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Networks, Horizons, Centres and Hierarchies: On the Challenges of Writing on Modernism in Central Europe

In 2008 the Polish art historian Piotr Piotrowski published an article in *Umění/Art*: 'On the Spatial Turn, or Horizontal Art History.'[1] One of a number of essays he wrote on issues in the history of central and eastern European modernism, it has become a much cited text, the metaphor of horizontal art history frequently recurring in writings on the subject.[2] The article was the culmination of some 30 years of intense reflection on the historiography of the art of eastern and central Europe that followed the collapse of the Soviet Union and its client regimes in 1989–1991. This has involved not only re-writing narratives previously shaped by the cultural politics of successive Communist regimes, or 'rediscovering' previously inaccessible and unknown art, but also trying to reconceptualise the relation between this region of Europe and wider European and global contexts. For Piotrowski, despite the enormous growth of international interest, art historians still struggle to integrate the art of eastern and central Europe into larger contexts. As a result, he argued, it still tends to be forced into an art historical framework devised around the major centres of modernism in western Europe and North America: Paris, Berlin, New York and London. Inasmuch as eastern and central Europe are seen as responding to innovations generated elsewhere, such a structure also depicts the region as backward. As Hans Belting stated: 'Eastern European art viewed in retrospect was, compared with the art of the West, delayed most of the time.'[3]

The scope and meaning of 'eastern' or 'central' Europe have been much discussed, but this article is not concerned with revisiting that particular debate; rather, its interests lie in historiographical questions raised by writing on the modern art and architecture of eastern and central Europe (i.e. those territories lying between Germany and Russia). In recent years East-Central Europe (for the sake of convenience the article will use this formulation) has been somewhat eclipsed by the increasingly *global* preoccupations of art historians, particularly in relation to the history of modernism. The recent publication of three important anthologies of writings on its art suggests, however, that the issues Piotrowski raised are far from resolved.[4] The geography of art he critiqued remains broadly the same as before. Research on the modernist practices of Prague, Budapest or Belgrade, for example, is still mostly left to scholars based in the countries concerned; major international museums and galleries in western Europe and North America seldom stage exhibitions of the art of East-Central Europe, and few have examples in their collections.

Piotrowski highlighted an issue of continued importance, therefore, and it was in recognition of this fact that, following his death in 2015, the Piotr Piotrowski Centre for Research on East-Central European Art was established at the Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań. But what did he envisage with the notion of a 'horizontal art history'? Why did he believe it would provide a challenge to traditional art historical practice, and *how* was it meant to be a solution?

This article is, initially, an attempt to answer these questions, but the discussion goes beyond the individual arguments put forward by Piotrowski and considers the broader debate about the place of East-Central Europe in histories of modernism. While in agreement with much of Piotrowski's diagnosis, it nevertheless suggests that 'horizontal art history' may not be the solution many have taken it to be. This is

due in part to certain inconsistencies in the concept, but also — I shall argue — the structural asymmetries he identified may well not be overcome until external pragmatic issues that impede writing about the history of art in East-Central Europe are also addressed. Given the institutional location of the author of this article, most of the examples will be selected from the Czech Republic, but it will touch on themes that have a wider pertinence.

Verticality: Hierarchies and Centres

Piotrowski's original article was prompted by the publication of *Art since 1900*, a survey of twentieth-century art that in many respects encapsulated the view of modernism promulgated by the American magazine *October* since the mid-1970s.[5] While its authors, Rosalind Krauss, Benjamin Buchloh, Yves Alain Bois and Hal Foster, have often been seen as some of the most important progressive art historians writing in English, their collective volume (and, by extension, the broader project of *October*) displayed a notable blind spot inasmuch as they left many long-standing assumptions about the geography of modern art untouched. In particular, the historical narrative focused on the traditional centres of modernism: Paris, Berlin, Moscow, New York and (to a degree) London.[6]

Art since 1900 is the most notable and prominent example of a more general problem, Piotrowski stated. Even when the modernisms of, for example, Bucharest, Belgrade or Kaunas, are explored, they are often treated as objects of exotic interest operating within a framework shaped by western Europe and north America.[7] If discussed at all, the modernist art practices of East-Central Europe are usually described in terms of the reception of ideas and practices flowing from elsewhere. A much-discussed example of this problem was Stephen Mansbach's *Modern Art in Eastern Europe*.[8] Despite its considerable merits in turning the attention of anglophone art historians eastwards and beyond the Elbe, it was stymied not only by its problematic assumptions of what 'eastern Europe' even meant, but also by a focus on certain stereotypical topics, such as the Czech reception of Parisian Surrealism, the influence of Cézanne in Hungary, dada in Romania, or Estonian responses to Expressionism. When it attempted to describe the character of this transfer or ideas and practices, the book was drawn into a treacherous debate over the *influence* of western modernism.[9]

At the heart of Piotrowski's critique lay the problem of hierarchy, which operates on two levels; first the institutional hierarchy of art history writing as a discipline and, second, the cultural hierarchies that historically governed the relations between artists in East-Central Europe and their peers in, for example, Paris and Berlin. The accumulation of economic and cultural capital in institutions, particularly in the United States, Germany, France and Great Britain, has created overwhelming inequalities. Universities, museums and galleries have access to resources — artworks, publications, research grants — that are unmatched elsewhere. In comparison, even the prestigious national academies and institutes of East-Central Europe are left wanting. Aside from the historical legacy of the economic mismanagement of Communist rule, its censorship policies and restrictions on travel and exchange of ideas, other factors also contributed to maintaining the hierarchy in question, of which the most important is undoubtedly language. With the exception of Russian, most languages of East-Central Europe are little known elsewhere. This automatically creates a boundary between, for example, Czech, Polish and Hungarian art, and basic primary and secondary sources are inaccessible. A reflection of this is the fact that most international scholars writing in English or German on the art of East-Central Europe continue to be either originally from the countries in question or descended from emigrés.

Language has further consequences, too, for it creates a limited community of scholars. Scholars in France, Germany or Spain, for example, can rely on a large cadre of fellow academics in their field, (both native- and second-language speakers) as well as a large potential readership, their peers in East-Central Europe can count on many fewer. In some cases, such as Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, scholarly communities can be vanishingly small. This compounds the issue of linguistic inaccessibility and limits the range and diversity of voices as well as impeding their ability to establish an international voice. It is no coincidence, perhaps, that the two scholars from East-Central Europe who have achieved the highest international profile, Piotrowski and Jan Białostocki, are both Polish, i.e. from the most populous state of the region.

In order to combat this basic difficulty, many scholars have turned to using English as a *lingua franca*. This has had some impact on the situation described by Piotrowski, although it does not circumvent one basic problem, namely that historical and important secondary sources remain inaccessible. In addition, the effect has not been as significant as one might hope, primarily because language is just one of many factors that have contributed to the scholarly marginalisation of the modernism of East-Central Europe. Certain ideological positions have proven hard to shift, of which the most stubborn has been the reliance on the notion of centres and peripheries. It is a truism that the narrative of art history has been constructed around this ideological binary which, to cite Beáta Hock, *'naturalises the political and symbolic power of the key academic institutions from where art historical discourse is defined and disseminated.'*[10]

This pertains to the geography of art, too, and the second type of hierarchy. Enrico Castelnuovo and

Carlo Ginzburg first brought the question of centres and peripheries to critical attention when challenging the traditional focus of Italian art historiography on Rome, Florence and Venice.[11] Italy, they argued, should be thought of as pluricentric, and it was mainly due to the enormous influence of Vasari and his emulators that other cities had been eclipsed. Challenging this traditional conception also meant dismantling a structure that conceived of 'peripheries' as merely belatedly receiving innovations generated in the centre. Instead, their agency was to be restored to them. In the 1980s Piotrowski's fellow Pole Jan Białostocki had, entirely independently, sketched out a similar argument, drawing on the work of the Croatian art historian Ljubo Karaman on the art of peripheries.[12] His untimely death only two years later prevented him from amplifying and developing his thoughts further. In certain respects Piotrowski's article was picking up the baton, responding to the historically dominant position of western Europe and North America in histories of modernism. His solution was to invert the relation between 'western' and 'eastern' Europe.

'Horizontal' art history involves taking the position of the periphery as a starting point, in order to provincialise the centre. Yet before examining its implications in more detail — including Piotrowski's problematic tendency to talk in essentialising terms of 'eastern' and 'western' Europe — it is worth exploring the question of centres and peripheries a little further. For against the common argument that this binary opposition is nothing more than an ideological construct, the starting point of this article is that talk of centres and peripheries cannot simply be excised from art historical discourse, for the reason that they have been and continue to be more than just discursive constructs of the art historian's imagination.

This is a provocative claim that obviously demands clarification. In one sense it is merely confirmation of Piotrowski's own assertion that there are imbalances of power and symbolic capital, and that this very imbalance is an important subject of inquiry. Acknowledgement that art produced in certain locations had a normative function that was absent elsewhere does not involve unquestioning commitment to a canon of modernism; nor does it entail omission of *'avant-gardes born in remote areas'* or justification of *'the international domination of a small Parisian elite who are seen as the model of cultural, ethical, and political progress in the history of modern art and culture.'*[13] In other words, as baleful as the reduction of East-Central Europe to the margins has been, challenging it does not necessarily mean delegitimising talk of centres and peripheries *per se*.

Castelnuovo and Ginzburg described an artistic centre as *'a place characterised by the presence of a large number of artists and of important groups of patrons who, moved by various motivations — be it their family or self-pride, their wish for hegemony, or their quest for eternal salvation — are ready to invest part of their wealth in works of art.'*[14] They were clear that such a definition may not apply at all times — the quest for eternal salvation has little relevance when speaking of modernism — but some variation on it can still be employed in contexts other than the Italian Renaissance. This is especially the case given their emphasis on the dependence of artistic centres on other, extra-artistic factors, beginning with the presence of surplus wealth, to which can be added, for the modern period, an institutional infrastructure, a dynamic art market, and the professional organisation of artists.

What might be a periphery in this context? A useful summary formulation is provided by Stephen J. Campbell, who suggests that a periphery may be, among other things, (1) a region that generally imports its art from elsewhere; (2) a centre *'supporting a* longue durée *of artistic practice not strongly motivated by imperatives of progress or modernisation'*; (3) a town *'supporting a local workshop tradition, from which art and artists may be exported to a major centre'*; (4) *'a major city which has been subordinated by a large territorial state, often with a flourishing artistic culture of its own.'*[15] Each of these is contentious, primarily because they bear the kinds of negative connotations which Piotrowski and so many others have criticised. Nevertheless, they are not so easily dismissed, since much hangs on how the relation between centres and peripheries is characterised. For Castelnuovo and Ginzberg the relation between them was one of competition for symbolic domination, one example being the response to the kind of artistic innovation that was *'not only new, but so prestigious that it established itself as the norm and exerted a kind of inhibitive action on those who, for one reason or another, are excluded from it.'*[16] Where such a norm did not manage to exercise 'inhibitive action,' i.e. where other, older, practices were maintained, this was not necessarily due to their being backward; rather, they argue, it could equally be a form of resistance.

Using the idea of symbolic domination, Castelnuovo and Ginzberg circumvented the criticism that talk of centres and peripheries necessarily relies on stereotyped binary of progressiveness and backwardness. Caution is nevertheless necessary, for symbolic capital does not always accumulate in political centres and vice versa, and hence the processes of cultural exchange cannot always be accounted for in these terms. London, a political centre with a vast accumulation of economic, political and cultural resources, was often an artistic periphery, if we consider either its dependence on migrant artists or the artistic establishment's entrenched scepticism about contemporary art in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. And this is despite the fact that in *certain* respects London was central to the international world. From the nineteenth century onwards, for example, the value of the London art market far exceeded that

of Paris.[17] Nevertheless, there were few 'imperatives to innovation' and a much documented aspect of British modernism is the decisive role of immigrants, from Jacob Epstein and Wyndham Lewis to Francis Bacon and Ernő Goldfinger.

Networks against Centres

Despite the reformulation by Castelnuovo and Ginzburg, the duality of centres and peripheries has been subject to extensive criticism. This has frequently focused on the dismissive attitudes towards art from the peripheries expressed by art historians in institutions of the 'centre.'[18] Some have attempted to use the exposure of such attitudes as a means of dismantling hierarchical value systems. Beáta Hock, for example, has suggested that the chauvinistic attitude of French artists during the 1920s towards art from elsewhere means that it was interwar *Paris* that was parochial, rather than the central European cities that looked towards her.[19] It Is difficult to determine the meaning of the term 'parochial' in this context, however, other than as a way of expressing understandable disapproval of narrow-minded attitudes. Criticism of this type does not address the basic methodological and conceptual issues that are raised by the question. Historical errors can also be generated by a determination to provincialise Paris. Hock approvingly cites the work of Csilla Markója, who has argued that we should see Parisian Impressionism as a provincial variant of a wider European phenomenon: *Stimmungsimpressionismus*.[20] The problem with this argument is that it takes an interpretation of the meaning of Impressionism (and modernism more generally) that was common in central Europe — one might mention here Alois Riegl's essay on atmosphere and modern art — and generalises it. Certainly, the idea that Impressionism was predominantly about evoking an atmosphere was widespread, and it also informed the work of many artists in Hungary, the Czech lands, Germany and Austria, but it had little to do with the painting that developed in Paris in the 1860s and 1870s.[21] The notion privileges a formalist reading of Impressionism as a *style* and overlooks the political and ideological relations between artistic language and social meaning that have been examined in such close detail by scholars such as T. J. Clark, Hollis Clayton or Tamar Garb.[22]

Attempts to invert hierarchies in this manner are thus not always convincing or successful. A more promising critique is advanced by attention to networks and the mobility of art and artists. Béatrice Joyeux-Prunel, for example, has argued that if we map the movement of avant-garde artists in the 1920s, focusing *'on the circulation of avant-garde artists and their works, as well as the social, economic, financial, geopolitical, and colonial bases of these circulations, and on the cultural transfers and resemanticizations that took place,'* the traditionally central role of Paris comes into question.[23] This contention relates not only to its historical position, but, more broadly, to the methodologies and values governing studies of modernism, for the centre / periphery dualism is part of a much larger framework dominated by *'the monograph, nationalism and ethnocentrism, and evolutionist formalism.'*[24]

Studies of the avant-garde have made particular use of the idea of the network as a means of revising the geography of art. In the last 30 years the avant-gardes of central Europe have become a prominent subject of this kind of analysis precisely because they illustrate the decline of the geopolitical order of the long nineteenth century. The modernist art-world of East-Central Europe before 1918, dominated by the old imperial capital, gave way to a fragmented landscape marked by new sites. These ranged from new capital cities, such as Kaunas, Prague, Belgrade, to regional cities emerging as important artistic centres in their right, such as Zagreb, Brno, Salzburg, Poznań and Košice. Historical ties between 'peripheral' centres and capital cities diminished and new networks were established that bypassed the old routes connecting them.

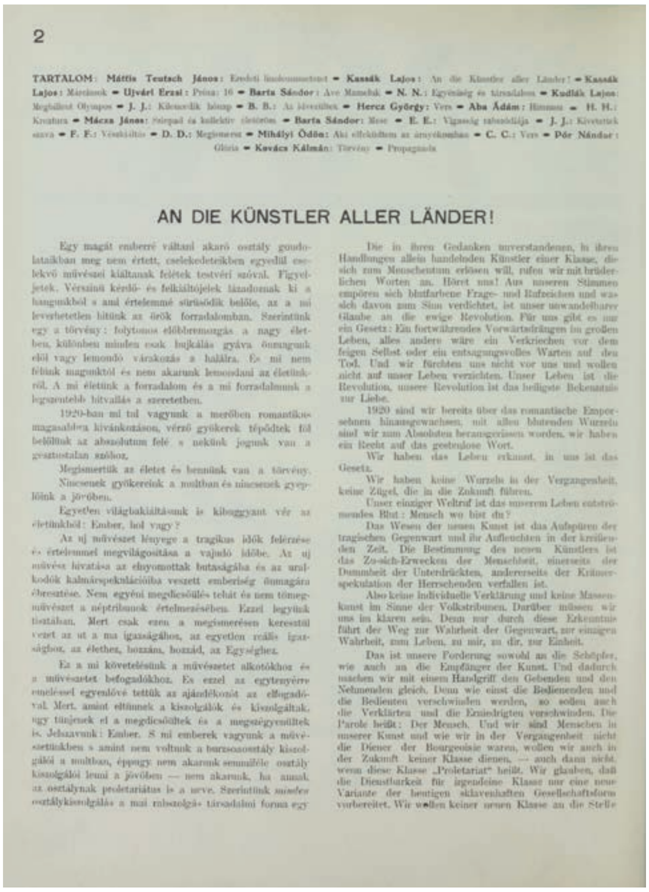
Some research projects have sought to illustrate this changed geography; Timothy Benson's ground-breaking exhibition of 2002 on the *Central European Avant-Gardes* tried to do so with diagrammatic maps indicating links between groups of cities.[25] A large-scale exhibition at the Belvedere on the Hagenbund pursued a similar project with maps indicating personal connections between artists and events.[26] In relation to contemporary art, the much lauded EAST ART MAP project by IRWIN on the contemporary art of Eastern Europe took a similar approach.[27] These and other similar projects serve the important strategic function of helping to visualise an alternative art historical geography, but they have drawbacks given by the inherent epistemological limitations of the map and of the network metaphor. As an instrument of art historical representation, the map is limited by its positivistic character. Critical cartography has long recognised that maps are ideological representations serving specific ends, but even so, a distinction has to be drawn between the epistemology of the map and object choice, i.e., *what* can be mapped and how.[28] The diagrammatic mapping of avant-garde networks, noting *that* certain relations existed between individual artists, groups, institutions and cities, says little about their *qualitative* character. The same observation applies more generally to the metaphor of the network, since the question as to whether these connections were ones of friendly rivalry, co-operation and exchange, emulation or hostility, is left untouched, due to the limitations of the medium. A brief discussion of one or two examples illustrates the kinds of problems that can arise when the metaphor is taken as a substitute for historical analysis.

1 / **Josef Fuchs — Oldřich Tyl, Prague, The Trade Fair Palace**, 1925–1928
Archival photography — V. Gotsche, around 1940
Prague City Archives, Collection of Photographs, sign. I 9661
Photo: Prague City Archives

Modernist and avant-garde magazines have increasingly become a major subject of study, and they have been used to strengthen the claims regarding the operations of networks.[29] Publications such as *Volné směry* and *ReD* in Czechoslovakia, the Hungarian journals *MA* and *Munka*, *Zdrój* based in Poznań or the Romanian *Contimporanul*, acted as important conduits for the international exchange of ideas and dissemination of artworks across borders. A more detailed reading of the publications, however, reveals familiar asymmetries. While magazines in Poland, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia and Romania, for example, were full of translations of texts by French and German authors, this enthusiasm was seldom reciprocated.

The Berlin-based critic and gallerist Herwarth Walden, for example, is often credited with playing an important role in encouraging the emergence of a transnational avant-garde network. In fact, however, aside from a few reproductions of artworks, the pages of his magazine, *Der Sturm*, published between 1910 and 1932, contain almost nothing on contemporary art from central Europe until the final few issues of the very late 1920s and early 1930s. Thematic issues with essays on Bulgaria, Slovenia and the Soviet Union, for example, are the exception rather than the norm.[30] A parallel case can be seen in French magazines; for all the intense interest shown in French art by the Prague art-world either side of the First World War, the sentiment was not reciprocated. The pages of *L'Ermitage*, *La nouvelle revue française* and *L'esprit nouveau*, rarely feature discussions of the art and culture of 'peripheral' regions. The debate in the late 1920s between Le Corbusier and Karel Teige, in which Le Corbusier saw fit to write an extended reply to the Czech theorist's criticisms of his Mundaneum project, is remarkable precisely because it was atypical.[31] Le Corbusier had a particular interest in Czechoslovakia — his visits to Prague and Zlín, and his praise for Josef Fuchs and Oldřich Tyl's Trade Fair Palace (Veletržní Palác) in Prague, built between 1925 and 1928 [1], attest this. Teige had a level of international engagement that few of his compatriots enjoyed and was a highly visible participant in the discussions and events of CIAM.[32] Nevertheless, whereas the writings of Le Corbusier were translated into Czech, starting with the purist manifesto, which was published in *Život* in 1922, the honour was not repaid: none of Teige's writings was translated into French during his lifetime.[33] The same can be noted of his reception in Germany where, despite his invitation by Hannes Meyer to teach at the Bauhaus in 1929–1930, none of his texts were published in German.[34] Likewise, while Toyen and Vitězslav Nezval may have been prominent in Paris, there is little evidence that Breton and Bataille were interested in including them in Surrealist magazines such as *Minotaure* or *Acéphale*.

It is likewise worth considering the example of Lajos Kassák and the group of Hungarian artists around the magazine *MA* based in Vienna. They are often seen as exemplifying the new transnational avant-garde that emerged after the First World War.[35] As Krisztina Passuth notes, however, while *MA* was international in its reach, its audience was primarily the Hungarian diaspora in Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia and Romania; the listing on its front cover of prices in the currencies of various states, far from demonstrating participation in an international avant-garde network, indicated instead a concern to reach Hungarian communities around central Europe.[36] Although the first edition of *MA* featured work by Czech and Slovak artists, Kassák made no efforts to develop meaningful relations with them. He emigrated to Vienna in 1920 and enjoyed some limited contact with artistic circles there, such as Franz Čižek and his students at the School of Art and Design, but this was not pursued in a purposeful manner. The first issue of *MA* to be published after moving to Vienna may have contained a bi-lingual German-Hungarian editorial appeal 'To artists of all lands' [2] but the contributors to *MA* were almost exclusively Hungarian writers.[37] Hence, rather than being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AN DIE KÜNSTLER ALLER LÄNDER!

2 **/ Lajos Kassák, Appeal 'To Artists of All Lands!'**, 1920
Reproduction: MA VI, 1920

at the centre of a transnational network, Kassák was rather more at the heart of a diasporic *national* network that was internationally distributed. This situation poses interesting questions of its own, but it does little to challenge the traditional art historical distinction between centres and peripheries.

Finally, it is instructive to consider the case of the Bauhaus. Since the large-scale exhibition of 1986, *Wechselwirkungen* (Mutual Effects), on the Hungarian avant-garde in Weimar Germany, there has been a growing interest in the involvement of central European designers and architects from outside Germany in the Bauhaus.[38] Interest in the involvement of artists and designers from central Europe was taken up again in the 2010 exhibition in Pécs and Berlin, *Art to Life: The Hungarians at the Bauhaus*, as well as Markéta Svobodová's more recent study of Czechoslovak students at the Bauhaus.[39] Yet such examples, while important for casting the school in a new light, also *confirm* its status as a centre due to its magnetic appeal to young men and women across Europe. They are essentially stories about Hungarians, Czechs and Slovaks *in* Germany. Despite its title, *Mutual Effects*, for example, did not mention the work of *any* German artist, designer or architect, or discuss any *mutual* effects.[40] To underpin the claim regarding the transnational basis of the avant-gardes, one would have to demonstrate that important schools, such as the Academy of Art and Design in Prague. likewise attracted international students from Germany, France or the Netherlands.

Horizontal Art History

Piotrowski's metaphor of a horizontal art history sought to relativise 'western' art history by a change of perspective. In particular, he argued, we need to consider: *'How is the centre perceived, not from the centre itself — the place usually occupied by the historian of modern art — but from a marginal position?'*[41]

This is an important question and is motivated by insistence on the potentially disruptive effect of that view for, he states, *'the marginal observer sees that the centre is cracked. If the centre perceives itself as homogeneous, then the periphery, in the process of its reception and transformation of the centre for its own use, will spot inner tensions which are, as it were, essential.'*[42] Once ideas and practices travel outward across borders, they are reinterpreted locally in ways that bring out aspects not evident to artists in the centres. Yet more is at stake, he argues, than emphasis on difference alone, for if we adopt the horizontal perspective, he claims, the ideology of a single, universal, modernism will be taken apart and the distinction between the putatively universal, international, modernism of Paris and Berlin, and the 'local' modernisms of, say, Prague and Budapest will be overcome. This is because when viewed from the periphery, Parisian and Berlin modernism are themselves revealed to be 'local,' too. In other words, their character is a function of the specifics of their place of origin.

Much hangs on Piotrwoski's initial claim that the 'marginal observer' sees that the centre is 'cracked' in ways that the observer in the *centre* does not perceive. This idea, that the art historian at the periphery knows the centre better than his or her counterpart in the centre, that his or her gaze is capable of *destabilising* the centre, is a commonplace in postcolonial criticism. Indeed, Piotrowski himself made this connection.[43] Yet on what theoretical grounds is it warranted? Its philosophical basis is, of course, pure Hegel, for here Piotrowski is invoking the dialectic of the master and servant.[44] He does so, however, without following through the full implications of Hegel's position.

This issue will be considered in due course, but first of all it is worth exploring its art historical pertinence, for there are, *prima facie*, historical instances that bear out his claims and that may allow for a re-reading of the history of art. The primary concern of this article is with the historiography of modernism, but one can take the fraught cultural politics of the late Habsburg Empire,

in which art practices became intimately bound up with questions of national identity, as apparent confirmation of Piotrowski's argument.

A major impetus driving the search for national art forms amongst Czechs, Poles and Croats in the late nineteenth century, for example, was the fact that whereas elites in Vienna and Budapest regarded German and Hungarian culture as *international* cultures of science and art, other minority cultures saw them as just one more national culture, albeit one that was particularly powerful. As Piotrowski notes, *'The subject occupying the centre tends to forget that it is situated there, in a place precisely located on the map of the world.'*[45] It was this ideological difference that caused many Viennese observers to react to the development of national cultures in the various crown lands of the Empire with incomprehension.

In this context, Hungarian social and cultural elites occupied a somewhat complicated position. On the one hand, they regarded themselves as the bearers of a *universal* culture and consequently had much in common with Austrian Liberals in the imperial capital, but on the other, they were highly conscious of their cultural, political and linguistic specificity in relation to the Habsburg administration in Vienna. Hence, Hungarian elites saw themselves as having a civilising mission in regard to the minorities in Hungary but, at the same time, a central thrust of much Hungarian design and architecture towards the turn of the century was the elaboration of visual languages, such as the folklore revival of the 1890s, that were believed to express their particular national identity. Already, therefore, the binary opposition of centre and periphery is complicated by their status as being central but *perceiving* themselves to be on the periphery.

All the same, it is one thing to state that the view from the margin is *other* and merits equal attention, but quite another thing to suggest that such a position provides a privileged perspective on the centre, or that it destabilises traditional hierarchies. Indeed, the view from the 'margins' in Austria-Hungary, for example, was often blind to the 'cracks' in the centre. Nowhere is this more evident than in the ambiguous status of Austro-German culture. On the one hand, it was hegemonic, and Austrian Liberals saw this as reflecting its 'universal' character. Yet after 1866, when the Habsburgs were expelled from German affairs by Prussia, the imperial administration in Vienna adopted a feudal cosmopolitanism to shore up the legitimacy of the ruling dynasty. This led it to view expressions of nationalism amongst its German-speaking population with considerable suspicion, since these could challenge its authority just as much as could Czech, Magyar or Polish nationalism.

Not only was the imperial government concerned with balancing the respective interests of its various subject peoples, but they, too, often jockeyed with each other for status and recognition. There was therefore a tension in the 'centre' over the status of German culture, yet such nuance was frequently ignored in the tense transnational encounters within the Empire, and Vienna was often treated as a single, monolithic, alien centre of power.

This opens up the wider question of the applicability of broader postcolonial approaches to central and eastern Europe, the initial object of Piotrowski's interest. The authors of the *Habsburg postcolonial* project, for example, argued that the attitude of policy-makers and intellectuals in Vienna and Budapest towards non-Germans in the Habsburg Empire — Serbs, Romanians, Roma, Croatians, Slovaks — bore structural similarities towards those in Paris and London towards subjects in their far-flung colonial possessions.[46] The designation of the Empire as the 'prison of nations' has a long history, and there may indeed have been certain parallels — a civilising mission, paternalistic attitudes, linguistic marginalisation, opposition to national cultures — but there were equally significant differences. For while national groups in the Habsburg Empire bemoaned the lack of legal recognition *qua* collective bodies, all individuals had the same legal rights.[47] This situation was completely different from that in France, Britain, Belgium or the United States, for example, where a vast legal gulf stood between recognised citizens and colonial subjects or, even worse, slaves. Similar arguments have been marshalled with regard to the Ottoman Empire, which does not fit easily into the framework of postcolonial analysis either.[48]

Power was clearly distributed unequally, but whether this means that peripheral observers were — and are — more sensitive to the fractures in the centre than vice versa requires interrogation and not mere assertion. We may question, for example, the assertion that the hegemonic cultures in Paris, Berlin or Vienna saw themselves as singular and universal. Attention to the ferocious internal arguments between protagonists of different modernisms *within* the centres of 'western' Europe should be sufficient to indicate the flaw in such a conception. Piotrowski claims that the historian of modern Czech or Romanian art 'knows very well where he or she is,' in contrast to the historian of 'western' European modernism, who will make assumptions about their place and about the universality of their subject. Yet if we take one example, Vienna, there has been just as much recognition of its specific characteristics. Already in the 1960s Carl Schorske's cultural analysis of the Habsburg capital sought to explain the peculiarities of Austrian modernity.[49] Why was it, given similarities with Paris including, most notably, massive urban development, population growth and rebuilding, that there was no artistic engagement with the new forms of social experience in Vienna comparable to that of Impressionism? Such a question alone registers the presence of diverging modernities and modernisms, and this difference between Paris and Vienna was

a major fault line identified by Jean Clair in the major exhibition on the Viennese fin-de-siècle. For Clair, the Vienna Secession was a form of inner retreat that was totally at odds with the intervention in public life by the *Salon des Indépendants*.[50] For the present discussion the point is not to debate his interpretation, but rather to question the assertion that artistic centres — and the subsequent historiography — were blind to their own specificity.

If we turn from such historical considerations to the theoretical frame, other difficulties emerge. For if we are to invoke the philosophy of the subject, we might conclude that the marginal subject is as blind to their *own* inner tensions and 'cracks' as the subject in the 'centre.' This flows from the model espoused by Hegel, for in *Phenomenology of Mind* he argues that neither master nor servant achieves full self-consciousness because of the imbalance of power. As Habib has recently noted, for Hegel, the *'consciousness of oneself that comprises our humanity cannot possibly arise in isolation. Nor can it arise in a relationship of subordination. It can emerge only through mutual recognition. And recognition can only be exchanged between equals, between two subjects, not between two objects, nor even between a subject and an object. If I treat someone as an object, that person's recognition of me will be inadequate for me to attain the status of subject, of humanity.'*[51] This point was central to Fanon's argument, too, in *Black Skin White Masks*: neither the colonial master nor their servant were fully self-conscious.[52] There are cracks in both the margin and the centre; each has its blind spots and neither is fully transparent to itself.

An episode from the late Habsburg Empire casts instructive light on the pertinence of these considerations to the art history of East-Central Europe. This was Alfred Woltmann's controversial lecture on 'German Art in Prague.'[53] Its basic claim, that the cultural heritage of Prague was mostly German, was explosive, especially when he argued that even the Czech National Theatre was German, pointing out that its principal architect, Josef Zítek, had been trained in Vienna and had pursued his early career in Germany — with the Grand Ducal Museum in Weimar as his first major commission. [3]

3 / **Josef Zítek, Weimar, The Grand Ducal Museum (Neues Museum)**, 1864–1869
Archival photography — Louis Held, 1903
Photo: Wikimedia Commons

Woltmann was not a Habsburg subject; he had been born in Berlin and had studied in Berlin, Munich and Breslau. His comments could therefore be interpreted in the light of the triumphalism accompanying the creation of the German Reich only five years previously. This undoubtedly fuelled the severe reactions in Prague to the lecture, which ranged from lengthy denunciations in the press to civil disturbances in the streets. Opposition was intense and he was eventually hounded out of his position, moving to Strasburg in 1878.

The objections to his lecture were entirely understandable, and the discourse of race and ethnicity that framed his understanding of 'German' only added to their fury, but they did not necessarily refute his claims. Zítek *was* a product of the Habsburg educational system, and he enjoyed close links to the architectural and education establishment in Vienna. Woltmann's emphasis on the deep artistic, social and economic ties between Prague and other cities of the Holy Roman Empire is a commonplace and was already being proposed anew in the interwar period: in his 1929 book *The Idea of Czech History* the Prague historian Josef Pekař, for example, argued that historical German influence had led the Czechs to *'higher forms of life in spiritual and material culture, in legal and social relations and in the economy.'*[54] Moreover, while Woltmann's conception of the Holy Roman Empire as 'German' was a late nineteenth-century anachronism, this was no different from his opponents' emphasis on the 'Czech' character of Bohemia. The arguments of both parties were rooted in contemporary discourses of nationalism. As Jindřich Vybíral has noted, the Woltmann affair also revealed the pathological insecurities of the Czech intelligentsia, for the German scholar's assertions were answered with equally one-sided grandiose claims.[55]

The dispute occurred at a time when art historians were immersed in sterile debates on the national origin of individual artists and architects, projected back to a medieval period when nineteenth-century notions of national identity had no meaning. Not all German-speaking art historians adopted a position as emphatic as Woltmann's, but Czech-speaking authors treated scholarship in German as a single homogeneous whole. Those whose writings questioned the Czech nationalist claim to Bohemia were dismissed as 'German' (ignoring the difference between Germany and Austria), or as Viennese agents.[56] It would be misleading to describe the toxic debates between Czech- and German-speakers in Prague as a conflict between the blindness and insight of centre and periphery. Rather, one can

speak of both sides being riven by cultural pathologies that underpinned mutual suspicion, resentment and misunderstanding.

By the end of the nineteenth century many voices sought to dismantle the entrenched hostility that marked the Woltmann affair. The collective manifesto of 'The Czech Modern' ('Česká moderna') published in 1895, called for co-operation between Czechs and Germans, and dismissed nationalist sentiment on the part of either.[57] Yet its assertion that '*... we condemn the brutality that is perpetrated by the Germans under the battle cry of nationalism, just as we would condemn it* if it were perpetrated *by Czechs*' [my emphasis] is, with its use of the conditional voice, revealing. It distinguishes arbitrarily between the two nationalisms, one already deemed to be guilty, the other only potentially so, ignoring the equally problematic status of both. Moreover, while 'The Czech Modern' and later, comparable, declarations, such as Stanislav K. Neumann's 'Open Windows' of 1913, appear to put nationalism behind them, mutual suspicion and neglect continued to be the norm. Indeed, contemporaries criticised Neumann for his inability to entirely relinquish the nation as the basic framework for understanding art.[58]

The short-lived artistic group The Eight (Osma) that operated in 1907 and 1908, was exceptional in that it comprised Bohemian German-speaking as well as Czech-speaking artists, whereas the norm was for artistic associations to be formed in keeping with linguistic differences. Artists such as Bohumil Kubišta may have developed friendships and artistic relations with German artists such as Ernst Kirchner, but this did not translate to a breaking down of such barriers *within* Bohemia.[59] Hence when the Modern Gallery of the Bohemian Kingdom opened in 1902 to promote contemporary art, the work of German and Czech-speaking artists was exhibited in separate sections as belonging to separate traditions. Likewise, in Moravia, SVUM, the Society of Moravian Artists (Sdružení výtvarných umělců moravských) was founded in the provincial town of Hodonín in 1907 by Czech-speaking artists from Brno as an alternative to the artistic societies dominated by German-speakers in the city.

Neumann may have called for an openness to art from elsewhere, but with this he was primarily referring to Paris, and not Vienna, and it was the French capital that provided an alternative centre of gravity for Czech-speaking artists in Prague. This was due not only to its artistic importance around the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, but also because it served the political purpose of providing a counterweight to Vienna.

It would be misleading, of course, to suggest that there was no artistic traffic between Vienna and Prague, for even the Mánes Society of Artists, founded in 1887 to promote the interests of Czech artists, exhibited work by artists from the Habsburg capital. Nevertheless, Vienna was seen in an ideologically charged way as the seat of Austrian power, and it was its symbolic importance as such that shaped the attitude of Prague-based artists. This situation continued after 1918. In 1923, for example, the Modern Gallery in Prague greatly expanded its collection of international artworks, but it was to France that it turned, and not Vienna, thanks to a state-funded purchase of paintings displayed at an exhibition of *Modern French Art of the 19th and 20th Century* organised by the Mánes Society at the Municipal House in Prague.

A parallel dynamic can be observed in Budapest, in which political frictions over Habsburg rule, culminating in the failed War of Hungarian Independence in 1848–1849, coloured views of Vienna as an artistic centre, too. Hungarian artists from the final decades of the nineteenth century onwards consistently tried to turn Budapest into an art centre by bypassing Vienna and following the lead either of London or Paris.[60] Motivations were similar, too, to those in Prague: envy and resentment at the pre-eminence of Vienna (including the fact that the Vienna art market was more internationally connected and fetched higher prices than in Budapest). In recent years there has been considerable interest in the connections between Hungarian and French artists. Some even dmade close personal friendships such as József Rippl-Rónai, who enjoyed a strong artistic and personal relationship with Aristide Maillol.[61] The term 'Hungarian fauves' has also been coined to describe artists such as Dezső Czigány (1883–1937), Béla Czóbel (1883–1976) and Róbert Berény (1887–1953) who, like their Czech contemporaries, were drawn to Paris where they studied and exhibited work at, for example, the Salon d'automne.[62] The same fascination with Paris held for collecting practices, too; important collectors such as Marcell Nemes (1866–1930) built up a substantial collection of contemporary French art, but acquired almost nothing by Vienna-based artists.[63]

Rather than bearing out Piotrowski's notion of horizontal art history, such examples suggest rather more a struggle for symbolic domination of the kind identified by Ginzburg and Castelnuovo. Connections were cultivated with Paris in part because of its prestige but in part, too, because it provided artists with a tool for contesting the normative status of Vienna as an artistic centre. Yet even though this picture may grant agency to peripheries, it does not challenge their status as peripheries. To illustrate this we might consider Rodin's visit to Prague in 1902. Hailed as a crucial event in the history of Czech modernism — the Rodin exhibition in the Mánes Pavilion that prompted his visit was a watershed for many artists in Prague — it nevertheless underlines the asymmetries between Paris and the Czech lands.[64] For Rodin was not just one more visiting artist; the gushing praise of his work by the art critic František Šalda in the pages of *Volné směry* indicates his elevated

4 / **Auguste Rodin visiting the village of Hroznová Lhota in 1902**, 1902
Archival photography
Museum of Czech Literature Literary Archive, Prague, Fotoarchiv Fund

status.[65] He was treated like a royal dignitary, his presence conferring recognition and legitimacy on his hosts, in keeping with his role as 'bringing civilisation.' Even his guided trip through the Czech Lands, including an excursion to the village of Hroznová Lhota [4] in eastern Moravia, home of the painter Jožа Uprka, was reminiscent of the tours of the Emperor that even minor municipalities eagerly sought to accommodate. Even if, as Catherine Giustino argues, the Rodin exhibition contributed to establishing the place of Czechs *in 'expanding global networks of communication,'* the terms of the encounter were set by others.[66]

Entangled and Transnational Art Histories

Certain theoretical weaknesses thus emerge in the notion of a horizontal art history; the view from the margin may be just as prone to ideological blindness as the centre. A more promising alternative is the related idea of *entangled* history, an approach that aims at *'replacing the central place that nations held in historiography with a concentration on the transfers and entanglements taking place between them—nations ... are not pre-existent to these multiple encounters, but constituted by them.'*[67] As such, it is a variant on the model of networks and transnational history, although the metaphor of entanglement is perhaps more vivid and better illustrates the idea at work.

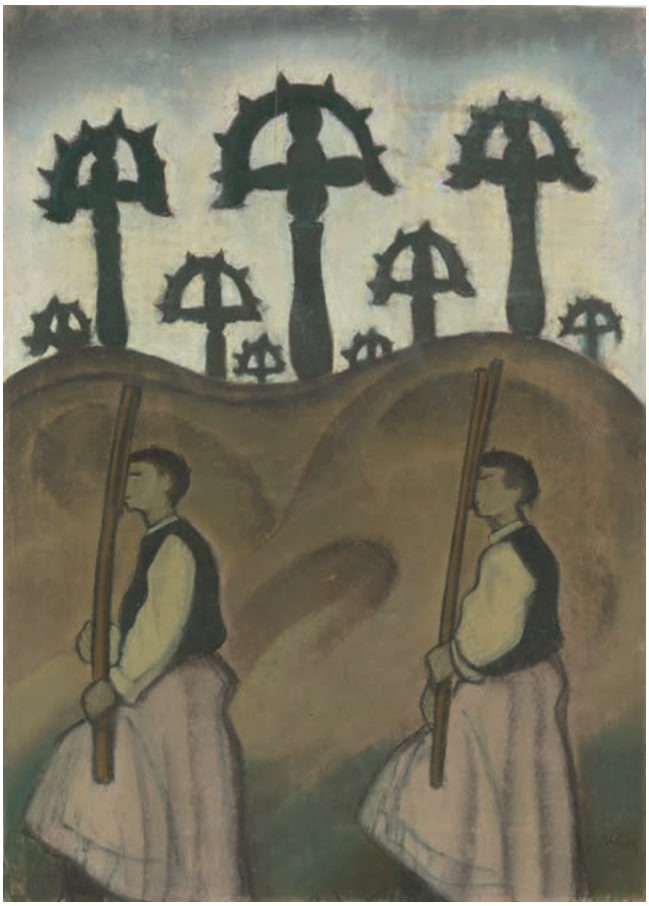
Here socio-cultural relations are stripped of the drama of the *struggle* for mutual recognition; rather than trying to overcome hierarchy by inverting its terms, 'entanglement' stresses the interdependence of two or more actors. No longer simply concerned with the gaze exchanged between centre and margin, it examines the ways in which that exchange is mutually constitutive of their identities. This model presents considerable challenges for scholars, for it demands substantial changes to existing art historical practices. Specifically, it requires that *all* parties of an entangled relation, centre and periphery should be examined together, with attention to the mutual effects of *each on the other*. The difficulties posed by this requirement become apparent when one examines scholarship devoted to such transnational and entangled histories.

The voluminous literature on the interwar avant-gardes illustrates the problem clearly, for although transnational and entangled histories are invoked, the result often amounts to parallel national histories rather than the kind of in-depth study that would be necessary. Benson's *The Central European Avant-Gardes* exemplifies the problem, for while its guiding image is of East-Central Europe as a transnational artistic space, it mostly consists of parallel stories of avant-gardes in individual states. This can also be seen in those few chapters that purport to address thematic topics. The discussion of Constructivism, for example, for all its aspirations, falls into separate sections on Russia, Berlin, Hungary, Poland and the Czechs (with the familiar omission of Slovakia).[68] A recent ambitious study on Expressionism in a 'Transnational Context' likewise presents a similar sequence of parallel histories of Expressionism in Slovakia, Poznań, Latvia, Denmark, Iceland and Portugal, to name just a few examples.[69] But beyond the question of how Expressionism was absorbed in different countries and how they adapted and interpreted it, the national paradigm remains the governing framework. As a final example, the 2014 Hagenbund exhibition explored the involvement of Hungarian, Czech and Polish artists, but these were treated as entirely separate topics. The relationship *between* them remained unexamined.[70]

The call to treat modernism and the avant-garde as a transnational field of entangled practices is thus seldom answered in practice, and research continues to be shaped by national frameworks and canons. Hungarians mostly write about Hungarian art, Czechs about Czech art, Estonians about Estonian art, and so forth. At international conferences and in collaborative research publications, scholars are frequently expected to be representatives of and authorities on the art of their country of origin.[71] In certain respects, this can be explained in terms of practical barriers; a scholar wishing to examine the entanglements of Polish, Hungarian and Austrian modernism, for example, would have to possess considerable linguistic versatility. But there are other reasons why so little research exemplifies this approach. A key factor is the motivation for the emergence of art

history in many countries and the way it has imprinted itself on the subsequent course of the discipline. For it has often served as a tool of self-definition and assertion, especially in relation to a hegemonic culture that was indifferent or even hostile to surrounding cultures. This is why national histories continue to be prestigious projects with considerable resources supporting them.[72] It is a phenomenon not unique to East-Central Europe; few Italian art historians write about art outside of Italy; Spanish art historians have mostly concerned themselves just with the art of Spain and the Spanish colonial world; creeping monolingualism means that British art historians increasingly focus on art in Britain and the English-speaking world. Nevertheless, this is of particular significance in East-Central Europe, when seen in light of the project of mobilising the idea of entanglement as a way of undermining traditional hierarchies and *overcoming* national boundaries.

Even if, in purely methodological terms, it *is* possible to construct an 'entangled history' of the avant-gardes, it is also important not to be insensitive to the problems that can emerge when we consider the question of choice of object, for at this point we run up against the ideological investment involved in writing histories of modernism and the avant-garde. Studies of the avant-gardes of East-Central Europe are themselves prone to confirmation bias, and this is a function of their ideological dimension.



5 / **Janko Alexy, Players of the Fujara Flute**, 1931
pastel, 58 × 43 cm
Slovak National Gallery
Photo: Slovak National Gallery

The focus on those avant-garde practices that are most obviously part of an international network confirms the prior image of a geography of art subversive of the older hierarchical map of the landscape. In this context, émigré artists occupy an especially privileged position. In addition, and conversely, the presence of an active avant-garde is often a sign of national validation; the most notable instance of this phenomenon is the interwar Czechoslovak avant-garde, which has performed the ideologically charged role of confirming the broader image of the Republic as the only modern progressive state of central Europe.[73]

What is also notable about choice of object is what is omitted. The place of Slovak modernism in the larger narrative of Czechoslovak art illustrates the point. The 2005/6 exhibition at the Slovak National Gallery on *The Slovak Myth*, covering the period between 1918 and 1948, displayed works such as Janko Alexy's *Players of the Fujara Flute* [5] which disappears in general histories of interwar Czechoslovak art, since it largely comprised pastoral images of peasant figures that functioned as a central *lieu de memoire* of Slovak identity.[74] In the case of Hungarian art, too, conservative interwar artistic groups in the provincial towns of Szentendre and Kecskemét, for example, are all but invisible in art history because of their failure to fit into pre-existing avant-gardist narratives.[75] To point to such examples is not to offer a counter-history, or to be embroiled in the *'distracting arguments over who and what is or is not, should be or should not be in which canon.'*[76] It is simply to note the need to recognise that the focus on entangled histories and transnational artistic practices involves investment in an image of history that is just as ideologically motivated as any that it purports to dismantle. The only difference is the extent to which that motivation is shared by art historians.

What is to be done?

The article so far has been concerned with the various problems that arise in relation to the art history of East-Central Europe and the attempts to challenge its marginalisation. Given its sceptical stance towards some interventions into this field, it is only fair to expect that it should outline what alternatives it envisages. The remainder of this discussion, therefore, offers some reflections on what might be involved.

A) Identify the problems and the *different* kinds of challenges they present

This article has been contending with the difficulties created by two separate, although interlinked, problems. Unfortunately, many of the authors discussed tend to

conflate them and then try to solve them with a single answer. Piotrowski's horizontal art history is an attempt to get over both the marginal place of East-Central European modernism on the landscape of art history and the tendency to view it as a derivative version of French and German modernism. These are not, in fact, quite the same problems, even though one might conclude that the tendency to view the art of East-Central Europe as of secondary importance is, ultimately, responsible for its absence from the map of modernism. Demonstrating the entanglement of the art of East-Central Europe with that of the rest of Europe (and beyond) will not, in itself, address the problem of marginalisation, nor will challenging the implicit value judgements that relegated it to a subordinate position.

An example can illustrate the point. In *Globalizing East European Art History* Thomasz Grusiecki provides a very fine and highly convincing account of the role of Poland-Lithuania as a conduit for the movement of Ottoman and Persian art and culture into Europe in the early modern period. The old Commonwealth was an important agent in the entangled history of Christian European and Islamic art, especially because long held beliefs about the eastern 'Sarmatian' origins of the Polish nobility meant that Islamic artworks were sometimes held to be Polish.[77] Grusiecki's essay amply demonstrates the gains to be made from an emphasis on entanglement, but its impact is limited because it is framed as a case study about Poland-Lithuania. Although I am speculating here, I think it is unlikely to persuade scholars of European art of the early modern period to include Poland-Lithuania. This is simply because it does not put their concerns at the centre of the inquiry. It demonstrates an important theoretical and historical point, but only for those already committed to serious engagement with Polish art and culture. Overcoming the marginalisation of the Commonwealth from wider narratives of European art would require framing the discussion in a different way, in a wider analysis of the entanglements of Islamic and Christian European art, in which the Polish example would be just *one* of many. Implicit in this comment, therefore, is the notion that art historians should focus less on the *productivist* question of the potential for devising new art historical frameworks and methods and attend more to the task of identifying audiences and readerships, and engaging productively with their horizons and expectations.

B) Pay more than lip-service to the idea of entanglement and transnational art history

In many cases the idea of entangled and transnational art histories may be irrelevant. There are innumerable instances of art practices that were little affected by wider processes, networks and events. Nevertheless, the idea is of central importance, for it holds the potential for demonstrating ways in which East-Central Europe modernism has impinged on practices elsewhere and therefore establishing for it a more equitable place on the wider map of modern art. At the same time, if the idea is to be more than a rhetorical gesture, its implications have to be followed through. Entanglements function at different levels. On the one hand there are those between capital cities and major regional centres within single countries. In relation to East-Central Europe there are infra-regional entanglements between centres of different countries and then, finally, entanglements between East-Central Europe and centres elsewhere, involving not only Europe but also cultures further afield. It is also important to emphasise that the notion of entangled histories demands more than merely noting the participation of individuals in exhibitions or personal links between artists and architects, since it is premised on the idea that cultural encounters are mutually defining. This transforms cultures from being subjects admired from afar, into agents that shape the observer in return. We might cite certain kinds of postcolonial criticism as exemplifying this issue. Edward Said's *Orientalism* is known for examining the way in which the representation of Islamic societies was framed by the colonising relation, but his subsequent work *Culture and Imperialism* is more relevant in terms of his exploration of the ways in which British culture was *in turn* shaped by the colonial experience.[78] Homi Bhabha's study of colonial mimicry also argued how *emulation* of dominant cultures by colonial subjects could destabilise the identity of the former, by creating a certain ambiguity where once the hierarchy was unquestioned.[79]

Translated to East-Central Europe, this would amount to more than merely observing the polite and approving reception of Czechoslovak, Hungarian or Polish art and architecture in Paris, Berlin, Zagreb or Belgrade, even though many scholars have dwelt on this. Instead, it would consist of analysis of how the former *transformed* and *defined* the latter, and vice versa. Very quickly, unless limited to the perception of superficial visual resemblances and 'influences,' this might demand a linguistic and cultural competence beyond the scope of any individual researcher. Writing entangled histories, therefore, may well necessitate a collaborative mode of research by multinational teams. Yet it would not be one where, for example, the Hungarian researched Hungarian case studies, the French scholar French instances and the Polish art historian the work of Polish artists and architects. Such an approach would merely be a falling back into the problem of parallel histories outlined earlier. Instead, it would require a genuine collaborative authorship and a pooling of knowledge and insight that is alien to research traditions in the humanities.

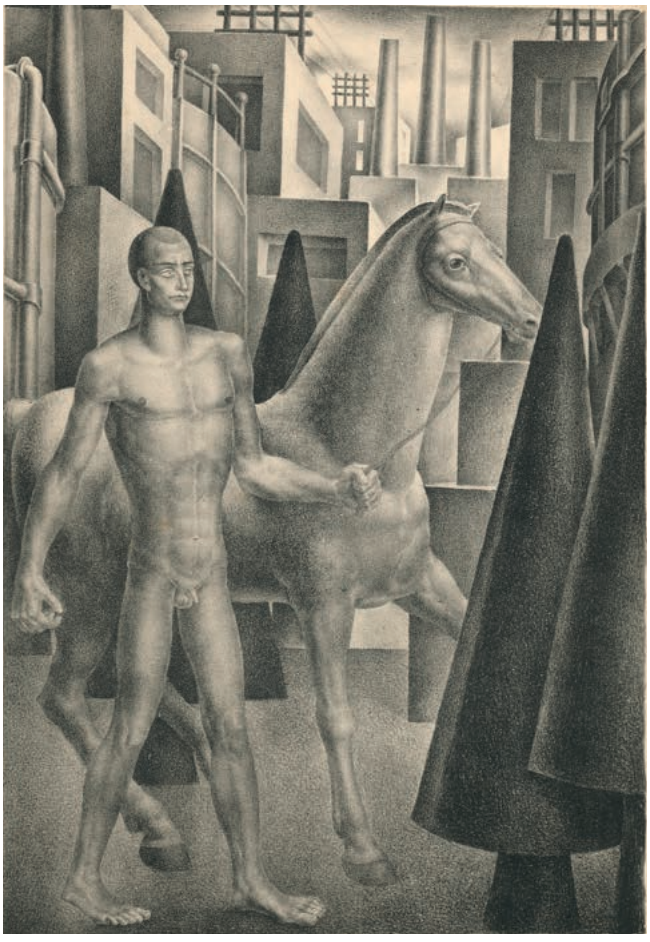
C) Change the Conceptual Frame

It is hardly novel to state that the understanding of the modernism of East-Central Europe has been disadvantaged by the kinds of narratives used to present it. The debate over its supposedly derivative and belated

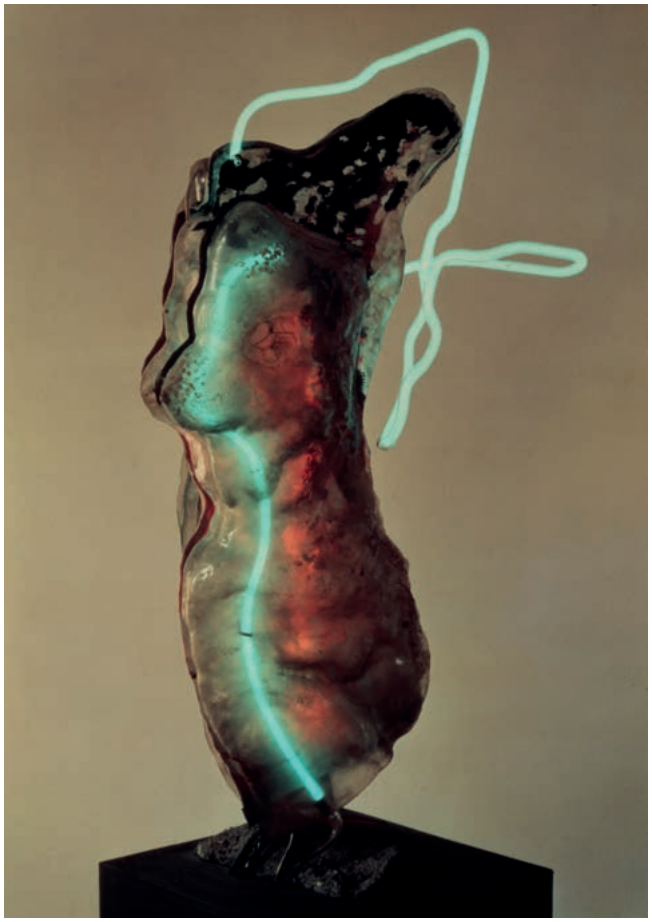
nature is an example of this problem. Stephen Mansbach's history of eastern European art illustrates the problem well, for it employed an approach that could not help but present the modern art of eastern Europe as mediocre and derivative. His discussion of the migration of Surrealism, Cubism, Expressionism and other modernist practices eastwards was bound to show figures such as Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, Edvard Munch and Max Pechstein as originators, with their peers in Prague, Budapest and Warsaw being 'followers.' Mansbach himself was searching for some way of avoiding this danger, arguing that the *'wholesale application of the iconographic categories developed to assess Western modern art may be inadequate to explicate the meanings and analyse the themes favoured in the East … an impressionist painting of the bridge at Mostar made in the early twentieth century did not incarnate the same symbolic content as a slightly earlier impressionist depiction of the bridge at Argenteuil.'*[80] Yet he evidently found it difficult to avoid; his discussion of the Czech painters Bohumil Kubišta and Emil Filla, for example, is organised around the painters' putative use of an 'expressionist palette' and 'expressionist morbidity' derived from Munch, which inevitably invites comparison both with the Norwegian painter and with German Expressionism.[81] In adopting this perspective he was in fact only following the lead of scholars in East Central Europe. Just a few years before Mansbach's book was published, the National Gallery in Prague staged a large-scale exhibition on *Expressionism and Czech Art* that raised similar questions, since it presented and discussed artists in terms of the differences from and similarities to, amongst others, their peers of Die Brücke, Der Blaue Reiter. [82]

This approach has been surprisingly tenacious, even in studies of the avant-gardes, which, for all their concern with trans-national exchange, still privilege certain concepts and practices, such as Constructivism, dada, and Futurism, which once again invite comparison between western and East-Central Europe with an outcome all too predictable. Indeed, even unquestioned categories, such as Czech 'Cubism' are problematic, since the work of artists such as Antonín Procházka, Pavel Janák and Bohumil Kubišta had little in common with Picasso and Braque, and to draw comparisons can be misleading. In this context it is worth mentioning Vincenc Kramář, one of the leading promoters in Prague of French modernism, who was renowned for a collection of Cubist art, that was facilitated in no small part by his friendship with Daniel Henri Kahnweiler. In 1920 Kramář published a short book, *Cubism*. He could look back not only to the wide interest that Picasso and Braque had aroused in Czech art circles, but also to a decade of so-called Cubist art, design and architecture in the Czech Lands. Yet his book makes no reference to 'Czech' cubism. Instead, it encouraged interest in the two French artists as part of the goal of instilling in Czech artists an openness to art *in general* beyond national borders.[83] In relation to architecture Jindřich Vybíral has argued that, historically, there is very little to justify the use of the term 'Czech cubism' and, further, has pointed out the counter-productive results of relying on imported categories in this way. Specifically: The canonisation of the creative work of the group around [Pavel] Janák under the label of 'Cubism' had a paradoxical consequence: it diminishes the originality and intellectual depth of Czech 'modern art' to just an interesting but obscure expression of the convergence between the Prague periphery and Paris centre. Western, concrete, French forms are taken as the modern forms *par excellence* and the evaluation of art close to home is grounded in its proximity and similarity to this model.[84]

Two responses to this situation are possible. One is entirely to jettison these kinds of stylistic labels, not only because they are weighted towards the old centres of European modernism, but also because they are hardly of any use in the case of many artists. The work of artists such as the Polish designer and graphic artists Zofia Stryjeńska (1891–1976), the Hungarian-Slovak painter Eugen / Jenő Krón (1882–1974) [6] and Zdeněk Pešánek (1896–1965) [7], who built sculptures out of electric



6 / **Eugen Krón, Man of the Sun**, 1925
lithography, paper, 48.8 × 34 cm
Šarišská Gallery, Prešov
Photo: Stanislav Veselovský



7 / **Zdeněk Pešánek, Male and Female Torso**, 1936
plastic, paint, neon tube, stone, light bulb, electrical wiring, 136 × 64 × 39 cm
National Gallery Prague

lights, cannot be fitted easily into any of those pre-existing categories, and clearly demand an alternative. However, such emphasis on incommensurability would inadvertently add to the process of marginalisation, producing an atomised picture of modernism deprived of any basis for meaningful comparison. It would also imply a questionable view of cultures as hermetically sealed, which no serious cultural theorist or historian would endorse. Pragmatically, it is unlikely that art historians are going to be persuaded to jettison the idea of Czech Cubism, Expressionism or Impressionism, if only because of the heuristic purposes they serve. In addition, as the American philosopher Kendall Walton suggested, aesthetic judgements *depend* on categories: we can only perceive something as an artwork if we have a prior sense of the *kind of thing* it is.[85] Nevertheless, embracing such artists *and foregrounding* the problems of categorisation they raise may be an important strategy to adopt, especially if its ability to impinge on and problematise the ready-made categories of western modernist art history writing can be explored and amplified. One model for this approach can be found in the 'associative art history' of the Czech art historian Tomáš Pospiszyl.[86] Pospiszyl takes the work of prominent Czech and Slovak artists of the post-1945 era that, at first sight, indicates the influence of contemporary ideas of artists in Europe and North America. Yet he demonstrates that despite superficial similarities to minimalism, fluxus, situationism and other contemporary art movements in western Europe and North America, the work of Jiří Kovanda, Jiří Kolář and Milan Knížák, for example, has its own genealogy and is the product of very specific circumstances. An interpretation that pays insufficient heed to this may misconstrue their work in significant ways.

The second possibility is to adopt entirely different kinds of analysis, using alternative framing concepts that make no reference to aesthetic concepts or stylistic labels. Examples of this kind of research include Matthew Witkovsky's exhibition and book *Foto*, and Elizabeth Clegg's overview of late Habsburg art and design.[87] Each uses extra-aesthetic thematic foci, such as landscape, technology and gender, which then underpin trans-national analyses. Hock has indicated that such approaches are problematic inasmuch as they conflate history of art with sociology.[88] There may be some truth to this observation, although the scholar concerned with the social history of art will be little troubled by it. Nevertheless, a non-aesthetic framework of this kind may be the only viable *tertium comparationis* that avoids reiterating some of the problems to do with aesthetic comparison and judgements about respective artistic merit outlined earlier.

D) Work *with* hierarchies rather than *against* them

The pragmatic solutions explored above will be rejected by some since they are based on implicit *acceptance* of hierarchies. Nevertheless, criticism levelled at discursive hierarchies will arguably achieve little on its own, since they are a product of wider geo-political and institutional factors. As Tomáš Pospiszyl has noted, *'the worldwide system of exhibitions and art markets … is a single, all-embracing whole. If art from the other regions is to succeed quickly and unproblematically within such a system, it must submit to the imposition of the system's categories …'*[89] A similar sentiment was also voiced by Dipesh Chakrabarty, in the name of a 'politics of despair.' Specifically he argued, since *'"Europe" cannot after all be provincialised within the institutional site of the university whose knowledge protocols will always take us back to the terrain where all contours follow … Europe,' the best one can hope for is a history 'that deliberately makes visible … its own repressive strategies and practices …'*[90]

What might this mean in practice? A first step is to return to the question of audiences, and in this context the comments by the literary and cultural critic Stanley Fish on change in literary interpretation are pertinent. Fish famously coined the notion of

the 'interpretative community' in recognition of the fact that cultural criticism and interpretation is a social enterprise that binds together both the critic and their readers in a shared horizon of norms and values.[91] Somewhat provocatively, Fish argued that change *within* interpretative communities never comes from outside; there is no empirical 'outside,' for the boundary is itself constructed by interpretative communities themselves. Writing in the late 1980s about deconstruction, for example, Fish argued that *'deconstruction is no more or less than a particularly arresting formulation of principles and procedures that have been constitutive of literary and other studies for some time. Indeed, deconstruction would have been literally unthinkable were it not already an article of faith that literary texts are characterised by a plurality of meanings and were it not already the established methodology of literary studies to produce for a supposedly "great text" as many meanings as possible.'*[92] In other words, deconstruction was not fundamentally at variance with the broader conceptions already held by literary critics of the goals and parameters of literary criticism. Consequently, he argued, whether an innovation succeeds in compelling a community to revise its assumptions and procedures *'depends on the extent to which the members of the community see the event in question as one that has a direct bearing on their conception of what they do.'*[93]

If we translate this to the issue of the modernism of East-Central Europe, a possible conclusion would be that its marginalisation in art historical discourse will only begin to be dismantled if its art can be seen to have a *bearing* on the history of modernism elsewhere. This would entail strategic forms of analysis that offer more than parallel histories or, indeed, case studies demonstrating the ingenuity or significance of individual countries. Rather, it would necessitate engaging with and impinging directly on the interests and conceptions of historians of the modernism of the canonical centres of western Europe. Here, again, entanglement provides a useful metaphor for thinking through what forms this might take.

E) Define the audience and adjust

Fish was a controversial figure, above all due to his relativist epistemology and his refusal to appeal to some grounds for critical judgement outside a particular community. It is, however, his analysis of the *pragmatic* aspects of scholarly practice as an institution that is of interest here. Fish's assumed 'interpretative community' comprised scholars of literature in North America, and if we wish to resolve the basic issue raised by Piotrowski, we need to identify what those communities are in respect of East-Central European art. In fact, there are many such communities, and how one addresses the problem of marginalisation depends on recognising the implied readership of individual publications. An ideal-typical description of central Europe might result in the following typology: At one level, the audience for scholarly research may be entirely local; this is a striking aspect of the landscape of central European art history. In the Czech Republic, for example, local art histories proliferate, written by trained professional scholars. They are often substantial publications, devoted to the art and architecture of specific cities, such as Brno, Hradec Králové and Plzeň.[94] Such works, usually published in Czech, are nevertheless seldom written for a national readership; they provide extensive analysis of subjects and issues that are of mostly local interest, and even when published in English, little reference is made to wider national or international contexts. This should not be taken as a criticism; they perform an important function, especially as their implicit readership is not only scholars but informed general readers and culturally engaged visitors and tourists. It would be absurd to demand that such publications occupy anything other than a subordinate place on the international landscape of art history, since they themselves make no attempt to do more.

In addition to such local scholarship, a large literature is also devoted to art and architecture on a national level; it is written in the national languages, and the implicit audience is again a national one reflected in the manner in which the narratives are constructed. The large-scale national histories published by state academies mentioned earlier are prominent examples, as are major monographs on individual artists and architects. Such publications may provide contextual overviews in which the wider European background is examined, but, written for a national readership (or interpretative community), the historical and geographical framework (the nation and its identity) may often go unexamined, based on assumptions tacitly shared with the readership. Topographical studies remain a prominent genre, as is positivistic documentation, continuing the genre of *Kunsttopographie* that was central to nineteenth-century art history. Much of this literature also relies on the unspoken commitment of its readership to the intrinsic value of the art and architecture of the state in question. In other words, its significance is not articulated because it is not in doubt.

In recent years, in contrast, efforts have been made, at considerable expense, to appeal to an international audience by publication of material in English, German and French. Bi-lingual exhibition catalogues are common at major museums and galleries, and scholarly journals publish articles in English. It is also increasingly taken as axiomatic that researchers should publish at least some work in English as a condition of professional preferment. This shift, however, has yet to be accompanied by a corresponding change of approach that takes into account the differing horizons of that larger readership. On the one hand this involves practical considerations, such as recalling that an international readership does not have the same shared background knowledge and understanding. But, equally, it poses challenges for

assumptions that scholars may make about their subject, for it requires a more self-critical approach when dealing with issues of significance. Why is the work of this or that artist significant and how might it speak to an expanded readership? Why is a particular event or set of ideas of importance? What is involved when value is attributed to a particular practice, especially for a readership that may not already be immersed in the art and culture of central Europe? Not all genres of art historical writing have the same currency internationally, either. Although one of the most famous examples of art topography is Nikolaus Pevsner's architectural guides to Great Britain and Ireland, the genre now has few exponents in the anglophone world and does not have the prestige it once had.

The suggestion here is that if the problem of being on the margins is to be addressed, that marginality cannot be dismissed as solely a function of structural inequalities — important as they undoubtedly are. Rather, it is indicative of a need, for new ways of making the history of art and architecture speak in compelling ways to other audiences whose proximate interests may, in the short term, lie elsewhere.*

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* This article was made possible with funding for the European Research Council project *Continuity and Rupture in the Art and Architecture of Central Europe 1918–1939* (ERC Project Number 786314. It is the result of an extended discussion with members of the CRAACE team, Christian Drobe, Marta Filipová, Julia Secklehner, and Nóra Veszprémi, whose input into this article has been invaluable.

MATTHEW RAMPLEY

Sítě, horizonty, centra a hierarchie: výzvy psaní o modernismu ve střední Evropě

Místo modernismu středovýchodní Evropy v širším kontextu moderního umění se v posledních třiceti letech opakovaně stávalo námětem diskusí. Dlouhodobé strukturální nerovnosti a ideologicky ovlivněné navyklé způsoby myšlení způsobily, že vědecký zájem o projevy modernismu ve státech střední a východní Evropy je v mezinárodním měřítku stále jen okrajovou záležitostí. Přes intenzivní snahu o překonání zakořeněných nerovností se scéna modernismu stále příliš nemění a nadále jí dominuje Paříž, Berlín, Londýn, New York a Moskva. Článek zkoumá několik nedávných pokusů, které se v rámci širšího projektu překreslení mapy moderního umění snažily přístup k modernismu přehodnotit. Tyto pokusy často vedly k pozoruhodným závěrům využívajícím teze propojenosti, horizontality a transnacionální analýzy. Zároveň si článek klade následující otázky: Nakolik je jejich koncepce koherentní a nakolik jsou účelné jako základ pro alternativní narativy? Nakolik jsou konkrétní případové studie z dějin moderního umění v Čechách, Československu a Maďarsku přesvědčivé? Článek naznačuje, že takové modely mohou historickou situaci zkreslovat. Pokud se však mají stávající hierarchie rozbít, je nezbytné se zabývat spíše pragmatickými faktory v jejich pozadí než se zaměřovat pouze na nové teoretické modely interpretace.

MATTHEW RAMPLEY

Networks, Horizons, Centres and Hierarchies: On the Challenges of Writing on Modernism in Central Europe

The place of the modernism of East-Central Europe in the wider landscape of modern art has been a recurrent topic of debate in the last 30 years. Long-standing structural inequalities and ideologically-shaped habits of mind have ensured that international scholarly interest in the modernist practices of the states of central and eastern Europe is still often a marginal activity. Despite concerted efforts to overturn long-established inequalities, the landscape of modernism is still little changed, dominated by Paris, Berlin, London, New York and Moscow. This article examines some of the recent attempts to rethink writing about modernism, as part of a project of redrawing the map of modern art. Such attempts have often resulted in striking formulations, drawing on metaphors of entanglement, horizontality and transnational analysis. Yet the article asks: How conceptually coherent are they, and how effective are they as the basis for counter-narratives? Moreover, when concrete case studies from the history of modernism in Bohemia, Czechoslovakia and Hungary are considered, how convincing are they? The article suggests not only that such models may misrepresent historical situations, but that also, if existing hierarchies are to be broken down, then it is necessary to address the pragmatic factors that lie behind them, rather than focusing on new theoretical models of interpretation alone.