

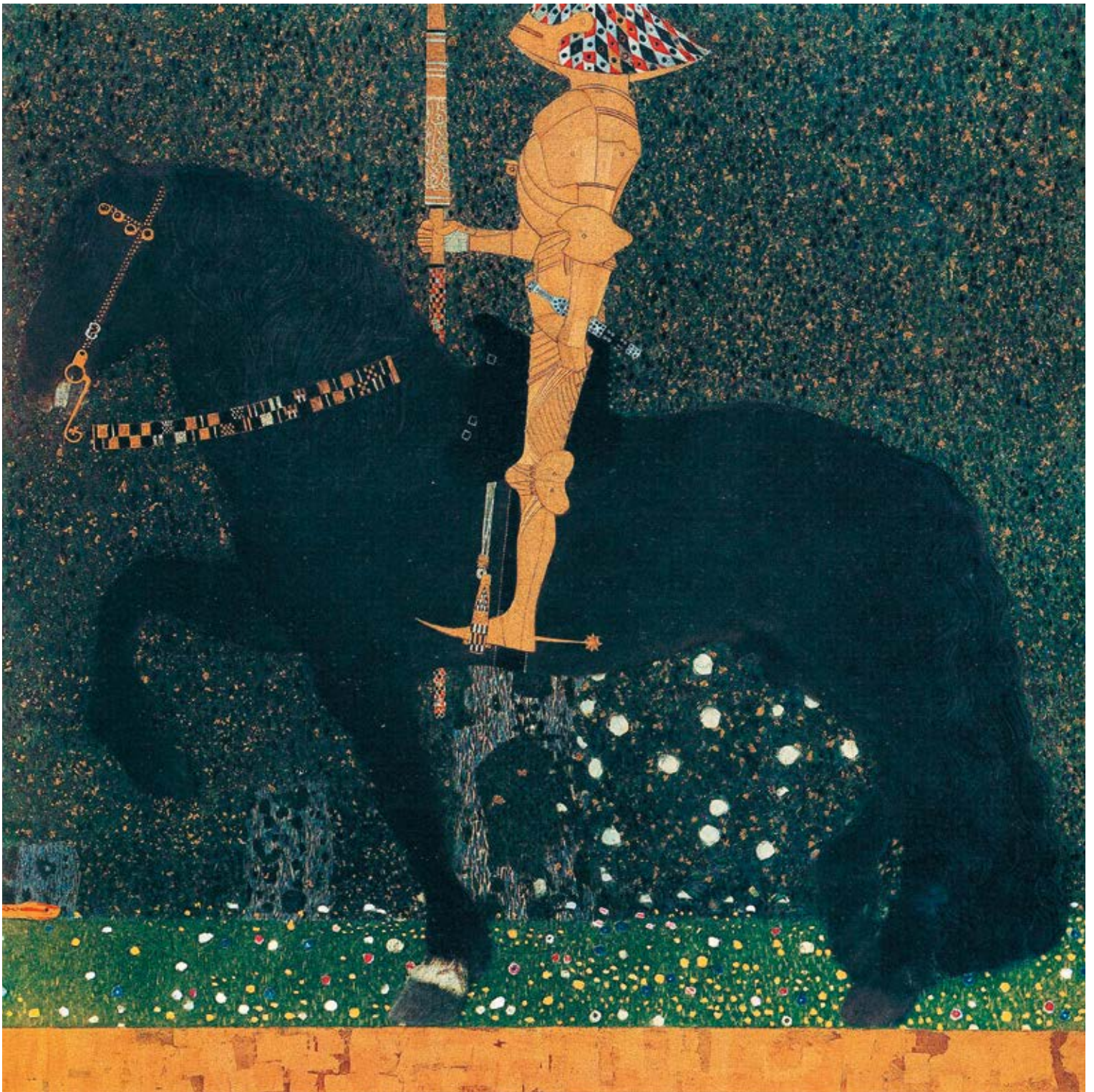


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New Horizons in
Central Europe

BEYOND KLIMT



Gustav Klimt
The Golden Knight, 1903
Aichi Prefectural Museum of Art, Nagoya

BEYOND KLIMT

New Horizons in
Central Europe

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C Psychological Studies – Revolution and Rebirth

“The heart of Austria is not the center, but the periphery”—
Avant-Garde Journals in East-Central Europe
Gábor Dobó
Merse Pál Szeredi

“The heart of Austria is not the center, but the periphery”—
Avant-Garde Journals in
East-Central Europe¹

Gábor Dobó, Merse Pál Szeredi

“The heart of Austria is not the center, but the periphery. You won’t find Austria in the Alps—chamois, yes, and edelweiss and gentians but barely a hint of the double-headed eagle. The substance of Austria is drawn and replenished from the Crown Lands.” (Joseph Roth, *The Emperor’s Tomb*, 1938, ch. 5)

N After the end of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, the editors of avant-garde journals in the successor states developed radical concepts that questioned the former function of art and artists. In East-Central Europe, until the end of Communism around 1990, the latter were ascribed a prophetic role inherited from the romantic nationalism of the nineteenth century and carried over into the individual national cultures, which the avant-garde of the time sought to overcome. Artists now regarded themselves as members and parts of an international and collaborative network. Of course, the cultural models of the different regions also had an influence on the avant-garde, and they had a marked effect, for example, as charismatic artists in many genres. Mention might be made here of Ljubomir Micić, Karel Teige, or Lajos Kassák, who were themselves influenced by the Romantic Sándor Petőfi or Adam Mickiewicz. After the disintegration of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy and in the ensuing complicated geopolitical and cultural situation (called “histoire croisée” by historians, on account of the parallel interconnections that existed²), avant-garde artists stepped out of the routine of their accustomed environments in many respects. This enabled them to bring together the diverse Modernist tendencies on the territory of the former Empire within the avant-garde network.³

After the collapse of the Monarchy, avant-garde journals played an important role, as they were by definition a collective cultural product in which a group of artists articulated their complex artistic and social program, which in turn contributed to the international discussion of art. The avant-garde journals did not appear out of the blue. Not only the number of “little magazines,” as they were called, but also their circulation had been increasing significantly since the 1880s, first in Western Europe and then worldwide.⁴ By the end of the nineteenth century, these periodicals had assumed the important role of communicating between European cultures and making cultural trends and their new interpretations more widely known. In another respect as well, the “little magazines” of that time and around the turn of the century resembled the avant-garde journals of the 1920s discussed here: They had a distinctive artistic program, their authors frequently profiled themselves as members of some putative movement, and they often attacked the existing institutional system. The avant-garde editors made exceptionally good use of the “little magazine” strategies so as to formulate their own programs in the successor states of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy.

C This essay will look at the strategies by which

avant-garde magazines became part of European art discourse, even assuming a trend-defining role within it. Moreover, they gave writers in the countries of the former Monarchy and beyond a platform that enabled them to remain in contact, despite language, ethnic, and national barriers⁵ (fig. 1).

The East-Central European avant-garde journals of the 1920s utilized the ground prepared for them by the “little magazines” in what was a crisis-ridden geopolitical context, to say the least. In fact, in his influential work *The Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century*, Eric Hobsbawm interpreted the period from the start of World War I to the end of World War II as a single war.⁶ The once multilingual and multinational Monarchy fragmented into individual nation-states, which often closed themselves off and, moreover, in which many millions of people found themselves in a minority situation.⁷ The governments of the successor states initiated various modernization programs, including cultural policy concepts, but in general these efforts were not intended to initiate communication between the multinational states of the Carpathian Basin. On the contrary, the neo-national program of Kuno Klebelsberg (1922–31 Minister for Religion and Education in the conservative Horthy system) pushed for comprehensive education reforms that were to present a first step toward restoring the “territorial integrity” of the country, meaning a revision of the peace treaties following World War I.⁸

In the context of this rising nationalism in the successor states, the role of the avant-garde journals, which were published in several languages and distributed internationally, took on increased importance—and not only in Hungary. Their format and the ease with which the “little magazines” could be distributed made them ideal as vehicles for relatively rapid transborder communication, even after several of them had been banned in some countries. Such was the case with *MA* (1916–25) by Lajos Kassák, who in the first half of the 1920s worked as an exile in Vienna. Kassák’s colleagues smuggled it under the name of *365* or *Kortárs* from Austria to Hungary, and also distributed it in Czechoslovakia and Romania. An indication of the connecting and integrative role of these avant-garde journals is the fact that their contributors included a strikingly large number of artists who were multilingual and at home in several cultures. Among Kassák’s collaborators in *MA* were the painter János Mattis-Teutsch, who worked for the journal in Budapest in the 1910s. In the 1920s he contributed to the periodical *Contimporanul* (1922–32) in Bucharest, although he continued to live in the Transylvanian-Saxon city of Kronstadt (now Braşov, Romania). Róbert Reiter (pseudonym Franz Liebhard/t) began as an avant-garde poet and literary translator, working initially for *MA* in Temeschwar (now Timișoara, Romania) in Hungarian and German. The avant-garde poet Lajos Kudlák was also initially involved in *MA*, becoming known later under the name L’udovit Kudlák as a Slovakian Modernist painter. The Hungarian-born Serbian

Fig. 1
Advertisement for
international
avant-garde journals
on the back cover
of *MA*, vol. 8,
no. 1, Vienna, 1922

De Styl Weimar		2x2		ÇA IRA Bruxelles		UT Novisad	
DER STURM Berlin		Wien		L'ESPRIT NOUVEAU			
BROOM Berlin		MECANO Weimar		LA VIE DES LETTRES ET DES ARTS Paris		CLARTE Paris	
DER GEGNER Berlin		DIE AKTION Berlin		ZENIT Zagreb			

MA internacionális aktivista művészeti folyóirat ■ Szerkeszti: Kassák Lajos ■ Fellelősszerkesztő: Josef Kalmer ■ Szerkesztőség és kiadóhivatal: Wien, XIII. Bezahlamalienstrasse 26. I. II ■ Megjelenés dátuma 1922 október 15 ■ Előfizetési ár: EGY ÉVRE: 35.000 osztrák kor., 70 szokol, 100 dinár, 200 lei, 500 márka ■ EGYES SZÁM ÁRA: 3000 osztrák korona, 7 szokol, 10 dinár, 20 lei, 50 márka ■ VIII. évfolyam, 1. szám ■ A lapban megjelenő cikkekért a szerző felel.

Druckerei „Eibemühl“, Wien, IX., Berggasse 31.

painter Petar Dobrović/Péter Dobrovits, who also worked for Kassák's journal early on, was later active in the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes.

The avant-garde journals of the region continued to have a sustained impact during the time of the disintegration of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy and the associated reduction in the territory of the Kingdom of Hungary. One of the consequences of the new geopolitical situation was the loss of importance, absolutely or relatively, of previous cultural centers. Even Vienna, capital of the former Monarchy, was no exception, losing its significance as an obvious point of reference for the artists of the successor states. For the Eastern European avant-garde journals of the 1920s, however, Vienna retained its important role, albeit for different reasons than before. After the collapse of the Hungarian Republic of Councils, the Social Democrats' "Red Vienna" became the most important emigration destination. It was in this context that the avant-garde émigrés founded their own periodicals, in part because they regarded Kassák's publication *MA* as

being insufficiently politically committed. Among these new journals was *Akasztott Ember* (1922), which was influenced by left-wing Berlin Dadaism, *Egység* (1922–24), which advocated the program of the Soviet Proletkult, and *Ék* (1923/24), created out of an amalgamation of the two concepts and editorial boards. Vienna thus still functioned as a catalyst, even though no significant Viennese avant-garde journal was published at the time. Historians explain this with the dominance of the highly institutionalized Modernist trends of the Secession and, later, of Expressionism,⁹ while some contemporaries drew attention to the "petty bourgeois" character of the Vienna art scene.¹⁰ At the same time, Vienna retained its importance as one of the meeting places of the avant-garde of the region and of Europe, and major events taking place in the city often provided a basis for friendships, discussions, and later collaborations, as was the case with the *International Theater Exhibition* organized in 1924 by the architect and set designer Frederick Kiesler. The artists saw in theater technology the possibility of creating a "synthesis," a total work

of art. Leading international avant-garde artists exhibited at the Konzerthaus, with pieces as diverse as Ferdinand Léger's *Ballet mécanique*, a "dynamic" futuristic play directed by Filippo Tommaso Marinetti and Enrico Prampolini, and Kiesler's revolutionary *Raumbühne* (Space Stage).¹¹ Many avant-garde journals—*MA*, *Pásmo* in Brno, *Periszkop* and *Contimporanul* in Romania, *Noi* in Rome, and *The Little Review* in the USA—published special issues on the exhibition. It gave rise to feverish activity in the art world, particularly among critics, and sparked lively discourse between European avant-garde journals (fig. 2).

Although Vienna remained a catalyst for the journals of the East-Central European avant-garde, regional avant-garde periodicals no longer regarded the city as a center but saw the network in which they operated as transnational and polycentric.¹² They therefore rejected the idea¹³ that the cultural transfer radiated from the "center" to the "periphery,"¹⁴ the center naturally being the "West" and the periphery the "East."¹⁵ The avant-garde periodicals, including the journals published in the successor states to the Monarchy, saw themselves as equal members of a network, unlike the Modernist publications, like *Nouvelle Revue Française* (1909–), *La Ronda* (1919–23), or *The Criterion* (1922–39), which sought to rebuild cultural life in postwar Europe on the basis of the Western cultural canon and rejected the avant-garde.¹⁶ By contrast, the editors of the avant-garde journals believed that statements about the new art could be made from Novi Sad, Bucharest, or Lviv just as well as from Vienna, Paris, or Berlin. These cities remained important but were no longer the absolute points of reference for East-Central European avant-garde journals.¹⁷ The declining importance of earlier cultural centers is illustrated by the fact that avant-garde artists sought their modernization models not in these cities but in the Soviet Union, which they saw as their future reality, in the USA, or even in the Jewish settlements in Palestine (fig. 3).

The journals of the polycentric avant-garde network offered a cultural transfer in several directions. These publications not only had knowledge of innovations in art but also interpreted them and actively shaped contemporary cultural discourse. East-Central European journals like *MA* in Vienna, *Zwrotnica* in Kraków (first series published in 1922/23), *Zenit* (1921–26) in Zagreb and later Belgrade, the journals of the Devětsil Group in Prague and Brno, or *Blok* (1924–26) in Warsaw contributed to international discourse with reproductions of major artworks or original theoretical essays. Through their network, these avant-garde journals were able to establish connections between the successor states of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy and also between the multilingual cultures within the same country. The East-Central European publications were written not only in the language of the country but also in German and French, both of which served as a *lingua franca*, and often in other local languages as well. This was of particular importance in the successor states created after the 1919 peace treaties, which were fraught with



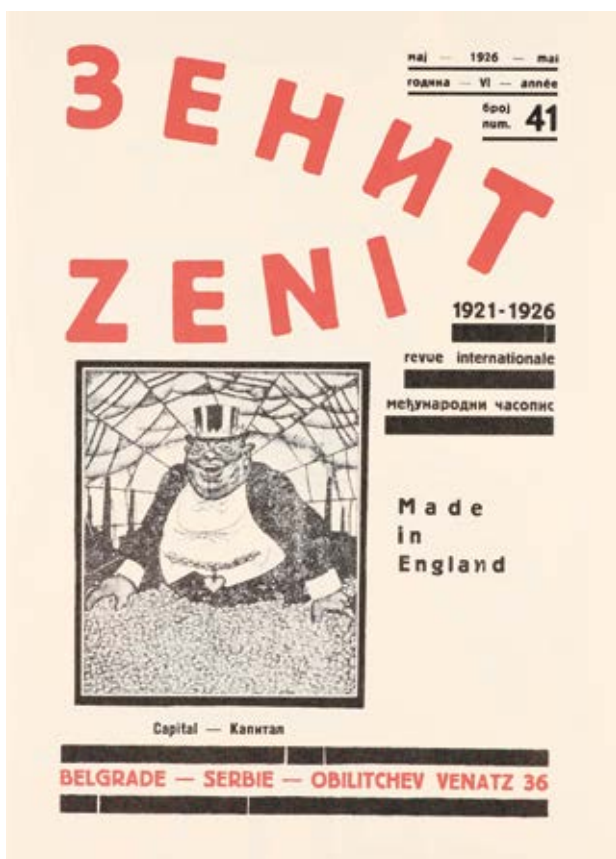
Fig. 2
Front cover of *Blok*,
no. 10, Warsaw, 1925

Fig. 3
Page from the almanac
Život 2, Prague, 1922



nationalist tensions. Thus the Hungarian avant-garde journal *Út* (1922–25) described itself as “Yugoslavian” in Vojvodina and published Hungarian translations of texts by authors from the *Zenit* group. At the same time it also remained in contact with the Vienna and Budapest avant-garde at a time when the majority of intellectuals in Hungary were suffering—in their new situation as a minority—from the “trauma of Trianon,” as it was referred to, and did not see the cultural transfer between the new states as a priority (fig. 4).

Apart from articles in Slovenian, French, and German, the periodical *Tank* (1927) in Ljubljana also used Italian, a remarkable gesture given the wartime conflict in the region between the Italian and South Slav inhabitants and the subsequent new border arrangements. The avant-garde journals *Yung-Yidish* (1919) and *Tel-Awiw* (1919–21), published in Yiddish in Poland and Ukraine (previously Galicia, which belonged to the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy), also had a transborder readership, using the avant-garde network and the mediating force of Yiddish to reach readers from Łódź to Poznań, and even as far as New York. With its “Balkanization of Europe” slogan, the magazine *Zenit* vehemently attacked the paradigm that saw cultural transfer in relation to “center” and “periphery,” provocatively and (self-)mockingly describing Europe as an “extension of the Balkan peninsula”¹⁸ (fig. 5).



Not only the number of “little magazines,” as they were called, but also their circulation had been increasing significantly since the 1880s, first in Western Europe and then worldwide.

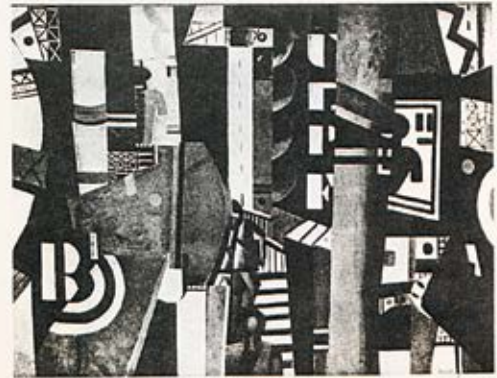
The avant-garde journals of the 1920s, including the East-Central European ones, possessed a common code system, “synthetic” editing, as it was called, which investigated connections between contemporary (avant-garde) art, science, and technology, and their communication through different media. Avant-garde artists believed in the potential of synthesis and envisaged its implementation through linking the achievements of contemporary art with those of non-related fields (science, technology, and social sciences).¹⁹ László Moholy-Nagy, a member of Kassák’s circle, who had quickly become an important European avant-garde figure, investigated the question of these “synthetic” avant-garde journals as early as 1925. He was a professor at the Bauhaus at the time, but published his study on this subject between 1924

Fig. 4
Front cover of *Dada-Tank*, no. 1, Zagreb, 1922

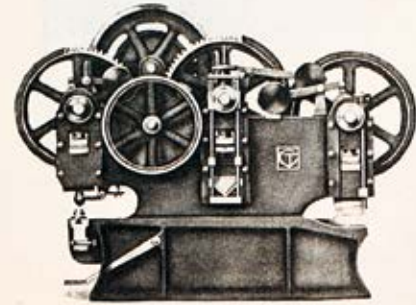
Fig. 5
Front cover of *Zenit*, no. 41, Belgrade, 1926



Léger



Léger



Bismarck

Fig. 6
Reproductions of artworks by Fernand Léger
and a machine, In László Moholy-Nagy,
Lajos Kassák, eds., *Buch neuer Künstler*,
Vienna, 1922

and 1926 in numerous contemporary avant-garde journals, including *Dokumentum* (1926/27) and *Pásmo* (1924–26). The latter was published in Brno, a mid-sized city that had become acclaimed for its Modernist architecture and thus grew into one of the regional centers of Modernism during the 1920s. Moholy-Nagy saw the promotion of the “new lifestyle” and its manifestations as a key feature of the “synthetic” art journals. They therefore included fields that, from a Modernist point of view, promised the most innovations, from architecture to education and typography. The visual appearance of these journals reflected developments in typography and bookmaking that made them recognizable and attracted attention.

One innovation was the fact that the reproductions and photos placed between the text sections not only illustrated the articles but were also items in their own right. The photos showing technological innovations or modern cityscapes, often published without comment, functioned as visual calls to action. Their message was that these beacons of modern life were a true reflection of the time. The “synthetic” journals used multiple resources, providing space for a wide range of creative expression, from architectural sketches to musical scores. They were also multilingual, with articles written in the national languages being summarized in the major European languages, and special issues published on topical subjects.²⁰

The synthetic editorial work appeared in its purest form in almanacs and anthologies, because, unlike newspapers, these publications

The visual appearance of these journals reflected developments in typography and bookmaking that made them recognizable and attracted attention.

were also typographically consistent. Typical works of this type include Moholy-Nagy's and Kassák's *Buch neuer Künstler* from 1922, the anthology *Revoluční sborník Devětsil*, edited by Jaroslav Seifert and Karel Teige, of the same year, the almanacs by the Polish Futurists in the early 1920s,²¹ and *Tisztaság könyve* by Lajos Kassák from 1926 (fig. 6).

The synthetic journals of the East-Central European avant-garde were not at all devoted to the promotion of a single direction but endeavored to present the latest artistic developments in an integrative (eclectic or syncretic) form. The titles alone were an indication of this: *Integral* (1925–28), *Zenit*, *Dokumentum*, *Contimporanul*, *Periszkop* (1925/26), etc. The power of these synthetic journals as a code can be seen from the fact that the Communist periodicals published in the late 1920s, such as *100%* (1927–30) or *ReD* (1927–31), used the same typographical design (fig. 7).



Fig. 7
Front cover of *Integral*,
vol. 1, no. 3, Bucharest, 1925

- 1 This study was written in connection with the research project of the Petőfi Literary Museum–Kassák Museum, financed by the National Research, Development and Innovation Office – NKFIH, project-no. NKFI-K 120779.
- 2 Michael Werner, Bénédicte Zimmermann, eds., *De la comparaison à l'histoire croisée* (Paris, 2004), pp. 15–49.
- 3 We use the term “Modernism” to designate cultural movements in the early twentieth century that refer to the era of “modernity”; Peter Brooker, Andrzej Gąsiorek, Deborah Longworth, Andrew Thacker, “Introduction,” in *ibid.*, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Modernisms* (Oxford, 2010), pp. 3–4. “Avant-garde” is used to describe the critical art movements that radically revised modernity and Modernism. There is no sharp boundary between Modernism and avant-garde and there were numerous overlaps.
- 4 See, e.g., Evanhélia Stead, Hélène Védrine, eds., *L'Europe des revues (1880–1920)* (Paris, 2008).
- 5 Mica Gherghescu, “Grilles et arborescences: Le rôle des revues dans la construction de l'espace artistique moderne,” in *Modernités plurielles, 1905–1970*, ed. Catherine Grenier, exh. cat., Centre Pompidou, Paris (Paris, 2013), pp. 39–45.
- 6 Eric J. Hobsbawm, *Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century, 1914–1991* (London, 1994).
- 7 One illustrative example is the title of the monograph about the Yugoslav avant-garde: Dubravka Djurić, Miško Šuvaković, *Impossible Histories: Historic Avant-Gardes, Neo-Avant-Gardes, and Post-Avant-Gardes in Yugoslavia, 1918–1991* (Cambridge, 2003).
- 8 Kuno Klebelsberg, “Neonacionalizmus,” *Nemzeti Újság*, January 29, 1928.
- 9 Christian Weikop, “Introduction: Germany, Austria, Switzerland,” in Christian Weikop, Peter Brooker, Sascha Bru, Andrew Thacker, eds., *The Oxford Critical and Cultural History of Modernist Magazines: Volume III: Europe 1880–1940* (Oxford, 2013), pp. 693–708.
- 10 On the Vienna experience of avant-garde artists, see, e.g., the introduction by the pro-Bauhaus reviewer Ernő Kállai to Lajos Kassák's 1924 exhibition at Galerie Der Sturm: Ernst Kállai, “Ludwig Kassák,” in *Der Sturm, 131. Ausstellung: Ludwig Kassák und Nikolaus Braun*, exh. cat., Galerie Der Sturm, Berlin (Berlin, 1924), p. 3.
- 11 More about the exhibition in Merse Pál Szeredi, “Budapest – Berlin – Budapest: magyar művészek Berlinben az 1920-as években,” in *Berlin – Budapest 1919–1933: Képzőművészeti kapcsolatok Berlin és Budapest között, kiállítási katalógus*, exh. cat., Virág Judit Galéria, Budapest (Budapest, 2016), p. 11–147.
- 12 Béatrice Joyeux-Prunel, “Weimar, Berlin, New York, Varsovie, São Paulo, Mexico ... Une géographie polycentrique,” in *ibid.*, *Les avant-gardes artis-*
- tiques (1918–1945): Une histoire transnationale* (Paris, 2017), pp. 113–18.
- 13 Per Bäckström, Benedikt Hjartarson, eds., *Decentering the Avant-Garde* (Amsterdam/New York, 2014).
- 14 We placed “center” and “periphery” in quote marks to indicate that ideological and historical constructions are implied. This issue is also picked up on in the history of East-Central European avant-garde magazines. For historiographic questions of “center” and “periphery,” see, most recently, Piotr Piotrowski, *In the Shadow of Yalta: Art and the Avant-Garde in Eastern Europe, 1945–1989* (London, 2011).
- 15 Similarly, “East” and “West” are not neutral terms, as history has shown; see Larry Wolff, *Inventing Eastern Europe: The Map of Civilization on the Mind of the Enlightenment* (Stanford, 1994).
- 16 Anne-Rachel Hermetet, *Pour sortir du chaos: Trois revues européennes des années vingt* (Rennes, 2009).
- 17 Béatrice Joyeux-Prunel, “Provincializing Paris: The Center-Periphery Narrative of Modern Art in Light of Quantitative and Transnational Approaches,” in *Art@s Bulletin*, vol. 4, no. 1, 2015, art. 4.
- 18 Ljubomir Micić, “Nova Umetnost” (New Art), in *Zenit*, vol. 4, no. 34, 1924, n.p.
- 19 The term was used for the first time by Jean Cocteau in *Le rappel à l'ordre* (Paris, 1926); see also Jean Laude, *Le retour à l'ordre dans les arts plastiques et l'architecture, 1919–1925* (Saint-Étienne, 1986); Jennifer Ruth Bethke, *From Futurism To Neoclassicism: Temporality In Italian Modernism, 1916–1925* (Berkeley, 2005).
- 20 László Moholy-Nagy, “Richtlinien für eine Synthetische Zeitschrift,” in *Pásmo*, vol. 1, nos. 7–8, 1925, p. 5; for further discussion, see Jindřich Toman, “Permanent Synthesis: László Moholy-Nagy's Idea of a Synthetic Journal,” in Gábor Dobó, Merse Pál Szeredi, eds., *Local Contexts/ International Networks: Avant-Garde Journals in East-Central Europe (The Avant-Garde and Its Journals 2)*, proceedings of the International Conference held in the Kassák Museum, September 17–19, 2015 (Budapest, 2018) (forthcoming).
- 21 Krisztina Passuth, *Les avant-gardes de l'Europe Centrale: 1907–1927* (Paris, 1988), p. 77.

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DICTIONARY DEFINITIONS

The texts about the words *border* and *nation* were taken from the dictionaries of each respective language. The aim here was to illustrate the changing use and definition of these terms. These definitions are interspersed throughout the catalogue in the following languages: German, English, Hungarian, Czech, Slovakian, Slovenian, Croatian, Romanian.

If, in spite of our thorough research, any individual illustrations have not been correctly attributed or acknowledged, we offer our apologies and would appreciate any information that will allow us to rectify the matter in future editions.

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Did the deaths of Gustav Klimt, Egon Schiele, Koloman Moser, and Otto Wagner in 1918 mark the end of an era in the art of the countries of the former Habsburg Monarchy? What new trends were already emerging before 1914 and the First World War? What effect did the new nation-states have on the common interests of artists, and how did they respond? Progressive artistic movements thrive on the exchange of ideas and reject

political and ideological boundaries. A sense of community was fostered, for example, through artists' associations, avant-garde journals like *MA*, the *International Exhibition of Theater Technology* in Vienna, and schools like the Bauhaus in Weimar. In 1938, the violent dictatorships that led to the Second World War put an end to this creative period and obscured the perception of a shared culture.