

THE OXFORD CRITICAL  
AND CULTURAL HISTORY OF  
**Modernist Magazines**

GENERAL EDITORS

Peter Brooker Andrew Thacker

Volume I. Britain and Ireland 1880–1955

Volume II. North America 1894–1960

Volume III. Europe 1880–1940



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AND CULTURAL HISTORY OF  
**Modernist Magazines**

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*Part II*

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## AVANT-GARDE PERIODICALS IN THE YUGOSLAVIAN CRUCIBLE

*Zenit* (Zagreb 1921–3, Belgrade 1924–6); Zagreb:  
*Dada-Jok* (1922); *Dada-Tank* (1922); *Dada Jazz* (1922);  
Novi Sad: *Ūt* (1922–5); Ljubljana: *Svetokret* (1921);  
*Rdeči pilot* (1922); and *Tank* (1927)<sup>1</sup>

LAUREL SEELY VOLODER AND TYRUS MILLER

In December 1918, with the victory of the Entente (including Serbia) and the resulting collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, which had kept Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, and Slovenia under its heel, a new, post-imperial political entity was declared: The Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes. Both stimulated by the hope for independent political and cultural development and bewildered by the destructive currents set in motion by the disintegration of the previous European order, a self-conscious minority of literary figures and intellectuals in the Yugoslavian territories, like elsewhere throughout Europe, took up the cause of profound spiritual and social renewal through the practice of radical art. Despite their seemingly marginal position compared to the metropolitan centres of France, England, Italy, and Germany, and despite the limited utility of their 'minor' language in communicating their thoughts to an international audience, by the early 1920s Yugoslavian intellectuals had begun to generate the discourse, ideology, venues, and institutions characteristic of other European avant-gardes and were vehemently asserting their place among this international community of artistic revolutionaries.

<sup>1</sup> Sincere thanks to Aleš Erjavec and Miško Šuvaković for their assistance in obtaining some of the rare materials discussed in this chapter.

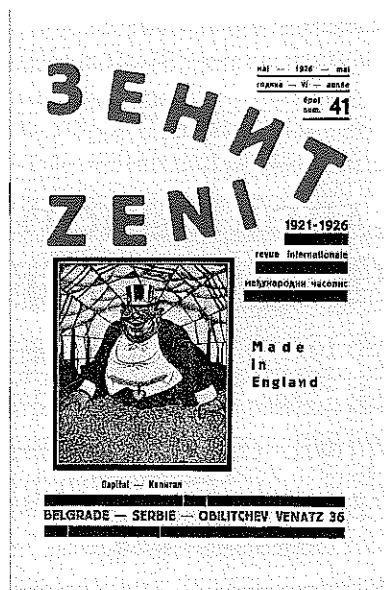


Fig. 47.1 Cover of *Zenit*, 41 (May 1926)

### *Zenit*

Without question, the most important journal of the Yugoslavian avant-garde was *Zenit* (Zenith), edited by Ljubomir Micić in Zagreb from February 1921 to May 1923 and in Belgrade until 1926, for a total of forty-three issues in thirty-four volumes (Fig. 47.1). In its early days, Micić had the editorial cooperation of his brother Branko Ve Poljanski (Branislav Micić), Boško Tokin, and soon, the Expressionist poet Ivan Goll in Paris. The latter two were co-authors of the first book in the affiliated 'Biblioteka *Zenit*', the 'Zenitist Manifesto'.<sup>2</sup> Tokin and Goll fell off the masthead by 1922, and subsequently Micić and Poljanski provided the editorial leadership. Under pressure by the authorities in Zagreb, Micić transferred the journal to Belgrade in 1923, but eventually fell foul of the law there as well. He was prosecuted for obscenity and the journal was banned for its putative advocacy of Bolshevism; Micić fled across Italy to Paris.

The name 'Zenit' implies the journal's 'vertical' orientation towards transcendence, the speculative leap upwards from material to spirit, from earth-boundedness to the sky (adopting Futurist tropes of flight, electricity, and radio), from lowly subalternity to the pinnacle of power, and from passivity to active intensity. In its

<sup>2</sup> Ljubomir Micić, Ivan Goll, and Boško Tokin, *Manifest Zenitizma* (Zagreb: Biblioteka *Zenit*, 1921).

lack of specificity, the name also hints at the abstractness of the movement's founding ideas: with little necessary content other than a generic avant-garde will to ascend and transcend, it could embrace several contradictory strains of thought and be submitted to the caprices and passions of Ljubomir Micić's dominating personality. Despite its intellectual shortcomings, however, through the relentless publication of manifestos and statements in issue after issue of *Zenit*, Micić gave shape to a specifically Yugoslavian avant-garde aesthetic: 'Zenitism', counterpointing the redemptive force of the Balkanic-Slavic 'barbarogenius' over against the decadence of Western Europe. Over the course of its five years of publication, *Zenit* accreted successive influences from international Expressionism, Futurism, Dadaism, and Constructivism to advance its cultural-political goals. Its political orientations were similarly idiosyncratic, eclectic, and fluctuating: a blend of Serbian nationalism, pan-Slavism, pacificism, Bolshevism (though often celebrating the anti-Western *Russian* character of Lenin and Trotsky rather than their *Soviet* politics), mystical new-age thought, internationalism, and anarchism.

Inspired in part by slightly earlier and contemporary precedents such as Lajos Kassák's Hungarian avant-garde publication *Ma* (Today), which from 1920 onwards was appearing from Vienna and incorporating texts in multiple languages (see Chapter 48), Micić likewise placed works by Yugoslavian artists and writers among those of the international avant-garde, which often appeared in their original languages rather than in Serbo-Croatian translation. During the five years of its existence, *Zenit* managed to garner a significant degree of international attention both for its solicitation of work for publication and for its subsidiary activities, such as the 'First Zenit International Art Exhibition' held in Belgrade in April 1924. The example of *Zenit* and the aesthetic ideology of Zenitism inspired other important publications across the region, such as the Hungarian-language journal *Út* and the Slovenian journal *Tank*, as well as individual practitioners of the avant-garde such as the Dadaist poet Dragan Aleksić and the Slovenian cubo-futurist Srečko Kosovel.

### Beginnings in Zagreb

From the first issue (February 1921) until issue 24 (April 1923), *Zenit* was a large-scale, folded sheet publication whose striking appearance was enhanced by the use of dramatic typography and different coloured papers. Throughout this period, there were several shifts in the visual appearance of the cover, indicating both Micić's restless search for an appropriate stylistic expression of an evolving Zenitism and his rapid evolution from a conventionalized Expressionism to a more up-to-date international idiom influenced by both Dadaism and Constructivism. Thus, the first three issues had the journal title written in handwritten Gothic lettering. The

third and fourth issues bore reproductions of Egon Schiele self-portraits, but unlike the third issue, which retained the Gothic logo, the fourth issue presented the title in large typographically modern printed letters stepped diagonally upwards across the top of the cover. For issue 7 (September 1921), only seven months after the journal's initiation, the title was printed in still larger letters vertically down the left side of the cover. That format was retained only through issue 10 (December 1921). From issue 11 to issue 24, when the journal was interrupted and transferred to Belgrade, every subsequent number had a different format except issues 12 and 13 (March and April 1922), which bore a common visual design.

Most notable about the early issues of *Zenit* was Micić's editorial commitment to a multilingual mix of texts, alphabets, and geographical sources of the published materials. Even the Yugoslavian writers were situated in various countries and major capitals, including Branko Ve Poljanski in Ljubljana, Stanislav Vinaver in Belgrade, Rastko Petrović and Miloš Crnjanski in Paris, Zlatko Gorjan in Vienna, and Dragan Aleksić in Prague. But within the first year, Micić had also printed Serbo-Croatian, German, French, Italian, English, Czech, and Spanish texts in the Latin alphabet, as well as Serbo-Croatian and Russian texts in Cyrillic. Moreover, Micić at times chose to present texts in translation, including his own, while at other times providing the original language text. While Alexander Blok's poem 'The Sythians' appeared in issue 3 in Cyrillic Russian, for example, Soviet Minister of Culture Anatoly Lunacharsky's essay on Proletkult appeared in Serbo-Croatian translation in issues 1 and 2.

Although this editorial choice might be explained as simply a difference of emphasis between the literary particularity of a poem and the communicative emphasis of an essay, in other cases, the linguistic choice is more symbolically significant. Thus, for example, the cover of issue 5 bears the German language heading 'Zenitistisches Manifest' (Zenitist Manifesto) by Ivan Goll—Paris. In large letters, this heading is followed by an evocation of international newspapers:

Every morning at five AM, everywhere on the five continents, the same NEWSPAPER raises its grey head with the black lies of life:  
 PEACE CONFERENCE = MURDER IN CHEESE STORE = THE LEAP OUT OF THE HEART OF THE BELOVED = BUY GILLETTE RAZORS = BERGSON IN AMERICA = VOTE FOR NERO! = HOORAY!<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> 'Jeden Morgen um fünf Uhr, überall, auf den fünf Kontinenten, erhebt dieselbe ZEITUNG ihr übernächtlich graues Haupt mit den schwarzen Lügen des Lebens: Friedenskonferenz = Mord im Käsegeschäft = | Der Sprung aus dem Herzen der Geliebten = | Kauft Gillette Rasiermesser = | Bergson in America = Wählet Nero! = | Hurra!' Ivan Goll, 'Zenitistisches Manifest', *Zenit*, 5 (June 1921), 1. Unless stated otherwise, translations are by the authors.

The 'foreignness' of the front page accordingly evokes the chaotic, decadent modernity of Europe and America, as exemplified by the parodic headlines of Goll's text. The manifesto continues on the next page, emphasizing through large, boldfaced print the equivalence of 'Zenit' and 'Sonne' (sun), and screams out in large letters a Zenitist continental and global creed against petty nationalisms:

Nations! Family trees! Primitive races! Nonsense!

MAN!

We are not Frenchmen, not Serbs, not Germans, not Blacks, not Luxemburgers!

We are Europeans, Americans,

Africans, Asians, Australians!<sup>4</sup>

In issue 9, Micić published numbers 10–16 of his own sequential poem entitled 'Words in Space', perhaps influenced by Lajos Kassák's numbered poems, which were also appearing in *Ma* at this time. Numbers 10, 14, and 16 appeared in Serbo-Croatian in Latin script, numbers 11, 12, and 15 in Cyrillic, while number 13 is in German translation (by 'Nina-Naj', the pseudonym of Micić's wife, Anuška). These poems were distributed throughout the issue among a cosmopolitan, multilingual mix of other texts: a manifesto by Ivan Goll translated into Serbo-Croatian and printed in Cyrillic; André Salmon's poem 'L'Age de l'Humanité' in French; remarks in German by Micić on Goll's poem 'Paris Is Burning' entitled 'A Work of Zenitism'; Jaroslav Seifert's poem in Czech 'City in Tears'; Raoul Hausmann's prose text 'Victory Triumph Tobacco with Beans'; and a Dragan Aleksić poem from Zagreb printed in Cyrillic. Here the journal issue itself became a unit of editorial composition made out of multiple authored elements in different languages. And this, accordingly, was raised to the level of an avant-garde 'formal' feature.

Micić's commitment to publication and composition in multiple languages went even further in the journal's second year. He continued to publish internationally significant avant-garde writers in their original language, such as Jean Epstein, Pierre Albert-Birot, Paul Dermée, and Ivan Goll in French; Filippo Tommaso Marinetti in Italian; Guillermo de Torre in Spanish; Franz Richard Behrens, Herwarth Walden, George Kaiser, and Ivan Goll in German; Sergei Jesinin, Ilya Ehrenberg, Boris Pasternak, and Velimir Khlebnikov in Russian; and Adolf Hoffmeister, Artiš Černik, and Ladislav Dymeš in Czech. A minor work, but contextually significant, was the short versified text '1922' (issue 14, May 1922) in Hungarian by the poet János Mester from Novi Sad in the Vojvodina, a multi-ethnic area on the border of

<sup>4</sup> 'Nationen! Stammbäume! Urgeschlechter! Quatsch! | MENSCH! | Wir sind nicht Franzosen, nicht Serben, nicht Deutsche, nicht Neger, nicht Luxemburger! | Wir sind Europäer, Amerikaner, | Afrikaner, Asier, Australier!' Ibid. 2.

Serbia and Hungary. The text identifies by name and equates Lajos Kassák and Ljubomir Micić, the leaders of the Hungarian and Yugoslavian avant-gardes, and concludes with lines aligning Kassák's journal *Ma* and Micić's *Zenit* with the Vojvodina Hungarian-language avant-garde journal *Út* (The Path; 1922–5):

MA + UT + ZENIT = WE ARE NEW ARTISTS!<sup>5</sup>

Most internationalist of all, however, were two fully 'foreign language' special issues: in July, a German issue accompanied by an 'extra' two-page leaflet published in Munich; and an issue dedicated to the 'New Russian Art'. Interestingly, the 'Deutsches Sonderheft' had a cover page in Serbian announcing the release in September of a special newspaper format issue in 10,000 copies to be distributed throughout Yugoslavia: an example of both Micić's monomania and his subversive avant-gardist imitation of the emerging mass media. Inside the German issue 16 (July, 1922), however, all the texts were Zenitist works in German translation: Micić's manifesto, 'Kategorischer Imperativ der Zenitistischer Dichterschule' (Categorical Imperative of the Zenitist School of Poetry), which argued for the Balkanization of Europe through the destructively redemptive force of the Zenitist barbaro-genius, along with related poetic texts by Micić and Poljanski.

The New Russian Art double issue (19/20) was guest-edited by Ilya Ehrenberg and El Lissitzky, who had earlier that year brought out in Berlin two issues of the trilingual constructive arts journal *Veshch. Objekt. Gegenstand* (see Chapter 36). The cover was a Constructivist print by El Lissitzky, combining letters and quasi-architectural features into a three-dimensional, 'proun'-like spatial design. The issue led off with Velimir Khlebnikov's introductory speech to Aleksei Kruchenykh's 1913 Futurist opera *Pobeda nad solntsem* (Victory over the Sun). It was accompanied by what was identified as an El Lissitzky 'costume design' for the opera; in reality, the image related to Lissitzky's designs of dolls for an electromechanical show of the piece. Further texts included poetic works by Vladimir Mayakovsky, Boris Pasternak, Velimir Khlebnikov, Sergei Jesinin, Nikolai Asejev, and Ilya Ehrenberg, as well as writings on art by Ehrenberg and Lissitzky, Kasimir Malevich, and Alexander Tairov. Along with the works by El Lissitzky, reproductions of visual artworks included a drawing of Vladimir Tatlin's 'Monument to the Third International', Suprematist designs by Malevich, and a photographed scene from a Meyerhold theatre piece.

On 23 September 1922, the newspaper edition of 10,000 (putatively) appeared, mostly containing texts by Micić and Poljanski. In October, Micić returned to the numbered format with issue 18, but now in a cheapened, more newsletter-like format. Nonetheless, he continued to include quality content, both domestic and

<sup>5</sup> 'MA + UT + ZENIT = [ MI UJ MŰVÉSZEK! ] János Mester, '1922', *Zenit*, 14 (May 1922), 27.

international. The cover page of issue 18 included a sculptural construction by Alexander Rodchenko, a report on Russian cinema by Micić, a notice of Sergei Prokofiev by 'I.G.' (probably Ivan Goll); the issue also included an El Lissitzky Constructivist architectural fantasy. The December double issue (19/20) presented a László Moholy-Nagy linoleum print, along with an excerpt from Lajos Kassák's landmark essay embracing Constructivist abstraction, 'Picture-Architecture'.

In the last few issues of the Zagreb period of the journal, the polemical tone and provocation to the public intensified. Issue 21, which appeared in February 1923, reproduced the programme and texts read by Micić and Poljanski at a Zenitist evening on 31 January 1923. In a series of unpaginated items Micić presented his manifesto 'zenitizam kao balkanski totalizator novoga života i nove umetnosti' (Zenitism as the Balkanic Totalizer of New Life and New Art), a poem, metaphorizing Zenitism itself, entitled 'aeroplan bez motora' (Airplane without Motor), a passage entitled 'slobodni pad' (Free Fall) from a 'synthetic short story', and a 'Zenit-Grotesque' called 'sud porote' (Court Jury). Poljanski similarly offered a selection of short manifesto, poetic, and dramatic texts. Issue 23 (April 1923) carried a long, similarly unpaginated, manifesto by Micić entitled 'radio film i zenitistička okomica duha' (Radio, Film, and the Zenitist Vertical Spirit). However, the most significant artefact of this phase of *Zenit* was the cover of issue 24 (May 1923), the last before the journal's transplantation to Belgrade. Whereas on the title logo of issue 23, a month earlier, the city names Zagreb and Belgrade still accompanied the journal name *Zenit*, on the cover of issue 24, 'Zagreb' disappeared and 'Belgrade' appears twice, in Latin and Cyrillic type, despite the fact that the editorial and administrative office was still listed as being in Zagreb. Most of the cover and the next page, moreover, were taken up with Micić's polemical blast 'papiga i monopol "hrvatska kultura"' (Parrot and the Monopoly 'Croatian Culture') directed against Stjepan Radić and more generally in opposition to pseudo-Europeanized 'Croatian culture'. In this essay, he dismissively characterized Croatian culture as an imitative confection, the 'illegitimate child of the marriage of monkey and parrot' ('vanbračno dete nenaravnog braka dresiranog majmuna i papige'), opposing it to the positive energies of the transnational Balkan culture. After the appearance of this issue, Micić moved the journal to Belgrade, where he was unable to bring out the next issue until nine months later.

### Belgrade 1924–6

Apparently hounded out of Zagreb for his purported Serbian nationalism, Micić published four issues of *Zenit* from Belgrade in 1924, the second of which came out in October after a seven-month hiatus as an extra-long compendium assembling material collected over the previous months. The February issue, which

marked the journal's definitive shift to Cyrillic as its primary alphabet, contained no original texts from outside contributors and reads like a vehicle for Micić's personal gripes and frustrations. While for the rest of the year *Zenit's* ideological thrust continued to be articulated in essays and poetry by Micić, Poljanski, and a few loyal Zenitists, these issues also contained a rich selection of prose, poetry, and essays that represented a range of ideological and aesthetic orientations in multiple languages. Contributors included South Slavic poets like Stevan Živanović (Zagreb), Marijan Mikac (Belgrade), Andra Jutrović (Sombor), and Vojislav Avakumović (Belgrade), as well as selections from international figures such as Grigory Petnikov (Russia), Franz Richard Behrens (Germany), Paolo Buzzi (Italy), Michel Seuphor (France), and Elmer Diktonius (Finland). The tone of these issues was one of marked high spirits, with Micić invigorated by the move to Belgrade and eager to 'actively participate in the construction of the cultural centre of the future Balkans' ('da aktivno sudjeluje u izgradnji kulturnog centra budućeg Balkana').<sup>6</sup> In a defiant reaffirmation of the vitality of the movement, Micić placed a new emphasis on the role of collective artistic expression in the eventual unification of mankind and makes a clear declaration of *Zenit's* anti-institutional stance; he designated as enemies all those who struggled against the movement 'authoritatively, academically, and aristocratically' ('autoritativno, akademski, i aristokratski').<sup>7</sup>

The high point of the year came in April with the successful Zenitist Exhibition of New Art, which lasted ten days and assembled 110 original works of art from 12 countries. Artists represented included László Moholy-Nagy (Hungary); Wassily Kandinsky, Alexander Archipenko, and El Lissitzky (Russia); Herbert Behrens-Hangeler (Germany); Albert Gleizes and Robert Delaunay (France); and Jozef Peeters (Belgium). Micić's opening address, printed in issue 34, called for all artists to work together for the internationalization of culture and the creation of one spirit. The new art, he claimed, could not be local in character, in part due to the miraculous new discoveries in technology and science with which it was closely linked. Zenitism, as the synthesizer of variegated forms of artistic expression, was the motor driving a process which would flip European values on their head and violently propel the geographic and cultural margins to the centre: 'I maintain that so-called European scientists fooled us and the whole world, because without any basis whatsoever they called our peninsula Europe. Europe is none other than an extension of the Balkan Peninsula. It is our

<sup>6</sup> Ljubomir Micić, 'Film Jednog Književnog Pokreta i Jedne Duhovne Revolucije' (Film of One Literary Movement and One Spiritual Revolution), *Zenit*, 38 (Feb. 1926), unpaginated.

<sup>7</sup> Ljubomir Micić, Untitled, *Zenit*, 25 (Feb. 1924), unpaginated.

historical, cultural, and even political mission, to Balkanize Europe with all available means.<sup>8</sup>

These themes are further elaborated in 'Zenitozofija' (Zenitosophy), an essay which simultaneously celebrates the seemingly contrary values of romantic individualism and collective expression. Micić lauds the 'barbarogenius' as creating 'a new work and awakening a collective feeling in people' ('novo delo i budi kolektivna osećaj kod ljudi') and posits Zenitism as encompassing and totalizing into a single supra-natural body the arts of poetry, painting, sculpture, music, dance, drama, and film.<sup>9</sup> The essay betrays another key tension between the general and the particular that lies at the heart of Micić's Zenitist philosophy: avant-garde internationalism and Serbian nationalism. As elsewhere, he vaunts 'we Serbs' as embodying the barbaric Zenitist spirit and, in another reconfiguration of the imaginary geography of Europe, conflates Serbia with the region as a whole: 'Where there are hearts, there is sun. Where there are new poets, there is not even old bread. Thus it is in Great Serbia or Yugoslavia or the Kingdom of Slovenes, Croats, and Serbs, or however you wish to call it.'<sup>10</sup> Timothy O. Benson argues that the historical forces that shaped Central Europe complicated the relationship between politics and aesthetics in the region: 'As artists sought commonality through their internationalist ambitions, there were often local conditions on the political scene that could deflect the meaning of their artistic production—foremost among them being nationalism.'<sup>11</sup> Despite Micić and Poljanski's vigorous rejection of nationalism in the pages of *Zenit*, the occasional parallel drawn between the 'barbarogenius' as synthesizer of diverse artistic media, and the Serb people as synthesizer of South Slavic cultural differences, is difficult to ignore.

*Zenit's* fluctuating interpretation of the relationship between art and ideology is thrown into relief by its increasing flirtation with socialist ideas. Despite the fact that it was controversial to even mention Russia,<sup>12</sup> the journal printed essays by Leon Trotsky (on the relationship between nationalism and internationalism in

<sup>8</sup> 'Ja držim, da su nas i ceo svet prevarili tzv., evropski naučnici, pošto su naše poluostrvo bez ikakvih stvarnih osnova nazvali Evropa. Evropa nije ništa drugo nego produženje Balkanskog Poluostrva. Naša je istorijska kulturna pa i politička misija, da balkanizujemo Evropu, svim raspoloživim sredstvima.' Ljubomir Micić, 'Nova Umetnost' (New Art), *Zenit*, 34 (Nov. 1924), unpaginated.

<sup>9</sup> Ljubomir Micić, 'Zenitozofija', *Zenit*, 26–33 (Oct. 1924), unpaginated.

<sup>10</sup> 'Gde ima srca, tamo ima i sunca. Gde ima novih pesnika, tamo nema ni starog hleba. Tako je u velikoj Srbiji ili jugoslaviji ili shs—kako hoćete.' Ljubomir Micić, 'Zenitozofija', *Zenit*, ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Timothy O. Benson, 'Exchange and Transformation: The Internationalization of the Avant-Garde(s) in Central Europe', in Timothy O. Benson (ed.), *Central European Avant-Gardes: Exchange and Transformation, 1910–1930* (Cambridge, MA/Los Angeles: MIT Press; Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 2002), 49.

<sup>12</sup> A reality acknowledged by Micić in his untitled opening essay in *Zenit*, 25 (Feb. 1924), unpaginated.



Lenin's thought) and Maksim Gorky (on proletariat revolution),<sup>13</sup> and Micić himself cited art as the best means of socialization.<sup>14</sup> By contrast, Micić's essay 'Nova Umetnost' (New Art) argued: 'In paintings one should search for the painter's vitality and nothing else... Each painting is thus a nature unto itself, and one should not wander outside of its frame.'<sup>15</sup> He coins the term 'ARBOS-painting'—an acronym for 'paper, paint, painting'—to describe the anti-mimetic Zenitist style and lauds the work of Zagreb architect and visual artist Jo Klek (a pseudonym for Josip Seissel) as its highest instantiation. Whether or not it failed to achieve its own stated goal of synthesis, or to live up to its core value of unfettered creative expression, *Zenit* steadfastly refused to reduce its many contradictory stances to any single monologic dogma.

*Zenit's* layout mutated over the course of the year, from a small newsletter to a medium single-column format that reduced the visual juxtaposition of diverse materials in the same space. The diminished production values of these issues suggest that hard economic realities coexisted with *Zenit's* soaring rhetoric and sense of whimsy; the subheading on issue 34's title page declared that *Zenit* was the only means of solving the political crisis in the Balkans, while the next month's subheading was a sober injunction to readers to renew their subscriptions. Among the few works of visual art represented were reproductions of some of the originals featured at the April exhibition, plus architectural prototypes by Austrian modern architect Adolf Loos and German Expressionist architect Erich Mendelsohn. The dwindling amount of visual art in these text-heavy issues was compensated by theoretical essays that presented ideological analyses of visual material, including modern advertising and new construction techniques in architecture.<sup>16</sup> The regular section 'Makroskop' (Microscope) continued to link local readers to the wider world by keeping them abreast of local art events, tracking mentions of *Zenit* in other European avant-garde journals, and reviewing recent publications—and also served as a mouthpiece for Micić to settle a few personal scores. Of particular interest are items that reflected *Zenit's* consistent advocacy of artists' rights, both legal and political; Makroskop takes note of a controversy over whether Brecht cited or plagiarized Rimbaud in one of his plays, the release of left-wing German playwright Ernst Toller after five years in German prison for his involvement in the Bavarian

<sup>13</sup> Leon Trotsky, 'Lenin', *Zenit*, 26–33 (Oct. 1924), unpaginated; Maksim Gorky, 'Povodom Revolucije' (On the Occasion of the Revolution), in *Zenit*, 34 (Nov. 1924) and 35 (Dec. 1924), unpaginated.

<sup>14</sup> Ljubomir Micić, 'Treba uništiti antisocialnu umjetnost' (Anti-Social Art Must be Destroyed), *Zenit*, 35 (Dec. 1924), unpaginated.

<sup>15</sup> 'Na slikama treba isključivo da se traži samo slikarska vitalnost i ništa drugo... Dakle, svaka je zasebna priroda, i van njenog rama ne treba da se luta.' Ljubomir Micić, 'Nova Umetnost', *Zenit*, 35 (Dec. 1924), unpaginated.

<sup>16</sup> Architect P.T., 'Novi Sistem Građenja' (New System of Building), *Zenit*, 34 (Nov. 1924), unpaginated. A.V.S., 'Moderna Reklama' (Modern Advertising), *Zenit*, 34 (Nov. 1924), unpaginated.

Soviet Republic, and the publication of a controversial issue of a politically persecuted Bulgarian journal.<sup>17</sup>

After a lapse of seven months, Micić brought out two issues of *Zenit* in 1925 in a discernibly more acerbic tone. Micić's essay 'Hvala Ti Srbijo Lepa' (Thank You Beautiful Serbia) expresses profound disillusionment with Serbian society, decrying its tendency towards both nationalism and the mindless aping of European ways. He depicts the Serbian aristocracy as peasants grotesquely dressed up in French tuxedos and European top hats, and young poets hurling their verses into a cultural void.<sup>18</sup> His article 'Beograd Bez Arhitekture' (Belgrade without Architecture) lamented the total lack of modern architecture in the city, which he ascribed primarily to its lack of cultural and artistic sense and its failure to shake off its patriarchal traditions.<sup>19</sup> The feelings, apparently, were mutual. Micić did not enjoy the reception he had anticipated in Belgrade, as evinced in a rancorous survey of local literary, cultural, and political journals that singled out *Srpski Književni Glasnik* (Serbian Literary Gazette) and *Misao* (Thought) among others, for their anti-Zenitist stance and trifecta of evils: stupidity, envy, and ignorance.<sup>20</sup> This year marked not only the increasing marginalization of *Zenit* by the local cultural establishment but also the beginning of Micić's trouble with Serbian authorities. Issue 36 was confiscated by police for identifying Serbia with the Kingdom of Slovenes, Croats, and Serbs and for inciting hatred between states (although the court would later reverse the ban), and issue 37 published an excerpt from Micić's anti-European poem 'Airplane without a Motor' (in French) with a line that would lead to his prosecution a year later: 'I'm leading a Bolshevik revolution of the metacosmos' ('Je dirige la révolution bolchevique du métacosmos').<sup>21</sup>

If, it turned out, the Serbian people were more barbarian than genius and not the avatars of the New Man for which Micić had hoped, then he deployed an increasingly Marxist vocabulary to describe the relationship both between the Balkans and Europe and between young artists and authoritarian regimes within the Balkans. Issue 36 published a moving obituary (in both French and Serbian) of Bulgarian poet Geo Milev and reproduced his poem 'September', which had led to his political persecution (for 'glorifying the revolution') and perhaps to his assassination. In a passionate declaration of solidarity with *Zenit's* friends and comrades still suffering under the reactionary Tsankov government, Micić called on Europe to redeem its Christianity and humanism by intervening against such oppressive regimes. Micić's article 'Maroko i Opet za Spas Civilizacije: Imperijalizam je Biblija Evrope i Evropejaca' (Morocco and

<sup>17</sup> 'Makroskop', *Zenit*, 35 (Dec. 1924), unpaginated.

<sup>18</sup> Micić, 'Hvala Ti Srbijo Lepa', *Zenit*, 36 (Oct. 1925), unpaginated.

<sup>19</sup> Micić, 'Beograd Bez Arhitekture', *Zenit*, 37 (Nov.–Dec. 1925), unpaginated.

<sup>20</sup> Micić, 'Zenitizam i Književni Pikavci' (Zenitism and Literary Cigarette Stubs), *Zenit*, 37 (Nov.–Dec. 1925), unpaginated.

<sup>21</sup> Micić, 'Avion Sans Appareil', *Zenit*, 37 (Nov.–Dec. 1925), unpaginated.

Again for the Salvation of Civilization: Imperialism is the Bible of Europe and Europeans) depicted Serbs as the primary victims of World War I (as opposed to the Croats, who aligned themselves with the Austro-Hungarian Empire) and drew an analogy between the Serbian people and the anti-colonial Riff uprising in Morocco. In rhetoric that recalls his earlier declaration that 'only after the Zenitist movement can it be affirmed with certainty that this country is no one's cultural colony nor will it be' ('tek posle zenitističkog pokreta, može se sa sigurnošću tvrditi, da ova zemlja nije ničija kulturna kolonija, a niti hoće to da bude'),<sup>22</sup> he accused Croats of trying to turn the Balkans into another Morocco and the Europeans of advancing their own capitalist interests in the region in the name of saving 'civilization'.<sup>23</sup>

Fractures within the European avant-garde, as well as *Zenit's* complicated relationship to local nationalisms, found succinct expression in a compelling short report, 'Dijalog Marineti-Poljanski' (Dialogue Marinetti-Poljanski), filed by Poljanski from Paris. Poljanski sets the scene by describing a public lecture given by Filippo Marinetti in which the Italian's assertion that Futurism is the foundation of fascism, making fascism a revolutionary rather than reactionary movement, leads to a brawl between French and Italian members of the audience. Poljanski, so outraged that his French abandons him, is able to delve into the subject with Marinetti during a private meeting the following day. Poljanski asserts that fascism represents nothing more than Italian imperialism, while Marinetti defends fascist violence as justified when it is directed against Communists. Ultimately, the two are able to part on a note of reconciliation by identifying a common enemy: old European culture. In the midst of the conversation, however, an intriguing exchange takes place:

POLJANSKI: Futurists also have our sympathy, but Fascists are terrorizing honourable Croats in Istria and closing our schools.

MARINETTI: Are you a Croat or a Serb?

POLJANSKI: A Serb!

MARINETTI: (raises one eyebrow and his left eye glitters with wonderment)...

POLJANSKI: The proof that our sympathy for you is genuine is that we have printed your works... And what have you done for us? Have you dedicated some lines to us?

MARINETTI: It's very difficult because of your language, which no one understands...<sup>24</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Micić, 'Nova Umetnost', *Zenit*, 35 (Dec. 1924), unpaginated.

<sup>23</sup> Micić, 'Maroko i Opet za Spas Civilizacije: Imperijalizam je Biblija Evrope i Evropejaca', *Zenit*, 37 (Nov.-Dec. 1925), unpaginated.

<sup>24</sup> 'Poljanski: I futuristi uživaju naše simpatije, ali fašisti vrše teror nad čestitim Hrvatima u Istri i zatvaraju naše škole. Marineti: Da li ste Vi Srbin ili Hrvat? Poljanski: Serbo! Marineti (diže jednu obrvu a levo oko mu diskretno zasja od čuđenja)... Poljanski: Da su naše simpatije za Vas doista iskrene, dokaz je, što smo mi štampali Vaša dela... A što ste Vi za nas učinili? Pisali ste o nama sa nekoliko redova?' Branko Ve Poljanski, 'Dijalog Marineti-Poljanski', *Zenit*, 37 (Nov.-Dec. 1925), unpaginated.

Despite *Zenit's* rhetorical see-sawing between nationalism and socialism, Poljanski's ability to find common cause with Croats suggests a sophisticated awareness of the ways in which Europe suppressed all South Slavic peoples. Moreover, Marinetti's implication that Poljanski's concern for Croats is disingenuous reads like a textbook example of how easily outsiders can exploit the quarrels of Balkan nations to distract them from more fundamental issues.

In the interstices of these ideological polemics, *Zenit* continued throughout the year to offer its readers a window on European artistic movements and a smattering of quality primary texts. Highlights included a theoretical essay by Kandinsky on abstract art,<sup>25</sup> an original musical score by Croatian composer Josip Štolcer-Slavenski,<sup>26</sup> and a report with photographs on the opening of Hannes Meyer's Co-op Theater in Geneva.<sup>27</sup> Overall, however, these issues with a preponderance of poetry and essays produced by Micić and a small circle of regular contributors, showed less commitment to diversity of content, included fewer languages, and little visual art or formal experimentation.

Issue 38 kicked off 1926 with a commemoration of the five-year anniversary of the journal, with notes of congratulations pouring in from friends and collaborators around Europe: including Marinetti; Tadeusz Peiper, founder of Polish journal *Zwrotnica*; Theo van Doesburg, founder of Dutch journal *De Stijl* (from Paris); Belgian artist Jozef Peeters, founder of *De Driehoek*; Slovenian Expressionist artist Veno Pilon; Dutch architect Cornelis van Eesteren; German poet Kurt Leibmann; French painter Albert Gleizes; Spanish Dadaist Guillermo de Torre; and German philosopher and poet Rudolf Pannwitz. This important issue stands as testament to the relationships with members of European avant-garde movements that Micić had so persistently cultivated despite significant political, economic, geographic, and linguistic barriers. The abundant international goodwill towards *Zenit* manifest in these pages contrasted starkly with the lack of local support, pointing to the cultural vacuum in which Micić was operating—a situation that he describes with typical flair: 'All continents and all nations on earth, in which literacy is somewhat greater than our university professors and antiquarian *Sprski Književni Glasnik*—know about the activities of ZENIT and ZENITISM. All nations, that is, except—the Kingdom of Slovenes, Croats, and Serbs.'<sup>28</sup>

<sup>25</sup> Wassily Kandinsky, 'Abstrakna Umjetnost' (Abstract Art), *Zenit*, 36 (Oct. 1925)—and 37 (Nov.-Dec. 1925), unpaginated.

<sup>26</sup> Josip Štolcer-Slavenski, 'Zagorski tamburaši' (Zagor Tambourine Players), *Zenit*, 36 (Oct. 1925), unpaginated.

<sup>27</sup> 'Pozorište Ko-op', *Zenit*, 37 (Nov.-Dec. 1925), unpaginated.

<sup>28</sup> 'Svi kontinenti i sve zemaljske države, u kojima je pismenost nešto više od pismenosti naših universitetskih profesora i antikvarnog "Srpskog književnog Glasnika"—znaju za aktivnost ZENITA I ZENITIZMA. To su, gotovo sve države, sem—Kraljevine SHS.' Ljubomir Micić, *Zenit*, 38 (Feb. 1926), unpaginated.

Micić chronicled his struggle for recognition in a year-by-year retrospective of the birth and development of Zenitism, titled 'Film Jednog Književnog Pokreta i Jedne Duhovne Revolucije' (Film of One Literary Movement and One Spiritual Revolution), a tale of 'a modest poetic worker... disappointed with the emptiness and mud of the contemporary literary generation' ('skroman pesnički radnik... razočaran prazninom i kaljužom savremene književne generacije') motivated by the desire to 'cross the frame of regional limitations' (preći okvir regionalne ograničenosti).<sup>29</sup> It is no coincidence that Micić, an inveterate self-mythologizer, cast his story as a screenplay for the cinema, a medium consistently celebrated by the journal for its ideological properties and synthetic nature. In his own epic film, Micić reads the movement's achievements against its many challenges. In the former column: an influence on other journals; the creation of a large leftist umbrella; the staging of events like public lectures, Zenitist evenings, the Zenitist Exhibition of New Art, and Zenitist theatre; the promotion of Russian literature; and travel throughout Europe publicizing the movement. In the latter: war; Croatian nationalism; the venom of ex-communicated former Zenitists; the enmity of mainstream publications in Zagreb and Belgrade; political persecution and even physical attacks on his person; lack of institutional support; and insuperable provincialism. The final tally: even in the face of an impending court case against Micić for offending public morals, *Zenit* triumphantly carries on with the publication of its jubilee edition.

The remaining five issues published in 1926 evinced an increasing sense of embattlement. Micić's 'Za Slobodu Misli, Za Slobodu Stvaranja' (For Freedom of Thought, For Freedom of Creation) reproduced his defence of his poem 'Airplane without a Motor' given before the Belgrade tribunal in April 1926. Micić turned the trial into an opportunity to render an ardent defence of creative freedom, distinguishing between words and acts and maintaining that a poet cannot be judged by the law.<sup>30</sup> At other moments, however, Micić interpreted the local conditions hindering his artistic expression as a personal vendetta against himself and the movement he founded. Thus, for example, his 'Legend of the "Dead Movement" or Between Zenitism and Anti-Zenitism' was a long diatribe against the many enemies that he perceived thronged against him—individuals, journals, and institutions—whom he called out by name.<sup>31</sup> The last few issues reproduced a dwindling number of original works of poetry, prose, and visual arts by international collaborators, with more space being devoted to reprints of older material composed by Micić and Poljanski. The journal—now a small, folded, and stapled sheet—boasted fewer aesthetic flourishes and advertisements, suggesting straitened circumstances. Despite the thickening

<sup>29</sup> Ljubomir Micić, 'Film Jednog Književnog Pokreta i Jedne Duhovne Revolucije', *Zenit*, 38 (Feb. 1926), unpaginated.

<sup>30</sup> Micić, 'Za Slobodu Misli, Za Slobodu Stvaranja', *Zenit*, 41 (May 1926), unpaginated.

<sup>31</sup> Micić, 'Legenda o "Mrtvom Pokretu" ili između Zenitizma i Antizenitizma; Ko nije za Zenitizam taj je protiv Zenitizma', *Zenit*, 43 (Dec. 1926), unpaginated.

shroud of isolation and paranoia (probably not wholly unjustified) that cloaked the last few issues of *Zenit*, they still managed to offer provocative material, such as the article by poet Ilya Ehrenberg 'Ruska Književnost Posle Revolucije' (Russian Literature after the Revolution) and an essay by Bauhaus founder Walter Gropius explaining the principles of functionalism and anti-ornamentalism in international architecture.<sup>32</sup> *Zenit's* continued international presence is attested to by a variety of short reports: the journal's participation in the 1926 International Exhibit of Revolutionary Art of the West in Moscow; a Zenitist manifesto read by Poljanski in Russian at a lecture hosted by Ehrenberg in Paris; and Micić's meeting with French communist novelist Henri Barbusse in Belgrade.<sup>33</sup>

While Micić asserted the autonomous status of art and sovereignty of the creative individual throughout *Zenit*, the final issues of the journal also addressed the ideology of mass culture. In a reprint of his 1922 essay 'Država i Kinofilm' (State and Kinofilm), Poljanski lauded the ability of film to disseminate the ideological underpinnings of the state and called for the creation of a state-run film factory and cinemas in every town.<sup>34</sup> In typically contradictory fashion, the same issue published Micić's essay 'O Štampi—O Sportu—O Književnosti' (On the Press—On Sports—On Literature), which decried the press as an evil institution beholden to nationalist and capitalist ideology.<sup>35</sup> The growing rapprochement of Zenitism and Marxism, suggested by works expressing sympathy with the proletariat in strident language—such as Micić's poem 'Made in England' and prose work 'Vrabac Pod Šeširom' (Sparrow under a Hat)<sup>36</sup> culminated in the essay that effectively ended the movement: 'Zenitizam Kroz Prizmu Marksizma' (Zenitism through the Prism of Marxism), written by Micić under the pseudonym 'Dr M. Rasinov' in the journal's last issue. Here Micić tracks Zenitism's consistent affinities with Marxism and announces the final synthesis of two apparently opposite ideologies. In a departure from the notion of poetry as emerging 'only in the beyond-sense sphere of space' ('tek u vanumnoj sferi prostora')<sup>37</sup> he reinterprets Zenitism as the inevitable product of historical forces and posits an equivalence between barbarians and the international proletariat. Earlier that year, Micić had challenged 'Dame Europe' with militaristic fervour: 'We throw the bombs of our poems at your monstrous European skies. With the canons of our new ideas we aim at the zenith of the silken

<sup>32</sup> Ilya Ehrenberg, 'Ruska Književnost Posle Revolucije', *Zenit*, 39 (Mar. 1926)—*Zenit*, 40 (Apr. 1926), unpaginated; Walter Gropius, 'Internacionalna Arhitektura', *Zenit*, 40 (Apr. 1926), unpaginated.

<sup>33</sup> Makroskop, *Zenit*, 40 (Apr. 1926), unpaginated; Makroskop, *Zenit*, 39 (Mar. 1926), n.p.; Micić, 'Moj Susret Sa Anri Barbisom', *Zenit*, 41 (May 1926), unpaginated.

<sup>34</sup> Branko Ve Poljanski, 'Država i Kinofilm', *Zenit*, 41 (May 1926), unpaginated.

<sup>35</sup> Micić, 'O Štampi—O Sportu—O Književnosti', *Zenit*, 41 (May 1926), unpaginated.

<sup>36</sup> Both in *Zenit*, 41 (July 1926), 13. 'Made in England' had its English title printed in Latin letters followed by Serbian original text printed in Cyrillic.

<sup>37</sup> Micić, 'Zenitozofija', *Zenit*, 26–33 (Oct. 1924), unpaginated.

bourgeoisie.<sup>38</sup> Just nine months later, in a swan song of sorts, he foresees a time when Zenitists can lay down their arms:

Zenitism is an art of struggle, just as our epoch is one of struggle. Zenitism will be valued as the great art of our era, but with the arrival of a classless society will come a calmer art. An art of harmony—because the future will be a time of harmony. That future art will arrive across the Zenitist bridge, which will separate it from pre-war art—and in its veins it will carry Zenitist juices.<sup>39</sup>

The authenticity of Micić's conversion to Marxism is debatable. Esther Levinger, for example, counters Irina Subotić's thesis that Zenitism fully embraced Russian Constructivism, arguing that *Zenit's* socialist strain should be understood within the framework of its essentially eclectic nature: 'Micić did not advocate a return to a lost paradise nor did he nurture fantasies of ideal cities to come. The charge of the poet was both narrower and higher, and Micić assigned him the role of the eternal agitator, of the Barbarian who would forever criticize and subvert the existing order.'<sup>40</sup> Regardless of the ingenuousness of his ideological convictions, his essay on Zenitism and Marxism resulted in *Zenit* being banned from further publication in Belgrade and in Micić's flight to Paris, where he served as correspondent for the Ljubljana journal *Tank*. No further issues of *Zenit* were published.

### Dadaism in Zagreb, 1922: *Dada-Jok*, *Dada-Tank*, *Dada Jazz*

Dadaism was originally introduced to the Yugoslavian public through Micić's *Zenit* and, for a brief time, formed an element of the Zenitists' eclectic avant-garde ideology. Already in issue 2 (March 1921), in a notice entitled 'Dada—Dadaizam', however, a 'Zenitist' had offered his rather dismissive view of the movement: 'Dada is already a fashion in the past tense. It's fun, but not a religion, a conviction, and a new art' ('Dada je danas moda, passe-temps. I zabava, ali nije religija, ubedenje i nova umetnost').<sup>41</sup> Yet

<sup>38</sup> 'Mi bacamo bombe naših pesama u tvoja nakazna evropska nebesa. Mi topovima naših novih ideja gađamo u zenit svilene buržoazije.' Micić, 'Manifest: Barbarima Duha i Misli Na Svim Kontinentima' (Manifesto: For Barbarians of Spirit and Thought on All Continents), *Zenit*, 38 (Feb. 1926), unpaginated.

<sup>39</sup> 'Zenitizam je umetnost borbe, kao što je i naša epoha—epoha borbe. Zenitizam će važiti kao velika epohalna umetnost ali će se po dolasku bezklasnog društva pojaviti i staloženija umetnost—umetnost harmonije—jer budućnost će biti vreme harmonije. Ta buduća umetnost doći će preko zenitističkog mosta, koji će je deliti od predratne umetnosti—a u svojim žilama nosiće i zenitističke sokove.' Dr M. Rasinov [Ljubomir Micić], 'Zenitizam Kroz Prizmu Marksizma', *Zenit*, 43 (Dec. 1926), unpaginated.

<sup>40</sup> Esther Levinger, 'Ljubomir Micić and the Zenitist Utopia', in Benson (ed.), *Central European Avant-Gardes*, 275.

<sup>41</sup> 'Dada—Dadaizam', *Zenit*, 2 (Mar. 1921), 17.

the following issue (April 1921) also carried an article by Dragan Aleksić from Prague, along with two 'Dada Songs', in which he expressed a much more affirmative attitude to Dadaism: 'Dada is the cry for youth. | Dada is primitivism and aspiration. Future. |...| Everything is Dada!'<sup>42</sup> Up to and including issue 13 (April 1922), Aleksić's reviews and poetic texts appeared in *Zenit* regularly. However, in May 1922, there was an abrupt break: the last words in issue 14, under an editorial heading, announced the ex-communication of Aleksić from the *Zenit* circle, along with the artist and writer Mihailo S. Petrov, who also featured often in the early *Zenit*.

The same issue announced a new periodical—which would appear in a single issue—edited by Branko Ve Poljanski, entitled *Dada-Jok* (Dada No). Although it is arguable that self-mockery is itself organically a part of Dadaism (Tristan Tzara, for instance, consistently emphasized the self-alienating and self-destroying aspect of Dada), the 'no' in the title was meant to be Dadaism itself: perhaps a bit of fun, but certainly not the sort of art that Poljanski and his brother could advocate. Through his skilful, reflexive parody of Dadaist conventions, Poljanski sought to expose Dada's limits as an artistic and spiritual current, containing its rival influence and keeping the field of avant-garde endeavour under the Zenitist banner. He wished to carry out 'a sanitary fight against intellectual tuberculosis' ('Sanitarna borba protiv intelektualnoj tuberkulozi'), as Poljanski put it in his programmatic text in the journal.<sup>43</sup> *Dada-Jok's* eight-page foldout sheet was littered with arbitrarily bold-faced letters or letters capitalized within words, photographs of and manifesto-style texts by Poljanski and Micić, and collage images such as Poljanski's parodic 'Antidada Construction' (Fig. 47.2). Poljanski's manifesto 'Dada Antidada?' acknowledges the ambiguity of *Dada-Jok*—Is it Dada or not? Is this 'just a negation' or is Dada itself self-negation?—which he accentuates by trumpeting his brother's status as a great anti-Dadaist Dada deity:

The great master of all Dadaists  
first great Antidada  
Contradada  
Zenitist  
Contrapseudozenitist  
GOD OF DADAISTS  
LJUBOMIR MICIĆ<sup>44</sup>

<sup>42</sup> 'DADA je krič za MLADOŠĆU | DADA primitivizam i težnja. Budućnost. |...| Sve je DADA', in Dragan Aleksić, 'Dadaizam', *Zenit*, 3 (Apr. 1921), 6.

<sup>43</sup> Branko Ve Poljanski, *Dada Jok* (1922), unpaginated.

<sup>44</sup> 'I veliki meštar sviju dadaista | prvi veliki Antidada | Kontradada | Zenitista | Kontrapseudozenitista | BOG DADAISTA | LJUBOMIR MICIĆ.' Virgil Poljanski [Branko Ve Poljanski], 'Dada Antidada?', *Dada-Jok* (May 1922), unpaginated.



Fig. 47.2 Cover of *Dada-Jok* (May 1922), designed by Branko Ve Poljanski

Following Poljanski's pre-emptive strike from the side of the Zenitists, however, Aleksić published his own single-issue Dada pamphlets in turn, in the summer of 1922: *Dada-Tank* (two slightly different printings in June 1922) and *Dada Jazz* (September 1922). *Dada-Tank* was a large-scale, eight-page folded sheet, with a typographically bold dispersion of cover information in interrupted, alternating horizontal and vertical rows of letters (Fig. 47.3). Inside, the two columns were divided by black lines, and programmatic texts by Aleksić touching upon various arts (music, drama, architecture) alternated with his own poems, poetic texts by other contributors including Tristan Tzara and Kurt Schwitters, picture-poems, and graphics by Mihailo S. Petrov. The fourth page is covered entirely by a picture-text by Aleksić printed in irregular vertical columns up and down the page; the other picture poem was a translation of a Hungarian-language poem by Erwin



Fig. 47.3 Cover of *Dada-Tank* (June 1922), designed by Dragan Aleksić

Enders, 'Grčka Vatra' (Greek Fire), which had originally appeared in *Ma* in the May 1922 issue in Vienna. Interestingly, this same issue of *Ma* had reproduced from the cover of *Zenit* issue II (February 1922) the maquette drawing of Tatlin's 'Monument to the Third International', while earlier in *Zenit* issue 9, Dragan Aleksić himself had contributed an article on Tatlin.<sup>45</sup> Besides adumbrating the international emergence of Constructivism, Tatlin was also a hero of the Dadaists, as demonstrated by Raoul Hausmann's 1920 photomontage *Tatlin at Home* and George Grosz and John Heartfield's use of a quote by Konstantin Umanski about Tatlin on a placard at the First International Dada Fair. These interconnections point to the lively multi-sided exchange of information, texts, and images about the whole sphere of international avant-garde activity among 'activist' publications in Central Europe, as well as to the close interpenetration of 'destructive' Dadaist and constructive artistic tendencies and the impetus such exchanges gave to rapid shifts of tendencies within local avant-gardes.

Although *Dada Jazz* (Fig. 47.4) has been characterized as a mere footnote to *Dada-Tank* (and there are indeed clear continuities between the two), *Dada Jazz* in fact marked a different sort of project than *Dada-Tank*. Its cover designated it generically to be a 'Dada anthology', analogous to Richard Huelsenbeck's *Dada Almanach*, which Aleksić had translated in full and excerpted in *Dada-Tank*. On

<sup>45</sup> Dragan Aleksić, 'Tatlin. HP/s + Čovek' (Tatlin: HPs + Man), *Zenit*, 9 (Nov. 1921), 8–9.



Fig. 47.4 Cover of *Dada Jazz* (Sept. 1922), designed by Dragan Aleksić

the second page, in contrast, the earlier publication was characterized as ‘The dadaistic review, dada-star revue’ (‘il revio dadaistico, dadaisticka revue’).<sup>46</sup> *Dada Jazz* reprinted Aleksić’s 1921 essay ‘Dadaism’ from *Zenit*, subtly reminding people of his priority over Micić in this field. It included a major text by Tristan Tzara, ‘Manifesto of Mr Aa the Antiphilosopher’, as well as Tzara’s short verse ‘Colonial Syllogism’, alongside a poem by Aleksić. On the centrefold two pages was printed the typographic picture poem ‘Smaknu’ (Execution), a translation into Serbo-Croatian of a Hungarian poem by Adám Csont that had originally appeared, like Erwin Enders’s ‘Greek Fire’, in the May 1922 issue of the Vienna-based Hungarian exile publication *Ma*.

### Hungarian voices in the Vojvodina: *Út*

Under the Austro-Hungarian dual monarchy, the Vojvodina, with its two major cities Novi Sad and Subotica, was under Hungarian domination. Its moderniza-

<sup>46</sup> *Dada Jazz* (Sept. 1922), 2.

tion after the turn of the twentieth century was in many respects typical of other provincial cities in Greater Hungary, which absorbed influences from Budapest and from abroad. This included the development of modernist tendencies in the arts, ranging from Art Nouveau in architecture and design, Impressionism and other stylistic currents in the visual arts, and Symbolism in literature. The presence of these earlier modernist foundations and the existence in the area of significant Hungarian and Jewish minorities, reinforced by the intelligentsia’s flight across the borders to escape the counter-revolutionary repression in Hungary after 1919, also led to the development of Hungarian-language avant-gardes in traditionally Hungarian cities of Serbia, Czechoslovakia, and Romania. One such avant-garde circle in the newly constituted Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes formed around the journal *Út* (The Path), edited by Zoltán Csuka and Zoltán Ember, which released its first number in Novi Sad in April 1922 (Fig. 47.5). The following month this new branch of the Hungarian avant-garde was noticed in the pages of *Ma*, one of its major inspirations, which was being published in exile in Vienna from 1920. The *Út* group, in turn, recognized influences from both linguistic communities in the Vojvodina, acknowledging both the Hungarian activists and Yugoslavian avant-gardism organized around the journals *Zenit* and *Putevi* (Roads) as their peers. Its cultural programme and aesthetic tendency were closely derivative of the *Ma* group, oriented towards a pacifist radical humanism that would somehow, in

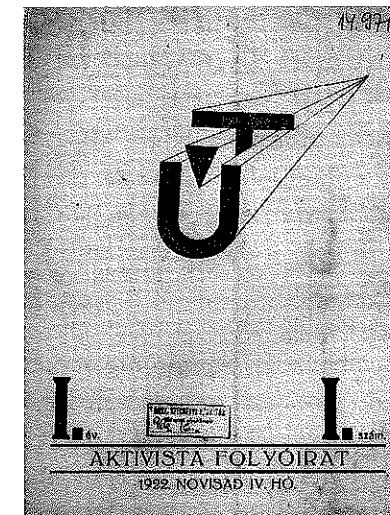


Fig. 47.5 Cover of *Út*, 1:1 (Apr. 1922), designed by Zoltán Csuka and Zoltán Ember

the words of a poem by Ember, unite the views of the Buddha, Christ, Marx, and Einstein in a new 'X', a redeeming humanism. Although most of their contributions were from their Hungarian core group, a graphic by Mihailo S. Petrov appeared on the second issue in May 1922, which also printed work in Serbian by Dragan Aleksić, Milan Dedinac (an editor of the proto-Surrealist journal *Putevi* and later an important figure in Belgrade Surrealism), and Žarko Vasiljević; the April 1923 issue included works by Boško Tokin, Ljubomir Micić (a Zenitist manifesto translated into Hungarian), and Žarko Vasiljević, alongside contributions of the editorial circle and distinguished Hungarians abroad such as the Constructivist art critic Ernő Kállai (an essay entitled 'Construction—Composition') and the Bauhaus-trained architect Molnár Farkas. The August 1924 issue represented a brief turn towards a more explicitly political stance, with a front cover declaring 'Háborút a háború ellen' (War against War) and enumerating the names of 'martyrs of socialism's belief in peace' ('a szocialista társadalom békehitének vértanúit'): international socialist heroes such as Jean Jaurès, Rosa Luxemburg, Karl Liebknecht, Giacomo Matteotti (murdered by fascists in 1924), and the Hungarian socialist journalists Béla Somogyi and Béla Bacsó (murdered and dumped in the Danube in 1920 after they published an article against Miklos Horthy's White Terror). In general, however, *Út* avoided the more directly agitational tone of the Hungarian emigrant Proletkult journals such as *Egység* and *Ék* that had broken with Kassák's avant-garde radical humanism (see Chapter 48). *Út* appeared at erratic intervals over the course of its existence, but survived until 1925.

#### Avant-Garde in Slovenia: from *Svetokret* to *Tank*

In January 1921, just before his brother Ljubomir Micić initiated *Zenit*, Branko Ve Poljanski published one issue of the journal *Svetokret* (World-Turning) in Ljubljana, Slovenia. Subtitled *List Za Ekspediciju Na Sevečni Pol Čovekovog Duha* (Journal of the Expedition to the North Pole of the Human Spirit), this short chapbook-like publication sported a cover design (Fig. 47.6) with the publication information presented in a spare, abstract calligramme with the place name Ljubljana printed upside down, perhaps to symbolize an overturning of the normal order in the provincial capital of the Slovenes. Inside, it included predominantly prose texts, along with two verse texts, distributed under four bold-faced headings: 'Misleni Labirint' (Abstract Labyrinth), 'Projekcije' (Projections), 'Z Bičem u Hramu' (On Being in Church), and 'Mnogokoješta' (All Sorts of Things).

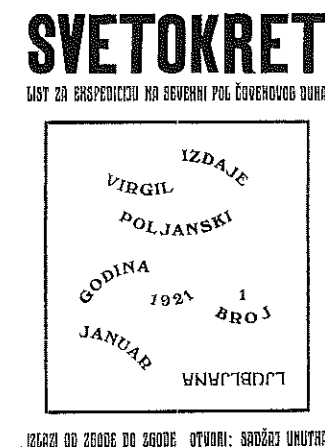


Fig. 47.6 Cover of *Svetokret* (Jan. 1921), designed by Branko Ve Poljanski

The opening text was an Expressionist dithyramb entitled 'Evo me!' (Here I Am!)—'dedicated to all psychiatrists of all continents of planet Earth' ('Posvećeno svim psihiatrima svih kontinentata planeta zemlje').<sup>47</sup> The speaker testifies to the pain that makes his days a torture, and his alienation from others, who know how to laugh at those who are suffering: 'I am screaming, but they laugh (not knowing how to laugh while others scream means condemning ourselves to torture)' ('ja sam vriskao, a oni—su se smejali (neznajući da smejati se, dok drugi u mukama vrišti znači osuditi sebe na muke)'), until at the end of several paragraphs beginning with the repeated refrain of 'O yes! Here I am!' ('Da! Evo me!'), the text concludes with a final scream: 'Aaaa a a!'<sup>48</sup> The text 'Manifesto', in contrast to the preceding Expressionist protest, screams out a new world orientation in positively ecstatic tones: 'Long live man's free spirit! Glory to the new man! May it be a glorious revolution of the spirit in October, when the old forms fall like dry pale leaves!'<sup>49</sup> It celebrates the International, the Soviets, and the heroes of the revolution, Lenin and Trotsky, concluding on a typical avant-garde note equating artistic and political revolution:

<sup>47</sup> Branko Ve Poljanski, 'Evo me!', *Svetokret* (Jan. 1921), 3–4.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Branko Ve Poljanski, 'Manifest', *Svetokret* (Jan. 1921), 4–5, trans. Maja Starčević, in Timothy O. Benson and Éva Forgács (eds), *Between Worlds: A Sourcebook of Central European Avant-Gardes, 1910–1930* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002), 292.

Long live the October Revolution of the spirit!  
 Long live the new art!  
 Long live the new man!<sup>50</sup>

Under the heading 'Projections', Poljanski included two verse texts, both in a fragmented, Expressionist style indebted to the fractured syntax of one-word lines in exemplary German works such as August Stramm's 'Angriff' (Attack):

Scarves  
 Wave  
 Flutter  
 Chatter  
 Winds clatter.  
 Your laughter blows  
 Grasp hold  
 Scuffle force  
 Kiss  
 Surrounded  
 Sink down  
 Nothingness.<sup>51</sup>

Similarly, the opening lines of Poljanski's 'Čežnja' (Longing) proceed with short, stark, isolated images:

Path  
 Cold  
 Winter  
 Branches of  
 Naked Night  
 White Silence  
 In the dark and frozen soul  
 Pain<sup>52</sup>

Or even more baldly, the concluding verse of 'Na tračnicama' (On the Rails):

<sup>50</sup> Benson and Forgács, *Between Worlds*, 293.

<sup>51</sup> August Stramm, 'Attack', trans. Will Stone and Anthony Vivis, in *Music While Drowning: German Expressionist Poems*, ed. David Miller and Stephen Watts (London: Tate Publishing, 2003), 42.

<sup>52</sup> 'Aleja | Studen | Zima | Grane crne | Gole | Noć | Tišina bela | U duši crn i smrznut/Bol.' Branko Ve Poljanski, 'Čežnja', *Svetokret* (Jan. 1921), 8.

Man  
 That is a worm  
 Worm.<sup>53</sup>

The heading entitled 'Z Bičem u Hramu' (On Being In Church) includes three reviews, the most extended and notable of which treats the Slovenian 'November Movement' in the arts, including the poet Anton Podbevšek and the musician Marij Kogoj, later celebrated in the journal *Tank* for his 1927 opera *Black Masks*. The back cover, finally, bearing the heading 'Mnogokoješta' (All Sorts of Things) clearly suggests that Poljanski intended further issues of *Svetokret*, which nevertheless did not appear. He announced various of his own contributions to the next issue, including fragments of his novel *Ludnica* (Madhouse), his play *Očaj* (Despair), and his article 'Teater novoga doba' (Theatre of the New Age). Even more significantly, however, there was an announcement of a new artistic review to appear the following month in Zagreb: his brother's journal *Zenit*.

Other modernist and avant-garde journals paralleled or closely followed the publication of *Svetokret*, including *Trije labodje* (Three Swans; 1920–1), *Rdeči pilot* (Red Pilot; 1922), and *Novi oder* (New Stage; 1924). *Rdeči pilot* is especially worthy of notice for its thematic conjoining of the typically avant-gardistic 'spiritual revolution of youth' at home and the political revolution in the Soviet Union. The first issue, released on 15 June 1922, began by reporting news of the deadly famine in the USSR and announced that any net profits from the issue would be directed to those in need in the proletarian state. The leading contributors to the journal included Anton Podbevšek, Štefanija Ravnika, Tone Seliškar, and Angelo Cerkvnik. In the second and last issue, it published a crucial document of Yugoslavian avant-garde aesthetics, Podbevšek's manifesto 'Politična umetnost' (Political Art), which Dubravka Djurić has characterized as 'one of the first avant-garde manifestos in Slovenia'.<sup>54</sup>

In 1927, theatre director Ferdo Delak, earlier the editor of *Novi oder* (New Stage), initiated the Ljubljana-based journal *Tank*, which is one of the landmark publications of the Central and Southern European avant-gardes of the 1920s. Intended to pull together the major figures of the Slovenian avant-garde and project a worthy regional successor to the suppressed *Zenit*, *Tank* itself also proved short-lived, appearing in only two relatively extensive issues (nos 1½ and 1½–3), after which it too was banned by the authorities. Although programmatic

<sup>53</sup> 'Čovek | To je crv | Crv.' Branko Ve Poljanski, 'Na tračnicama', *Svetokret* (Jan. 1921), 7.

<sup>54</sup> Dubravka Djurić, 'Radical Poetic Practices: Concrete and Visual Poetry in the Avant-Garde and Neo-Avant-Garde', in Dubravka Djurić and Miško Šuvaković, *Impossible Histories: Historical Avant-Gardes, Neo-Avant-Gardes, and Post-Avant-Gardes in Yugoslavia, 1918–1991* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003), 78.



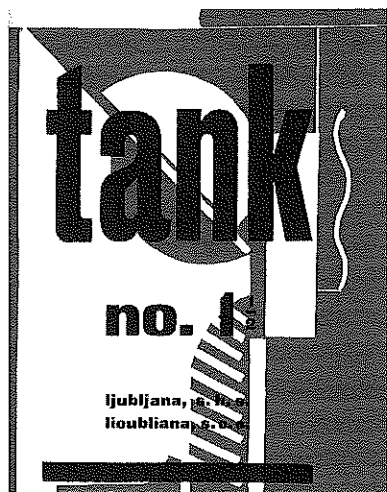


Fig. 47.7 Cover of *Tank*, 1½ (1927), designed by Ferdo Delak and Avgust Černigoj

cally expressing allegiance to a version of Constructivism represented especially by the painters Avgust Černigoj and Edvard Stepančič, *Tank* was eclectic in its appropriation of avant-garde tendencies from German Expressionism and Dadaism to Zenitism to Bauhaus and Constructivism. In several aspects of format and orientation—such as its publication of texts in several original languages and even its use of particular rubrics such as ‘Makroskop’ for announcements—it followed the model of *Zenit*.

Beneath a Constructivist style cover, the title page of *Tank* no. ‘1½’ used Bauhaus-inspired lower case typography and geometrical Constructivist design utilizing black rectangular bars and figuratively disposed type to define an abstract patterning of the page space (Fig. 47.7). At the top appeared the contributors’ names, including Avgust Černigoj, ‘Liubomir Mitsitch’, the Soviet cultural minister Anatoly Lunacharsky, Tristan Tzara, *Der Sturm* editor Herwarth Walden, the young Trieste-born Futurist Giorgio Carmelich, the pacifist novelist Henri Barbusse, and Expressionist poet Albert Ehrenstein. In the middle range of the page, the date of its appearance (6 May) was printed in Slovene, French, Serbo-Croatian, and German. In the bottom range, in larger lettering, was an explanation of the whimsical numbering, playfully alluding to the concentration of cultural innovation that was typical of avant-garde ideology: ‘1½ tank = account of 100 years’ (‘1½ tank = likvido por 100 jaroj’). The opening page, however, already indicated the eclectic variability of the journal’s aesthetic, by reproducing Veno Pilon’s primitivistic nude, viewed from behind, and two lines in German by the Hungarian activist poet and editor of the journal *Ma*, ‘Ludwig’ (Lajos) Kassák: ‘Here you have the heroes of destruction | and here you have the fanatics of construction’ (‘da habt ihr die helden der vernichtung | und da habt ihr die fanatiker des

aufbauses’).<sup>55</sup> As this suggests, both ‘destruction’, the subjective explosions of Expressionism and the mocking nihilism of Dada, and ‘construction’, the clarity of geometrical forms and abstraction, would find their place within the covers of *Tank*.

The first issue began with facing page versions in the date of its appearance (6 May) was printed in Slovene, French, Serbo-Croatian, and German of Ferdo (Ferdinand) Delak’s manifesto addressed to the young pioneers. It was immediately followed by a linoleum cut of a modernist architectural construction by Černigoj, and another manifesto, ‘moj pozdrav!’ ‘saluto!’ (My Greeting), in different Slovene and Italian versions, signed by ‘Comrade Professor Avgust Černigoj, Constructivist’. The Slovene version sets out the credo of the new art:

long live the new art } = construction!  
 ” ” ” } = synthesis!  
 ” ” ” } = collectivism!

[...]

the new art is not individual.

” ” ” luxurious.

” ” ” traditional.

the new art is the collective expression of a new generation.

” ” ” the beauty of a new religion.

” ” ” the beauty a new justice.

art is not advertising.

” ” exhibition.

” ” a church.

our art is the spirit of creation!<sup>56</sup>

It concludes with praise for the review *Tank*, for the new art, and for young Ljubljana. The Italian ‘version’, however, offers positions that stand in tension with the Slovene text, implying that Černigoj was consciously negotiating different artistic identities across national and linguistic borders. Moreover, it addressed Italian artists aggressively, with a different message from that addressed to Slovenians and other Yugoslavians:

the new being I = collective harmony of individuals + idea =  
 form which contributes to essence, since every element =

<sup>55</sup> *Tank*, 1½ (1927), 3.

<sup>56</sup> Živela nova umetnost = ziađjoča! | » » » = sintetična! | » » » = kolektivna! | (...) | nova umetnost ni individualna. | » » » luksusna. | » » » tradicijonalna. | nova umetnost je kolektivni izraz nove generacije. | » » » lepota nove religije. | » » » lepota pravičnosti. | ne umetnost reklame | » » razstave | » » cerkve. | naša umetnost je stvarstvo duha! *Tank* 1½ (1927), 7.

function, every function = movement, new form of life and creation.  
 [...] the review *tank* intends to illustrate vividly the individuality of international art and to reproduce articles in all languages in order at least to give the feeling that the movement can exist in all the various nations  
 [...] inviting all the Italian avant-gardists to learn about and collaborate in this active construction of the new spirit, leaving aside completely petty personal or other speculation, so that no one can accuse anyone along the way of being passively unaware of the constructivist activism of the art of the Slavic avant-garde group.<sup>57</sup>

Taken together, Delak's and Černigoj's opening manifestos indicate the complex politics of language that *Tank* would deploy, in which the presence of multiple languages and single texts appearing in multilingual variants was not merely an incidental feature, but rather an integral compositional element of the journal and an emotionally charged performance of ethnocultural politics. Particularly important is the deep mimetic rivalry of the Yugoslavian avant-garde—evident in both *Zenit* and *Tank*—with Italian Futurism, especially once Futurism aligned with fascism in its post-World War I phase, which was pursuing an aggressive territorial and ethnonationalist consolidation in the Istrian and Dalmatian border regions with the new Yugoslavia, preparatory to their full-scale occupation with the outbreak of World War II. The Zenitists and their Slovenian successors differentiated themselves from their national rivals with exemplary Futurist tones and tactics. Simply to publish a contestatory manifesto in Slovenian, however, would have only confirmed their marginal status, since few Italians would have been able to read it—a symptom of the very problem, rather than an answer to it. In Černigoj's bilingual and variant manifesto, in contrast, the opacity of Slovenian to the Italian Futurist reader is cast as a diagnostic sign of the latter's 'passeist' provinciality, especially as the manifesto's typography renders evident some general sense of its tone and content, which is typical of an *international* idiom of the avant-garde. Černigoj's Italian text,

<sup>57</sup> 'il nuovo essere io = collettiva armonia di individui + idea = | forma quale contributo ed essenza, perciò ogni elemento = | funzione, ogni funzione = movimento, nuova forma di vita e creazione. | (...) | la rivista *tank* intende ad illustrare vivamente le individualità dell'arte internazionale | e riprodurre articoli in tutte le lingue per | dare almeno la sensazione che | il movimento può esistere in tutte le varie nazioni. | (...) | invitando tutti gli avanguardisti italiani di informare e collaborare | a questa costruzione attiva dello spirito nuovo, dimenticando | completamente piccola speculazione personale od altro, affinché | non si possa occasionalmente rinfacciare a nessuno la passività informativa in merito all'attivismo costruttivista dell'arte del gruppo d'avanguardia slavo.' *Tank*, 1½ (1927), 8.

in a sense, throws the illegible text in the rival's face and, while not offering a translation to the uneducated, underscores for the Italian reader how very ignorant he is. Beyond this specific example of Italian and Slovenian, the use of other languages in the journal, such as French, German, Spanish, and English at once served to demonstrate the cultural capital of the individual principals, their proficiency in the realm of European culture, and established an implicit equal sign between 'minor', subaltern languages such as Slovene and Serbo-Croatian and 'major' languages of imperial or ex-imperial powers such as Germany, Austria, France, Great Britain, and Spain.

The continuity of *Tank* with *Zenit* was signalled not only in format and orientation, but also by the presence in both issues of texts by Ljubomir Micić and Branko Ve Poljanski from Paris (and in French), including Micić's 'rien de personne ou mon autobiographie' (No One at All, or My Autobiography) and his poem 'à paris balade balcanique' (Balkan Tour in Paris) as well as two instalments in French translation from Poljanski's book *Crveni petaol/Le coq rouge* (The Red Rooster), which a note tells us was the last book he would write in Serbian. But along with the more regional associations with Zenitism, *Tank* also demonstrated its connections with both international Expressionist currents, as represented especially by two essays by the *Sturm* gallerist and editor Herwarth Walden; Dadaism, through the inclusion of sound-poems and other works by Kurt Schwitters; and constructive tendencies in the arts, including Bauhaus and international Constructivism.

One of the most important contributions of *Tank*, finally, from an art-historical perspective, lies with its preservation of photographic and textual documentation of the Trieste Constructivist exhibition of 1927, which otherwise disappeared leaving few other traces, along other work by the Trieste Constructivist circle around Černigoj, which included Edvard Stepančič, Zorko Lah, Jože Vlah, Giorgio Carmelich, Ivan Poljak, and Thea Černigoj. In fact, this activity formed the confluence point of both Zenitism and the Bauhaus in *Tank*. On the one hand, as Irina Subotić points out, the group sent work to Micić in France, for display in his short-lived gallery in Meudon.<sup>58</sup> On the other hand, issue 1½–3 of *Tank* included, alongside the photographs of the 1927 exhibition, a letter from Willi Nürnberg of the Dessau Bauhaus reporting in German about the Trieste Constructivist group. Černigoj's Constructivist artistic orientation and organizational leadership was thus presented by *Tank* as the legitimate continuation and further development of Micić's Slavic avant-gardism, and a worthy contender on the international scene as well.

<sup>58</sup> Irina Subotić, 'Avant-Garde Tendencies in Yugoslavia', *Art Journal*, 49:1 (1990), 26.