, 1189–1201.

6) For example, Jaroslav Zatloukal, *Podkarpatská Rus*: *Sborník hospodářského kulturního a politického poznání Podkarpatské Rusi* [Sub-Carpathian Ruthenia: a compendium of economic, cultural and political knowledge of Sub-Carpathian Ruthenia], Bratislava: Klub přátel Podkarpatské Rusi, 1936; Amálie Kožmínová, *Podkarpatská Rus* [Sub-Carpathian Ruthenia], Prague: Josef Zeibrdlich, 1919–1939; Václav Drahný and František Drahný, *Podkarpatská Rus, její přírodní a zemědělské poměry* [Sub-Carpathian Ruthenia, its natural and agricultural conditions], Prague: Českoslovak Ministry of Agriculture, 1921.

His goal for the exhibition and the ensuing publication was to map the local culture that he presented as one that was predominantly rural and comprised of rustic peasants. It was his attempt to popularize the best examples of 'the rural arts' and to raise interest among the general public in the rest of Czechoslovakia in the people who, in his view, preserved traditional artistic forms and customs. The Ruthenia that Makovsky showed therefore conforms to the somewhat limited view of the country held in Prague. The remoteness from the capital also encouraged the perception of an unspoilt, ancient heritage that had survived here: 'The villages and individual farmsteads sitting on the promontories of the Carpathians in still untouched forest solitude are better at protecting the heritage of ancient handicraft.'

## Isolation as a prerequisite for folk art

The view that the geographical isolation of folk art was responsible for its historically backward state was common to many writers. It was also shared by Czechoslovak politicians, who saw the western parts of the country as significantly more culturally developed. This was based on the fact that Bohemia, especially, was more industrialised compared to the eastern parts of Subcarpathian Ruthenia and most of Slovakia. The physical remoteness and economic neglect that the region had suffered under the Hungarian government prior to 1918 were presented as the main reasons for the preservation of folk art. Such a view was also held by Drahomíra Stránská (1899–1964) an ethnographer based in Prague at the Náprstek museum and Charles University, who focused on the 'true folk art' of Slovakia, Subcarpathian Ruthenia and other Slavic regions.[7]

This understanding helped to identify 'typical' features of folk art. In 'The Work of Women in Folk Art,' Stránská argued for the conservativism and timelessness of folk art, as well as its tendency to imitate and simplify complex forms. Yet, she saw certain traits in folk art that could be identified as modern, and she was not alone in such a view. While she found folk art purposeful and having the ability to adapt to material and technique, Makovsky added emphasis on permanency, durability and flawlessness, which were important in the economy of the rural environment. These required characteristics were not far from modernist ideas of functional design, yet aesthetic properties, including a sense of colour, were also key for folk art, Stránská noted.

The authors nevertheless did not agree on the degree to which the alleged geographical and cultural remoteness was responsible for other characteristic features of folk art, including its conservative character. The Czech art historian Zdeněk Wirth believed that folk art was intellectually and materialistically conservative as a result of not only the geographical isolation, but also its place in the social structure in which it was born. Wirth (1878–1961) was a Czech art historian responsible for cataloguing monuments in Bohemia and Czechoslovakia. His methodological and meticulous approach to material including folk art produced many studies that had international distribution as official publications on the art of Czechoslovakia.[8]

7) Drahomíra Stránská, *Lidové kroje v Československu* [Folk costume in Czechoslovakia], Prague: J. Otto, 1949; Drahomíra Stránská, *Lidové obyčeje hospodářské: Zvyky při setí* [Folk economic customs: crop sowing habits], Prague: D. Stránská, 1931.

8) For example, Antonín Matějček and Zdeněk Wirth, *L'art tchèque contemporain*, Prague: Jan Štenc, 1920; Antonín Matějček and Zdeněk Wirth, *Modern and Contemporary Czech Art*, London: George Routledge & Sons, 1924.

## Folk art in social structures

With his interest in the so-called peasant class, Wirth addressed the social aspects of the origins of folk art. The peasant class, he argued, was historically subjected to servitude to local rulers, with little exchange with the outside world; this led to a lack of innovation in art-making, both formally and the use of materials. It was only in the last two centuries, he argued, that contact with the town and the markets created conditions for the adoption of high art forms and specialisation in specific crafts. However, Wirth pointed out, the needs and tastes of the peasant, as the recipient of the works in question, still remained conservative.

Elsewhere, Wirth emphasised other key factors that explained the state of folk art, including patriarchal family social structures and the slow pace of life.[9] This was a view shared by others, including Makovsky, who pointed to the specificity of the village environment in the creation and reception of folk art, especially related to a different lifestyle. Outside of cities, he held, time passes more slowly, and people have more time to engage in folk art and craft.

The patriarchal nature of rural society, Wirth suggested, was a crucial issue that explained why folk culture was gendered. Most interwar commentators viewed rural communities and their arts as clearly split into male and female domains. Stránská illustrates this split well: in her view, women of the eastern regions were skilled in weaving, embroidering and lace-knitting, painted decoration on house walls, furniture painting, and decorating Easter eggs. Bound to the home and traditional roles in it, they make and decorate household items. Faithful to the belief in a West - East trajectory, from industrialisation / urbanisation / civilisation to ruralism / traditionalism / the primitive, Stránská also noted that the patriarchal divisions in folk art change. In more 'advanced' rural regions in closer proximity to the West, the greater emphasis on individualised craft as well as advanced technical skill was apparent. As a result, embroidery and lacemaking in Bohemia was no longer the collective women's craft known in the so-called East, but had become more specialised and creative.

## Creativity and individuality

The gendered aspect of folk art is obvious in the other texts, however implicitly. It is Stránská, though, who explicitly focused on folk art created by women in the villages, and by doing so she stresses the creative input of women makers. They never repeat exactly the same pattern, she says, and continually create new variations of older themes. Her answer to the question of whether folk artists can be inventive and innovative is therefore clear: almost no work of folk art is absolutely identical to another, it is always a modification or improvement of an earlier version. The women that Stránská talks about have an artist's creative relationship to their work.

Others were of a different view. The most critical account of folk art and its potential creative aspects was that of the avant-garde artist and art theorist Karel Teige (1900–1951). As a Marxist and representative of Poetism and the Devětsil group of artists, he argued that art is the product of ordinary people, but not people in the villages. Instead, he praised the

9) Zdeněk Wirth, 'Lidové a moderní umění,' *Styl* 1: 2, 1909–10, 10.

practices of the working class in the cities as unspoilt, urban production.[10] His article 'New Art and Folk Creation' therefore adopts a sarcastic tone when talking about the peacefulness and humble work of the peasants and the idyllic life of the village folk. He clearly associates folk art with kitsch both in its original rural form and in its adoption by fine art. Alfons Mucha's use of folk references becomes, for Teige, 'inexhaustible and inartistic slush.' He sees little creativity in such art and has a similar approach to the 'wholly inartistic fever' of using folk motifs in fashion, furniture or textiles. Modern times, in his view, produce a different kind of popular art, that of the everyday in the suburbs, a new kind of folk, or popular, art that is oriented towards the future, is free and collective. In this, Teige was highlighting the close links between 'the people' and 'folk,' both expressed with the term 'lid' in the Czech language.[11]

The collective nature of artistic creative work seems to be the only issue that all four authors agree on in relation to 'folk' art, even though they link it to different sections of society. Teige vehemently dismissed the folk art that Wirth, Stránská and Makovsky were concerned with. In contrast, the other three authors did find that rural makers and artisan exercised various levels of autonomy and creativity in the designs and objects they produced and, as a result, were rather less inclined to dismiss folk art as irrelevant. Wirth questioned the active intellectual and artistic input of the peasants and saw folk art as mainly derivative. He nevertheless acknowledged a degree of skill and quality in the works, as well as an aesthetic natural taste and sensibility on the part of the creators. They were able to recreate patterns and apply them creatively to different objects and thereby make each work into an original piece. Makovsky likewise placed importance on the ability to alter each and every work despite the prevalence of traditional, customary, habits and rules. Folk artists with their skills do not passively copy templates, he argued, but rather actively and skilfully turn them into new works. 'Craft remains art,' Makovsky believed.

The four authors differ significantly in their opinion of the relevance of folk art and its creativity and inventiveness in interwar Czechoslovakia. The texts nevertheless reveal the political motivations of the authors; while Stránská stressed the contribution of women, Makovsky's aim was to bring attention to the new geographical composition of the interwar state. Wirth combined a similar attempt to find a place for Subcarpathian Rusyns and Slovaks in the Czechoslovak narrative with class awareness. Teige went furthest in his call for a societal revision and bid farewell to peasant art of the olden days in favour of workers' suburban art of the future. The attention they paid to folk art therefore demonstrates that the phenomenon was not only a historical concern but a topical issue for debate about contemporary art and society.

10) Karel Teige, *Jarmark umění*, Prague: Československý spisovatel, 1964.

11) For a discussion of the linguistic distinction and semantic similarity of 'popular' and 'folk,' see Marta Filipová, *Modernity, History and Politics in Czech Art*, London – New York: Routledge, 2020, 57.

**Sergei Makovsky**

# The Folk Art of Subcarpathian Ruthenia,

## translated into Czech by Ant. Poláček

Originally published as *Lidové umění Podkarpatské Rusi*, Prague: Plamja, 1925, 9–16.

Translated by Sky Kobylak

Edited by Marta Filipová

My impulse for writing this book was the exhibition titled *The Art and Life of Subcarpathian Ruthenia*, which was organized in Prague in the spring of last year by the educational department of the Uzhhorod Civil Administration. While compiling various objects for it as the exhibition's commissioner and 'folk art expert,' I became acquainted with Subcarpathian artistic folklore in places ranging from Nová Stužica, the most beautiful northwest point of the Verkhovyna (the mountainous region bordering Poland to the north and passing south to the Marmaroš [now: Maramureș] lowlands) to Jasina [now: Yasinya] the main village of the Hutsuls – and its widely scattered shingle-roofed cottages and wickerwork fences on the eastern Galician border.

In searching for all the things that in some way or other fall into the category of 'folk art,' I travelled for over half a year through this territory, passing from place to place along the winding streams flowing to the Tisa river. I usually travelled on foot; the railway intersects the region only in one direction, if we are not to count several narrow-gauge short-distance tracks. Aside from this, here like everywhere else, the artistic character and life of the village is wiped out by the proximity of railway signals. The villages and individual farmsteads sitting on the promontories of the Carpathians in still untouched forest solitude are better at protecting the heritage of ancient handicraft.

In the introduction to the exhibition catalogue, I explained the goals of the exhibition as follows: 'Just as it is its scholarly and pedagogical goal to collect museum material for the further systematic study of the local crafts of Subcarpathian Ruthenia together with its whole way of life, its goal is also to attempt to popularize the best examples of these rural arts and to raise interest among the general public in the people, who despite their age-long servitude, have preserved the tradition of their forms and customs in life.' I believe this is also the primary task of this book, which has been printed by a Russian publishing house in Prague.

It is perhaps unnecessary to emphasize that, when mentioning scholarship, pedagogy and popularization, I already had in mind the high artistic appraisal of Subcarpathian folklore when putting together the exhibition catalogue. However, doesn't the high appreciation of rural creative practice signify its energy, its ability to impregnate urban culture, even though it seems to be somewhat archaic? For folk art, especially that which does not live only in museum collections but has persisted until today, is a living force. In our times, such art is not only an anachronism, but it is a true source of charm today, an oasis of captivating barbarism with gurgling springs within the loose sand of the civilization of factories … The beauty of

a village is nurtured by the folk spirit of the church, its mysterious roots, all the juices of the soil, the works of countless male and female artists, tied together by tradition, passed on since time immemorial from one generation to the next. Is it not a healing spring for the art of urban centres, which is becoming impoverished by the banality of bourgeois monotony or as a result of overly individualised affectation? The enthusiasm is not irrelevant when we acknowledge that 'revealing' the Subcarpathian village can partially influence contemporary decoration practices and can on all accounts strengthen good taste in the attentive observer.

Folk art is far from being banal. It captivates with its grandness of shades and diversity despite its canonical persistence. It is never vulgar, as everything in it springs from the overflowing heart of the people and is always warmed with creative emotion despite repeating age-old patterns. In this lies its magic: it links collective custom with the non-recurring originality of its products; it is not individualized – as we conceive it in the city – yet at the same time possesses a singular accent. The most deeply ingrained 'template' of the village does not exclude a certain freedom of creation. On the contrary, freedom gives rise to inimitable beauty. It is the same each time, but also minutely altered. Folk art is linked, like no other art, to customary rules and the inertness of the peasant soul, and captivates with its nearly unrecognizable deviations like no other art, as it is not a crafted copy and thus does not degenerate into soulless fabrication: craft remains art. Although the village maker copies the same object one hundred or one thousand times, he is still partially improvising as a true artist. In his perhaps crude work, which copies to an almost ridiculous degree what his fathers and grandfathers did, we still always feel the living fantasy of the artist.

While travelling in Subcarpathian Ruthenia, I saw thousands of embroideries on rural shirts and created a collection from them according to the Russian patterns of one village, but not once did I find a pair of completely identical *naplechniky* or two of the same *farametliky* (the embroidered chest area of a man's shirt).[12] There is something identical in them, but it is always altered in some way. It is the same pattern … but at the same time it is not, it has a deviation, one of the many countless variations of a traditional theme. Here we find an unnecessary curl, there a doubled row of 'crosses' and expanded or narrowed strips on the edge of the ornamentation. Yes, even woven towels are almost always 'individual' in this sense, although they have been mechanized by the very technique; after all, male weavers sometimes improvise just as well as female embroiderers.

The inventiveness of the domestic artisan is remarkable… Would it not, however, be more accurate to call it spontaneous? Invention assumes a conscious impulse: 'I shall not try to do it this way, but in a different and new way.' All 'individual' deviations from rural products are not invoked by the rural woman embroidering a *naplechnik* or a potter drawing cornflowers on a ceramic cup, even though they yearn to create 'in some new fashion'; a great role is played here by the subconscious creative will (similar to a child's imagination) of the village artists, who transform themselves, their naïve feelings, their proximity to nature full of terrible and gracious miracles into either a long, jagged *krivulka* or into stitches on linen that are twisted into 'palm rings' or branch out like ferns.[13] Who can tell us what some Verkhovyna or Marmaroš 'brides' are pondering over as they embroider in the long winter twilight, sitting by the window

12) Editor's note: a *naplechnik* was an embroidered shoulder-pad.

13) Editor's note: a *krivulka* was a type of stitch.

of the cottage covered in snow? What bewitching plants appear before their eyes in the layout of these branch-like threaded paths and how many secret thoughts, sad and merry, do they put into their work? This is why, despite all the author's pretention, we are so moved by this work, which is unwittingly pervaded by spiritual life. Therefore, this work does not degenerate into craftsmanship, even when it is meant for sale and not for home use.

The relationship to work often explains other values of goods produced by the calloused hands of villagers: technical durability, form corresponding to matter, purposefulness. These values are so mutually connected in this context that we cannot imagine them being separated from one another. Does this creative spontaneity not mean, within a tradition that is hundreds of years old, permanency and high quality? Can an object created following the example of so many predecessors be bad, especially if it is meant for one's own use, one's own house? Is impermanent that into which countless hours of spiritual being are invested? The city is shrewd, the village is permanent, and the swiftness and power of the villagers' hands cannot be compared at all to a skill that has been learned. Usually, the simplest of tools is enough for the technical conventions inherited in the village, but at the same time, what ancient experience there is here! These conventions do not advance helter-skelter but move forward together with the majesty of the centuries. The local creator is not one to hurry. Haste and negligence arise in mass production, even in the home, and that is in fact an infection from the city. There is enough time in the village and time also passes more slowly than in the cities. The idea of becoming rich quickly does not eclipse the joys of a work completed down to its most minute, 'unnecessary' details. Folk art enchants just as much with its careful production, which often seems unnecessary, as it does with its high quality. Both stem from the richness of emotion, from a sufficient amount of time, and also wise, from prudent calculation: Is it desirable to make something carelessly and in haste? A product that is durable, flawless, and impossible to tear and whose deficiencies have never been an eyesore is certainly desirable.

How possible is it to use poor material, or how can form not follow a certain object, if this object is to last for centuries? It is permanency, after all, that is partially conditioned by the harmony of material and shape. And furthermore: is the purposefulness of the object not a similarly important condition for its permanency? It is indisputable that beauty has its own logic, which combines art with material, permanency and designation – what is beautiful must correspond to its purpose. In this sense, folk art has nearly always been a lesson in taste. Its forms correspond to the purpose in life. There is nothing here to show off, for outward effect, nothing redundant. Although decorative extravagancies and, yes, even unsightly asymmetry occur, this is certainly excusable by living conditions, faith and superstition; by some deeply rooted anachronism, some historical cause working from afar. It is a general rule that art in the village gravitates towards symmetry and modesty. These virtues and a sense for beauty can certainly not be denied in Subcarpathian artistic folklore in any way, a fact which even further stirs our interest, be it ethnographic or other. In selecting objects for the Prague exhibition and also for this publication, I proceeded as an aesthetician closely familiar with ethnography which reveals for us new areas of beauty… The crafts of Subcarpathian Ruthenia, the beauty of embroidered, woven and carved patterns and the songs, legends and fairy tales – is all this not a mysterious chest of treasures?

It is mysterious because it remains an almost unexplored area to this day from ethnographic and even less so art-historical perspective. It can be said that there is a lack of scientific literature on these matters. Attempts have been made, but they have either not been completed (by Hungarian folklorists, who were the most knowledgeable) or are of random nature. A lot has been written of Subcarpathian village churches, and it should be said that much of it is amateurish, but there is hardly anything else. Several Ukrainian and Czech artists have taken an interest in objects of domestic use and woodcarving, but sketches from their travels remain inaccessible to the wider public. No systematic description of clothing or decorations according to individual areas and villages has been published (giving even greater value to M. Tůmová's summary, which is attached to the Prague exhibition catalogue which supplements the fragmented information collected by A. Kožmínová and, many years earlier, by J. Golovacký and H. Bi[e]derman).[14] Lastly, the fabric embroideries so characteristic of Subcarpathian Ruthenia have not yet been subjected to stylistic analysis, nor has the highly intriguing issue of their origin been dealt with in connection to the indisputable oriental nature of all Russian folk ornament.

The roots of the 'Russian style' of Subcarpathian Ruthenia, primarily the style of clothing and embroidered patterns, run very deep, despite the more or less evident borrowing from neighbors (often of a completely new date), despite all the various historical additions and imported fashion. I am thinking of those roots that grow from a certain primeval soil and are partly common to all Slavic folklore.

This problem is alluring. A question presses on the mind: where and how far do the paths of this patterned tradition lead, which speaks so strongly to the heart of the Ruthenian and, simultaneously, breathes with Eastern diversity, old kingdoms and the raids of Asian hordes? Where to? ... Not towards the Hungarian oppressors, one thousand years into the past, although it is obvious that many a thing was adopted from them. Where then? To the travelling *kibitkas* of the nomads that struck fear into medieval Europe?[15] Perhaps towards the Parthians and Sarmatians as assumed by H. Weiss, the author of the well-known *Kostümkunde*, towards the shores of Lake Maeotis, Tanais, the Tyras, the Lower Ister [now: Danube], and to the warlike land of the Alans,[16] to the Scythian lowlands where Slavic races mixed with Finns, who at the time inhabited a massive area from the Baltic and White Sea to the upper course of the Dniepr long before the invasion of the Goths, Huns, Khazars, Hungarians, Polovtsians and Tatars?[17] Do these paths not continue further into the twilight of the mythical East: over the Carpathian hills towards the Black Sea, to the old Mohammedanized land of the Circassians to the Caucuses

14) M. Tůmová, 'Národní kroj na Podkarpatské Rusi' in Sergej Makovský, eed., *Umění a život Podkarpatské Rusi* [The art and life of Subcarpathian Ruthenia], Prague: UPM, 1924, 24–54; A. Kožmínová, *Podkarpatská Rus* [Subcarpathian Ruthenia], Pilsen: self-published, 1922; J. Th. Holovackij, *О народной одеждѣ и увранствѣ Русиновь или Рускихъ Въ Галичинѣ и сѣверо-восточной Венгріи* [On the folk clothing and decoration of the Rusyns or Russians in Galicia and northeastern Hungary], St. Petersburg, 1877; H. T. Biedermann, *Die ungarischen Ruthenen, ihr Wohngebeit, ihr Erwerb und ihre Geschichte*, Innsbruck: Wagner Verlag, 1862.

15) Editor's Note: A *kibitka* was a type of Russian sledge.

16) See Prof. J. Kulakovskij, *Аланы по цвѣдѣніямъ классическихъ и византійскихъ писателей* [The Alans according to classical and Byzantine writers], Kyiv: St. Vladimir Imperial University Press, 1899; N. Jakovlev, *Новое въ изученін Сѣв. Кавказа* [New issues in the study of the Northern Caucasus], Novy Vostok: Scientific Association of Oriental Studies, 1924.

17) Editor's note: Lake Maeotis was the ancient Greek name for the Sea of Azov, in which was situated the city of Tanais. 'Tyras' and 'Ister' were the ancient Greek and Scythian names for the River Dniestr.

and Central Asia through the Kirghiz steppe and there to the cradle of civilization, through the gates of the migration period, to the bluish mountains of the Altai, in the ancient cradle of Iran, India, Tibet and Mongolia?

After all, this question of ancient origins is highly complex and can hardly be solved given the present state of the ethnography of art. Not only do the hidden corners of Subcarpathia remain unexplored, so, too, is the whole territory inhabited by western Slavic populations (Galicia, Bukovina, Bulgaria, Serbia, Croatia, Czechoslovakia, etc.). After an explanation and stylistic division, this tremendous material should be compared with the richness of the villages in our eastern Kievan Rus and 'Little Russia.' Only then would it be possible to touch these roots, which reach back to the depths of the ages. The roots of the Subcarpathian people in general, although not of its present population (as the question of its local antiquity remains an open one after historical research by A. Petrov)[18], are the roots of their adopted artistic and life culture. The time for an answer has not yet come. Toilsome preliminary works are necessary for the accumulated material to appear in its original historical perspective. The opinion defended by V. V. Stasov at the time on the Finnish-Persian origin of Russian ornamentation cannot be considered final.[19]

This work primarily means the popularization of the material, i.e. material systematized to only a certain degree. In organizing the Prague exhibition, the compiled collections were divided according to geographical areas in accordance with the most distinct variations of Subcarpathian ethnography. Although the borders of these areas, which do not exist on the map, do not fit completely onto the ideal map of Subcarpathia's artistic-ethnographic borders (which still needs to be drawn) and do not fit into a racial categorization in the country, they at least correspond in their main traits with the true grouping of the 'Ugro-Ruthenians' in keeping with the family of taste. After all, racial nuances hardly have a decisive significance in the case in hand. The influence of geographical and climatic conditions and greater or lesser differentness from neighbors are much more important.

It is best to see which embroideries and individual parts of clothing change by region and, yes, even by village. This is understandable when we realize that clothing is more strongly linked to a place than, for instance, wooden products or pottery are. Plates produced in Khust decorate cottages throughout nearly all of the Verkhovyna region, and the 'Hutsul' wooden cross can be found in the churches of any parish, from Stavná [now: Stavne] to Trebuše [now: Kruhlyj], but a difference in the seam or pattern embroidered on a shirt will astonish

18) Alexei Petrov, 'Когда возникли русскія поселенія на угорской "Дольной землѣ"?' ['When did Russian settlements appear on the Hungarian "Dolnaya Zemlya"?'], *Гл. Изъ VI, Выш. Матер. для исторіи угор. Руси*, St. Petersburg: Senate Printing House, 1911: 'the greater number of settlements beyond the Carpathians, on the Hungarian Lowlands (*Alföld*), as well as the band of downhill slopes of the Carpathians near to them, cannot be considered to be the remnants of an originary Russian population. Rather, it arose in a markedly later era, in the sixteenth century, predominantly in the seventeenth and the first half of the eighteenth (p. 2). By the same author: *Объ этнографической границѣ русскаго народа въ Австро-Угріи* [On the ethnographic border of the Russian people with Austria-Hungary], Petrograd: no publisher, 1915, and *Къ вопросу о словенско-русск. этнографической границѣ (Русск. Земля)* [On the issue of the Slovenian – Russian ethnographic border (Russian land)], Uzhhorod: no publisher, 1923, 26, 27, 28.

19) V. Stasov, *Русскій народный орнаментъ* [Russian national ornament], St. Petersburg: Society of Art Patrons, 1872: 'The eastern motifs, with which ours have most in common, divide into two main groups: Finnish motifs and Persian ones.' Even though this claim was controversial, Stasov's general conclusions remain valid: 'Russian ornament is a late echo of Asian ornament, it is a fragment preserved from the ancient world (p. xvi).

a woman from a distant village, which is home to other seams and pattern details that are linked to the place by firm custom.

I have selected the embroideries published here from thousands of variations, and as a whole they provide a scale of typical patterns according to regional diversities and types. Almost all patterns that are evidently foreign have been almost completely omitted and, as a result, whole regions in which the oldest motifs have been nearly displaced by Moravian-Slovak, Hungarian and Romanian fashion.

[ … ]

Whatever is the case, the Hutsul region, the picturesque southeastern corner of the Subcarpathians bordering Polish Galicia and Romanian Bukovina deserves special attention. It is strikingly similar in the character of its culture and life to the Galician Hutsul region. To those who have never been to the mountains near Yavorov or Sokolovka, I would recommend reading the book by Szuchiewicz to confirm this.[20] At the upper course of both of the Tisa rivers, over the whole length of the Polish border, there is basically an identical way of life and the same decorative tendencies as on the other side: this also includes weaving, woodcarving and the type of Russian dress – long women's shirts with *zapasky* in place of skirts, and men's shirts drawn up and over the trousers and held in place with a belt. Whichever way we deal with the issue concerning the ethnic makeup of these Subcarpathian highlanders (they themselves dislike the name 'Hutsul,' for they use the name for their small ponies and in mockery of their neighbours), there is no doubt that they are the successors of one culture shared with that of Galicia. The difference is in the nuances and the fact that artistic productivity is considerably greater on the other side of the border.

These thoughts have also inspired me to supplement the present publication with images of the Galician products that have made their way to the Prague exhibition from the Ethnographic Museum and the Náprstek Museum: a series of wooden altar crosses (undoubtedly manufactured at the time somewhere in the Przemyśl region), copper gunpowder-flasks with tasteful engravings and inlays, picturesque *keleva* axes and pottery from somewhere in Jaroslav [now: Jarosław], Mikolajev [now: Mykolajiv] or Galicia.[21] The latter had long been renowned for its potters when Hungarian Ruthenia was dominated by Hungarian pottery works. Home production, remaining outside this influence, did not advance farther than the most basic products from clay, which lacked enamel and drawings (such is the pottery now in Drahovo [now: Dragovo]). Old Galician bowls from the time, which still decorate cottages along the banks of both Tisa rivers, are an excellent supplement to the general image of artistic crafts in the Subcarpathian Hutsul region. Cups and plates from Khust far better complement Vrchovina households, as the pottery industry of Khust, Uzhhorod and Sevljuš [now: Vynohradiv] has been Magyarized to the highest degree.

Nonetheless, the ceramics of all these pottery centres are represented in the book. The hand of the home producer inadvertently brings local characteristics even into an adopted motif, such as the petal of an iris or tulip. True Hungarian ceramics do not tend to be so

20) Włodzimierz Szuchiewicz, *Huculszczyna* [Hutsul matters], Cracow: Dzieduszycki Museum, 1902, 4 vols.

21) *Келевы* [kelevy] – sticks with copper handles, used instead of axes. See Holovackij, op. cit., 70.

strongly naïve in their design and so synchronised in colour, although its forms are sometimes reminiscent of the fairy-tale-like East. After the embroideries of the Hutsul region, which – and this should be pointed out immediately – are in no way inferior to those of Galicia (some characteristic patterns from Jasina or Kobyli Poljana [now: Kobyletska Poliana] are distinguished by their more subtle beauty), the most interesting products are those made of wood. The truth is that the new is not the best. At present, woodcarving here is more of a tradition from the past than a living craft, and it is very difficult to find bottles, spoons, butter churns and spinning-wheels with carved and burned ornaments. Yet, the tradition has not died out, and excellent woodcarvers and people burning ornaments into wood can still be found; the shapes of some objects themselves are proof of the sophistication of this tradition, for instance the shapes of *paskovtsi*, i.e. bread baskets for Easter sweetbread.

In this introduction, I have aimed to provide a broad overview of the material published here in order to then proceed with the description of details according to individual branches of national creative work. The four chapters correspond to these branches: Woodcarving, Ceramics, Costume and Decorations, and Embroideries and Weaving. I mention wooden churches only in passing – their decorative character is to a large degree a secondary phenomenon that is less linked to the ethnography of the country. It is true that the same unique taste is reflected in church building as in everything created by the village; however, the significance of this local authenticity or local imitation should not be exaggerated.[22]

22) Vadim Shcherbakovski, *Українське мистецтво* [Ukrainian art], Kyiv: V. M. Shcherbakivskyi, 1913; Viktor Myszkovsky, 'Holzkirchen in den Karpathen,' *Mitteilungen der K.K. Zentral-Kommission zur Erforschung und Erhaltung der Kunst- und Historischen Denkmale,* VI, 1880, xxvi-xxxv; Jul. Zikmund: 'Dřevěné kostelíky pod Užockým průsmykem' [Wooden chapels under the Užok pass], *Památník III. Sjezdu československých inženýrů a architektů*, Košice: Unie, 1923, 283–285, tab. 29–33); Florian Zapletal, 'Dřevěné chrámy jihokarpatských Rusínů' [The wooden churches of the south Carpathian Ruthenians], Josef Chmelař, Stanislav Klíma and Jaromír Nečas, eds, *Podkarpatská Rus,* Prague: Orbis, 1923, 117–21; V. Zaloziecky, 'Dřevěné cerkve v Podkarpatské Rusi' [Wooden churches in Subcarpathian Ruthenia], *Umění a život Podkarpatské Rusi*, ed. Sergej Makovský, Prague: UPM, 1924, 55–70.

**Drahomíra Stránská**

# The Work of Women in Folk Art

Originally published as 'Práce ženy v lidovém umění' in Anna Roškotová, ed., *Sborník Kruhu výtvarných umělkyň*, Prague: The Women Artists' Circle, 1935, 55–59.

Translated by Sky Kobylak

Edited by Marta Filipová

The more independent a nation, in terms of its culture, and the more it is separated off from the influences of its neighbours, and dependent on itself, the livelier and more distinctive is its folk art. For ordinary people do not easily adopt foreign products, but, rather, create them according to the needs of their own environment. The more independent the cultural life of a certain area, the more capable talented individuals are of applying their abilities and the more encouraged they are to undertake creative work.

There are regions in which folk art is still alive, namely in the Carpathians and in the foothills of the mountains. In Slovakia and Subcarpathian Ruthenia, some areas are still home to true folk art, which ordinary people need, just as much as the intelligentsia, and which signifies the healthy spiritual life of the rural classes.

Women play an important role in folk art and are not only the protectors of traditional decoration and traditional forms; they are also the exclusive creators of whole sectors of labor. Some areas are solely reserved for women and they are the only creative forces in them, upholding old traditions and further developing them. This not only concerns embroidery, needlework and other similar handiwork, which has long been in the hands of women and is still considered to be the domain of female labour. It also includes weaving and all textile production, which, in those regions where true folk art still flourishes, are primarily created by women. For example, in Slovakia, in regions with patriarchal characteristics, a woman is tasked with weaving all fabrics for the family, including linen, cloth and more. She needs to prepare all the material for this, to make the fabric, turn it into garments, and decorate it. This circumstance creates an interesting difference between the lands that are a part of the advanced Central European culture and those ones of a more traditional disposition. In western regions, Bohemia, Moravia and in some more advanced areas of Slovakia, weaving is the domain of male craftsmen, who make a living from it. On the other hand, in the patriarchal areas of Slovakia, hand looms are used only by women while each *gazděna*[23] makes fabric only for her own family, spending the whole winter at her distaff and loom. In keeping with tradition, she also decorates the woven fabrics either simply with stripes, or with more complex floral and bird motifs, etc., which are frequently adopted under the influence of the male weavers. In earlier times, woven woolen fabrics were richly decorated; today, however, decorative weaving is limited to

23) Editor's note: the woman in charge of a rural Slovak household, usually the wife of a *gazda* (farmer).

flat sheets, towels and aprons or, on much rarer occasions, shirts and headscarves and swaddle scarfs.

Women thus uphold the ancient tradition of making and decorating. It is also their conservatism that has preserved some traditional knitting and weaving techniques that have already died out in many regions of Europe and that have survived until today only in patriarchal areas. These include techniques such as knitting on a sewing frame or a sprang, in which women's agile hands create very fine and complex patterns by picking and braiding threads of the warp. The white bonnets of the Trenčín and Hont regions stand out, whereas elsewhere women knit only simple strips. Ribbon weaving is also undertaken by women. In contrast, the production of gloves and solid woolen *zapiastky*,[24] done by looming the warp with the use of a wooden mold, is the work of men, which is quite a striking phenomenon.

In addition to weaving, embroidering and lace-knitting continues to be a field reserved for women. Artistic creativity has developed most richly in these areas, where there are the most variations and patterns. However, in this area, too, the folk artistic creation is mostly imitative and relies on older patterns while changing them according to established tastes and current needs. Conservatism is a distinguishing feature of folk art and it clings to inherited forms and preserves their motifs for long periods. There is also a tendency to imitation, which accepts patterns from high art without hesitation but simultaneously strives to simplify complex forms and motifs into abbreviated folk-art form; and timelessness, which preserves elements and forms from long-gone styles and mixes them together to create a new form. On the other hand, the indisputable advantage [of folk art] is its distinctive sense of purposefulness, its unconditional ability to adapt to material and technique, and its animated, sophisticated sense of color. Whole generations work on creating folk art and a whole score of skillful individuals shape them, creating products that are balanced, harmonized and usually tasteful. The same traits that are characteristic of folk art are also found in embroidery and lace, mainly in places where artistic activity is still alive today, which talking about this country is primarily in Slovakia. Even there, however, embroidery and lace are subject to external influences, influences from higher classes, monasteries, towns and so forth. Next to this, however, the old tradition lives on, which transforms and adapts new motifs to the local character. It is noteworthy that in these regions each woman and girl engages in embroidery, although they leave more complex work to more capable embroiderers. Therefore, in such cases we can truly use the term 'collective folk art,' since everyone takes part in its co-creation. However, the more egalitarian the culture of a people is and the more advanced the techniques and patterns that are used, the more art distances itself from the broad collectivity of the people and becomes the specialization of certain especially skilled individuals until it most often finally becomes an object of profit and trade. In such cases, embroidery and lace are created by skilled and usually poor embroiderers and laceworkers, who may master the technique but artistically they deteriorate. The artistic side either stagnates or the old patterns and techniques are abandoned and replaced by quite new and fashionable ones that the embroiderer is happy to adopt from the towns and spread amongst her clients.

24) Editor's note: A *zapiastka* is a sturdy protector made of thickly knitted wool and used to cover wrists, legs, or feet that was often used in forestry work in the mountainous regions of Slovakia.

Folk embroidery in Bohemia reached this phase of development when it began to decline and die out and when the work of skilled seamstresses and embroiderers started copying the Rococo and Empire patterns of the town. Folk art is reaching a similar phase in some regions of Slovakia, too. However, artistic work in which all the women of the village take part, and which is transformed by the direct participation of all of them, still flourishes in some remote areas. In such an environment, each woman creates and feels all the joy of the work of art she creates with her hands, even though creative individuality is limited to modifying, arranging and adding new elements. Womenfolk[25] never repeat the same things, they continually create new variations. Amongst the hundreds of folk embroideries, we hardly find pieces that are identical. Women have an artist's relationship to them and feel the joy of creative work; thus, we can consider this to be art.

Another interesting area of folk art that belongs to the field of women's work is colorful painted decoration on house walls, especially the archways around the main doors in Moravian Slovakia and over kitchen fireplaces in the region around Bratislava. In this cheerful region, which is fertile, rich and full of sunshine, where wheat turns gold and grapes ripen, people love color and rich ornamentation on their folk dresses and in their dwellings. If we enter into the kitchen of a well presented home, we are met with the gleam of rich painting of various colours overflowing with flowers and leaves that cover the whole arched wall, and sometimes the side-walls, corners, and so forth, too. The painting of walls with richly coloured decoration is a characteristic trait of the southern European zone of earthen whitewashed structures reaching all the way to Ukraine. In our country it can also be seen in the regions of southern Slovakia, where women, due to their conservative nature, have maintained this beautiful branch of folk art. In it is practiced a love for color and sense of rich ornamentation, which is not carried out generously by first outlining the design across the whole surface but rather it emerges gradually by the addition of motifs and supplements to them until the surface is filled. This is why these ornaments are so complex, so detailed, so varied, and so diverse in form. The sense of ornamentation amongst women in these regions is so lively that it even appears in the way water is sprinkled on walkways and in rooms; girls sprinkle the ground with water so as to create simple ornaments in the soil.

Womenfolk are diligent participants in decorative painting. Women have helped paint furniture, cabinets and chests; women have painted or helped paint images on glass and sometimes the ceramic products made by potters. We lack information on their role in illustrating books, and they have not taken part in working on religious buildings. Work with wood and wood-carving has remained distant from women in folk art, and women have not been known to work with metal.

However, there is one more field of painting that has long been the exclusive field of women's work, a conservative field in its archaic technique and patterns – the painting of Easter eggs. In regions with historic, traditional culture, women paint single-colored Easter eggs with the help of wax; they use simple motifs of crosses, hooks and twists and divide the surface with straight lines, and so forth. Once again, this is done by all the women in the village as Easter time approaches. In regions where folk art is still flourishing and has

25) Editor's note: The old-fashioned term 'womenfolk' corresponds to the somewhat archaic phrase 'ženy z lidu' Stránská uses in the original.

evolved into sophisticated forms, Easter eggs are decorated in diverse colors only by skillful *malérečky*[26], who make use of very rich ornamentation and detailed motifs that cover the whole surface of the egg. However, in Bohemia and regions with advanced culture, the decline of folk art means that only simple techniques have been preserved, with motifs mostly of a more modern character and more individualised than those in Slovakia, or new methods of scratching motifs of naturalistic flowers, of pasting, and so on have been introduced. In addition, such Easter eggs often tend to be the work of men, which is a true sign of new influences on their creation.

This brief overview has made it possible to point out merely the most important traits of women's participation in folk art. However, it makes it fully clear that women play an important role in folk art. Women have not only preserved folk art, but significantly participated in its creation; they have done so not only today, but also in the past, as some fields have exclusively belonged to women since time immemorial.

26) Editor's Note: *malérečka* is a term for women painters of traditional female Easter-eggs.

**Zdeněk Wirth**

# The Art of the Czechoslovak People

Originally published as *Umění československého lidu*, Prague: *Vesmír*, 1928, 5–11.

Translated by Sky Kobylak

Edited by Marta Filipová

Until recently, alongside the development of high art in Czechoslovak, a second – temporally and stylistically belated – artistic layer of art was developing, a layer of so-called folk art which at first glance is wholly original and certainly pleasing in its forms, colors and intellectual content. It had almost been doomed to extinction by the natural development of social conditions when it became the subject, first, of a romantic view of national life, then, of the museum curator's conservation practice and care, and, finally, of the cold analysis of the art historian who analyzed its age, the origins of its elements, and what relation it had to high art.

Romanticism (the influence of this opinion has been long-lasting) caused confusion of the concept of 'folk' art with the concept of 'national' art, in which it saw the sustained forms of racial art in contradiction to contemporary European art and managed productively not only to influence Czechoslovak visual arts and music in the second half of the nineteenth century, but also attempted artificially to extend the tradition of this timeless art to the present day. This endeavor strikingly and positively influenced the study of folk art and, at the time of its greatest efforts in the great exhibition of 1895 and later in rich museum collections, it collected the most beautiful evidence of it and hence material for its objective study.

Scientific study has however not justified the view among romantics that a distinctive folk culture is the authentic bearer of national purity and that its art is the truest manifestation of the national soul. If the art historian assumes that there is only one artistic foundation and creative instinct in all mankind and in the artistic creations of all periods and cultures, that although every cultural region has its own differing forms of artistic expression and development, each knows the difference between art and non-art at all levels, created by the quality of artistic expression, then the art historian will view the art of the whole Western European cultural sphere as a single entity, whose highest quality – in times pertinent to us – is determined by the genius of Italy and France, rarely by Germany. Such art develops in several centres and spreads from them throughout this whole area in the form of nationally tinted artistic cultures of the Romanic, Germanic and Slavic nations. The historian has established that alongside work on the level of high art, every national art has a whole score of categories of high standard artistic professions stretching from the national centre to the cultural peripheries and from there to the villages and hamlets, and even further to categories of dilettante, all the way to the complete barbarism of the simplest autodidacts.

Folk art is then only one of the categories in the art of a nation and not the national art in itself. It is the product of the countryside, of the mostly rural environment in contrast to

the art of the aristocratic, bourgeois and urban classes. The 'folk' here is understood almost exclusively as the population of the villages, which, in the nineteenth century, dwelled in settlements with a population twenty times greater than cities and made up 90% of the nation, or it is sometimes understood as the population of small agrarian towns where the economic conditions are relatively the same and the formal taste is similar. The working classes, arising as a result of change in the social conditions of the nineteenth century, therefore, do not come into consideration here. The concept of Czechoslovak folk art should be explained in this sense and within the boundaries defined by its absolute quality and character.

The historical foundations of folk art, for which almost all documentary evidence and material landmarks are missing up until the seventeenth century, can only partially offer an answer to the question that is crucial to establishing the age of this art: when was it that both branches of national art, i.e. high and folk art, broke in two, only to come back together as late as the twentieth century in the general levelling off of national culture in today's democratic society?

Roughly speaking, the population of the lands of Czechoslovakia, which had practiced agriculture since prehistory and whose culture, cultivated from primitive pagan conditions, did not reach the level of the west and south of Europe, was at first socially and culturally united and made up a single class that differed only in ethnic affiliation. In the natural method of farming, the people self-sufficiently carried out all types of agricultural and craft work – and also artistic work in a certain sense – on their own. The father, with the help of the family, relatives and neighbors, and even the chief of the tribe did not differ from the nation other than in the possibility of delegating this work to slaves. This state of a single cultural class persisted until the creation of a military and bureaucratic nobility and, later, of a clerical class created a new social stratification in the nation, in which the continual servitude of those who worked the land significantly changed the living conditions of most of the population in relation to the lifestyle of a small number of privileged families and individuals. The more quickly the privileged class caught up with European culture in the first centuries of the Czechoslovak nation's history, the more social and cultural differences accumulated. Certainly, by the time Romanesque culture matured in Czechoslovakia, the concept of manorial culture arose alongside that of folk art, and the consequent rapid development, during which castles and finally cities emerged, then clearly differentiated the higher classes of lords, clerics and burghers from lower classes, thus creating three cultural categories whose simultaneous and mutually separated lives survived with certain transformations until the nineteenth century.

The chasm between the aristocratic and peasant class, as it emerged in this way already in the early Middle Ages, was deepened further by natural living conditions and psychological causes. How could a peasant – bound to servitude on the soil and thus intellectually and materialistically conservative, placed under aristocratic and divine subordination, increasingly excluded from active participation in forming the fates of his own tribe, land and nation – keep up with the development of higher cultural classes, whose intellectual outlook continued to grow, with those who had continual contact with the world and eagerly received the intellectual and material influences of more cultured lands abroad? The cultural backwardness of the peasant has been permanent since the Middle Ages, and not even the

extensive colonization by the culturally adept rural German element or the great social revolutions in the Hussite era and after the Thirty Years' War, changed much about this. On the contrary, these conditions of backwardness perhaps even increased.

Theoretically, in the sphere of artistic activity in the Middle Ages, we must also assume the same fissure of the cultural categories. Unfortunately, to be able to make this assumption, we lack documentation on folk art up to the seventeenth century. Thus, a probable explanation of this phenomenon is found in the almost paradoxical assumption that it was only with the Baroque period that the peasant was culturally elevated to such a degree that even he developed a need for genuine art, i.e. in his case, primarily the decoration of forms and typical objects, which had been reduced to simple expediency and efficiency. Proof of this assumption is also found in the fact that all the templates for decorative details that can be proven by analysis to have served as patterns for the folk art for which we have documentation, were created after 1600. At the same time, all older elements found in folk architecture and dress concern only the typical material, and typical elementary forms, frameworks and constructions, that had been the intellectual property of the people from time immemorial, some of them from a time when the nation had a single cultural class.

The second basic question that is crucial for defining the concept of folk art can be answered with greater certainty – to what extent is this art the spontaneous creation of talented individuals of the people working without commission, made only for their own needs or to satisfy their creative instinct?

Only for the oldest period of natural economy, in this country perhaps until the thirteenth century, can we assume that the commissioner, draughtsman and creator of the work of art was the same person. Although perhaps primitively, the peasant was able to build a wagon, horse trappings, rough furniture or an oven, and his wife could make linen cloth and woolen blankets; with the help of his family members, relatives and neighbors, who worked for food, he was equally capable of building a house. Just as almost every rural person today is still able to work from a young age with a team of horses and understands cattle, field crops and gardening. And just as the peasant who lives high in the mountains and in the forests, is a wheelwright, carpenter, saddler, weaver and woodcarver in one, so the person commonly found in the countryside in the oldest times would do all other work of craft or even artistic character, as long as he was spontaneously forced to carry them out himself.

This primitive state, in which the peasant lagged behind the nobleman, priest and burgher by centuries, had already changed in the Middle Ages in the sense that, in certain areas of craft, the peasant gradually became the commissioner and was continually dependent on cooperation with a specialist or craftsman and an artist in a certain limited sense of the word. We must place the emergence of the village craftsman to a very early period, although mention of it in documents is found only from the fourteenth century on. First, only as an accidental folk artist working not for profit but for his family, such a peasant stood out in certain work by virtue of his dexterity, technique and combined ingenuity. While remaining an inhabitant of the village, he was gradually abandoning other peasant work and increasingly began to devote himself to specialised craft activities. He started being called upon as an expert in this craft work, and thus developed into a craftsman who stood outside of guilds and who created the transition from the former

self-sufficient peasant with universal skills to a guild craftsman in the town. The village craftsman then completely mastered certain crafts that fulfilled only daily peasant needs, which were, however, technically more difficult and generally more artistic. Therefore, a peasant who could still skillfully lay down a roof, fix a cart or build a fence and oven could hardly construct a house from scratch, sew all his garments and shoes, shoe horses, trim his wagon, make harnesses, furniture and tableware and carve or paint his gable. Progressive organization later arranged these conditions very precisely. It was the younger son of the family who commonly became a craftsman – usually a tailor, shoemaker, saddler, carpenter, wheelwright or smith – and received permission from the nobility to be trained. He wandered about and worked on farmsteads and cottages. He was not allowed to produce goods for the market. When the general guild regulations were established in 1738, he was finally allowed to become a member of the closest urban guild.

The elevation of the peasant's cultural level from the seventeenth century led to his need – generally speaking – for a festive life that neither his own work nor the product of village craft could satisfy anymore. An exception here is the delicate handiwork of women, primarily the production and decoration of linen and clothing, which surely always displayed better taste than a man's manual work and therefore resisted professionalism in the village for the longest amount of time.

Around 1700, the peasant cultivated comfort brought from the city to cottages not only simple pots, but also glazed and painted products of the potter, not only a table, chest and a bench made by the carpenter but also chests decorated and inlaid by a joiner, later, cupboards and chairs with backs shaped and decorated by the woodcarver; in place of coarse serging, artificially sewn costumes and leather coats with color application and, on top of that, embroidery, lace and golden bonnets made by embroiderers; jewelry and metal plated prayer books from smiths and glassmakers; and even statuettes for the niches of cottage facades and paintings on glass for the walls of the common room made by woodcarvers and painters. In this way, the peasant gradually and increasingly became the consumer of urban crafts after coming into contact with them at markets or directly by ordering them in the workshop if this involved a product not just for everyday use. From the above concerning the relationship between aristocratic and peasant culture, it is evident that, at the same time, the peasant did not tend to seek out the workrooms of master craftsmen who created fashionable and high-quality products for the castle, church, town hall or the rooms of rich burghers. Aside from the manifestations of peasant vainglory, which appears in all periods in the peasant's effort to balance his appearance with that of the lords, he instinctively sought out workshops that suited his simple taste, conservative view and the coarser character of the village. However, even the masters and their workrooms tried to adapt to the peasant's taste if, on exception, they were to deliver a spectacular piece to the village. In the same way, the former painter of cards or teacher attempted writing and decorating village women's prayer books, in order to express in color and ornament their naïve understanding of beauty; and even factory producers of ceramics, glass, printed textiles and wall or pilgrimage images made special goods to please the eyes and hearts of the rural folk.

Thus in the Baroque period, by the latest, so-called folk art became an art form that was created and produced for the rural environment; it became a derivate of cultures higher in

quality. It did not have the same artistic goal in all regions and slowly died out when the cultural level of classes began to level out.

Since we are not able to assess the artistic creations specific to the common people, the remains of which are either wholly absent or, within the small amount of historic material, have yet to be differentiated from the artistic products of higher cultural classes within the small amount of historic material, we can only focus on the records of art for the people by seeking to establish its basic characteristics. At the same time, we must first realize that our knowledge lacks a more accurate delimitation namely in terms of periodization, as this art does not have the singular character of an artistic totality in a precisely defined period, and it does not comprise a stylistic epoch.

Generally speaking, just like every folk art, Czechoslovak art is highly conservative if we measure it by the period of its origin and the state of contemporary high artistic culture; furthermore, it is primitive in its expression, technique, color, etc. We can ultimately establish its lack of authenticity in terms of its subject and stylistic form. This all provides an answer to the question of its artistic quality and its only apparently anonymous character.

The conservative nature of the folk artist can best be explained to us by the nature of the village environment, which differs from urban life or life in a castle. In material terms, this environment was, until the mid-nineteenth century, very poor despite its relative development from the Middle Ages. It was familiar with the hardest work and the least comfort; it had coarse intellectual inspirations and a slow tempo of life. The peasant's physical and intellectual horizon did not reach past the boundaries of the lordship or the closest small town, which, in the eighteenth century, before the intervention of industry – especially in the mountains – was culturally close to the village and was not expanded significantly by either school or church but more by multiple years of military service or involuntary journeys accompanying troops. It is no surprise that in all aspects of life, the peasant held on tenaciously to inherited views and forms and thus, in all aspects of intellectual and physical life, maintained the timeless constructs created by the shared work of whole generations. This conservatism applied not in the sense of artistic typification, but rather in the sense of life's persistence, not only in the ground plan of the village, the disposition of the farm, and the ground plan of the farm, but in all objects that the peasant used, down to the tiniest tool; this conservatism also determined his attitude as the commissioner of art. Whenever a folk artist – whether a peasant trained in a trade or a petty master-craftsman living in a town – returned from his wanderings filled with various technical and artistic notions and trained in the techniques of his field, he failed to bring the commissioner from the rural environment to accept contemporary stylistic forms without hesitation; the craftsman applies the novelties he has encountered only slowly and almost stealthily, but in the end this development stagnates and repeats what he has learned for a whole generation.

Conservatism causes a continuous belatedness (which was certainly greater in earlier times) in the stylistic character of folk art. During the eighteenth century and the first half of the nineteenth, we estimate this belatedness to be that of roughly half a century, and therefore we still find echoes of the early Baroque period in folk art of the mid-eighteenth century and stylistic elements of Rococo up to the mid-nineteenth. However, next to this almost regular belatedness behind the primary stylistic character of the period, irregularities appear in the

periods in which various stylistic forms – chronologically unconnected and contradicting in nature – tend to be adopted from observation.

We immediately find the primitive nature of folk art in the technique or, as the saying goes, 'according to the apron,' in simple, non-economic construction, in situations and measures defined more by instinct than by calculation, and in the selection of material; however, this trait is even more striking when it concerns the understanding of the stylistic form, the higher principles of artistic composition and stylization, and the sense of color. As we have already established, the folk artist does not receive a contemporary artistic form, and neither does he decide to use a single older form. The remnants or fully adopted new or old forms appear in his work in the same way that the cultural anachronisms of old superstitions reverberate within his soul or the anachronisms of uneconomical farming appear in his work in the fields. His naïve sense of color knows only a small number of primary tones, with no halftones, and he does not in his compositions sketch out the surfaces nor balance the substance. Instead, he places individual elements and motifs next to each other, one after the other, over and under each other, opposite each other, knowing only absolute symmetry – if this is possible with his imperfect tools and a 'rule of thumb' manual work – and seeing only in two, not three dimensions.

If there is a certain trait of folk art that refutes the romantic opinion that it is a true treasure of national art, it is its lack of formal originality, namely in decorative detail. The peasant artist does not adopt an observed pattern precisely or completely; he does not copy originals but selects only what suits his taste or what he manages to imitate. At the same time, his memory is limited and his observation naïve, and thus, not knowing the stylistic canon, he often mixes older and younger forms or confuses a subordinate element with a main one.

If we are looking for the specific sources of the folk imagination, we find them primarily, following art historical principles and according to the environment in which the peasant lives, in his surroundings and the influence exercised within the boundaries of the lordship's estate and the distance of his journeys as a journeyman, and rarely further. There can be no doubt that these elements are spontaneously adopted from high art. This includes everything that the peasant sees at the country fair and the market in the closest town; it includes the impulses that the lord of the underling peasant brings to the village. As a patron, the lord builds for the peasant a parish church, the priest's dwelling or a school; he builds his own residence for summer habitation in the village or near it or equips the church with lavishly painted and gilded furniture, embroidered vestments, paintings and sculptures. In addition, we discover elements in the eager attention paid to the work of bourgeois and urban craftsmen, in the distant pilgrimages to miraculous statuettes and paintings at Svatá Hora, Svatý Kopeček, Chlumek, Wambierzyce or Mariazell, where trade in the artistic pilgrimage industry is blooming, or during occasional visits to fairs, the products of which help to create peasant housing culture.

The means by which all these elements make their way to the village are neither theoretical (via school education) nor literary (via literature), but are purely practical, and depend only on imitation of what was observed (often long-ago) drawing on memory and influenced by the imagination and natural manual dexterity. The point when the influence of creative art of the time begins to come under more pervasive influence is convincingly established by the

development of graphic art in the seventeenth century, when ornamental and hagiographic engraving became an article of trade.

Patterns adopted from models of high art by the peasant for the architectonic forms are preserved in large number in Renaissance and Baroque façades until the nineteenth century; forms of urban and aristocratic or bourgeois costumes in various periods of fashion from the beginning of the sixteenth century were decisive for garments, folk dresses and their decoration; we find models for painted, carved, embroidered and coated ornamental decoration in late Renaissance and Baroque ornamental painting and woodcarving, in seventeenth-century prints with arabesque or Dürer-style ornamentation, and in popular illustrated books from the printing works of Landfrass, Tureček and Steinbrenner.[27] For painting and sculpture, we find models in the illustrated bible, in pilgrimage images with engravings printed in large number from plates and in the copies of Madonnas in images and sculptures for fairs.

Despite their primitive, conservative and derivative character, works of folk art cannot be denied their intrinsic quality. Although the process whereby a specific work of art affected the anonymous folk artist and, through it, became a model for a whole multitude of other works, is not the same as in high art, in which the demand for originality began to increase from the sixteenth century onwards, there is a certain creative process here on the part of the commissioner and the maker, influenced by a marked imagination which is a great source of feelings and natural taste. Yet, not everything primitive, especially when created without purpose or need, is folk art in the proper sense of the word. The folk artist has a sense for natural measure, for material and for technique, which, so to speak, have long been the property of the people. He is able to vividly capture an observed pattern with ease, re-stylize and simplify it in his own way, and apply it to the most various materials and objects. One spirit and one form rules the pattern of an embroidery, an Easter egg, a painting, pottery, on a board and while dripping and pouring sand to form an ornament, but what diversity of patterns and motifs there are in the details! The pattern is almost never repeated with the help of a break in the design, a *dessin* or a *pendant*; in each case it is created anew from the beginning once more. The folk artist does not usually work to stockpile goods and does not have the same tendency to produce a standard as industry does. In places where at first glance we encounter a group of similar creations, they are in no case a slavish copy, but rather always the new variation of a type, and this freedom and individuality becomes larger the farther back into history we go. Although it is difficult to identify a folk artist as the author of a certain work of building, sculpture, painting or industrial art is difficult and, in most cases, impossible, we can often nonetheless discern personal talent in the works of the folk artist and certain degrees of creative power.

27) Editor's note: This refers to the printer and bookseller Josef Jan Landfras (1769–1840), based in Jindřichův Hradec, in southern Bohemia; Václav Tureček (? – 1822), based in Litomyšl, and Jan Steinbrener (1835–1909) of Vimperk.

69. ŽDIAR (SLOVENSKO).
*Chalupa. Maison de paysan. Cottage. Bauernhaus.*

70. ČIČMANY (SLOVENSKO).
*Statek. Ferme. Farm. Bauernhof.*

**Figure 1: (Above): Nineteenth-century decorated farmer's cottage, Ždiar, nr. Kežmarok, Slovakia; (Below): Nineteenth-century decorated farmer's cottage, Čičmany, Slovakia.**

Source: Zdeněk Wirth, *Umění československého lidu*, Prague, 1928.

61. KOLNÉ (ČECHY).
*Statek. Ferme. Farm. Bauernhof.*

62. OPATOVICE (ČECHY).
*Statek. Ferme. Farm. Bauernhof.*

**Figure 2: (Above): Early nineteenth-century farm building, Kolné, nr. Lišov, southern Bohemia; (Below): Front façade of a farm building, first half of the nineteenth century, Opatovice, nr. Hluboká, southern Bohemia.**

Source: Zdeněk Wirth, *Umění československého lidu*, Prague, 1928.

83. NEŠKAREDICE (ČECHY).
*Brána. Porte. Gate. Tor.*

84. VRÁTNO (ČECHY).
*Brána. Porte. Gate. Tor.*

**Figure 3: (Above): Farm gateway, second half of the eighteenth-century, Neškaredice, nr. Kutná Hora, Bohemia; (Below): Farm gateway (1838), Vrátno, nr. Běla pod Bezdězem, Bohemia.**

Source: Zdeněk Wirth, *Umění československého lidu*, Prague, 1928.

**Figure 4: Majolica plates from Bohemia, Moravia and Slovakia, mid-eighteenth to mid-nineteenth centuries.**

Source: Zdeněk Wirth, *Umění československého lidu*, Prague, 1928.

**Figure 5: Early twentieth-century ceramic figures by the peasant sculptor Ferdiš Kostka (1878–1951), Stupava, nr, Trnava, Slovakia.**

Source: Zdeněk Wirth, *Umění československého lidu*, Prague, 1928.

117.—118. SLOVENSKO.
*Červená keramika z Lubietové.* *Fayence rouge de Lubietová.*
*Lubietová Red ceramics.* *Rote Tonware aus Lubietová.*

**Figure 6: Red *engobé* decorated ceramic plates from Ľubietová, nr. Baňská Bystrica, Slovakia, second half of the eighteenth century.**

Source: Zdeněk Wirth, *Umění československého lidu*, Prague, 1928.

143.—144. ČECHY A SLOVENSKO.

*Malby na skle.* *Peintures sur verre.* *Glass paintings.* *Glasmalereien.*

**Figure 7: Glass paintings of (above) St. Isidor of Seville and the miracle of the plough, (below) Janosík and his band of brigands, ca. 1800, from Soběchleby, nr Olomouc and Baňská Bystrica, Slovakia.**

Source: Zdeněk Wirth, *Umění československého lidu*, Prague, 1928.

169. ČECHY.
*Kroj blatský. Costume de Blata.*
*Costume from the Blata. Tracht aus Blata.*

170. ČECHY.
*Kroj chotěšovský. Costume de Chotěšov.*
*Costume from Chotěšov. Chotěschauer Tracht.*

**Figure 8: (Left) Wedding costumes, late nineteenth century, from Blata, nr. Tábor, Bohemia; (Right): Woman's dress, late nineteenth century, from Chotěšov, nr. Pilsen, Bohemia.**

Source: Zdeněk Wirth, *Umění československého lidu*, Prague, 1928.

**Karel Teige**

# New Art and Folk Creation

Originally published as 'Nové umění a lidová torba,' *Červen* 4:12, 1921, 175–77.

Translated by Sky Kobylak

Edited by Marta Filipová

Folk art? Oh, yes, our beautiful national costumes for which, we think, the whole world should envy us, the folk costumes of Slovácko and Moravia, abounding with bright and red color, the most inherent product of the Czechoslovak people's artistic work! What a feast for the eyes it is when national and Slavic flags flutter and tint all the otherwise grey and inhospitable facades of high houses, when the parade of village striplings and girls pours through the wide streets during any celebratory event, as it is customary to express national consciousness and the Hussite traits of our tribal character by donning the Slovácko folk costume.[28] When the sun is shining, the image calls out for the rich and glowing palette of Joža Uprka, and it is impossible not to recall his gaudy, theatrical painting. Even the grand master Mucha himself sweetens his inexhaustible and inartistic slush with the ornamental motifs of embroideries. Or in other cases: Behind the shop window of a Prague furniture wholesaler, we see 'modern and practical' designs and, all of a sudden, Slovácko-style embroidery ornaments wink at us from under the cornices of a wardrobe, on the head board of a bed or the backrest of a chair. This is the result of fashion and a patrioteering and wholly inartistic fever! Alas, you might say, it is art that has been abused rather than applied! Indeed, this mania for distinctiveness has given many a distaste for the ornamentation of our folk costumes. And this should come as no surprise.

Folk art! Growing from a joyful life, from peacefulness and humble work, from the idyllic life of our village folk, once, long ago, it was a beautiful and ardent song, a cheerful hymn of the gracious passing of days and, as the lost joy of the past, purer and fuller life it was conserved in the coffin of the ethnographic museum and it continues to powerfully affect our perception. In addition to the richness of folk costumes, which are, however, more interesting from an ethnographic perspective than from an artistic or psychological one, we find here genuine and honest pictures, fresh and bright amateur paintings, imbued artificially with the moving magic of the simplicity and peacefulness of the rustic Czech idyll of the past. Colorful and highly intense folk paintings, as simple and lovable as folk songs, this rural art of the folk people begs for your attention and affects your sentimentality the same way here in the museum, it conjures up before your eyes some

28) Editor's note: Slovácko is a region in eastern Moravia, known for its folk traditions and customs.

glorious past life, for example a year in the village more than a century ago.[29] But as we have already stated, in the coffin of the museum, it is itself the past.

In front of the museum, vast and plain factory buildings tower up with their smokestacks, the industrial quarter of the metropolis; just step over the threshold and you find yourself in the midst of the chaotic, hurried present, overflowing with a myriad shapes and immediate realities. You do not even have time to measure the distance between the blissful quiet of the idyll of the past and the din of the civilization of the present. The art of the present is supposedly based on conceptual and psychological tendencies that stem from Impressionism, which started this 'technical revolution.' In formal terms it seeks to derive its surface from the precipitous ferment of this industrial and Americanized world: modern painters have painted images that are as geometric and machine-like as everything that surrounds us in cities today. The once ridiculed paintings of Umberto Boccioni †, which, with a unique method not based on the naturalistic vision of bare reality, attempted to interpret the rhythms of life and lines of force of the grand, populated avenues, the forms of which amaze with their momentum and immediacy, these paintings are – as we can see – the most truthful and faithful imprints of this environment. It is something fundamentally different and hostile, distant from the freshness of rural folk art, and it is no surprise that the general opinion that folk art is dead or dying was born in these times, and that it will certainly be completely eradicated by the era of unyielding civilization of factories and industrial conquest and expansion.

Today, when art, undergoing a critical and inter-directional, inter-stylistic interregnum, is preparing to draw elementary and valid lessons and support for new work from primordial and folk art, when Lunacharsky is founding a state organization in Russia in support of folk art, on which young Russian painting in many respects relies (as we learn from K. Umansky's book *New Art in Russia*), today, Josef Čapek's small book *The Humblest Art* shows us that folk art has survived, despite perhaps having had to eke out a living in the barren land of life and culture, and the book strives to appreciate it warmly, to grant it what it deserves, to pay respect to it that, as Vildrac beautifully put it, we are obliged to give to the smallest beauty.[30] He is not concerned with that past folk art; the folk art of the present in our country is far more an urban and suburban art, which is often as rigid, inelegant and drastic as a common vulgar tune or anecdote exchanged by people on the streets. For example, [Čapek] discusses painters of shop signs that are often closer to the famous works in galleries and more worthy of such comparison than a common salon painting: Before them, we can recall the Primitivists, or some Gothic and Empire painting, and indeed, last but not least, Henri Rousseau. The author gives equally passionate attention to artistic work beyond the borders (borders acknowledged by tradition) of the visual arts: photography, film, craft furniture and tools, seemingly lacking taste and 'inartistic.' Aside from visually artistic beauty, we can find the beauty of work and the general beauty of the world. – This book points out work that has been neglected and

29) Editor's note: a year in the village refers to a popular realist novel of the same name by Alois and Vilém Mrštík, who describe the customs, people dialect of a fictitious village in Moravia over the course of a year. Alois and Vilém Mrštík, *Rok na vsi: Kronika moravské dědiny* [A year in the village; the chronicle of a Moravian village], Prague: Máj Publishing House, 1903–1904.

30) Editor's note: Charles Vildrac (1882–1971) was a French poet, novelist and playwright. Konstantin Umansky, *Neue Kunst in Russland 1914–1919* [New Art in Russia 1914–1919], Potsdam: Gustav Kiepenheuer, 1920; Josef Čapek, *Nejskromnější umění* [The Humblest Art], Prague: Aventinum, 1920.

lingers in a melancholic separation from life and the bustle of exhibitions, the art that is immersed in its solitude, which nonetheless enters silently but vigorously as an active element of today's creation and the birth of new art.

For we live in a moment when we are experiencing the twilight of one great art, which culminated in the naturalistic nineteenth century. Impressionism was followed by a split into diverse, sometimes contradictory tendencies and movements, which – despite sometimes opposing Impressionism in form, however radically – necessarily stemmed from it with their ideas and content, as we have mentioned above, and even escalate it at times. And in this individualistic art, we were surprised by the mysterious and incomprehensible solitude of the doyen of folk production, the humble customs officer from a Parisian district, a pure man of the people, father Henri Rousseau. Contrary to the paintings in the *Salon des Indépendants* (the only place that allowed him to exhibit), which were merely aggregates of the forms of sharp, modern taste, a dynamic interpretation of the *sujet* and the mise-en-scène of the environment, his honest, modest and cordial (so wholly non-Impressionistic!) masterpieces spoke of the eternal human meaning of art, the very fascination, fundamentality and mysteriousness of the soul. His era, his generation, his peers could not entirely comprehend Rousseau; aestheticians stood before him somewhat puzzled, and critics felt their standards were failing. His monographer Wilhelm Uhde concluded correctly that the generation that was quick to power and violence and which had only derision for the painter of love and goodness can only partially understand his significance.[31] Today the name Rousseau is famous, but perhaps its true time will come when it will be possible to describe the meaning of the century in the words: 'peace on earth to people of good will!,' which can be used to describe his whole life, reminiscent of the legends of saints.

Art is ruled by a certain reticent misunderstanding, a victorious and irreversible inner security that triggers all the powers of the world into a collective whole. Something unified, homogenous and kindred, despite racial individual nuances, is emerging; a new spirit is being created from all forms. From the desperate, material and spiritual misery of today, an unmistakable dream of the future is nascent in the mind of the suffering mankind.

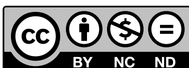
The hidden courage of all working spirits springs just as much from desire as it does from the need to build a new world. It is truly necessary to revise all values, which have been so intensely revalued by the vortex of war, and bring back their most fundamental meaning, especially in art. It is necessary to start from the beginning with everything, from the original foundations and original law, and from here it is possible to explain more than just the formal attention that contemporary art gives to all manifestations of primal creativity. Painters paint, as you can hear, no longer only for art, but for people. They do not paint self-serving, perfect and ostentatious works, but poems of a new, free and collective life and its deep and truthful harmony. They believe, perhaps, that they will be able to become folk artists once again; indeed, a stylistic era is emerging, one that in history last existed in the Gothic period, when one single stem of art existed, when there was no difference between the so-called great, ruling art and overlooked, minor, second-rate, folk art.

At a decisive moment, when the old intellectual and spiritual world is sinking into the depths like a massive and monstrous transatlantic ship, and when the symbol and image of

31) Wilhelm Uhde, *Henri Rousseau*, Dresden: Rudolf Kaemmerer, 1921.

tomorrow is being elaborately and strenuously constructed, the dawning of which provides a valid support for artists addressing tasks in their own work which they have drawn from the character of the era, there is the artistic creativity of ordinary people, the art that does not withhold the warmth of its near biblical scale, whose meaning is perhaps this: 'Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened...!'[32]

32) Editor's note: Teige's conclusion is a quotation from Matthew, 11.28.



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04 / September 2024 / [123—128]

# In Search of the Archaic

## A Review of: Irina Shevelenko, *Russian Archaism: Nationalism and the Quest for a Modernist Aesthetic*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press / Northern Illinois University Press, 2024. 294 pages. ISBN 9781501776342.

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**Keywords**

archaism; primitivism; Bakst; Stravinsky; Prokofiev; icon painting; Alexander Benois; Exposition universelle 1900; Siberia

**https://doi.org/10.5817/AEC2024-4-6**

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**Julian Adoff**

Irena Shevelenko's *Russian Archaism: Nationalism and the Quest for a Modernist Aesthetic*, originally published in Russian in 2017, considers Russian answers to the questions of nationalism and folk culture that dominated Europe from the 1800s onwards.[1] The 2024 English-language edition is not a word-for-word translation but, rather, a reworked version of the original. Through five chapters and an epilogue, Shevelenko explores how Russian artists, authors, and composers contended with Western influences and folk, pre-Petrine, and Byzantine cultural referents to attempt to define a 'new, unified culture' for Russia (p. 4). As was the case elsewhere in Central Europe, when discussing any attempt to create a so-called national style, the intellectual personas discussed in *Russian Archaism* built their ideas around a binary of acceptance or rejection of the European influences that had come to prominence in Russia since the Westernization of Russia under Peter the Great.

In her introduction, Shevelenko notes that while Western influences, European taste, Orthodox chants, and traditional Russian popular culture were to be found together, 'the coexistence of these two cultural traditions—the Russo-European and the Russian indigenous (native)—was nearly always a source of conflict and discord.' (p. 6). Shevelenko weaves together numerous examples that all share a common trait: interaction with ideas of the archaic. The text defines archaism as an amorphous practice that looked to the past when the region was supposedly free from Western influence. Shevelenko uses the language of the Russian Formalists to define archaism as the practice of applying 'premodern sources as points of aesthetic reference.' (p. 7) Archaism plays a central role in the different historical episodes discussed in the volume, dating from Russia's participation in the 1900 *Exposition Universelle* in Paris and ending with the 1917 Revolution.

The volume offers a study that covers great depth and breadth in its analysis of Russian aesthetic culture and is a must-read for anyone studying the region's art, literature, or culture. The first chapter begins with the Russian offering at the 1900s Paris fair. This episode is an ideal way to start a study that hinges on the relationship between Russia and Europe. Shevelenko's account of Russian participation begins with the rationale around the location of the Russian Pavilion (**Figure 1**), which was not located along the Street of Nations but instead near the colonial pavilions. The reader is immediately confronted with the opposition between acceptance and rejection of European ideas as the book recounts both the location

1) The original was published as: *Модернизм как архаизм: национализм и поиски модернистской эстетики в России*, Moscow: NLO Books, 2017.

**Figure 1: Robert Meltzer, Pavilion of Russian Asia and Siberia at the *Exposition Universelle*, Paris (1925).**
Source: Brooklyn Museum / Wikimedia Commons.

and design decisions for the Pavilion. The Russian planners avoided any reference to Russian high cultural production featuring Western influences and instead presented an archaic version of Russia that turned away from the educated Russian class and towards the more rural, eastern villages. From here, Shevelenko presents a fascinating discussion that considers the effects of ethnographic study and the colonial relationship between St. Petersburg and Siberia. The chapter also introduces one of the book's main protagonists, the Russian artist and critic Alexander Benois (1870–1960), who wrote about the *Exposition Universelle* for the Russian-language journal *World of Art* (*Мир искусства*). Benois' review of Russia's presence in Paris was mixed. He noted that 'European' Russia did not seem to have a presence in Paris; rather, it was Siberia that did. Unlike the other European powers, Russia did not showcase its metropolitan centres in relation to far-flung territories; instead, it only opted to showcase the Russian peasantry. Benois' criticism of the exhibit does not seem to affect the Russian art world much, for the chapter concludes by outlining the 'national turn' in Russia following the Exposition Universelle. This national turn solidified the turn away from St. Petersburg and that which was conceived as European in favor of representing Russia in archaist terms.

In the second chapter, Benois and the *World of Art* take center stage. Shevelenko takes the reader through the early period of the journal's existence and dissects writings in the publication by Benois and other major critics of the time, such as Igor Grabar (1871–1960),

Sergei Diaghilev (1872–1929), Dmitry Filosofov (1872–1940) and Ivan Bilibin (1876–1942), in order to dissect the clashes that graced its pages as they attempted to define an aesthetic program for Russian modernism defined either as imperial (which, Shevelenko argues, was seen as westernized) and as pre-Petrine (or indigenous). The chapter devotes detailed attention to the different views of the *World of Art* writers and their perspectives on the role of the West in the foundation of Russian art. Diaghilev, for instance, put forward the belief that there was no opposition between Western schools of art and national authenticity. In contrast, the painter Victor Vasnetsov (1848–1926), an influential member of the arts and crafts Abramtsevo artists' colony, believed that Russian aesthetics were self-sufficient and needed no external—western—influences. In the wake of this ideological quest to define the Russian aesthetic, Benois takes centre stage, for, Shevelenko points out (p. 63), he argued in his *History of Russian Painting* (1901–1902) that a 'sincere, strong, and inspired' Russian art should 'struggle with all their powers to cast off finally the yoke of nationalism.' While he believed that Russian forms were 'exotic,' he was skeptical of the distinction between nationalist folk aesthetics and cosmopolitan ideas of the West. He ultimately claimed that the educated, artistic elite was not in sync with the people, and in their use of folk aesthetics artists were merely 'playing peasant' (Shevelenko, p. 69). This accusation of 'peasant play' led him to sharply criticize the artistic class as being full of chauvinism and faux populism. Using Benois's critique of the educated class's archaistic use of peasant and folk motifs, Shevelenko invites the reader to consider whether the national turn was truly rooted in vernacular culture or whether it was a middle-class invention. Ultimately, War and Revolution would change the landscape of the nationalist debate before a single national aesthetic could be defined.

Chapters 3 and 4 consider literary and musical responses to the Russo-Japanese War and the First Russian Revolution. The two chapters flow together well as both follow the path Benois' criticism set the stage for in the previous chapter. At this point, Shevelenko asks the reader to consider how archaism was transformed from an amorphous idea and practice to a form of ideological modernism. She offers close readings of literary publications that were founded in the early twentieth century such as *The New Path* (Но'вый путь), *Questions of Life* (Вопросы жизни), and *Libra* (Весы) to show how Russian nationalist thought changed from the early period of the Russo-Japanese War—where Russia was conceived of as a European colonializing power that would be the 'ruler of Asia' (p. 88–89). In a manner similar to Western European colonial ambitions, Russia viewed the war as a chance to bring a 'civilizing force' to the region. In his article 'Yellow or White' (1903) Petr Pertsov, editor of *The New Path*, described the Russo-Japanese War in terms of bringing about a 'Yellow Russia' by continuing to spread Russian influence east (this expansion was historicized as the next logical step after Russian expansion into Kazan (p. 90).

At this stage in the discussion of the national turn, Shevelenko turns her attention to the next stage of the archaist phenomenon; having first looked inwards and to the past in order to define the Russian nation, cultural institutions then turned outward in order to consider how Russia could influence the world around them. It is at this point in the book that we begin to see much more realized interactions with Russian artists and writers and their Western counterparts. Russian authors commonly wrote about Japan's status as a leading warrior state in the East and placed great importance on the fight between the two powers, for if Russia hoped to become 'the representative of Europe' in the region, the struggle would result in the 'enslavement of

one of the combatants' (Shevelenko, p. 91). As the Russo-Japanese war took a turn for the worse for Russia and it was bitterly defeated, followed closely by the first Russian Revolution of 1905, Shevelenko calls attention to the authors' shifts in attention. National sentiment declined, and, in its place, the pages of literary publications were filled with symbolic references to premodern times. Some, such as Viacheslav Ivanov, turn to Ancient Greece, while others turn to Rome to create a new myth of the nation divorced from the defeats of the early 1900s. Any discussion about Slavic myth-creation and language would be incomplete without discussing Pan-Slavism, and Shevelenko also offers a detailed and succinct account of the developments in this regard.

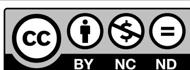
Chapter 4 turns to music, notably the ballet, in the aftermath of the first Russian Revolution. Sergei Prokofiev, Diaghilev, and Andrei Rimsky-Korsakov are the main discussants of this chapter and are successfully contextualized by writings from other critics such as Benois and Leon Bakst, one of the chief contributors to Diaghilev's *Ballets Russes* enterprise. Central to this chapter is the unrealized ballet by Prokofiev, *Ala and Lolli,* which Diaghilev rejected as too 'international' for production. Shevelenko traces the rejection of the ballet to the creation of Prokofiev's later work, the *Scythian Suite* (1915), which Rimsky-Korsakov regarded as too aligned with Diaghilev's penchant for the 'primitive as an expression of the national' (p. 19). Shevelenko's use of numerous primary sources here is exceptional and offers a rich point of comparison with the written and visual arts of previous chapters. As with Chapter 2, her field of study shows that the field is complex and layered, for the boundaries between international and Russian were not distinct from one another. Drawing attention to Benois' writings in *Apollo,* Shevelenko stresses the importance of this period for Russian art, and, she argues, it changed the nature of the debate in Russian aesthetics. It was no longer concerned with the question of working with or against the West, but rather, with working in the West to create a 'universal culture.' (p. 152) By staging productions of fervently Russian performances in Paris, Shevelenko furthers the suggestion that these performances marked a shift to a new stage of Russian nationalism. The successful staging of Stravinsky's ballet *The Firebird* in Paris in 1910 is treated as a prime example of the use of Russian folklore that 'forever burst open the dam of Western European complacency, as northern barbarians victoriously defeated the Rome of the Present' (p. 163). The appeal of Russian archaism and the idea of a collective primitive past was seen as the reason for *The Firebird's* success and led to Stravinsky becoming one of the best-known Russian composers in Europe. Even after Stravinsky's success, Shevelenko stresses that the debate around nationalism was far from over. Disagreements around the appropriation of folk motifs, the revival of historical traditions, and arguments around claims to authenticity and critiques of the barbarically primitive continued.

The final chapter considers the legacy of Russian icon painting and its role in shaping the Russian imagination in the twentieth century. Debates around the status of icon painting and newly published historical studies of medieval icons offered artists in the early 1900s unprecedented access to an art form that had been unavailable to earlier generations of artists. The book traces the process by which the icon was secularized, politicized, and transformed from being a religious object to a marker of national identity. A small epilogue considers the months following the February Revolution and sees a new era of national art. Calls for democratization of the arts and shifts towards class discussion resulted in a fusion of political

and aesthetic programs that resulted in new sociopolitical orders that pushed much of the national and aesthetic debates discussed in this book to the margins.

All in all, the book offers a vital contribution to the English-language study of early Russian modernism, and the main characters of Benois and Ivanov offer compelling figures for even those only casually familiar with Russia. Those familiar with the larger region of Central and Eastern Europe will have some qualms, notably when it comes to the perception that the study appears to support a claim that the binary of acceptance or rejection of the European influences expressed in the book is unique to Russia. Quoting the Russian Art Historian Nils Åke Nilsson, Shevelenko brings forward the argument that the engagement with the archaic and primordial was something that 'expressed Russian uniqueness amid European discussions about the new art' (pp. 7–8). However, this practice appeared as a common lexicon across much of Central Europe if not all of Europe more broadly. Overall, Shevelenko argues that the cultural milieu in Russia began as an extension of Western trends but then moved beyond them in a different direction, in part because of this pull of archaism. The success of this argument hinges on the definition of 'West' she employs, something that is not made explicit. While she does a wonderful job interpreting the exchanges between the aesthetic and political that informed the pull towards archaism in Russia and shows that the binary of the dualism of East and West is not as resolute as it may appear, the structural components between the two sides are left standing—perhaps as a device to aid those only somewhat familiar with the dialogues taking place between the boundaries. If France, Britain, Spain, Italy, and, to some extent, Germany are defined as 'Western,' then the book does indeed succeed in offering a rich exploration of Russia's particular aesthetic of nationalism. The mixing of folk, premodern, and marginalized traditions used by the creative practitioners in the volume does indeed show a 'fusion of national particularism and radical universalism' (p. 16) that is altogether different from what we see in France and Britain. If, however, anything to the west of Russia constitutes 'Western,' the goal remains unrealized, for there are numerous artistic, literary, and musical examples in the amorphous and equally hard-to-define Central European region that depict a similar fusion of particular and universal, and the struggle to either emulate or reject Western ideology in the quest for national styles. In this manner, the volume becomes part of the Russian versus Western ideological debate.

As the original Russian version is dated to 2017, this book predates the quickly evolving dynamics in the region after the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Questions of nationalism and imperialism are at the forefront of not only the volume's historical examples but also occupy the minds of scholars of Russian art, history and culture. This reviewer wonders how the 2024 English-language revision could have utilized the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine. Given the importance of political influence on aesthetics for Shevelenko, there is a rich possibility for connecting the current political crisis to the events discussed in the book. The third chapter's discussion of the Russo-Japanese War and Russia's attempt to become the 'ruler of Asia' is one such location that a discussion of the 2022 invasion might have offered great insight into how this link between archaism and imperialism has been maintained.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art east / central

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# New Narratives for Viennese Modernism

## A Review of: Stefanie Kitzberger, Cosima Rainer and Linda Schädler, eds, *Friedl Dicker-Brandeis: Works from the Collection of the University of the Applied Arts Vienna*, Berlin and Boston: Walter De Gruyter, 2023. 352 pages. ISBN 978-3-11-078907-2.

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**Keywords**

Bauhaus; Theresienstadt / Terezín; Viennese modernism; John Heartfield

**https://doi.org/10.5817/AEC2024-4-7**

# New Narratives for Viennese Modernism

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**Julia Secklehner**

Friedl Dicker-Brandeis (1898–1944) has received exceptional attention in Austria in recent years: beginning with an exhibition at the Lentos Art Museum in Linz, Upper Austria, in 2022. Vienna has seen two further shows since, one focused on her collaborations with the designer Franz Singer at the Wien Museum's MUSA Gallery in 2022/23, another at the University of Applied Arts in 2023. Emerging from these shows was her position as one of Austria's foremost avant-garde artists of the 1920s and 30s: Bauhaus-trained and working in multiple media, well-connected and politically engaged in leftist circles, Dicker Brandeis offers ties between Vienna, a place often considered to be without an interwar avant-garde, and other places of modernist production in the German-speaking world, most notably Berlin.

Born into a lower middle-class family, Dicker-Brandeis studied photography and reproduction at Vienna's School for Graphic Arts, attended the textiles class at Vienna's Academy of Applied Arts, as well as Johannes Itten's private art school in Vienna, following her teacher to the newly founded Bauhaus in Weimar in 1919. After leaving the school where she studied and taught, she led and worked in several design and architectural studios in Vienna, Berlin, and Prague. What she has been known for best until only a few years ago is her engagement with child art education, which led her to give children's art classes when she was interned in the Theresienstadt / Terezín Ghetto. Although she had several chances of escaping, she refused to leave her pupils and accompanied them when deported to Auschwitz. She was murdered with them in the gas chambers in 1944. Leading an exceptional life as a highly productive artist comfortable with many different media and finding a tragic end as one of many remarkable cultural figures of her generation, Dicker-Brandeis thus epitomises both a highly impressive artist and a generation of Central Europeans erased by fascism.

Out of the several exhibitions and publications that have been dedicated to Dicker-Brandeis based on her successful yet short career and life, *Friedl Dicker-Brandeis: Works from the Collection of the University of the Applied Arts Vienna* is undoubtedly the most comprehensive and scholarly one. It brings together a range of art and architectural historians with the explicit aim of reconsidering the artist's work and offering new ways relating to her education, social networks, pedagogical commitment, politics, and interest in psychology. Published to accompany the exhibition mentioned above at the University of the Applied Arts, yet going beyond the scope of an exhibition catalogue, *Friedl Dicker-Brandeis* has the ambition of being a new authoritative work on her. Aside from contributions by leading scholars, it does so by building on the collection of the university, which houses the most significant

collection of the artist's work thanks to the efforts of its late director, Oswald Oberhuber, who laid the foundations of the collection in 1981. In the publication, insights into this collection, comprising textile work, paintings as well as graphics, are reflected by shorter sections between the essays that offer detailed descriptions of individual works, mediating between an evaluation of the artist's oeuvre in a broader context and an introduction to her wide-ranging oeuvre. In doing so, the publication has two main aims: first, to address 'the heterogeneity and disciplinary versatility of Dicker-Brandeis's work beyond monolithic concepts of the avant-garde or of modernism' (p.14), and second, to provide close engagement with individual works concerning this broader framework. Admittedly, this dual approach of extended essays and close work descriptions risks repeating information, since several essays also include detailed artwork analyses. The occasional repetition also points to the fact that reassessments of Dicker-Brandeis's work and life are constrained by the limited number of objects and sources available, of which some, such as the children's drawings from Theresienstadt, are more abundant than others: examples of her output from the Bauhaus, including the missing sculpture *Anna Selbdritt,* are rare by comparison. In light of these imbalances, however, *Friedl Dicker-Brandeis* represents the most critical sourcebook on the artist's work yet, most notably because it builds on themes rather than simply taking her biography as a guiding thread.

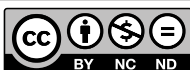
A key aim throughout all chapters is to offer a framing for her oeuvre that overcomes the longstanding emphasis on her role as leader of the child art classes in Theresienstadt, which effectively defined only the last years of her life. Instead, the essays build on her multivalent practice and try to gauge it with a focus on specific topic areas, including a broader contextualisation of her work with children in the Central European context (Bernadette Reinhold, pp. 225–243), her collaborations with the architect Franz Singer (Mark Wigley, pp. 69–91; Katharina Hövelmann, pp. 303–332), and the artist's political trajectory in light of the rich yet turbulent atmosphere of interwar Vienna (Stefanie Kitzberger, pp.117–199). In doing so, the publication also frames the artist as a representative of the Central European avant-garde in interior design and the applied arts that connected Vienna to the Bauhaus in Weimar and Berlin. The key to such an interpretation, it emerges from the essays, is to move beyond medium-specific approaches, allowing Dicker-Brandeis's oeuvre to stand for the multimedia approaches in the applied arts that defined creative production in interwar Vienna. This approach is particularly evident in Julie M. Johnson's essay, which emphasises the breadth of Dicker-Brandeis's work in order to reshape approaches to Viennese modernism more broadly. Using the metaphor of Indra's net, a Buddhist concept to emphasise the interconnectedness of different phenomena, Johnson builds an image of Dicker Brandeis as a 'remediator extraordinaire' (p. 148), whose 'rule-bending' approach to artmaking she takes as exemplary for feminist interdisciplinary creative production. While Johnson is most direct in this emphasis on Dicker-Brandeis as a 'great artist,' relying intensely on the interdisciplinary character of the artist's output, a similar approach can also be found in other contributions. As such, her work with children, her interest in interior design, as well as her psychological portraits after spending several months in an Austro-fascist prison all find a connection in the depiction of the artist as an intensely socially engaged figure interested in psychology, music and pedagogy. In this light, the stress on the artist's social networks,

particularly in the essays in the volume by Bernadette Reinhold and Stefanie Kitzberger, places Dicker-Brandeis at several hotspots of innovative thought in interwar Central Europe. At the same time, the shorter analyses of individual artworks dissecting these discussions were integrated into the wider interpretation of her practice. Even aspects of the artist's work that have lately been contested, such as the fact that she contributed architectural designs to her and Singer's company when in fact she had primarily focused on interiors, textiles and colour compositions, gain a different angle in this light and emphasise the importance of interiors and soft furnishings (which she designed) to form an architectural 'whole.'

Given its discussion of all the different aspects of the artist's work, and the aim of combing them in order to form an image of her as a whole, *Friedl Dicker-Brandeis* is the most detailed and scholarly book about the artist that has yet been published. It offers a thorough and critical analysis that clearly supports the claim that she was an essential figure of Central European modernism.

Despite this achievement, however, some notable omissions indicate areas where consideration of the artist's work should still be undertaken. Specifically, even though all the contributions make an effort to view Dicker-Brandeis in a *transnational* context, the project adopts the perspective of specialists on Viennese modernism and interwar German culture. As a result, Dicker-Brandeis's time in Czechoslovakia, which, after all, amounted to the last six years of her life before Theresienstadt, is mentioned in several places, yet without much detail beyond the artist's close networks, relying on letter exchanges and personal testimonies by friends such as Hilde Kothny. Morever, what the contributions fail to mention or discuss more closely is that Prague was a significant refuge from 1933 onwards, and became a place of exile for many German and Austrian artists fleeing totalitarian regimes at home. This led to numerous collaborations between Czech and German / Austrian artists, the most famous of which is probably John Heartfield's involvement in the International Exhibition of Caricature in Prague in 1934. Given that Dicker-Brandeis was a highly politically interested artist with strong ties to leftist circles since her teenage years, as Kitzberger and Reinhold so convincingly outlay, it is hard to imagine that Prague's position as an antifascist, multi-lingual staging point went past her. Admittedly, Dicker-Brandeis's frequently cited connection to the communist *Schwarze Rose* ('Black Rose') bookshop and its networks are mentioned, yet this information appears to be based on oral testimony alone (first published by Elena Makarova, who played a pivotal role in recovering the artist's work since the 1990s) and would merit further attention.

This omission aside, and from the perspective of recent writing on Viennese modernism in particular, *Friedl Dicker-Brandeis* is a commendable publication. It shows that it is certainly worth breaking up and revaluing established narratives, trying on new theories, and shifting the importance given to one aspect of an artist's work to another. Indeed, this is an approach that the history of Central European modernism would benefit from more broadly.



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04 / September 2024 / [133—138]

# The Islamic Heritage of Central Europe: Revivals and Neglect in the Last Two Hundred Years

## A Review of: Maximilian Hartmuth and Ayse Dilsiz Hartmuth, eds, *Patrimonialization on the Ruins of Empire. Islamic Heritage and the Modern State in Post-Ottoman Europe*, Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, 2024. 282 pages. ISBN 978-3-8394-7104-3.

Available Open Access: https://www.transcript-verlag.de/978-3-8376-7104-9/patrimonialization-on-the-ruins-of-empire/

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**Keywords**

Ottoman heritage; Islamic Architecture; architectural monuments; patrimony; heritage making; Balkan heritage; Bosnia; Crimean Tatars

**https://doi.org/10.5817/AEC2024-4-8**

# The Islamic Heritage of Central Europe: Revivals and Neglect in the Last Two Hundred Years

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**Cosmin Minea**

The volume is an original analysis of the modern history of heritage politics in Central and Eastern Europe and contemporary practices of preservations and reconstructions. It describes monuments and processes rarely seen in an international publication and is therefore a welcomed addition to studies about the history and culture of the region. Resulting from papers given at two workshops in Vienna in 2022, the book is the outcome of a European Research Council project titled *Architecture and Orientalizing Style in Habsburg Bosnia, 1878–1918*, of which Maximilian Hartmuth, one of the editors, was the principal investigator.

The history of heritage preservation is little-explored, particularly in Central and Eastern Europe where studies tend to focus on the present situation and are rooted in the social sciences (including political science, heritage studies, sociology and anthropology), with not enough attention to the history of the way states and Empires of the region preserved and promoted the material and immaterial remains of the past.[1] However, the volume under review is more than just a supplement to existing literature. Its main theme, Ottoman heritage on the territory of modern European Empires and nation-states, represents a depart from the topic of nation-building, the dominant framework of most of previous studies.[2] Therefore, while studies so far have understandably focused on heritage as part of the process of creating or consolidating a national identity, this volume's focus is instead on the often unwanted, unknown or overlooked heritage of the Ottoman Empire in Europe.

From even before its capture of Constantinople in 1453, the Ottoman Empire had gradually expanded into Europe. It was halted only after the failed Siege of Vienna in 1683, but by then it had already kept Hungary under control for more than 150 years, and it ruled most of the Balkan Peninsula until the beginning of the twentieth century. This impressive record of expansion and domination for almost 500 years begs the question why so little is known of its past heritage in South-Eastern Europe? A possible answer is alluded to by the editors

1) Some of the few studies on the topic in the last decades are: Matthew Rampley, ed., *Heritage, Ideology, and Identity in Central and Eastern Europe: Contested Pasts, Contested Presents*, Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2012; Gerhard Eimer and Ernst Gierlich, eds, *Kunsthistoriker und Denkmalpfleger des Ostens: Der Beitrag zur Entwicklung des Faches im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert*, Bonn: Kulturstiftung der deutschen Vertriebenen, 2007; Dragan Damjanović and Aleksander Łupienko, eds, *Forging Architectural Tradition: National Narratives, Monument Preservation and Architectural Work in the Nineteenth Century*, New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2022.

2) Another volume that has a bloc of chapters on the Ottoman legacy in the Balkans is Tchavdar Marinov and Maria Couroucli, *Balkan Heritages: Negotiating History and Culture*, Farnham: Ashgate, 2015.

in the introduction when they announce that the aim of the volume is to 'add nuance to the scholarly discourse on de-Ottomanization.' Indeed, the nationalist and triumphalist concept of de-Ottomanization, according to which nations formerly part of the Ottoman Empire succeeded to revive their own cultures and overcome the Islamic culture of their previous rules, obscured the many ways in which Ottoman heritage has survived until today. Some of the prime examples of European Ottoman heritage and the ways modern states and Empires have dealt with are the subject of the volume. The ten chapters give a sense of the complex nature of this heritage, highly dependent on the political and regional context but also imbued with nuances and contradictions across time-periods.

One of the main strengths of the volume is precisely the focus of most chapters on a long time-period, from the nineteenth century to the present, reflecting perhaps also the interests of the two editors in the historical dimension of the heritage and its place in contemporary heritage studies. Chapters on the Behram-beg mosque in Tuzla, Bosnia, for example, or on the tomb of the dervish poet Gül Baba (died 1541) in Budapest, on the Tatar heritage of Crimea and on Ottoman literary heritage demonstrate ways in which the modern history of heritage is connected directly to present problems and discussions around it.

The volume focuses mainly on buildings; only the final one, concerned with literature, is about the built environment. As a result, a central concept, advanced in the introduction, is that of *patrimonialization*, meaning the construction of the heritage in modern times. Generally, the term 'heritage' can refer to landscapes, buildings, but also movable artefacts and also intangible objects, so it would have been useful to have a more precise definition of the actual *type* of heritage that is the object of the volume and especially to find out what determined the almost exclusive focus on buildings.[3]

The chapters are arranged in three groups, each with a particular focus, namely: former Habsburg regions, Crimea, and Waqf or Islamic charitable proprieties. The final chapter, on Ottoman literature, seems again to stand alone. Maybe the most striking example to be discussed, alongside political contexts that are little-known to an international audience, is the Tatar heritage of Crimea, Russian and Ukrainian historiography on it, and practices of preservation in Crimes. The three chapters give us a sense of the extraordinary rich Islamic heritage in the peninsula and also highlight the ways in which scholars in Russia and Ukraine managed to marginalise it over and over across the past two centuries. Anna Guboglo, in 'Scales of patrimonialization in late imperial Crimea' (pp. 89–110) explains how the first systematic interest in the Crimean Tatars emerged in the Russian Empire by way of ethnography and as part of a broader scholarly interest in the Orient, two key ways of marginalising a culture, the association with 'folk' and 'Orient.' Stefaniia Demchuk in 'Amazing stories? Crimean heritage and the Reinvention of Ukrainian Art History' (pp. 111–33) looks at the ethnocentric basis of Soviet and Ukrainian art histories, that have promoted one grand narrative of Ukrainian art while the Tatars were exoticized, at best, or merely dismissed as barbarians and slave owners. In parallel though, as Nicole Kançal-Ferrari remarks in 'Between destruction, protection, and transformative re-creation' (pp. 135–74), Ukraine undertook steps to document and protect Crimean Tatar heritage, which testifies to the difference between attitudes of historians or

3) It is worth comparing this volume with *REVENANT: Revivals of Empire – Nostalgia, Amnesia, Tribulation*, an ongoing ERC project that also focuses on (amongst others) the Ottoman Heritage in Europe, but which uses heritage in relation not just to buildings but also sites of memory, cultural traditions, and everyday objects.

art historians, and those who were working with the monuments, restorers, activists, and institutions that are often much more active in promoting a specific heritage. A change of paradigm in Ukraine came after the Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014 when funds were invested to present Crimean Tatars as a part of the national culture, as 'indigenous peoples of Ukraine' (p. 147).

The chapters on Crimean Tatar heritage, together with the book as a whole, would have benefited from closer visual engagement with the monuments. The reader does not get a clear sense of what the most important Tatar monuments were, what they looked like and whether they were deemed artistically valuable. The same absence is also apparent in the chapters dealing with the Ottoman heritage of Cyprus, Bosnia, Serbia or in Turkey. Not even when the focus is on one specific monument, such as the extraordinary sixteenth-century Khan's Palace in Bağçasaray, Crimea, does the chapter explore its most interesting architectural and artistic features. The feeling is that despite the merits of the book and its close attention to the politics of heritage, no space was left for analysis of the monuments themselves.

Returning to Ottoman Crimean heritage, Kançal-Ferrari gives a very accurate critical appraisal of contemporary restoration projects under the temporary Russian administration. The aim has been in recent years to recreate an idealized Ottoman style through restorations and the construction of new buildings funded via the Turkish state. Examples include several Tatar monuments, including the most famous one, the Khan's Palace, but also in the wider region, the newly built Sultan Süleyman Mosque in Mariupol or the Kadyrov Mosque in Grozny, Chechnya, both modelled after the Ottoman Golden Age monuments. Kançal-Ferrari sums-up the paradox that 'efforts to articulate the cultural heritage of local Muslim communities are carried out through reference to a former imperial (for Crimea) or an entirely distinct (for Chechnya) cultural and ideological context, the classical Ottoman past' (p. 183). But what alternatives could there have been? What exactly would have been a building referencing the local heritage and what is the 'authentic' Tatar heritage of Crimea? After all, as the authors also show, most of these buildings have changed continuously throughout the centuries and each generation simply brought its own vision and artistical preferences. And what about the views of the local populations in Crimea, Mariupol (when one existed) and Grozny? Is it possible that they agreed and encouraged such neo-Ottoman buildings? We do not know, since Kançal-Ferrari does not consider the views of the local population, admittedly, a very hard to almost impossible task in the current political situation. In Crimea we know that the local population and the tourists are almost exclusively ethnic Russians. From this perspective, to promote the Russian history of the monument comes across as the natural option. Instead of a complex history of Muslims and Tatars in Crimea, it is perhaps not only much easier but also more attractive to focus on the legends and symbolism associated with Pushkin.

However, Ajla Bajramović's chapter 'Ottoman until proven Otherwise: Mutations of the Behram-beg Mosque in Tuzla, 1540–2021' (pp. 37–58) *does* consult the local population and her findings could be expanded to provide interesting insights. She analyses the successive reconstructions and modifications to the Behram-beg mosque in the former Ottoman territory of Bosnia since its construction in an Orientalizing style by the Habsburg authorities in 1888 (the original sixteenth-century structure was destroyed in a fire in 1871). Bajramović

describes the initial building designed by the engineer Franz von Mihanović, referred to in the press as in the style of 'Arabic models,' as a Habsburg invention, unrelated to the local building tradition or the Ottoman mosques. Indeed, elements such as the horizontal bands of beige and red, 'Alhambresque arcades' and the decorative portico, were all in fashion in Central Europe in the late nineteenth century, and they were not related to Ottoman culture but were, rather, part of an Orientalist and neo-Byzantine set of fashionable architectural motifs. But this first building only survived a few years because in 1895–1899 its dome was replaced by a pitched roof, a new portico was added and the façade was painted in white and beige. Why then, asks the author, do contemporary restoration projects seek to revive this Orientalizing building, in particular since they are sponsored by the Turkish state, which should not, in theory, want to restore a Habsburg building? After conducting interviews with the local population, Bajramović arrives at the answer: they agree with the restoration as they wish to have a building that impresses, that looks original and has the potential to attract believers and tourists.

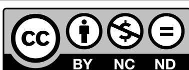
Bajramović might have gone even further and asked whether the same attitudes were also current at the end of the nineteenth century. Perhaps few saw the building as a Habsburg foreign invention and most welcomed it as an original Islamic building. This would not mean that the local population felt into some kind imperial trap but rather that they were active participants in reconfiguring their city with new, impressive buildings that were not in any way perceived as part of an orientalising project. Seen in this way, the local population might not have been the submissive subjects of Habsburg, just as, today, the population of Tuzla has been supportive of the principle of restoration. If we were to expand on the findings in Bajramović's chapter, we might also find that the Muslim community of Mariupol in Ukraine and of Grozny in Chechnya also accepted their neo-Ottoman monuments, rather than having the buildings imposed on them. After all, the period of classical Ottoman architecture and of the architect Mimar Sinan is one of the most prestigious artistic periods in all Islamic culture. There are perhaps plenty who would wish for such monuments rather than less prestigious ones based on local building traditions.

The volume excels at the analysis of official policies in the specific cultural and political contexts of the time but does not look at the responses and initiatives of the local communities, much harder to grasp as we go further away from present times due to lack of sources on the matter. Even so, most of the chapters are perhaps grounded too firmly in institutional and official analysis looking solely at legal documents, official publications, state institutions. For example, Maximilian Hartmuth in the first chapter, 'No News as Good News? Occupied Bosnia's Ottoman Heritage in the Habsburg Imperial Imaginary ca. 1900' (pp. 15–36) analyses the representations of the Ottoman heritage in the well-known multi-volume description of the history and cultural heritage of all the regions of the Habsburg Empire, the so-called *Kronprinzenwerk*. The article about the architectural heritage of Bosnia, written by the Brno-born Johann Kellner, focused on the so-called 'Oriental style,' under which he included all buildings related to the Muslim community, historical as well as new ones. Kellner thus presents the buildings erected under Habsburg rule as a continuation of the Ottoman building tradition and culture, and indirectly presents the Empire as nurturing the Islamic culture. It was part of a strategy of 'conciliatory modernization,' in Hartmuth's words, even if

Islamic heritage remained foreign for most imperial subjects, and was perhaps even seen as trophy of war in a conquered land. But, to use the same hypothesis derived from interviews with the locals in chapter 2, could it be the case that also local populations were involved in adopting the Orientalising style for their buildings? Perhaps they were even influential over the Habsburg authorities and the writers in Vienna because after all the new 'Oriental' style was fashionable, spectacular and easily recognisable as Islamic.

The volume ends with an excellent Afterword by Jeremy F. Walton, who emphasises the main themes and strong points of the book. Accordingly, the chapters demonstrate the double aspect of patrimonialization, to revive a specific past and of 'capitalizing on the past for present aims.' They also describe 'the multiple scales of expertise' (p. 276) in charge of heritage management, but perhaps, above all, they put together a variety of monuments, regions and contexts that are not typically analysed together. Indeed, the volume's geographical scope, from the Balkans to the Caucasus, and the discussion of monuments which do not normally feature neither in histories of architecture of the region nor in bigger surveys, is what makes it of incontestable value.

Walton also thinks beyond this volume and asks: 'how might we think against the grain of patrimonialization' (p. 277), since the chapters have exposed the process as selective, exclusionary and connected to specific political goals? He proposes using the notion of the 'post-imperial uncanny' (p. 279) to account for the ambiguities and unsettling confusions regarding imperial pasts in the (national) presents. It is accordingly a good instrument to think in post-imperial times because it invites 'unanticipated, even unrecognizable forms' as many heritage sites are already 'an invitation to as yet unanticipated futures' (p. 280). The notion indeed invites and includes many possible views, interpretations and actors. It is the opposite of the orderly, comprehensible display that today's heritage managers prefer for their sites, driven by market and political expectations. Today's return to the exotic, romanticised neo-Oriental styles is however, as the volume shows, more than just the direct imposition of political power by eastern strong man. It also responds to the expectation of tourist and of a large part of the population. Perhaps researchers should directly inquire into the reasons for its success at many levels rather than just criticising it. Otherwise, they risk being stuck in an echo chamber that unfortunately becomes ever more enclosed.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art east/central

04 / September 2024 / [139—145]

# Histories of Decentral Art History during the Cold War

A Review of: Antje Kempe and Beáta Hock and Marina Dmitrieva, eds, *Universal – International – Global. Art Historiographies of Socialist Eastern Europe*, Vienna and Cologne: Böhlau, 2023. 317 pages.
ISBN 978-3-412-52083-0.

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**Keywords**

decentral art history; decolonising art history; regional art history; transnationalism; transregionalism; East European art history; Cold War culture; exchange; transfer research; Socialist Internationalism

**https://doi.org/10.5817/AEC2024-4-9**

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**Katalin Cseh-Varga**

Central to today's art history of East, Central and South-East Europe are discussions of international, transnational, and even transregional connections and exchanges. Conferences, research projects, and publications over the past two decades or so exploring cultural and aesthetic encounters have shaped the academic landscape of the region's investigation.[1] The conference *The State-Socialist World Turned Global: Cultural Encounters during the Cold War*, organized in October 2023 in Bucharest, is an example that included transfers based on the concept of socialist friendship and established meeting points of European, American, and Asian representatives of socialist politics and art scenes, yet also spanned 'intellectual trade' in scientific fields that inspired a variety of cultural players in broader Eastern Europe.[2] Within the context of this academic direction of drawing new contours and structural frameworks in centre-periphery dynamics and the destabilization of the Cold War bipolarity and the East-West divide which have been activated and projected retrospectively and into post-socialist times, it is increasingly difficult to detect original and game-changing art historical narratives and methods.

*Universal – International – Global. Art Historiographies of Socialist Eastern Europe* takes the themes briefly outlined above and applies them to the field of art history. This volume is a conscious investigation of tendencies, concepts, and activities in art historical discourse against the background of an expanded geopolitical and geocultural context that often transcends Europe's continental borders. Antja Kempe and Marina Dmitrieva introduce a collection of essays organized around the idea of '… exchange and connectivity in national, transnational, and international dimensions' (p. 23). A 'comparative approach' is the structural

1) See, e.g., Beata Hock and Anu Allas, eds, *Globalizing East European Art Histories. Past and Present*, New York and London: Routledge, 2018; Jérôme Bazin and Pascal Dubourg Glatigny and Piotr Piotrowski, 'Introduction: Geography of Internationalism,' *Art beyond Borders. Artistic Exchange in Communist Europe [1945 – 1989]*, Jérôme Bazin, Pascal Dubourg Glatigny and Piotr Piotrowski, eds, Budapest and New York, Central European University Press, 2016; *Resonances: Regional and Transregional Cultural Transfer in the Art of the 1970s*. Artpool Art Research Center Budapest/ Comenius University Bratislava/Academic Research Center of the Academy of Fine Arts Prague/Piotr Piotrowski Center for Research on East-Central Europe at the Adam Mickiewicz University, research project, 2021–2024; *Die globale DDR: eine transkulturelle Kunstgeschichte (1949–1990)*, conference, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen and Technische Universität Dresden, June 9–11, 2022; Bojana Videkanic, *Nonaligned Modernism. Socialist Postcolonialist Aesthetics in Yugoslavia, 1945–1985,* Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2020; Caterina Preda, *Art and Politics in Modern Dictatorships. A Comparison of Chile and Romania*, London and New York and Shanghai: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017; *ARTMargins.* Special Section: Artists' Networks in Latin America and Eastern Europe, 1: 2–3, June-October 2012; *Socialist Exhibition Cultures. International Exhibitions in the Socialist World, 1950–1991,* 2021-, research project and workshop series, https://socialistexhibitions.com/.

2) *The State-Socialist World Turned Global: Cultural Encounters during the Cold War*, organized by Irina Natasă-Matei and Catarina Preda, 5–6 October 2023, University of Bucharest, conference program.

principle of the volume which offers a 'history of art history under the aegis of Socialism' (23). Contributions spanning a period stretching from the post-war years into the reform-driven era of Perestroika in the 1980s all demonstrate that many of art history's now common methods and approaches were already established and practiced in the Cold War years by art historians from socialist Hungary, Poland, Czechoslovakia, and the Soviet Union. Essays by Maja and Reuben Fowkes, Elena Sharnova, and Corinne Geering in *Universal – International – Global* confirm that plenty of platforms and approaches in state socialist countries went beyond the geographic and ideological boundaries implied by Cold War stereotypes. Non-hierarchical global accounts as inscribed into the international spread of Pop Art, and 'examples of specific episodes of creative contact, influence and borrowing' (p. 160) in the historiographical account on nineteenth-century Russian painting, demonstrate that the current insistence on a transnational art history of East Europe is anything but new. *Universal – International – Global* does an excellent job of focusing attention onto the historical fact that non-Western-dominated and Western-initiated communication channels and exchange forums paralleled the conflictual East-West axis of socialist and capitalist worlds. Transfers and encounters in the arts and art historiography happened between related and distant regional cultures and often reached beyond Europe. Similar to *A Socialist Realist History? Writing Art History in the Post-War Decades* (2019), edited by Krista Kodres, Kristina Jõekalda and Michaela Marek, the volume discussed here also offers a rereading of the negatively stigmatized style of socialist realism and its discourse, presenting this aesthetic directive both as heterogeneous and possessing a concise social and political function.[3]

*Universal – International – Global*, with its special focus on Socialist Internationalism, *stands out among the admittedly few publications and research outputs concerned with the art historiography produced in state socialist times*.[4] As an official program to connect socialist regimes across the globe and an alternative to decolonial discourses, the Socialist Internationalist framework offers this volume on decentred artistic exchange and critical art historical cartographies the ideal point of reference. In their contribution to the volume Douglas Gabriel and Adri Kácsor produce the following definition: 'Socialist Internationalism, when defined as a mode of knowledge production, operated through artworks, theories, and institutional practices that were set in a multitude of places around the world fostering a critical and at times bellicose stand against the imperialist political and economic structures of capitalism' (p. 242). While non-western art and cultures were, according to Socialist Internationalism, to be discussed '... in relationship to a Socialist materialistic world art...' (p. 18), this program and concept nevertheless underlines another core idea of this volume, namely, that the art and art history of East, Central and South-East Europe should not feel obliged to 'answer' to the West. (Art) historical narratives of Eastern European backwardness and belatedness

3) Krista Kodres, Kristina Jõekalda and Michaela Marek, eds, *A Socialist Realist History? Writing Art History in the Post-War Decades*, Wien and Cologne: Böhlau, 2019.

4) See, for instance, the conference paper by Karolina Łabowicz-Dymanus entitled 'How to challenge Polish art history writing from a critical perspective?' and Cristian Nae's 'We Don't Need Another Hero: Horizontal, Entangled and Constellational Approaches to Writing Transnational Art Histories in Central and Eastern Europe' at the *Rethinking Art Historical Narratives and Canons* conference, Ateneum Art Museum and University of Helsinki, 9–10 November 2023. It should nevertheless be noted that these presentations only marginally fall back on historical models of art history writing invented in the former Eastern Bloc.

should be left behind to reinvent the area's own position.[5] In this regard, Éva Forgács's chapter in the book is perhaps the most important. In her reminder of the European integration which occurred in East and Central Europe following the end of the 1939–45 war, Forgács spells out that internationalism was always present in the region's art development. The real disruption in the (historiographical) perspective was introduced by western scholars who exaggerated the bipolar divide of the Cold War. The image of a backward Eastern Europe later outlasted the Cold War period. Mária Orišková's chapter similarly confirms that the former Czechoslovakia has always had tight cultural connections with western Europe. In the introduction, Kempe and Dmitrieva quote Nikos Hadjinicolau, who encourages cultural historians to disregard power relations as quality relations.

Even more convincing than the decentralized art historical approach outlined above is how essays in this volume (re-)discover and introduce forgotten networking figures and key players in art history active in socialist states. Ján Bakoš, Dmitri V. Sarabianov, Lajos Vayer, Jan Białostocki, and Adolf Hoffmeister, to mention just a few names, either organized or initiated innovative methods and fostered discussions on microhistory and new art historical geographies.

Across the volume, Vayer and Białostocki's methodological contribution to the 1979 congress of the International Committee of Art History (CIHA) is repeatedly cited as an outstanding model for actual transnational debates in the discipline. These actors are also intellectually contextualized in their respective circumstances, including references to other, mostly western European, gatekeepers of art history such as the experts of the Vienna School, Ernst Cassirer, and Aby Warburg. Inspirations from these renowned art historians and how their theories and 'historical-critical' or 'cultural-historical' methods (p. 231) resonate with their Eastern and Central European counterparts underline the entanglement of the art history discourse which is so important to the editors and authors of *Universal – International – Global*.

The key statement of the volume, that transnational and decentral approaches in art history were already present in the state socialist period, is elevated to another structural level. Through adding source texts written by the abovementioned cultural players, and critically reflecting on them from today's knowledge and perspective, the editors successfully bridge the gap between past methods and the screening of those methods to enrich the field of Eastern European art historiography. By re-publishing the source texts within the current scope of knowledge on globalized Eastern Europe, East European art history discovers a genealogy distinct from a dominating Western view.

*Universal – International – Global* is divided into three sections. Section one (Platforms of Exchange and Knowledge Transfer) focuses on processes of idea transfer, while section two (Integration and Adaptation) investigates the relationship between 'universal' and 'national discourses of art history' (p. 23) that rarely existed without confrontation and hierarchies. Section three (Intercontinental Encounters) aims to draw new cultural (and political) maps along the lines of Socialist Internationalism and beyond. In it, the role of international

5) Sven Spieker argues 'that Eastern Europe, even during the time of its geo-political isolation, never stopped being a part of the European *Kulturraum* ….' Sven Spieker, 'Conditional Similarities: Parallax in Postwar Art from Eastern Europe,' Tomáš Pospiszyl, *An Associative Art History. Contemporary Studies of Neo-Avant-Gardes in a Bipolar World,* Zurich and Dijon: JRP Ringier and Les presses du reel, 2017, 4–11, here 7–9.

organizations such as CIHA or UNESCO is assessed regarding the extent to which scholarly exchange was made possible and can be deemed successful.

The volume begins with Maja and Reuben Fowkes' insightful essay on how bipolar narratives outlived the Cold War in art history and considers the effect decolonized approaches can have on understanding Pop Art as a phenomenon with equal weight in all corners of the globe, including Eastern Europe. When approached from a decentred angle, East and Central European artists devoted to Pop Art appear as empowered, conscious 'co-producers' (p. 48) operating within a global art movement. Then, Krista Kodres's chapter takes translation strategies and publication practices as examples of Socialist Internationalism in the Soviet context. The Socialist Internationalism project is presented as a framework within which cultural models and the achievements in art history as a discipline were exchanged among socialist states. Kodres follows the trends and specificities that help to define when and which cultural (linguistic) landscape was most prominent in knowledge transmission. Although unable to provide insights on the impact of translated scholarship on local art histories, Kodres interestingly identifies a translation and publication practice that allowed access to ideologically problematic art historical sources. This strategy was present in other state socialist contexts too. Mária Orišková's work on Socialist Internationalism is more sceptical than those of Kodres or Douglas and Kácsor, for example. In her contribution from the field of exhibition history, Orišková understands exhibitions under the aegis of Socialist Internationalism as tools of socialist (national) ideology and diplomatic propaganda. Her work walks through selected exhibitions from different periods in the history of socialist Czechoslovakia, but also covers the more recent isolation and limits of integration in international art history.

Peter H. Feist's is the first source text in *Universal – International – Global* to elaborate upon the contact points between art historians of the German Democratic Republic (GDR) and East and Central Europe. According to Feist, scholars from East Germany conducted a limited, exclusive discussion of the region's art. Feist had the opportunity to network with his colleagues from the Eastern Bloc and regarded Jan Białostocki's methodical advances as progressive. Both Feist and his discussant, Antje Kempe, highlighted the relevance of the Lexikon der Kunst, a five-volume collaborative enterprise published in the late 1980s, as a valuable encounter platform for East and Central European and German art that was non-hierarchical, decolonial and non-racist. Kempe also comments on how Feist's notion of heritage can enrich today's discipline of critical heritage studies.

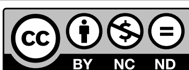
Section two begins with an assessment of alternative strategies in Czechoslovak art history. Ivan Gerát investigates the challenges encountered in discussing the aesthetics and iconography of medieval religious art in the overtly anti-religious setting of Czechoslovak socialism. Gerát follows the implementation of creative approaches to the analysis of 'spiritual concepts' (p. 125) by art historian Karel Stejskal in the inconvenient circumstances of supervised academic work. In describing the political and cultural climate of the period between 1945 and 1948, Éva Forgács's contribution to *Universal – International – Global* demonstrates how the most diverse artistic expressions shared the common denominator of internationalism. In the Hungarian European School, it did not matter whether artists worked with abstraction or figuratively; they produced art in a context that 'value[d] … knowledge, intellectual progress, and freedom of expression … [yet] reject[ed] the ideology of fascism' (p. 140).

Elena Sharnova takes the reader to the 1970s Soviet Union and engages in the debate on nineteenth-century Russian painting embedded in the European context. Her central reference, which is critically approached, is the work of Dmitri V. Sarabianov, who is included in the republished source texts of the volume on this topic. Sharnova also guides the discussion through exemplary exhibitions and museum policies from the 1970s and 1980s. Readers can retrace the process through which 'after a long interval of neglect, Russian modernist paintings were hung next to works by contemporary European masters' (p. 154), a development which peaked in a 'breakthrough exhibition' entitled *Moscow-Paris 1900–1930* staged in Moscow in 1981. Neatly linked to Sharnova's discussion is an excerpt from Sarabianov's book *Russian Nineteenth-Century Painting among the European Schools. A Comparative Approach* (1980) and Marina Dmitrieva's comment on the book's introduction, which is republished here. Both Sharnova and Dmitrieva praise the inclusive approach Sarabianov takes to bring Russian and western European painting into dialogue with each other, even though the concept of the nation remains the main cultural container in his thinking. Despite the numerous shortcomings of the book, including various methodological problems, Sarabianov stages a critical assessment of Russia's cultural geo-artistic position. Another positive is the thoroughness with which Sarabianov examines appropriation and recycling in his own national art and culture.

The task of Section three was to draw new maps of art historiography. The UNESCO Cultural Studies program was productive in bringing neglected and overlooked cultural landscapes onto the map and enabling socialist scholars to take part and shape international art history debates. Corinne Geering demonstrates that scholarship and cultural politics were often intertwined during the Cold War. Close cooperation between global regions, such as the Soviet Union and India, and the improvement and promotion of socialism as a model for success, mirrors today's academic interests. Lajos Vayer's source text relates regional discourses of art history to more comprehensive discourses and engages with the dynamics of changing centres and peripheries. Importantly, Vayer consistently used the term 'Central Europe' instead of Eastern Europe and sought to establish methodological connections with areas not usually associated with the former socialist states; in doing so, in the words of his discussant Robert Born, he pursued a non-nationalist art historiography. Vayer was not only an ambassador of little-known Central European art history, he also played a crucial role in overcoming the bipolar Cold War cultural oppositions. This shift in geopolitical and geocultural view is key to Douglas Gabriel and Adri Kácsor's case study on the exchange between Hungary and North Korea, in which they discuss different levels of cultural and political contact. Despite Socialist Internationalism's intended aim of peaceful coexistence and mutual learning among socialist cultures, some misunderstandings occurred, for instance, concerning Socialist Realist art's purpose when transferred to a different culture.

Piotr Juszkiewicz's essay investigates Polish interest in Mexican art between 1949 and 1972, where the latter was considered 'an ideal example of communist art' (p. 260) and a perfect alternative to Socialist Realism Modernism. From around 1955 until 1965, Mexican art exhibitions and publications on Mexican art served as inspirations for the reformation of local Socialist Realism. Despite the seemingly idealized presentation and reception of Mexican art, it was conceived as primitive and exotic and, as Juszkiewicz writes, as an

art that allowed a distanced view on modern, industrialized societies. The connection of Juszkiewicz's chapter to Jan Białostocki's source text commented upon by Antje Kempe is again organic. *Universal – International – Global* includes an extract from Białostocki's 1972 book *On the Art of Early America. Mexico and Peru*. In this monograph, Białostocki provides some novel insights into the early art on Mexico and Peru that add up to an asynchronous interpretation of art history. Back in 1972, the Polish art historian succeeded in establishing a dialogue between local Latin American traditions and appropriated, recycled influences coming from outside, mostly from colonizing powers. However, he does not deny Peruvian and Mexican art their independence and agency. In Antje Kempe's interpretation, *On the Art of Early America* is an 'art-historiographical contribution on how to overcome Eurocentric superiority' (p. 291). Closing the book with Białostocki must have been a conscious editorial decision since his methods succeed in repositioning Eastern European art history as a leader of decentralizing approaches with a willingness to establish an art historiography founded on the idea of contact and mutual enrichment among distant cultural epistemes. Comparative art history as practiced by Białostocki, Vayer, and Sarabianov can generate regional, alternative archetypes opposing dominating discourses. However, in every instance, it is essential to critically re-examine the contexts of these methodical models both to avoid misestimating their impact, and to understand the position of Eastern, Central, and South-East European art history within a broader spatial and temporal framework.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**Vratislav Effenberger (1923–1986)** was a Czechoslovak poet, critic and cultural theorist. He was a major figure in Czech postwar Surrealism from the 1950s through to his death in 1986. His publications include *Henri Rousseau* (1963), *Realita a poesie* [Reality and the poetic] (1969), *Výtvarné projevy surrealismu* [The artistic expressions of Surrealism] (1969), *Surrealistické východisko 1938–1968* [The Surrealist starting point, 1938–1968] (1969) and *Surovost života a cynismus fantasie* [The rawness of life and the cynicism of the imagination] (1984). His collected poems were published posthumously in two volumes in 2004 and 2010, and his historical reflections on postwar Czechoslovakia, *Republiku a varlata* [For the Republic and testicles] were published in 2013. A collection of essays, *Modely a metody* [Models and methods] is due to be published in 2025.

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**Sergey Makovsky (1877–1962)** was a Russian poet, art critic and curator, and brother of the Viennese painter, Elena Luksch-Makowski. From 1909 to 1917 he was founder of the art journal *Аполлон* (Apollo) based in St. Petersburg. In 1920 he emigrated to Prague and, in 1925, to Paris, where he later became chair of the Association of Russian Writers in Paris, and after the Second World War was a prominent representative of émigré Russian culture.

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**Karel Teige (1900–1951)** was a Czech artist and writer. One of the founders of the interwar *Devětsil* avant-garde art group, he was also an architectural and cultural critic. His publications included: *Soudobá mezinárodní architektura* [Contemporary international architecture] (1928), *Moderní architektura v Československu* [Modern architecture in Czechoslovakia] (1930) and *Nejmenší byt* [The smallest dwelling] (1932).

**Zdeněk Wirth (1878–1961)** was a Czech art historian who specialised in Czech art, architecture and heritage preservation who, alongside teaching at the Technical University in Prague, was an official in the Czechoslovak Ministry of Education. His numerous books included: *L´art tchèque contemporain* (1920); *Česká architektura XIX. století* [Czech Architecture of the nineteenth century] (1922); *Dějepis výtvarných umění v Československu* [A history of art in Czechoslovakia] (1935); *Zmizelá Praha* [Lost Prague] (1945–1948).

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N°04 / September 2024

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