



GLOBALIZING EAST EUROPEAN ART HISTORIES

Past and Present

EDITED BY

BEÁTA HOCK AND ANU ALLAS

ROUTLEDGE RESEARCH IN ART HISTORY



Globalizing East European Art Histories

This edited collection reassesses East-Central European art by offering transnational perspectives on its regional or national histories, while also inserting the region into contemporary discussions of global issues. Both in popular imagination and, to some degree, scholarly literature, East-Central Europe is persistently imagined as a hermetically isolated cultural landscape. This book restores the diverse ways in which East-Central European art has always been entangled with actors and institutions in the wider world. The contributors engage with empirically anchored and theoretically argued case studies from historical periods representing notable junctures of globalization: the early modern period, the age of Empires, the time of socialist rule and the global Cold War, and the most recent decades of postsocialism understood as a global condition.

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Cover Image

Gyula Várnai, *Peace on Earth!* 2017. Entrance of the Hungarian Pavilion at the Venice Biennale. Photo by Gyula Várnai. Courtesy of the artist.

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Edited by
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Acknowledgments

Galeria Labirynt, the venue hosting the Lublin conference, had had plans to publish the conference proceedings. Strongly believing, however, that papers presented at the event were of extraordinary importance from the perspective of inscribing east-central Europe into a transnational history of the arts, I informally urged the convener Piotr Piotrowski straight off to develop the proceedings into an academic essay collection and approach an international publisher with the material. After Piotrowski's premature death just a couple of months after the Lublin conference, an initial editorial team set out to undertake the interrupted plan in honor of Piotrowski. Waldemar Tatarczuk, director of Galeria Labirynt, started to collect texts presented at the conference or additional manuscripts still commissioned by Piotrowski, and invited Katarzyna Murawska-Muthesius and myself to give shape to the collection and bring the publication project to fruition. Their invaluable germinal efforts are to be thanked first. Due to her various other engagements, Katarzyna regretfully had to withdraw from the editorial work early on, and Anu Allas joined in to make the editorial duo complete again. We are grateful for colleagues across the globe and disciplinary fields or historical periods, and to Katie Jakobiec, Angela Dimitrakaki, and Anthony Gardner, who read some of the manuscripts and gave their expert comments on topics that lay outside our scholarly competence. We must acknowledge the support of the Leibniz Institute for the History and Culture of Eastern Europe (GWZO) in Leipzig for providing funds for copyediting. Our words of appreciation also go to Will Potter and Amy Bryzgel, whose sharp eyes and attention to detail have much improved the texts.

The Introduction is illustrated by artist Mariusz Tarkawian's drawings. Mariusz, like a forensic draughtsman, sketched portraits of we conference participants as we were lecturing and discussing in the auditorium of Galeria Labirynt back in October 2014. Our deep thanks go to him finally, for making his great drawings available to visually enhance our book.

Introduction—Globalizing East European Art Histories

The Legacy of Piotr Piotrowski and a Conference

Beáta Hock

There are a number of concepts, key words, and catchphrases that most researchers and students of East European art history are likely to come across at some point during their inquiries. These include “horizontal art history,” “close other(s),” and “provincializing the centers”—phrases that the Polish art historian Piotr Piotrowski (1952–2015) introduced into this field. Having been one of the few eastern European art historians whose work became well-known and widely read by international audiences, Piotrowski became the “leading voice” of what has gradually revealed itself to be a first wave of postsocialist art history writing in the region. His views have been taken up, refined, and further developed by a host of peers and younger colleagues.

The present volume grew out of the conference “East European Art seen from Global Perspectives: Past and Present,” the last professional meeting that Piotrowski convened before his untimely death in May 2015. Galeria Labirynt in the eastern Polish city of Lublin hosted the event between October 24 and 27, 2014. On this occasion Piotrowski, again, led the way. Although the contemplation of Eastern European art history from a transnational or global perspective (rather than from the more limited national–local or dominant Western ones) was certainly a strong point on the conference agenda, this proposition was not entirely novel, as comparable undertakings had already been underway in the preceding years in various pockets of regional or international academia.¹ However, the opening-up of this spatially broadened view onto a longer time span was pioneering—also insofar as it brought together researchers working on a variety of time periods of East European art history. Piotrowski’s own work focused on the postwar and postsocialist periods, as his two recent cross-regional survey books, *In the Shadow of Yalta: Art and the Avant-garde in Eastern Europe, 1945–1989* (2009, originally published in Polish in 2005, translated into Croatian in 2011) and *Art and Democracy in Post-communist Europe* (2012, in Polish 2010) indicate. It follows from the chronological focus of Piotrowski’s projects that his closest adherents were colleagues similarly engaged with the contemporary era. In Lublin, this familiar circle had the opportunity to see their analytical concerns reflected in research done on earlier periods of art. The resulting encounter was not only exceptionally fruitful because it gave versatility and new dynamism to an already well-formed “global” network of eastern European art historians, curators, and critics, but because it brought a breakthrough toward proposing new and locally-anchored theoretical perspectives. This is not to say that the recent art historical or art critical writing in east-central Europe had been generally short of theory. On the contrary, art professionals from the region—especially those

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engaged in the global circuits of the contemporary art world—appear to have been preoccupied with the deluge of international (read: Western) discourses and theoretical perspectives that suddenly became easily accessible after 1989 as the Iron Curtain came down. These approaches seemed to supply, for a good two or three decades, stimulating conceptual frameworks for rethinking art production in the region as well as for a new understanding and criticism of the operation of dominant canons and master narratives. Applying them to the local context might have possessed, in the majority of cases, clear explanatory power, while sharing in an international conceptual language also definitely helped intellectuals from the region to (re)connect with a global community—but it did not necessarily or self-evidently lead to sovereign knowledge production. The portentous word “sovereign” stands for approaches and methodologies that consciously work toward a differentiated paradigm; that invent and implement context-bound concepts and terminologies in order to fully explore phenomena issuing from a shared historical experience and current local concerns. The above-mentioned terms coined or repurposed for “local use” by Piotr Piotrowski point in this direction.²

On the occasion of the Lublin conference, Piotrowski gave an interview (2015) in which he briefly explained how his concept of “horizontal art history” is intertwined with the methodological practice of “provincializing the centers,”³ and how these were to come together in the next project he was planning, which he provisionally referred to as “globalizing Eastern Europe.” Horizontal art history is a methodological

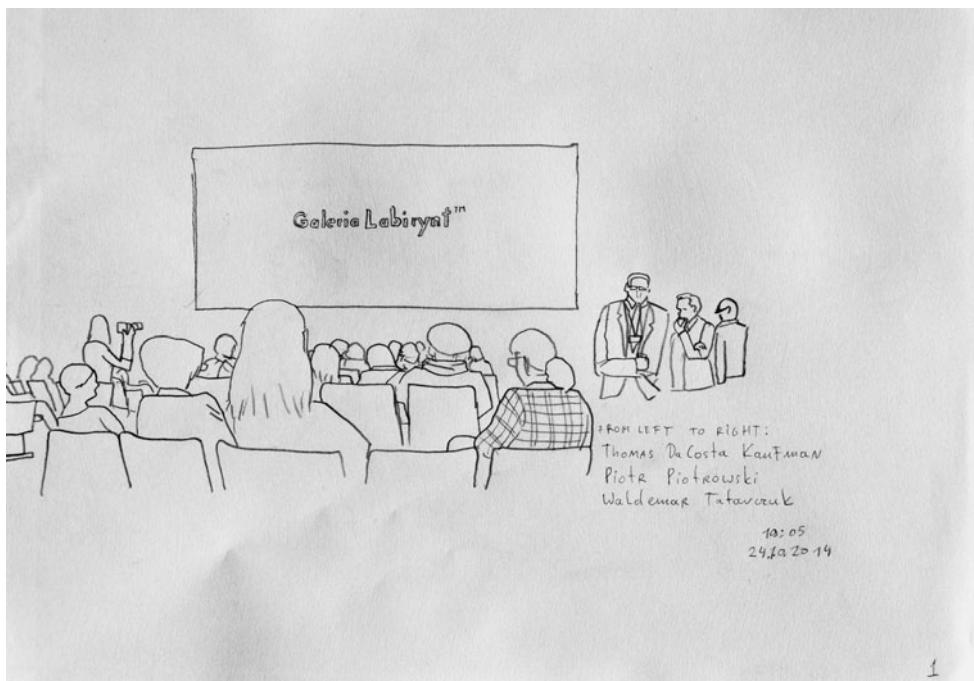


Figure I.1 Mariusz Tarkawian, drawings from the conference “East European Art seen from Global Perspectives: Past and Present” in Galeria Labirynt, Lublin, on October 24–27, 2014. Courtesy of the artist

device intended to counteract a fundamental assumption of art history writing: that the cultural experiences of the Western world and their description can serve as a universal model, providing paths for “peripheries” to follow.⁴ (Above all, this is here understood as the canon of selected masterpieces and a historical narrative built upon the succession of artistic styles.) The call for “provincializing the center” discloses the fact that cultural metropolises within a hierarchically-defined art geography may possess political, economic, and epistemic power, but they, too, are rooted in specific contexts, very much like any other location. Experiences and patterns observed there are particular as well and, hence, should have no stronger claim for general validity as processes unfolding at the margins.⁵

The conference “East European Art seen from Global Perspectives” responded to Piotrowski’s call—both in terms of the actual Call for Papers and his broader intellectual enterprise—by bringing together twenty-two speakers from various parts of the world working on art and architectural history, contemporary art, and broader cultural processes in east-central Europe. Nine articles in this volume are based on the conference papers, while another four were later commissioned to devote attention to topics that had repeatedly surfaced in the conference discussions, or were relevant in relation to its wider intentions but not directly addressed in the presentations. Piotrowski’s take on a global perspective entails two interrelated approaches. One concentrates on the connections and interactions (be they direct or indirect, actual or imaginary) of eastern European art and artists with cultural phenomena and producers around the world. The other foregrounds a transnational approach as it seeks out and contemplates side-by-side developments and debates in Eastern European art history with similar processes elsewhere. The essays that came to shape the contents of the present volume engage with both aspects; however, the latter approach is more dominant and reflects the firm intention to put the methodological proposition of writing horizontal art history into practice. In our experience, authors—and Piotrowski is not necessarily an exception here—frequently run into similar difficulties when it comes to the processing of their “empirical material.” Although the declared goal may well be to construct a revisionist art history and disrupt the universalizing Western perspective, the actual interpretative or curatorial work nevertheless overwhelmingly falls back on the concepts and underlying assumptions of this same metanarrative.⁶ This implicit dependence on existing theoretical configurations may be partly due to eastern Europe’s intricate position between the western and non-western worlds (also in terms of their geographical closeness), which Piotrowski (2014) captured with the mental image of the “close others.”⁷ “Close others” are different from “real Others” in that they are almost, yet not quite, like the Self; their understanding of the world and cultural models are basically similar to, yet slightly different from, those of the Self (in this case, the West). This sort of conceptualization of the intertwined histories of the Western world and its “Others” was taken up by researchers of a transatlantic axis of art and politics in the postwar–postcolonial era, who advanced horizontal connections and critical transregionality across the Global South, with Eastern Europe as a counter-model to prevalent hierarchical relations and as a model of cultural and social solidarity.⁸

Beside his academic service as Professor Ordinarius and Chair of Modern Art History at his home institution, the Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznań, and fellowships and visiting professorships at numerous universities and research institutes around the world (including, among others: Bard College, New York; Hebrew

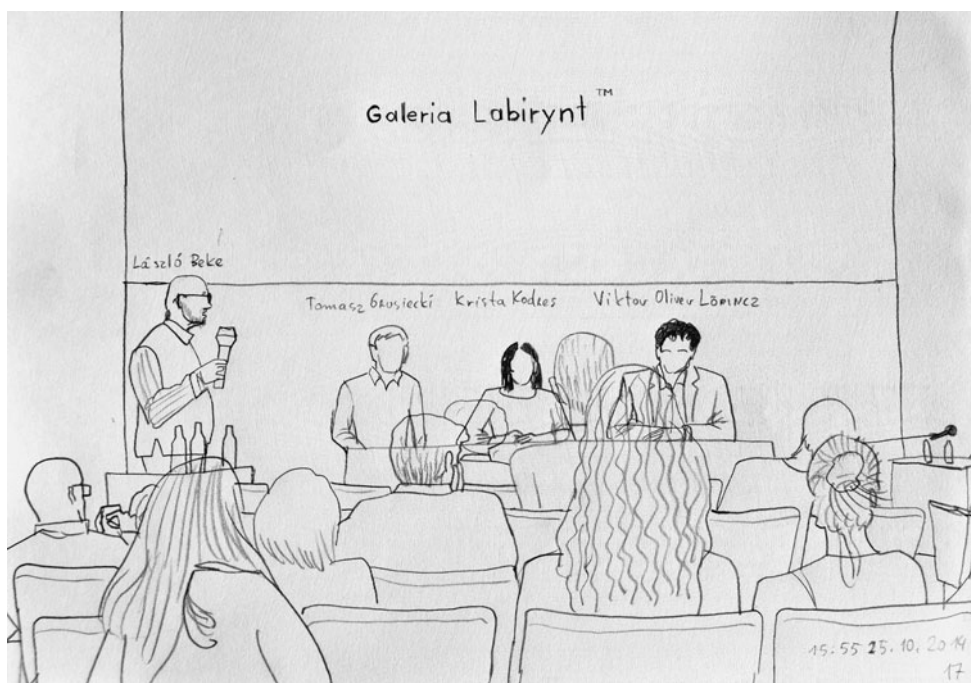


Figure 1.2 Mariusz Tarkawian, drawings from the conference “East European Art seen from Global Perspectives: Past and Present” in Galeria Labirynt, Lublin, on October 24–27, 2014. Courtesy of the artist

University, Jerusalem; Humboldt University, Berlin; the Clark Art Institute, Williamstown, and the Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles), Piotr Piotrowski was also involved in various curatorial and other knowledge projects (most importantly, ERSTE Foundation’s various initiatives to study East-Central European art and cultural history or the Former West project).⁹ Between 2009 and 2010, he was the director of the National Museum in Warsaw, a terrain where he set out to implement his idea of a “critical museum.” In *From Museum Critique to the Critical Museum*, a volume he co-edited with Katarzyna Murawska-Muthesius (2015), leading museum professionals and academics set out to examine this concept, drawing together case studies of engaged art institutions from different parts of the world. Mobilizing its collections, spaces, and authority, the critical museum would be actively engaged in current political, social, cultural debates rather than being a passive reproducer and conservator of already-existing knowledge. The last section of our book is devoted to critical curatorial and artistic engagement in recognition of Piotrowski’s impact on work in the exhibition room as well as in academia.

Global Art History and Transnational Perspectives on Cultural History

In the past decade, scholarly involvement with cross-cultural approaches, global and transnational perspectives on production, and the reception and display of art has been

on the rise. Since the 2000s, Global Art History and World Art Studies have been buzzwords promising to renew art history by dispelling the discipline's persistent Eurocentrism and Western biases. Consequently, much of the related study has prioritized extra-European areas while important differences between Europe's western and eastern halves tended to be overlooked. As a result, Eastern Europe remains nearly as invisible in this new and ever more mainstream scholarship as it has always been in traditional master narratives on the continent's art history: the region is only represented sporadically and largely incoherently in volumes implementing the new methodology and conceptual framework.

Whereas many would contest that there is a distinctly "Eastern European" (cultural) identity or self-perception (e.g., Forgács 2003, 93) and would, instead, argue that eastern European artists and intellectuals have always oriented themselves toward and identified with the core of the continent, some two decades after the political regime change of 1989–1991 there seems to have emerged a mutual interest in neighboring cultures across the region.¹⁰ In the cultural field, this interest has been manifest in the form of research and publication collaborations, as well as curatorial projects and educational programs. By definition, these enterprises—monographs, edited volumes, exhibitions, newly introduced university courses—now engage east-central Europe, and their focus is often set on the region alone. This sort of regional emphasis certainly exemplifies one step away from nation-centered narratives but, for the purposes of (art) history writing in a transnational or global paradigm, the exclusive regional angle still frequently blurs the area's connectedness to the wider world. "Methodological nationalism" or the "national container" mentality versus an awareness of global, supra- or transnational contexts are issues to which we will return after a couple of paragraphs.

The majority of publications that do engage east-central Europe as an artistic region embroiled in a globalizing world focus on particular historical periods. In recent years and in the course of the past couple of decades, the socialist and postsocialist periods have received increased scholarly attention, while modernism and the avant-garde were the subject of monographs and collective studies even before this more recent boom. To the best of our knowledge, hardly any English-language scholarly publications have traced these entanglements in the *longue durée*.¹¹ However, a growing number of studies or publication series within German academia address the transnational connectedness of east-central Europe both historically and in the modern and contemporary periods. Given that some of the contributors to this volume are doubly anchored within these two academic cultures, we hope to cross-fertilize current discussions with insights from both scholarly communities.

There seem to be two recurrent reference points within this dynamically growing body of literature—including the essays collected in the present book—that may serve as important starting points to unpack what the gain of a transnational and global perspective on East European art (history) can be—and how one can meaningfully operate with the very concept of East European art, art history, or Eastern Europe itself. Larry Wolff's academic bestseller (1994) gave an account of how Eastern Europe was *invented* at a particular point in history. In the mind of Enlightenment philosophes and travellers, the previously operational "North"/"South" civilizational division of the continent came to be replaced by the construct of "East" *versus* "West." Whereas the earlier division contrasted the southern centers of lucid Renaissance culture with the perceived barbarism and boorishness of northwestern Europe,

from this point on “Eastern Europe” came to be understood as a counterpoint to the advanced core. Situated within the same spatio-temporal matrix as “Western Europe” (for not as clearly distant in space or time as the East or Africa), yet backward relative to it, western Europe’s importance and civilized reason were thought to be unequivocally admired from this location. Wolff cites numerous pieces of contemporary writing to demonstrate how this discourse was taken up and reproduced. The American historian developed this argument at a time (1994) in which another important difference was attached to the region, cementing its attributed civilizational deficit. The freshly dissolved Eastern Bloc was, and to some extent still is, widely imagined as a hermetically isolated cultural landscape, having always lacked access to cultural goods and flows from beyond its regional borders. In our experience, this Cold War-era hangover also retrospectively affects eastern Europe’s historical image. These mental constructs are all the more pervasive as they occupy central spaces in eastern European subjects’ self-understanding. However, being what they are—constructs—they can be effectively dismantled, we believe, by adopting a transnational perspective to the history of the region. Indeed, the aim of this volume is to restore the diverse ways in which eastern European art scenes have always already been entangled with actors and institutions in a wider world.

A Transnational Approach to Art History—What’s New?

The now-standard definitions of the relatively new study field of global and transnational history emphasize the fact that societies do not develop in an unhindered free space at any given time. External links also profoundly shape the national political, cultural, and economic landscape, and therefore key processes in a nation’s history are circulations, transfers, global mobilities, and supranational tendencies. While this claim is reasonably plausible, the so-called “national container” mentality and the long-practiced “methodological nationalism” have naturalized a considerable context-blindness inasmuch as researchers downplayed the relevance of national history in cross-border interactions. Instead, they took the national as an analytical and explanatory framework, and also frequently conceived of this “national” entity as a unified, homogenous realm.

Art history, at least its versions before the “social,” “interdisciplinary,” “spatial,” and other turns from the 1970s onwards, was often regarded a conservative discipline with a descriptive, rather than critical, methodology. From the perspective of the “global turn” in the humanities, however, art history appears to be, by definition, a pioneer of sorts. The exploration of intercultural connections, the circulation of images, styles, and aesthetics, is an axiom of art historical research and has long belonged to the list of conventional disciplinary tasks. If this is true, how is an explicitly transnational approach different from the default art historical methodology, and what can this approach offer to practitioners? This is a crucial question if we want—and this is one of the main aims of this book—to integrate art historical topics into the relevant established debates of the broader historical scholarship.¹² Going one step further, we wish to propose the art and cultural history of east-central Europe as a viable and productive subject field for knowledge production in the transnational and global paradigm.

Most importantly, the disciplinary methodology of art history as we have known it operates with a set of key concepts that establish and perpetuate pre-determined

ideas of cultural hierarchy. Art historical “development” is captured in consecutive period styles, the study of which traces primacy, origins, influences, and diffusions. The dominant way in which this temporally-defined scheme deals with space is subjecting variations across geographical locations to normative comparisons. The thus-observed alterity led art historians to account for developmental routes *other* than those witnessed in the few select(ed) centers as “belated,” “peripheral,” “backward,” or witnessing “derailed” development. These qualifiers clearly echo the intellectual artifice described by Larry Wolff. Moreover, even the local disciplinary tradition has invariably examined East-Central European art and artists as they relate or are indebted to a Western art historical and artistic canon. Rather than perpetuating this vertical model, the authors contributing to this volume take inspiration from theoretical debates introduced by postcolonial criticism and endorse the concepts of “multiple modernities,” “entangled histories”—or, paying a tribute to Piotr Piotrowski, “horizontal art history”—and, most recently, “minor transnationalism.” Also, in these investigations a global paradigm does not necessarily have to take the entire globe as the framework of analysis: rather, this sort of historiography encourages us to straddle traditional regional boundaries and propose innovative comparisons or case studies of movements and forces that cut across national boundaries.¹³

In and Beyond Eastern Europe

It is a recurrent worry whenever countries are lumped together under the regional signifier of “east-central” or “eastern” Europe that a coherent region is being posited by this designation. We do not bring together countries and nations in this book on the basis of their assumed cultural similarity, specificity, or “otherness” from known models—hence, we also have little interest in operating with otherwise popular thought patterns (like “regional specificity” or “Eastern European collective identity”). Rather, we see the region as an imbricated and heterogeneous field that nevertheless shares historical characteristics that do warrant the use of the term and concept “East-Central Europe” or “Eastern Europe.” The common denominator that we might wish to propose is a historically shared geopolitical and epistemic position, intimately linked to the region’s location at the margins of the European core and the concomitant exposure to “epistemic violence,” which we now aspire to turn into an “epistemic privilege.” Epistemic violence is Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s shorthand for harm inflicted against subjects through discourse (1999, 229–234); for example, in the writings of global “theoretical elites” on other areas of the world, which often include distortions, stereotyping, and generalizing as well as the representation of others as lacking agency or being captive to their circumstances.¹⁴ Spivak also defines “sanctioned ignorance” as the knowledge base of people trained in the Euro-American tradition who are essentially exempt from knowing about other traditions or cultures or histories. Meanwhile, the reverse is not true (post-colonial and other non-core scholars and thinkers are still expected to have read their Shakespeare or visited the Louvre or Museum of Modern Art (MoMA)), and the unilateral flow of information both proves and seals the power that lies with European traditions. The margin as a valuable, even privileged, epistemic location was also proposed within the orbit of feminist and post-colonial critical literature (Bar On 1993, Harding 1993); this tenet both accommodates the effects of social and historical

factors on the “knower” (in our case, cultural agents) and posits that knowledge produced from marginalized social locations are better capable of correcting falsehoods and revealing previously-suppressed truths.

The self-permitted relative instability in defining our object of study also trickles down to decisions about the spelling of the geographical locator “eastern” and “east-central” in the region’s name. We did not request that our authors conform to a unified usage throughout the volume because opting for this or that variation might itself be a conceptual question, whether or not explicitly addressed in the individual chapters. When, however, authors did not insist on a different treatment of the place-name, we follow the proposition of one of our contributors—Tomasz Grusiecki—to keep these qualifiers in lower case when they stand for mere geographical descriptors rather than cultural indexes; in the latter case, the place-name is capitalized. Similarly, and for reasons stated above, we refuse the notion that east-central Europe is a homogenous cultural unit or a locale beyond the known or knowable, which would always have to be introduced to general audiences from scratch and in its entirety. We consciously strove not to comprehensively represent the actual geographical territory or tackle the reception of eastern European art as such elsewhere. In our view, these are operations that regard eastern Europe as a separate and separable unit or tend to reify its supposed alterity.

Therefore, rather than try to achieve a balanced representation of all countries within the broad geographical area, we opted for showcasing relevant research from



Figure 1.3 Mariusz Tarkawian, drawings from the conference “East European Art seen from Global Perspectives: Past and Present” in Galeria Labirynt, Lublin, on October 24–27, 2014. Courtesy of the artist

the perspective of globalization, transnational, and transcultural studies. Since our major interest is to probe the methodological gains of a transnational paradigm when it comes to the exploration of the entanglement of east-central European societies and individual actors in transcultural encounters, there is no single topic around which these encounters should necessarily circle. The selected essays trace how east-central Europe or its constituent parts fared under changing conditions of cultural opening and internationalism on the one hand, or national(ist) preoccupations and relative isolation, on the other. The studies cluster around historical moments representing notable junctures of globalization: the early modern period; the age of Empires and their dissolution; and the time of socialist rule and the global Cold War; as well as the most recent decades of postsocialism understood as a global condition.

Junctures of Globalization and the Transnationalization of East-Central Europe

In the popular usage of the term, globalization is understood as a recent phenomenon and is used to refer to the period starting in the mid-1980s. Cultural geographers, however, submit that in fact the early modern era should be regarded as that of a “first globalization” (e.g., Gunn 2003). It is hard to claim cultural goods produced in the east-central European territories before nation-states were established as exclusively belonging to one specific nationality or ethnic group: throughout these centuries, masters from the European centers worked alongside local artisans and workers (Kaufmann 1995, 15). This medley, together with all the cultural exchange that contributed to it, attests to the kind of cultural cohesion east-central Europe once possessed: one that erodes rather than forecasts more recent visions of national identity and purity. Economic historians, when they talk about the beginnings of worldwide economic integration, point to later dates (Goodwin 2010), identifying the late eighteenth and, even more definitively, the late nineteenth and the early twentieth century as the moments of the “first globalization” (Bordo, Eichengreen, and Irwin 1999). This was a time when ever-larger geographical areas and ever-larger numbers of individuals were drawn into transborder entanglements. Many of these enterprises—the building of cross-frontier railway networks, the shaping of the international postal system, the beginnings of mass media, the introduction of passports, and the unification of measurements, etc.—necessitated regulations that could not be undertaken by a single state. This need gave rise to a series of international organizations and congresses. The emerging *international* was, however, predominantly built on political entities: states, empires, kingdoms, in a period when sovereignty or the status of a fully-fledged nation-state was only the prerogative of a handful of European nations. Most of today’s east-central European nation-states were still missing from the map of Europe at this point: the territory was ruled by three multi-ethnic empires. Hence, the question arises as to what degree and in what ways the would-be nations of eastern Europe could participate and position themselves in this early global arena, in the absence of self-government?

Historians usually consider the two decades between Europe’s two World Wars as an era of deglobalization. However, when non-economic flows are also considered, this tendency is less absolute (Saunier 2009, 458): the almost unprecedented movement of émigré or exiled scientists, artists, intellectuals, and political activists point in a

different direction. Within the domain of art, the excitement over cosmopolitanism meant a conscious disapproval of a nationalist stance, and since worldwide international orientation was already seen as a basic feature of modernity, the development of international structures (organizations, collaborations, networks) was actively sought (Berg 2013, 26, 31). This is perhaps the period in which the contribution of eastern European artists came closest to the mainstream of European art history, as is gradually becoming widely recognized (see, e.g., Joyeux-Prunell 2015; Sandquist 2006). On account of this relative acclaim and the circumstance that one of the editors is currently engaged in compiling an anthology of texts exploring modernism and the avant-garde in central Europe (Hock, Kemp-Welch, and Owen, forthcoming), this volume only tangentially addresses these developments.

Following a brief period of independence in the interwar years, the region's recently-established nation-states were subordinated to the Soviet "Empire" in the postwar world and had, once again, only limited sovereignty. At the same time, rearranged political alliances during the global Cold War ushered in new cultural dependencies and thereby new directions in the cross-border flow of intellectual and artistic currents. Overshadowed by the limitations put on cultural traffic with the West (the traditionally-favored source of creative inspiration), the widely international, and inter-continental, character and reach of cultural exchanges among the "brotherly states" of the socialist world have been long underrated, if not altogether ignored. The routes of this non-Western-focused globalization have started to be recuperated in research projects of the past five to ten years.¹⁵

On the surface of it, postsocialism, practically a synonym for postcommunism, is a technical term denoting the historical-political phase that former communist countries, located in parts of Europe and Asia, have been experiencing since the collapse of the Soviet Bloc in 1989–1991. But the term is being increasingly understood not as an internal affair only affecting ex-Eastern Bloc states but rather as a global condition defining our post-Cold War present fraught with asymmetries of power. Some historians studying east-central Europe within the contemporary world would argue that, through the EU-accession, the nation-states of the region operate in an arena that is predominantly governed by larger forces and in which their own political agency continues to be limited (Buden 2009; Hadler and Middell 2010). Artistic and curatorial projects demonstrate a heightened sensibility toward exploring and critiquing the global distribution of power, or the lack thereof.

The theoretical and methodologically-oriented chapters in Part I, "Challenging the National Container: From the Transnational to the Planetary," explore the historical statuses east-central European art has assumed in a web of transnational, global, or planetary relations over centuries. *Tomasz Grusiecki's* opening chapter reconceptualizes cultural transfer between Poland–Lithuania and the Ottoman Empire against the backdrop of recent transcultural approaches in art history. Grusiecki's main aim is to challenge the peripheral status of Polish–Lithuanian art in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century historical accounts and to counteract the conventional framing of Poland–Lithuania as an imitative cultural milieu. Rather than overemphasizing originary moments and linear causalities (the privileged concepts of art historiography's paradigm of core and peripheries), the author foregrounds the practice of adaptation as belonging to a greater infrastructure of cultural entanglements. Meanwhile, he also gives new importance to random connections, fault lines, and unexpected mutations. Grusiecki's revisionist history is fully aware that "space

matters”: in other words, that “*where* things happen is critical to knowing *how* and *why* they happen” (Warf and Arias 2009, 1)—or indeed, to knowing simply *that* they had happened. A speaker at the thirty-second CIHA conference confidently claimed that Rembrandt, on account of his fascination with foreign cultures “through costumes, miniatures, weapons and shells, which were assimilated as an essential component of his own art,” belonged to the “avant-garde” of his time (Scallen 2009, 265). It turns out, however, that Polish princes—Grusiecki’s protagonists—collected the same sort of exotic objects as Rembrandt (Grusiecki 2012, 6, 25), but their activities and collections went unnoticed in the historiography of Western art and in international academic discourse. These as well as several seminal issues broached in this opening chapter will also be tackled in later chapters of the book. To these belong the questions of whether the center-periphery model is indeed the most suitable to capture eastern Europe’s geocultural location, of how to tackle nativeness composed of material forms that originated abroad, and of whether or not the impact of such art on the better-known artistic centers is a valid measure of its relevance. We are inclined to suggest that researching any historical subject from a marginal perspective is in and of itself important, rather than only acknowledging these developments insofar as they may have also shaped Western thought.

While arguing that a transnational perspective has more capacity to reconfigure east-central European cultural history into a key subject of transnational studies, *Beáta Hock* takes issue with the tradition of writing nationally compartmentalized art histories. Although transnational history became an academic buzzword in the past decade, it has often been deployed carelessly. Much of the related literature actually depicts relations between two (or occasionally more) well-defined entities (countries or other political-administrative entities), or uncritically gather all occurrences of border-crossing under the umbrella term of transnational history. In the author’s view, the adjective *inter*-national aptly describes these phenomena, whereas *trans*-national should be better reserved for encounters and transfers, in which individuals or other actors have recourse to a wide pool of resources—institutional models, patterns of thinking and practice—that become accessible in an increasingly globalizing world. Hock proposes two distinct methodological operations to inscribe nineteenth-century east-central European art into a globalized history. At the same time, a variety of brief case studies highlight some always-already transnational features of the region, where the interconnection between the ethnicities, linguistics, and religious communities of three multinational empires were infrequently constituted along the lines of nationality alone.

The chapters by Kristóf Nagy and Maja and Reuben Fowkes both follow up processes anchored in state-socialist times, while they point to two different, and differently conceptualized, openings of the region’s relative isolation behind the Iron Curtain. *Kristóf Nagy* offers an analysis of the goals, ideologies, activities, and transnational relations of cultural agents who propelled the integration of east European art scenes into “the global contemporary” after the political changes of 1989–1991. A major agent was the network of the Soros Centers for Contemporary Arts with offices throughout the region. While the Soros Foundation facilitated the disentanglement of the respective national scenes from a Soviet-type cultural colonization, it developed new, less conspicuously hegemonic dependencies.¹⁶ Actors engaged in the Soros-project became dominant figures of the new intellectual elite, also taking their share in an international knowledge transfer between leading western

art historians and local art professionals. Seeking to reconfigure traditional artistic paradigms framed in relation to political history, *Maja and Reuben Fowkes* reassess the art history of eastern Europe in the light of the environmental perspective offered by planetary thinking, from socialist realism to the political, cultural, and ecological turning-point of 1968 and today's Anthropocene world. The authors draw on the important distinction Gayatri Spivak made between the global and the planetary, with globalization implying the illusory control of world processes and the globe featuring as a disembodied, virtual abstraction. In contrast, the planetary encompasses attitudes to nature and a serious engagement with ecology.

The chapters in the introductory part are joined, in the three ensuing parts of the book, by empirically-based case studies that revolve around the main temporal axes identified above. Part II, "Hybridity: Identities And Forms," interrogates East European nations' ways of entering, and interacting under, the *global condition* in the pre-World War II era—at a time when it became increasingly impossible for societies to abstain from adjusting to the structures of global markets and politics.¹⁷ Questions of multiple cultural identification, the politics of (national) self-representation, and the material factors enabling or constraining full participation in the global arena are crucial to these explorations. *Carolyn C. Guile* revisits early modern Europe's easternmost borderland, the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, and the extraordinary variety in architectural form, sculpture, and the decorative arts as well as in religious and ethnic makeup or style of government that the Commonwealth



Figure I.4 Mariusz Tarkawian, drawings from the conference "East European Art seen from Global Perspectives: Past and Present" in Galeria Labirynt, Lublin, on October 24–27, 2014. Courtesy of the artist

bred. Guile postulates that this inherent resistance to uniform description in part may explain why the region has been left out of standard art history surveys.¹⁸ Hanging on to the East as an excluded close other or the West's Orient is, however, a lot less exciting, the author argues as she brings in the East's Orient instead. Along this line, crucial differences can be discovered between "Orientalism" as we have known it from Edward Said's critique on the one hand and, on the other, the kind of non-colonial Orientalism witnessed in the Commonwealth and across east-central Europe, where populations were often subjected to conditions of internal colonization themselves (Born and Lemmen 2014, 24–25). Since Said was little interested in observing forms of imperial rule other than the French or British type, his metageographical opposition of the terms "Orient" and "Occident" have limited relevance in an area situated outside of direct colonial power relations, recurrently envisioning itself as lagging behind the civilized West. Beside the absence of explicitly colonial interests in Poland–Lithuania's case, the difference can be captured by the presence or absence of direct contact (Lemmen 2013, 209–10). Whereas (Western) European fascination with the Orient was rooted in imaginary constructions of the East, the presence of the "Orient" in Poland grew out of direct contact between and among neighbors during moments of both war and peace.

Jörg Scheller underscores that, around 1900, east-central European art and intellectual life were powerfully shaped by phenomena that are today commonly associated with globalization, such as migration, cosmopolitanism, diaspora, hybridization, transculturality, and the salience of imagined communities. This confirms that globalization has been with us for over a century. The recently-coined terms "transculturation" and "transculturality" seem to capture processes that were already the norm, rather than the exception, over a century ago. This, then, elicits not only—or not so much—the default-sounding operation "globalizing Eastern European art" but, and a lot more importantly, that of "eastern-europeanizing globalization." Zooming in on Polish participation at the early editions of the Venice Biennale, Scheller detects how globalization had been at work even in modernist–folkloristic tendencies from the Tatra region or in academic salon art. Addressing the subsequent period, Sarah M. Schlachetzky highlights material and social aspects, especially obstacles, that may interfere with the unhindered movement of creative visions—specifically, the "International Style" of modern architecture. In urgent need of solving its postwar housing problem, the peripheral *Großstadt* of Breslau/Wrocław, offered career opportunities and attracted socially-minded experts from beyond regional borders. Schlachetzky depicts the city as a stage where transnationally constructed socio–aesthetic visions competed—even as soaring ideas frequently had to be scaled down due to crippling hyperinflation and a lack of municipal resources. While steel, reinforced concrete, and glass dominated cutting-edge architecture in the world at large, Breslau's architects, in search of the doable, were driven to experiment with *ersatz* materials, testing, for example, ecological techniques such as clay.

The chapters in Part III, "Global Communities and the Traffic in Ideas," revisit and reconsider in nuanced ways the phenomenon often referred to, in traditional art historical accounts, as "local variations" of "international" artistic movements and trends. These articles focus on cases of observable contact, cultural transfer, and mutual projections, as well as (imaginary) thinking communities shared by actors in eastern Europe and the rest of the world in the aftermaths of the Second World War. Women's and gender history, and especially women's art, are fields of inquiry where

one distinguished experience—that of the North-American women’s art movement—has acquired, and continues to possess, definitional monopoly, or functions as a yardstick with which to measure developments everywhere else. Authors commenting on women’s art in Eastern Europe, *Agata Jakubowska* among them, are often intrigued by the kind of “reluctant feminism” they observe in the region in the post-1945 period (also including the post-1989 decades).¹⁹ By this term, they refer to an attitude in which “feminist overtones” mix with an indifference toward discourses of western Second Wave feminism. The expectation that women’s social experience of their gender should be captured and expressed in politically and aesthetically identical ways across different societies and political systems might be regarded as one of the last strongholds of a diffusionist conception of both social change and artistic development. The recurrent question *Jakubowska* also poses, of whether women (artists) have established direct contact with their western counterparts to receive feminist knowledge, as it were, is part and parcel of such an approach. Due to their undemocratic ways of power-wielding, state-socialist arrangements rarely receive unbiased scholarly attention and the policies of socialist governments are equally seldom seen as potentially progressive;²⁰ this tendency, however, is gradually changing. Meanwhile, the discounting of socialist states’ emancipation programs continues to divest researchers of a central key to grasp how and why many women under state-socialism were receptive toward questions of gender equality and yet did not feel that western feminist discourses spoke to them.²¹

East European neo-avant-garde art of the 1960s–1970s has often been regarded as a reflection of the Western neo-avant-garde, submits *Anu Allas*. Yet, the author does not strive to situate Czech artist Milan Knížák exclusively in this web of relations but rather considers his ideological stance against the background of ideas and aspirations circulating during the “global sixties,” from Brazil to Japan, and to North America. Underlining that propositions, e.g. for the de-institutionalization of art or for the renewal of personal and social life through artistic practice, appeared in different cultural contexts around the world at the time, the study reconnects eastern European artists with their transnational thinking communities. Even as the bond between these communities was in most cases only theoretically postulated and imagined, *Allas*’s perspective effectively weakens narratives presupposing isolated cultural landscapes sealed off from one another by political divisions and the Iron Curtain. As *Katarzyna Cytlak* asserts, a different sense of imaginary belonging, projections, and “misunderstandings” structured perceptions of Eastern Europe (an art) in the South American continent. The region appears to have been outside of what was considered to be the known world: a distant place at best imagined. Yet, projected images of Eastern Europe had their roots in reality: in eastern European countries’ geopolitical position in the Cold War as well as in Latin America’s colonial history and hence in its particular relation to the “Old World.” On the one hand, seen from Latin America, the whole of Europe belonged to “the North,” while the association of the continent’s eastern half with communism—an anti-imperialist ideology actively urging decolonization—held out the promise of non-hegemonic transatlantic cultural exchanges, mainly through Mail Art and visiting experimental theater troupes.

Part IV, “Contemporary Art Praxis and the Production of Discourses,” offers a double focus on recent art critical discourses on the one hand and artistic and curatorial practices on the other as it follows up processes of art workers’ self-



Figure I.5 Mariusz Tarkawian, drawings from the conference “East European Art seen from Global Perspectives: Past and Present” in Galeria Labirynt, Lublin, on October 24–27, 2014. Courtesy of the artist

positioning in a globalized world. Drawing on her own situated experience, *Joanna Sokołowska* presents a handful of curatorial projects in which questions of hegemony, peripheral or semi-peripheral location, the global market, and Capitalocene, as well as mapping and deterritorialization, are tackled. This thought-work gave rise to a candid proposition for undoing the margin and the periphery as hard-to-leave-behind realities. Through the gesture of “orientalizing” or “balkanizing” all localities, and considering Europe itself as one random place among many, Sokołowska and the artists she has worked with translate Piotr Piotrowski’s concept of “horizontal art histories,” in which the West is effectively treated as one of many regions in the world, into creative and curatorial practice. Looking at contemporary performance art, *Amy Bryzgel* points to the capability of eastern European artists to “squeeze in” and occupy multiple subject positions.²² Bryzgel drafts the contours of an—often tacky—Eastern European identity politics where artists lament over their unequal position within the global art world while in their related actions and statements they reaffirm their group difference and choose to ignore multi-factor explanatory frameworks. No matter how justified at its core, such an undifferentiated take on complex processes might be interpreted, especially from the vantage point of core countries, as the manifestation of a culture of complaint, if not a minority complex—and, in other cases, as dated patriotism or suspect nationalism. One could try and sort out this knotty issue (and thereby relativize eastern European artists’ grievances); however, with the introduction of citizenship as the most salient factor impacting on

social inequality, inequality is today much more produced on the global rather than on the national level. This is the insight of a “decolonized” social theory which, after a phase of general fascination with globalization in mainstream European sociology, introduced postcolonial thought into social research and hence directed attention to the vexing question of inequality (see, e.g., Go 2016; Rodríguez, Boatcă, and Costa 2010).

In the closing contribution, *Alpesh Kantilal Patel* discusses artistic projects that challenge notions of what an archive is and what it can do in that they creatively respond to the erasures and misrepresentations of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered, and queer (LGBTQ) subjects from and in official state records. Identifying a need to update Jacques Derrida’s abstractions on the archive, Patel inserts them in their respective embodied oppressive frames: from Soviet occupation to domestic American xenophobia. The breadth of horizon to Patel’s study is the outcome of an almost chance encounter with the work of Piotr Piotrowski and Paweł Leszkowicz (Piotrowski’s colleague at Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań), and eventually the Estonian artist Jaanus Samma, whose work is detailed in Patel’s chapter. The contingent connection that arose between the Polish art historians and himself (a Florida-based researcher of Asian descent) confounded the author but also inspired the conceptual framework of his chapter. The concept of minor transnationalisms (Lionnet and Shih 2005) turned out to be key for him to make productive sense of this somehow improbable meeting of individuals and their preoccupations. At the

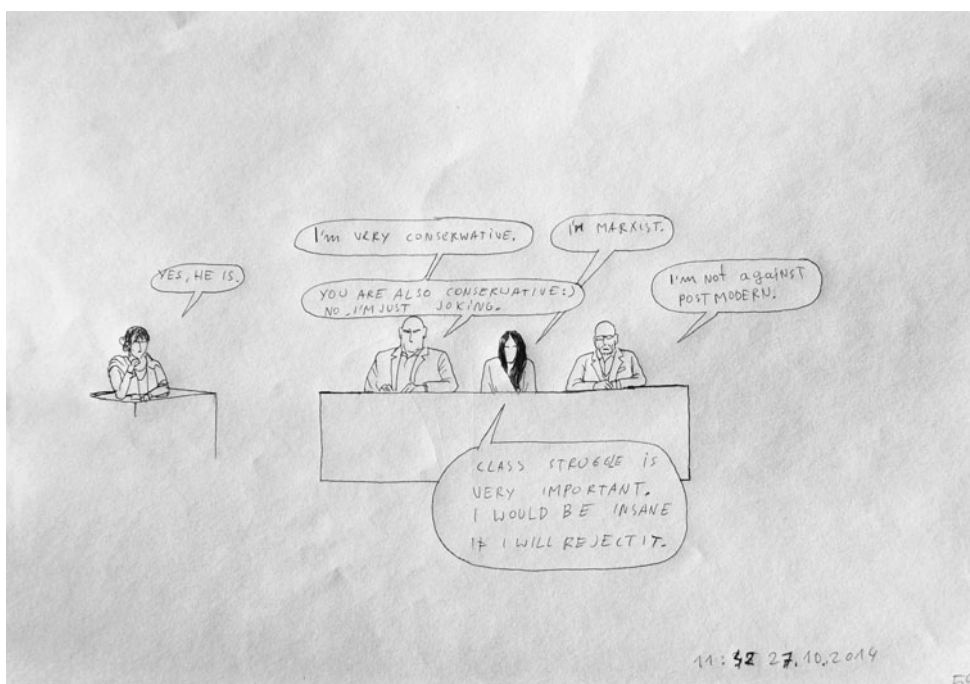


Figure I.6 Mariusz Tarkawian, drawings from the conference “East European Art seen from Global Perspectives: Past and Present” in Galeria Labirynt, Lublin, on October 24–27, 2014. Courtesy of the artist

same time, a minor transnational perspective shows a way out of the tired center-periphery dyad. Connections taking place through a minor to minor engagement can do without the center: transnationality here is not the result of connection between dominant, western metropolitan locations, nor does it emerge through a vertical relationship of power between dominant and minority cultures.

Finally, reflecting over the usual circuits of contemporary knowledge markets (and marketing) that eventually mask, rather than reflect, shared interests inasmuch as they create categories according to topics and geographical territories rather than methodological approaches, Patel points to the critical importance of keeping national and regional art histories relational, preventing their becoming closed systems.²³ With the dynamically growing recognition of transnational and global history and art history, these divisions appear ever-easier to surpass. The relevant forums bring together researchers working on diverse areas of the planet, and a shared interest in the transnationality of phenomena creates productive dialogue between them. In our experience, eastern European art historians are both relatively rare guests at these professional meetings and infrequent contributors to related publications. The undeniable and sad reality of an underfunded academic infrastructure across the region is certainly responsible for these absences as well as for the resultant underrepresentation of eastern European perspectives (also repeatedly addressed on the pages of this book). It is nevertheless our conviction that approaches to the (art) history of east-central Europe that are themselves open to surpassing and

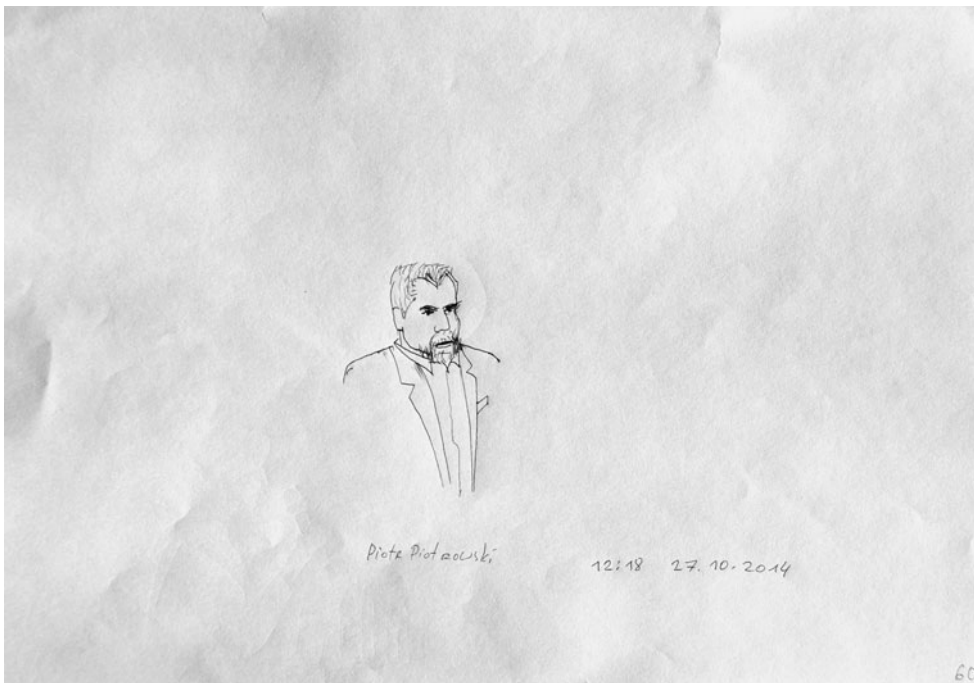


Figure I.7 Mariusz Tarkawian, drawings from the conference “East European Art seen from Global Perspectives: Past and Present” in Galeria Labirynt, Lublin, on October 24–27, 2014. Courtesy of the artist

reconceptualizing traditional regional boundaries will find their eager audiences. Cutting across national boundaries in innovative ways is a direction that most of the authors of the incisive studies contained in this volume follow. It is an approach that we, the editors, endorse and hope finds an equally enthusiastic audience.

Notes

- 1 In this Introduction, the editors refrain from reviewing the sea of related ruminations on whether the (cultural–)historical entity of Eastern/Central/East-Central Europe may indeed exist, and home in, instead, on another set of related issues. Nevertheless, our own take on this question as well as our alternation between capitalization and lowercase spelling will be clarified under the heading “In and beyond Eastern Europe.” The discussions or reference lists in the individual chapters of the book will provide further possible approaches and definitions.
- 2 Beside Piotrowski, Bulgarian cultural historian Alexander Kiossev (1999) also came up with the concept of self-colonization, which has been widely used. The names of Slavoj Žižek, Boris Groys, Boris Buden, Svetlana Boym, Marina Gržinić might also be important reference points from this generation for those interested in theoretical perspectives. Because their concerns are philosophical rather than art historical, we did not consider their work in the rumination above.
- 3 Piotrowski came back several times to elaborate these terms in his writings and lectures; the most straightforward formulations are to be found in Piotrowski 2008 and 2014.
- 4 This is of course hardly unlike the way various modernization theories (and their respective critics) have accounted for the worldwide diffusion of Western economic and technological development, culture, and literacy as well as styles of living (e.g., Bernstein 1971, Eisenstadt 1968, Giddens 1991).
- 5 Piotrowski (2015) preferred referring to “the margin” rather than “the periphery” when talking about the center’s Other.
- 6 A systematically conceptualized research project at the Schweizerisches Institut für Kunstwissenschaft (SIK-ISEA) presents a case of “best practice.” Admittedly inspired by Piotrowski’s tenet about writing horizontal art history, the participating researchers worked on reconstructing the participation of eastern European nations (Czech, Hungarian, Polish, Romanian) at the Venice Biennale from its beginnings to the present day with the aim to reveal the development of multiple modernities beyond the perspective of dominant Western art history. The resulting publications include Wolf 2005, Wyss and Scheller 2010, and Bódi 2015, as well as Jörg Scheller’s contribution to this volume.
- 7 Piotrowski borrows the idea of “close others” from Bojana Pejić (1999, 20) who refers to Boris Groys’ concept “fremde Nahe” (strange closeness) and links it to the “Other” of postcolonial theory.
- 8 See, e.g., the Barcelona-based collaborative projects “Decentralized Modernities” (<http://modernidadesdescentralizadas.com/en/proyecto/>) and “Art, Globalization, Interculturality” (<http://artglobalizationinterculturality.com/>).
- 9 “Former West” is a transnational publishing, education, and exhibition project searching for ways of *formerizing* the persistently hegemonic conjuncture that is, or was up to 1989, “the West.” Contributors aim to produce new constellations instead. See more at: <http://formerwest.org>.
- 10 One could even argue that this interest was partly generated through the activities of the ERSTE Foundation that has been systematically collecting central and south-eastern European art and sponsoring cultural initiatives in the region since 2003 (Hock 2018a).
- 11 Although Jeremy Howard’s *East European Art 1650–1950* (2006) offers a three-decade-long overview, the volume’s primary aim is to introduce key figures and developments within this cultural landscape to English-language readers and, in so doing, follows the conventional regionally-focused methodology.
- 12 This may sound overstated at first, but, while art historians could easily testify that global art history is by now an established study field, its debates and insights are not necessarily familiar to those practicing global studies. The 2017 volume *The Global Turn: Theories*,

Research Designs, and Methods for Global Studies (Darian-Smith and McCarty) lists half a dozen disciplines engaging globalization from economics to anthropology to geography, but art or cultural history is not listed among these. In German academia, “cultural historical” perspectives are often deployed at best as a peculiar alias for segments of social and intellectual history.

- 13 Here, we follow the lead of the creators of the *Journal of Global History* (published since 2006) and the editors of the volume *Circulations in the Global History of Art* (Kaufmann, Dossin, and Joyeux-Prunel 2015, 12).
- 14 Spivak’s criticism specifically pertains to writing on women in the Global South.
- 15 For some convincing cases, consult Kenzler 2014, Khouri and Salti 2016, and the special issues “Vietnamese in Central and Eastern Europe” (*Journal of Vietnamese Studies*, no. 1, 2017) or “Socialist Networks” (*ABE Journal*, no. 6, 2014).
- 16 Nagy’s analysis concerns the transformation of the institutional structure and the main orientation of the art scene; similar patterns have been documented by Susan Zimmermann (2007) in the domain of higher education.
- 17 For this sort of definition of the global condition, see Geyer and Bright 1995.
- 18 While broad survey books may have indeed isolated early modern Poland from European arts and culture, (art) historians of the region have certainly identified the area as an important locus of cross-cultural production. Besides literature referenced by Grusiecki and Guile in the present volume, see also Banas 2011 or Bömelburg 2016.
- 19 The film program and symposium of one section of the 2017 “GoEast” film festival in Wiesbaden explicitly centered on this perception: http://filmfestival-goeast.de/en/press/2017/170316_PR_III.php.
- 20 Apart from socialist achievements, it was of course the regional legacy of the First Wave of the women’s movement that brought ideas of emancipation and equality to familiar proximity in Eastern Europe. This legacy is, however, similarly neglected by many authors in the field, when they postulate that feminism might have been a mid-twentieth-century western export. Haan, Daskalova and Loutfi 2006 give an encyclopedic overview of First Wave feminism in the region.
- 21 Hock 2013, 2018a offer attempts to read together these segments of social and art history, while Hock 2018b exposes the fairly singular, if not in some ways “anomalous” conditions under which West Coast feminist art emerged.
- 22 Jörg Scheller in Part II of this book makes a similar assertion while discussing a different historical period.
- 23 This brings to mind Marc Bloch’s appeal to his fellow historians to “read works written outside their own countries as well as studies devoted to countries other than those on which they were working” (Bloch, referenced in Kaufmann, Dossin, and Joyeux-Prunel 2015, 6).

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Part I

Challenging the National Container

From the Transnational to the
Planetary



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1 Uprooting Origins

Polish–Lithuanian Art and the Challenge of Pluralism

Tomasz Grusiecki

What does it mean that the art of the “other” Europe was developed with reference to the art of the West, and how did that development go on?

Piotr Piotrowski, “On the Spatial Turn” (2009, 7)

A bearded man looks at us from a life-size portrait at the National Arts Museum in Minsk. The inscription on the right identifies the sitter as Krzysztof Wiesiołowski, describing him in Polish as “Lord-Grand-Marshal of Lithuania, governor (*starosta*) of Tykocin, Suraż, Kleszczele, Mielnik and Krzyzew, steward (*ekonom*) of Grodno, Anno 1636.”¹ The Ogończyk coat of arms above the inscription additionally marks Wiesiołowski as a Polish–Lithuanian nobleman, while the marshal’s baton, which he holds in his right hand, is the attribute of the man’s position as Lord-Grand-Marshal of Lithuania—Wiesiołowski acquired this high office of state in 1635 (Kamieniecka 1972, 93). But, despite these cues to the sitter’s identity and status, the portrait moves between different registers of cultural belonging. On the one hand, the sitter’s full-length, confident pose, together with an *all’antica* architectural background, recalls portraits commissioned in western Europe in this period. Yet, simultaneously, Wiesiołowski wears clothing that is far removed from western European fashions of the day, instead appearing in thrall with contemporaneous Ottoman custom. What to make of this mix of cultural forms on view in the same painting?

For all intents and purposes, the portrait draws no line between the European and Ottomanesque traits. Rather than clashing visually, the *all’antica* and *alla turca* formal conventions remain in sync with one another. What we might perceive as a pluralism of sartorial and architectural forms is here presented as a mark of integrity: the background mixes with the foreground, producing the effect of interplay of cultural traditions. It is perhaps unsurprising for this transcultural symbiosis to feature in a painting produced in the culturally heterogeneous Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth—a vast polity located at a crossroads between the lands of Western Christendom to the west, Muscovy to the east, and the Ottoman Empire to the southeast. Indeed, if the sitter’s costume dovetails with classical décor despite drawing parallels with the world of Ottoman convention, it is because by the mid-sixteenth century, Polish–Lithuanian nobility had assimilated a number of Ottoman-style sartorial forms into their ways of life (Gutkowska-Rychlewska 1968, 395; Turnau 1991a, 71).

Historians of Polish–Lithuanian costume have long considered the effects of cultural contact between the Ottoman Empire and the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth (Mańkowski 1947), and Wiesiołowski’s portrait is a telling case. He wears a golden



Plate 1 Anon., portrait of Krzysztof Wiesiołowski (Крыштап Весялоўскі), 1636, oil on canvas, 205 × 132 cm

Minsk, National Arts Museum of the Republic of Belarus

silk tunic (*żupan*) and a black velvet, fur-fitted cloak (*delia*) thrown across his arms, both of which were Ottoman-inspired garments that had found their way into the Commonwealth by way of Hungary, and were adapted to the needs of Polish–Lithuanian nobility. The sitter also dons an Ottoman-style metal belt across his mid-section, which acts as a holster for the sword—the hilt of which is embraced by the nobleman’s left hand. A fur hat adorned with a silver pin and feathers (*szkofia*) lies on the table at the right edge of the portrait, adding to the atmosphere of opulence. Completing this image of cultural entanglement, Wiesiołowski wears yellow leather heeled boots, which, in addition to associations with hunting or military pastimes, also bring up similarities with Ottoman custom.

Considering these simultaneous inspirations from the lands of Western Christendom and the Ottoman Empire, the image opens itself up to several scenarios regarding its formal and stylistic taxonomy. If the tradition of large-scale European portraiture is taken as a point of reference, one could read the Minsk painting as a peripheral offshoot of Western art: a provincial manifestation of European heritage. Conversely, if Ottoman material culture is deemed the stimulus, one could then see the portrait as a medium of circulating and naturalizing Ottomanesque costume in Poland–Lithuania. In both scenarios, the portrait would appear as an impression of another culture seen as a source.

This way of understanding cultural transfer follows from the conventional model of artistic influence—the old idea that artistic traditions originate in key artistic centers, from where they trickle down to other, lesser-known areas (for a critique of this model, see Kim 2014, 26–33). In this framework, while places like Poland–Lithuania are free to choose artistic solutions from the centers that are considered more dynamic, they nonetheless merely collate other traditions, even if simultaneously creating a local artistic language—a local language, one might add, that will be taken up nowhere else but in the peripheries. For, although the peripheries might be deemed creative, it is a qualified type of creativity—one that can only be appreciated locally (see Piotrowski 2008, 378). According to this logic, Polish–Lithuanian art may only approximate the rules and conventions of the best examples of western European art or Ottoman material culture and never actually replicate them (compare Bhabha 1994).

But does Wiesiołowski’s portrait simply collate other traditions into an idiosyncratic art form that had consequences only for Polish–Lithuanian cultural landscape and for local art history? This chapter will argue that the significance of the seemingly imitative artifacts becomes more relevant to wider art historical concerns when these pieces are considered not merely on their own, or even within a larger context of regional culture, but rather as part of a greater infrastructure of cultural entanglement, which transcends regions and states. By conveying a mix of cultural forms and molding them into a totem of localness, Wiesiołowski’s portrait took part—like many other images of this kind—in a continual re-formulation of Polish–Lithuanian ways of life and cultural self-identifications. Thus, the appropriation of the European style of painting and the habitation of Ottoman fashions proves to be not merely an act of assimilation, but a symptom of a gradual process of creation.

Taking the generative possibilities of adaptation as a starting point, this chapter will propose that the pluralist status of much Polish–Lithuanian art is where its radical potential for the discipline of art history comes to the fore. Located at a point of juncture between several cultural macro-regions, and thus marking a transition

point between Europe and its alleged others, Poland–Lithuania was a cultural contact zone where various peoples and artifacts crossed paths regularly (see, for example, Chrzanowski 1986). I will suggest that foregrounding random connections, fault lines, and unexpected mutations, instead of pandering to the notions of cultural distinctiveness and clearly-defined origins, can productively introduce this geographically peripheral milieu into mainstream art historical narratives. I will first review the most worthwhile previous attempts to reevaluate the status of Polish–Lithuanian art in art history, and then focus on how we might rethink this milieu as an active agent of cultural entanglement, and a catalyst for disintegrating discourses that frame its geographical peripherality as a cultural marginality, and thus the domain of artistic imitation. The purpose of this chapter is then to shift the purported peripheries away from a model that tends to overemphasize hierarchies and linear causalities to one that asserts the possibility of the peripheries’ active participation in wider cultural processes.

Periphery Marginalized

Given Poland–Lithuania’s distance from the major cultural centers of Italy and north-western Europe, the artists who worked in the Commonwealth were systematically excluded from the earliest art historical grand narratives, of which the most influential example is Giorgio Vasari’s *Lives of the Most Excellent Painters, Sculptors and Architects* (1550). Like Vasari, who famously used his position to promote Tuscan artists and disparage their foreign competitors (Kaufmann 2002, 71–80), other writers of artist biographies, including the Venetian Carlo Ridolfi (1594–1658), Dutchman Karel van Mander (1548–1606), and the German Joachim von Sandrart (1606–1688), also favored their own respective milieus. None of these writers mentions a single Polish–Lithuanian artist when constructing canons of artistic excellence. Even if Poland–Lithuania is referenced, it figures merely as a site to which artists and artworks from artistic centers travelled, to enliven the local art scene of a distant land. For example, Ridolfi mentions the Venetian acquisitions of the Polish–Lithuanian monarch, Sigismund III (r. 1587–1632), but only as a pretext to boast the international fame of Venetian painters (Ridolfi 1648).²

When art history emerged as an academic subject in the nineteenth century, the discipline’s pioneers were largely in agreement with the earlier biographical studies as to what should be considered great art. But it was not only the reliance on older literature that perpetuated the focus of art history on the great metropolises of western Europe; the nineteenth-century scholars were also restricted in their approach by the artifacts they could see on display in the museums of Vienna, Berlin, Dresden, Paris, Florence, Rome, London, New York, and a handful of other cultural centers of the day. None of these venerable institutions housed Polish–Lithuanian art. As Michael Camille observed, “whether their bias be nationalistic, formalist, or iconographic, canons are created not so much out of a series of worthy objects as out of the possibilities of their reproduction” (1996, 198). But, to insert an artifact into scholarly discourse (and thus discursively reproduce it), an art historian must believe in its significance. In the preface to the first edition of his *Histories of the Latin and Germanic Peoples* (1824), founder of modern source-based history Leopold von Ranke expresses a view that exemplifies the lack of resolve to include Polish–Lithuanian art in historical grand narratives:

Slavic, Latvian and Magyar tribes belonging to [Latin Christendom] have a peculiar and special nature which is not included here. The author remains close to home with the tribally related peoples of either purely Germanic or Germano-Latin origin, whose history is the nucleus of all recent history, and touches on what is foreign only in passing as something peripheral.

(von Ranke 2011, 85)

For Ranke, the study of the Slavic, Finno-Ugric, and Baltic past is futile since it had no impact on universal history, which is allegedly driven by the “Latin and Germanic peoples.” Places such as Poland-Lithuania were thus, from the very beginning, placed on the margins of modern academic discourse.

Art historians have long attempted to challenge the perception of so-called artistic peripheries as unworthy of serious attention. As early as 1962, in his subsequently-published lecture on “provincialism,” Kenneth Clark lamented that “the history of European art has been, to a large extent, the history of a series of centers” (1962, 3). To the traditional view that artistic peripheries—allegedly marked by provincial backwardness—could only develop by copying the art of the center (“where standards of skill are higher and patrons more exacting” (1962, 3)), Clark extols elusive “provincial virtues,” such as sharpness of vision, acceptance of fact, and a modest acceptance of the limitations of artistic medium (1962, 10). Artistic peripheries, in Clark’s account, were guarded from the center’s symptoms of over-refinement and academism. This was a defense of peripheries expressed on formalist and sentimentalist terms.

With the ascent of theoretically-inclined, critical strands of art history in the 1970s and 1980s, however, art historians began to point to the epistemological violation that the traditional model of art historical metropolitanism inflicts on non-canonical visual cultures. Enrico Castelnuovo, together with the historian Carlo Ginzburg, argued in a seminal text, “Centro e periferia” (1979), that it is owing to the eminent historiographers such as Vasari (1511–1574) and Luigi Lanzi (1732–1810) that we have dropped the notion of artistic polycentrism of early modern Italy in favor of a narrative built around a small number of powerful centers. Even more forcefully, Nicos Hadjinicolau put forward four years later (1983) that the paradigm of center and periphery is not merely a spatial construct, but an ideological infrastructure, which naturalizes the political and symbolic power of the key academic institutions from where art historical discourse is defined and disseminated.

Given Poland-Lithuania’s marginal position in the discipline’s grand narratives, historians of Polish-Lithuanian art needed to address the country’s reliance on Europe’s artistic centers if they were to enter a wider scholarly conversation. Jan Białostocki, one of Poland’s few art historians widely recognized abroad, contended that

periphery is after all not only a place where everything is delayed and simplified; that it has virtues of its own; that although situated far away and often lacking initiative, it has considerable freedom to choose and independence to combine elements and motifs adapted from the more dynamic centres.

(1986, 53)

Thus, emphasizing the periphery’s agency to choose only certain art forms and to reject others, Białostocki foregrounded active participation in lieu of passive reception.

More recently, Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann has proposed that the largest cities in Poland–Lithuania, and within the region of east-central Europe writ large, be themselves considered key cultural centers. Kaufmann discusses three such places: Buda, Cracow, and Prague, all of which were important political and commercial sites that attracted artists working for the court and affluent burghers (Kaufmann 2004, 164–179). Coming predominantly from Italy, Germany, and the Low Countries, these artists adapted the forms and designs of western European courts and urban centers to the expectations of their new patrons, triggering chains of creative replications throughout the region of east-central Europe.

Yet the question remains: could art generated in a place like Poland–Lithuania have an impact on the better-known artistic centers of western Europe? This question might sound purely hypothetical to an ear accustomed to treating the Commonwealth as a site of cultural reception rather than a point of creative origination. But art historians should nonetheless take this question seriously. Despite the geographically peripheral location of early modern Poland–Lithuania vis-à-vis western Europe, other sub-disciplines of history within Anglo-American academia have been able to reconfigure this geopolitical locale into a key subject of study. The vision of Poland–Lithuania as the bulwark of Christendom was a rhetorical conceit often used by early modern Poles (Srodecki 2016), and is thus taken seriously by military historians who acknowledge—rightly or wrongly—the contribution of the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth to ending the Ottoman march across Europe (Stoye 1964). Similarly, economic historians have examined the development of so-called “second serfdom” in Poland–Lithuania as an important constituent of early modern European economy, whose role is paramount for an understanding of the early modern European economic system as a whole (Kula 1976). In both cases, Poland–Lithuania is regarded as an important component of Europe’s past.

Perhaps most importantly, however, Poland–Lithuania acted as the preeminent case study for conceptualizing the model of center and periphery in historical studies, which mapped the mechanisms of uneven development within the world economy. Key theorists of this binary, Fernand Braudel and Immanuel Wallerstein, referred specifically to Polish–Lithuanian economic underdevelopment as they addressed an unequal relationship between the world’s regions in the early modern period. Wallerstein asserts that the ready flow of Polish–Lithuanian grain and timber to Amsterdam and other economic hubs in northwestern Europe was one of the reasons why, by the sixteenth century, this part of the world had become the center of the newly emergent capitalist world-system (1979, 37–48; 1980, 128–175). The concentration of commercial activity in the continent’s northwest allowed for further growth and expansion into the whole world. Similarly, Braudel also points to Amsterdam’s dependence on Polish–Lithuanian raw materials for acquiring its dominant position in Europe and the world (1984 vol. 3, 25–57, 254–256). Although Wallerstein’s and Braudel’s models postulate the interconnectedness of regions and the world as a whole, the binary configuration of the economic system and a hierarchy of central and peripheral zones always exists in these conceptualizations. Wallerstein’s model in particular is often criticized for its economistic reductionism (Conrad 2016, 49–50). But what is truly radical about these scholars’ theorizations is their assertion that a center cannot exist and survive without its peripheries.

Could a similar model of mutual dependence be drawn to rethink Polish–Lithuanian art’s alleged marginality within the system of European art? Put simply, could Polish–

Lithuanian art be re-conceptualized as having impact on other cultural milieus in a manner traditionally reserved for western European artistic centers? Wiesiołowski's portrait—suffused with sartorial ambiguity and cultural receptiveness—offers a partial answer. As it depicts a sitter who is visibly at ease with a plurality of forms and styles, the Minsk painting defies the idea, inherent in the paradigm of center and periphery, that cultural transfer is a one-way projection of form or design from the dominant core to a dependent margin. Manifesting Poland–Lithuania's exposure to Ottoman fashions on top of its indebtedness to the conventions of European portraiture, Wiesiołowski's portrait instead exemplifies an artifact that derives from several different sources. Thus, it foregrounds multi-directional cultural entanglements that transcend the binary logic of center and periphery. Categories such as “origin” and “reception” are misleading in this context, as they imply a singular direction of transfer and a hierarchy of influences. In direct contradiction to such purist claims, Wiesiołowski's portrait highlights a plurality of inspirations, challenging the theories of local, regional, and national styles as either inherent or self-contained. Can this picture of cultural plurality offered by the Minsk painting help us reconsider the status of Polish–Lithuanian art in the narratives of art history? What is the place of the allegedly peripheral visual and material cultures under the ascending paradigm of world entanglement?

Periphery Entangled

We do not know the identity of the maker of Wiesiołowski's portrait, but Elena Kamieniecka, who traced the provenance of this painting, assumes that it was probably executed by a local artist—friar of Grodno, possibly the Dominican Hilary Chojecki (1972, 113). Until relatively recently, the portrait was kept in the Bridgettine monastery in Grodno (Belarussian Hrodna), which was largely founded by Wiesiołowski and his wife Aleksandra (Kamieniecka 1972, 93). But while Wiesiołowski was a pious Catholic, he was also an owner of Ottoman and Persian rugs—a predilection that will not surprise anyone who has seen the Minsk portrait. We get a sense of the man's tastes for decorative textiles from a carpet possibly made in Anatolia (Ostrowski, Kaufmann, Krasny, Kuczman, and Zamoyski 1999, 171), which is today preserved in the collection of Wawel Castle.

The identification of this object as a piece commissioned by Wiesiołowski hinges on the display of his personal coat of arms incorporated into the design in the upper edge of the rug. We receive additional information from Aleksandra's last will (d. 1645), which has led to speculation that the rug was produced in Poland–Lithuania. The document lists “five grand carpets in the Persian manner of our domestic manufacture” (*swojej domowej roboty*), and “twelve carpets in the Turkish manner of domestic production” (*na kształt dywańskich domowej roboty*).³ Although the document specifies that the Wiesiołowski carpets resembled in style Persian and Ottoman prototypes, they were allegedly produced “domestically.”

The rhetoric of this document is puzzling as it marks a hazy line between the carpets made in Poland–Lithuania and those woven in the Middle East. The Wawel Castle carpet was commissioned in this ambiguous context, which—if the Wiesiołowski inventory were to be believed—saw little difference between Ottoman and Ottomanesque textiles. Just like Wiesiołowski's portrait, the rug naturalizes foreign art forms into a material expression of localness. A family coat of arms superimposed onto Ottoman-style fabric functions here as a metonym of Polish–Lithuanian cultural



Plate 2 Uszak medallion carpet, Turkey or Poland, first quarter of the seventeenth century, knotted rug, 348 × 227 cm

Photo by Łukasz Schuster. © Wawel Royal Castle, Cracow

specificity. Daily contact with such artifacts, particularly through seeing, touching, and contact with the body, habituated the nobility to material forms of self-identification that were both local and global, domesticated and exogenous.

Historians of Polish–Lithuanian art had been exploring these processes of trans-cultural mixing decades before the global turn gained momentum in Anglo-American art history in the mid-2000s. Thus, it is admittedly somewhat misleading to claim to introduce Poland–Lithuania to this discourse, for already in the 1930s Polish scholars

were considering the effects of the Commonwealth's proximity to the Ottoman Empire, and its consequences for local self-perceptions (Żygulski 1996). Tadeusz Mańkowski is usually credited with re-orienting the focus of Polish cultural history from Italy, Germany, and France to the Ottoman Empire and Muscovy. In a 1935 English-language article on the reception of Ottoman and Persian textiles and metalwork in Poland–Lithuania, Mańkowski asserted that the Commonwealth “became the territory where East and West met, where their cultural and artistic influences came into touch and intermingled very often creating new, mediate forms of an interesting and peculiar kind” (93). In his oft-cited monograph, *Genealogia sarmatyzmu* (The Genealogy of Sarmatism, 1947), Mańkowski took an even stronger stance and argued that Polish–Lithuanian nobility traced their origin from the ancient Sarmatians, who were an Iranian people. It is through this “Eastern” origin that Mańkowski explained the Polish–Lithuanian predilection for Ottomanesque costume, textiles, and metalwork. Mańkowski expanded on this theory in two subsequent monographs, one devoted entirely to textiles (1954), and another to the influence of what he calls “the Orient” on Polish–Lithuanian art and culture (1959).

Mańkowski's general assumption about the eastward orientation of Polish–Lithuanian costume, textiles, and metalwork became the starting point for many Polish historians of art and material culture. Historians of costume spoke of the “Orientalization” of Polish–Lithuanian dress in the sixteenth century (Biedrońska-Słota 2005; Chrzanowski 1986; Gutkowska-Rychlewska 1968, 375–422; Mrozowski 1986; Turnau 1991b), and art historians continued to explore the high demand for Ottomanesque and Persianate textiles in Poland–Lithuania (Banas 2013; Biedrońska-Słota 1997; 1983). Several monographs and edited volumes have been devoted to the expression of Polish–Lithuanian identities in costume, with their authors suggesting that the Commonwealth's nobility saw no contradiction in priding themselves in Christian virtue while wearing a costume that was Ottoman and hence Muslim by association (Chrzanowski 1995; Dobrowolski 1962; Wiliński 1958).

Wiesiołowski's patronage exemplifies this embrace of the cultural forms that escape precise definitions and limits. As his coat of arms features in both the Minsk portrait and the Wawel carpet, it turns these otherwise ambiguous artifacts into an acceptable means of cultural self-expression for a Polish–Lithuanian nobleman. And Wiesiołowski was only one of many owners who treated such objects as local. Indeed, although initially of Persian and Ottoman provenance, carpets were reinvented as goods that were closely associated with Poland–Lithuania. By the seventeenth century, both imported and domestically-produced “Turkish” and “Persian” rugs furnished many noble homes (Mańkowski 1935, 98), even the humbler ones,⁴ thereby legitimizing the notion of the local derivation of these artifacts. If it is so difficult to frame these carpets within a single cultural sphere, how should we then call them?

This terminological question received attention in the nineteenth century, when a type of flat-woven silk rug brocaded with gold and silver threads acquired the name “Polish carpets” (*tapis polonais*). It all started at the 1878 Paris World Fair, where carpets belonging to the aristocrat Władysław Czartoryski (1828–1894) were displayed to promote Polish culture. These objects had family coats of arms woven into their design, giving commentators the false impression that the Czartoryski rugs were made in Poland–Lithuania, despite their actual production in Persia (Banas 2013, 123; Biedrońska-Słota 2006, 285–286). The theory of these artifacts' Polish origin was further supported by the abundance of flat-woven carpets in *fin-de-siècle*

Poland, Lithuania, and Ruthenia, then partitioned between Russia, Germany, and Austria–Hungary (Mańkowski 1959, 175–176, 180).

Early doubts about this attribution were expressed thirteen years later by the pre-eminent art historian Alois Riegl who noted the similarities of *tapis polonais* with the objects from the Kashan and Isfahan imperial workshops (Dercon, Krempel, and Shalem 2010, 119; Riegl 1891, 192–195). The whole Polish theory was completely dismissed in 1902 by another titan of German-language art history, Wilhelm Bode, then director of Berlin’s Gemäldegalerie and later the creator and first curator of the Kaiser-Friedrich-Museum. Bode brought together stylistic and technological evidence to prove that these carpets were of Persian origin (Bode 1902, 49–60). As carpet expert Friedrich Sarre put it in the catalog accompanying the 1910 Munich exhibition of the “Masterpieces of Mohammedan Art,” “the fable of the Polish origin of the silk Persian rugs woven with silver and golden threads was many years ago destroyed by Wilhelm Bode” (1912, n.p.).⁵ Even so, to this day the type of seventeenth-century flat-woven carpets from Kashan and Isfahan are still referred to as “so-called Polish carpets” by carpet historians, curators, and dealers, evoking the erroneous 1878 attribution in a performative act of undoing the Polishness of these carpets. For, one utters the name “Polish carpet” only to nullify its meaning by adding the qualifier “so-called,” as if to make sure these objects are not considered Polish.

But one might argue that Riegl’s and Bode’s terminological corrective, which was applied at the heyday of European nationalism, went a step too far. While it rightly debunked the idea that the *tapis polonais* were produced in Poland–Lithuania, it simultaneously entrenched a limiting, purist notion of their origin in Persia. There was little interest in the fact that many of these carpets arrived in western European and North American collections by way of Poland (and other lands formerly forming the Commonwealth). Nor was it appreciated that many of them had been commissioned by Poles, Ruthenians, and Lithuanians who sometimes sent out agents with specifications as to what these carpets were supposed to look like (Mańkowski 1938b). The designation “so-called Polish carpets” thus discouraged the examination of these objects’ fuller history. Moreover, having attributed the best-quality *tapis polonais* to Persia, art historians had no interest in the rugs that were actually manufactured on Polish–Lithuanian looms (see Mańkowski 1938a). Consequently, the full relevance of this topic remains unexplored.

In asserting the Persian production of “so-called Polish carpets,” Riegl and Bode assumed that the origins of an art form could only be linked to a single nation, people, or geographical place. Revisiting *tapis polonais* allows us to challenge such outdated assumptions. First, the historically high occurrence of these rugs in Poland–Lithuania implies that the imperial workshops in Kashan and Isfahan were not self-sufficient, but operated partly thanks to commissions from abroad. Second, these commissions changed the appearance of some rugs: certainly, one never sees coats of arms on carpets made for the Persian market. Third, the success and proliferation of the *tapis polonais* outside Persia shows that their development was influenced by external factors. Yet, despite the importance of these factors, the role of Polish–Lithuanian nobility in the history of these types of carpets continues to be downplayed.

The impact of the cultural traditions of in-between places such as Poland–Lithuania is often overlooked in favor of the narratives of cultural transfer celebrating interactions between two readily-identifiable centers. This reductionist assumption impoverishes our understanding of the social lives of things like *tapis polonais*.

Such artworks were created in relation to not just one but several regions, and were consumed in still more places than their current location might imply. Commissions from Poland–Lithuania not only influenced the design of these objects, but also secured their relatively high survival rate, as these carpets had been safely preserved in Polish, Lithuanian, Ukrainian, and Belarusian households before they made their way into North American and western European collections in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Polish–Lithuanian visual and material culture thus offers a fruitful avenue for renewed scholarship in the field of transcultural studies, as the country’s geographical position made it susceptible to ongoing transformation triggered by stimuli from many different places. The complex genealogies of Polish–Lithuanian artifacts are, then, of interest not only to historians of the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth, but also to art history and cultural studies more broadly, as a corrective to faulty theories of mono-causal determinism and geographical commensurability.

Returning to Wiesiołowski for the last time, neither his portrait nor his carpet fully fit into what art historians still often describe as European or Islamic traditions. Engaging with this misfit, however, is a productive revisionist strategy because it encourages us to make connections with a wider constellation of artistic media, as we seek—and ultimately fail—to define the origins of Polish–Lithuanian art forms. The task is, of course, an impossible one: are these artifacts more European or more Islamic? As the answer to this question cannot be given, we should embrace the ambiguity of Polish–Lithuanian culture and seek to learn from it. Certainly, one lesson to be drawn from stylistic and formal pluralism is its methodological role in defying traditional art historical categories, particularly “influence” and “origin.” Both Wiesiołowski’s portrait and his carpet produced a *habitus*, which in turn safeguarded the “Polishness” of these artifacts despite their foreign extraction. After all, the “Polishness” of these objects was a make-believe by which the pluralism of multiple origins gave over to an invented national tradition. For the sake of historical accuracy, we must keep this often-messy pluralism of origins in place rather than attempting to disentangle it.

As Foteini Vlachou has recently noted, “the periphery has the potential to subvert categories that have dominated (art) historical thinking since its inception (center, canon, nation), while bringing to the fore the fundamentally unequal power configurations that have characterized the discipline and its various practices” (2016, 10). The center and periphery paradigm (as theorized by Braudel and Wallerstein) is undoubtedly a form of dualism that could be at once politically constructive (as it inspires resistance) and methodologically counterproductive (as it reifies artistic hierarchies). It is therefore worth addressing artifacts that have been linked to specific places—such as Polish–Lithuanian portraits and Persian carpets of the *polonais* type—with an acknowledgment of their formal and stylistic pluralism and discursive ambiguity. If we want to move beyond the hierarchical model of originality that privileges major cultural centers, then culturally liminal forms offer productive ways to rethink art historians’ interpretative priorities. For, such seemingly imitative artifacts manifest the dynamic and intermingled processes involved in the transference of an art form from one place to another, and its capacity to regenerate itself in a different context. In such an open-ended model, the purported peripheries matter as much as the centers. As visual and material forms oscillate and circulate rather than originate and descend, we have much to gain from acknowledging the critical potential of Poland–Lithuania to renew our discipline both *from* and *for* the margins.

Notes

- 1 “Krzysztof Wesołowski, Marszałek Wielki W.X. Lit., Starosta tykociński, suraski, kleszczelski, mielnicki, krzyzewski, ekonom grodzieński, Anno 1636.” According to various sources, Wesołowski was the owner of Białystok and Kamienna and the leaseholder of thirteen crown lands spanning both the Kingdom of Poland and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. See Czyżewski 2005, 297.
- 2 See the following biographies: Palma the Younger, vol. II, p. 195; and Antonio Vassilacchi, vol. II, p. 214, p. 216.
- 3 “Podkanclerzemu W.K.L.—swojej domowej roboty naznaczam kobiercy wielkich 5 różnej maści na kształt perskich; podkanclerzemu W.K.L. . . kobierców na kształt dywanńskich domowej roboty 12.” Narodowy Instytut Dziedzictwa, Warsaw, Teki Glinki, Teki 66, f. 19.
- 4 See, for example, the 1626 inventory listing the possessions of the Madaliński family. Castr. Halic., vol. 122, f. 327, in Mańkowski 1959, 153 note 139.
- 5 “Schon seit langem ist von Wilhelm Bode die Fabel von der polnischen Entstehung der seidenen, mit reicher Einwirkung von Silber- und Goldfäden Perserteppiche zerstört worden.”

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2 Managing Trans/Nationality

Cultural Actors within Imperial Structures

Beáta Hock

In the last few decades, a number of emerging historiographical trends have posed challenges to writing cultural and art history within an exclusively national framework and the dominant Western paradigm that is preoccupied with the European core and a progressive linear developmental model. Within Anglo-Saxon academia, the change began in the 1970s and 1980s with New Art History, and from the late 1990s onward, the approaches of World Art History or Global Art Studies further reinvigorated the field. New Art History took a socially oriented critical turn in an effort to account also for the realities of the social world in which art is created.¹ Earlier preoccupations of the discipline (such as iconography, aesthetic quality, influence, period style, the figure of the genius, the hierarchy of genres, etc.) were replaced by a terminology more closely related to that of the social sciences, while new research objects came to include the material conditions under which artworks had been made. In the wake of these methodological shifts, the hierarchies within the spatial regime of art history (also known as center/periphery relations) were disputed as authors aspired to account for developments in particular localities, rather than trace purportedly universal processes. The divergence of historical developments, the reality of multiple modernities, and different path-models are being increasingly acknowledged in this framework, within which the value assignment implied in the label “backward/belated” is also relativized, or indeed refused, in favor of exploring the very factors that may have enabled or rather constrained certain developmental paths in any concrete historical location.

While this recent scholarship has posed apparent challenges to the conventional disciplinary model of art history and to pre-determined cultural hierarchies, the gain of a transnational perspective might not be immediately clear. After all, in art history, cross-cultural comparison and the observation of the history of relations—so, if you will, a wide and always already transnational horizon—form part of the elementary methodological standards of the discipline. The cross-border linkages and exchanges have themselves also been present for centuries in the world of art and culture, long before the advent of the “first globalization.” The latter is a term ever more frequently used by historians of economics to capture the era spanning the last third of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century up to World War I. Over the past six years i have been a member of an interdisciplinary research group that set itself the goal of writing/re-writing the history of east-central Europe from the perspectives of transnational and global history, taking this precise period as its starting point.² This task has been approached along five “dimensions,” some of which are subject fields brought to life by global history itself—such as the intensive

study of migration, processes of spatialization and territorialization, or the emergence of inter- and supranational organizations. Other dimensions straddle the traditional disciplines of economic and cultural history, both of which had to be rethought and retold within this specific conceptual framework.³ When historians claim that the turn of the last century was the “first globalization” they do not deny the existence of worldwide trade and cultural circuits in earlier centuries. Rather, these authors mean to underscore that, by the late nineteenth century, ever-larger geographical areas and aspects of social-cultural life were drawn into cross-border entanglements. Due to the rapid development in transportation and mass communication, the participation in global networks was no longer reserved for select individuals but became a fairly common phenomenon.

We proposed that this period has two important aspects for east-central European history. One of them is related to the impact of the recently-emerging trend of Empire Studies. This branch of history has departed from a nation-centered approach and reconstructed conventional narratives of pre-twentieth-century Europe (and beyond) as a transnational history of empires. This was an acknowledgment that, for millennia, diverse groups of people were often united by force in a certain territory, which implies that political organization had little to do with ethnic or national belonging (Burbank and Cooper 2011; Kaufmann 1995). The lands ruled by emperors were connected by what may be called the ruler’s supranational ideals rather than cultural unity. These are important insights for (re)conceptualizing the cultural history of a region—East-Central Europe—in the majority of which the nation-state did not exist until the twentieth century, and where prevalent state formations had been instead a mixture of ethnic, religious, and language groups. The other aspect governing our investigation was an exploration of the mechanisms of transnationalization during the period under scrutiny. Concurrently with the increasing wave of globalization, the small nations of eastern Europe (or at least certain circles of their elites) also strove to achieve political independence and statehood as well as to give shape to their particular national cultures. National culture here is not only meant to include venerated works of high art but also the creation of the system of cultural institutions and, in many cases, the codification of the national language in order to elevate it to a level where it could be introduced as the means of communication in public administration, higher education, scholarship, etc. In this double force field lay a challenge for eastern European “little peoples”:⁴ beside an intense focus on the national, they simultaneously had to enter a global stage and position themselves on a transnational market of consumer and cultural goods. In the absence of (full) national self-administration, what were their chances of doing so and what were their strategies to “manage” the global condition? In this chapter i intend to report on ways and methodological perspectives i drew on when tackling the task of transnationally rethinking Eastern European art and cultural history.

Although exploring intercultural connections or the circulation of images, styles, and aesthetics is an axiom of art historical research, from the nineteenth century until the postwar period, art historiography tended to take the national container as a usual unit of its narratives. Treatises deploying such traditional national perspectives usually disregard the fact that the conditions of interculturality vividly characterized earlier historical periods. Thomas DaKosta Kaufmann (1995) extensively wrote about the times when no urge was yet felt to nationally compartmentalize the shared intellectual-cultural field of which east-central Europe was also a part. The need to

do so emerged with the modern nineteenth-century idea of the nation as an enduring collective, and with the work of scholars who constructed territorially-based histories of “national culture.” The fact alone that political borders criss-crossed the eastern part of the European continent over centuries should have discouraged champions of national history writing. Nevertheless, scholarly praxis has overlooked this historical reality for a long time and projected current borders onto the continent’s historical map, thus helping create and perpetuate a sort of “nationalist memory” (Labno 2011, 64). A transnational approach to cultural history operates in a different manner: this method does not so much conceive of the “world” as a quantitative sum of distinct national units defined by their borders; here, cross-border flows, connections, and biographies of mobility are just as relevant parts of the history of a country as events unfolding within state boundaries. Following processes of cultural appropriation and global exchange that shaped the visual arts throughout the past five or six centuries, World Art History and Global Art Studies, for their part, opened up an art historical inquiry toward non-core parts of the world (Sheriff 2010, 1–16; see also: Carrier 2008; Rampley 2006; Zijlmans and Damme 2008).

As suggested above, extra-national references—in other words, influences from, comparisons and exchanges with, foreign developments, and especially with the European mainstream—do take a prominent role even in the nationally-construed master narratives of Eastern European art history. Much of the discussion, however, has been carried out with a sort of self-documentational or compensatory thrust to prove that the arts and culture of “little peoples” did dedicatedly follow the developmental line of the European core (Trencsényi 2002, 154). The related literature explicitly evaluates local artistic and intellectual output against “international” (read: western European) standards and, as a result, often attributes an overall backwardness to regional culture. Such normative assessment can inevitably only acknowledge cases when particular local actors or works “stand comparison,” follow suit with only minor delay, or acquire international fame.⁵

Besides foregrounding east-central Europe’s deep interconnectedness in a wide web of artistic exchanges, a transnational approach allows for the development of theoretical and methodological tools that help retrieve a sort of synchronous agency on the one hand and to achieve a narrative or diachronic agency on the other. The former operation aims at reinstating the scope of actions of cultural actors from the region as they engaged in, occasionally impacted on, or sometimes consciously abstained from transnational processes emerging in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Through this operation, the cultural history of east-central Europe will be made visible and proposed as a productive subject field for world art studies, whereby a particular blind spot of global (art) history might also be brought into view: while global history as a booming academic trend is, these days, open to expand the discipline’s conventional scope into Asia, south America, and Africa, Europe’s eastern part has received relatively little sustained attention within this new paradigm. The second and perhaps more challenging methodological task is deploying history writing as a kind of narrative strategy with which to remove East-Central European art history from the disadvantaged status it has acquired within the Western-focused cultural canon, a status often marked by the labels “backward,” “delayed,” “imitative,” or “derivative.” What makes this task truly challenging is that its accomplishment requires more than garnering evidence in the form of artistic achievements whose value lies in the faithful reproduction of great models. The

ultimate aim is to abandon such normative comparisons and to dethrone the dominant Western narrative and canon as single valid vantage points.

In what follows, i will showcase how this dual task has been tackled in recent scholarly projects. While drawing up my far-from-complete survey, i found that several issues have taken center stage in these endeavors and hence i selected these questions to structure the second part of my discussion. The questions include various takes on the movement of artistic ideas and cultural practices, including (successful or failed) attempts to replace the commonly practiced diffusionist approach or to deploy the travelling concept of cultural transfer in art history. Discussing artistic output in terms that respond adequately to the historical–geographical (or geopolitical, if you prefer) conditions of their making is another approach attracting growing analytical attention. The construction of national culture and identity, or the lack or ambiguous nature thereof, has also been widely discussed by historians and art historians of the period.

Ways of Overcoming the Backwardness Complex

Two English-language monographs were among the first volumes to both endorse newer cultural historical approaches and offer comprehensive overviews of the artistic landscape of the east-central European region around the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The 1999 monograph *Modern Art in Eastern Europe* by the American Steven Mansbach provided the first comprehensive survey of the subject.⁶ Mansbach presents an overview of the various artistic movements, the ideas that inspired them, their sources, and the varied geographical, political, and historical factors that underpinned their emergence. Throughout the book, the author also highlights important cross-regional differences—e.g., the degree of freedom to express patriotic feelings or the receptiveness of the general public to artistic innovation—as well as the ever-intensifying contact between western Europe and the eastern areas. Elizabeth Clegg’s *Art, Design and Architecture in Central Europe 1890–1920* (2006) takes Austro-Hungary as a cultural historical unit and, unlike Mansbach, who organizes his material according to present-day nation-states, Clegg focuses on eight regional centers: Vienna, Brno, Prague, Cracow, Lemberg, Budapest, Zagreb, and Ljubljana.

While Mansbach invests heavily in the aesthetic assessment of individual artists and artworks, Elizabeth Clegg’s work is more a contribution to the sociology of art than to art history, and it also embraces the entire institution of art.⁷ The author’s take on national culture is diametrically opposed to that found in the majority of the Eastern European scholarly literature. Whereas art historians in the region tend to include in the national container artists and intellectuals who spent most of their professional careers abroad and might never have resided in, or returned to, the countries of their national origin, Clegg avoids “retrospective reappropriations” and neglects such figures (2006, 5). This may be a viable viewpoint if one wants consciously to avoid essentializing national belonging. However, this is considerably more debatable in situations in which some of the most ardent proponents of the national cause were driven to emigration or exile where, quite far from severing links to their home regions, they continued their political organizing or artistic work. Master narratives of Polish cultural history have even tended to overemphasize this circumstance to claim that, despite the conditions of the Partition,⁸ dividing frontiers

were ignored in both political and cultural life, since the activities of émigré circles always targeted fellow Poles. Another disputable aspect of Clegg's treatment of historical actors and their national cultures is that she only seems to take *ethnic* belonging seriously, and does not admit the possibility of multiple cultural-national identification, let alone of the rejection of one-dimensional identities—however, this particular characteristic of the late nineteenth-century east-central European cultural landscape is one that many recent historical studies underline (Buzinkay 1989; Judson 2006; Telesko 2007; Wendland 2009; and Scheller in this volume).

In the introduction to his monograph, Mansbach expressed his aspiration to reintegrate the art of the European periphery within the mainstream history of European modernism. He hoped to achieve this by breaking with the uni-dimensional view of artistic movements that hides east Europeans' role in shaping the progressive artistic tendencies of the time. Rather than automatically adopting categories commonly used in modern European art history, the author was pressing for more nuanced local readings and an awareness of local geography. At the beginning of individual chapters, Mansbach indeed sketches the historical context of the country discussed there, but he appears to be at a loss as to how to utilize this background knowledge when treating individual artworks or oeuvres: in the actual discussion chapters, well-entrenched categories and seminal figures of western European art history continue to haunt his narrative. The firm grip of the art historical canon and a diffusionist vision of the emergence and spread of artistic ideas and products are clearly felt in Mansbach's approach. The diffusionist approach informed early scholarship both in art history and cultural anthropology, presuming that creative innovation originates in a limited number of cultural centers before spreading to peripheries.⁹ This vertical model has been particularly dominant in discussions of modern art and fell back on a methodology positing that "international" period styles all had their own—at times resourceful and at other times derivative—national variations. This postulate does not only establish cultural hierarchies but fallaciously smooths over incongruities and provides clear contexts for the sake of arriving at a unified view of individual oeuvres and artistic movements (Ades 1988, 17–18). Viewed in this light, Mansbach's praise of eastern European artists' inventiveness in adapting and combining styles from abroad appears problematic, even if it might be commendable from the perspective of cultural transfer theories according to which transferring is never simply an act of transporting or adopting but rather of actively reworking and metamorphosing.¹⁰ Presenting, however, the ability to borrow and mix as peripheral actors' greatest achievement does not only implicitly reinforce the seamlessness of period styles (which allegedly only get admixed at a distance from the center), but this kind of framing also makes eastern European artists appear helplessly dependent on western European influences (cf. Elkins 2000) while virtually incapable of more sovereign contributions.

James Elkins has reviewed Mansbach's monograph, and his long and thorough-going text is basically a methodological attempt to better sort out dilemmas around peripheral location, relative isolation, historical-cultural differences, a shared artistic vocabulary, and genuine creative accomplishment. Addressing the disturbing question of "what is to be done about this problem of description, in which every work that is made at a distance from the center becomes a soup pot of styles from other countries," Elkins puts forward some guidelines, among them ways to distinguish various species of regionalism (Elkins 2000, 782–784). An artist is "regionalist"

when s/he knows what is happening in some other region but decides to continue making art that is particular to his/her own culture; an artist is “parochial” when s/he knows something is happening elsewhere but is afraid to find out too much, for fear of compromising their perceived unique contribution to their nation’s art; and, finally, a “provincialist” artist is one who wants to know about art that is taking place in some other region, but is prevented from partaking in it for political and economic reasons. This terminology and typology is not always warmly received, as “regional(ist)” and “provincial(ist)” tend to appall because they are thought to be synonymous with “marginal” or “of lesser relevance,” whereas, in Elkin’s classification, “parochial” is really the only category that carries a pejorative value. When deployed consequently, however, this latter category does not only have bearing on artistic positions on the periphery, as we will see. To me, this appears to be a materialist taxonomy that, as opposed to an idealist treatment of artistic production, is no longer dominated by a temporal–chronological viewpoint (most notably, the succession of period styles) but also foregrounds space. In also reckoning with the question of *where* happens what happens (under what conditions of economic development or political organization), not only the seamless flow of interconnections between different parts of the world becomes visible but also the *limits* of engaging in interconnections. In addition, assessing the material conditions of encounters and exchanges, rather than merely assigning backwardness or belatedness to the “lack” of a particular development, helps recover the agency, projects, and resources of historical actors. In particular, the limits of partaking in international trends hardly affected, for example, the many visionary design and architectural drafts of early-twentieth-century avant-garde and constructivist artists in eastern Europe, the implementations of which were hindered, in most cases, by the scarcity of financially adequate state (or private) commissions or access to the coveted building materials of the day (Crowley 1992, 94–96; Ferkai 2003, 18–19).¹¹

Influence, Transfer, or . . . ?

The term “influence” had a prominent place in the vocabulary of art and cultural history until recently, when it was pointed out that this concept connotes hegemonic and uni-lateral relations and the passive adoption of ideas. More recent theories prefer delineating more dynamic scenarios in which any movement of an intellectual trend or cultural object from one context to another results in the transformation of its meaning. Re-signification and creative reformulations, as proponents of the theory of cultural transfer assert, possess just as much legitimacy as an incoming “model” itself; indeed, intercultural exchange is always reciprocal and, hence, better described as a series of “contaminating” acts rather than as the delivery or reception of self-contained ideas and objects. The notion of cultural transfer was formulated in the framework of a research project on knowledge flows between nineteenth-century France and Germany (cf. Espagne and Werner 1985), and became itself a “travelling concept,” witnessing a number of re-articulations and inflections. In the Franco-German context and Espagne’s subsequent inquiries, the interaction of two dominant languages/cultures was at stake, where a dynamic intercultural dialogue could indeed be posited, and the existence of, say, mutual literary translation projects could be assumed and described. But does Espagne’s *terminus technicus* prove to be a similarly incisive heuristic tool for the study of less equal-footed relations, too?

Having encountered postcolonial criticism and its interrogation of the relationship between influence and power, newer interpretations of cultural transfer came to also rethink more composite center–periphery scenarios. Espagne (2015), for example, deliberated the contact zones between Vietnam and her French colonizers and hypothesized cultural mixing, but in the meanwhile he seems to have minimized the relevance of the factor of power. As a result, his empirical examples of a purportedly two-sided creative process expose hierarchical positions and fairly different sorts of agency between a suppressed and a master culture. In a setting where one of the parties has only very limited possibility to freely choose influences and initiate cultural transfer, radical changes in meaning may have indeed taken place (French education was, for instance, eventually used against the occupier), but active reinterpretation and transposition appear to have been only the task of the non-dominant party. The material and spiritual culture of the colonizers changed inevitably, at best, under the influence of the local culture, as an “unintended consequence” of the encounter.

This language reflects a lingering belief in the existence of particular cultures and of exchanges in which source and recipient are still well-distinguishable. This perception maybe rooted in the concept’s origin in the study of French–German historical relations: two nations that, in the course of the twentieth century, invested so much in underscoring the distinctness of their national cultures and were engaged in a long history of mutual enmity.¹² At the same time and as the east-central European experience shows, active re-working has long been practiced, and recognized as such, in peripheral locations where cultural zones often stretched over national or political boundaries and the mixing of different cultural elements was practiced on a daily basis. To bring this observation to a logical conclusion, we might hazard the suggestion that a readiness to adopt and transfer is an epistemological attitude, intimately linked to the knower’s lower position in an epistemic hierarchy. The following early-twentieth-century testimony stresses the moments of conscious transplantation and reformulation:

Although the initiators of [the artists’ association] Sztuka had imbibed French culture, they were far from the idea of transplanting French schools to Polish ground. They employed this culture rather as an antidote in the uprooting of German influence on Polish Art. The Art they wished to propagate in Poland was nether German, nor French, but Polish.

(T.Ż. Skarszewski [1922], quoted in Brzyski 2007, n.p.)

Transfer theory can be developed toward dislocating the tenacious concepts of the origin and the original through inspiration taken from semiotics and literary theory. Here notions such as intertextuality (and more broadly, transtextuality) or copying and faking will be especially helpful. Intertextuality as a mode of analysis captures how signs derive their meanings within and among “texts.”¹³ While earlier examinations of the “dialogue” between literary products only tracked allusions to a set of basic cultural–religious texts (e.g., the Bible, heroic epics, and the classics), for postmodern theories of intertextuality, all cultural texts belong to a complex network of other texts where even the great “originals” cannot claim to have fixed meanings. In other words, a “text” does not contain its own meaning and this meaning is not transferred directly from author to recipient, but instead is construed by the latter in the “reading” process. This approach might be able to account for the phenomenon

of borrowing elements from a cultural space shared by various nations without reaffirming a model of primary and recipient cultures. As conscious practices in the nineteenth century, copying and faking also throw into sharp relief the different degree of access to both artistic education and cultural goods themselves. In the era before originals and photographs were widely available and affordable, copying great masters' original works of art had a dual purpose in east-central Europe: art students, less likely to afford study trips to culturally rich lands, learned painting techniques through the process, and the copies made these artworks available to audiences otherwise cut-off from the chance of ever seeing the originals (Révész 2004). As a reverse tribute, the polyglot French author Prosper Mérimée published a volume of Dalmatian folk songs he purportedly collected during his publicly-announced journey to the Balkans, and later translated into French. The truth is that he had never been to Croatia or Bosnia–Hercegovina, only read a few Dalmatian ballads, and hoped to capitalize on the remoteness of south-eastern European culture. It is to Mérimée's credit that his re-formulated pieces did popularize a distant folk culture—which, of course, relied on the perception of the Balkans as part of the Orient.

Platforms of Exchange

World fairs, international trade fairs, and art exhibitions began to be organized in the second half of the nineteenth century. They were to bring prestige to the host city and country, to celebrate technological achievements and sell new products, to bring together specialists, as well as to provide popular education and entertainment for large audiences, and hence offered an incomparably broad overview of human creativity. In this capacity, world fairs greatly contributed to an emerging perception of a globe “out there,” beyond general reach, heterogeneous and unified at the same time. Nineteenth-century grand exhibitions also had their colonialist features: participating countries showed off their riches to home populations, rivals, and the world at large. In displaying colonies or internal colonies the emphasis was not on the history of conquest and domination but on indigenous cultural performance supported through colonial rule and the civilizing mission of the mother country or empire (Benedict 1991, 5–7). The Habsburg Monarchy, while not a colonial power itself, likewise promoted national diversity inside its political borders as an asset, and conveyed a state image in which the empire guaranteed to each of its constituent nations the best possible conditions of development—masking, of course, very real disadvantages (Clegg 2006, 23; Heerde 1993, 15). Regional units or occasional individual participants of the nationalities, whose presence was made possible through the support of patriotic entrepreneurs and industrialists, necessarily featured as constitutive parts of the Austrian display. This often led to political calculations and confrontations. On the occasion of the 1873 Vienna World's Fair, for instance, Czech politicians appealed to nationalist concerns and urged Czech artists to boycott the fair, where they would have to exhibit in the Austro-Hungarian pavilion. At the same time, this appeal further contributed to the relative international invisibility of Czech culture that many contemporaries bemoaned. At the Rome International Exhibition in 1911, it was the Croatian and Serbian artists from Austro-Hungary that managed to break out of a pre-set presentational regime: they refused to display their works either in the Austrian or Hungarian pavilions,

but decided instead to show in the building of the Kingdom of Serbia, where they did not politically belong. The ambassador of Austria–Hungary in Rome reported on the affair, and expressed his conviction that the Kingdom of Serbia had only decided to erect a pavilion in order to capitalize on already existing inter-ethnic tensions (Heerde 1993, 172). Certainly, after 1918, and with their national independence achieved, Poland and Czechoslovakia celebrated their sovereignty with grand national exhibitions.

After the 1867 Austrian–Hungarian Compromise, the Hungarian Kingdom gained sovereignty in matters of culture. Nevertheless, it was not before the 1900 Paris World’s Fair that the country independently built its own pavilion. The applied arts products on display in the Hungarian Hall bravely combined an internationally-recognizable up-and-coming visual language (Art Nouveau) with elements of folklore and vernacular culture. This display not only enjoyed a resounding success but earned Hungary an invitation to erect its own national Pavilion at the Venice Biennale. The Biennale had been in existence since 1895 but the first Pavilion—the Belgian one—was only built in 1906. Hungary’s pavilion, built in 1909, was the second. But—as we learn from Kinga Bódi’s (2014) research—besides aesthetic considerations, the invitation was partly due to other, extra-artistic factors. Part of the favorable treatment Hungary received from the Italian host was connected to the still-lingering gratitude toward Hungarian political emigres who had fought on the Italian side in the third war of independence against Habsburg Austria some forty years before.

Studying large-scale international exhibitions also highlights scenarios in which transnational networks are formed and reached through alternative routes. Viewed from the perspective of such alternative trajectories, the centers that typically host grand expositions are not so much perceived as the ultimate sources of influence, but rather as *resources*, providing an opportunity for marginal countries that otherwise might be less likely to come together, to establish contact, and to work together. The above-mentioned Paris World’s Fair in 1900 was home to such a “center as resource” kind of meeting between two European peripheries. The Hungarian triumph in Paris was attributable to the participation of the Gödöllő workshop. In the same year, another hit of the Paris exhibition was the output of another small nation, a group of Finnish artists clustering around the leading personality of Akseli Gallen-Kallela. Both groups drew on, yet reworked, popular Europe-wide tendencies like Art Nouveau or the British Arts and Crafts movement by combining them with motifs derived from their own vernacular culture (Hudra and Keserü 2005). It was in Paris that these artists became aware of each other and their common creative aspirations. The results of their Parisian meeting were lasting mutual inspiration, exhibition exchange, and commissions that continued in the United States after World War I, where key figures of both groups acquired positions at the Cranbrook Art Academy, an educational institution modelled after the Bauhaus. A more politically-tainted variation of this idiom was the Polish Zakopane style that aimed to contrapose a distinct independent national character, as it were, and exclude foreign hegemonic influences. Paradoxically, this visual phraseology, anchored in ethnic and historical origins, turns out to be, on reflection, not so much a national but a transnational phenomenon, the success of which was itself conditioned on liberal western European audiences’ sympathy for the independence struggle of small central European nations.

Paris as Parochial

Methodological attempts within postcolonial criticism to de-center or provincialize the European core have been carried over into revisionist art history. Several innovatively conceptualized recent studies de-center or provincialize the artistic centers, pointing out that it has often only been their definitional monopoly that made particular junctures *the* artistic center of the time. Understandably, Paris has been the most frequently targeted and dethroned capital of modern art and culture.

I recalled earlier how Steven Mansbach identified the pluralism and blending of artistic styles as a distinguishing feature of Eastern European Modernism, but i also expressed doubts regarding the explanatory power and methodological value of his thesis. Another researcher, Csilla Markója (2008), also goes back to the difference between how artistic styles developed in the Western centers and in other parts of Europe, but she follows an analytical strategy other than pointing to a mere skillful reworking of foreign influences—and she ends up with provincializing French impressionism. Markója revisits Impressionism, the blueprint for late nineteenth-century artistic progressivism, which came to overshadow other stylistic tendencies that at the time were equally noteworthy parcels of the much broader and much more heterogeneous spectrum of modern art. She shifts the focus to *Stimmungsimpressionismus* instead, a widely-practiced but subsequently sidetracked artistic idiom that was also the preferred form of expression of several east-central European artists as well: in general art histories today, their paintings are described as “national variations” derived from a “parent” French Impressionism. Markója argues that if we leave behind the usual east European provincialism and belatedness complex, we may even end up challenging the universal relevance of Impressionism and its key position within the art historical canon. For, we may reach the conclusion that it was not the “national variations” but French Impressionism itself which was a “local, if you wish ‘provincial’ version, a logical but after all particular outgrowth” of a more widespread artistic style of its time (2008, 204–209). Meanwhile, *Stimmungsimpressionismus* turns out to have been “perhaps the largest, the most comprehensive, unified and progressive trend of the nineteenth century, the impact of which ranged from Barbizon to the Hague School, to Wien, and to the Russian Empire or, further to the South, Italy” (2008, 204–209). The author hopes that with this sort of methodology and through bringing in as yet lesser-studied artistic genealogies, the conventional developmental scheme of art history can be modified. Striking byways, detours, and, at times, parallel paths will be made visible and it will become clear that the idea of “artistic import should not suggest that all that is to be found east of Paris is ‘second-rate stock’ or ‘copied stuff’.”

In canonical art histories, Surrealism continued to secure Paris’ position as the single most important artistic center of the interwar period. Delving into the magazines, the publication and personal networks of the transnational avant-garde provided evidence for Béatrice Joyeux-Prunell and the Artl@s project to destabilize established histories of Modernism. It is an undisputed fact that founding magazines was an essential means to become part of the international art scene: for the period between 1917 and 1940, researchers have compiled a list of approximately 305 modernist magazines in Europe and in the Americas (Joyeux-Prunel 2015, 51). Running a magazine indicated an artist group’s aspiration to be recognized as part of the international avant-garde. Rather than already-established canonical fame,

Joyeux-Prunell and the Artl@s project took this “will to cosmopolitanism” as their criterion to assess contemporary relevance. Through mapping the social and professional networks of artist groups across the continent, they revealed a more intricate geopolitics of the avant-garde than the single-center model has long suggested. While new vanguard magazines were very dynamically created in, and distributed from, east-central Europe, the Surrealists and other modernists of the French capital proved to be the most reluctant to engage in cross-border networking. Thus, inasmuch as cosmopolitanism was the most decisive indicator of being progressive at the time, Parisian groups turn out to have exhibited a rather *parochial* attitude toward transnational networking, as James Elkins’s taxonomy would have it.

As the handful of theoretical propositions and methodological operations i have discussed in this survey show, a simple geographical enlargement of the inquiry is not enough to study East-Central European art history on a transnational level; scholars must also “turn analytically from para-Europe.” The phrase “para-Europe” was submitted as a tentative terminology by Susan Zimmermann (2000) to capture a set of research methodologies and interpretations that are rooted in the dominant paradigms of thought within a nominally “global,” yet relentlessly Eurocentric (or “West”-centric), academia. Eroding the legitimacy of such research designs brings to the surface a genuinely multi-faceted international picture. This methodological move helps reveal concepts and realities in other parts of the world—eastern Europe for instance—that have been largely ignored, or the existence of which has hardly been considered, due to the limiting boundaries of para-European scholarly approaches.

Notes

- 1 In central and eastern Europe, a social historical approach to the history of art was already strongly present from the 1930s on and during the Cold War decades. Azatyan 2009 and Born 2013 offer excellent overviews of these early tendencies.
- 2 The use of the lowercase pronoun “i” signifies my reservations about a unique convention in the English language, wherein the first-person singular is capitalized and thus prioritized. It comes across as a remarkably self-centered characteristic and as such may deserve to be denaturalized. In this sense, my usage is not unlike the initially distracting but now widely-accepted replacement of the generic “he” with gender-neutral pronouns. This usage continues T.R.O.Y.’s practice in his essay, “The New World Disorder: A Global Network of Direct Democracy and Community Currency,” submitted for the Utopian World Championship 2001, organized by SOC, a Stockholm-based non-profit organization for artistic and social experiments. http://utopianwc.com/2001/troy_text.asp.
- 3 The first volume of a prospective three-part publication was published under the title *Handbuch einer transnationalen Geschichte Ostmitteleuropas* (Hadler and Middell 2017).
- 4 This kind of designation of the small nations and countries of eastern Europe goes back to the seminal writings of István Bibó ([1946] 1986) and Peter Brock (1992).
- 5 This latter achievement also appears to be credited in the newer literature, a predilection of which is to explore reverse flows and impact from periphery to center, whereas emphasizing impact made on “universal history” (i.e., Western thought) should be of secondary importance for a de-hierarchized view in the strong sense. For this approach, see e.g., Monaville 2012.
- 6 A monograph by Hungarian art historian, Krisztina Passuth, surveying avant-garde artistic connections from Prague to Bucharest was first published in French in 1988, in Hungarian just about the same time as Mansbach’s book (1998), and was translated into German years later (2003). For a brief remark of Mansbach’s access to research resources, see Kristóf Nagy’s contribution to this volume.

- 7 The catalog of the exhibition *Das Zeitalter Kaiser Franz Josephs* (Kühnel, Vavra, and Stangler, 1987) works with a similar approach but only covers areas belonging to Habsburg Austria.
- 8 The territories of the once-powerful Kingdom of Poland were divided among Prussia, Austria, and Russia in three partitions of 1772, 1793, and 1795, whereby the Polish state temporarily ceased to exist until the end of World War I.
- 9 For a broader discussion of the diffusionist approach, see Hugill 1996 or Kaufmann, Dossin, and Joyeux-Prunel 2015, 2–3.
- 10 The theory of cultural transfer itself will be problematized at a later point in this chapter.
- 11 Cf. also Sarah Schlachetzki's chapter in this volume.
- 12 For a succinct account of the frantic attempts to set apart infectious enemy art from spiritually-invigorating national culture, see Segal 2016, 17–30; and see Middell (2016) for the meaning of the French's defeat in 1871 for initiating French–German knowledge transfer as a conscious cultural operation to seek out the enemy's key to success.
- 13 The term “text” here does not only denote verbal or written messages but any meaningful structure, cultural product, or set of representations composed of a combination of signs.

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3 From Fringe Interest to Hegemony

The Emergence of the Soros Network in Eastern Europe¹

Kristóf Nagy

The Soros Foundation is a philanthropic organization that played a definitive role in the formation of the eastern European artistic field in the 1980s and early 1990s. In this study, I recount the emergence of the foundation in Hungary, and discuss its ideological framework. I will investigate the reasons behind the activities of the Foundation. I argue that, although during the political regime change the Foundation was a catalyst for the integration of the artistic life of Hungary and other eastern European countries into the Western paradigm, it also promoted new kinds of political, economic, and cultural dependencies. While this restructuring of the Hungarian and eastern European art scenes was not solely due to the work of the Soros Foundation, my inquiry is exclusively focused on it due to its leading role in the transition, which resulted in a new institutional framework that provided both more opportunities and new contacts for the actors in the field.

George Soros (born 1930), a Hungarian-born businessman who accumulated his capital via hedge funds in the US the 1970s and 1980s, became interested in the struggles of eastern European dissidents around 1980 (Harms 2014, 31–32). In those years, the political climate was thawing in Hungary, and the relationships and dependencies between Hungary and First World countries were strengthened both in economic and cultural respects. This was especially true after 1982, when Hungary joined the IMF (International Monetary Fund) and, indebted in foreign currencies, the country became more dependent on its creditors. Soros started to extend his philanthropic activity onto Hungary against this backdrop. This activity was primarily manifest in the establishment and support of institutions for culture, civil society, and higher education. Even though Soros' funding practices and liberal values posed a political threat to the state-socialist apparatus, the government—that could no longer afford generously subsidizing cultural and educational programmes—permitted him to establish philanthropic organizations as these brought valuable income in dollars, when the country was otherwise in a constant need of hard currency. Although Hungary was softening politically and ideologically, it still effectively functioned as a one-party state, and therefore offered an ideal opportunity for Soros to achieve his aim: the creation of a Popperian open society (Nóvé 1999, 35).² As Nicolas Guilhot (2005, 15) points out, the expansion of the Soros Foundation in Hungary and its aim of spreading the idea of open society, which in this context resonated with the promises of capitalism and liberal democracy, was mainly carried out by cultural means during the 1980s.

For Soros, the visual arts were not a priority; he even stated in an interview: “I really don’t like most of the art in the centers” (Soros 1995, 125). However, as

Annette Laborey, the former vice president of Soros' Open Society Foundations argued, "Soros abhors charity . . . He works as an investor and looks for what gives the best result" (Laborey, quoted in Gardner 2015, 108). Therefore, the visual arts become important in this project not for their own sake, but because the state-socialist regime prevented Soros from directly focusing his activities in the political sphere. More broadly, culture was an area where charity promised to be a good investment—in other words, charitable work could serve as an indirect political intervention. This political–philanthropic attempt was based on a sort of informal top-down logic, in which liberal democracy and market economy were promoted from "above," primarily by intellectuals (Scheppelle 1999, 23). Therefore, visual arts and the idea of contemporary art were small but inherent parts of the struggle to construct a Soros-promoted version of the open society.

While Soros came from a business background, his activity in eastern Europe was neither a business enterprise nor an interest-free donation; it was rather a conscious attempt to help create the foundations of an open society as an alternative to authoritarian forms of power-wielding in the region. Therefore, the Soros Foundation's operation in eastern Europe was not part of a business enterprise, and in this sense, I agree with Slavoj Žižek (2009, 2) that Soros is an old type of capitalist because his business and charitable activities remain separated.

The Soros Foundation, whose mission was to support academic and cultural life, was established as part of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences (HAS) in 1984. The charter ratifying a Fine Arts Documentation Center was signed by Katalin Néray, director of the Budapest Műcsarnok (Contemporary Art Center) and George Soros on April 10, 1985.³ The work of the Documentation Center was assisted by an International Advisory Board from 1985 to 1988, which gave it an international character and the explicit aim of strengthening the international reach of the Hungarian art world. The agreement eventually registered a board of ten members: five from Hungary and five from abroad. Soros made the following Hungarian art historians members of the board: László Beke, Lóránd Hegyi, Márta Kovalovszky, Lajos Németh, and Júlia Szabó; of whom only Németh held a leading position at a local institution (Nagy 2014). This shows that most Hungarian members were chosen from a pool of professionals who might have not occupied top positions but certainly exerted intellectual influence at that time. Nevertheless, the Hungarian members were not explicitly opposed to the government; instead, their positions were comparable to those of the reform economists of the late-socialist period. Both groups seem to have been working within the state apparatus toward reforming the system from within, with the aspiration of (re)integrating their own professional field into Western institutional patterns in a technocratic way (Bockman and Eyal 2002, 310–352). Thus, the constitution of the Advisory Board took place according to the general mode of operation of the eastern European "Soros Network" that expanded into the field of artistic production in the 1990s within the framework of the Soros Center for Contemporary Arts (SCCA) (Guilhot 2007, 468). Foreign members of the board were powerful American, British, and Austrian art historians, primarily heads of esteemed museums: J. Carter Brown, Michael Compton, Thomas Messer, Meda Mládek, and Dieter Ronte. Loránd Bereczky, Director of the National Gallery and the official in charge of art history for the Central Committee of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party (MSZMP KB), was later included in the Board upon request of the Party. In order to balance the number of the Hungarian and foreign members,

Jean-Cristophe Ammann was appointed a member too.⁴ While the selection of the Hungarian members seems to suggest that the most thoroughly-informed and influential art historians were invited, the appointment of the foreign members with international prestige was also important. The foreign members were not hired for their knowledge about east European art. All but one of them, Mládek, held important positions in the international art world.⁵ The presence of highly-qualified western members leading renowned institutions functioned as an authority-guarantee in encounters with Hungarian governmental agencies. When, during the negotiations about the Center's establishment, Thomas Messer, the director of the Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, represented Soros, his affiliation to the prestigious Guggenheim Museum greatly impressed the central figures of Hungarian cultural politics.

According to staff member Andrea Szekeres's testimony and the Center's archival documents, the staff of the Center arranged the collection of materials rather than authoring document entries, and provided information to visitors, mainly foreign art professionals and students (Szekeres 2012, pers. comm.). Until 1989, the Documentation Center worked as part of the Budapest Múcsarnok. During this period, their task was to document the work of about 100 artists selected primarily by the Hungarian members of the Advisory Board.⁶ The compiled records contained the biography of an artist, a brief summary of their work, and a list of exhibitions and publications covering their work, as well as color slides, collated and organized following the model of the Washington National Gallery's archive. The records were arranged in a readily comprehensible format, meant to be accessible even for those who had no previous information about a given artist (Szekeres 2012, pers. comm.). This arrangement was to serve the needs of an internationally-emerging actor in the artistic scene around the same time: the curator. Nevertheless, the documentation process was neither entirely clear nor resolved. In the meetings of the Advisory Board, two—not necessarily contradictory—approaches were set against each other: the need to assist exhaustive, academic inquiry, and the creation of shorter, more clearly arranged, market- and curator-friendly documentation.

The Struggle for Cultural Hegemony

The notion of hegemony helps us better understand the relationship between the Soros Foundation and the Hungarian state in the late Kádár era, in which George Soros and his network were working on dislodging state-socialist authority and attempting to usher in a new form of social organization which they referred to as “open society.” Cultural hegemony signifies a power structure that does not exert direct political influence, but is effective on other levels, such as culture and civil society. To establish a hegemonic order, a dominant group must possess political power, but need not have total control over the dominated. The creation of a social and cultural leadership is also essential for keeping the relative freedom of the dominated in check. The notion of cultural hegemony, which was introduced by Antonio Gramsci in the early 1930s, does not refer merely to domination, but rather to intellectual and moral leadership (Gramsci 2000, 249). According to Gramsci, hegemony is based on the consent of the dominated social groups—therefore, its essence lies not only in politics, but also in civil society and intellectuals who form the “collective will” of the people (Jessop 1982, 148). Moreover, hegemony is always

temporary and processual; it is inherently unstable, thus it has to be continuously remade and re-established. The Hungarian government seems to have been maneuvering between taking advantage of the money Soros invested locally and hoping to be able to neutralize, in the long run, the cultural-social values promoted by the Foundation. Thus, this particular constellation can be regarded as a war of positions between the Soros Foundation and the Hungarian state for cultural hegemony. I wish to argue here that, in this struggle, the Soros Foundation primarily sponsored an up-and-coming non-Communist elite. Numerous key figures of the cultural and political counter-culture now had the opportunity for institutional backing through receiving grants or finding employment in the Foundation.

The question remains as to why the government allowed the Soros Foundation to start operation in Hungary if part of the Foundation's declared mission was the spreading of knowledge and critical tools that could potentially contribute to destabilizing the power of the existing cultural and political hegemony. The relation between the goals of the Foundation and those of the state was paradoxical: some of their aims intersected, while others were incompatible. On the one hand, the Foundation spent large sums of money on Hungarian culture, partly in US dollars at a time when the Hungarian state was beginning to withdraw from subsidizing this area. From this point of view, their interests converged: cultural projects left underfunded by the government were now supported by the Foundation, and through this support the Foundation also gained a degree of indirect political influence in the region. On the other hand, both parties wanted either to maintain or acquire influential positions in the cultural and social spheres. The party state wanted to sustain its own dominant role even though the ideology behind it was wearing thin, whereas the Soros Foundation wished to introduce reforms based on the model of a liberal-humanitarian utopia, previously only shared by a handful of dissident intellectuals. Between 1984 and 1989, the state and the Foundation were teetering in this complicated situation however, we know that they continued cooperating because the agreement of HAS and the Foundation was never terminated.⁷ However, hegemonic aspirations did not only present themselves in the form of financial support. The Documentation Center's making of records was likewise a project aiming at an epistemic hegemony inasmuch the Center took over a sensitive task from the state. Of course, documentation is never neutral; as Octavian Esanu (2012, 17–18) points out, it can be a step toward acquiring power in two respects: through the possession of information, and through the selection and organization of information that creates a position of control.

In this complex struggle for cultural hegemony, the old, state-socialist technocrats and the new, typically liberal and internationally embedded cultural elites worked together within the circles of the Soros Foundation in the second half of the 1980s. A result of this cooperation was a subtle and continuous shift in power relations. As Piotrowski has argued (2009, 403–405), this also meant that no radical change took place in the Hungarian art scene in 1989, as transformation had already been underway in the 1980s and did not end in 1989.

During this ongoing conflict, the participating influential intellectuals (in our concrete case, the Hungarian members of the Advisory Board) were assimilated into the emerging liberal cultural hegemony. While in the 1980s they were condemning the ideology of the state, these intellectuals now risked compromising their critical distance by participating in the emerging hegemony of the Soros Foundation (Guilhot

2005, 14). Under state-socialism, the Hungarian intellectuals of the Advisory Board were primarily interested in gaining support for their aesthetic objectives, but did not articulate this politically. Drawing on Gramsci's definition from the early 1930s, these board members functioned as "traditional intelligentsia" because they were not closely involved in the dissident activities of the 1980s but maintained their institutional positions. For Gramsci, traditional intellectuals primarily "think of themselves as 'independent', autonomous"; they are nevertheless potentially useful to any hegemonic project because "one of the most important characteristics of any group that is developing toward dominance is its struggle to assimilate and to conquer 'ideologically' the traditional intellectuals" (Gramsci 2000, 303–304). However, the members of the Advisory Board kept to the stance of traditional intellectuals even after the political shift and during the rise of the new Soros-supported liberal hegemony. They continued to see their own position or function as one distinct from the majority of society, while they only felt responsible for the transformation of the contemporary art scene without, however, reflecting on this sphere's broader social context. Consequently, they were primarily loyal toward the cause of contemporary art but not necessarily that of the Soros-promoted open society. Another line of thought to be explored in a subsequent study would be how this adherence, among art professionals, to a traditional apolitical intellectual ethos at the same time jeopardized the emergent liberal project that would have badly needed its own engaged, organic intelligentsia.

Power Structures Under Transformation

During the 1980s in eastern Europe and Hungary, economic dependency on capitalist countries and international organizations increased, and this circumstance fostered a rethinking of the relationship between the two sides of the Iron Curtain. In eastern Europe, intellectuals were encouraged to draw conclusions from the experiences of the capitalist world and integrate them into socialism rather than aim to outdo the Western world. This intellectual shift went hand-in-hand with the cultural implications of dual economic dependency, where both Soviet and capitalist Western expectations had to be reconciled simultaneously (Böröcz 1992, 189–209). In Hungary, dual dependency became a real issue between 1987 and 1988, when neighboring socialist states pressured the Hungarian government to ban the Soros Foundation due to its advocacy of Western interests and liberal cultural politics across eastern Europe. Ultimately, however, the national economic arguments in favor of the Foundation were stronger (Nóvé 1999, 354). The concept of dual dependency applied both to the Hungarian state and to the activities of the Soros Documentation Center, which "served two masters": it concurred with the cultural politics of the late Kádár era, and catered to the broader aspirations of the Soros Foundation as well as the needs of art professionals from western Europe and the US.

There has been an enduring image both in the eastern and western European public imagination about the relation between the two halves of the continent, and this image resembles a slope. The figure of the slope is anchored in the historical perception of Eastern Europe as backward and essentially different, as continuously but unsuccessfully trying to catch-up with the western part of the continent. While this perception has been in place since the enlightenment, the thought figure of the slope experienced a revival during the Cold War (Melegh 2006, 189–191).⁸

The slope connotes a situation in which every actor aims to progress as much as possible, to become as Western as possible, as it were, and adopt the apparently more civilized capitalist model. In this portrayal, Eastern Europe and the postcolonial countries bear several similarities: they all appear as “other” to Western culture, while local peoples tend to identify with a subaltern position (Chari and Verdery 2009). The activity of the Soros Foundation focused on moving the postsocialist countries upward on the slope. Its philosophy apparently reinforced the concept of the civilization slope and saw the Eastern European region as subordinate to Western countries.

From the perspective of the Soros Foundation, the project of Eastern Europe’s upward movement and catching up was a process of enlightenment that aimed to help the Hungarian elite to assimilate Western cultural patterns. These patronizing attitudes clearly manifested themselves in Meda Mládek’s account, as she argued that from the beginning it was doubtful that the Soros Foundation’s steps could be successful since, in her view, Hungarian artists were fundamentally different from their western European counterparts. She wrote: “They are not patient, they want success and material advantage now, immediately. They are suddenly confronted with different possibilities and are unable to handle them . . . They are aggressive and confused.”⁹ Her statement mirrors the mindset from which the concept of the civilizational scope was also conceived, and describes Eastern Europe as the counterpoint of the Western world, without a chance of catching up. Mládek’s description of the local artists echoes a widespread kind of portrayal, according to which negative Eastern European traits have always existed and are historically and biologically determined. There are similar assertions in the letters of Steven Mansbach, an American art historian specialized in east European modernism; he complains, e.g., about the slowness of compiling documentation.¹⁰ In this letter, Mansbach questions the Hungarian Board’s logic for selecting artists and contrasts Western professionalism with the politically-motivated personal choices of the Eastern Europeans: “Although requested, no rationale for the selection of the artists to be documented has been provided,” and he adds his opinion: “[. . .] the selection process appears to be the result of the personal choices of a few Hungarian art critics; it does not necessarily reflect scholarly need or expectation in this country.” He even suggests a way to minimize the damage caused both by Hungarian politics and colleagues working in an unscholarly manner: “[. . .] a working committee might best be composed exclusively of western scholars and museum officials, thereby insuring both political independence from (Eastern) governmental influence, and responsiveness to the needs of western scholars and curators.”¹¹ In Mansbach’s opinion, the primary aim of the Documentation Center was to assist English speaking experts as efficiently as possible, while in its public documents the Soros Foundation always presented itself as an organization serving local interests. Mansbach’s comments also assumed that the relation between the Eastern Bloc and the West was binary, with the latter being superior: Anglo-Saxon work organization was opposed to Eastern European actors’ low level of productivity, Western intellectual independence, and impartiality to Eastern bias. Therefore, while Mládek framed Hungarian artists as underdeveloped and uncivilized, Mansbach used similar categories for writing about east European art history, while both agreed that these situations could only be improved with the help of western experts. These positions fit into a logic that, according to Boris Buden (2010, 18–25), assumes Eastern Europe to be an immature entity that should be patronized to help it catch up with Western norms and culture. After the political

transition of 1989, the Soros Foundation expanded and spread this approach to the artistic fields across the postsocialist region. With the establishment of the Soros Centers of Contemporary Arts (SCCA) network, which in their peak included twenty centers in every capital of the former Eastern Bloc, the Foundation aimed to foster not only the catch-up of Hungary but also of the entire postsocialist region to Western standards. Moreover, with SCCA, the Soros Foundation aimed to expand its hegemony project at the regional level, and established a horizontal system that networked across the postsocialist region, had transnational ambitions, and popularized similar artistic practices in every country (Gardner 2015, 108).

The scholarly methodology of the documentation process of the Budapest Center, and, later, that of the SCCA network, eventually followed US protocols. As previously mentioned, the records were to be made according to the model of the National Gallery in Washington, since it was considered to be the only globally accepted “scholarly” method of documenting the visual arts. While individual documentation was produced by Hungarian art historians, it was eventually supervised by Henry Millon from the National Gallery in Washington (Mayer 2013, pers. comm.). The completed documentation gave insight into the local art scene for international researchers and gallerists without any deeper prior knowledge, and functioned as a reference for them to make grand narratives regarding eastern European art and to choose artworks for exhibitions. Thus, as a scholarly database, the Documentation Center served the interests of an asymmetrical scholarly and curatorial relationship, and similar tendencies of academic colonization were also present in other scholarly fields (Csepeli, Örkény, and Scheppele 1996, 487–510).

This asymmetry continued to exist in the 1990s, when Budapest became the hub of the SCCA network’s regional expansion. At that time, the directors of the Soros Centers for Contemporary Art from every eastern European country travelled to Budapest to learn database handling. This knowledge transfer was coordinated by Suzanne Mészöly, who joined the Budapest Center in the late 1980s with a background in visual arts. Mészöly was the key figure in the introduction of the term “contemporary” in the name of the Center. She rose through the ranks and quickly became the director of the Budapest Center and the SCCA network thanks largely to her Hungarian-Australian background. Mészöly visited the freshly established SCCAs across eastern Europe to define the principles of their operation and documentation (Szekeres 2012, pers. comm.). Consequently, in the 1990s, the Soros Foundation replicated a series of unequal set-ups, now placing the Budapest Center in an intermediary, relatively privileged position.

Setting the agenda of a Western level of development as an aim did not only characterize the participants from the other side of the Iron Curtain. The Documentation Center functioned as an elite project, which was an opportunity for the internationally-connected and -oriented section of the art scene. The participating and supported Hungarian professionals expected the Soros Foundation to assist catch-up to western European and US models of contemporary art, the demand for which was already very present in the aspiring section of the local art scene in the early 1980s. Thus, the Foundation did not establish, but only reinforced, existing associations of Eastern Europe with underdevelopment, backwardness, and un-European behavior (Chari and Verdery 2009). In the 1980s, it was not only art historians, but also the majority of Hungarian artists who held an uncritically optimistic view of the West, which even Mládek found exaggerated.¹² She wrote to

George Soros: “For them USA means success, money, western style of life which they admire without knowing and understanding it.” The oppositional intelligentsia of Hungary was a partner in setting models, proposed by the Soros Foundation, as an example, and they mostly shared the agenda of conversion to the Western institutional system of contemporary art (Esanu 2013, 173–198).

The formation of a new cultural hegemony and uneven East–West power relations amounted to more than capitalizing on the modest benefits of some little known art scenes of the periphery. The expansion of Western-type art institutions in Hungary in the 1980s and throughout eastern Europe in the 1990s led to a seamless takeover and did not incite an open conflict of interests in the transitioning (post)socialist societies. This is because the new, ideologically liberal hegemony emerged simultaneously with the crumbling of the state-socialist regime’s ideological base and with the triumph of neoliberal capitalism across the Western world. In this context, the Soros enterprise and its influence did not meet any strong resistance; rather, the values it stood for became naturalized and continued to live on as the dominant fiction of the transition period. As some of the most venerated Hungarian art historians belonged to the international networks of the Advisory Board, they, too, strengthened this fiction within their professional and intellectual circles. Thus, they and the younger and internationally more embedded artists functioned as the local faction of the transnational cadre class¹³ within the local scene. Therefore, their presence was actually a condition of the conversion to the Western institutional models, and, although they could profit from it, it primarily meant integration into an already-formed art world with little opportunity of shaping it.

As Bockman and Eyal (2002, 310–352) argue, the positions within any network are hierarchic, and the key points are controlled by specific actors who can oversee the distribution of resources within it. Likewise, the activities of the Soros Foundation were about the extension of the international contemporary art scene’s hierarchic network into Hungary and eastern Europe with good intentions, rather than a deliberate colonization. All the participants in this network stood to gain from it. Hungarian artists and art historians got access to the international circulation of contemporary art. Moreover, the extension of their network provided them with a chance to seek additional financial support for their projects and to confirm their leading position in the local scene. At the same time, actors of the international art scene gained access to sources and materials for their research and exhibitions, and they had the opportunity to use the local sources as a base material for their projects. For example, the SCCA network facilitated contacts and provided lists for exhibitions, such as the Manifesta Biennial (Gardner 2015, 110–111) and *After the Wall: Art and Culture in post-Communist Europe* that was shown in Stockholm in 1999 (Szekeres, 2012, pers. comm.).

Besides serving the demand for curatorial and art historical knowledge production on east European art and shaping the local canon, an additional goal of the Soros Center was to foster the adaptation of the contemporary artistic practices. This tendency was particularly strong in the 1990s, due to the end of the state-socialist control over the Soros Foundation and thanks to Suzanne Mészöly’s personal focus on contemporary art. Here, the structural preference for cutting-edge contemporary art forms adopted from western centers and the personal values of an individual intersected. This conjunction facilitated working methods, such as thematically curated exhibitions; artistic forms, such as public art and new media; and approaches, such

as socially-engaged art. These methods, artistic forms, and approaches had some precedent in the state-socialist years, but they only became dominant in the 1990s, parallel to their rise in the global art world; therefore, they offered an ideal entry point to current Western tendencies. In the fostering of these new approaches in Hungary, the Soros Center played a major role, and these attitudes were manifest as early as the *Polifónia/Polyphony* exhibition in 1994 (Mészöly and Bencsik 1994). This show encouraged socially-engaged and public art, while strongly dividing the local art scene (Hock 2005, 103–109), with one faction claiming that the project was only about importing Western issue-based art. The SCCA network primarily supported art projects dealing with identity, such as topics of Central European regionality, abstract politics, multiculturalism, and the internet, as the means of globalization. These projects never foregrounded identities or positions (e.g., national identity) that did not endorse the liberal agenda of the Soros Foundation; they tended to work instead within more abstract and universal frameworks (Gardner 2015, 109–110).

The Soros Foundation's framing of the Hungarian art scene as aesthetically and institutionally underdeveloped explains why, in the 1980s, its documentation practice sought Hungarian art that conformed to the international canon. While the local canon was diversified, the documentation only included tendencies that the Hungarian members of the Advisory Board considered compatible with international artistic developments: postwar modernism and abstraction, the conceptual tendencies of the 1970s, and the neo-expressionism of the 1980s.

Although in the 1980s the Soros Fine Arts Documentation Center in Budapest had to cooperate with a weakening state apparatus that hindered many of its planned projects, it could establish a Western-style canon and institutional background for contemporary art by incorporating local tendencies that conformed to this canon and model. In realizing these aims, the Foundation contributed to the collapse of the former cultural hegemony and prepared the ground for a new one that was going to be based on liberal and Western-oriented values and required the participation of intellectuals from the socialist state.¹⁴

However, this new cultural hegemony, in contrast to late Cold War-era expectations, did not result in equal positions: the Hungarian artistic scene was incorporated into the uneven, hierarchic networks of the globalizing art world. While the local institutional system was restructured to foster this integration, in contrast to the expectations of catching up with the imagined West, the entry of the eastern European art scenes into the global arena merely resulted a subordinate, semi-peripheral position, in which only an elite faction of the cultural field could benefit from increasing integration. As a result, in the art field a new, closely-woven mesh of dependencies and power relations has formed, which has started to function as common sense for the elite of the scene.

Notes

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resulting publication Nagy 2014), long before the Hungarian government began openly attacking the Soros network in early 2017. As this chapter demonstrates, I am highly critical of the interventionist operations of the Soros Foundation. However, despite the common critical stance toward post-political liberalism and globalization, my position is essentially different from the current Hungarian government's campaign in that it is *not* wedded to a broader xenophobic and politically authoritarian agenda. I also agree with Ágnes Gagyí (2017), who explains both current and former attacks on the Soros network as they relate to post-1989 global trends (e.g., the expansion of western capital in eastern Europe) rather than presenting them as isolated local phenomena.

- 2 Karl Popper was Soros's master in philosophy at the London School of Economics, where Soros was a student in the 1950s.
- 3 Agreement, HU OSA 13–9-7. Vera and Donald Blinken Open Society Archives, Budapest.
- 4 Minutes of the Advisory Council. 18 November 1985, HU OSA 13–9-7, Vera and Donald Blinken Open Society Archives, Budapest.
- 5 As a staff member later recalled, Soros planned to fire Mládek because she did not hold any leading institutional position. Undated interview with Open Society Foundation staff Mária Lónyay by Béla Nóvé, Vera and Donald Blinken Open Society Archives, Budapest.
- 6 Minutes of the Advisory Council. June 21, 1985, HU OSA 13–9-7, Vera and Donald Blinken Open Society Archives, Budapest.
- 7 Soros repeatedly threatened the Hungarian state with the termination of the agreement in the 1980s to gain bargaining power. Interview with the lawyer of the Soros Foundation, Alajos Dornbach. Budapest, March 5, 2013.
- 8 The longstanding “othering” of a backward eastern Europe was documented in Larry Wolff's widely read volume *Inventing Eastern Europe* (1994).
- 9 Mládek to Soros; May 10, 1985, HU OSA 13–9-7, Vera and Donald Blinken Open Society Archives, Budapest. Original documents are cited here without correcting linguistic errors.
- 10 Memorandum by Steven Mansbach. March 1, 1988. MKI-C-I-182, Box 68. Archive of the Institute of Art History, Budapest.
- 11 Ibid
- 12 See Mládek to Soros; May 10, 1985, HU OSA 13–9-7, Vera and Donald Blinken Open Society Archives, Budapest.
- 13 Here I am borrowing the terminology of Kees van der Pijl (1998).
- 14 The art historians who participated in the work of the Soros Foundation in the 1980s and in the early 1990s also integrated well into the globalized system of contemporary art. Márta Kovalovszky became national superintendent of the Venice Biennale in 1995; László Beke was director of the Institute of Art History of the HAS between 2000 and 2011; Katalin Néray was the founder of Manifesta, and the director of the Ludwig Museum until 2007; Lóránd Hegyi directed museums in Vienna, Naples, and St.-Étienne; Barnabás Bencsik was the director of the Ludwig Museum from 2008 until 2013.

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4 Toward a Planetary History of East European Art

Maja Fowkes and Reuben Fowkes

Before we start delineating a planetary perspective of East European art, we want to sketch out the position from which we are speaking and working, as it is increasingly clear to us that our formative years as curators and art historians were very much marked by the changes of 1989 and the years of triumphal globalization that followed. As Croatian and British art historians who decided to settle in Hungary, one of the many so-called hearts of Europe, we believed in the abolition of the East/West divide and the promise of translocality, made possible by revolutionized communications—both virtual, through the Internet, and physical, through the increased accessibility of air travel. When searching for an appropriate web domain name for our activities in the mid-2000s, we decided on “translocal.org,” not only because it described the potential of being situated in more than one locale and the comparative outlook that offers, but also because of its affirmative reference to a postnational, cosmopolitan view of new Europe.

However, the onset of the financial crisis in 2008 turned out to have marked the high tide of globalization and now seems to constitute an equally important historical turning point to the system change of 1989. Counter-globalization long stood as a potential alternative projecting a more democratic and egalitarian model to the kind of globalization that is based on the values of neo-liberal capitalism. What we are witnessing today, however, is another model, a sort of state-run counter-globalization policy directed toward the furthering of national interests that the fading post-1989 political consensus has to come to terms with. This corrosive notion has been pioneered in Hungary under the moniker of illiberal democracy (Krasztev and Van Til 2015).¹ What had seemed to be the long-gone issue of the East/West division of the European continent has recently reawakened as a result of the refugee crisis that began in 2015, with former Czech President Václav Klaus pointedly declaring the failure of “Western-isms” including “humanrightism, multiculturalism, environmentalism, homosexuality, cosmopolitanism and transnationalism” (Klaus 2015).

In the pivotal year of 1989, Felix Guattari, in his treasure-trove essay *The Three Ecologies*, warned about the rise of all kinds of danger: “racism, religious fanaticism, nationalitary schisms that suddenly flip into reactionary closure” (Guattari 2014, 23). Nevertheless, we still need to work toward what he called “the production of human existence itself,” in a form that would be adaptable to the “new historical context” in which humanity finds itself (2015, 22). This “new historical context” has recently been recognized as the Anthropocene, based on the realization that the changes that are happening on the planet are no longer just a matter of geography,

but actually cut into the geological matter of the world. When scientist Paul Crutzen introduced the Anthropocene in 2002, in an article in *Nature*, to describe the escalating effects of humans on the global environment, pointing to climate change, the disappearance of the rainforests, the extinction of species, and the burning of fossil fuels as impacts that make humans an environmental force of geological proportions, he could not have foreseen the success of the term. Nowadays, geologists, scientists, theorists, as well as writers and artists are engaged in exploring its implications for their field (Fowkes and Fowkes 2017a). Whether they situate the Anthropocene at the onset of industrialization in the eighteenth century, or at the beginning of the Cold War and nuclear age, when “a layer of radionuclides was spread over the Earth’s surface, a layer that will act like a flashing light for geologists of the future,” it is clear that globalization has escalated the impact humans have made on the planet to an unprecedented degree (Hamilton, Bonneuil, and Gemenne 2015, 1).

In the face of an ever-intensifying ecological crisis that challenges both the economic model and ideology of globalization, the theoretical structures of the global era are also exposing their flaws. Dipesh Chakrabarty, in his influential essay on the climate of history from 2009, confessed that:

As the [ecological] crisis gathered momentum in the last few years, I realized that all my readings in theories of globalization, Marxist analysis of capital, subaltern studies, and postcolonial criticism over the last 25 years, while enormously useful in studying globalization, had not really prepared me for making sense of this planetary conjuncture within which humanity finds itself today.

(2009, 199)

Addressing the illusionary control of world processes that globalization implies, Gayatri Spivak made the important distinction between the global and the planetary, with the globe implying a disembodied, virtual abstraction, which allows us to “think that we can aim to control it,” while the planet belongs to “another system” which we inhabit on loan, and therefore, as Spivak suggests, we need to imagine ourselves as “planetary subjects rather than global agents” (2012, 338).

The question that this text sets out to investigate is: what would constitute a planetary history of East European art? Taking into consideration the fact that Environmental Humanities is one of the fastest-growing academic disciplines, what implications does this new paradigm have for the practice of art historians? What could East European art contribute to the emerging field of planetary art history, which, to our best knowledge, is still in the making in most regions of the globe? Looking more closely, how might this influence established accounts of East European art history, which have been habitually framed in relation to political history, leading to the neglect of art practices that fall outside the narrow scope of the political? At the same time, one must bear in mind, as André Gorz expressed it in the mid-1970s, that ecology is also political, despite the fact that it was in the interests of both the capitalist and socialist systems to deny its political potential (Gorz 1979).

The entwinement of ecological and political concerns is most clearly visible in the years leading up to 1989 and the fall of the Iron Curtain, through the complex relation of art to environmental issues in the period. Although the communist parties of the Eastern Bloc maintained that pollution is a problem of the capitalist West and

cannot occur under socialism, the environmental flaws of real existing socialism would turn out to be fatal to the whole system. Significantly, the first UN Summit on the Human Environment held in Stockholm in 1972 was heavily colored by the geopolitics of the Cold War, as the communist parties of Eastern Europe boycotted it over the professed issue of the representation of East Germany. By not taking part, they effectively sabotaged the first attempt to take global action in the face of mounting evidence of an ecological crisis, leaving the West and the Third World embattled in discussion of unbridgeable social justice questions. At the same time, boycotting the conference was a handy way to sweep under the carpet, and restrict public discussion of, corrosive environmental problems in their respective countries across the Bloc for another decade (Tickle and Welsh 1998).

By the 1980s, the scale of environmental pollution accumulated by state-socialism had reached a level that could no longer be covered up, and the secret reports about the condition of the environment started to leak out into the public sphere, turning into international affairs and triggering mass protests. The consequences of industrial pollution in the Black Triangle between Czechoslovakia, Poland, and East Germany blew over the Cold War divide; chemical pollution from Romanian factories led to protests in the Bulgarian town of Ruse on the other side of the Danube, while the same river was a central concern for the environmental movement in Hungary, with massive gatherings to oppose the plans for a hydroelectric dam between Hungary and Czechoslovakia. The Chernobyl disaster on April 26, 1986—a nuclear meltdown that released clouds of radiation across the continent—was a final blow to the environmental record of the socialist bloc. As a consequence, green parties featured regularly on the ballots of the first free and democratic elections across Eastern Europe during the political changes of 1989 (Kenney 2002).

The planetary aspects of East European art can be uncovered in a host of artistic, curatorial, and art historical positions toward the ecological crisis of late socialism, although these did not constitute a coherent movement and were rich in contradictions and dissonances. For instance, the Maribor Art Gallery in Slovenia initiated a Yugoslav Triennial of Art and Ecology that started in 1980, motivated by the desire to show how “Yugoslav artists think about the suicidal relationship of today’s society toward the environment” (Gabršek-Prosenc 1980). As it was organized on a federal basis with each republic taking part, the organizers opted for “a panoramic view of artistic production” and included works that “search for not only existential, but also ontological questions,” which were local as well as general in focus and addressed the relationship of “man-nature-man.” The selection was not based on formal requirements of style, but rather on the “topicality” and “quality” of the works (Gabršek-Prosenc 1980).

This might have been the reason why the art presented there often remained focused solely on the depiction of nature, prompting Slovenian curator Igor Zabel (1958–2005) to comment in his catalog text for the third edition of the Triennial in 1988 on the lack of socially-engaged artistic approaches. Posing the question as to where one can encounter the overlaps of art and ecology and in what way ecology enters into the artistic domain, Zabel observed that a “few years ago” the answer to this question was easy, due to the spread of “the idea of art as practical social force” that brought “respect for the works which dealt with ecological warnings, protests and consciousness raising” (Zabel 1988, 64). However, by the end of the 1980s, such a concept, in Zabel’s view, seemed “anachronistic and inadequate,”

because the “function of engaged art was taken over by political action as the most appropriate form for such tendencies” (Zabel 1988, 64).

The separation of artistic practice and political action was not so pronounced in the context of Slovakia, where warnings of environmental degradation often merged with artistic projects and artists took an active role in voicing political and ecological critique. The future politician but then practicing artist and dissident activist, Jan Budaj (b. 1952), who, through the platform of the Temporary Society of Intense Experience, engaged with political issues in performative settings, was prominently involved in the publication *Bratislava Nahlas/Bratislava Aloud* that appeared in 1987. It was a report that collected information about the “dangers of polluted air and water, untreated waste, nuclear energy, improper urban planning” and so on, aiming to produce a document that would show the general public that “these issues were all directly linked to the political and cultural situation that dominated Slovakian society” (Migdal Glazer and Peretz Glazer 1988, 51). It became a key part of the opposition program, and environmental issues were strongly voiced during the democratic changes of 1989.

Particularly illustrative of the potential of artistic engagements with the environment at the time were the actions undertaken by Ilona Németh (b. 1963) and József R. Juhász (b. 1963) in protest against the plans to build a hydroelectric dam on the river Danube between Slovakia and Hungary. The Gabčíkovo–Nagymaros dam was an international socialist megaproject initiated in the 1970s, with the intention to improve navigation, serve as flood protection, and use hydropower for energy production. By the 1980s, public discontent with the threat it posed to the natural environment became increasingly vocal, and in the end only the Slovak side of the dam was built, while the Hungarian party, under pressure from the civil initiative Danube Circle, abandoned their plan for a dam at Nagymaros. Ilona Németh, one of the signatories of the founding document of the Danube Circle in 1984, was a young artist and activist who studied in Budapest but lived in Slovakia and acted as a kind of eco-messenger connecting both scenes, as she regularly travelled between the two localities (Németh 2015, 90).

On July 25, 1991, the artists organized an action on the building site of the dam in Gabčíkovo, protesting against the completion plans after it became clear that the Slovak side would continue with the project. Németh’s public intervention, entitled *Nature Effect*, was a large-scale action painting on the walls of the water intake channel of the dam, which is now a reservoir.

She drew the silhouettes of local tree species such as willows, which were native to the habitat and also an important component of traditional lifestyles of the local population, who used them to make baskets and fences, pointing to the local ways of living that were destined to disappear together with the river habitat. Her ephemeral action emphasized the inevitably drastic effects of the dam on the riverine environment, while she also expressed solidarity for other organisms affected by its construction.

On the same occasion, artist József R. Juhász made a performance entitled *Dunasaurus*, in which he emerged from an oxbow, a side arm of the Danube that had formed as a consequence of building works cutting it off from the rest of the river, wearing a diving suit and carrying a living fish in a plastic bag of water.

He walked toward the police officer who was guarding the building site of the dam, and informed him of the fish’s request to join its friends from which it had



Figure 4.1 Ilona Németh, *Nature Effect*, 1991. Documentation of an intervention (wall painting)

Courtesy of the artist

become separated in the process; however, the permission was not granted. The artist's alliance with the fish in front of the insensitive eyes of the authorities indicated not only the indifference of state apparatuses toward grassroots initiatives, but also put forward the issue of the rights of nature and its species.

Attitudes to environmental art at this crucial juncture are also revealed by the critical reception of the environmentally-conceived travelling exhibition *Resource Kunst* at Múcsarnok Budapest in 1990. Art critic Julianna P. Szűcs used her review in the daily *Népszabadság* to reveal how a longstanding “illusory deep faith in the human” had been dispelled by a new awareness of environmental questions. She explained the break from modernist humanism, and the shift from viewing Beuys's *Honeypump* as “capitalist stupidity” and Smithson's spiral as a “well advertised bluff,” in light of a sequence of environmental events:

Then came Bős-Nagymaros [dam]. Then we saw the denuded fir trees of the North Czech lands. Then we experienced the West Berlin smog alert caused by Trabants. Then Chernobyl exploded. Then the 8am news started to read out pollution levels. Then we started to see art with different eyes.

(Szűcs 1990)

Art historian Katalin Keserü's review in *Új Művészet*, entitled “Revolutionary Decadence or the Color of Tomato Soup,” revealed her critical attitude to the works in the show, in which she identified a lack of revolutionary vigor and activism.

Her title made an oblique reference to the well-known culinary metaphor for the softer, less ideological Goulash Communism of the Kádár era and the unrevolutionary nature of the negotiated “system change” of 1989 in Hungary (Keserü 1990). In her writing, it is clear that even environmental art fails to materialize into more solid, engaged, activist responses to acute environmental problems. This understanding turned out to be true more globally, in terms of the squandering of another precious opportunity to articulate a global response to the mounting ecological crisis at that time. Although the ending of the Cold War made possible the second attempt to respond to ecological challenges on a global level at the Rio Earth Summit in 1992, in the end, despite considerable environmental rhetoric, the achievements were modest, as the desire to combat climate change came up against the economic imperatives of globalization, through the infamous coinage of the term “sustainable development.” Environmental activist and journalist Naomi Klein has drawn attention to the ways in which free market ideology “from the very first moments, systematically sabotaged



Figure 4.2 József R. Juhász, *Dunasaurus*, 1991. Performance carried out in Čilistov, Slovakia

Courtesy of the artist

our collective response to climate change” (Klein 2014, 19). Subsequently, while in Eastern Europe during the rollercoaster of transition environmental concern was superseded by the consumerist promises of capitalism, in the Old West the radical notion of sustainability was hijacked for a renewed round of economic growth under the banner of green capitalism and carbon trading.

However, as André Gorz in his *Ecology as Politics* asserted, “Growth-oriented capitalism is dead. Growth-oriented socialism, which closely resembles it, reflects the distorted image of our past, not of our future” (Gorz 1979, 11), expressing his critique of industrial society in both its socialist and capitalist guises. The idea that communist goals were to be achieved through growth in fact lay at the heart of the project of the “building of socialism,” epitomized by the five-year plans of the Stalin era, a model of development devised in the Soviet Union in the 1930s and exported to Eastern Europe after World War II. The short-sightedness of this model that Gorz identified, with its blindness to ecological limits and ideological fixation on the future, was also manifest in the official art of the time.

One of the main genres of Socialist Realist art was the portrait of the leader, depicted surrounded by the adoring masses, in conversation with comrades, or at the center of historical events. In the years after World War II, the great leader came to be portrayed as a more solitary figure, as in the case of Fedor Shurpin’s (1904–1972) iconic *The Morning of our Native Land* (1948), against the backdrop of the Soviet countryside. The artist described his ideologically-fuelled vision for the creation of this work as follows: “In the sound of the tractors, the movement of trains, in the fresh breathing of the limitless spring fields—in everything I saw and felt the image of the leader of the people” (Shurpin, quoted in Cullerne Bown 1998, 237). Indeed, glancing at this painting, one can hear the sound of unstoppable progress embedded in the five-year plan of Soviet modernization, feel what was assumed to be the unlimited bounty of Soviet nature, and observe the larger-than-life figure of Stalin, with his hands clasped in front of him suggesting satisfaction at a job well done.

Interestingly, the painting was made in the year that also symbolized the dawn of a unique experiment in the environmental history of the Soviet Union. The resolution adopted unanimously by the communist party on October 20, 1948, which became known as the Great Stalin Plan for the Transformation of Nature, envisaged the geo-engineering of the whole natural system of the Soviet Union. The plan had three basic elements: the “sculpting of rivers” by turning them into a service for industry, agriculture, and cities; the planting of massive forest belts to protect farmlands from drought and hot dry winds; and the building of an extensive network of roads, railways, and dams (Josephson, Dronin, Mnatsakanian, Cherp, Efremenko, and Larin 2013).

Even landscape painting could be a tricky genre for artists under Stalin, as, for instance, they had to eliminate the use of rain for a positive, always-sunny, and future-oriented socialist realist art. One proposed solution was to focus on the “beautiful rain that brings harvest,” since “even a landscape with rain may exist, if it is beneficial rain” (Cullerne Bown 1998, 256). When Aleksei Gritsai painted *A Stormy Day in Zhiguli* (1950), which shows a barge fighting its way up the Volga through stormy weather, one critic observed that “in a courageous struggle with the stormy elements, a laden self-propelled barge, of a kind that has become a typical feature of the river landscape during the Stalinist 5 year plan, continues confidently on its way” (B. Nikiforov, quoted in Cullerne Bown 1998, 256).

The barge has been typically interpreted as a metaphor for the ship of the state, but could it also symbolize the Stalinist attitude to nature? The ship's mastery of the waves reflects an ideology that saw nature not just as an unlimited resource for exploitation, but as practically an enemy of state, at the very moment that environmental history reveals the river was in the process of being ruthlessly tamed and defeated. While the socialist system shared the capitalist fixation with growth, the scale of environmental degradation, particularly in the Soviet Union, exceeded that experienced in the Western branch of industrial society. Environmental historians have concluded that the Soviet worldview and practices toward the natural environment "went beyond those common to Enlightenment thinking about the desirability of reshaping nature to serve human needs, the inevitability of progress and the ability of humans . . . to subjugate nature" (Josephson 2010, 26).

On the other hand, the war on nature was experienced from a particular perspective in the post-World War II environment of Poland, where the destruction of human habitat and the vistas of desolate scenes of flattened city landscapes was felt to be on a planetary scale (*Just After the War* 2015–2016). The experience of life turned to ruins, and fragments of a destroyed past found in rubble, have been sown together in the abstract patchwork paintings of Jadwiga Maziarska (1913–2003), such as *Spontaneous Cause* from 1950, vividly showing the scale of the destruction witnessed then. More specifically, in several abstract paintings of Andrzej Wróblewski (1927–1957), it was the whole planet Earth that was broken to pieces and had to be "pasted" together to form the characteristic sphere again. As he often painted on both sides of the canvas, the image on the other side of the painting *Earth* (1948) was entitled *Dark Sky*, where the geometric figures of the stars in the universe acquire dark hues, suggesting that the conflict had taken on cosmic proportions (De Chassey and Dziewańska 2015). His cosmogonist compositions, in the immediate aftermath of the war, suggest that a new level had been reached in the destruction of the environment that was commensurate with the extremes of human suffering.

It was not destruction of war, but the destruction caused by postwar development and modernization that was the subject of a work created by Jerzy Bereś (1930–2012) for the *First Symposium of Artists and Scientists* that was hosted by the Nitrogen Plant in Puławy in August of 1966 (Lesniewska and Świetlik 2006). Upon finding an uprooted and dried-out tree in the vicinity of the factory, which was evidently cleared during preparation works on the construction site, the artist decided to return the tree to its original location and reinstall it in the industrial environment as a reminder of the dire consequences of progress. The organizer of this manifestation, entitled *Art in a Changing World*, was critic Jerzy Ludwiński (1930–2000), whose interests lay in investigating the intersections of art, technology, and science.

A few years later, Ludwiński articulated more explicitly his view that "living in a world where the most characteristic disciplines of human creativity are science and technology, one cannot ignore their influence on the dialogue of artists who both challenge and immerse themselves in reality" (Ludwiński 2007, 34). It was in the context of this statement, on the occasion of the Wrocław symposium in 1970, that Ludwiński observed that at present "human interference on all disciplines of life is tremendous," and recently "enormous energy production in almost all areas has led to the destruction of [the] natural landscape"; therefore, he warned that "in the era of flights to the moon we should pay particular attention to protecting what remains of the Earth" (Ludwiński 2007, 35). His environmental concerns had a strong

influence on the artistic circles of Wrocław, prompting artists such as Natalia LL (b. 1930) to take the natural environment into consideration when engaging in conceptual practice (Fowkes and Fowkes, 2017b).

Architect Stefan Müller (b. 1934) envisioned a technocratic transformation of the entire Earth, and, thanks to him, an International Exhibition of Intentional Architecture was organized by the Museum of Architecture in Wrocław in 1975, entitled *Terra* after Müller's work. The exhibition presented the projects of leading young architects and their progressive designs engaged in offering global solutions, while Müller's own concept was to solve the environmental problems of the world by building a structure in the sky that would span the whole planet at the height of 6,500 feet, and would replace traditional cities by offering a new life zone in the clouds. According to his eco-futurist vision, the surface of the Earth could be returned to nature and be used mostly for recreation, while manufacturing would be relocated underground and "serviced by computers," which would ensure the production of energy and goods as well as the "treatment and processing of waste" (Duda 2015, 113). This was a planetary proposal that was undoubtedly based on the promised utopia of technocratic solutions to the ecological imperatives of the time.

Technological achievements had notably also enabled the crew of the Apollo 8 mission in 1968 to photograph the Earth rising above the Moon, which, along with the ultimate "blue marble" photo taken four years later, allowed the planet to be perceived for the first time in its entirety from an outsider's perspective. Bringing a new awareness of the unity and finitude of the Earth at a time when the world was divided along Cold War lines and living in fear of nuclear catastrophe, the image projected both a reassuring vision of harmony and triggered subliminal fears of environmental risk. With its associations of an interconnected and fragile biosphere, the symbolism of the blue planet countered the utilitarian and economic logic of the global and also led artists to explore notions of planetary consciousness that pointed beyond the technological mindset of modern man into the distance of space and time.

It was against this background that East European artists began, in the 1960s and early 1970s, to voice an opposing, ecological attitude to the planet, which goes hand-in-hand with the articulation of the environmental crisis on a planetary scale. One such articulation of a planetary approach to the environment came from Slovak artist Rudolf Sikora (b. 1946), who developed an exemplary ecological critique despite the obstacles he faced in normalization-era Czechoslovakia, where, in the wake of the Soviet invasion of 1968, repressive measures were enacted to limit freedom of expression and maintain strict control of society (Fowkes 2015, 151–195). The state of the environment in Czechoslovakia at that time had become such a serious issue "with ramifications for whole sectors of the population, that the Communist regime was forced to pay attention to the problem" (Vaněk 2004, 174), while still attempting to keep the information out of sight. In such a situation, where even environmental scientists could not get access to the latest scientific findings and environmental debates of the time, Sikora managed to get hold of a *samizdat* copy of the study produced for the Club of Rome that was the subject of weekly discussions in his studio, and, through him, *Limits to Growth* entered Slovak art history (Hrabušický 2008, 149).

As a young artist with an interest in cartography, Sikora represented the places he visited as abstract geographies in his paintings. When normalization took hold, however, and the socialist borders stiffened to the degree that Bratislava felt closer

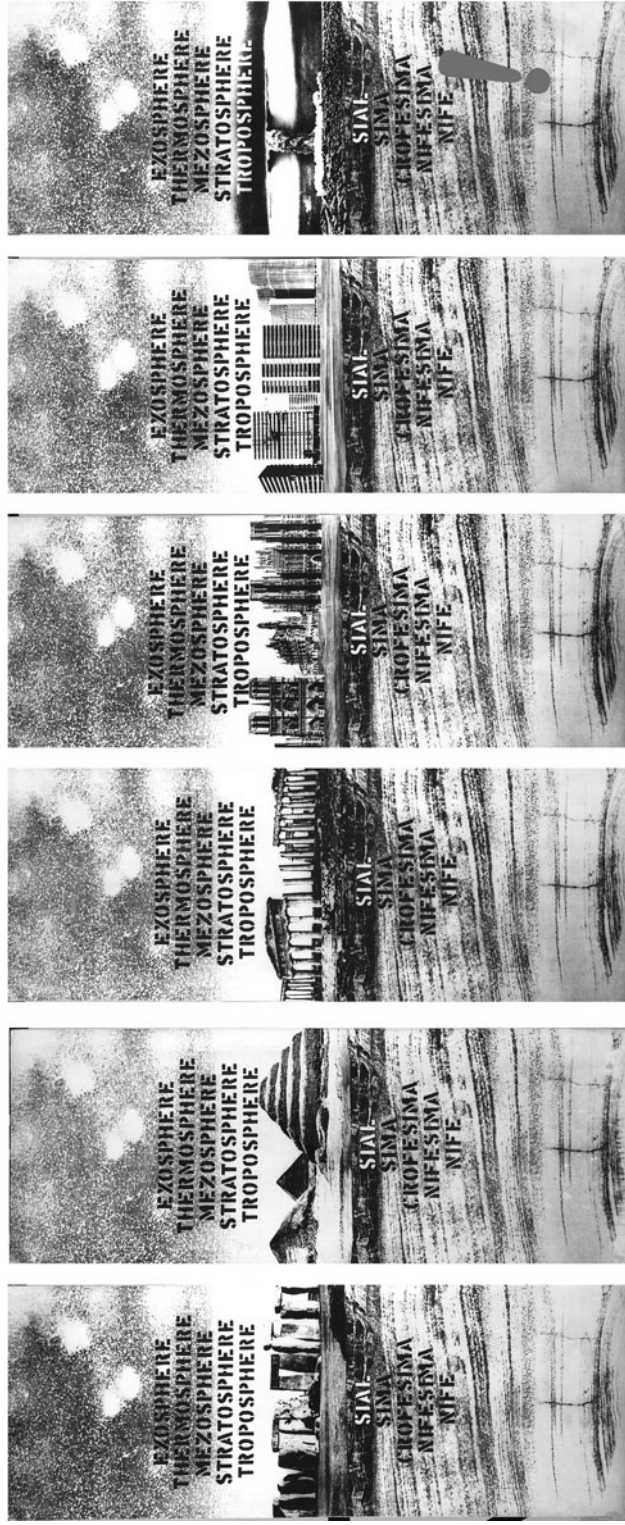


Figure 4.3 Rudolf Sikora, *The Earth Must Not Become a Dead Planet*, 1972. Photomontage (gelatin silver prints on Masonite panels), 125.5 × 310 × 3 cm
 Courtesy of the artist

to Moscow than Vienna, the artist started to think about environmental issues that spanned the globe and could not be contained within any state borders. This is evident in his work *The Earth Must Not Become a Dead Planet* (1972), conceived as a series of graphic sheets.

Here, Sikora inscribed the layers of the earth's atmosphere, as well as the geological layers of the planet's crust, on each sheet, with a central image charting the progress of human civilization expressed through architectural structures from Stonehenge to modern housing estates. The last sheet shows a nuclear mushroom cloud on the surface of the Earth, clearly warning of the dangers posed by human inventions and the damage they could cause to the ecological balance of the planet. Sikora dealt with the spatial aspects of the intersections of the human and natural worlds, referring to geomorphology and meteorology while pointing at the same time to the social conceptualization of the environment, decades before the theorization of the Anthropocene relied on similar observations.

In that respect, one could ask what related considerations we can find in more recent artistic practice that arises not only in the midst of the globalization crisis, but also through familiarity with the groundbreaking concept of the Anthropocene, or the ascent of a new human-centered geological era in the history of the planet. These aspects are sometimes manifest on a posthumanist level of inter-species thinking, as in the work of Anca Benera (b. 1977) and Arnold Estefan (b. 1978), whose series

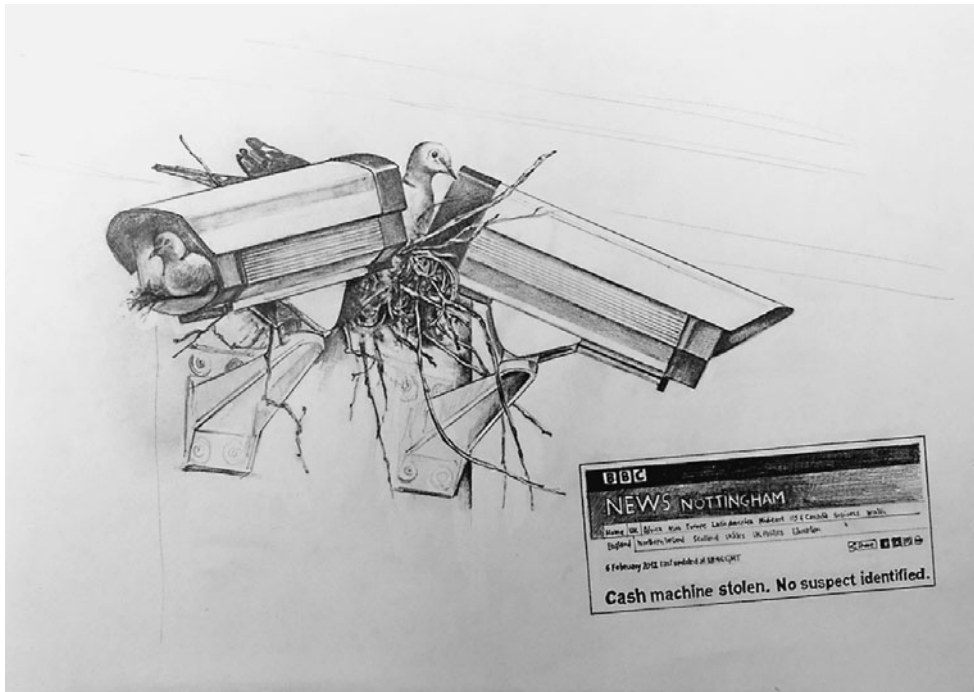


Figure 4.4 Anca Benera and Arnold Estefan, *Urban Wildlife*, 2012–2014. Drawing, part of a series

Courtesy of the artists

of drawings *Urban Wildlife* (2012–2014) depicts intersections of global media and planetary phenomena through the example of birds that have moved to cities and adapted to new circumstances resulting from the loss of their natural habitat.

For example, on one sheet there are news clippings from the BBC, with the headline “Cash machine stolen. No suspect identified.” The clue for this is provided by the juxtaposed image of the birds nesting on security cameras. It is through the wit and humor of the found images and matching press cuttings that the artists comment on the “dimension of human influence on the planet at large,” and how birds adapt to these new circumstances “when human activity has become the central driver of the planet’s geological changes” (Benera and Estefan 2015a, 57).

Relying in their research on the examples of “synanthropization” or adaptation of wild populations to human-created conditions, Benera and Estefan effectively demonstrate the interconnectedness of global policies and changing environmental conditions. The representation of animals in this “new human–animal interaction,” according to the theorist Rosi Braidotti, needs to match “the complexity of contemporary non-human animals and their proximity to humans,” where animals are no longer a “signifying system that props up the humans’ self-projections and moral aspirations,” but need to be approached “in a neo-literal mode” (Braidotti 2013, 70). This kind of literal mode of animal representation that is present in the work of Benera and Estefan is different to the regular treatment of animals in art of earlier decades, when they stood as metaphors for the human condition and where birds would typically symbolize issues of freedom and peace (Fowkes and Fowkes 2015, 87–93). Here, by contrast, we are presented with microcosmic scenes of interspecies interactions.

While their *Urban Wildlife* series sheds light on the unanticipated adaptability of species to a new planetary situation, their film *No Shelter from the Storm* (2015) is a more somber narration of the destruction of the natural environment, the effect of which has dire consequences for the human population as well. Two solitary figures climbing in woodland desolated by deforestation are whistling the melody of an anti-war song that powerfully speaks of the horror of wars, both those waged on humans and those inflicted on the planet. Shot in the disappearing primeval forest in the Carpathian Mountains of Romania, one of the last remaining old-growth forests in Europe, which is currently “being destroyed by multinational corporations and corruption,” the film comments on the fact that, while traditionally forests have provided refuge for humans in times of need, today they only stand as reminders of the “human condition of our age” (Benera and Estefan 2015b). Indeed, the reason for the disappearance of some past civilizations from the face of the Earth has been identified by interdisciplinary research as “at least partly triggered by ecological problems: people inadvertently destroying environmental resources on which their societies depended” (Diamond 2005, 6). What is different today is that the disappearance does not happen in isolation any more, as it is now manifest on a wider scale, affecting the whole planet. The anti-war tune in this black-and-white film could therefore be seen as a wake-up call against our complicity in global conflicts and the environmental degradation caused by our civilization.

Hungarian duo Tamás Kaszás (b. 1976) and Anikó Lorant (b. 1977), who work together as Ex-Artists Collective, addressed the place of human civilization and the social struggles that have accompanied it within a longer geological timeframe in their complex installation *Pangaea—Visual Aid for Historical Consciousness* (2011).



Plate 3 Tamás Kaszás and Anikó Lorant (Ex-artists' Collective), *Pangaea—Visual Aid for Historical Consciousness*, 2011. Installation

Courtesy of the artists

In its title, the work refers to the longevity of geological history of our planet, pointing to the period more than 200,000,000 years ago when all the continents formed one landmass surrounded by a single ocean. While on the one hand it indicates the transformative power of natural matter, *Pangaea* is also a powerful metaphor for the interdependence of “all-earth,” both historically and from today’s globalized perspective. The installation rests upon wooden poles, on which bulletin boards and shelves are arranged with drawings, objects, and posters organized in four sections: “Symbol Rehab,” “Agro-culture,” “Collapsism,” and “As We Live It,” flanked with the inscriptions “Pangaea United” and “We are all from Pangaea” emphasizing our common origins (Fowkes and Fowkes 2013, 379–391).

The work is indicative of the artists’ habit of interlinking, rearranging, and recycling materials from their previous installations into new constellations, such as the repeated use of a collection of images of fists as symbols of social struggles. The figure of the peasant as a revolutionary force also appears regularly in their practice, as they salvage from the past potent role models, which serve as premonitions of future developments of the planet (Fowkes and Fowkes 2016). The agro-utopian imagery and references to peasant uprisings through history address the issue of industrial agriculture and unsustainable food production in today’s globalized world as much as the potential of small-scale gardening co-operatives, which are empowering in both a social and ecological sense.

This is also related to the segment of *Pangaea* entitled “As We Live It,” which thematizes practical skills and ways of living—DIY ideas that, in Kaszás’s view, make “life more fun” than any technological solutions. “The more you are able to make things on your own (or with your collective),” he states, “the more autonomous you can be” (2015, 117). In that sense, regarding the dominance of the technological paradigm, it has become “countercultural to choose [a] lifestyle whose goals are even partly independent of technology, of its costs and its power to globalize and make us all the same,” while our capacities for “alternative creativity are diminished” (Pope Francis 2015, 68). *Pangaea* therefore serves as an actual visual aid pointing to the decisive moments of creation of historical consciousness, as well as striking a chord with the understanding of the long history of the planet that existed before humans, and our responsibility for its future.

In 1975, André Gorz observed that “until very recently all economists, whether classical or Marxist, have rejected as irrelevant or ‘reactionary’ all questions concerning the longer term future—that of the planet, that of the biosphere, that of civilizations” (Gorz 1979, 12). This insight is arguably as relevant now as it was in the 1970s, a decade when the environmental crisis was for the first time perceived on a planetary scale. Forty years later, and with half of the earth’s species lost along the way, we are still largely failing to get the message, with Putin abolishing the Ministry of Environmental Protection, a bright future for new nuclear plants despite Fukushima, and little hope of holding global warming at the already-weak official target of two degrees above preindustrial levels. A glimmer of hope could be seen in the new Ecuadorian Constitution from 2008, which grants nature, “where life is reproduced and exists,” the rights to “exist, persist, maintain and regenerate its vital cycles” (“Rights of Nature” 2014, 87). It can also be recognized in artistic practices that transmit planetary consciousness, an ecological tendency with strong roots and a distinctive presence in the changing landscape of East European art.

Note

- 1 The term “illiberal democracy” was used by Prime Minister Viktor Orbán in a high-profile speech at the Tusnádfürdő summer camp in July 2014 to describe the kind of state being constructed in Hungary.

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Part II

Hybridity

Identities and Forms



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5 Reflections on the Politics of Portraiture in Early Modern Poland¹

Carolyn C. Guile

Through remarks on early modern Polish portraiture, this chapter takes as a point of departure a particular goal related to the stated aims of an emerging field of art history, namely the development of a deeper and more accurate understanding of artistic and cultural dynamics across the entire field of Western art history. To this end, the borderlands of the continent need to be recognized simultaneously as autonomous regions that evinced visual expression particular to place and historical circumstance, and as relevant participants in the uninterrupted movement of culture between and among social groups and regions. A cultural history of the Polish–Lithuanian borderlands that emphasizes visual culture contained within or in proximity to the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth, a Christian state, must also examine direct encounters with its several eastern neighbors—the Ottomans, Crimean Tatars, Ukrainian Cossacks, and Muscovites—and how those encounters made Poland and its visual culture different from that of its other western neighbors.

The Situation of Early Modern Poland in Recent Art History

Early modern Polish arts and architectures have been both underappreciated and understudied in Anglophone scholarship on European topics. Though the situation is changing gradually, these arts and architectures are largely unfamiliar to most within the wider field as such and, when proposed as the object of study, have been seen as anomalous or eccentric: “What is left there to study?” Extra-art historical factors are only partly responsible for this, and include the problem of extensive, deliberate destruction of cultural property during World War II; the relative inaccessibility to foreign scholars of primary sources during the postwar period, until 1989; a lack of knowledge of the requisite languages and historical background needed to conduct substantive research; by extension, the infrequency with which Slavic specialists connect their findings to issues of broader, interdisciplinary interest (inadvertently perpetuating the misconception that Slavic area studies are relevant only to locals and specialists); more recently, political biases; and more remote but relevant historical problems, such as the disappearance of the Polish–Lithuanian state from the map of Europe in 1795 for 123 years, and the accompanying destruction and/or dispersion of cultural property. Though waning as a result of scholarly innovation and greater access to information, enough residual narrow canonicity in the field of art history remains so as to continue to promote the tacit expectation that Anglophone art historians examining this “peripheral” subject matter must necessarily demonstrate the validity of doing so, namely by underlining relationships

to contemporaneous arts of more conventionally studied regions (e.g., Italy, the Dutch Republic, France) whose significance has been presumed to be self-evident. Such attitudes have been counterbalanced with a body of important and indispensable Polish scholarship that sometimes is tintured by a perceived need to legitimate the Polish achievement in the eyes of an outside readership through frequent and rigorous comparison to other “source” objects and traditions. Hence the center-periphery approach to Polish art history beginning from about the mid-1970s. Taken as a whole, and across linguistic borders, the twentieth-century art history of early modern Poland is in some sense the history of a form of intellectual disquietude that has yet to be fully acknowledged or thoroughly discussed.

Of late, researchers across the broader field of early modern art history have sought to modify or jettison the conventional language of art history cast as a history of period styles, because these models are insufficient vehicles for understanding centuries-long interculturalization within “borderland” states—entities that represent diverse or divergent cultural paradigms that interacted across cultural boundaries, creating and responding to changing social, political, and economic conditions or opportunities. In an effort to describe and explain these phenomena, writing on the early modern arts and architecture has returned time and again to two basic themes: the national and the supranational. The revival and refinement of approaches to artistic geography has sought to eliminate strictly national, essentialist conceptual frameworks and language, emphasizing instead cultural interconnectedness and the circulation of ideas, forms, and persons in relation to the character, function, and reception of the work of art or architecture. But, valuable as this latter approach has been to our understanding of regions that resist uniform description, it, too, risks obfuscating something important about the relationship between a state and its culture, which stand in active, reciprocal relationship to one another where formal patronage is concerned. With state boundaries sometimes came distinct differences between cultural paradigms that remained robust across political lines: “We are this, you are that.” Wars resulted from these conditions; so, too, did collaborations, exchange, and fruitful diplomacy. The early modern Polish–Ottoman relationship is a case in point.

Central to the present discussion, the case of early modern Poland is especially complex owing to its broadly-acknowledged status in the seventeenth century as the *antemurale christianitatis* on the one hand, and to the open political relationships and cultural exchange it cultivated along its southern and eastern borders on the other. Poland’s early modern status as a Christian state is a fact. King Jan III Sobieski’s defeat of the Ottomans at Vienna in 1683 was hailed at the time as the victory that prevented further Ottoman expansion into continental Europe; and while there were Polish subjects living in the Ottoman lands who embraced Islam (Kunt and Yelçe 2014), there is also little to be gained by introducing confusion about historical matters of state identity where none obviously existed. Many fascinating examples may be found of cultural sharing and accommodation between and among different religious communities across state boundaries. Rather than contradicting the notion of a cohesive state identity, the generalization is helpful in relation to individual case or context studies that reveal the dynamics and problems of toleration, communication, and disruption alike, and that show the extensions and limits of cultural exchange.

On the subject of this type of interculturalization, Nebahat Avcioglu and Finbarr Barry Flood have cautioned against too reductive an approach to complex phenomena.

Through a critique of Edward Said's understanding of so-called key differences between Renaissance and eighteenth-century European perceptions of "the East," they rightly note that Said's binary comparison was not quite historically accurate; importantly, they state (with reference to Italy) that the "unrelenting hostility between Renaissance Europe and the Orient" described by Said "has been mitigated by research demonstrating the complex cultural entanglements of the Ottoman Empire and the mercantile city-states of peninsular Italy, and their mutual centrality to the phenomena comprising the Renaissance" (Avcioglu and Flood 2010, 7). Likewise, the example of Poland-Lithuania also deserves mention in this class of relationship, as we consider how cultural exchange between places embracing different cultural paradigms and different confessions informs visual expression. There, the cultures of Christendom and Islam variously met, collided, and cooperated throughout the early modern period across sparsely-populated, remote lands whose features and cultural particularities were conspicuous. The tangible, historical, and persistent differences observed between the broad yet varied eastern and western regions of Europe also remind us that assessing interregional artistic phenomena in relation to a conception of an "Eastern" Europe that we encounter today comes with its own methodological risks: as art historians began to address the lacuna of a missing eastern European art history in earnest in the 1990s, there arose, as Katarzyna Murawska-Muthesius has stated, "the vexed issue of a kind of local European Orientalism" that contended with the "ontological status of the apparently indisputable border between western and east central, or eastern European art, and the notoriety of teleological projections of the Iron Curtain divide into the past" (Murawska-Muthesius 2000, 11). This vexed issue is more responsible for the lacuna under discussion than has been heretofore acknowledged.

Poland-Lithuania, the easternmost state in Latin Christendom, once shared borders with the Ottoman Empire, Ruthenia, and Muscovy. Such proximity resulted in direct (as opposed to imagined) contact with these neighbors, giving rise to a visual language marked by interculturalization on one hand and bearing the stamp of specifically Polish traditions on the other, as expressed in the language of political-religious uniformity in matters of state. Put another way, a history of Polish artistic culture is the product of interregional engagement (peaceful or not); it is also intimately connected with early modern Polish traditions of political and religious liberty, represented by kings (often themselves foreigners) whose powers were extremely limited, owing to the laws that protected the nobility's (in Polish, the *szlachta*'s) privileges. Further, in the seventeenth century, clarity—not confusion—about official political and religious identity across the Polish and Ottoman states, and the simultaneously elastic and mutable nature of Poland's other interregional relationships (with the Ruthenian Cossacks in what is now western Ukraine, or the Tatars in the Crimean Khanate) could also be the product of mutual respect and interest, as well as of political expediency and self-interest. It might be assumed that, at times, pressing local matters made what the rest of Europe thought about the Poles' political—and by extension, visual—eccentricities a somewhat irrelevant and distant issue for the Commonwealth's inhabitants; in other instances, these encounters, often connected to affairs of state, could produce sometimes perplexing and always intriguing impressions to visitor and host alike (Grusiecki 2017; Żygulski 1999). Ultimately, there is no historically justifiable reason to assert in absolute terms either the national purity (what does it mean?) or the absence of native origins of Polish artistic achievement when attempting to describe the "Polishness" of Polish art (Kaufmann 1999).

Hence, over time, the fluid adaptation within the seventeenth-century Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth of a multivalent visual language shaped the character and function of Polish art. The state’s historically porous and frequently changing borders repel essentialist methodological approaches to its art history, and the language of studies concerned with “global art history” that examine how movement, exchange, and circulation yield visual expression has been especially useful to the derivation of new methods.² While, on the one hand, an approach to networks and supranational patterns of transmission helpfully exposes the interdependencies of visual cultures and economies on one another, on the other hand, and hypothetically, if relied upon too strictly, an over-emphasis of the dynamics of circulation somewhat ironically runs the risk of eviscerating the historical realities of place and of the role of (real) communities in shaping traditions and customs over time. Art historians can learn from “granular” studies that focus on the deep analysis of physical and philological phenomena in a very limited spatio-temporal sphere (Frick 2013). Primary source analysis such as that published by historian Dariusz Kołodziejczyk shows how important and complex the Polish relationship to “the East” was, and how the frank recognition, among rulers and emissaries from Poland and the Ottoman Empire or the Crimean Khanate, of paradigmatic, religious difference facilitated diplomacy and cooperation as often as it bred conflict. A thorough reading of these sources reinforces the inherent diversity of the notion of “the East” (Kołodziejczyk 2011) and provides a caveat against conceptual flattening where the issue of alterity is concerned. The analysis of eastern European arts in the early modern period, resistant to reductive formulae or uniform definition and description, may require us to devise completely new terms and tools for analysis than the ones thus far advanced in the field.

Significantly, Poland–Lithuania was a multi-confessional and multi-linguistic state. Trade routes between the Baltic and Black seas, diplomatic relationships among the Venetians, the Ottomans, and the Poles, the problem of Tatar raids and incursions into Polish territory, the presence of Armenian and Jewish craftsmen in important south-eastern trade cities such as Lwów (L’viv) and Zamość, interactions with Dutch commerce, and exposure to Dutch art through the Baltic port city of Gdańsk bred extraordinary visual variety seen in architectural form, sculpture, decorative arts, weaponry, and painting. This inherent resistance to uniform description in part may explain why the region has been left out of standard art history surveys intended to expose readers to the broad trajectories of art historical change. A map published in Stockstad and Cothren’s *Art History* (2011) offers a case in point. Purporting to show “the religious situation in Europe in the late sixteenth century,” in the area where we would expect a representation indeed of any “religious situation” in the eastern regions of Europe, we see only a few notations in the Polish territories for synagogues scattered across a grey field, demonstrating the unresolved or ambivalent boundaries of the book’s conceptual framework.

The Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth, according to this map, appears to have been outside of what is considered Europe proper—a land virtually untouched by Judeo-Christian culture, a distant place at best “imagined,” and relegated to the map’s margins. The unassuming reader is left to presume that the “messiness” of borderland regions makes them either too difficult to summarize in survey texts, or not relevant enough to stand shoulder-to-shoulder with the regional narratives of more canonically referenced “centers.”



Figure 5.1 The Religious Situation in Europe in the Late Sixteenth Century

From Janson's *History of Art, Book 3: The Renaissance through Rococo* (2010), 678. Courtesy of Pearson

The approach to “centers” and “peripheries” has been fruitfully employed by Polish art historians themselves. In 1976, Cornell University Press brought Jan Białostocki’s analysis of the extensions and limits of Western humanistic—i.e., Renaissance—culture in the Polish visual arts and architectures to an Anglophone audience (Białostocki 1976). The volume published under the title, *The Art of the Renaissance in Eastern Europe: Hungary, Bohemia, Poland*, remains an important point of departure for art historians discussing the region (Grusiecki 2017; Guile 2015; Kaufmann 1995; Kaufmann 2004). In his analysis of arts and architectures during the era of Jagiellonian dynastic patronage—i.e., Cracow in the first three decades of the sixteenth century—Białostocki emphasized the dominant influence of Italian artistic centers and migrant practitioners on Polish art, with Italy considered the genius loci for a rational approach to form; the courtly patronage of the Jagiellonian dynasty, itinerant craftsmen, and royal marriages made a specifically Italianate mark on the Cracovian built environment. But the center–periphery model, as Białostocki described it in relation to Renaissance arts, effectively confined analysis to comparison between source and imitation, so that the complexity of the mechanisms of artistic transfer and transmission are only partially uncovered and the texture of historical circumstances imparting variety to form is flattened. What Białostocki called “vernacular” arts in Poland represented a dilution or shadow of their “original” inspiration (be it native or foreign). Foundational though it may be for the study of

regional arts within (Białostocki's particular conception of) eastern Europe, this important and valuable scholarship reinforced aspects of the center-periphery approach to Polish visual culture at the expense of the details that make the Polish-Lithuanian case especially interesting—and here we refer again to its relationships with its several eastern neighbors, for one, which challenge any notion of unidirectional cultural exchange from a dominant model to a subordinate one. But it should also be recalled that the social and political circumstances under which Polish scholars were working in the postwar period informed their methodologies. Scholarly efforts needed to be made to reconstruct, retrace, and reestablish historically accurate, long-standing cultural links across early modern phenomena in, or traveling from, sites from which Poland was unnaturally cut off in the aftermath of World War II. Across roughly the last eight decades, while some Polish scholars have been especially interested in revealing the multiple connections between Polish arts and architectures and their various western European sources or models (Fabiański 2010; Mossakowski 2012), others have turned their attention to the eastern borderlands, examining the historical interactions between Poland and its Orthodox and Muslim neighbors (Mańkowski 1935; 1959; Reyman 1964; Żygulski 1999), or cataloging and analyzing comprehensively the monuments populating the lands of the Commonwealth's easternmost places (Ostrowski, Betlej, and Krasny 1994–2000; Ostrowski, Kuczman, Kałamajska-Saeed, and Betlej 1993–2015). Increasingly, scholars are also addressing the formerly multi-confessional nature of the Commonwealth within its own historical borders, both within and beyond the field of art history (Frick 2013; Krasny 2003).

Remarks on Seventeenth-century Polish Portraiture during the Era of Jan Kazimierz Vasa

Poland-Lithuania's political decentralization and the porosity of its borders directly influenced the transmission of visual forms and the invention of new visual styles, imagery, iconography, and artistic practices. For the purposes of this brief chapter, selected and representative examples of early modern Polish portraiture can show how the sense of freely-chosen cultural affinity, and the circumstance of place, generated and affected the nature of visual representation in the seventeenth century.

Proximity to these eastern neighbors directly influenced the visual language through which monarchs would represent themselves, as seen in a portrait of the Swedish-born, Polish king, Jan Kazimierz Vasa (r. 1648–1668) painted around 1650 by the Gdańsk-born painter, Daniel Schultz (c. 1615–1683).

In contrast to extant representations of his older brother, King Władysław IV Vasa (r. 1632–1648), or his father, King Sigismund III Vasa (r. 1587–1632), as seen in paintings executed by the workshop of Peter Paul Rubens during the second decade of the seventeenth century, Jan Kazimierz appears in what were typically “Eastern” modes of Polish noble dress. His audience was asked to recognize not only the king's “Polishness” as the head of state, but also his deliberate connection to and identification with a certain form of it. The Eastern style increasingly had been the preferred mode of dress among the *szlachta* since the late sixteenth century, and was derived from sources both Persian and Turkish (Żygulski 1999). The costume's Eastern inflections are thought to have officially entered Poland through the Ottoman-inspired dress of King Stefan Bathory (r. 1576–1586), a Hungarian who had been a



Plate 4 Daniel Schultz the Younger, *Jan II Kazimierz*, c. 1650, oil on canvas, 210 × 154 cm
National Museum, Stockholm

vassal to the Porte before he attained political independence for the Hungarian kingdom. As military conflict with the Ottomans intensified into the late seventeenth century, King Jan III Sobieski (r. 1674–1696) sometimes preferred to be portrayed in a more overtly Roman and imperial manner.

In the eighteenth century, another foreigner—the Saxon Elector and King of Poland, Augustus III (r. 1734–1763)—would don the Polish, Eastern costume, as shown in a 1737 portrait attributed to Louis Sylvestre. Twentieth-century exhibitions of Polish portraiture have singled out for display images that bear this particular style precisely because it has come to be identified by Polish scholars with Polish noble, national dress (Gutowska-Dudek 2012; Rostworowski 1983–1986).

Some aspects of this dress can be described in more detail here. In Schultz's portrait of Jan Kazimierz, a curtain has been tied back to reveal the king clothed in the Ottoman mode, in brilliant red garments, and framed by a darkened portico that appears to contain an epitaph. He wears the chain of the Order of the Golden Fleece



Figure 5.2 Daniel Schultz the Younger? Andreas Stech? Jerzy Eleuter Szymonowicz-Siemiginowski? *Jan III Sobieski*, 1673–1677, oil on canvas, 139.5 × 113 cm
National Museum, Warsaw

over a dark *delia*, or outer coat, draped over a rich red *kontuż* trimmed in gold. His *kontuż* is girded by a woven belt of silk, or *pas kontuszowy*, that also supports his saber; on his feet, he sports Moroccan-style yellow leather boots popular among the *szlachta* and reminiscent of King Stefan Bathory's preferred style. Ready for battle, he grasps his regiment in his right hand, his left hand positioned near his saber (Kłoda and Szeląg 2016, 10–11). The royal crown sits at his left elbow, the ensemble completed by an Eastern-style hat worn by the nobility in Poland–Lithuania and Hungary. The presence of the crown, almost parenthetical here, is a reminder of his proper title *primus inter pares*; he is both king and nobleman (*szlachcic*). The portrait makes a visual statement that reinforces Jan Kazimierz's social and political position during a time of particular political uncertainty in Poland–Lithuania. For example, Poland sometimes relied on neighboring Cossack support and military know-how in its conflicts with the Ottomans and Muscovy. As Paul Robert Magocsi has explained, since the fifteenth century, Cossack support proved essential in the effort to guard the southern border settlements near the Ottoman Empire, and continued to be so into the sixteenth century. In return, the Cossacks received political liberties and land, as well as tax exemptions for their services—clear incentives for preserving the peace in Poland–Lithuania (Magocsi 2007, 85–90). Such was the importance of the Cossack presence in the borderland region that art historians have debated the notion of a specifically Cossack Baroque style (Pevny 2009–2010). While useful as allies to Poland's (and others') Christian rulers, Cossacks themselves were sometimes seen as mercurial: defenders of Orthodoxy in the Polish–Lithuanian eastern borderlands, or alternatively as mere bandits who raided, robbed, pillaged, and kidnapped. When Schultz painted the portrait under discussion, the Cossacks in the borderlands, now western Ukraine, were placing considerable pressure on the Polish monarchy, proving a significant challenge to the state's southeastern territorial integrity as they attempted to form an independent entity of Hetmanate (Magocsi 2007, 88; Steinborn 2004, 136). Thus, the picture's militant visual language is informed by the pressing problem of civil unrest revolving around the Cossack question, understood as a threat to the territorial cohesiveness of the Commonwealth itself.

The early modern Polish kings and nobility, without contradiction, adopted signifiers of Eastern culture. King Jan Kazimierz again appears in the Ottoman mode in an engraving produced in Amsterdam around 1667.

Here, the equestrian images of Sultan Mehmed IV (r. 1648–1687) on the left, and King Jan Kazimierz on the right, commemorate the intention to renew the Polish–Ottoman alliance via a symbolic meeting (that did not take place). An image like this could serve as a form of political assurance at a moment when the status of territories and alliances was in flux and uncertain; as it happened, Poland would lose southern territories, in Podolia, to the Ottomans in 1681.

A brief excursus on the origins and meaning of this Polish Eastern form of dress is warranted, because the history and ideology behind it is not commonly known outside eastern Europe or in non-specialist writing. Jan Kazimierz's "Ottoman" attire joined him with an estate that saw its members as social equals irrespective of individual wealth or property. Details about its ethos and sense of identity elucidate what is particular about this group, and why contemporary observers in other European lands deemed them so. The *szlachta* distinguished itself from non-Poles through the embrace of a special, supra-national ideology that would become known as "Sarmatism"; as Zdzisław Żygulski and others have claimed, the style of dress



Figure 5.3 Unknown engraver, equestrian portraits of Sultan Mehmed IV and King Jan Kazimierz, 1667, copperplate engraving on laid paper, 25.3 × 34.5 cm

Princes Czartoryski Foundation, Cracow

described above has been considered an integral visual sign of this ideology (Tazbir 1986; Żygulski 1999). (Most recently, Emilia Kłoda and Adam Szeląg (2016) have provided an insightful and important account of the afterlife of “Sarmatism” in relation to the post-WWII display of Polish seventeenth-century portraiture.) This “Sarmatian” creed defined and determined political behavior, and reinforced the estate’s special political liberties, e.g., the *ex liberum veto* and the principle of *nihil novi*—laws and principles preventing new legislation or changes to legislation from being enacted without unanimous consent among the members of the parliament (or *Sejm*) (Lukowski 1991). It also influenced style and taste. This ancestral creed drew its authority from fifteenth-century geographers and chroniclers who claimed that the Sarmatians, who were Christians, had inhabited the Black Sea steppe between the Don and lower Volga rivers in the early centuries of Christianity, migrating westward to settle the region between the Dnieper and the Vistula rivers (Tazbir 1986, 318). Those embracing the idea of origins generally wished to promote Polish noble, ethnic separateness from other estates, and deemed Sarmatians the “true Poles.” On the other hand, modern scholarship beginning in the late eighteenth century attacked the insular quality of the ideology that has been blamed for the Polish state’s weakness, and is thought to have primed it for partition.

What other early modern Europeans would note as visual eccentricity in the appearance of the Polish *szlachta* was in Polish hands a useful, flexible tool that

could be deployed according to circumstances and context (Grusiecki 2017). Noble portraiture more broadly also proved particularly useful as a vehicle for displaying the *szlachta* image. The examples shown thus far represent instances in which a foreign king adopted “Polish” dress in order to display signs of his unity with and belonging to a group that regarded him with deepening suspicion and displeasure. A multi-figure portrait by Daniel Schultz that today hangs in the Hermitage under the title “Family Portrait” shows the Eastern presence in Poland–Lithuania from another angle, borne as it was from the complex cultural and political conditions that characterized Jan Kazmierz’s reign, and this time including foreign actors.

In her monograph on Schultz, Bożena Steinborn summarizes the current consensus on the sitters’ identities: in the center of the composition sits Dedesh Agha, a Crimean Tatar who was among King Jan Kazimierz’s most valued deputies during the time of the Polish–Crimean alliance in 1654. He appears in a red *żupan* and unbuttoned *ferezja*; the youth on the left may be his younger brother, though this has not been firmly established (Steinborn 2004, 136). The individual in the center depicted in Western courtly dress may be the court falconer to King Jan Kazimierz Vasa. Dedesh journeyed to Poland several times in the 1650s and 1660s (Steinborn 2004, 136). An example of interconfessional alliances at the time, Dedesh Agha aided the king with the campaign in Ukraine of 1660 and the 1663–1664 expedition against



Plate 5 Daniel Schultz the Younger, *Portrait of Dedesh Agha and Entourage*, 1664, oil on canvas, 166 × 231 cm

Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg

Muscovy, commanding the Tatar auxiliary forces. Further mention of the surrounding historical context is useful. In 1654, Jan Kazimierz took an oath before a Crimean envoy, pledging to “maintain a stable friendship” with the Khan of Crimea “and all the hordes that obey him.” He would refrain from invading the khan’s territories, and entered into an oath against Muscovy (Kołodziejczyk 2011, 972). In 1663–1664—that is to say, around the time Schultz painted the group portrait—Jan Kazimierz was again engaged in a fight against Muscovy. Dedesh Agha, together with two Giray princes, commanded the Crimean forces that took part in this offensive in support of the Polish king. The portrait may have been painted just before that event, a pictorial send-off and expression of the solidarity between Dedesh and Jan Kazimierz executed during Dedesh’s stay in Warsaw. The Russian army probably seized the picture during Münnich’s invasion of the territory in 1736 (Kołodziejczyk 2011, 238).

Taken together with the historical context, the particular, rich contrast between portrait and clothing types underlines this alliance between neighbors of different confessions with shared goals (at the time); the self-assured attitudes on display and the sense of unity of the group as its members engage the viewer directly, suggests that this is an alliance of strength, familial, and built to last. The presence of the falcon is not merely ornamental. Falconry, popular among the Commonwealth’s nobility, here serves as a metaphorical reference to the hope that the alliance would stick, that Dedesh and the loyal Crimean forces would return at least symbolically to the homeland for further service, not unlike the well-trained falcon returns to its skillful master. In October 1672, another agreement was signed guaranteeing the prevention of Tatar raids into the Polish territories in return for annual gifts from the Polish Crown: “And if the Polish kingdom suffers any harm due to willful Tatar incursions, then we should demand neither gifts nor the supplement due for the given year” (Kołodziejczyk 2011, 1000). Schultz’s group portrait can be understood in part in relation to those particular, precarious political alliances of the Vasa era and of the tumultuous years of Jan Kazimierz’s kingship. The agreements cited are specific examples of diplomatic motions put into place precisely because each side recognized the highly-charged stakes governing this borderland, the potential for alliances to shift, and the fragility of peace. The portrait represents the painted word of a guarantee sealed in language between the signatories.

The Image of the East in Europe: Postscript

By the time Lord Byron composed his poem *Mazeppa* in 1819 (Byron 1857, 255–261), eighteenth-century Europeans had taken to observing, describing, and judging the qualities and character of the people inhabiting Christendom’s eastern borderlands. Taking his cue from Voltaire’s account in his *Histoire de Charles XII* (1731), Byron deployed a particular image of the region through the evocation of mixed races, exotic, unbridled equine breeds, and an untamed landscape. An illicit love affair between the Ruthenian Cossack Jan Mazepa (1687–1709) and one Theresa, the beautiful wife of a Polish nobleman, occupies the poem’s center. Set in the aftermath of the decisive Battle of Poltava (1709), we find Mazepa in a grove, rubbing down his Tatar horse. Following an ekphrastic passage extolling the horse’s virtue and the bond between horse and rider, Byron shifts into first-person narration as Mazepa recounts his youthful romance and the humiliating punishment he suffered after

his lover's husband found the pair out. Drawing the reader into the space of the protagonist's own recollection, Byron depicts Theresa's form:

But let me on: Theresa's form—
Methinks it glides before me now,
Between me and yon chestnut's bough,
The memory is so quick and warm;
And yet I find no words to tell
The shape of her I loved so well:
She had the Asiatic eye,
 Such as our Turkish neighbourhood,
 Hath mingled with our Polish blood,
Dark as above us is the sky

(Byron 1857, 257)

By endowing Theresa with an "Asiatic eye," Byron in this portrait alludes to the historical relationship between the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth and its southeastern neighbors. He invokes the influences between dissimilar entities who, in sharing borders, exchanged with one another goods, words, and blows of the sword, but also broke bread, donned one another's costume, learned one another's language, and found union in flesh and blood. Mazepa's recollection captures the foreignness and wildness of the Ukrainian steppe, the setting for the pair's relationship of which he can "find no words to tell." Through the choice of "Such as," Byron conveyed Mazepa himself as a living feature within this mixed, sublime landscape, a condition that at the time defined Poland–Lithuania itself, its histories, and its myths, complicating how outsiders experienced, interpreted, and understood it (Wolff, 1994). As an outsider and a poet, Byron seized on the exotic potential of a tale that unfolds in these eastern edges of Europe. The territories of Poland—those same lands that, as discussed earlier, bristled with conflict during Jan Kazimierz Vasa's reign and Mazepa's own lifetime—served as the perfect foil for Byron's Romantic imagination; eighteenth-century letters provided, in their own semi-factual, semi-imaginative narrations, the spring.

During Voltaire's time, the notion of "Eastern Europe" was only just emerging. Europeans' first-hand knowledge of the region was limited, and impressions were frequently very negative: these lands had not yet been properly civilized. As Larry Wolff has pointed out, Voltaire's *Histoire* "describe[d] lands that were only just being recognized as conceptually related, Poland and Russia, the Ukraine and the Crimea" (1994, 89). Voltaire described the outer edges of the Polish–Lithuanian state as populated by "'all brigand peoples'" (Wolff 1994, 91), neither confessionally unified nor culturally homogeneous. Byron's poem further dwells on the heterogeneity of the region itself, capturing in the figure of the couple its mixed and complex features. (Such was the poem's impact that it made an impression on Eugène Delacroix, who painted Mazepa's "wild ride" (c. 1824, today in the Mohamed Mahmoud Khalil Museum, Cairo) and on Pushkin, in his *Poltava* of 1828, to name but two of the poem's many afterlives (Koropeckyj 1990; Pelenski 1983).)

In some real sense, we are left to wonder how far our field has come from Voltaire's assumptions; a separate discussion might consider in what sense and why that is the case. But these varied images, painted and literary, share their awareness

of the imprint of “east upon west,” and their attendant way of understanding that intersection. In conclusion, in their respective manner they demonstrate that paradigmatic difference was not a hindrance to interculturalization, but in fact gave rise to different forms of artistic expression rooted in custom and observation. As John Walker notes, “There are no two words in contemporary discourse more current, or more elastic and therefore potentially more misunderstood, than ‘difference’ and ‘otherness.’ Both terms are constantly present in discussions of intercultural communication” (2013, 15). The “otherness” of early modern Poles was something the Polish nobility itself sought to emphasize, and did so in visual terms. The recent scholarship cited here suggests the analytic potential that lies beyond the binary model of “center” and “periphery” and the likewise sometimes reductive language of “otherness.”

Notes

- 1 I would like to extend special thanks to the editors of this volume for their many thoughtful comments and suggestions; to Joanna Wolańska and Wojciech Bałus for numerous and invaluable conversations on this chapter's themes; and to Artur Schäffer for drawing my attention to Byron in a new way.
- 2 See, for example, the Introduction to Kaufmann, Dossin, and Joyeux-Prunel (2015).

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6 Eastern Europeanizing Globalization

Polish Artists at the Venice Art Biennale and the Historical Microcosms of Globalization

Jörg Scheller

Introductory Remarks

In this chapter, I will discuss selected Polish artists and artworks exhibited at the Venice Art Biennale as examples of the globalization of east-central European art in the context of large-scale exhibitions around 1900. By “east-central Europe,” I refer, roughly speaking, to those regions between Russia and the western European states such as Germany, Austria, and Italy, which developed under the influence of Protestant and Catholic, i.e. non-orthodox, faith from the middle ages onward and were part of the Soviet empire after World War II. The Biennale is introduced as a hub of the first international, later global, art world(s)—a hub that facilitates the simultaneous consideration of, among other things, national and international, local and global aspects. With its (particularist) national pavilions in the Giardini, its (universalist) international or global group shows in the main pavilion or the Arsenale, and its dispersed collateral events, the Venice Biennale concretizes the abstraction “globalization” in terms of what British sociologist Roland Robertson defines as one of its core elements: the “linking of localities” (1995, 35). Globalization is made tangible as a spatial-temporal junction and compression of usually distinctly separate entities: “Localities . . . are temporary negotiations between various globally circulating forms. They are not subordinate instances of the global, but in fact the main evidence of its reality,” as the Indian anthropologist Arjun Appadurai argues (Appadurai 2012, 69). Thus, the Biennale can be interpreted as a paradigmatic form of globalization: as a further compression of the “compression of the world” that globalization ultimately is (Robertson 1995, 40).

What is at stake in this chapter is not only the globalization of eastern European art but also, and, equally importantly, the eastern-Europeanizing of globalization. Globalizing eastern European art implies that eastern European art was or is located outside of globalization, when in fact the opposite is true. As I will argue below, globalization was at work even in modernist-folkloristic art from the Tatra region or in late Polish academic salon art, and I will elaborate on the problematic use of the adjective “Polish” later in this chapter.

Recently, art history, art criticism, and curators have paid much attention to globalization in relation to art after World War II, and in particular after 1989. A good example is Andrea Buddensieg’s and Hans Belting’s large-scale group exhibition

The Global Contemporary (2011–2012) at the Museum of New Art in Karlsruhe. Polemically speaking, here it seemed as if globalization and so-called “global art”—whatever that may actually be—had emerged abruptly after 1989 and the demise of the Soviet empire. The same was the case in the 220th volume of the periodical *Kunstforum International* (2013) that went by the title *Globalkunst—Eine neue Weltordnung* (Global Art—A New World Order). To counteract this short-sightedness, I will concentrate on the time around 1900.

Globalization is more than *now*. Behind its facade of neon glitter, frantic traffic, and pulsating bits and bytes, it is old. Dusty. Tainted. And often inconspicuous. Transculturation and transculturality, arguably two of the closest allies of globalization, have “been the norm rather than the exception, both in the past and today” (Altehenger, Abu-Er-Rub, and Gehring 2011, 142).

The example of Poland around 1900, in particular, provides relevant case studies of phenomena now commonly associated with contemporary globalization, such as migration, cosmopolitanism, diaspora, hybridization, transculturality, cohabitation, and imagined communities and worlds. Tellingly, however, east-central European arts only play a minor role in contemporary studies of art and globalization. The focus is, aside from the usual interest in the impact of Anglo-American capitalism and media culture, currently on Asia—a strong sign that research still tends to follow the tracks of political, economic, and military power. The British historian Norman Davies wrote in his *Vanished Kingdoms*:

Historians and their publishers spend inordinate time and energy retailing the history of everything that they take to be powerful, prominent and impressive. . . . As soon as great powers arise . . . the call goes out for offerings on American History or Chinese History, and siren voices sing that today’s important countries are also those whose past is most deserving examination, that a more comprehensive spectrum of historical knowledge can be safely ignored.

(2012, 3)

As for me, I am neither interested in floating with the tides of power nor inclined to speak for, with, or about the subaltern. I am interested in liminal spaces where power is fragmented, ambivalent, blurry, and where things in general are in constant transition, hardly ever unequivocal, and difficult to grasp. Perhaps it is for this reason that I became fascinated with the modern cultures and arts from east-central Europe, characterized, as Polish writer Czesław Miłosz asserted, by a certain “amorphousness” (1961, 79).¹ I strongly disagree with Karl Rosenkranz’s opinion, formulated in his 1853 *Ästhetik des Hässlichen* (Aesthetics of Ugliness), that amorphousness (“Formlosigkeit,” “Gestaltlosigkeit,” “Ungestalt,” “Amorphie”) is a sign of deficiency or weakness (Rosenkranz 1853, 67–77). On the contrary, amorphousness can be considered as a sort of queer form of strength when viewed as an inspiration to being non-chauvinistic, non-ignorant, non-identical (in the sense of Adorno), etc. In the field of art and aesthetics, it anticipates an ethics and aesthetics of existence.

Whereas Miłosz described amorphousness as a mode of existence (the internal perspective), I refer to “amorphousness” primarily in connection with that modern scholarly practice (the external perspective) that was eager to *identify*, to *specify*, to *evaluate*, and to *correlate* mentalities with geographies, unique styles with individuality or national sovereignty, originality with progress, etc. One of the major tasks

of modern art history was to distinguish national styles and to correlate them, overtly or covertly, with their respective national characters—Nikolaus Pevsner's *The Englishness of English Art* (1955) is probably the best case in point. Of course, the according identifications, specifications, and evaluations were ideologically or politically tinged projections. Nevertheless, they became naturalized in the course of time and only in recent decades (e.g., Belting 2011) have they been called into question thoroughly.

Regarding modern art from east-central Europe, however, the act of identification was always a bit more challenging, which in the 1980s led Polish art historian Andrzej Turowski (1986) to ask the question: "*Existe-t-il un art en Europe de l'Est?*" Piotr Piotrowski stressed in an interview (2012) that for the—"former" and contemporary—West, "Eastern Europe is not the real Other" but "a 'close Other'." As early as 1930, the German art historian Alfred Kuhn had characterized—sympathetically, one has to stress—Polish art as showing "such a thoroughly European face" that it "hardly supplied the [then predominant] want for otherness" (1930, 9), which made it difficult for scholars to do what they like doing best: identifying, specifying, correlating, eradicating amorphousness. Value judgment, in turn, was easy: lack of unified identity meant lack of value, lack of originality meant lack of progressiveness. Yet, what once was regarded as a blemish has become a virtue among today's advocates of transcultural and cosmopolitan ideas; for instance, for the German philosopher Wolfgang Iser (1999), the former "real others" vanish, whereas the "close others," and thus implicitly the above-mentioned (non-)characteristics of east-central Europe, thrive and multiply. This is exactly what makes east-central European art and culture around 1900 so topical in our present time of accelerated globalization. However, before demonstrating that east-central Europe today is transcending east-central Europe in the same manner that "Shakespeare no longer belongs to England" (Robertson 1995, 38), I will provide some brief remarks on my approach, terminology, and theoretical background. Readers not interested in these issues may proceed to the third section.

***Zeitgeist*, Exhibitions, and Agency: General Remarks on Globalization and Large-scale Exhibitions**

Globalization is not a linear process or a "total project capturing all geographies with equal force" (Appadurai 2012, 67). It is characterized by varying grades of intensity or temperature, metaphorically speaking. There are cold phases, and there are hot phases. In this regard, the periods around 1900 and 2000 in Europe and the USA are *hot* and have much in common, for instance in terms of overall acceleration, cultural and economic connectivity and circulation, technological and scientific revolutions, increased mobility, and robust urbanization, foiled by widening income gaps, terrorist attacks, the idealization of nature, nostalgia for the past, and the looming or even return of military conflicts after relatively long phases of peace (Robertson 1995, 36).

Moreover, it is striking that both eras witnessed a significant increase in the number of large-scale exhibitions. In the second half of the nineteenth century, world exhibitions were on the rise, and, alongside other models, inspired the foundation of the Venice Art Biennale. In the second half of the twentieth century, the number of biennials of contemporary art grew exponentially after a lean period

of about fifty years (Grandal Mondero 2012, 14). I will return to these parallels later in this chapter.

Since the late nineteenth century, large-scale exhibitions have been salient catalysts for the globalization and hybridization of the arts on the one hand, and have served as platforms for the staging of differences and identities on the other. As windows onto the respective local, international, and global publics, they provided—and continue to provide—opportunities for countries, institutions, and individuals to communicate, agitate, politicize through, and capitalize on art. Hungary's debut at the Biennale is a case in point: in 1909, during the Habsburg era, the country built a “national” folkloristic pavilion at the Venice Art Biennale *before* becoming a *de facto* nation state (Bódi 2014). Another case in point is the work of the Zimbabwean curator Raphael Chikukwa, who in 2011 initiated a national Zimbabwean pavilion in Venice not least to criticize the former pan-African pavilion. Accordingly, the exhibition was titled *Seeing Ourselves*. In her catalog text, the director of the National Gallery of Zimbabwe, Doreen Sibanda (2011, 20), highlighted the importance of the national precisely against the backdrop of globalization. The national and the global appeared as two sides of the same coin—a coin that is made of, above all, imagination.

The American political scientist Benedict Anderson (1983) described nation states as “imagined communities” that can only exist with the help of the media, since their members are physically disconnected. In this regard, the globalized world is an imagined community as well, and maybe even more so. Viewed in this light, globalization is not the antidote to nationalization, but its logical continuation: the “imagined community” becomes an “imagined world,” as Appadurai calls more recent developments in globalization (1990, 295–310).

Looking back at the history of large-scale exhibitions, it becomes clear how they helped to hypostasize imagined communities and, later, imagined worlds: by co-creating what they allegedly represented. Daniel Birnbaum's Venice Biennale of 2009 carried the telling title *Fare Mondi/Making Worlds*. In this regard, I would like to introduce the term “exhibitions and agency” or “exhibition agency” to complement Alfred Gell's well known term “art and agency” (1989). Rather than being considered only as mirrors of political conditions or part of a *Zeitgeist*, large-scale exhibitions should be regarded as veritable political agents. They not only reflect upon politics, they *are* political. If only because of their sheer size, their transformative power regarding city- and landscapes, their broad cultural connectivity, and the concomitant involvement of various stakeholders, they inevitably transcend the sphere of the arts and their respective curatorial themes.

Deterritorialization and Reterritorialization: Diaphanous Borders, Retro-modernism, and a Sort of Amorphousness

The growing global importance of large-scale exhibitions had already been recognized in the Polish territories in the nineteenth century, despite the “marginal” or “peripheral” position of these lands. In 1897, a remarkable article in the widely-read magazine *Tygodnik Ilustrowany* heralded the “century of exhibitions” on a global scale:

Our century, among other titles, will be called the “century of exhibitions.” It is so tireless in organizing these industrial-agricultural-artistic-universal-provincial

pastimes that today there is neither a day nor an hour without an exhibition taking place somewhere across the globe.

(F-y 1897, 600)

The author, in a lucid manner, summarized the main characteristics of any large-scale exhibition born from the spirit of the world fairs: the recurrent interconnection of heterogeneous elements under the auspices of the spectacle on a global scale. At a time of (inter)nationalism, he explicitly referred to the “globe.”

The “century of exhibitions” found a particularly strong manifestation in the Venice Art Biennale, established in 1895 and still running. Given that Poland had been occupied by and divided under Prussia, Russia, and Austria in the late eighteenth century and did not exist as a sovereign state for 123 years, a period which was followed by the rule of National Socialists and Soviets for another fifty years in the



Figure 6.1 Polish pavilion in the Giardini of the Venice Biennale, opened in 1932

Photo by Ilya Rabinovich

aftermath of the Second Republic (1918–1939), it is common knowledge that art and culture played a major role for the perseverance of the imagined community. It was not only literary texts, such as Adam Mickiewicz's *Pan Tadeusz*, but also large-scale exhibitions—including the Galician Provincial Exhibition of 1894, world exhibitions, and the Venice Biennale—that were salient vehicles of this cultural maintenance work (Cavanaugh 2000, 9).

Polish artists and curators have participated in the Venice Biennale since 1897, in solo shows, international group shows, special Polish sections and, last but not least, in the Polish pavilion that was built, despite harsh economic conditions, during the inter-war years, in the Giardini in 1932.

Whereas the Polish historian Włodzimierz Borodziej sees the 1894 Galician Provincial Exhibition as proof of Galicia's "equal participation in modern civilization" (2010, 52)—the exhibition included "folklore and industry, modern architecture and traditional crafts, art and agriculture," an "electric cable car," and the holding of "the first soccer match" in Poland (*ibid.*)—Polish art historian Marek Bartelik stresses that only the Venice Biennale of 1920 "marked the official reappearance of Polish artists on the international scene" (Bartelik 2005, 44). Bartelik is correct with regard to the official, international character of the event. The 1920 exhibition was the first international large-scale exhibition in which Poland participated officially as a state-forming nation, not "only" as an "ethnic-national culture." 1920 can thus be considered as the year when Poland entered the emerging "global art world." In Venice, it was already possible in the 1930s to situate the "peripheral" and economically weak Polish state in the "power center" of the art world, namely among the Giardini pavilions. Hence, the Biennale was used to *anticipate* and *prefigure* a desired political power. The Polish ambassador in Rome, Konstanty Skirmunt, did not exaggerate when, in the run-up to the Biennale, he wrote to Vittorio Pica, general secretary of the Biennale, and pleaded for Poland to be "represented in a dignified way at her first participation in the Venetian exhibition, the most important one among the exhibitions of world art [Art du monde]. . . ."²

In 1920, the organizing committee of the Second Polish Republic presented 145 works by thirty-one artists in the pavilion of the defeated German state or, more precisely, in the Bavarian pavilion run by the Munich Secession (Sosnowska 1999, 34).

With respect to politics, the venue was of great symbolic significance: Poland exhibited in the pavilion of one of the partitioning powers. At that time, national distinction was of major importance, as the Polish art historian Katarzyna Nowakowska-Sito points out: "In the 1920s, the problem [of national distinction] was solved primarily by placing emphasis on elements of folklore that would always contribute an individual flavor" (2010, 175). Although the Polish exhibition was oriented toward Western artistic centers such as the *École de Paris* and the Vienna Secession, many works contained folkloristic elements and thus evoked topics specific to Poland's (imagined) history, if only subtly, through references to the Tatra region (Scheller 2015, 47–58).

From the late nineteenth century onward, Polish intellectuals and artists had travelled to the remote mountain regions of Galicia where they sought to create a truly Polish aesthetic by referring to the architecture and garments of the indigenous Górale people and others (Hutsuls)—a representative example of what Hobsbawm and Ranger (1983) labeled as the "invention of tradition" in modern times. Rather



Figure 6.2 Opening of the Polish exhibition in the Bavarian/German pavilion at the Venice Biennale in 1920

From the archive of the author

than being “authentically Polish,” the thus-emerging *Zakopane Style* and its diverse aesthetic branches were part of a general folkloristic and retro-modernist tendency that started with “Arts & Crafts” and the vernacular revival in the UK and led to Art Nouveau (*Jugendstil*), which developed international, even global ramifications; for example, the Art Nouveau design of the traditional Coca-Cola bottle is just one instance of the wide-ranging momentum of retro-modernism. An exhibitor at the 1920 exhibition and commissioner of the Polish exhibition at the Biennale of 1914, Teodor Axentowicz, for instance, was a cosmopolite and a member of the internationally active Polish artists’ organization *Sztuka*, as well as of the Vienna Secession. He lived, worked, and exhibited in Lwów, Kraków, Zakopane, Munich, Paris, London, St. Louis, and Vienna, but kept a strong predilection for site-specific, culture-specific folklore. Hence, folklore, in terms of recourse to distinct local, regional, or national features, or as a fetish of locality, is no contradiction to cosmopolitanism and globalization.

If local issues are expected to be appreciated beyond their respective local communities, they have to be translated into a *lingua franca*. The Polish artist and intellectual Stanisław Witkiewicz, one of the most influential protagonists and promoters of late-nineteenth-century Polish retro-modernism, was well aware that “the native tradition would retain its vitality only so long as it was able to engage in cultural commerce with the rest of Europe. Toward this end, he encouraged Polish artists to adopt . . . ‘universal’ formal principles . . .” (Cavanaugh 2000, 25).

Modernist-folkloristic genre paintings from the 1920 exhibition, such as Axentowicz’s *Kołomyjka* (Rural Dance, 1895); Władysław Jarocki’s *Huculi* (Hutsuls, 1910), or Fryderyk Pautsch’s *Topielec* (Drowning Victim, 1911), are good examples

of this strategy that oscillated between deterritorialization and reterritorialization and could be associated with what Appadurai calls circulating “forms”: “A family of phenomena, including styles, techniques, or genres, which can be inhabited by specific voices, contents, messages, and materials” (2012, 66).

A similar tendency, under different stylistic and ideological auspices, characterized a neo-classicist work by the Polish sculptor Henryk Kuna, which greeted the Biennale visitors at the entrance of the Polish 1920 exhibition: *Jutrzenka* (Dawn or Aurora, 1919), a marble sculpture of a female figure was intended to allegorically evoke the dawn of the Second Republic.

Notwithstanding stylistic and ideological differences, *Jutrzenka* is actually comparable with Tatra-inspired retro-modernism. In both cases, the meaning of the artwork was related to specific cultural, political, historical, and social circumstances in Poland, whereas the aesthetic was part of two broader international trends, the classicist “retour à l’ordre” in the art scene after World War I on the one hand, and the older modernist interest in rural and premodern motifs on the other. The “antiquification” and “southernization” of Poland at work in *Jutrzenka* resonated with other contemporaneous attempts to move Poland away from the Slavonic sphere, to de- and reterritorialize it, as it were. They became manifest, for instance, in the magazine *Południe*, published in the 1920s and intending to leave behind the alleged



Plate 6 Teodor Axentowicz, *Kołomyjka* (Rural Dance), 1895, oil on canvas, 85 × 112.5 cm
National Museum, Warsaw

“chaos of modern artistic life” in favor of “artists who in their daily, arduous, relentless work eagerly learn to turn inspiration into a form of perfect beauty.”³ This was to be achieved through a return to the classical and the antique; that is, southern antecedents. In 1939, the southern tendency culminated in Jan Parandowski’s essay *Polska leży nad Morzem Śródziemnym* (Poland Lies on the Mediterranean). The Polish author published the text in connection with Poland’s participation in the world exhibition of the same year in New York City:

Of all the Slavs, the Poles are most Latin. In saying so we neither disown our origin [...] but we definitely disown the so-called Slavonic spirit. [...] Our culture has not the same borders as our political state. The East is as far from



Figure 6.3 Henryk Kuna, *Jutrzenka* (Dawn or Aurora), 1919, marble
From the archive of the author

us as if the Ocean flowed in between. Spiritually, Poland lies on the shores of the Mediterranean.

(Parandowski, quoted in Nowakowska-Sito 2010, 178)

What better place than the Venice Biennale, then, to territorialize this spiritual realm? The Polish pavilion, like an embassy, allowed for at least a partial relocation of Poland to the Mediterranean—fittingly, Venice lies on the *eastern* shores of this sea. And, in the east, there is also the *Jutrzenka*.

In such dialectics, diaphanous borders, shifting identities, and cultural hybridizations, I see germ cells or prolepses of our present-day globalized (art) world in which deterritorialization correlates with reterritorialization, and in which site-specific issues are mediated through site-unspecific media or styles. Hence, “globalizing eastern European art” ought also to account for more subtle instances of globalization, which took place before the term “globalization” obtained its current purchase, and which took place in less-expected contexts. After all, Polish folkloric and neo-classicist art from the 1920s carries aspects of modern globalization just as the allegedly boring late academic salon art at the Venice Biennale does.

The academic history painter Henryk Siemiradzki was invited to the Biennale in 1897 and is listed in Polish art historian Joanna Sosnowska’s book *Polacy na Biennale Sztuki w Wenecji 1895–1999* (Poles at the Venice Art Biennale 1895–1999) as a Polish artist, whereas, in the recently-published book on the Russian participation in the Biennale, he is counted among the Russian artists (Molok 2013, 110; Sosnowska 1999, 22–24). Neither of the categories actually fits. Siemiradzki, an offspring of a Polish *szlachta* (aristocratic) family, may have considered himself a Pole, but he led a cosmopolitan way of life. He was born in the Ukrainian part of the Russian Empire, worked in Strzałków, studied in St. Petersburg, travelled extensively through Europe, produced works for Russian and Polish institutions, lived in Rome permanently from 1872 onward, and died in Strzałków. Today, his works are shown in the national museums of Poland as well as Russia. In Sosnowska’s book, his name is spelled “Henryk Siemiradzki,” and, in the Russian Biennale-book: “Heinrich Semiradsky.”

Much the same can be said about the painter Włodzimierz Szereszewski. He was born in Brest, then a major center of Jewish culture in the Russian partition of Poland, enrolled at the Munich Academy of the Arts as “David Szereszewsky” in 1883, later became “Wladimir Schereschewski,” and presented himself as “Włodzimierz Szereszewski” again at the Galician Provincial Exhibition (Zgórniak, 2012). Szereszewski was based in Venice and always presented his works in the international section of the Biennale, never in the Russian or Polish ones. In Sosnowska’s *Polacy na Biennale*, he is counted among the Poles and his name is spelled accordingly (Sosnowska 1999, 22, 24); in the Russian book, he reappears as a Russian with his name spelled “Vladimir Schereschewsky” (Molok 2013, 111–112, 114, 120, 142). Neither of the books adequately addresses the complex identities of Siemiradzki–Semiradsky and Szereszewski–Schereschewsky. Parandowski, as a champion of the mediterraneanization of Poland, would have probably argued that Szereszewski was not a Pole for he appealed to a “Slavonic spirit” with melancholic exhibits such as *Stages of Deportation to Siberia* (1897).

I am providing these observations to show that the purchase of some catchwords in present-day discussions on art and globalization, such as “shifting identities,”



Figure 6.4 Włodzimierz Szereżewski/Vladimir Schereschewsky, *Stages of Deportation to Siberia*, 1897

“cultural hybridity,” “circulation of forms,” or “art and mobility,” should not be limited to the contemporary era. Rather, it needs to be acknowledged that these terms cut right to the core of the “amorphous” conditions that characterized east-central Europe around 1900. In his 1961 book *Rodzinna Europa* (Family Europe), Czesław Miłosz wrote about his youth and adolescence:

In a certain sense, I can consider myself a typical Eastern European. It indeed appears to be true that this specific—inner and outer—otherness can be simply traced back to a sort of amorphousness. [...] My example makes sufficiently clear what great efforts it takes to come to grips with contradictory traditions, names and an excess of impressions, that is, to put all this in some sort of order.
(Miłosz 1961, 79)

Today, amorphousness, which was long considered to be a disadvantage within the cultures and populations of east-central Europe, is becoming an increasingly common feature of the globalized world. Thus, the modern east-central European experience is an experience of globalization *avant la lettre* in a microcosm.

Biographies such as Siemiradzki’s, Szereżewski’s, and Miłosz’s could also be perceived as prefigurations of the postmodern “global artist”: a mobile, hybrid, elusive personality who might nonetheless localize her or his subjectivity (not only through

their residence, but also through ideological, spiritual, aesthetic, and/or symbolic means). One needs only to think of the prototypically postmodern, chameleon-like, strangely amorphous and at the same time perfectly localizable American/New Yorker artist, Andy Warhol. His family—what a coincidence—was of east-central European, Carpatho-Rusyn origin. On the cover of Paul Robert Magocsi's book, *The People from Nowhere: An Illustrated History of Carpatho Rusyns*, Warhol's portrait appears to be painted on a stone wall sporting a window that opens up to a Carpathian landscape (Magocsi 2006). Like Szereszewski, Warhol changed his name: from "Andrzej Warhola" to "Andy Warhol." At one point, he tried to convince his assistant, Bob Colacello, to adopt the name "Bob Cola" (Colacello 1990, 47–48). Warhol used to say about himself: "I am from nowhere"—and one may be reminded of the Polish state that has "been everywhere and nowhere," "flitting from one mode of existence to the next," as Norman Davies wrote in his *God's Playground: A History of Poland* (2005, 24).

Closing Remarks

An examination of the year 2000 may help to further highlight parallels between the two "hot phases" of globalization. At the fifty-fourth Venice Art Biennale in 2011, the Israeli artist Yael Bartana presented her *Jewish Renaissance Movement in Poland* in the Polish pavilion: a half fictitious, half-real activist movement lobbying for the return of 3,300,000 Jews to their "ancestral homeland," to Poland, that is. Bartana's aim was to reclaim the largely forgotten ethnic, religious, and social diversity of pre-World War II Poland, home to large Jewish, Ukrainian, Belarusian, and German populations. The exhibition carried the title *And Europe Will Be Stunned*; it consisted of three highly stylized films that not only dealt with, but virtually emulated, modern totalitarian propaganda aesthetics. Bartana stated in an interview:

I felt like if I want to talk about the early 20th century, I would also like to engage the esthetics of that time. The use of esthetics is very simple, very direct. Leni Riefenstahl was a huge influence; the esthetics, not the ideology!

(Zwick 2013)

It is debatable if a distinction between aesthetics and ideology, between the medium and the message, is indeed so easy to make. Bartana's mimicry-as-critique, drawing on the somewhat worn-out postmodern strategy of appropriation may also appear unconvincing to some. Her project was nonetheless an efficient "way to shake people," as Bartana put it, and to awaken them from their posthistorical hibernation (Zwick 2013). *And Europe Will Be Stunned* can be interpreted as an attempt to demonstrate that history is never historical, that the specters of the past still haunt us, and the discourse on the end of history, which emerged in the 1990s along with an increased interest in globalization, may have been a bit short-sighted. The crucial point here is that Bartana conceives of history in global dimensions, carefully considering the overlapping of past and present: "the Third Reich and the Holocaust are not just historical events," the artist stated once, "they also resulted in long-term global chain effects that reach into the present day" (Bartana 2014).

Returning to my argument in the introduction, it is salient to complement a focus on the most-discussed aspects of globalization with its less excessive and perhaps less

conspicuous features, such as Polish retro-modernist–folkloristic paintings from around 1900, or academic salon art from the same time and region. In a way, Bartana combined the two aspects by going further back in time, back to the lesser-known inter- and pre-World War I periods, thus shedding light on Poland’s Jewish heritage, of which there is hardly any general knowledge outside of Poland. Being featured as the official Polish project for the fifty-fourth Venice Biennale, and thus highly visible for global audiences and media, *And Europe Will Be Stunned* underscored the pertinence of east-central European history for discourses on globalization. At the same time, Bartana chose to address a strong, controversial case, replete with allusions to (forced) migration and diaspora, conflicting identities, entangled histories, and political turmoil.

In this chapter, I have attempted to proceed with a similar approach and trace the less spectacular *longue durée* of globalization as it impacted on the organizational structures of large-scale exhibitions, and on the lives and works of participating “Polish” artists. Amorphousness, captured by Czesław Miłosz in a somewhat cursory and essentializing—but nevertheless enlightening—way, as a main feature of eastern Europe in the modern era, makes a case for *Eastern Europeanizing globalization*. This methodological exercise topples current geopolitical power constellations, and it can be done both diachronically and synchronically—after all, the main task in dealing with globalization today is precisely the one identified by Miłosz when describing turn-of-the-century eastern Europe: processing contradictory traditions, names, and an excess of impressions. Large-scale exhibitions such as the Venice Biennale have long provided the congenial spatial–aesthetic setting for such excess.

Notes

- 1 Unless otherwise indicated, all translations from the German original are by the author.
- 2 Skirmunt, Konstanty, letter from the Légation de Pologne à Rome, January 15, 1920, ASAC Archive, Busta 13.
- 3 Foreword to Issue 1 of *Południe Kwartalnik Ilustrowany*, 1920.

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7 Modernism on the Margins

Breslau's Architectural Future Between High-rise Utopia and Down-to-Earth Realism

Sarah M. Schlachetzki

“[... A]rchitecture, not for men, but for angels and aviators!” (Mumford (1924 (1933, 174)—it was not without resorting to celestial beings that American critic Lewis Mumford framed his criticism of New York skyscrapers in 1924. A year before Mumford published his deliberations on what he saw as the desolate state of the metropolis, the architect, city planner, and outspoken Socialist Raymond Unwin had delivered a speech at the Royal Institute of British Architects, in which he too evoked the messengers of God: “There was once a great controversy which, I believe, profoundly moved the theological world of its day, if it did not even threaten the peace of empires, as to how many angels could stand on a needle’s point” (Unwin 1967, 127). Unwin mentioned the religious sophistry of bygone days only to compare it ironically to the theme that dominated the urbanistic debate of his time: the question of how many people—and cars!—per square foot a city could take without succumbing to chaos and distress. In this gulf between angels and very real human beings there lay a dilemma for a future debate. The controversy was to encompass divergent visions of the city, architectural promises, national and regional identity, and finally the *basso continuo* of the time: the socio-economic misery that crystallized in housing shortages on both sides of the Atlantic in the decade following World War I. The discussion of ways to tackle the problem of rapidly-growing cities was transnational in scope, as was the capitalist economic system that brought it forth, despite its local manifestations. Mumford’s focus was the US metropolis, with architecture “bloom[ing] only to be cut down at the first ‘business opportunity’” (Mumford [1924] 1933, 157). Unwin was the Chief Architect at the Ministry of Health in London and scrutinized the “dire economic necessity arising from the [...] reputed gains” of centralization (Unwin 1967, 129). And, just as Berlin’s architects and technocrats were addressing similar urban challenges, in the city of Breslau, a four-hour train ride east of the German capital, ideologues clashed over the issue of ways to provide adequate housing for humans rather than divine beings.

Breslau was the seventh largest city in the Weimar Republic and the provincial capital of Lower Silesia, and, with half a million inhabitants, the principal urban center in the east of the country.¹ To be sure, it was affected by the postwar depression more severely than other German cities, especially with respect to its housing crisis. Between 1920 and 1925, two of Breslau’s eminent public figures competed for the right to realize their architectural vision for the city in distress. The rivals were City Architect Max Berg and the young architect Ernst May. Their conflict laid bare the

predicaments and paradoxes that fuelled a debate based on what Manfredo Tafuri has aptly called “*une nouvelle gestion globale du sol urbain*” (1975, 4). The “new management of urban ground” indeed had a global dimension, both in economic terms and linguistic analysis, and this global dimension significantly shaped debates in Breslau in the early 1920s. Although they disagreed in their approaches to restructuring a city they perceived as an ailing organism, the two architects both sought ways to conceive an architecture of tomorrow that would meet not only the *formalist*, but, more importantly, the *social* demands of the day. Immediately after the war and before they both left the city in 1925, Berg and May defended starkly-opposed solutions for “managing urban ground,” but also ways to “manage the masses.” “The masses,” the main currency in the political discourse of the time, now also permeated the urban disputes, although they were only passingly mentioned by many architects whose central concern remained the aesthetic form. In Breslau, however, the poorly sheltered had become more than just currency for an aesthetic trade-off; their existence influenced the debate because it demanded emergency measures that translated directly into architectural practice.

The gap between vision and reality—between angels and residents, between the capitalist high-rise and the modest single-family home—accounts for more than the influx of international urban models into Weimar’s eastern periphery. It also testifies to the lure of a particular economic system with respect to urban debates in a struggling Central European city. The way in which “man” became a rhetorical tool in a dispute that revolved around capital and building material foreshadows two sides of the same coin called “modernism”—modernism in its corporate form which it would be, after yet another war, re-imported into Europe; and modernism as the struggle to provide solutions for dwelling at a minimal level.

Max Berg, the City Architect of Breslau from 1909 to 1925 and the designer of its seminal Centennial Hall, pursued his monumental visions, maintaining that the modernist high-rise was the most suitable means to counter the rampant housing shortage. However, he soon felt compelled to dismiss accusations that his conception of architecture was “American,” and vehemently went on the counter-attack without refraining from nationalist undertones. The paradoxes of Berg’s time and geographic location converged in a type of argumentation that favored the monumental while employing a social-democratic rhetoric. Ernst May, on the other hand, a newcomer in town and sixteen years Berg’s junior, took the opportunity to set his own architectural convictions against those of the city’s *grand seigneur*. May also operated within a network of ideas absorbed during his apprenticeship at Raymond Unwin’s London office from 1910 to 1912 and broadened at international venues such as the International City and Regional Planning Conference in New York City in 1925, where he also met Lewis Mumford. As I will show, May’s unwavering commitment to social architectural solutions—often reproached for their alleged “anti-modernism” in Breslau—was not only indebted to Unwin’s impact on his thinking, but also to Lewis Mumford’s criticism of the American metropolis.²

A “denunciation turned into stone,”³ as Berg would pejoratively call it (1921/1922, 102), the capitalist success story exerted its effects not only on Manhattan island, but also on the imagination at the German periphery. Although any considerable investment remained out of reach for years, and although architectural “salvation” could only be experienced in the form of *ersatz* modernism, such as the one proposed by May and his team, the American model was the continuous backdrop against

which the social utopias of Breslau's early 1920s were set. The virtual relationship between the metropolis New York and the eastern *Großstadt* Breslau lays bare the "dialectic of the absurd," to which Tafuri alludes in his comparative article on the high-rise in America and Europe. What he calls "avatars of ideology" (another allusion to celestial beings!) with respect to the American skyscraper analyzed in Europe is a concept I extend to the context of the ideology of the Garden City movement. The concepts of the high-rise and the Garden City divided the architectural field into those who strove for corporate and representational enterprises and those concerned with social issues. In Breslau, these ideological themes were actively endorsed by Berg and May, whose direct confrontation in the press (and no doubt beyond) was not only a battle between the newcomer and the incumbent on site, but also quite literally a clash over the "new global management of urban soil." Berg's stance on the "production of space" would take other turns later, when he veered away from social democracy and toward *völkisch* ideas that were fashionable in the 1930s. However, that deserves a study in its own right.

Monuments for the Masses—The "Saving Exception"

When Max Berg made his high-rise proposal for the city, Breslau may have been on the international map, but not due to its favorable geopolitical location, or its potential for investment. What made it into the news across the Atlantic was its deplorable economic conditions and political instability, typical of the early Weimar Republic:

Here in Breslau nobody is allowed more than one room and the members of the family are permitted to have a dining room between them, and a drawing room or work room and kitchen. As they have to take in people they are glad to take us. I think I am the only American in Breslau and cannot move a step without my passport. [. . .] I visited several feeding places at Goldschmeden [*sic*]. It is pitiful to see the difference made by one extra meal a day with the proper number of calories.⁴

This report by a member of the Quaker organization "American Friends Service Committee" to the *New York Times* in late 1920 was as much a description of the bleak situation two years after World War I as one of the housing problem reflected in earlier statistics. Breslau, where the correspondent was stationed, had been in notoriously bad shape, even before the onset of the war. While the lack of housing was widely discussed as a transnational phenomenon, the literature scrutinized Germany both for the pioneering efforts made in non-private housing construction and the very circumstances that had rendered these efforts necessary. By supplementing the work of national and international help organizations such as the American Quaker *Kinderhilfe*, architects tried to show how their craft could help to alleviate the situation and address the socio-economic problems of the time.

It was at this point that Berg developed his ideas about integrating buildings of unseen scale into Breslau's cityscape. Since 1919, along with his employees Ludwig Moshamer and Richard Konwiarz, he had been elaborating designs of office high-rises for specific points in the city. The tallest structure Berg proposed was intended for the Central Market Square.

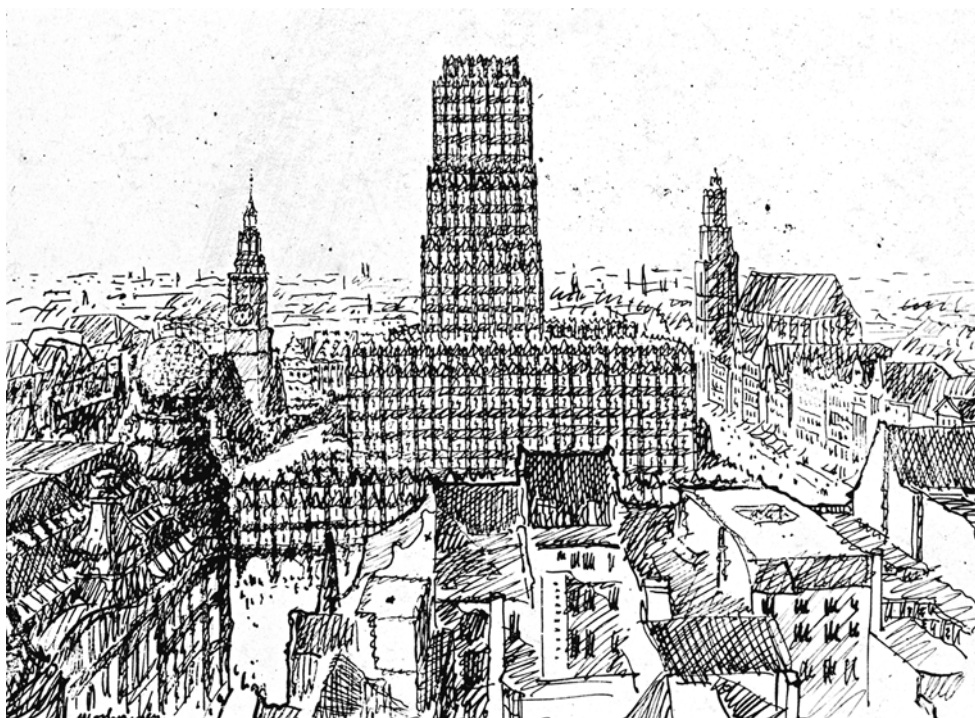


Figure 7.1 Max Berg, *High-rise at the Central Market Square*, project 1919/1920 (sketch by Ludwig Moshamer)

Repro from: Max Berg papers, Deutsches Museum, Munich

This prominent building, whose construction would have required the neo-Gothic addition to the adjoining Gothic town hall to be torn down, was to eventually rise up to twenty-eight stories, or ninety-three meters in height, and demonstrate the “connection of a high-rise as municipal office building with the old town hall” (Berg 1920b, 277).⁵ Berg first presented his proposals to the main committee of the municipal People’s Council in January 1920. In June of the same year, he displayed several sketches as well as a plaster model of the Lessingplatz high-rise at an art exhibition, which showcased modernist currents in town (Ilkosz 1992, 207). However, these local presentations were not what made Berg a prominent figure in the high-rise “fever” that was taking hold of Germany in the early twenties. Between 1920 and 1922, he also published numerous articles in the national press that presented him as an outspoken proponent of the cause—as a promoter of his own designs first, and later as expert witness and commentator of the seminal competition for a skyscraper on Friedrichstraße in Berlin.

Months before the “fever” would reach its peak in the capital, Berg advanced a line of argument that many of his colleagues would later repeat (Zimmermann 1988). At the presentation in front of Breslau’s municipal council on January 8, 1920, Berg was astute enough to know that, in an economic situation as tense as this, megalomania would not win him any points. He therefore presented his high-

rise visions as a measure to counter the housing shortage in the city. By constructing office high-rises in the center, Berg argued, the business district would be condensed in accordance with the demands of a modern city, while, at the same time, “thousands of flats” currently used as offices would become vacant and could be restored to their original residential function. The gain of flats was not merely a beneficial side-effect of the construction of high-rises; on the contrary, he claimed, it would be substantially more economical to construct tall buildings “than to use the existing materials and [work] forces to build single-family homes.” To underscore his point, Berg referred to the American skyscraper with its “extraordinary economic concentration,” and pointed out that the single-family home and low-rise solutions were an ideal fit for the “heyday of a state,” an “era of wealth,” not for the poverty-stricken Germany of that time. At the same time, Berg was well-aware of the enormous cost of constructing gigantic office blocks. And since it was impossible for the city to provide anything even close to the large sums of money needed for the erection of a municipal office high-rise, he suggested the foundation of a “big corporation” that would be in charge of the endeavor.⁶

From an architectural perspective, Berg’s designs for Breslau were bold in their vision,⁷ generally well thought-out in their handling of volumes, and compellingly modernist in their appearance. Yet, by basing his proposals on social grounds, and referring to the unsheltered not as coincidental beneficiaries but as the main reason to build high-rises in the first place, the rhetoric and underlying assumptions by which he sought to promote their construction negated the economic prerequisite of the high-rise itself. And it was precisely on this point that his proposals aroused controversy among those who not only supported a different vision of the future city, but who were actively involved in the construction of those modest single-family homes that Berg dismissed as belonging to bygone days of wealth.

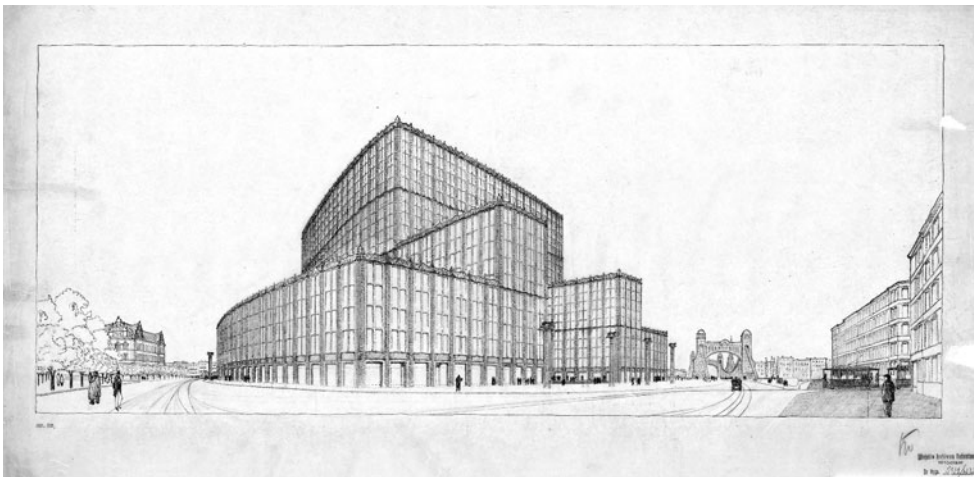


Figure 7.2 Max Berg, *High-rise at the Central Market Square*, project 1919/1920

Architectural historian Rainer Stommer (1982) has astutely highlighted the political climate in which the German high-rise debate took off after World War I. Although the high-rise was a utopian project for years to come, it became a symbol of recovery in a country whose national identity had been shaken to the core. Nationwide, architects promoted it as an instrument to retrieve the confidence that had been lost during the war—a promise of renewed economic prosperity and the reassurance of international significance. If Berg alluded to the American model as a prime example for efficient and rationalized construction, he was in good company: already before the war, German architects had shown a keen interest in American civil and industrial architecture, lauding the country's technological and economic acumen (Banham 1986; Neumann 1995). The argumentative triangle Berg then put forth—the pursuit of urban centralization, an allegedly more economic approach to dwelling construction, and concerns for the social problem—epitomized the principal tropes of the urban debate in the dire postwar years.

Scholarship about Berg's designs, especially Jerzy Ilkosz's seminal research on the minutiae of the Breslau high-rise affair, has generally sympathized with the social arguments supporting his campaign (Ilkosz 1992; Stommer 1982, 43–47).⁸ Even Tafuri, who had a socio-economic approach to architecture, read Berg's utopian proposals of 1920 primarily (and positively) as “administrative policy” for the community. At the same time, he shrewdly portrayed them as the “saving exception,” which they had indeed been conceived to be. To prove this, Tafuri alluded to the buildings' steel frame as the ultimate symbol of salvation in the absence of a model for genuine social and economic change (Tafuri 1975, 4). I believe that, although Berg supported his argument with elaborate numbers and statistics, his critics had a point that went beyond what some (for example, Ilkosz) have alleged to be merely conservatism on their part, or the novel, socio-administrative policy that Tafuri took at face value. In Breslau, a Central European city so distinct from New York, the booming skyscraper metropolis, or even the buzz of postwar Berlin, Berg's high-rise plans represented much more than a purported solution to the housing crisis. While Berg was hoping to see an influx of capital to realize his visions, many of his colleagues, and especially the young Ernst May, accused him of ignoring the very logic of a typology it would involve. They saw in the capitalist high-rise coming along in a social(ist) guise an admixture of belated imperial grandiosity and Americanism—both of which would effectively render the social argument implausible. In order to understand May's criticism, it is important to highlight his work in Silesia and consider his publications in the period.

Single-family Home or High-rise Utopia?

Like other colleagues, Ernst May confronted Berg's designs from a position that was seeking the feasible. May arrived in Breslau in late 1919 to assume the post of director of the construction department of the Silesian Homestead (*Schlesische Heimstätte*). Silesian Homestead was a non-profit provincial settlement society established after the war and, like other building associations, stood under the auspices of the Ministry for Social Welfare. May and his team began to design housing estates for Breslau's rural surroundings (later also in industrial Upper Silesia)—units not clad in modernist dress, but making do with whatever experimental method could be applied at a time of crippling hyperinflation and scarce resources (Störckuhl 2011;

2013, 147–156). With inflation rendering planning and budgeting extremely difficult—costs were literally increasing from one day to the next—it was close to impossible to draw up realistic financial plans. Building materials were very limited. Many of Silesia’s brick factories had closed down during or after the war and the coal needed not only for steel but also for the resumption of brick production was most difficult to obtain. Due to the continuously strained border situation with Poland and Czechoslovakia, major sources for wood imports have been cut off as well (see Fuchs and Behrendt 1927, 99).

It was under these circumstances that May and his colleagues developed serial building types for suburban and rural Silesia in order to rationalize the construction process. Thus, rationalization was not limited to the (imaginary) construction of high-rises following an American model, as suggested by Berg. May’s work in Breslau, his designs for the rural and for the suburban surroundings, was driven by a comparable managerial impetus. Yet, the high-rise stood for economic strength, representation, and the accumulation of capital, whereas Weimar Germany’s provincial Settlement Societies operated in a non-profit system for the benefit of the public. Managing the masses in this case was not aimed at the concentration of office workers in the urban center, the coordination of inner-city traffic, or the elevation of monumental “temples of labor,” as suggested by Berg. Rather, this management meant to tackle the problem of the day, while the pressing needs of “the masses” could be exploited on either side of the political divide. While Berg thought up representational schemes for the urban future, May’s job seems to have been more directly anchored in the present. His support for the modest single-family home, however, collided with Berg’s position and got challenged by other local colleagues as well.



Figure 7.3 Ernst May, modernized version of his work in and around Breslau, 1925
Repro after: *Der Neubau*, 4 (1925, 48)

“The Worst Living Conditions in the Entire World”

In January 1920, and at the same meeting in which Berg presented his high-rise projects and contended against the viability of small homeownership, a Breslau-based architect named Lange detailed how the inevitable reverse in the prevalent strategy of constructing mostly single-family houses in the area had come about. Lange called for the construction of multi-story apartment buildings, which, he maintained, would be more economical to erect in the end. He was backed by the main committee of the municipal People's Council. Whether Lange's elaborations were intended as a direct confrontation or not, May found that not only were his personal convictions under attack, but also the work of the Silesian Homestead, which emblematically stood for the model of the small rural house with a little garden for the partially self-sustaining family. Providing concrete figures and estimates, May immediately replied to Lange's report:

As to the claim that the minimal flat can be produced more cheaply in a multi-story building than as a single-family home, this has to be contradicted especially in consideration of today's conditions in the construction market. Specifically, those materials that are most difficult and most costly to get hold of, namely cement and iron, are needed in much larger quantities for the construction of a multi-story building.⁹

The disagreement between Berg, Lange, and May that crystallized at the council meeting made evident how architecture was indeed administrative policy rather than a mere exercise in form. In the climate of a multi-level conflict, May knew how to compensate for his youth and his status as newcomer. From then on, he began to use his newly-founded journal *Schlesisches Heim* as a platform to promote his ideas and to bring international voices into the debate, among them Raymond Unwin and Lewis Mumford, in order to support his viewpoint.

Even before Berg published his high-rise plans in the national press, May openly confronted the older man's arguments. In an article in the Spring of 1920, May reacted to Berg's proposals and the alleged socio-economic advantages thereof as well as to New York or the American model Berg drew upon. May captured New York through its “worst living conditions in the entire world”; through its “intoxication [...] to own the most colossal edifice of the world” (May 1920, 20). Instead of resorting to monumentalism, he maintained, there was only one way to address the housing crisis and that was by introducing a general house rent tax. Only by means of public revenues, to be used to “vigorously” subsidize the construction of low-rise units, could the collapsed construction industry and commerce be revived (May 1920, 21).¹⁰ In direct reference to Berg's central argument, May contended that the vast majority of flats vacated by the construction of business towers in the city were large, bourgeois apartments, which would have had to be transformed into small flats (*Kleinstwohnungen*), which he deemed either impossible or extremely costly.

Others discussed Berg's plans favorably. Welcoming his timely proposal in view of “the dreadful housing misery,” Berlin-based leftist critic Adolf Behne confirmed that it was the “most urgent economic reason that demand[ed] engagement with the system of the skyscraper” (1920, 1041). In 1921, Berg's argument was even taken up by the Association for the Construction of High-rises in Great-Berlin, predecessor

to the Turmhaus Stock Corporation that was mostly composed of influential capitalists, whose engagement in the Berlin competition was openly profit-driven (Köhntopp 1988). More critical observers in turn joined the opposition to Berg; Martin Mächler's evaluation in the national press, for example, echoed the one previously published by May. After a research trip to the United States, Mächler was among the few who had actually seen what they criticized: that the construction of high-rise buildings would not alleviate the "misery of the time." "On the contrary," he continued, "it would only get worse. In order to understand that, it is necessary to face the American skyscraper as *type* and *symbol*" (Mächler 1920/1921, 192, italics added). Although America—that is, New York as its *pars pro toto*—was invoked by both sides, the dispute was not about angels on a needle's tip, nor, for that matter, the imminent arrival of dark and overcrowded streets in a Berlin or a Breslau turned Manhattan. It was about the management of urban space, about the role architecture played in the distribution of capital, and about the impact this would have on human beings. The fight was ultimately about nothing less than the availability of, and control over, tangible amounts of building material. And "America" was the rhetorical lever that both sides used to argue their point.

In late 1920, May no longer had to agitate against Berg's high-rise plans for Breslau. The summer had brought about long committee meetings on whether to support or reject the projects the City Architect had now exhibited and elaborately promoted. None less than the Minister of Science, Art, and Education in Berlin had joined the opposition, once he had come across Berg's nationally publicized plans to tear down the neo-Gothic city hall to make space for one of his high-rises. The minister indignantly called on Breslau's District Governor to block that plan; and the year ended with the latter ultimately turning down Berg's proposals for steel-framed visions (Ilkosc 1992, 207). Berg reacted with the airs and graces of a misjudged genius in a polemical defense of his ideas:

The disdain for me, which is expressed in the critique exerted by Mr. District Governor, can touch me or my work, however, only as little as the critique of past times has touched the works of the artists of that time. I find myself in good company here (Beethoven, Wagner, and others). And just how the Centennial Hall has withstood imperial criticism, so will the temples of labor, the office high-rises, survive the criticism of [our] contemporaries, if they are built—and at some point they will be built [. . .].

(Berg 1920c)

His letter to the governor illustrates how the dispute in Breslau was as much about personal vanity, professional hierarchies, and ambitious careerism on either side, as it was about urban policies. Architectural historian Jerzy Ilkosc has branded the opposition to Berg "conservative" (1992); in Ilkosc's reading, May is regarded an early critic, who in the end was won over by Berg's lobbying for free architectural expression and who finally voted in favor of the plans.¹¹ That this view falls short of what was going on behind the scenes is elucidated by May's unrelenting activism in his journal *Schlesisches Heim*. Until he left for Frankfurt in the summer of 1925, he continued to lobby against an ideology that favored the monumental even in the absence of any concrete high-rise schemes for Breslau.

“If Man was Only a Commodity”

By March 1921, the debate was gaining momentum nationally with Berlin's Friedrichstraße competition in preparation, and May launched another attack on the “high-rise epidemic” taking hold of Germany. The article, simply entitled “The High-rise Question,” consisted of a short introduction followed by the transcript of a lecture delivered earlier that year by Raymond Unwin. In the introduction, May opposed the high-rise more outspokenly than ever before, and declared it not only indefensible, but also “a public danger [*gemeingefährlich*]” (May and Unwin 1921, 30). By granting Unwin a platform in his home journal, May introduced an internationally-renowned urban designer to the Silesian readers. This also backed the position he had taken a year earlier and fanned the flames of criticism of Berg's stance that had gained widespread attention in town and beyond. While Berg insisted that “purely economic reasons and, by consequence, ethical points of view” were decisive for his propositions (Berg 1920c), bringing in Unwin was a shrewd move on May's part. Unwin—Chief Architect in the newly-formed Ministry of Health, a key figure in the Garden City movement, and one of the most prominent international players in the field of urban planning—was a Socialist and he criticized the monumental visions that were the urban topic of the day. “If man was only a commodity that had to be conveniently stacked and administered, even under these circumstances, I highly doubt that the vertical extension could be a satisfactory solution to the problem of the big city,” he stated, underscoring his land reformist convictions against a high-rise capitalism wrapped in a social guise (May and Unwin 1921, 30–31).¹²

May's journalistic activism might have caused Berg to intensify his nationalist and social rhetoric in his article “High-rises in the Cityscape.” It is probable that it was written in direct response to Unwin's paper, since Berg attempted to counter once and for all any allegations of megalomania or undue Americanism. He again conjured up “America” as a model of economic rationalization, but launched more vehement attacks on its “ruthlessly brutal egocentrism,” “unrestricted individualism,” and the non-existent city planning in the “American *Citystädte*” that were, overall, “failures” (*Versager*) (Berg 1920a, 101–102). The politics of Berg's high-rise texts is ambivalent. They clearly presumed German culture to be superior (socially more sensitive, “organic-artistic”), even as they hinged on the American (anti-)model. Berg not only used but also needed “America” to make his point: German cities should allow for the construction of tall buildings, albeit incomparably smaller than New York skyscrapers.

Taking his Breslau visions to the national level, Berg remained firm in his claim concerning their social benefits and refuted the notion that skyscrapers would contribute to an increase in land value. While the erection of high-rises would be the “fastest [. . .] alleviation of the housing misery,” any possible increase in land value could be allocated back to the public, he maintained (Berg 1920a, 104). Not *despite*, but precisely *because of* its utopian essence, this very idea of municipal control over urban soil led Tafuri to compare Berg's dreams to the ones of Alexander Pasternak in the USSR. Although it may have represented a novel take on the reality of the high-rise in theory, in practice, Berg's own admission that a “big corporation” would have to be established in order to realize his projects already foreshadowed the clash of interests that so many corporate–public projects would face in the decades to come.

Contrary to Berg's rhetorical blow against the family homes that May and his team were busy completing in the countryside, it was the high-rise that clearly remained a marker of prosperity. While Raymond Hood's Chicago Tribune tower, topped off by neo-Gothic embroidery, was an emblematic target of Berg's vociferous contempt for the artistically inferior craft of American "decorators at work" (Berg 1920a, 102), Hood's Daily News Building of 1928 readily redeemed all earlier accusations. Its volume stretched vertically in the Manhattan context, and the building symbolically resonated with Berg's shattered high-rise dreams.

Driven by the money and manpower of a capitalism despised by Berg and his compatriots, the Daily News Building proved that only Americans could bring such projects to realization. And America, after all, was the place from where the history of modernist architecture would be written, with the re-importation of a corporate high-rise modernism into Europe after the Second World War.

Lewis Mumford and Ernst May

Breslau's urbanistic disputes in the early 1920s defy the reductionist view of what soon came to be known as the "International Style"—allegedly generated by a cosmopolitan abstraction that was opposed to national expressions in architecture. Berg's national eminence as promoter and analyst of the high-rise was soon to be outdone by the international recognition May received after leaving for Frankfurt am Main in 1925. During the depression following World War I, architects had looked westward in their efforts to adapt the American skyscraper for the European context. Now it was the Americans who lauded German achievements as the Great Depression was taking hold in the United States and the housing question entered the exhibition room.

The exhibition *Modern Architecture* at New York's Museum of Modern Art in 1932 granted May's Frankfurt *Siedlungen* a prominent place next to other contemporary housing estates such as the Garden City Radburn in New Jersey or J.J.P. Oud's Kiefhoek development in Rotterdam. The event was to shape the contemporary view of what "modernism" was (and what it was not), and it proved to be seminal for its international historiography. In its bibliography on "Housing," the exhibition catalog also featured the journal *Neues Frankfurt* that May founded upon arrival in Frankfurt, equipped with incomparably more advertising power and visual appeal than the Breslau journal he had left behind. The exhibition spotlighted the modernist villa, the work of individual international architects, and the corporate skyscraper such as Hood's. The German *Siedlung*, linked above all to the names of Otto Haesler and Ernst May, also occupied a central position in the show. In his contribution to the catalog, chief curator Philip Johnson observed how "Germany ha[d] so far outstripped other nations in solving the housing problem" (1932, 192). Though the housing question was far from being "solved" during the Weimar Republic, the Dawes plan and subsequent influx of international capital had indeed allowed for impressive modernist housing estates constructed in many cities after 1925, most notably in Frankfurt.

May's presence at the MoMA show was largely due to Catherine Bauer and Lewis Mumford, May having encountered the latter on a trip to the United States during his last months in Breslau. They met around the International City and Regional Planning Conference in New York in April 1925, which was the reason for May's

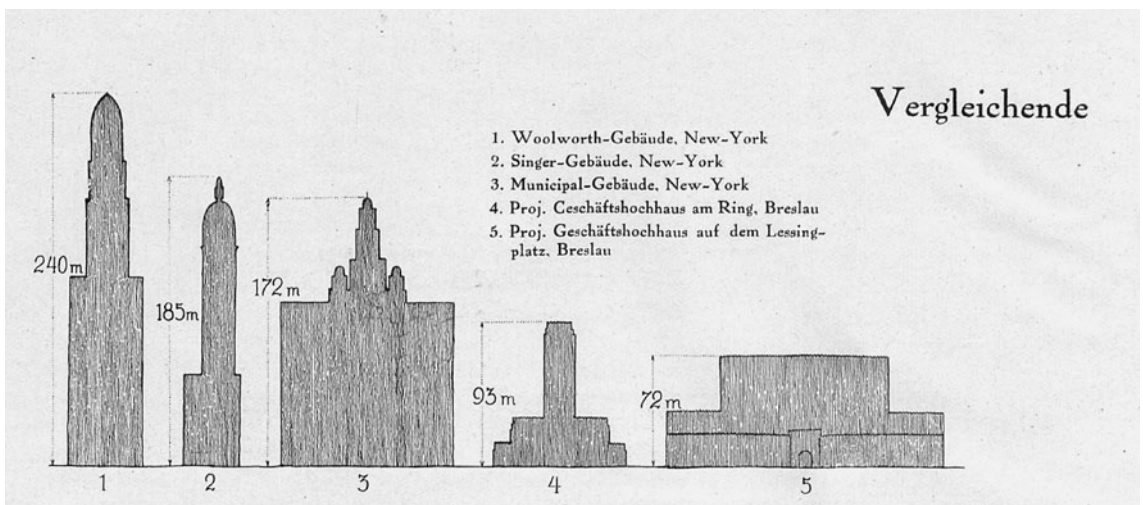


Plate 7 Max Berg, *Building Heights in New York, Breslau, and Cologne*, 1921

Repro after: *Wasmuths Monatshefte für Baukunst*, 4/5 (1921/1922, 102–103)

Darstellung

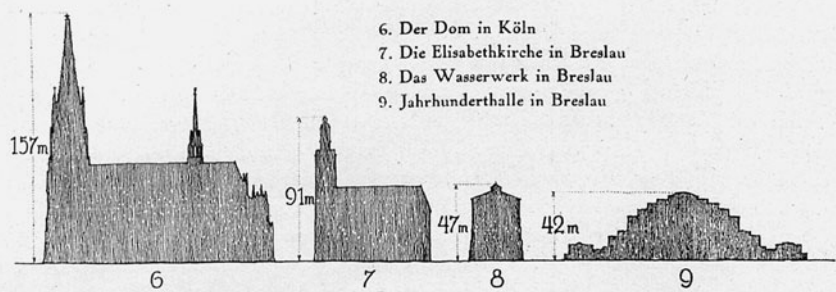




Figure 7.4 Raymond Hood and John Mead Howells, *The Daily News Building*, 1929–1930
Repro after: *Propyläen Kunstgeschichte: Die Kunst des 20. Jahrhunderts: 1880–1940*, 12. Berlin: Propyläen 1977 (Figure 378)

journey reinforcing his previous criticism of American urbanism aligning—as they discovered—with Mumford’s stance on the matter. Their encounter left a lasting impression on May and a mutual interest in each other’s work. Although Mumford was not involved in the selection process of the architects for the exhibition, thanks to his incessant commitment to the matter, the question of housing was granted the space it deserved within *Modern Architecture*. While Johnson covered Haesler’s work and commented on his “great regard for the aesthetics of modern architecture” (1932, 193), Mumford contributed a much longer article on housing to the catalog. Within the context of the show, he tirelessly brought the social question into the debate about a modernism that was on the verge of being reduced to aesthetic questions at the cost of its social principles. His criticism of avant-garde formalism was not blind to modernism’s triumphs, but it tried to take a more differentiating view of what a new architecture—a social architecture—could and should accomplish.

What I don’t like about the New Pioneers [of the International Style]—aside from their personalities—is their decoration, and their willingness to sacrifice more important things to decoration. For what is the cantilever and concrete . . . but decoration: if it’s there, it’s the new architecture, and if it isn’t, it’s just new traditionalism. That’s too easy both as architecture and as criticism.

(Mumford, quoted in Wojtowicz 1996, 92)

Although May spearheaded the modernist vanguard with his housing estates in Frankfurt, he shared Mumford’s skepticism *vis-à-vis* a modernism void of social concerns. Immediately upon return from the United States to Breslau, May published his “American Travel Impressions,” in many ways mirroring Berg’s disdain for the US metropolis:

The Silesian can easily get an illustrative picture of this chaotic architecture. He only has to go to the Upper Silesian industrial area in order to see—though on a smaller scale—what kind of wild construction, bare of any consideration of beauty, one has achieved at the same time in America

(May 1925a, 119)

May’s “Impressions” were elaborately illustrated with photographs he had taken himself, and the captions as well as text formed a narrative above all concerned with the social injustice reflected in architecture.

It was not by coincidence that May’s view correlated with that of Mumford. They were both ardent devotees of the English Garden City concept. May thus found his own critique of the American city shrewdly validated by Mumford’s interpretations put forth in his recently published book, *Sticks and Stones*. May’s “Impressions” were then little more than a synopsis of Mumford’s study, interspersed with his own conclusions as well as credits to American traffic planning where it was due. Months before *Sticks and Stones* was published under the German title *Vom Blockhaus zum Wolkenkratzer* [*From Log Cabin to Skyscraper*], May—obviously unaware of the translation overseen by Walter Curt Behrendt in Berlin—provided the Silesian reader with an outline of Mumford’s observations, yet again channeling ideas circulating abroad into the republic’s periphery.¹³

As if in a tacit tribute to the industrial *Pathosformel* coined by Walter Gropius in 1913, May's "Impressions" closed with the proto-modernist image of a grain silo in Buffalo.¹⁴

They would be his last contribution as editor-in-chief of the Breslau journal. In a letter written aboard the ocean liner back to Europe, May had still expressed hope that Mumford would soon visit Germany's eastern periphery (1925b). Just one month after his return, however, May informed Mumford of his appointment as City Architect in Frankfurt, bringing about an indubitably long-awaited "enlargement of [his] work" (1925c).

May and Mumford would not cross paths again, but their lifelong correspondence underscores the enduring kinship of their ideals. When Mumford finally visited the Frankfurt *Siedlungen* in 1932, May had already left the city to embark on yet another professional venture in the USSR. Deeply impressed by Frankfurt-Römerstadt, the American critic compared it to the pioneer housing project Sunnyside Gardens in Queens, where he lived with his wife Sophia:

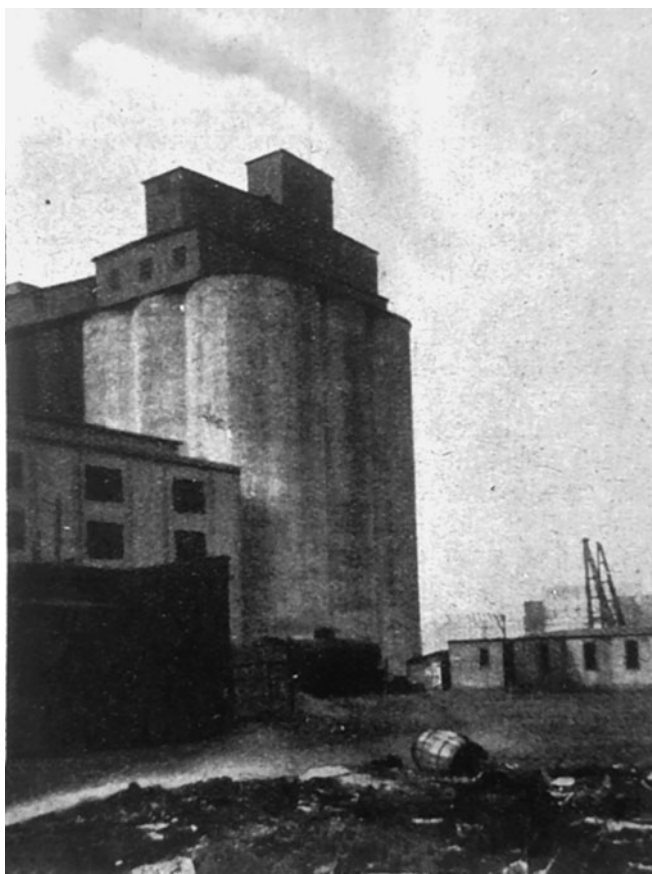


Figure 7.5 Ernst May, *Grain Elevator in Buffalo, NY, 1925*

Repro after: *Schlesisches Heim*, 6 (1925, 229)

I have been in Römerstadt, the most beautiful Siedlung I have yet laid my eyes on. A good thing you are not with me: you'd never be content to live in Sunnyside or anywhere else if you walked through the houses & gardens & looked over the Nidda Valley. . . . It gave me a real notion of what our new cities might be like: a real fulfillment, & infinitely better than most of the other examples of modern architecture I have seen.

(Mumford, quoted in Wojtowicz 1996, 130)

The concept of Sunnyside had been elaborated by Clarence Stein and Henry Wright around the same time as May was working on his rural *Siedlung* schemes in Silesia; by the time May visited New York, construction in Queens was in full swing. While Römerstadt then had little to do with Stein's and Wright's project from an architectural perspective, their common root in the Garden City movement did render them comparable.

With respect to May's oeuvre after 1925, his early work in Silesia occupies a distinct place, as he retrospectively pointed out himself. Twenty years passed before he wrote another series of letters to Mumford—first from the South African internment camp, where he spent two and a half years during the next war, then from Kenya, to where he had emigrated after three years spent in the USSR, and where he returned in 1942. In 1945, right after the end of the war, May informed Mumford of his plans of returning to Germany and expressed hope to apply his transnational urbanistic expertise to a terrain of postwar misery once again. "I expect hell!," he wrote, "[b]ut, this job to take up the struggle against appalling conditions and obstacles and to win through [*sic*], this is what I feel born for. I did it successfully after the last war in Silesia" (May 1945).

May's post-World War I achievements in the surroundings of Breslau neither measured up to his work in Frankfurt, nor to later endeavors in Russia. They were, as he emphasized, efforts to mitigate a postwar housing shortage with whatever means were within reach; and they displayed the regionalist approach to which he adhered again later in life as well as the unbroken priority he gave to social rather than formal questions. In the middle of the war, May conveyed to Mumford what can be read as an afterword to his struggle against visions deviating from his own in the 1920s: "It will take time till Regionalism can develop. Most people will stick to their narrow so-called economic outlook, based on old-fashioned capitalistic dogmas" (May 1941). May continued to address human beings—not angels or aviators—with his town planning. The early years in Breslau, when he held his first leading position and not least of all his opposition to Berg's monumental visions, were to shape the convictions to which he would remain true throughout his life.

Notes

- 1 The then-German city Breslau became Polish Wrocław after World War II, when Poland was shifted westward as a whole by the Allies' decision at the Tehran Conference in 1943.
- 2 On May's indebtedness to Unwin, see Barnstone 2014 and Störckuhl 2011.
- 3 Unless otherwise indicated, all translations from the German original are by the author.
- 4 "Inside Germany," *New York Times*, December 12, 1920.
- 5 For details of Berg's high-rise plans, see Ilkosz 1992; for the wider context, see: Ilkosz and Störckuhl 1997; Störckuhl 2013, 137–146.

- 6 “Ein Wolkenkratzer für Breslau,” *Schlesische Zeitung*, January 8, 1920. Later, Berg would call for a “building society” created with the help of the state and commune (1920b, 277).
- 7 This especially holds true in view of the fact that, some two years later, 144 entries were submitted to the Berlin-Friedrichstraße competition, of which only a few framed the formal problem of the skyscraper convincingly and aptly for the European urban context (Zimmermann 1988).
- 8 Stommer, however, clearly considered these designs unrealistic.
- 9 “Umkehr im Wohnungsbau,” *Schlesische Zeitung*, January 8 and 11, 1920.
- 10 The so-called House Rent Tax was introduced in 1924.
- 11 According to the minutes of the *Schlesischer Bund für Heimatschutz*, May did, despite his critical stance, vote in favor of Berg’s plans in August 1920 (Ilkosz 1992, 210, 219).
- 12 Unwin ([1923] 1967) continued to expound the problem; see his address at the Royal Institute of British Architects in 1923.
- 13 May even planned to publish his “extract” in the national press, see May 1925c.
- 14 For further discussion of Gropius’ circulating images, see Banham 1986, 11–15.

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Plates



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Plate 1 Anon., portrait of Krzysztof Wiesiołowski (Крыштап Весялоўскі), 1636, oil on canvas, 205 × 132 cm

Minsk, National Arts Museum of the Republic of Belarus



Plate 2 Uszak medallion carpet, Turkey or Poland, first quarter of the seventeenth century, knotted rug, 348 × 227 cm

Photo by Łukasz Schuster. © Wawel Royal Castle, Cracow



Plate 3 Tamás Kaszás and Anikó Lorant (Ex-artists' Collective), *Pangaea—Visual Aid for Historical Consciousness*, 2011. Installation
Courtesy of the artists



Plate 4 Daniel Schultz the Younger, *Jan II Kazimierz*, c. 1650, oil on canvas, 210 × 154 cm
National Museum, Stockholm



Plate 5 Daniel Schultz the Younger, *Portrait of Dedesh Agha and Entourage*, 1664, oil on canvas, 166 × 231 cm
Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg



Plate 6 Teodor Axentowicz, *Kołomyjka* (Rural Dance), 1895, oil on canvas, 85 × 112.5 cm
National Museum, Warsaw

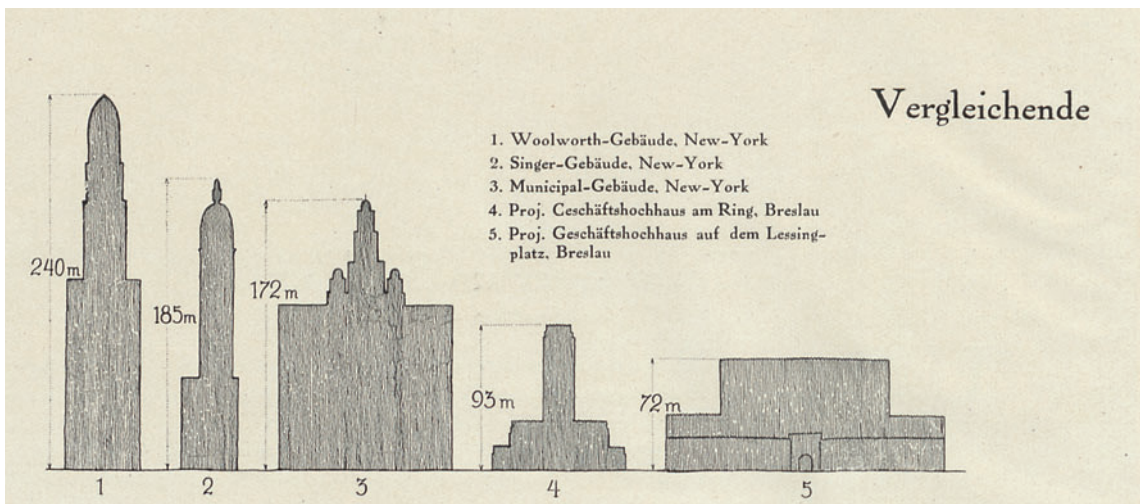


Plate 7 Max Berg, *Building Heights in New York, Breslau, and Cologne*, 1921

Repro after: *Wasmuths Monatshefte für Baukunst*, 4/5 (1921/1922, 102-103)

Darstellung

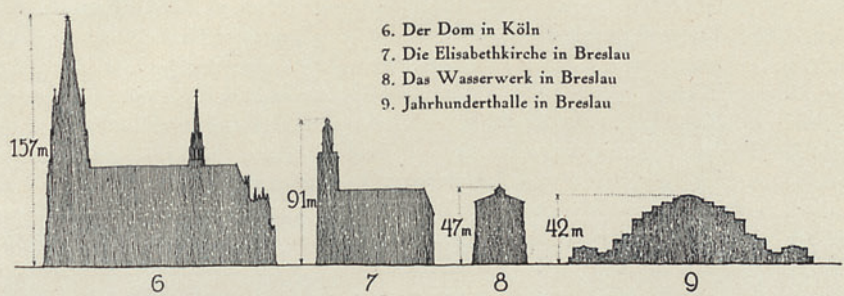




Plate 8 Cricot 2 Theatre, *The Dead Class*, 1983, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris
Photo by Jacqueline Bablet. Centre for the Documentation of the Art of Tadeusz Kantor Cricoteka, Cracow



Plate 9 El Periférico de Objetos, *El hombre de arena* [The Sandman], 1992

Photo by Magdalena Viggiani. Courtesy of Magdalena Viggiani



Plate 10 Mona Vătămanu and Florin Tudor, *Le monde et les choses*, 2014, cloth
Courtesy of the artists



Plate 11 Flo Kasearu, *Estonian Sculpture*, 2005. Living sculpture performed in Tallinn Art Hall, Estonia; in Warszawski Aktyw Artystow, Warsaw, Poland; in front of the Estonian Embassy in Berlin, Germany [sign reads: "I am dead"]

Courtesy of the artist



Plate 12 Ghenadie Popescu, MM, 2008. Video still of a performance in Moldova and Romania
Courtesy of the artist



Plate 13 Tina Takemoto, *Looking for Jiro*, 2011. Production stills
Photo by Maxwell Leung. Courtesy of the artist



Plate 14 Jaanus Samma and Marko Raat, *Public Toilet, 2015*. Production still, part of Samma's installation *Not Suitable for Work: A Chairman's Tale* in Museum of Occupations, Tallinn, 2016

Photo by Anna Stina Treumund. Courtesy of the artist

Part III

Global Communities and the Traffic in Ideas



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8 The Circulation of Feminist Ideas in Communist Poland¹

Agata Jakubowska

In 1980, Ewa Partum's exhibition *Self-identification* was organized at the Mała ZPAF Gallery in Warsaw. It consisted of a series of photo-montages in which the artist's nude figure was pasted into photos depicting everyday life in Warsaw. She appeared to be crossing a street, waiting at a tram stop, waiting in line in front of a shop, etc. During a vernissage, the artist also appeared naked. She presented a manifesto declaring her interest in feminist art, which, according to her, "reveals to a woman her new role, the possibility of self-realisation" (Stepken 2013, 140). Grzegorz Dziamski, a critic writing about Partum's art, admitted several years later that the audience was surprised and disoriented by her decision to appear naked, which was



Figure 8.1 Ewa Partum, performance documentation from the opening of *Samoidentyfikacja* / *Self-identification*, Galeria Mała ZPAF, Warszawa 1980

Photo by Marek Grygiel. © Artum Foundation, Ewa Partum

not only provocative but also difficult to interpret. He explained this by claiming that, at that time:

the feminist discourse was not really present in Poland, and therefore the artist's 'nudity' could not be 'clothed' with any theoretical comments. [. . .] Polish critics had as much to say about Ewa Partum's performance as an elderly lady walking down the street or a female traffic officer from the exhibited photo-montages would have had, if they only had the chance to meet the naked Ewa Partum in reality.

(Dziamski 2001, 156)

My chapter aims to challenge Dziamski's notion regarding the absence of a feminist discourse in Poland. The single fact that feminist art texts were not unknown to Partum may alone undermine Dziamski's claim that Polish art critics had no theoretical tools with which to "cover her nudity." My aim is not to provide a counter argument and attempt to prove that a feminist discourse flourished, or was even well developed. Yet, feminist ideas did circulate in Europe and were also known to some in communist Poland. Both the Polish critic and "the elderly lady walking down the street" could have familiarized themselves with them at least partially.

Feminist ideas did not originate in Eastern Europe, nor did they simply "come from the West," as has been presented in analyses favouring the center-periphery paradigm. As Marsha Meskimmon observed, usually "the chronological delimitation of 1970s feminist art implies a cartography focused upon the United States and emanating outward from it," first toward the United Kingdom, then through Europe, "and, when venturing very boldly, touching upon the wider context of the Americas, Africa, and Asia". Meskimmon proposes—and my text is indebted to this approach—to rethink such a chronologically-defined history of feminist art

through a spatialized frame, a global cartography. Thinking spatially, [. . .] we can admit the coexistence in time of locationally distinct narratives and connect disjointed temporalities, thus asking vital questions concerning networks of relation, processes of exchange, and affinities of meaning.

(Meskimmon 2007, 324)

The focus of this text will be precisely these networks of relations and processes of exchange that made feminist ideas circulate in Poland as well.

The editors of the volume *Circulations in the Global History of Art* emphasize that understanding culture as a result of the circulation, rather than the diffusion, of different ideas may help us consider "other" cultural landscapes (in this case, that of a country behind the Iron Curtain) without "shutting them inside the prison of the notion of alterity or dismissing them as peripheral" (Kaufmann, Dossin, and Joyeux-Prunel 2015, 2). This method might make it possible to challenge a vertical kind of history of feminist art and introduce a horizontal perspective. Yet, as Piotr Piotrowski, the author of the concept of horizontal art history, underlined, "although the meanings of art in East-Central Europe were different from those in the West, art in East-Central Europe kept developing within the orbit of Western culture" (Piotrowski 2009, 54). It would be historically incorrect to claim that Polish art historians and women artists contributed to the same extent to the development of

feminist ideas in the arts as their colleagues working in the West. Nor have they passively received them. The examination of the circulation of people, texts, and artworks, as well as the circumstances of their encounters and exchanges, and the study of the reception of traveling ideas, would all aim at demonstrating how complex and dynamic a relationship the Polish art world had to feminist concepts—concepts that supposedly “just” came from the West.

Susan Gal, in her text devoted to the circulation of discourses about women in East-Central Europe, claims that, because of limited possibilities of travel and scarce knowledge of foreign languages, it was the translations of texts that played a crucial role in the transfer of ideas (Gal 2003, 93–120). To my knowledge, no text from the field of feminist art was translated into Polish during the communist period. Yet, if we understand “translation” widely, as a text being not only “simply” translated but also cited, summarized, and discussed, then we also can take into consideration the catalogs, magazines, and books in the original languages that were brought back to Poland by those who traveled and made them available to colleagues or to a more general public by referencing them in local magazines. In a limited number of cases, publications were also bought by Fine Art School libraries. They served as one of two main sources of knowledge about feminist tendencies, the second being the people themselves, both coming to Poland from abroad and Polish artists and critics who actually travelled to different places and shared their experience, contacts, and knowledge.

In October 1975, Natalia LL visited Innsbruck where the exhibition *Frauen—Kunst—Neue Tendenzen* was organized at Galerie Krinzinger. Many years later, she recalled having been surprised that her work, *Consumer Art*, was visible “everywhere.”² It was reproduced—recalls Natalia LL—on posters and invitations for the exhibition as a “symbol of feminism” (Natalia LL 2004, 242). Although this quote may partially reveal wishful thinking on the part of the artist, participants of this event confirm the importance of the work (Nabakowski 2012, 128–144; Abramović in Radziszewski 2012). At that moment, a little-known neo-avant-garde woman artist from Poland, from behind the Iron Curtain, took center stage within the European feminist art movement.³

In the vast majority of texts devoted to Natalia LL, her relationship to feminist art-making is referred to superficially, and the reference is usually limited to a list of exhibitions in which she has participated since 1975. Sometimes a letter sent to Natalia LL by Lucy Lippard is mentioned and it functions as a kind of cornerstone of feminist art tendencies in Poland. The letter itself is lost, and for that reason art historians have to rely on Natalia LL’s testimony. The artist claims that she received the letter in December of 1971 and that it included a prompting address to the artist to become the representative of a feminist vanguard in Poland and in Eastern Europe (Natalia LL 2004, 242). Lippard, when recently asked about this correspondence and her contact with Natalia LL, replied that she did not remember this and emphasized having had established contacts with hundreds of “wonderful feminists.”⁴ Some people doubt the existence of the letter, which was supposedly destroyed during the huge flood in Wrocław in 1997, yet here it is more important to note that it seems not to have played an important role in helping Natalia LL to establish contacts with feminist art circles. To my knowledge, the letter remains unanswered.

In the 1970s, several critics and curators interested in the art of Eastern Europe visited Poland, including Wrocław where Natalia LL lived (and still lives), met artists

and then exhibited, discussed, and reproduced their works. As Klara Kemp-Welch and Cristina Freire pointed out in their introduction to a special issue of ARTMargins devoted to artists' networks in Latin America and Eastern Europe, there were several networkers who traveled to Eastern Europe and developed significant contacts, which resulted in the international presentation of artists met there (Freire and Kemp-Welch 2012, 8–10). They mention, for example, Klaus Groh, a German artist and author based in Oldenburg, who published volumes on the work of Eastern European experimental artists, *Aktuelle Kunst in Osteuropa* (1972) among them. They underline the most significant role of Jorge Glusberg, Argentinean curator, known as a global networker, who had the means and possibilities to establish contacts among artists and critics from different parts of the world. He could have been responsible for informing Lucy Lippard about Natalia LL, as he probably told her about another Polish woman artist, Zofia Kulik, as the artist herself presumes. Among Lippard's archival materials there is a piece of paper with names of women artists whom she took into consideration when choosing participants for the *c. 7500* exhibition in 1973.⁵ On the list, the name "Kulik" appeared twice. Zofia Kulik claims that Lippard did not contact her but she and partner Przemysław Kwiek were in touch with Glusberg.⁶

Some photos from Natalia LL's archive depict both Groh and Glusberg during their visits to Poland as companions of Natalia LL. It seems, however, that it was another person who played a crucial role as far as her presence in the feminist context is concerned—Giancarlo Politi. Politi is an Italian critic living at that time in Milan, the founder and editor-in-chief of *Flash Art*, which devoted some attention to the art of Eastern Europe. In the photos documenting his visit to the apartment belonging to Natalia LL and her husband Andrzej Lachowicz, we see them standing above Natalia LL's *Consumer Art* spread out on the floor. It was Politi who presented this piece and its author to the German art critic Gisliind Nabakowski, then his partner in life and at work. Nabakowski was responsible for the German edition of *Flash Art*—*Heute Kunst*—in which she devoted an entire issue to feminist art.⁷ She included material devoted to Natalia LL, such as her text on *Consumer Art* and the artist's statement on visual language (it made no references to feminism or gender). In addition, two fragments from *Consumer Art* were featured on the cover. It is interesting that Nabakowski's Editorial was written before she met Natalia LL, and was based on the photos and description delivered by Politi. Nabakowski and Natalia LL got to know each other later that same year in Belgrade, during the fourth Young Art Meeting, at which a discussion entitled *Women in Art* and some presentations of feminist art were organized; this was one of few occasions for Natalia LL to meet an international group of feminist artists and critics and exchange thoughts in person. After that event, the artist was invited to take part in the above-mentioned exhibition in Innsbruck. In the following years, she participated in the following exhibitions: *Magma: Rassegna internazionale di donna artist*, Castello Oldofredi, Brescia (touring to Florence, Ferrara, Verona, 1976), *Frauen Machen Kunst*, Galerie Magers, Bonn (1976), and *Feministische Kunst International* in Haags Gemeentemuseum (1979, later travelling to other Dutch cities).

Another Polish woman artist also took part in the latter exhibition: Maria Pinińska-Bereś. Her situation was completely different—first, because this was her first contact with the women's art movement. *Feministische Kunst International*, in which Natalia LL and Pinińska-Bereś participated, was the second edition of the exhibition organized

by SVBK (Stichting Vrouwen in de Beeldende Kunst). The first took place in 1978 in the Gallery de Appel, whose founder, Wies Smals, was a member of SVBK (Wentrack 2012, 76–110). The show was met with great interest but also criticism, among which was the argument that the exhibition should have had a more international character. During the second edition, works by artists from thirteen countries were presented, among them two Polish artists. Natalia LL was already known in the feminist circles, which cannot be said for Pinińska-Bereś. The latter did not make contact with these circles through Natalia LL. In an invitation letter that was sent to Pinińska-Bereś in the spring of 1979 (dated April 11, 1979), Aggy Smeets from de Appel gallery is mentioned as the person from whom the exhibition organizers learned about her works. He showed them slides of her work, and their choice was made on that basis. Maria Pinińska-Bereś often complained that she was not treated seriously by art critics, who always visited her husband, Jerzy Bereś, not her. His international career started to develop earlier than hers and it was he who attracted attention of most critics.⁸ In this case, he was a go-between. Aggie Smeets visited Jerzy Bereś, as the de Appel gallery, which concentrated on new media, including performance, was interested in collaborating with him.⁹

As is clear from the above-mentioned facts, it was usually not feminist artists who established contacts. Yet, contacts having been established, they could profit from them to transmit feminist ideas to Poland. Polish women artists taking part in feminist exhibitions outside Poland seem to have had the best opportunities to do this, yet most of them were not good mediators of feminist concerns. It is necessary to remember that they did not always participate personally in the exhibitions where their works were shown. For example, Maria Pinińska-Bereś did not go to Holland to see the show in which she took part. Gisłind Nabakowski recalls that “Natalia LL travelled and promoted herself as best as she could. I met her in 1975 three times: in Innsbruck, Belgrade and Paris” (Nabakowski 2012, 129). Yet, it is worth noting that Nabakowski met Natalia LL *only* these three times. After that, they saw each other in 2012, on the occasion of the *Where is Permafo* exhibition in the Wrocław Contemporary Museum. Natalia LL exhibited her work at subsequent feminist exhibitions, but sometimes she did not get a passport or money and thus could not participate personally in all of them. An artist from Poland could not physically cross borders whenever she wanted. Her freedom of travel, and thus of being personally present at these feminist events, was limited by the government. The consent of the authorities was necessary to receive a passport (for a short, precisely defined period of time and specific destination) and permission to purchase a small (very small) amount of foreign currency. One more element from Nabakowski’s recollections is symptomatic. She wrote that when they had first met, Natalia LL “was verbally very cautious, as if embarrassed, restrained and often gave the impression of being a diva.” And later about herself: “when I met Politi, I was 25 and spoke four languages fluently. When I left him and Italy (1977), I was fluent in the next, fifth—Italian” (Nabakowski 2012, 133). Although there were polyglots in Poland, poor knowledge of languages was common at that time in communist countries, which made it harder for many artists to communicate freely with their foreign colleagues.

Although her possibilities were limited, Natalia LL made some effort to disseminate feminist thinking in Poland. In 1977, she wrote a text (dated March 1, 1977) devoted to *Feminist tendencies in the arts* that she has presented twice in galleries in Lublin and Katowice.



Figure 8.2 Natalia LL and VALIE EXPORT, *Art and Feminism*, Labirynt Gallery, Lublin 1977

Photo by Andrzej Polakowski. Courtesy of Andrzej Polakowski

In that essay, she mentions several feminist curators, critics, and artists, summarizing their opinions, and clearly states that for her the most important element of feminism was the attention paid to increasing opportunities for women who are marginalized in the art world. In 1978, Natalia LL organized a small exhibition of women's art in Wrocław, where she lived, in the Jatki PSP Gallery. She showed works by Carolee Schneemann, Naomi Meidan, Suzy Lake, and herself (one by each artist). Schneemann and Lake are the artists she had met during her three-month study visit to the U.S., funded by the Kościuszko Foundation. This exhibition can also be considered a "text" that has an important role to play in transferring ideas. As Jenni Sorkin observed, this was often the main objective of such events. Making reference to the concept of nomadology, as elaborated by Deleuze and Guattari, she characterizes the all-woman exhibition format as "inherently local while still being a multinational phenomenon [. . .] transient, quickly assembled, and short-lived, they were statements"—she continues—"without fixed meanings particular to the milieux from which they sprung," but with a significant role in the dissemination of feminist thought and culture (Sorkin 2007, 460–461). The show organized by Natalia LL was an occasion to present works by some important feminist artists and feminist issues they were working on.¹⁰

The fact that Natalia LL, who had connections with the women's art movement, was prepared to propagate its tenets in Poland does obviously not indicate that this was typical behavior. Participation (or not) in feminist exhibitions or direct contact with feminist artists does not necessarily result in the dissemination of feminist ideas. A comparison of Magdalena Abakanowicz's and Ewa Partum's attitude can illustrate this discrepancy.

Magdalena Abakanowicz had the opportunity to engage with the feminist art movement in Los Angeles in the 1970s. In 1971, the University of California Art Gallery hosted a renowned group exhibition titled *Deliberate Entanglements*:

An Exhibition of Fabric Forms, in which Abakanowicz was included. She also had a solo show at the Pasadena Art Museum at that time, and both exhibitions were important steps in her flourishing international career. Joanna Inglot, in her analysis of the exhibition's reception, remarked that a number of viewers and critics, also from the feminist milieu, "were indeed captivated, [. . .] especially by her evocative sexual imagery, seen as referring to wombs or earth goddesses" (Inglot 2004, 66). Many of these viewers were members of the women's art movement that was burgeoning in California at that time, and were captivated by her work and saw them "as an explicit manifestation of women's art and female sexual identity" (Inglot 2004, 66).

Although Abakanowicz did not respond positively to this interest expressed by feminist circles (contrary to Natalia LL), and never considered herself or her works to be part of the women's art movement, she participated occasionally in all-women shows. (Jakubowska 2011, 253–265). The most significant was her inclusion (as the only Polish artist) in *Künstlerinnen International 1877–1977*, organized in Berlin in 1977.¹¹ This was the first exhibition of that type in Europe, an exhibition that presented a historical overview of the most important women artists from the previous century. Abakanowicz's presence there did not result in any activity on her part that would lead to the presentation of feminist ideas in Poland.

Ewa Partum however, the artist mentioned at the beginning of this text, is an example of a radically different attitude, as she actively promoted feminist ideas in her art. She was a member of the mail art movement, participating extensively in an international exchange of works and ideas. In her case, this did not result in any feminist contacts that would lead to her taking part in feminist exhibitions, even though she produced works with clear feminist overtones, such as one of her *Poem by Ewa* with the slogan "My touch is a touch of a woman," which literally pointed to the gender perspective inscribed in that series of works. In the second half of the 1970s, Partum intensified her feminist artistic activities. In 1979, at the Gallery Art Forum in Łódź, she organized a performance entitled *Change*. This was an extension of an earlier action under the same title (1974), during which she underwent the process of aging half her face. In this instance, the same procedure was repeated, but on half of her entire body. During the performance, the artist read her manifesto with a clearly articulated feminist message. She spoke mainly about the fact that "a woman lives in a social structure that is alien to her," where she can function only "if she masters the discipline of camouflage and leaves out her own personality" (Partum in Stepken 2013, 136). Partum also read fragments of texts by VALIE EXPORT and Lucy Lippard. These texts were taken from the catalog of the above-mentioned exhibition *Künstlerinnen International 1877–1977* (Nabakowski 2001, 21). Partum neither participated in the event, nor visited Berlin to see the show.

As the example of Ewa Partum indicates, exhibition catalogs were an element of great importance in bringing knowledge about art across the Iron Curtain. Polish artists and art critics referred to them in search of information, inspiration, and sometimes confirmation of their ideas. In 1977, when Natalia LL wrote and presented her text devoted to feminist tendencies in art to a limited audience during two gallery meetings, the first article on the same subject appeared in a Polish art magazine. It was an essay entitled *Neofeminism in Art*, written by Stefan Morawski, a philosopher dealing with the aesthetics, and published in the bi-monthly journal, *Sztuka* [Art] (Morawski 1977, 57–63). This turned out to be the main presentation of feminist

ideas in art that appeared in the Polish media before the collapse of communism. This lengthy article includes numerous references to feminist texts from different disciplines, such as philosophy, sociology, or psychology, but as far as visual art is concerned, his comments are based solely on the catalog of *Künstlerinnen International 1877–1977*. Morawski admits openly to his readers that he did not see the show, and did not purchase the catalog himself but obtained it from the Austrian feminist artist, herself a curator of feminist shows, VALIE EXPORT, who gave it to him during her visit to Poland. It is significant that Morawski did not receive that catalog from Abakanowicz, who took part in this exhibition, and he also does not mention her in his article. He makes no reference to the Polish context nor to Polish women artists. In the final part of the text, he clearly states that his article was intended simply to be informative for Polish readers.

It seems that ideas concerning feminist art were introduced to Polish readers in the 1970s mainly through Morawski's text and Natalia LL's activities (Ewa Partums' actions did not have such a resonance), but Morawski presented the feminist art movement differently than Natalia LL. While she concentrated on the fact that women are in a worse position in the art world and that their working together is a strategic move to change it, for Morawski, feminist art is part of the liberating social movement of feminism, which corresponds with what VALIE EXPORT had been claiming from the beginning of her feminist artistic practice.¹² He compares a feminist artist with "a proletarian or Negro artist who is convinced that his view of the world should entirely define his artistic practice" (Morawski 1977, 59).

One starts to understand the importance of Morawski's presentation of feminism when one reads reviews of the first Polish feminist art exhibitions, especially the above-mentioned *Women's Art* organized by Natalia LL. In his review, the young critic Andrzej Sapija, in response to a very negative critique that had appeared in the local weekly, *Wiadomości* [News], recalls Morawski's article as one that can provide an explanation to those who lack information and an understanding of feminist ideas. Instead of explaining the main ideas of feminist art himself, he offers a summary of Morawski's text (Sapija 1978, 13). As Morawski's text appeared in an art magazine with national distribution while Sapija's text appeared in a local weekly, we can perceive this as a diffusion of the feminist ideas presented in the Berlin catalog, through the Polish art world, to "ordinary" people.

Surprisingly, although some Polish critics were interested in feminist art in general, they seldom paid attention to activities related to feminist art that were undertaken in Poland at that time. Usually they noticed just one of them and ignored others, which resulted in the impression that feminist ideas did not circulate among Polish art centers. In 1978, another feminist exhibition was organized in Poland—*Three Women*—in Poznań at the BWA Gallery. It was a show of three colleagues associated with the Poznań Fine Art School—Anna Bednarczuk, Izabella Gustowska, Krystyna Piotrowska—who were all engaged with the artistic problem of the self-portrait and what we would call nowadays the female identity, which was the basis for exhibiting the three artists together.

None of the texts written in relation to either of the exhibitions—*Three Women* in Poznań and *Women's Art* in Wrocław, both organized in 1978—connected the two shows. It seems as if nobody knew about events taking place in other cities, which was obviously not the case. In 1980, Krystyna Piotrowska and Izabella Gustowska organized the festival of women's art that was the first attempt to bring

together several Polish women artists interested in women's issues from different art circles. Unfortunately, it did not result in the creation of a community understood as a group of female artists cooperating with one another and undertaking joint initiatives. Also, those artists that either appeared on the international feminist art scene, or promoted feminist ideas in Poland, had no interest in working together with other artists. In this text, I am not concerned with the artists' motivations to engage in feminist activities, yet it is worth mentioning that, with very few exceptions (of Piotrowska and Gustowska), these activities had an individualistic character, which was, as a matter of fact, incongruous with the ideals of many feminist communities (Jakubowska 2016).

One important element to note, regarding the reception of feminist ideas in the Polish art world, is that, even if feminism was introduced as a frame for analysis of particular shows, this framing was not brought into bear in discussions of works by Polish women artists who took part in these shows. Critics writing about the *Women's*



Figure 8.3 *Three Women*, BWA Gallery, Poznań, 1978
Cover of the catalog. Courtesy of Izabella Gustowska

Art exhibition underscored that it had been an exhibition of feminist art and they defined feminist art as encompassing “all women’s artistic accomplishments that express their social situation” (Baworowska 1978, 70). The exact same sentence appears in the above-mentioned text by Sapija and in another review written by Barbara Baworowska. Additionally, when writing about the exhibition of Natalia LL’s *Artificial Photography*, they say nothing about the feminist content of her work and interpret it without making any reference to the social situation of women. This corresponds with how Natalia LL saw her art—she took part in feminist exhibitions, mentioned above, but did not present her art as a feminist. Today, when asked whether she was a feminist or not, she answers: “I was chosen by a group of feminists who invited me to the exhibitions. They thought that my art fits . . . I was happy to be there” (Radziszewski 2012).

In the 1970s, when her art was presented in the context of feminist art for the first time, in *Heute Kunst*, it was Gisliind Nabakowski who explained its feminist dimension. Her text was accompanied by Natalia LL’s artistic statement that made no reference to feminism. The artist herself, as well as the authors writing about her, were those who disseminated feminist ideas in Poland, yet, strangely, their knowledge of feminist art and its strategies did not inform their interpretations of Polish women artist’s works. This was also the case of the art works exhibited in the *Three Women* exhibition in Poznań. In two reviews that appeared after the show, feminism is referred to directly.¹³ At the beginning of one of them, its author, Sławomir Magala, recalls the catalog of another important feminist exhibition—*Women Artists, 1550–1950* at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art—which confirms the importance of catalogs as sources of knowledge (Magala 1979, 34). Nevertheless, his interpretation of the works presented in Poznań is solely focused on their formal attributes, such as seriality or usage of photography, which allow him to perceive them as examples of new tendencies in art, yet no reference to any feminist content of the works is present.

The 1980s was a decade when the political situation in Poland did not encourage the flourishing of feminist ideas. The development of the Solidarity movement, the introduction of martial law in December 1981, and the disastrous economic situation all favored political discourse that focused on freedom and independence and marginalized the women question.¹⁴ This constellation correlates with the kind of hostility or resistance that the backlash against that the second wave of Western feminism carried with it, and it hindered the expansion of a feminist discourse also in the domain of art. Yet, in the second half of the 1980s, one can observe a revival of interest in feminist art discourse in Poland. In that period, it was Izabella Gustowska who played an important role in the dissemination of feminist thought. Her all-women exhibitions, organized together with Krystyna Piotrowska in 1978 and 1980, were limited to a presentation of Polish artists, as she did not have contact with the international women’s art movement. This changed in 1985 when she took part in the exhibition *Kunst mit Eigen-Sinn. Aktuelle Kunst von Frauen*, organized at the Museum Moderner Kunst/Museum des 20. Jahrhunderts in Vienna.¹⁵ The curators’ (Silvia Eiblmayr and VALIE EXPORT) choice of Polish women artists was a surprise to Gustowska, as they did not include artists who in Poland had been linked to some degree with feminist cultural practice (for example, Natalia LL, Maria Pinińska-Bereś, Ewa Partum). The show was an opportunity for her to meet other feminist artists from whom she profited in creating her gallery program. From 1979 to 1984,

she ran (together with Krystyna Piotrowska) the Gallery ON, which functioned under the umbrella of the Socialist Union of Polish Students.¹⁶ After the exhibition *Kunst mit Eigen-Sinn*, she started to invite women artists she had met in Vienna—for example, Eva Maria Schön and Adriena Šimotová—whose shows presented works of art and performances by Polish women artists dealing with the theme, widely understood, of feminine identity, such as Teresa Murak, or Anna and Irena Nawrot.

In 1987, these artists all took part in an all-woman show organized by Gustowska under the title *Presence*.¹⁷ This was one of the few, if not the only, international meetings organized in Poland that focused on women's art.¹⁸ It did not, however, result in the development of discussion about feminist issues. The Vienna show curators stressed that, for women's art of that day, it was self-realization, not protest, that mattered most. (EXPORT and Eiblmayr 1985, 7–9). They underscored the interconnection between individualism and freedom, and considered the development of women's individuality a prerequisite of a free society; Gustowska shared that opinion. In an interview she claimed that *Presence* was, for her, interesting as a situation where several individualities had the chance to meet (Dziamski 1991, 51). In 1980, she organized an event (together with Krystyna Piotrowska) that was more a set of individual presentations than a group show, and the 1987 event was similar. This clearly indicates that Gustowska's opinion, with regard to what women's art and art events should be, did not develop under the influence of the ideas from behind the Iron Curtain. Rather, in the mid-1980s, the way she had always thought about women's art—distancing herself from guerrilla and collaborative practices and concentrating on individual artistic proposals—became common in the feminist art movement in Europe. Thus, one can reasonably argue that Gustowska did not follow the curators of the Vienna show, but developed her way of thinking independently and concurrently with them.

Grzegorz Dziamski, whose interview with Gustowska has just been mentioned, was the critic who often commented on her art and activities at that time. He wrote a review of the *Presence* exhibition for an unidentified foreign journal. He also published a long text devoted to feminist art and is the second (of two) presentations of that movement in Polish cultural magazines that appeared during communism (Dziamski 1988a, b). In a two-part article, he presents feminist art as part of the women's movement, describes the development of both, and proposes a short overview of the most important characteristics of feminist art. His article is up-to-date and includes a presentation of the above-mentioned Vienna show. What differentiates it from the Morawiński text from 1977 is that Dziamski also wrote about Polish women artists and their relationships with feminism. He proposed a graduation of their attitude in relation to feminism, from Ewa Partum (“representative of guerrilla feminism”), through Natalia LL and Maria Pinińska-Bereś (both, according to him, representing feminism that was “less noisy and less declarative”), Teresa Murak and Ewa Kulryluk (“whose art bears some similarities to the works of American and West-European feminist artists”), and Izabella Gustowska and Krystyna Piotrowska (“similarities that were more than accidental”) (Dziamski 1988b, 88–90). In conclusion, he states that there is no feminist art in Poland but it “left some traces in the art of several women artists and these are traces worth attention” (Dziamski 1988b, 90).

This text written by Dziamski clearly indicates that the critics' lack of knowledge about feminism—about which he himself wrote in reference to Partum's 1980

performance, as quoted at the beginning of this text—was no longer a problem several years later. As I have tried to show in this text, some art writers and artists were quite well-informed as far as feminist ideas are concerned, in relation to both social issues and the arts. Yet, the nature of the circulation of feminist ideas in Poland was paradoxical. These concepts were definitely present and there was a group of people that found them meaningful, which resulted in a number of texts and exhibitions with feminist overtones. Yet, feminism—as a political idea, as an interpretive framework, and as an ideological base—remained alien. By Polish artists and art critics, it was perceived as ideology and hard to accept as something that makes art subject to politics. After the trauma of mandatory socialist realism accompanied by political terror, they strongly supported autonomous high art that they perceived as a guarantee of artistic freedom. Even if some Polish artists' works really resonated with feminist ideas and they were recognized as feminist outside of Poland, they (with the exception of Ewa Partum) and their critics did not identify with feminism. The emergence of these initiatives was related, obviously, to developments within the women's movement, yet artists and critics involved assumed a pronounced distance, if not hostility, toward political activism. They also did not create feminist groups, nor develop collaborative art practices, which are often considered typical for feminism at that time.

Comparative research on women-only art initiatives organized in several European countries in the 1970s demonstrated that feminist initiatives in particular countries developed differently, in terms of dates, projects, and dynamics, but also in terms of the impact the travelling views of feminism had on art (Deepwell and Jakubowska 2017). The insight gained is that diffusional narratives seem inappropriate and that feminist initiatives have to be considered in their diversity. The character that they acquired in Poland is thus no deviation from a supposed feminist "norm," but one of the multiple versions of feminism that were to a high degree dependent on the prevailing political situation in particular countries.

Notes

- 1 Parts of this text were presented during a symposium organized by Anna Markowska in Wrocław in February 2013 on the occasion of a show she curated—*Where is Permafo* (Wrocław Contemporary Museum)—and also during the CAA 102nd Annual Conference in Chicago in February 2014 as part of a panel on transnational feminism organized by Kalliopi Minioudaki. New elements of the paper are based on research funded by the National Science Center (NCN 2013/09/B/HS2/02065).
- 2 *Consumer Art* is a series of boards consisting of regularly-arranged photos depicting—in the most popular version of the work—a young naked woman eating bananas. Natalia LL also made photos and films with other variations of women eating different products.
- 3 For a reception of Natalia LL's *Consumer Art* at this time see Jakubowska 2007, 241–248.
- 4 Cf. the artist Karol Radiszewski's project *America is not Ready for This* (2012).
- 5 This document was exhibited in the exhibition *Materializing "Six Years": Lucy R. Lippard and the Emergence of Conceptual Art* at the Brooklyn Museum in 2012.
- 6 Email from the artists, January 2013.
- 7 "Feminismus und Kunst." *Heute Kunst*, 9 (1975).
- 8 A visit of the Italian gallerist and collector Arturo Schwarz in the early 1970s, and the subsequent purchase of her work, was an exception.
- 9 It was also Jerzy Bereś who took one of her works, entitled *The Fallen Woman*, to Amsterdam.

- 10 Naomi Meidan disappeared from the history of feminist art, but Carolee Schneeman and Suzy Lake occupy an important position in it.
- 11 *Künstlerinnen International 1877–1977. Gemälde, Grafik, Skulpturen, Objekte, Aktionen*, March 8, 1977–April 10, 1977, Schloss Charlottenburg, Berlin.
- 12 VALIE EXPORT, in her manifesto “Women’s Art,” written in 1972, claimed that feminist art is part of the feminist social movement.
- 13 One of the critics called them “our feminists”; cf. Juszczuk 1978, 3.
- 14 Cf. e.g. Kondratowicz 2013.
- 15 Izabella Gustowska discussed the importance of *Kunst mit Eigen-Sinn. Aktuelle Kunst von Frauen* for her practice in a film that comprises an element of Anka Leśniak’s project entitled “Fading Traces. Polish Women Artists in the 1970s” (2010).
- 16 The umbrella of the government-controlled student organizations was one of the few possibilities in communist Poland to run a relatively independent, although censored, gallery space.
- 17 Among the artists taking part in the exhibition were Izabella Gustowska, Aleksandra Hołownia, Danuta Mączak, Anna Plotnicka, Krystyna Piotrowska, Anna M. Potocka, Joanna Przybyła, Eva-Maria Schön, Adriana Simotova, and Lidia Zielińska.
- 18 In 1978, Natalia LL showed works by artists from abroad who were not themselves present. What Izabela Gustowska organized was more of a festival with the artists present, than an exhibition.

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9 “Our Imaginings Unite with Reality”

Ideological Encounters in Milan Knížák’s *Ten Lessons*

Anu Allas

In 1966–1968, Czech artist Milan Knížák (b. 1940) wrote the text *Aktual universita, 10 lekcí* [*Aktual University: Ten Lessons*]. The text was meant to provide basic ideological guidelines, inspirational thoughts, and points of discussion for the members of the Aktual community: a group of artists based in Prague, later in Krásno, who were known for their search for alternative ways of living and of making art (cf. Knížák 2007).¹ *Ten Lessons* is one of the hundreds, maybe thousands, of statements and manifestos written by artists at the time, both in relation to new artistic practices and to social or political processes, that urged them to rethink the role and possibilities of artistic activity in a changing world. The 1960s and early 1970s witnessed not only a substantial increase of artists’ writings in many countries, but also a search for new and timely articulations of dissent and resistance within the frame of what was about to be defined as the artistic neo-avant-garde (Puchner 2006, 212). In this context, Knížák’s *Ten Lessons* shows a variety of characteristics that tie this text to different ideological or strategical backgrounds, and reveals, among other things, significant ambiguities in how neo-avant-garde artists positioned themselves in socialist eastern Europe. My aim is to look at the leitmotifs, agendas, and rhetorical strategies of *Ten Lessons* to show how Knížák’s deliberations are rooted both in his local environment and in the global context, and highlight how these two interact or intertwine. By underscoring the global dimensions of *Ten Lessons*, I do not so much mean to give prominence to Knížák’s many international connections but, rather, to bring into play an understanding of the *global* as “an imaginary, a whole of which actors imagine themselves to be a part” (Brown 2012, 8). “Keeping Together Day,” initiated by Knížák and American Fluxus artist Ken Friedman in 1968, provides an eloquent example of this imaginary affiliation: the day was meant to encourage people in Prague, New York, San Francisco, and other places around the world to gather and “demonstrate the right of human beings to live completely and fully human lives” (Mazzone 2009, 287) as opposed to a life guided by any particular social system.

The activities of Aktual have often been described as an eastern European counterpart to the Fluxus movement. Knížák, as one of the founders and leaders of the group, was appointed “director of Fluxus East” by George Maciunas, although Knížák himself had a rather ambiguous attitude toward this position: he expressed

both enthusiasm about the general aims of Fluxus and disappointment with some of their strategies (Knížák 2007, 88ff.; Stegmann 2007). The dynamic of cooperation between Fluxus networks in western and eastern European countries and the U.S. was shaped both by a recognition of similar goals transcending specific political and cultural contexts, and by mutual projections and misunderstandings.² The Fluxus movement is one, but not the only, point of reference for understanding Knížák's statements and Aktual's aspirations. They were equally formed by their particular surroundings (a country where the hope for Socialism with a human face emerged and where it found its end) and by global processes (liberation movements, student activism, and protest waves that culminated in the Prague Spring and May 68 in France).

Before looking more closely at *Ten Lessons*, I will first introduce the concept of the neo-avant-garde to better understand the changes in art and culture of the 1960s, and address the specificity of artists' writings in the context of those changes. I will consider how both content and language use in these writings were influenced by social and cultural processes in the postwar world and how these texts functioned in relation to artistic practices. Then, I will analyse different chapters of *Ten Lessons* to show how they bring together various philosophical, political, and cultural discourses. I pay attention both to what is said and how it is said, and how the interplay between the content-related and performative elements of this text reveals its heterogeneity against the background of transcultural phenomena of the time.

The Language of the Neo-avant-garde

Despite its controversial arguments, Peter Bürger's classic *Theory of the Avant-garde* (1974) has been a common starting point for discussing the international neo-avant-garde since the 1990s (Buchloh 2000; Bürger 2010; Foster 1996; Hopkins 2006; Scheunemann 2005). Bürger's understanding of neo-avant-garde art is derived from the experience of the historical avant-garde at the beginning of the twentieth century (Futurism, Dadaism, Surrealism, etc.). According to Bürger (1974, 67), the aim of the historical avant-garde (which attacked the institution of art in a bourgeois society) was a transference of art to the praxis of life, in which this transference would not mean the destruction, but the preservation of art (although in a changed form), and serve as a source for the organization of a new life praxis. A similar aspiration for the de-institutionalization of art (and sometimes for a renewal of personal or social life through artistic practice) appeared again at the end of the 1950s and throughout the 1960s. However, Bürger viewed the second occurrence as "inauthentic"—an empty gesture that had lost its credibility due to the "failure" of the historical avant-garde (1974, 71).

Critical readings of Bürger have pointed out that his negative judgement of the neo-avant-garde overlooks the fundamental differences between the historical contexts before and after World War II. Hal Foster has analysed several "models of return" to the historical avant-garde as a necessary tool for the renewal of artistic strategies of the 1960s: as *reconnecting* with a lost practice in order to *disconnect* from the present way of working which was felt to be outmoded, misguided, or otherwise oppressive (1996, 3). Benjamin Buchloh (2000, xxii) has equally addressed some significant lessons of historical avant-garde for the formation of new identities in postwar art in Europe and in the U.S. regarding the complex and ever-changing

relationship between the past and present. Not least, Bürger himself has retrospectively acknowledged that his theory of the avant-garde was affected by the political events of the late 1960s (Bürger 2010, 698).

Second, Bürger's critics have pointed to his tendency to reduce both the historical avant-garde and the neo-avant-garde to manifestos (i.e., to verbalized goals), without considering a complex relationship between manifesto and practice (Foster 1996, 8–15 ff.). It is clear enough that manifestos generally deploy certain rhetorical exaggerations and are not always to be viewed as literal manuals for action; the manifestos of artists do not necessarily give direct guidelines for artistic practice even if they prescribe a general understanding of its goals. The relationship between verbalized aims and concrete artistic strategies was already complicated in the historical avant-garde, and may have been even more so during the re-actualization of avant-garde ideas in the postwar world. This re-actualization was accompanied by a continuous feeling of the devaluation of language (which characterized the culture of the 1940s and 1950s), and by attempts to find new—critical and reflective—ways of language use. Sporadic returns to the revolutionary rhetoric of the historical avant-garde cannot be regarded as mere repetitions, but must rather be seen as both reconstruction and deconstruction of the positions and experiences of the historical avant-garde (Foster 1996, 1–8). Therefore, I consider artists' writings not as secondary phenomena, nor as means to illuminate practice, but as integral to their practice. I do so out of recognition that neo-avant-garde art was characterized by a complex interaction between rhetorical strategies and practical activities, in which manifesto and action did not always form a discursive unity.

In recent decades, the statements and manifestos of artists in socialist eastern Europe have been published both in comprehensive anthologies—such as *Art in Theory 1900–2000: An Anthology of Changing Ideas* (Harrison and Wood 2003) *100 Artists' Manifestos: From the Futurists to the Stuckists* (Danchev 2010) or *Theories and Documents of Contemporary Art: A Sourcebook of Artists' Writings* (Stiles and Selz 1996)—and in books focusing on particular geographical areas and historical periods, such as *Primary Documents: A Sourcebook for Eastern and Central European Art since the 1950s* (Hoptman and Pospiszyl 2002) and *Art Always Has Its Consequences: Artists' Texts from Croatia, Hungary, Poland, Serbia 1947–2009* (Hegyi, László, Süvecz, and Szanyi 2011). The writings of eastern European artists after World War II do not constitute a consistent whole in terms of content or ways of writing, and neither do they necessarily represent any fundamental difference from artists' writings in other places of the world. However, there are certain aspects of the environment in which these texts were written that should be kept in mind while reading them.

Whereas the Western neo-avant-garde was characterized by a critical deconstruction of language, the attitude toward language in the eastern European neo-avant-garde was shaped by several additional factors. As highly valuable information from the outside world arrived mostly through texts (books, journals, correspondence, etc.), the written word was central to many of the new artistic phenomena in eastern Europe and was therefore also trusted—not only deconstructed—by the neo-avant-garde. Josip Vaništa, a member of the Croatian artists' group Gorgona (1959–1966), has described their activities that often manifested themselves “through conversation, ideas, some realizations, with the help of the written word when nothing else could be done” (Vaništa, quoted in Denegri 2013). On the other hand, the formalization

of state rhetoric during late socialism created a habit of speaking and writing “between the lines”: hidden messages were inserted into formally/ideologically correct texts and those were often read with an eye on what’s “behind” the explicit agenda of the writer. In this context, a specific way of writing and language use occurred within the oppositional or semi-oppositional culture, where the space for potential meanings—the performative efficacy of a text—was as important as the content and consistency of what was said or written.

Hal Foster’s critical remark about Bürger taking the romantic rhetoric of the avant-garde at face value (and therefore missing crucial dimensions of its practice) helps me to summarize the approach I prefer to use while reading texts by (neo)-avant-garde artists:

Now to speak of the avant-garde in terms of rhetoric is not to dismiss it as merely rhetorical. Rather it is to situate its attacks as both contextual and performative. [. . .] It is in this *rhetorical* relation that avant-garde rupture and revolution are located.

(Foster 1996, 16)

In the context of the (avant-gardist) blurring of the boundaries between art and everyday life, every “saying” (or an act of writing) can be equally regarded as a “doing” as in any other activity, and every saying—like every gesture—is rooted in a particular context. Bearing this in mind, I will now focus on *Ten Lessons* without looking closer at how these ideas were put into practice—which is not to say that those actions didn’t matter. If anything, every manifesto poses the question of how to live the ideas presented in the text—without, unavoidably, giving any definite answers.

(Im)Possibilities of Art and Revolutions

The activities of the Aktual group (founded in 1964 as Aktualní umění and known as Aktual after the word “art” was rejected in 1966) aimed for a reunion of art and everyday life.³ This was meant to be achieved through street rituals, spontaneous collective activities, and through an alternative way of living as a community (cf. Knížák 2007, 82–88; Piotrowski 2011, 231–232). In their first manifesto (1964), they stated: “We are not interested in aesthetic norms that serve as a measure of perception. We are interested in man. [. . .] No more paintings or statuettes need to be created for interiors, no more sentimental wailing on concert hall podiums” (Morganová 2007, 180). Knížák, who was the most articulate promoter of the strategies of Aktual, had considerably more contacts with artists outside socialist countries than many of his contemporaries in eastern Europe (cf. Knížák 2007, 88–94; Mazzone 2009). The similarities between Aktual’s ideas and the statements of George Maciunas, who was an advocate of a type of “anti-art” that was against “the artificial forms or patterns or methods of art itself” and aimed for “true reality” (Maciunas (1962) 2003, 723), cannot be overlooked. Nevertheless, Knížák’s retrospective explanation of his activities is not based on cohesiveness with the Western neo-avant-garde, but on an emphasized difference, on the exclusivity of his circle: this was, according to Knížák, rooted in the higher social sensitivity of his group (Stegmann 2007).

The difference in social sensitivity was not so much due to higher or lower receptiveness of one or the other circle, but to the differences between societies and the artists' positions in those societies. In particular, after the Prague Spring in 1968, which was followed by the reintroduction of strict censorship, artists in Czechoslovakia rather avoided addressing politics directly and neo-avant-garde activities often relocated to rural areas, seeking refugee from surveillance by the authorities (Badovinac et al. 2012); Aktual's relocation from Prague to Krásno seemingly confirms this observation. However, this was not (only) a reaction to the Prague Spring for it had been planned and started earlier. *Ten Lessons* may shed some light on the specific social sensitivity praised by Knížák: a sensitivity that was linked both to the local/actual and the global/imaginary environment of the writer. Most importantly, his deliberations reveal that Knížák did not want to reject the actual environment and embrace the imaginary one, but that they were perceived as equally—even if differently—conflictual.

Ten Lessons first appeared in a samizdat journal of Aktual; the English translation was published in *Theories and Documents of Contemporary Art* in 1996 (Knížák [1967–1968] 1996, 739–744). This text consists of ten short chapters, each focusing on one significant notion or phenomenon, examining its meaning and function in contemporary society: conflict, dreams, revolutions, love, belief, play, art, etc. Every lesson follows a slightly different type of discourse. Two of them—"Build Yourself Wings" and "Lesson Nine"—are similar to the instructional works that were widely produced within the framework of conceptual art and Fluxus (by Yoko Ono, George Brecht et al.) and were often distributed as mail art.

Fly straight ahead. Walk a straight line. Visit. Leave a special sign on the door.
Make a gift of words. Mark your path with books. [. . .]
(Knížák [1967–68] 1996, 742)

Some chapters combine guidelines for actions with philosophical reflections on the meaning and function of these actions (e.g., "About Play"), some of them present shorter, often poetically disrupted, statements ("On Conflict," "On Love," and "On Belief"), and some lessons are lengthy and substantial deliberations on art and society ("On Revolutions" and "On Art").

The two most profound chapters of *Ten Lessons* are "On Revolutions" and "On Art"; the latter being the last lesson with the most confrontational message, serving as a culmination of the entire body of texts. In this chapter, Knížák takes up the question of the "original social function of art," which, he claims, can be found by rejecting institutionalized art and reintegrating creative activity into everyday life:

For the development of art is directly proportional to the development of the human senses. And in that brief space of human history that we know and understand, the senses have undergone no dramatic changes. [. . .]

In art as such, it is no longer possible to discover anything. Everything has already been discovered because everything is permitted. And so a gradual fulfilling of the *original social function of art* is coming about. But on a different qualitative level. [. . .]

Art, as a visible, tangible reality perceivable by the senses is ceasing to exist.
[. . .]

Art is becoming one of the indispensable factors influencing the organization of everyday life. It is present everywhere and nowhere. It is becoming fluid. [. . .] It is irreversibly dissolved in the solution of burgeoning human existence.

(Knížák [1967–68] 1996, 733–744)

This statement is one of many similar manifestos by neo-avant-garde artists advocating a reunion of art and everyday life, for a state of being where the “line between art and life should be kept as fluid, and perhaps indistinct, as possible” (Kaprow [c. 1965] 1996, 709), where “EVERYTHING IS ART and ART IS LIFE” (Vautier [1966] 1996, 730) or “Everything I say is Art is Art” (Ukeles [1969] 2010, 383). Against the background of the various ideological or strategic means that were brought into play to achieve and explain this intertwining, the main distinctive characteristics in Knížák’s text are the following. First, he does not define the social function of art in relation to the actual historical moment and political environment—instead, he projects the search for it onto the ancient development of “human senses,” into the area of “human existence.” Second, there’s a clear distance between the actual and imaginary contexts in which Knížák was located while writing this text: while saying that, in art, “everything has already been discovered because everything is permitted,” he was literally in Czechoslovakia in the 1960s, where, clearly, not everything was permitted in the arts. Third, while describing the disappearance of art as a professional activity and its integration into everyday life, he stresses the turn away from the “visible and tangible,” the “fluidity” and “irreversible dissolution” of art, rather than its new embodiment in everyday materiality.

Knížák therefore brings together two discourses on art of the 1960s: the search for the initial impulses and functions of artistic activity (Schechner 2002, 347–353), and the tendency of “dematerialization” that appeared in the frame of conceptual art (cf. Lippard 1973). It has to be noted that, apart from the critique of institutionalism and consumerism in the art world, “dematerialization” had a specific additional function in art under socialism, a function that is closely linked to the aforementioned centrality of the written word in the eastern European neo-avant-garde: it made communication between artists much easier since a piece of paper or an idea written down could be easily exchanged without the interference of control mechanisms (Badovinac et al. 2012). The discourse that was based on the idea of returning to the “sources” of art had very different output, including various “trans-religious” practices of rituality, sacrificial processes, etc. However, within the atheistic wing of this discourse (with which Knížák is in many aspects affiliated), the ideological focus was often on the concept of “concretism,” as it was variously in the writings of George Maciunas ([1962] 2003) in the Fluxus movement, the Brazilian neo-concrete movement (Gullar [1959] 2010), and the manifestos of the Gutai group in Japan (Yoshihara [1956] 2010) or the statements of the OHO Group in Slovenia (OHO [1966] 2002). “Concretism” expressed the preference for concrete reality over “illusionism” (Maciunas (1962(2003, 728) and demanded a close and direct encounter between the artist and his material. When Knížák rejects materiality and moves into the sphere of the ephemeral and “uncatchable,” he forms a distinctive position between these two discourses.

Knížák’s own retrospective reflections illuminate this distinctiveness: he clarified that his call for “total abandonment” was brought about by the “desire to experience a sort of raw, primitive enlightenment” (Knížák 2007, 80). By insisting on both

“primitiveness” and “enlightenment,” Knížák was apparently trying to find a compromise between two incompatible worlds: to return to pre-modern times while clinging on to the experience of the modern man, to be simultaneously completely innocent and highly cultured. The general *blasé* attitude and existentialist tones in Knížák’s text reveal that, while searching for the “roots,” he did not intend to leave behind what the world had learned in the twentieth century. It is possible that part of this contradictory attitude was related to the specific role that “culture” (so often under attack within the Western neo-avant-garde) had in a socialist society: it often functioned as a defence strategy against totalitarian oppression, it was an “ahistoric construction,” a way of integrating with the “European universe of values” (Piotrowski 2011, 29).

The lesson “On Revolutions” provides a general philosophical framework for understanding Knížák’s position:

Revolutions have proven incapable of totally changing the world. They are always merely a shifting of power. [. . .]

All societies so far have had and still have one common characteristic—ANTIHUMANITY.

Societies create enormous social institutions for the protection of man and at the same time, from the very beginning, they destroy him by absolutely annulling the basic requirements of his humanity—respect for him as an individual with a unique nature and unique opinions. [. . .]

It is unfortunate and sad that there is so little difference between the capitalist and the socialist states. The socialist petty bourgeoisie is in no way different from the capitalist (except perhaps a bit poorer). [. . .]

It is necessary to abandon so that one might find. [. . .] One must abandon totally so that what comes can also be total.

(Knížák [1967–1968] 1996, 740–741)

The statement that every society is “anti-humanist” and that there’s little difference between socialist and capitalist states is key to understanding the global dimension of Knížák’s text. While questioning the foundations of contemporary society as a whole—and not a particular ideological state apparatus—he aligns himself with various counter-cultural movements of the 1960s. This is where Knížák is also different from many eastern European artists of the time who—either explicitly or implicitly—still believed in Western freedom. On the other hand, by praising “humanity” and “individuality,” he dismisses the critical deconstruction that these categories were undergoing within Western protest movements, whereby he reveals his belonging to the socialist environment where “universalism” was not perceived as a strategy of repression but of liberation (Piotrowski 2011, 179). Furthermore, Knížák’s rejection of the hope for change is distinguished from the activist attitudes that characterized the neo-avant-garde in other contexts (the political wing of the Western Fluxus group, Latin American politically engaged artists, cf. Maciunas (1964, 1996; Oiticica [1967] 2003).

One of the fundamental differences between neo-avant-garde movements in socialist eastern Europe and in Western countries was due to the dominant attitudes of the Western neo-avant-garde, which were largely incomprehensible to artists living under “actually existing socialism.” However, Knížák has admitted that, despite his

resistance to the communist regime, he was very much influenced by its aims and ideas, even if they were hardly being realised in his actual environment—which is why he stopped aiming for a social revolution and turned to revolutionizing everyday life (Mazzone 2009, 283). The focus on everyday life, the hope of finding ways of living to escape social suppression, took center stage in the credo of the global neo-avant-garde. Perhaps most famously and radically, the Situationist International was advocating revolution in everyday life that would “create the conditions in which *the present dominates* the past and the creative aspects of life always predominate over the repetitive” (Debord [1961] 1996, 707). In eastern Europe, the Gorgona group in Zagreb in the late 1950s and early 1960s was ideologically—even if not always strategically—the closest ally of Aktual while being oriented “towards a reality outside aesthetics,” seeking “normal behaviour, normal life in an ideologically imbued world” (Denegri 2013), promoting the idea of “anti-art” and embracing absurdity, emptiness, monotony, nihilism, and metaphysical irony (Hegyí et al. 2011, 28). Among other things, Gorgona’s activities bring forward a particular ideological combination that also appears (even if less explicitly) in Knížák’s *Ten Lessons*: the co-existence of existentialist attitudes (which shaped Western culture in the 1940s and 1950s but were often disputed by the generation of counter-culture and protest movements) and the interest in Eastern philosophy that spread widely within the neo-avant-garde of the 1960s.

The Importance of Everyday Life

The main issues that Knížák addresses throughout the chapters of *Ten Lessons* are: interpersonal communication and its difficulties in the modern world (in “On Conflicts” and “On Love”), the importance of the unique nature and individual choice of man (in “On Being Different” and “On Revolutions”), and the relationship between general concepts and concrete actions, where Knížák stresses the preference of the latter over the former (in “On Belief”). The main emphasis throughout the lessons is on the appraisal of the small and trivial: on seemingly insignificant gestures and practices that serve for Knížák as a source of a “new qualitative level” for both art and life.

The lesson “About Play” most clearly elaborates on this last aspect and shows affinity for the postwar artistic discourse that was mainly inspired by the activities of John Cage and is discussed in relation to the impact of Zen Buddhism and the wider new age movement on neo-avant-garde art (cf. Meyer 1998).

If we consider everything as a game, as play, if we ignore the usefulness (and sometimes even the difficulty, the strain) of what we happen to be doing, then we may make even something as boring as shopping seem just as amusing as watching cats stretching themselves. [. . .]

Breaking up commonplace, deadening regularity. Divide time into unexpectedly irregular stretches [. . .]. And in this chaos, the chance appearance of regularity has a sensational effect. [. . .]

It enables us to see intimately familiar things and phenomena less intimately. It reveals other dimensions.

(Knížák [1967–1968] 1996, 742–743)

In “About Play,” Knížák stresses that small shifts in the perception of everyday activities, the little changes one can make while doing the most trivial things, the reorganization of daily patterns, and distancing from the established notions of the world will reveal “other dimensions” of one’s life. However, by associating these shifts and little differences with an amusing “game” (which is meant to save oneself from everyday boredom and deadening regularity), he slightly modifies the Cagean concept of being present in this boredom, immersing in it as deeply as possible without actively challenging it. Against this background, the short lesson “On Belief” provides another example of small ideological shifts and interweavings:

To believe in the power of caressing, in peace-conferences in Geneva, in Buddha or in medicine herbs *it doesn’t matter*. The properties of the God in which we believe do not matter: what matters is the quality of the actions we perform in that belief.

(Knížák [1967–1968] 1996, 742)

By stating that it doesn’t matter in what exactly one believes, Knížák still stresses the importance of belief and the “quality of actions” we perform in that belief. By emphasizing actions over concepts, he comes close to the existentialist view (in the sense of postwar Sartre), which claimed existence to be prior to essence and stressed individual responsibility in forming this existence. However, in contrast to Sartre, Knížák does not abandon the concept of belief completely and continues seeing it as necessary to empower individual actions.

Considering the popularity of existentialist philosophy in eastern Europe throughout the late socialist decades, “existentialism” has sometimes been used as a wide umbrella term for art that expressed suppression, hopelessness, and the irrationality of the human condition as opposed to the optimism and rationality of governmental discourses. In the context of Czech postwar art, “existentialist” works emerged from the late 1950s onwards: these works did not only refer to the past aggression of World War II, but also—and more importantly—to current oppression and isolation experienced by artists in a socialist country (Svašek 1997, 392). The keen reception of existentialism in eastern Europe has been often interpreted in terms of social circumstances: for instance, Martin Esslin (1969, 307) has described eastern European theater of the absurd not primarily in relation to the crises of a traditional value system (as in the West), but as a reaction to the enforced rationalism in socialist countries. However, as can be seen in “On Revolutions,” Knížák does not prefer one society over another and is not searching for possibilities to escape the “everyday absurdity” of a socialist state, but social suppression as such, whereas he (unlike existentialism) still holds on to an idealist view of an individual with a “unique nature” and believes in a primal innocence of a human being (in contrast to the understanding of human nature as the source of every social suppression).

“On Dreams” provides another explanation for valuing and interpreting everyday reality from a different point of view. The beginning of the lesson sounds slightly psychoanalytical in its emphasis on the substantial influence of dreams on our lives, but also in its suggestion that there is a “beautiful and dangerous” difference between dreams and reality, and a need to eliminate the gap between the two. Knížák then proposes a specific method of closing this gap:

We must separate out of the flood of problems that surround us a few of the most important and make them the centre of our efforts. In such a way, in them, our imaginings unite with reality. But it is also a question whether we are capable of setting up that scale of importance. For in some circumstances, apparently trivial problems may become quite basic. [. . .]

Sometimes, it becomes our bound duty to solve even the most subtle problems. Even the smallest problems.

(Knížák [1967–1968] 1996, 740)

This passage illustrates some significant tropes. First, the need to concentrate on the most important issues is stressed while admitting that it is not easy to “set up the scale of importance.” Despite acknowledging relativism, Knížák still implies that there is a certain hierarchy of problems in human life (even if circumstantial), which can be discovered, i.e. it is not insignificant what one concentrates on (as it is in meditation, for instance). Second, “apparently trivial problems” and their possible substantiality are pointed out to suggest that the importance of a problem cannot be determined on the scale from the high and cultured/philosophical versus the low and mundane. Third, overcoming the gap between dreams and reality is not described through the preference of one over the other (dreams *or* reality), but as a union of the two. One cannot avoid noticing a similarity to the iconic slogan of Paris in May 68: “Be realistic, demand the impossible.”

Changing Perspectives

In *Ten Lessons*, Knížák is both searching for his position as an artist and searching for the language to express and explain this position. The rhythm of the text is formed by a variation between longer deliberations (which either drift into resignation or confirm the insoluble conflicts of human life) and rebellious (even if ambiguous) statements often formulated not as whole sentences, but as disrupted fragments of them. This is where the interplay of the contextual and performative elements of this text becomes apparent: the different writing regimes not only question the messages they express, but bring forward the complicated and fluid relationship between word and action, between problem and solution, as in the counter-intuitive commands in “Lesson Nine”:

Are you tired? Work!
 Are you sleepy? Wake!
 Are you hungry? Don't eat!
 Do you want to talk? Keep silent!
 Are you afraid of death? Commit suicide!

(Knížák [1967–1968] 1996, 743)

As noted above, Knížák's ideas had a lot in common with the international Fluxus movement, but a look at the other side, to one of the centers of socialism—Moscow—is equally helpful for understanding his writing. Russian artist Ilya Kabakov has described a specific form of self-description among the Soviet underground artists of the 1960s:

Under these conditions [in unofficial artistic circles] a unique genre of ‘self-description’ emerged, whereby the author would imitate, re-create that very same ‘outside’ perspective of which he was deprived in actual reality. He became simultaneously an author and an observer. Deprived of a genuine viewer, critic, or historian, the author unwittingly became them himself, trying to guess what his works meant ‘objectively.’ He attempted to ‘imagine’ this very ‘History’ in which he was functioning and which was ‘looking’ at him.

(Kabakov 2002, 7–8)

Knížák’s position was different from that of the Soviet artists, who rarely had international connections, but it was also different from the position of Ken Friedman in San Francisco or George Maciunas in New York. Being situated between these two poles, Moscow and New York, gave Knížák an opportunity not only to look for an external perspective, but rather, and more importantly, to initiate a conversation between the inside and outside views: a conversation that makes visible both the consonances and conflicts between different contexts. This change of perspective is one of the significant features determining the rhythm of *Ten Lessons*, which in turn creates its ideological and strategical heterogeneity, its contextual relativizations and performative affirmations. This heterogeneity makes it possible to view *Ten Lessons* not only as a piece of writing by an eastern European neo-avant-garde artist and member of the Fluxus movement, but as a testing ground for ideas and ideologies of the “global 1960s.”

Notes

- 1 In an email to me on June 29, 2014, Milan Knížák explained that, in the mid-1960s, the Aktual community planned to create its own “town” (even if it was more the size of a village) with a school that was pretentiously called “university,” and *Ten Lessons* was meant to be the basic learning material for this school. According to Knížák, the text was written in 1966, although the English translation of *Ten Lessons* (Knížák 1996) dates it to 1967–1968.
- 2 These similar goals can be traced, for instance, in the correspondence between Knížák and Friedman, cf. Mazzone 2009. One of the clearest misunderstandings is demonstrated by George Maciunas’ fascination with the Soviet Union, cf. Medina 2006.
- 3 The founders of Aktual were Milan Knížák, Jan Mach, Vít Mach, Sonia Švecová, Jan Trtílek, and Robert Wittmann.

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10 Transculturation, Cultural Transfer, and the Colonial Matrix of Power on the Cold War Margins

East European Art Seen from Latin America

Katarzyna Cytlak

In 2003, Chico Buarque, a Brazilian musician and successful novelist, published his third book, entitled *Budapeste*. The book tells the story of a young Brazilian man who, due to an unscheduled landing, alights in Budapest, learns Hungarian, and becomes one of the most celebrated writers of that country. The Hungary depicted by Buarque has little to do with the real country, as Hungarian literary critics Ildikó Józán and Laura Lukács remarked. Both critics based their judgment on the author's immoderate use of clichés and fantasies about the culture of the country (Józán 2012, 37–44; Lukács 2004, 264–268). They also found the author's decision to set his story in the Hungarian capital peculiar, especially since Buarque, who had never visited Hungary before he wrote the book, claimed to have chosen Budapest for its exotic quality. He explained that he chose that location because he wanted a cultural setting as remote as possible from his own. Budapest was a city he could only imagine, and Hungarian culture seemed exotic to him (Buarque 2006). In the late nineteenth century, the French writer Alfred Jarry set his play *Ubu Roi* “in Poland—that is to say nowhere,” in order to depict a virtual kingdom.¹ In a similar way, Buarque's Hungary is a country of phantasmagoria, composed of elements vaguely anchored in the real place. In both cases, an eastern European country has been turned into “the Orient” familiar from Edward Said's description: a clichéd hyperbole of difference invented to create contrast with the identity of the West.

The example of *Budapeste* will help highlight various artistic strategies and intentions that have led some Latin American artists to connect to Eastern European cultures. In the period of the Cold War, Eastern European culture was received as an alternative to the colonizing, imperialist, and capitalist Western world, and Buarque's *Budapeste* seems to fall back on this perception. A transregional perspective and the concept of *transmodernity* offer a viable framework to comment on Latin American artists' interest in East European art. On the one hand, transmodernity works toward the recognition of the legitimate existence of *other* modernities that are distinct from the western European and north American experience of modernity. On the other hand, the concept presumes a non-hierarchical inter-epistemic dialogue between cultures. The rapprochement between Eastern European and Latin American cultures has taken place within the framework of contemporary global art studies,

which assumes the inadequacy of national frameworks and is aimed at decentering Western modernism. Above all, the study of artistic contact—both actual and virtual—between eastern Europe and Latin America would require reconsideration of whether and to what extent decentered transatlantic artistic exchanges between cultural actors from non-Western contexts might escape historically-developed power relations between Europe and Latin America. Bearing this in mind, the present chapter surveys selected cases of cultural transfer between the Argentinian and eastern European art scenes. The Centro de Arte y Comunicación (CAYC; Centre for Art and Communication) in Buenos Aires and the international expansion of mail art and visual poetry networks have been key factors in establishing more horizontal cultural relationships with Europe. Taking a narrower focus, I will discuss two internationally-renowned Polish theater directors—Jerzy Grotowski and Tadeusz Kantor—whose art became, by the 1990s, a major point of reference for Argentinian artists and theater groups, the latter including El Grupo de los Trece and El Periférico de Objetos.

Cultural Transfer, Transculturation, and the Colonial Matrix of Power

The concept of cultural transfer, conceived in the mid-1980s by Michel Espagne and Michael Werner (1988) to outline exchanges between Germany and France in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in non-hierarchical terms, remains a useful tool for studying relational and circulatory processes between cultures. Unlike the concept of “cultural translation” that was later formulated by Homi K. Bhabha to bring out the performativity of cultural difference (1994, 212–235), cultural transfer foregrounds the phenomena of cross-mixing with other cultures to be able to speak of “cultural zones” and consequently reject the idea of homogeneous national cultures (Espagne 2013). In this sense, it relativizes the notion of center. The notion of cultural transfer can be particularly helpful in capturing the character of relations between non-Western, “marginal,” or “peripheral” phenomena, such as the art scenes of eastern Europe and Latin America. The marginal positions that both geopolitical regions occupied within the colonial and modern world warrant bilateral and reciprocal sorts of cultural exchanges between them. Nevertheless, in the context of Latin America’s colonial past, the “horizontality” of the cultural transfer—a concept formulated initially to describe inter-European relations—is insufficient. Not only were the majority of exchanges with European cultures unilateral, they also contributed to the devaluing of local cultures. The concept of transculturation, coined by Cuban anthropologist Fernando Ortiz in the 1940s, goes to the very core of this problem. Transculturation denotes various multidirectional processes of appropriation between cultures as well as their resulting transformations. In some cases, transculturation led, Ortiz stresses, to *desculturación* (deculturation), as was the case in Latin America, where transculturation resulted from colonialism. As an extreme stage of transculturation, deculturation implies the loss or disavowal of elements from one’s own culture due to the acquisition of new facets from another context (1995, 102–103). Deculturation does not only result from the clear imposition of a set of preferred values, but also from the responses of those subjected to the process of transculturation. This response may even be considered an act of self-colonization: a voluntary recognition of the superiority of another culture over one’s own (Kiossev 2011).

The concept of transculturation was reworked in the 1990s by members of the Modernity/Coloniality network (Mignolo 2000, 167–170, 206–208).² The persistence of patterns from the colonial past is captured in Latin American debates on the postcolonial condition by the key analytical concept of “the coloniality of power.” The term was introduced in the 1990s by Peruvian sociologist Aníbal Quijano to describe a matrix of relations of power that survived colonialism and constitute a hidden face of postmodernity (1992, 11–20). Quijano observed that the sovereignty that guaranteed the continual reproduction of capital in modern societies required the westernization of imagination. The coloniality of power seeks to modify the *habitus* of the subjected, which is understood as a structure of mind characterized by a set of acquired schemes, sensibilities, dispositions, and tastes, or ways of producing and transmitting knowledge. As Quijano stated, repression was primarily exercised via the production of knowledge and perspectives, but also through the production of images and systems of images, symbols, meanings, patterns, and instruments of intellectual or visual expression. The coloniality of power concerns the visual arts as part of the cultural imaginary tissue. Naturalizing European cultural imagination was a unique way of wielding colonial power. From the colonial perspective, as Argentinian semiotician Walter D. Mignolo and German Romanist Freya Schiwy remarked, transcultural relations in Latin America acquired an asymmetrical character:

Structured by the coloniality of power, translation and transculturation became unidirectional and hierarchical and, therefore, one pillar for the foundation and reproduction of the colonial difference, from the sixteenth century to the Cold War and beyond.

(Mignolo and Schiwy 2003, 4)

I will demonstrate here that the coloniality of power has tainted Latin American artists’ perception of European culture and influenced their ways of relating to it. It should also be noted that the perceived image of Eastern Europe was multifaceted, and this mixed vision became the main trait of East–South cultural relations, creating a complex net of phantasies. On the one hand, Latin American artists’ have viewed Eastern European culture as an integral part of the European “heritage” and hence located it within the matrix of colonial domination. As the Bulgarian thinker Alexander Kiossev (2011) remarked, Eastern Europe had indeed “absorb[ed] the basic values and categories of colonial Europe.” In this respect, contacts with eastern European culture merely conformed to Latin American artists’ habitual orientation toward the hegemonic West. At the same time, it was also understood that eastern Europe had no colonial history on a global scale and, as a region, has always had a marginal standing in the modern world-system and, hence, exchanges with it offered the promise of a more symmetrical cultural communication. Also, artistic relations established with eastern Europe in the Cold War period developed at the same time as the decentralization and dewesternization of modern culture, the search for encounters outside the sphere of the West, and the recognition of alternative geographies of cultural production. Nonetheless, these encounters did not automatically bring about decolonial processes because, as Quijano and others stated, this also presupposes an epistemic delinking (*desprenderse*) from the matrices of the coloniality of power (Mignolo 2009; 2010; 2013; Quijano 1992).

The Role of Eastern European Art in the Self-invention of CAYC

The increasing popularity of conceptual art and the expansion of mail art networks after the late 1960s fostered the development of non-institutional artistic exchanges between geographically distant parts of the world, such as Latin America and eastern Europe. During that period, east European art started to be presented in Latin America as an important point of cultural reference. The exhibiting of Eastern European culture and the establishment of personal contact with artists from the Eastern Bloc became an important feature of the aesthetic program of CAYC (Centre for Art and Communication), the key institution showcasing conceptual art, performance, and video art practices in Argentina. CAYC was founded in Buenos Aires in August 1968 by Argentinian curator and entrepreneur Jorge Glusberg, whose aim was to create an art center with an international profile and, as Argentinian anthropologist Néstor García Canclini remarked, introduce Latin American art to the “international symbolic market” (2005, 62–64). At the same time, Glusberg wanted to present alternatives to Western ways of making and administering art, and relations with the eastern European cultural scene contributed to this mission.

Around the time of founding CAYC, Glusberg was fascinated with the work of Polish theater director Jerzy Grotowski. As Argentinian art historian María José Herrera has reported, an early name of the CAYC group—the collective of artists who assembled around the center—was Grupo de los Trece [Group of the Thirteen] and was inspired by Theatre of Thirteen Rows [Teatr Trzynastu Rzędów], a studio theater that Grotowski set up in 1958 (1999, 131). In this context, Grotowski’s visit to Buenos Aires and Córdoba (Argentina) in November 1971 was important and directly stimulated the consolidation of the artists who had already been exhibited and supported by CAYC. In 2004, Glusberg recalled: “[A]n extensive lecture by Grotowski, who was our guest on November 12, 1971, took place at the founding of the CAYC Group. Some days later, we invited 25 artists to form a working group similar to that of Grotowski’s laboratory” (65).³ In the promotional leaflet of the event, Glusberg presented the Polish theater director as one of the most pioneering internationally-recognized theater directors who “questions theatre in the broadest sense of the term” (Glusberg 1971, n.p.) and who comes from Rzeszów—a small city in the Socialist Republic of Poland.

Glusberg stressed the fact that Grotowski’s Poor Theatre had received more appreciation in Paris, New York, and London than in his native Poland. Despite this, Glusberg noted that “Grotowski was and is consistently confronted, questioned, [and] rejected by many professionals and theorists” (Glusberg 1971, n.p.). Besides being a stimulating influence on members of the CAYC group, Grotowski’s visit also inspired the formation of several experimental theater troupes in the early 1970s that referred to themselves as “*laboratorios*” (laboratories). While some of these groups also occasionally performed at CAYC, as *Grupo Laboratorio de Teatro* did in 1973 (Fediuk 2013, 125–160), it is difficult to identify directly this theatrical inspiration in the artistic output of the CAYC group, because at that time they were engaged in “multimedia” or “mixed-media” art, and subsequently video art.

Glusberg drew a parallel between the situation of Grotowski, an artist from the European “periphery,” and that of CAYC, a marginal institution that had gained some recognition abroad but had received relatively little appreciation in its home

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centro de arte y comunicación

encuentro con jerzy grotowski

Jerzy Grotowski nació en Rzeszow, ciudad capital de la más oriental voivodia de Polonia. Se licenció en la Escuela Superior de Teatro de Cracovia. Puso en escena varias obras en el Stary Teatr de Cracovia: "El Tío Vanía" de A. Chejov, "Las Sillas" de Ionesco, pero muy rápidamente se trasladó a Opole, donde fundara en 1959 "Teatr Trzynastu Rzędón" (El Teatro de las 13 sillas).

Aquí se inicia la colaboración de Ludwik Flaszen (actual director del Teatr Laboratorium) con Grotowski. Aquí desarrollan y definen - con una sorprendente coherencia experimental - los fundamentos y premisas metodológicas de este fenómeno teatral que el mismo Grotowski nominara "Teatro Pobre".

Recién en 1965 el equipo humano creador que Grotowski dirige se traslada a Wrocław. En 1971 y después de exitosas presentaciones en Nueva York, París, Madrid, Londres, etc. el Teatr Laboratorium se presenta por vez primera en Varsovia. Esto es importante, Grotowski fue y es combatido, cuestionado, rechazado consecuentemente por muchos profesionales y teóricos.

Contados son los creadores teatrales (Stanislawski, Meyerhold, Wachtangow, Brecht, Artaud, Peter Brook) que revolucionaron de manera similar la escena contemporánea.

"El Buda" (así se lo llama entre los profesionales polacos) no sólo cuestiona las tradicionales y herumbrosas premisas del teatro serio y del otro al que estamos acostumbrados, cuestiona al teatro en el más amplio sentido del término y sin embargo hoy ya se le reconoce como el creador que más aportara a éste arte en nuestros días.

Esta es una excelente ocasión para dilucidar con él nuestras dudas.

auspicia fotevisión

Viernes 12 de noviembre
de 11 a 13 horas
Viamonte 452
Entrada Libre

Figure 10.1 *Encuentro con Jerzy Grotowski/Encounter with Jerzy Grotowski*, CAYC, Buenos Aires, November 1971. Leaflet of the event

Courtesy of the archive of artist Juan Carlos Romero, Buenos Aires

country.⁴ The relevance of this comparison is due to the fact that Grotowski rose to fame despite his "provincial" origins, and this seemed to challenge the logic of center/periphery between industrialized capitalist and developing societies that were reminiscent of the colonial order and that Glusberg himself aimed to question in his criticism from this period. In texts from 1972, Glusberg did not welcome the prospect of becoming integrated into a universalist understanding of culture, the canonical discourse of which presented art produced in the "cultural periphery" as a "derivation" from modernist art movements initiated at the center. He assumed the marginal position of CAYC and aimed to redefine the role of "provincial" artistic creation and decentered art institutions (Glusberg 1972a; Glusberg 1972b).

Glusberg's direct contact with eastern European artists resulted in exhibitions of Polish and Hungarian art in Argentina, such as the Festival of the Hungarian Vanguards [Festival de la vanguardia húngara] and Hungary 74 [Hungría 74 en el CAYC]; both were organized at CAYC in 1973 and in 1974 respectively.

In 1974, he also organized an exhibition of the Polish artist group *Permafo* at the Platense University Club in La Plata. Interestingly enough, the contact with eastern European artists also helped Glusberg get acquainted with Argentinian artistic circles from outside the capital city. In 1970, Glusberg recalled how he met Edgardo Antonio Vigo, one of the most active Argentinian mail art networkers and the editor of the visual and experimental poetry reviews *Diagonal Cero* (1962–1968) and *Hexágono '71* (1971–1975):

My personal relationship with Edgardo Vigo is emblematic, for it began not by the direct contact between a man from Buenos Aires and another living in La Plata, some 60 kilometers away, but rather through the comments made by Ladislav Novak [Novák], a painter who lived in Trebic [Třebíč], a small town in Czechoslovakia. It was he who mentioned Vigo for the first time, and I discovered him only two years later, upon returning to Buenos Aires.

(Glusberg 1970, n.p.)

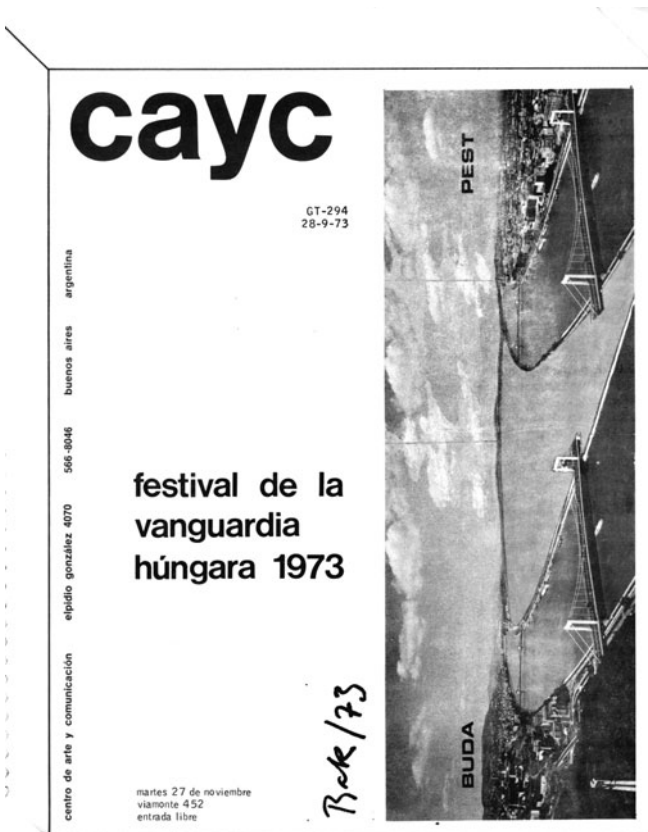


Figure 10.2 Festival de la vanguardia húngara/Festival of the Hungarian Vanguards, CAYC, Buenos Aires, November 1973. Leaflet of the event

Courtesy of the archive of artist Juan Carlos Romero, Buenos Aires

Ladislav Novák authored the book *Alchemical Poems*, which was exhibited in April 1969 at the *Expo/Internacional de Novísima Poesía*. Organized by Edgardo Antonio Vigo, it was the first show that introduced mail artists from Czechoslovakia to a Buenos Aires audience. As Glusberg remarked, Novák exerted a certain “tangible impact” upon the Latin American art scene because he became an intermediary between the two Argentinian cultural actors. In Glusberg’s view, a provincial (eastern European) mediator suspended, in this concrete case, the habitual role of the West as the source of intellectual goods: the mediations of artistic centers like Paris or New York were no longer the only possible vehicles for establishing artistic networks within the contemporary art world. I wish to argue that, as early as in the 1970s, Glusberg called for a sort of margin–margin cultural relations—a proposition that was later echoed by other thinkers and art historians, such as Piotr Piotrowski (2015). Ideally, the relations established between artists from Latin America and Eastern Europe were to possess a more symmetrical and less hegemonic character, and they should not lead to the processes of deculturation.

Staging Violence, Re-politicizing Death

Tadeusz Kantor was another Polish artist and theater director whose visit had an impact on the Argentinian art scene. During the communist period, Kantor was one of the internationally-travelled Polish artists who, however, never considered applying for legal emigration. He had even perceived his settlement in Poland as a crucial component of his artistic activity (Schorlemmer, 2006). His Cricot 2 troupe was invited twice by the Teatro Municipal General San Martín in Buenos Aires. The play *Wielopole*, *Wielopole* was performed from September 19 through to September 30, 1984, and *Let the Artists Die* from August 20 to August 30, 1987 (Chrobak, Stangret, and Świca 2000, 130, 144). Several theater professionals active at the time have recalled that Kantor’s presence had a major impact on large segments of Argentina’s creative environment and his visits “triggered a revolution in Argentinian scenic arts.”⁵ Julia Elena Sagaseta also emphasizes Kantor’s pivotal role with respect to the development of visual theater in Argentina (1992, 73–74).

Founded in 1989, El Periférico de Objetos [The Periphery of Objects] was one of several troupes that celebrated Kantor as the main influence on their own creative activities (Propato 2002). Ana Alvarado, a member of El Periférico de Objetos, recalls that they attended Kantor’s public lectures and discussions at the San Martín Theatre.⁶ El Periférico de Objetos were particularly interested in Kantor’s concepts of the “poor object” and the “reality of the lowest rank,” which were developed in his *Emballage Manifesto* in 1964, and promoted the use of humble and common objects “rescued” from garbage (Kantor 1965, n.p.). After Kantor, who first introduced mannequins in his play *Kurka wodna* [The Water-Hen] in 1967, El Periférico de Objetos used “anthropomorphic objects” that included a variety of plastic or porcelain dolls (Alvarado 2009). Kantor’s peculiar machines or hybrid objects evoking human elements, such as the “man-package” (1963), the “woman-window” (1971), or the “man-stool” (1971) showed the Argentinian group ways in which they could conceptualize the relationship between objects, their manipulators, and the actors in their own plays. Alvarado’s concept of the “handler” who should “act on the object in such a way that you cannot tell where one ends and the other begins” (47) was related to Kantor’s idea of the “bio-object” developed in his notes for the play

Wielopole, Wielopole (1980). Both Alvarado and Kantor defined the relationship between the object and the actor as a symbiosis. Kantor stated that “the actors become their [objects’] living parts, their organs. They were as if genetically linked with that object.” They created “a BIO-OBJECT, acting and secreting the tissue of a rather special action” (Kantor 1984, 133).

The elements taken from Kantor’s oeuvre allowed *El Periférico de Objetos* to create a politically- and socially-engaged theater and to adopt a critical position regarding the Argentinian military dictatorship. The effect of blurring the physical distance between the spectators and the staged scene, characteristic of Kantor’s plays, as well as the use of anthropomorphic objects, permitted *El Periférico de Objetos* to explicitly stage the violence carried out by the state. As I will argue below, *El Periférico de Objetos*’s critical approach was sharper than that of Kantor, whose attitude toward communist Poland was more reserved and ambiguous.

At some stage of his career, Kantor refrained from directly criticizing the government of the People’s Republic of Poland and commenting on the socio-political reality of his time. Immediately after World War II, he spoke out against the doctrine of socialist realism and, as a result, lost his job at the Cracow School of Art in 1949. During the following decades, he was nevertheless one of the few Polish artists who were allowed to travel or exhibit abroad.⁷ He repeatedly claimed that his only aim was to question the limits of art, even if he permanently struggled to reconcile the formal investigations of his art practice with the situation in which he lived; his extremely metaphorical artworks and plays, which allude to situations of control and



Plate 8 Cricot 2 Theatre, *The Dead Class*, 1983, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris

Photo by Jacquie Bablet. Centre for the Documentation of the Art of Tadeusz Kantor Cricoteka, Cracow

imprisonment, however, were readily interpreted by some critics abroad as reactions to state oppression.⁸ Kantor's reserved attitude toward politics notwithstanding, his plays were, in the interpretation of El Periférico de Objetos, framed by such critique. The Latin American theater makers may have also thought it was virtuous only to criticize indirectly. As Ana Alvarado has recalled, Kantor's plays were read in Argentina as subversive and politically engaged pieces.⁹ Being a theater director coming from a socialist country, part of the Argentinian public projected on Kantor the image of the politically-engaged Eastern European artist or that of an avant-gardist visionary, fighting for a new society. Kantor's plays generated associations with revolutionary theater: that of Vsevolod Meyerhold, Vladimir Mayakovsky, and the Russian avant-gardes. In this sense, El Periférico de Objetos adopted a clichéd image of Eastern European culture and political positions in the arts under socialism. The fact that Kantor came from behind the Iron Curtain and that his pieces did contain some kind of vague, indirect political criticism created a situation in which his plays were viewed in Argentina as critical commentary not only on twentieth-century totalitarianism and wars, but also on American imperialism.

Both Tadeusz Kantor and El Periférico de Objetos used techniques to disturb their audience. While Kantor explored the question of death in several pieces, the Argentinian group frequently staged violent and aggressive behavior to provoke feelings of unease and anxiety. The translation of Kantor's 1975 manifesto *Theatre of Death*, which remains one of his best-known texts to this date, was published in Argentina in 1984. In one of his plays, *Let the Artists Die!* (performed in Buenos Aires in 1987), his own death was staged by sequences of his memories that predicted his own demise. Even so, violence was not a subject Kantor was particularly interested in. His theater was saturated in his own personal reminiscences and his extremely subjective and intimate experiences. Conversely, as Jorge Dubatti (1995) observed, El Periférico de Objetos's plays were more firmly linked to the question of individual, collective, and social memory and mourning in the context of post-dictatorial Argentina. This resulted from the palpable reality of torture and violence that the last Argentinian military dictatorship—that of Jorge Rafael Videla (1976–1981)—inflicted upon society.

El Periférico de Objetos was one of the few theater troupes confronting the issue of power by making it the major subject of their plays, which were in effect metaphors for the mechanisms of authoritarian rule. Daniel Veronese proposed that the group explored "an aesthetic of the obscene, as one of the elements in the group's plays is obscenity: with the goal of showing what people don't expect to see, and making visible what should have been left off of the stage" (Castillo 1995, 60–63). *Variations about B . . . (Beckett)*, presented in May 1990, contained a scene of torture enacted by a puppeteer assuming the role of a tyrant. The action of *El hombre de arena* (The Sandman), dated April 1992 and based on E.T.A. Hoffmann's story, was set in a drawer full of sand-covered dolls manipulated by actors. At times the dolls became visible, only to be covered with sand again. *The Sandman* evokes the practices of burial and exhumation and refers, as Cecilia Propato has observed, to "the trauma of *desaparecidos* [the missing]"—anonymous victims of Latin American dictatorships whose remains were at that time discovered in remote parts of the continent (Propato 1998). By using poor and common objects (e.g., a doll) to stage violent behavior, El Periférico de Objetos conveyed the message that torture and violence formed part of the current social experiences in which the Argentinian public were



Plate 9 El Periférico de Objetos, *El hombre de arena* [The Sandman], 1992

Photo by Magdalena Viggiani. Courtesy of Magdalena Viggiani

living (Dubatti 1995, 29–37). Unlike Kantor, who adopted a much less pronounced position vis-à-vis Polish social reality under autocratic political rule, the plays of El Periférico contributed considerably to the debate about Argentina's recent history and the dictatorship's crimes.

East–South Contacts: De-colonization/De-westernization and the Decolonial Option

As was previously emphasized, South–East cultural transfers and circulations have been affected by the colonial matrix of power. In the period under scrutiny, Europe was (and continues to be today) associated politically and culturally with dominance, hegemony and imperialism when viewed from the perspective of Third World subjects. As Aníbal Quijano has stressed, the power relations that originated in the colonial period survived the end of Europe's actual dominance over Latin American territories, even if these relations are often considered as belonging to a bygone historical phenomenon. "Cultural Europeanization," as Quijano observed, "was transformed into an aspiration" and it relied primarily on "a colonization of the imagination of the dominated" (2010, 23). Although the eastern part of the European continent has also witnessed political dependence and domination throughout its history, culturally, it has been frequently conflated with the whole of Europe. After all, eastern European artists participated in and occasionally shaped the European tradition, a representative example of which is east-central European artists' seminal role in the main avant-garde "isms" of the early twentieth century.

But as Chico Buarque's *Budapeste* shows, eastern European culture was generally only imagined in Latin American contexts, rather than known from experience.

During the Cold War period, fantasies of Eastern Europe took on another aspect: through the region's embroilment in the communist sphere of influence, it ceased to connote imperial dominance and became increasingly perceived as an alterity to the West. Latin America was a battleground where the two superpowers struggled for influence and parts of it witnessed recurrent violent American interference; therefore, any evocation of Soviet-style arrangements or visual culture was, for many, aligned with the anti-imperialist stance opposing North American supremacy and Latin American military dictatorships supported by the US government (Herkenhoff 2012, 21). Hence, building bridges with Eastern European culture was thought to enable transatlantic exchanges freed from unequal hierarchies. The envisioned decentered or pluricentric dialogic relationships between Latin American and Eastern European artists could be then understood as, to some degree, decolonial. The positive projections vested in a non-domineering political formation remained in place even when the eastern European artists who participated in these interactions happened to be rather critical of their communist authorities. Art from eastern Europe was imagined as inevitably socially- and politically-engaged, even if this sometimes seemed at odds with the intentions of eastern European artists, as was the case with Tadeusz Kantor's theater in Argentina. In addition, artists in Latin America used the inspirations garnered from East European art to express their social and political criticism. *El Periférico de Objetos* used Kantor's aesthetic not only to criticize past dictatorships, but also to point to emerging problems and issues in the new Argentinean democracy, principally the prevarication of recent history and amnesia concerning the dictatorships' crimes.

Artistic exchanges with Eastern Europe were also motivated by the will to redefine habitual relations with a colonizing Europe. In the case of *El Grupo de los Trece* and *El Periférico de Objetos*, to relate to Eastern European culture became an artistic strategy, and it could be detected more on the level of discourse than artistic practice. In those two particular cases, the choice of an internationally-recognized Eastern European artist became a gesture of dewesternization: the recognition of art created beyond Western hegemonic centers, in an attempt to abandon Western-centric narratives on art. Bringing together two regions with no history of colonial domination in their mutual relations was also an effort to establish a new type of transatlantic cross-cultural exchange outside the existing norms of power and authority.

Notes

- 1 In 1795, the Polish state ceased to exist for 123 years. Its entire territory was divided between the Russian Empire, the Kingdom of Prussia, and the Austro-Hungarian Empire.
- 2 The *Modernidad/Colonialidad* network was formed by sociologists, anthropologists, semiologists, and philosophers from Latin America. Important analytical categories of the group include transmodernity, the coloniality of power, colonial difference, gnosis of border, interculturalism, point zero, and body-politics (Castro-Gómez 2005).
- 3 Unless otherwise indicated, all translations from the French or Spanish original are by the author.
- 4 García Canclini has pointed out that Argentinian art professionals' ambivalent approach toward CAYC was caused by Glusberg's own authoritarian position (Glusberg also presided over the Argentine Association of Art Critics) as well as his changing attitude toward the Argentinian military governments. In the early years of CAYC, Glusberg supported

politically engaged art, often critiquing existing authorities. By 1976, however, he had established an “excellent relationship” with the military government (García Canclini 2005, 62–65).

- 5 Carlos Fos, in discussion with the author, Buenos Aires, September 24, 2014.
- 6 Ana Alvarado, in discussion with the author, Buenos Aires, September 27, 2014.
- 7 Kantor’s acceptance of two national prizes in 1981 and 1982, within the context of Polish Solidarity and Martial Law (from December 1981 to July 1983), was seen as fairly controversial by many and confirmed his status as an artist tolerated by the Polish state.
- 8 Kantor’s play *Szafa—Der Schrank* [Wardrobe], staged for the first time in 1966 in Baden Baden (West Germany), was interpreted as a metaphor of an individual’s confinement in Communist countries (Schorlemmer, 2006).
- 9 Ana Alvarado, in discussion with the author, Buenos Aires, September 27, 2014.

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Part IV

Contemporary Art Praxis and the Production of Discourses



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11 Undoing the East

Toward the World's (Semi-)Peripheries

Joanna Sokółowska

Le monde et les choses (2014), an art piece by Mona Vătămanu and Florin Tudor, is a handwoven map of the world designed using CIA-provided online statistics. While maintaining some selected state borders, it represents geopolitical units' dependence on the division of major resources and key branches of the globalized economy. Whereas a few core areas feature as the providers of financial products and advanced electronics, the rest of the world functions as periphery or semi-periphery, the supplier of resources and cheap labor in relocated branches of industry, agriculture, or services. Poland, Romania, and the Czech Republic are not indicated on this map, and neither are other countries that historically and culturally formed



Plate 10 Mona Vătămanu and Florin Tudor, *Le monde et les choses*, 2014, cloth
Courtesy of the artists

Central and Eastern Europe. The areas where we would expect to find them are marked as “machinery, vehicles, motors.”

In this work, Mona Vătămanu and Florin Tudor do not merely reproduce the unequal global division of labor, traffic of goods, and resources within the capitalist world-economy. Theirs is not a mimetic but a strategical map, enabling us to trace different trajectories simultaneously if we follow the visible seams in the cloth which delineate territories. These marginal trails reveal the manual labor involved in manufacturing the world map, while they also bring into play reflections on both the gender composition of the workforce within, and the relocation of, global textile production. Hence, there is a tension between the concrete, material qualities of the map and the digital origins of its data. This discrepancy points to further contradictions related to the invisible division of work, the relations of power and benefits that are all involved in the construction of apparently transparent tools for navigating and viewing the world. *Le monde et les choses* reminds us that the abstract algorithms and quantitative models of techno-science used for measuring, trading, and determining our mapping capacities have been closely tied to the particular needs of the US military-industrial complex. At the same time, as the piece suggests, the abstraction processes at the core of global capitalism obscure concrete labor, particular places, and bodies at work, and thus impede an individual's or a collective's orientation and conscious navigation within this complex field.

Le monde et les choses was part of the exhibition *All Men Become Sisters* at the Muzeum Sztuki in Łódź,¹ a former textile industry center that was abandoned following Poland's capitalist transformation in the 1990s. The exhibition was a curatorial proposition for transnational feminist solidarity and sisterhood grounded in artistic inquiries into the spheres of labor, production, and reproduction of life. In examining this particular work, as well as the exhibition context and its location, I will take the marginal position of the seams delineating territories in the piece of cloth as a tool of an artistic and curatorial cartography. Artistic cartography attempts to chart diverse (semi-)peripheral trajectories traversing, construing, and going beyond Eastern or Central Eastern Europe in the process of mapping the global economy and imagining different systems and geographies. One of the goals of this operation is to discard both “ideologies of Eastness” (Zarycki 2014) and binary, essentialist constructions of “the East” and “the West,” and, consequently, to call into question discourses on civilizational superiority, inferiority, or cultural narratives that ignore, obscure, or naturalize economic conditions. Furthermore, I would like to use this simultaneously marginal and peripheral view to ask how art can help us imagine the deterritorialization of the prevalent world maps. Could territories and assemblages emerging on this new mental map be more experimental and horizontal, so that relationships between peripheries are not organized hierarchically by centers and that both these terms—center and periphery—become questionable or even obsolete?

As a curator working with artists and audiences, I will draw on my own situated experience of thinking with art, considering it a mode of knowledge or an inquiry that both draws on and contributes to, but does not illustrate, scholarship tackling geopolitical divisions. The selected exhibitions and artistic case studies to be discussed are all connected to Muzeum Sztuki in Łódź. They thus stem from my own engagement with artists and their works as these are mediated and converted through global networks of communication, while at the same time being located in the peripheral city of Łódź, in the semi-peripheral country of Poland, Eastern Europe,

and anchored in a museum conforming both to universalizing claims within the art historical discipline and to ideologies therein pertaining to the avant-garde, or modern and contemporary global art.

Piotr Piotrowski's lesson of critical art geography engaging with Central and Eastern Europe as one of many places construed as peripheral has been one of the formative paradigms for myself, working in a particular location to find a way through the economy of attention in a globalizing art world. Drawing on Franco "Bifo" Berardi's (2009) translation of this into the Deleuzoguattarian paradigm of semio-capitalism, I have considered this concept a temporary "conceptual transformer" to make sense of the chaos resulting from an incomprehensible complexity of the globalized cultural environment and the intensity of communication shared by many contemporary art workers. In this sense, it is one of the many possible "bridges over the absence of meaning" affecting minds exposed to too many signs and energy flows appearing and disappearing too fast (Berardi 2009, 129). However, I would like to take this bridge and pass it, following the compelling lead of *Le monde et les choses* as I look both at and beyond the region. The critical art geography I am proposing here takes up and expands a relatively open call by Fredric Jameson (1999) for cognitive mapping as a practice of orientation on the one hand and, on the other, of charting different trajectories within the field of late capitalism. The theoretical points of reference for this operation are Immanuel Wallerstein's (2004) model of the capitalist world-economy and Deleuzoguattarian concepts of maps as creative laboratories (Deleuze and Guattari 2004; Guattari 2007, 172).

According to the Wallerstein's model, which underscores the international division of labor between core and peripheral areas, the majority of the countries located in postcommunist Central and Eastern Europe could certainly be appropriately described as (temporary and relative) semi-peripheries or peripheries. While the core dominates this map with technological and scientific innovation and the complexity of manufactured products, the periphery is driven to function as the supplier of cheap labor, raw materials, resources, production facilities, and food for the core. Semi-peripheral countries share the features of both areas, while often also mediating between them and facilitating their unequal economic exchange. The divisions proposed by Wallerstein cut across national and regional entities—they are dynamic, relative, and interdependent. As Wallerstein and many contemporary thinkers argue, the world capitalist system is in a chaotic condition, for its contradictions have reached the point where the system eventually becomes unable to survive due to the growing gaps and conflicts between the rich and poor worldwide, and the commodification and destruction of natural resources and of diverse forms of life. According to Jason W. Moore's (2015) world-ecological perspective, the mechanisms of capital accumulation have led to creating Cheap Natures: labor, energy, food, and raw materials became the very source of the crisis of the age of capital—"Capitalocene." The incessant exhaustion and appropriation of Cheap Natures sets a boundary for the expansion of the system on a planetary scale and, at the same time, also points to the limits of the ideology of growth. Moreover, as Fredric Jameson (1999, 54) states, the complexity of the "world-space of multinational capital" with no detectable command-center has grown increasingly difficult for the sensuous human subject to map. It has become obscured from, incomprehensible to, and beyond the representational powers of the human intellectual and affective capacity, for the nervous system or the senses. The resultant confusion is, he claims,

an obstacle to any political action. Instead, he called for a kind of political art or geopolitical aesthetics that would provide orientation by concretizing the abstractions of multinational capital and geopolitics: rendering them palpable, specific, and thus intelligible to the sensory experiences of individuals and collectives. Jameson also insisted on a “breakthrough to some as yet unimaginable new mode of representing a capacity to act and struggle which is at present neutralized by our spatial as well our social confusion” (1999, 54).

The motivation underlying the exhibitions and artistic works I am discussing here is perhaps best described as an attempt to capture various aspects of global capitalism, with a special focus on notions of periphery, involving, but not limited to, post-communist Eastern Europe. Furthermore, the creative endeavors under scrutiny also set out to challenge representations of the dominant forms of production and to put forward vocabularies and images of a different, postcapitalist future of “diverse economies” as described by J.K. Gibson-Graham (2008), or other, less optimistic, visions of new world economies and ecologies.

The challenge to represent the contemporary global division of work as a feature construing social relations worldwide served as the point of departure for the projects *Labor in a Single Shot*³ and *Workers Leaving the Workplace*,⁴ both involving Harun Farocki. His work is instrumental to considering filmmaking and artistic practice as tools for developing critical, self-reflexive ways of seeing, enabling orientation in the contemporary conditions of production. Initiated in 2011 by Farocki and Antje Ehmann, *Labor in a Single Shot* was an exercise in critical filmmaking. Farocki and Ehmann cooperated for three years with students of film schools and art academies, emerging filmmakers as well as video artists in fifteen cities around the world: Bangalore, Berlin, Boston, Buenos Aires, Cairo, Geneva, Hanoi, Hangzhou, Johannesburg, Lisbon, Łódź, Mexico City, Moscow, Rio de Janeiro, and Tel Aviv. In each venue, they conducted workshops asking the participants to capture the process of work in a single shot lasting a maximum of two minutes, without cuts. The anachronistic formal criteria evoked the first film in motion picture history: *La sortie de l'usine Lumière a Lyon* [*Workers Leaving the Lumière Factory in Lyon*, 1895]. Eliminating cuts and having very little time at their disposal, workshop participants had to grasp the specifics of the kind of labor they chose in real time. The constraints were supposed to enhance attentiveness and precision in observing, analysing, and registering details, as well as to encourage experimentation with alternative narrative techniques. In many cases, the shooting technique deliberately gave preference to peripheral vision, thus also revealing agents moving at the edges of a mediatized attention economy. Bahaa Talis made direct reference to the Lumière Factory sequence when she shot her own *Workers Leaving their Workplace while Ignoring a Bicycle Man* in Cairo. Talis simply directed her camera onto the pavement, capturing toys sold by street vendors in front of a huge office building. Focusing on a miniature wind-up cyclist at street level, she simultaneously recorded the constant flow of workers leaving their office after work. Paying no attention to the level of their feet, they seem to live in another world to that of street vendors, though they use the same street. In this way, the artist grasped the invisibility of the precarious workforce of informal grey zones and the street economy.

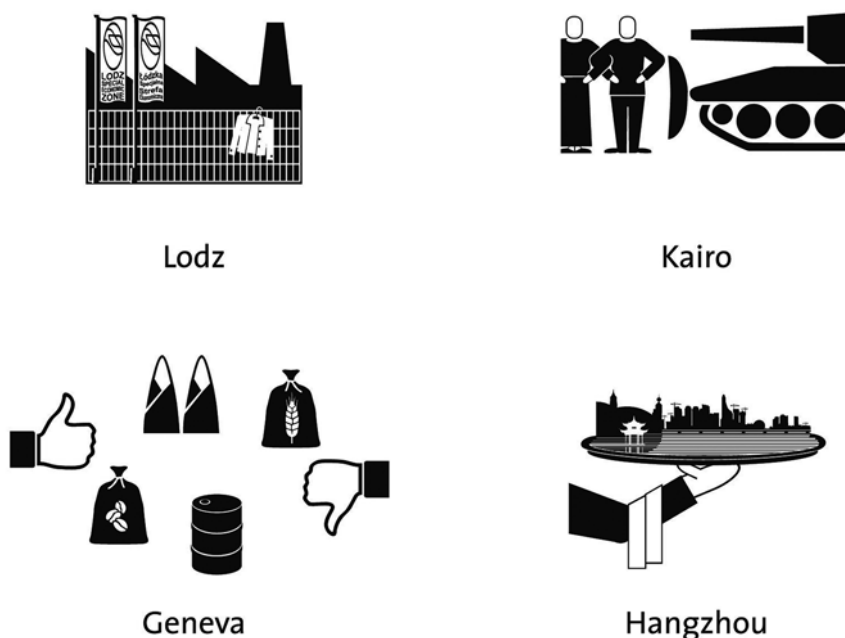
Other participants searched for alternative perspectives to show the diversity of human interactions with materials, animals, and other non-human environmental agents in relief. Sarah Childress used an underwater camera in her *Phil Gray's Blue*

Dragon Mussel Wagon to capture fishing in New England from the perspective of the net (or perhaps the mussel). *Labor in a Single Shot* also gave insight into locations otherwise hardly accessible to the public; for instance, the private room of a philosopher reading a book, surgical rooms, research labs, the actual workplace of a phone sex operator, the rehearsal halls and the backstage areas of various spectacular performances. Going against the grain of abstract and immaterial conceptions of work, the pre-set shooting technique turned out to foster images exposing concrete, material environments and embodied, gendered, or class aspects of all kinds of labor. Sooyong Kwon's footage shows the hyper-modern research centers at MIT from the perspective of the teams cleaning them at night. This strategy does not deny the importance of cognitive labor and techno-science—rather, it denaturalizes the hype and immaterial aura around them, while inscribing them in a set of social relations and contradictions. In fact, many films represent labor in the twenty-first century as toil, the repetition of gestures, and the exhausting reprocessing of matter. Creative, immaterial cooperation, virtuosity, or invention, emphasized by influential operaist and post-operaist thinkers as the defining and potentially emancipatory features of contemporary work, appear to be rather marginal here (Hardt and Negri 2000; 2005; Lazzarato 2014; Virno 2004). *Labor in a Single Shot* confronts viewers with the ubiquity of work construed as peripheral in terms of geopolitical divisions and largely overlooked by seminal white, male, Western-centric theoreticians.

The workshop results were presented in a series of exhibitions in all the cities involved, while a web catalog stores all videos produced in the framework of the project.² This global cartography of labor offers a possibility to compare representations of the different scales, places, conditions, relations, and processes of work in core as well as peripheral and semi-peripheral areas. In Łódź, where Farocki and Ehmann cooperated with the Film School and with Muzeum Sztuki, most recordings depicted simple repetitive work processes in industry and services, thereby countering the image promoted by local authorities of a postindustrial, creative city. All exhibition venues of the *Labor in a Single Shot* project were accompanied by pictograms designed by Alice Creischer and Andreas Siekmann.

Based on their research of statistical data, the artists prepared graphic representations of the economic structure of a given city. In each location, pictograms from all participating cities were displayed so that the viewers could establish for themselves relations between diverse places of the world-economy. The pictogram designed for Łódź appropriated the logotype of the Special Economic Zone set up in the area, a source of pride for local authorities as well as business and political elites across Poland. Along with statistical data in the infographic, the pictogram created an image of the peripheral city, a source of exploitation of cheap local labor by multinational capital with the help of public aid, and a place of industrial production of commodities based on patents and licenses created in core areas. The Łódź edition of *Labor in a Single Shot* thus referred to processes which are known but neglected. If we follow the trail of the Special Economic Zones of Łódź, we will soon get to Ukraine, Uzbekistan, Nigeria, Bangladesh, Indonesia, Pakistan, Zambia, or Ethiopia and other peripheral economies far from Eastern Europe where such zones exist at the service of core areas.

Taking up some questions posed by Harun Farocki in his seminal piece *Workers Leaving the Factory in 11 Decades* (1995), the exhibition at Muzeum Sztuki Łódź *Workers Leaving the Workplace* focused on artistic modes of reworking and



Figures 11.1a, b, c, d Alice Creischer and Andreas Siekmann, pictograms for the exhibition *Labor in a Single Shot* in Muzeum Sztuki in Łódź, 2013

Courtesy of the artists

translating post-Fordist changes in labor. While devising the exhibition, I was particularly drawn to Farocki's working methods based on montage of diverse data and film footage to map systemic interdependencies between social relations and contemporary work. The aim of the essayistic narrative of the show was to confront the abstraction, invisibility, and seamlessness of the subsumption of living labor and financialization of life under capital, as well as the geopolitical expansion of the system in search of cheap frontiers to be appropriated. The exhibition aimed at capturing processes that obscure relations between humans, alienate commodities from their relocated producers, and flows of images and information from their mode of production. While some pieces confronted various forms of capitalist transformation in Eastern Europe, they were put in constellations connecting them with trajectories of the global supply chain. For instance, a series of photographs by Jean-Luc Moulène entitled *Strike Objects* (1999–2000) documents default "objects of altered production" made by striking French factory workers, and the workers' lost class struggle due to relocation of industrial production from France to peripheral or semi-peripheral areas. This relation was emphasized by other artworks alluding to manufacturing processes in Romania or Turkey. Some artists, for instance Ali Kazma or Mona Vățămanu and Florin Tudor, proposed looking closely at and thereby decoding and questioning abstract patterns and rules employed by the economy. Documenting a process of manufacturing jeans in a factory in Turkey,

Ali Kazma's *Jean Factory* (2008) captured the complexity of the enormous field involved in this highly automated and standardized form of production. Meticulously recording and editing footage of human movements, gazes, expressions, rearrangements of bodies, and choreography of machines, he exposed the immensely repetitive physical and affective effort, and documented the materials and machinery involved in making one of the cheapest, most popular, and commonest items of clothing. The final product—the commodity and its global market value—thus appears in the end to be absurd and disconnected from the real costs and concrete material conditions of the labor process. Hence, without any didactic commentary, the film translates the rules of commodity fetishism, rendering them intelligible to our senses.

In their works, Mona Vătămanu and Florin Tudor illuminated mechanisms of accumulation of capital through an arrangement of metal in different states of aggregation. The installation *The Path* [*Calea*]/*Rust Ingots* [*Lingouri de rugina*] (2009) consisted of a huge mass of particles of rust and metal dust covering the exhibition floor juxtaposed with ingots made of rust, and a primitive wooden pathway connecting both elements. In the film *Surplus Value* [*Plus valoarea*] (2009), the artists recorded the activity of manually whittling down a metal bar to nothing. The minor, transitory, and ephemeral metal dust acted as a floating signifier, which might have led to questions about the destruction of postcommunist or (semi-)peripheral industries as a prerequisite for the expansion of capitalism or to other more abstract inquiries into the extraction of surplus value. The diverse artistic modes of mapping discussed above do not merely reproduce the existing territories. They focus on the hardly visible, obscured, abstract, or marginal processes and render them instrumental in understanding the global division of work as a tool for construing peripheral and hegemonic worlds. Appealing to the critical, attentive, and intense gaze of viewers, the artists let them complete the task of reconfiguring existing maps and imagine alternatives of their own.

For Félix Guattari and Gilles Deleuze, maps, and in particular those charted within artistic activity, are laboratories (Berardi 2009; Deleuze and Guattari 2004, 3–28; Guattari 2007, 172). These maps are not there to represent but to experiment and produce complex, rhizomatic territorial assemblages, resonating and connecting with the multiplicity and alterity of future becomings. They compose and organize cosmic chaos, yet do not reduce its complexity. The emergent models mapped in artistic procedures do not search for utopia as a non-site, but reprocess and reorient existing strata, creating lines of flight out of sealed-off territories and repetitions. Following this line of thought, finally, I would like to discuss case studies that are actively engaged in producing new maps through the cultivation of a speculative, fictional imaginary that is capable of deterritorializing existing conditions of production and geopolitical divisions.

The exhibitions *Untimely Stories* (2012) and *Hüseyin Bahri Alptekin: Facts, Incidents, Accidents, Circumstances* (2013) staged new possibilities in peripheral reorientation of world maps.

*Untimely Stories*⁵ employed diverse modes of fiction to imagine future scenarios, concepts, and ideologies of Europe, taking issue with neoliberal visions of growth and development. One of the major works in the exhibition, *Famine Food* (2011) by Tamás Kaszás and Anikó Loránt (Ex-Artists Collective), arose from their vision of “collapsism”: an anticipation of the downfall of the current world-system based on the perpetual accumulation of capital, resulting in the destruction of resources, imperialist wars, and deprivation of bio-cultural diversity. Through its integration of



Figure 11.2 Exhibition view: Hüseyin Bahri Alptekin: *Facts, Incidents, Accidents, Circumstances, Situations*, 2013–2014, Muzeum Sztuki in Łódź, 2015

Photo by Piotr Tomczyk. Courtesy of Muzeum Sztuki in Łódź

permacultural and artistic practices, the Ex-Artists Collective creates and examines diverse, alternative means of survival, maintenance, and cultivation of life on Earth. Speculating about the future of socio-ecological relations, the collective locates the battlefield for the common good in the area described by feminist theoreticians as the reproduction of life, involving maintenance and care. Drawing on local, peripheral, and folk knowledge from the past, as well as a myriad of contemporary indigenous, activist, DIY experiences and diverse, non-capitalist, community economies, Kaszás and Loránt construe an engaged aesthetics for a future ecological livelihood on a planetary scale. In their holistic system, they thus reevaluate practices already functioning in the world but rendered marginal within the mainstream political economy or used by inhabitants of the peripheries of global capitalism. In the series *Famine Food*, they research poverty food—that is, any cheap or easily-available foodstuff used to nourish people in times of poverty or starvation, as during war or famine. Since this food is associated with the hardship under which it is eaten, it is socially rejected as a food source in times of relative plenty (Lubiak and Sokołowska 2012, 117–118). However, following the anticipations of the Ex-Artists Collective, knowledge about preparation of such food and other autonomous practices might not only raise one's chances of survival but also of having good and joyful life in the future. Resonating with Dipesh Chakrabarty's (2000) claim for provincializing Europe, within *Untimely Stories* we proposed to think of European belief systems and concepts

from and for the margins and peripheries, considering Europe as one place among many, rather than the template for modernity. Consequently, many artists in the exhibition created fictional narratives, reversing traditional geopolitical and colonial trajectories that have defined the direction of influence and knowledge flows from the West and other core areas to the rest of the world. They staged scenarios in which currently peripheral areas might take a leading role in the future. For instance, Angolan artist Nástio Mosquito performed an African person buying the devalued West, Europe, and the United States (*3 Continents*, 2010). In his speech, which mimicked the style of angry, religious preaching, he denounced both greed and ignorance. The simplified and stereotypical notions deployed in the performance were attributed equally to both Europe and the United States; in fact, the distinguishing features of these large entities became blurred or imperceptible in Mosquito's ironic speech. In this way, the claims of the core areas to maintain an exceptional civilizational position were fictionally erased and their status brought down to the current status of Africa.

The cartography conceived by Hüseyin Bahri Alptekin presupposes that margins and peripheries will traverse centers to the extent that these distinctions will blur and finally lose their epistemic value. He has dedicated his work to grasping and reworking the intensifying processes of globalization that he has witnessed in his lifetime (1957–2007), through the concepts of peripheries, inferiority, and marginality (Ziółkowska and Sokołowska 2013). During his numerous travels, as well as at home in cosmopolitan Istanbul, he registered, collected, and reused the multiplicity of globally-circulating popular and collectively-created images, dialects, signs, and products. In particular, he was drawn to vernacular, cheap, mass-produced objects, advertisements, roadside architecture, and second-rate design as egalitarian and anonymous forms of cultural production. Alptekin also documented and mythologized inconspicuous everyday events taking place at the periphery of mediatised attention. Apart from the works he created between 1991–2007 (in the early period in collaboration with M.D. Morris), the exhibition presented objects from Alptekin's archive, which he had not earlier exhibited or considered art. These included, among others, postcards, hotel stationery, packs of cigarettes, food and cosmetics containers, and labels that he collected obsessively during his worldwide travels. This miscellany was the environment of his life and work, a resource of themes or the material basis for his artworks. Apparently, during his extensive travels, the artist was drawn to almost the same things whether in Kosovo, Tirana, Helsinki, or Łódź (logos on packs of cigarettes, cheap ads, hotels). Alptekin's art certainly bears testimony to the end of the Cold War order resulting in the acceleration of capital's flow and new asymmetries of the world order. Yet, the signs of inferiority and marginality reprocessed by the artist go beyond this historical event. He accumulated, appropriated, and construed the myth of the Balkan and Orientalism, rather than presenting an endless nexus of images from the peripheries and borderlands of Western modernity such as Eastern Europe. Making use of the tactics of mimicry, he created an imaginary hybrid territory of poor, low-rank reality, one that is imitative, common, vulgar, secondary, aspiring, and filled with insignificant, coincidental, minor events beyond any great historical narrative. In his alternative map of the world, due to their endless ubiquity, margins and peripheries cease to be the externalized or inferior "other" to highly civilized centers because they traverse, contaminate, and deterritorialize all boundaries. If it is still unthinkable to discard the notions of frontiers, boundaries, and ideologies of Eastness, the Orient, or the Balkan mythology, Alptekin put forward a proposal

for a type of universality that would balkanize, for instance, the Baltic and the Barents Sea, or orientalize any random place on Earth, including Łódź, of course (Sokołowska 2013, 66).

Notes

- 1 *All Men Become Sisters*, Muzeum Sztuki, Łódź, 2015–2016, curated by Joanna Sokołowska.
- 2 Cf. www.labour-in-a-single-shot.net.
- 3 *Labor in a Single Shot*, Muzeum Sztuki, 2013, curated by Antje Ehmann and Harun Farocki, in cooperation with Aleksandra Jach and Joanna Sokołowska.
- 4 *Workers Leaving the Workplace*, Muzeum Sztuki, 2010, curated by Joanna Sokołowska.
- 5 *Untimely Stories*, Muzeum Sztuki, 2012, curated by Jarosław Lubiak and Joanna Sokołowska.

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12 Performance Art in the Global Flow of Cultural Goods

Some Eastern European Positions

Amy Bryzgel

If globalization is marked by the free movement of goods, capital, services, and people, then artists, and the work that they produce, are no exception to this list. In the following text, I focus on the manner in which several artists from the former socialist countries of central and eastern Europe employ movement and travel, border crossings and military maneuvers, and the circulation and flow of global capital and goods in performance, to demonstrate how their individual and cultural identity, along with location and place, is in continuous flux—a constant negotiation and renegotiation—rather than being fixed. Whether they themselves travel (or attempt to travel) or create artworks that are deliberately fashioned as commodities, being shipped around the globe, all of these artists cross and defy borders in their work. If, for Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann, Catherine Dossin, and Béatrice Joyeux-Prunel, the study of circulations can successfully account for the historical experience of “Others” without relegating them to a subaltern or peripheral position because of their alterity (2015, 2), then examining the circulations of art and artists from a region that has historically been treated as peripheral within the discipline of art history can further enhance such studies. In traversing the political and economic boundaries themselves, the artists featured in this chapter simultaneously acknowledge, address, critique, and reject hegemonic structures and institutions, mapping out and navigating their own individual courses in relation to the world, both cultural and otherwise.

Travel and Border Crossings

In 2004, Serbian artist Vladimir Nikolić brought Milica Milošević, a Montenegrin dirge singer, to Rouen, France, to sing at the grave of Marcel Duchamp, in an artistic performance entitled *Death Anniversary*.

Nikolić described the piece as a response to what he calls his “geopolitical burden,” which he feels he bears as an artist from Serbia. In his words, “no matter what my work was about—it was seen only in the light of this Balkan communism–postcommunism, war–postwar, anti-modern tradition, weird local habits, and described in terms of cultural, social and political references . . .” (Nikolić n.d., 1). For him, this tendency of associating an artist and his or her artwork only with a limited understanding of the context from which they emerge is precisely the opposite of what he understands Duchamp had intended with the idea of the readymade, which enabled the artist to remove an object (or in this case, an artwork, artist, or individual) from its context and enable it to acquire new meaning. In the performance,



Figure 12.1 Vladimir Nikolić, *Death Anniversary*, 2004. Performance in Rouen, France.
Video still

Courtesy of the artist

Nikolić positioned the dirge singer between himself and Duchamp, representing the situation as he sees it: he is prevented from gaining access to the French artist's legacy, by virtue of his background, and entering freely—without the baggage of pre-determined meanings—into the international art context.

About this piece, Nikolić said:

Did you ever talk, but no one was listening? Felt like you were talking to a deaf person? In basic terms, *Death Anniversary* is a performance in which one is trying to communicate with a person who cannot hear him. I had that experience almost every time I was showing my work internationally.

(Nikolić n.d., 1)

While this statement may or may not accurately represent his own unique experience, or that of his compatriots, Nikolić's statements express a desire to *resist* his presumed designation as a *Serbian* artist, and a refusal for his artwork to be labeled as such. At the same time, he produces a work of art that could not be seen as anything other than an exotic spectacle for those unfamiliar with this local tradition of dirge singing. In the video recording of the performance, Milica's undulating tones are jarring and inexplicable to the uninitiated, and out of context insofar as these

songs would usually be performed live at a funeral. By presenting this “weird local habit” in the context of art, the artist has created precisely the type of work that he laments feeling forced to produce. In some ways, the piece gives the critics what Nikolić claims they want. Given the fact that the remainder of the artist’s oeuvre does not include such specific cultural references, I see this gesture as a peace offering to his critics, satisfying what he perceives as their desire, in order to gain some room to maneuver, so that he can move on and produce other work that will not be implicitly connected to his background.

Whereas Nikolić’s statements surrounding *Death Anniversary* demonstrate that he feels pigeonholed as a Serbian or Balkan artist, Mladen Miljanović embraces his own position as an outsider to the global art world but nevertheless uses quasi-military strategies to try to force himself in. In defeat, Nikolić offers an olive branch to his critics, yet Miljanović accepts his situation and prepares for battle with them. In *At the Edge*, the artist literalizes his position by dangling from a window during the opening of an exhibition, placing himself outside of the gallery, hanging on for dear life. He enacted this performance several times, between 2011 and 2014, at various venues in Zagreb, Venice, New York, and Budapest. The artist doesn’t try to escape from the margins by entering the safety and comfort of the gallery, but remains in his outsider’s position, accepting it. It is a struggle for him to remain hanging there, but he resigns himself to the challenge.

Acceptance is the approach Miljanović has taken toward his situation in general. As an artist from Banja Luka, Bosnia, and a former sergeant in the Army of Republika Srpska, he comments that he accepts the epithet of “occupier,” ascribed to Serbs following the war. Instead of resisting this label, he co-opts it. One of his first performances was the long-duration *I Serve Art*, which took place from October 20, 2006 to July 14, 2007 in the ex-military base Vrbas, which was being converted into the Academy of Arts Banja Luka at the time. Here, Miljanović repurposed his previous military education for the art world, creating plans to “infiltrate the international cultural system,” by “mapping the potential moves of ‘artistic terrorism’ towards the West.” He did this mapping literally, during his confinement, in series of paintings entitled *Strategies*, which visualized those plans for the invasion of art institutions, such as the Tate Modern, utilizing military language and signs to indicate the forward movement of an invading army upon these artistic bodies.

In addition to the physical maps that he created, a component of his “artistic terrorism” included the act of mounting exhibitions in various cities across Europe, over the course of seven years. By the summer of 2014, he had “captured” his last city, with an exhibition in Budapest.¹ Miljanović used the military skills acquired while being trained as an “occupier,” in the eyes of the international community, not only gain to access to the art world, but to expose what he regards as its underlying mechanisms, which he identifies as similar to those used to keep the military functioning: “discipline, service, oath and hierarchy” (Miljanović 2011, 28).

Both Miljanović and Nikolić raise their individual critiques of the institution of art as dominated by western Europe and north American, using strategies of resignation, resistance, and reconnaissance. Craig Owens characterizes the “impossible complicity” of postmodern art as “the necessity of participating in the very activity that is being denounced *in order to denounce it*” (Owens 1991, 235). Thus, both artists continue to acknowledge the center in order to critique its very position and thereby delegitimize it, while at the same time becoming part of it. In hiring a

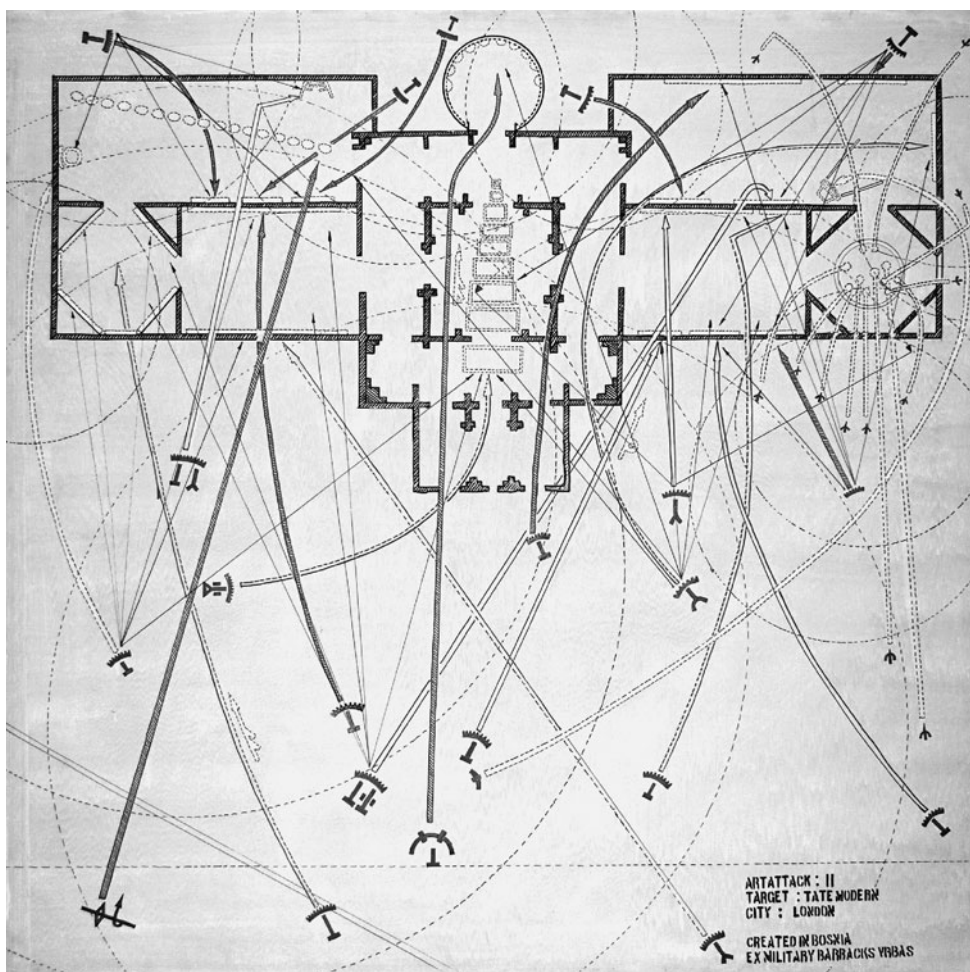


Figure 12.2 Mladen Miljanović, *Operation: Tate Modern*—London, 2007. From the series *Attack*, acrylic on canvas, 150 × 150 cm

Courtesy of the artist

Montenegrin dirge singer who invariably produces local folk art, which Nikolić has described disparagingly as “ethno art,” or, “*look how they celebrate religious holidays in my village art*” (Nikolić n.d., 2), he brings Milica to, in his words, “the wrong place [. . .] to the ultimate point of art universality” (Nikolić n.d., 24). Although he relocates the local cultural expression of singing, the dirge fails to communicate, remaining inaccessible to a wider audience, demonstrating the irrelevance and futility of the modernist aim of universalism.

In a piece from 2011, Miljanović, as an artist, bridged the former border between eastern and western Europe by shuttling people back and forth across it. In the performance piece *Taxi to Berlin*, the artist placed an advertisement through local news media outlets in Bosnia, asking for people who needed to travel to Berlin from Banja

Luka on a given date. He selected the participants and drove them to Berlin in a popular Yugoslav car, a Zastava,² and the entire trip was recorded on video. With this socialist-era relic, the artist brought passengers across several borders, to the city that once literalized the Cold War divide by being split into East Berlin and West Berlin. He also transported himself, an artist from post-conflict Bosnia-Herzegovina to reunified Germany, forging his own path to an artistic and economic center. His path literally replicates the patterns of migration for many from the post-conflict nation, including artists, and, in taking this journey in a Zastava, he not only crosses physical borders but also temporal ones, driving from the former Yugoslavia directly into the EU.

In recent years, no other mechanism has demonstrated the politics of inclusion and exclusion better than the Schengen and UK visa regimes. In 2009, Moldovan artist Tatiana Fiodorova applied for a visa to travel to the UK and was rejected, with no reason given. In response, she painted her face and hands black—representing herself as a slave, or a person without rights, in the context of Europe and the European Union—and walked around the city of Chişinău in a performance entitled *I Go*.

While the artist was not claiming to imitate traditional blackface theatrical make-up, one can interpret the racist implications of covering her face in black paint as a counterpoint to the implicit cultural racism in the migration policies she encountered. In the performance, she asserts her marginalized identity by walking around Chişinău, including in her route the British Embassy, carrying a blue raffia bag, which for her is a reference to individuals from less affluent geographies, such as migrants and refugees. Her bag, however, is given a geographic mark of stability, emblazoned with gold stars, evoking the EU flag. The piece conceptualizes her hybrid identity as one located (and restricted) to eastern Europe yet yearning for travel beyond those borders, into the EU. Like Miljanović and Nikolić, Fiodorova both rejects and yearns for that from which she is excluded.

A demonstration of the complexities of cultural identity can be seen in Estonian artist Flo Kasearu's *Estonian Sculpture*, a 2005 performance at the *Living Sculptures* exhibition.

Dressed in national costume, raised on a pedestal, Kasearu appeared at the Tallinn Art Hall, bearing a sign that read "I am dead." The piece points to concerns about the potential loss of national cultural identity in the wake of EU accession, a common fear among the smaller nations of Europe that have only just shaken off the shackles of the previous (Soviet) "Union" and are keen to assert their individual cultural heritages on the European and world stages. In contrast to other nations with longer periods of nationhood, Estonia's first independence lasted just a short 22 years, from 1918 to 1940, which may explain some of the underlying assumptions behind Flo's³ project in relation to the idea of maintaining and projecting a national cultural identity as opposed to a global one. In an interview, Flo mentioned that, following this project, when she was living in Germany as an Erasmus student, she began to think about her homeland and what it means to be Estonian. While there, she created the short film *Multi Travels* (2007), which depicts a young Estonian woman in national dress walking around Berlin and promoting "Estonia" as a nation, brand, or even religion. The girl walks up and down a subway car, not begging for money, as one might often witness in such situations, but providing information to the locals about her faraway land, Estonia, in awkward, broken English: "In Estonia we have



Figure 12.3 Tatiana Fiodorova, *I Go*, 2010. Performance in Chişinău, Moldova
Courtesy of the artist

east European time zone,” she announces. The girl eventually stands on a pedestal in front of the Estonian Embassy, as a representative of her country abroad.

In some ways, the piece responds to the idea of “branding Estonia” developed during the EU accession period, by attempting to make Estonia visible abroad. Leitti Mändmets, Brand Manager of Enterprise Estonia, a non-profit established in 2000 to promote business and regional policy in Estonia, has described at length how to effectively market the “almost imperceptible” country: “As important as it is to bring foreigners here and show them what life is like here, it is equally important to go abroad and talk about Estonia to as many people as possible and as unambiguously as possible” (2010, 71), advice that may seem unusual to give to one’s citizenry, but was perhaps developed by the organization, whose board members include the Deputy Secretary General for Economic Development of Ministry of Economic Affairs, among other ministers and academics in Estonia, in order to make the country visible on

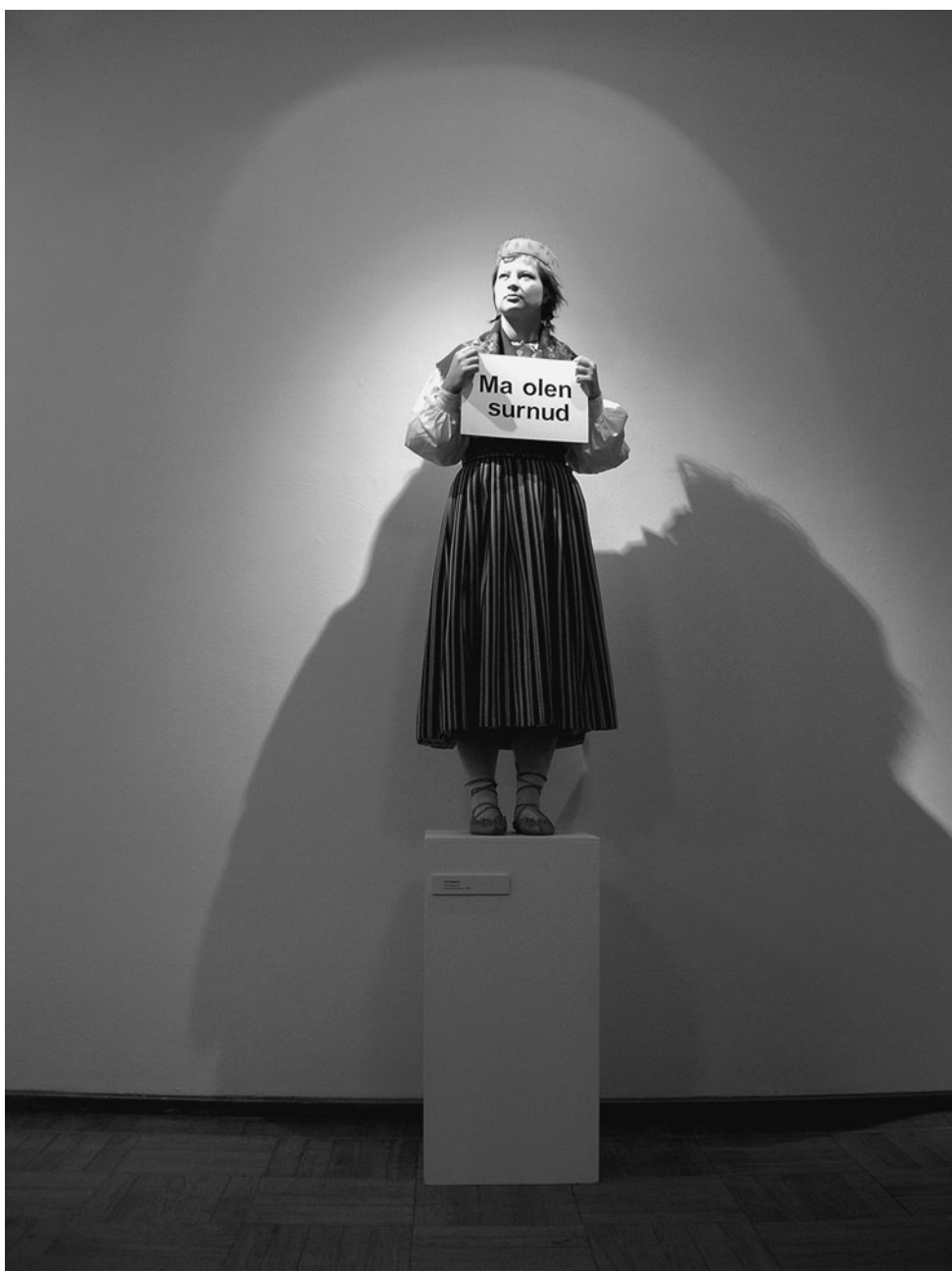


Plate 11 Flo Kasearu, *Estonian Sculpture*, 2005. Living sculpture performed in Tallinn Art Hall, Estonia; in Warszawski Aktyw Artystow, Warsaw, Poland; in front of the Estonian Embassy in Berlin, Germany [sign reads: “I am dead”]

Courtesy of the artist

the world stage.⁴ Here, Flo takes this advice literally, by having the character in her video do just what the advice suggests: “go abroad and talk about Estonia to as many people as possible and as unambiguously as possible.” At the same time, the video’s humor highlights the absurdity of doing so. That said, the piece also represents, in a hyperbolic manner, the cultural understanding that ended up taking place as individuals from the EU’s new accession countries began to travel abroad. In later parts of the film, the girl, after having unsuccessfully tried to integrate and adapt, escapes into the forest, running to the metaphorical safety and comfort of the woods, which for Flo is a clichéd representation of her homeland, a forested refuge. A parallel to this film can be seen in a work that Flo created after returning to Estonia, *Keep in Touch* (2008), a photographic performance where the artist posed as a tourist in her own city, taking Polaroid snapshots of herself in front of the displays at the Estonian National Museum, in a forced effort to reaffirm her ties to her national, cultural, and historic roots. While the piece may not reflect Flo’s own concerns regarding national cultural identity, it certainly represents, even if ironically, the concerns of many in the small Baltic nation.

These projects demonstrate how travel is always a negotiation of borders, cultures, and contexts. Miljanović, Nikolić, Fiodorova, and Flo all manage these negotiations in different ways, and their work reveals the complexity involved in managing the shifting positions of artists from post-conflict and post-Soviet nations. If, for Kaufmann, Dossin, and Joyeux-Prunel, “only an understanding of history as an outcome of the continuing circulation of materials, people and ideas can escape from the hypostasis of cultural entities such as ‘Western and non-Western’” (2015, 2), then these artists, in foregrounding the circulation of “materials, people and ideas” in these particular artworks insofar as they both comprise mobile individuals and are also about that process of movement, demonstrate the manner in which contemporary art and the position of the contemporary artist involve continuous negotiation, not to mention a complex set of movements and (strategic) moves. Like the above authors, the artists in this section “emphasize,” through their own work, “questions of transcultural encounters and exchanges as circulation” (2015, 1). For example, Miljanović’s *Taxi to Berlin* was a durational artwork that took place across borders and time zones, and in fact was constituted as much by the “in between” spaces—between Banja Luka and Berlin—as the arrival or destination cities. Likewise, Flo’s *Multi Travels* is both about emigration and return, and the transformation that happens (or does not happen) in-between to both the subject who moves and the individuals s/he encounters in the new territory. In the following section, I expand on this concept further, demonstrating how artists used the backdrop of the Venice Biennale to foreground the transcultural encounters and exchanges taking place at this major international art exhibition.

Hijacking Venice

For many artists, the Venice Biennale still represents a pinnacle of artistic achievement, and being selected to exhibit their work at the longest-running festival of art is a mark of success. In 1997, when there was no Kosovar or Albanian representation at the Biennale, Sislej Xhafa created a mobile *Clandestine Pavilion* in a performance where he walked around the city with an Albanian flag, kicking a football, dressed in the uniform of the Albanian national soccer team, with a tape recorder broadcasting

an Albania–Italy soccer match. This performance proposed a “non pavilion” in a world of “non people” (Di Pietrantonio 2005, 13), equating the lack of a national pavilion in Venice with the status of non-citizen (or non-person) in the art world. While his hijacking of the Biennale enables him to call attention to the absence of a Kosovar or Albanian representative there, he nevertheless participates in the exhibition, his itinerant position evoking the tension between presence and lack (of visibility) inherent in his act—the “impossible complicity” of his art. As a contemporary Kosovar Albanian artist, he wanders through the Giardini in search of not only a place but, more importantly, acknowledgment from those representatives of the art world in attendance. Using football as a universal language, he forms an itinerant pavilion of one, compelling viewers to engage with his work and form an audience by engaging them in impromptu play, kicking the ball back and forth with them.

By contrast, Bulgarian artist Ivan Moudov used bribery and appeasement to subtly occupy sixty-five national pavilions at the Venice Biennale in 2007, by donating nearly 2,000 bottles of Bulgarian wine to be served at the respective openings. Although there is a performative aspect of the piece in the consumption of the wine, the artist carefully presented the bottles as artworks, each with its own label including the title of the work and the artist’s name, so that, even after the wine has been consumed, the bottles and labels remain. With this piece, the artist uses his strategic positioning at an iconic gathering of contemporary artists, one that becomes the focal point of the international art world every two years, and offers an exchange: free wine for the presence of a Bulgarian artist, and thus Bulgarian art, across the city of Venice and specifically in the central pavilions in the Giardini, during the Biennale. In this piece, Moudov literalizes the circulation and flow identified with globalization, creating an artwork that is simultaneously an experience and a commodity: first, the bottles are shipped around the microcosmic world of the various Venice pavilions representing different nation-states, and then the drink is consumed by the individuals visiting the pavilions, unifying them in their experience of the performance. Finally, the bottles remain in the pavilions as discarded objects, yet their labels identify them as works of art, or traces and objects of a previous performance that had taken place. The piece stands in contrast to the institutional critique of the 1960s and 1970s, which sought to remove the art object from circulation by eliminating its materiality entirely. Instead, Moudov not only creates an art object, but a mass-produced one that is meant to circulate, be exchanged, and be (literally) consumed. Moudov’s wine, like Xhafa’s itinerant pavilion, presents an object that is “impossibly complicit” in Venice.

What seems to be an act of generosity differs from other tactics that Moudov uses in his navigations of the art world—namely, theft. In a series of actions wherein he stealthily steals small objects, pieces of art, and cultural displays in museums, the artist, like Miljanović, accepts his stereotyped role—that of the eastern European as thief or the eastern European artist as derivative. He arranges these objects, which he calls *Fragments*, in boxes, reminiscent of Duchamp’s *Boîte-en-Valise*. The artist acknowledged that this feat is not original (even his theft is a copy), and one of these boxes contains a photograph of him stealing the photograph of German artist Timm Ulrichs stealing a work of art.⁵ Moudov’s pilfering, however, has a particular significance, as it provides Bulgaria with a service—that of creating a makeshift contemporary art museum to evidence a history of Bulgarian avant-garde and neo-avant-garde art, which doesn’t really exist.⁶ The artist described this project as

enabling him to “participate in colonial art history,”⁷ looting the treasures of other nations to add to his own nation’s national collection. Like Xhafa, Moudov pushes his way into the contemporary art world by showing respect neither for borders nor for the rules of these institutions. Although at first he removes the objects from the institution, he then re-institutionalizes them under a different name: while *Fragments* was exhibited as part of Bulgaria’s official representation in the Venice Biennale in 2007 in Palazzo Zorzi, Moudov’s *Wine for Openings* managed to extend Bulgaria’s participation to the national pavilions in the Giardini, balancing on the border between official and unofficial representation.⁸

Bulgarian art historian and critic Iara Boubnova has commented on the manner in which Moudov’s work “infiltrates reality . . . creating a small pause [or] opening that provides the opportunity to see the ordinary at a different angle, with a certain disbelief and slightly didactic chuckle” (2008, 16). Instead of occupying one position or another, she describes his method as “just squeezing into the situation while using its own language and means” (2008, 16). This notion of “squeezing into” is useful, as it implies the creation and occupation of an ambiguous position for oneself. Instead of establishing an institution, Moudov disperses it by distributing its various components—scattering wine across a number of pavilions and galleries, and displaying his *Fragments* in various locales. Both his theft (of fragments) and gifting (of wine) literalize the flow and circulation of goods characteristic of globalization.

Tanja Ostojić’s 2001 performance during the Venice Biennale’s opening days, *I’ll Be Your Angel*, adds another dimension to these geopolitical issues—that of the place of the *woman* artist, specifically the eastern European woman artist, in the Western art world. During the piece, Ostojić acted as an escort to Harald Szeemann, director of that year’s Biennale, following him around the event dressed in *haute couture*. The performance not only addressed the power structures at work in the Biennale, with the grand vision of the curator at the helm, but the problematic relationship between artist and curator, especially when the artist is young or aspiring (and thus relatively powerless) and the curator renowned and established, and therefore in a position of power. Initially, Szeemann invited Ostojić to propose a piece for the 1999 Biennale, but Paola Barta, President of that year’s Biennale, was not interested in a project that would not last the entire duration of the exhibition. Ostojić was able to enact this piece two years later and used the performance to occupy a central and focal position during the opening of one of the most prestigious art events of the year.

Unlike Moudov, Xhafa, and Ostojić, who sought ways to enter the Venice Biennale, Nela Hasanbegović’s 2011 *Pavilion for Bosnia Herzegovina* ignores the Italian setting and provides an alternative venue to showcase contemporary art from Bosnia, by constructing her own pavilion in Počitelj, near Mostar. Bosnia was absent from the biennale for several years, primarily owing to local politics, until Mladen Miljanović was selected to represent the country in 2013. In the aftermath of the war and the division of the country into three separate governing factions, there was disagreement as to how to select an individual to represent the divided nation. Not only does the pavilion eschew the so-called center for the periphery, it creates a showcase of contemporary art in a very remote setting, thirty miles from the city of Mostar and 500 miles from Venice, in a village with a population of 900. Like Nikolić, Hasanbegović brought her pavilion to the “wrong place” for contemporary art, at least relative to Venice. Hasanbegović’s temporary intervention eventually became permanent, as Počitelj erected a proper structure, metaphorically eliminating the need for a pavilion

representing Bosnia on the other side of the Adriatic, in Venice. Although a stable structure, it facilitates ephemeral performances, by everyday citizens, in their own private Biennale, several hundred miles down the coast from Venice.

Finally, another nation with a complicated history related to the Venice Biennale is Moldova, which has often been unable to finance a representation in Italy. In 2011, Tatiana Fiodorova designed a T-shirt to compensate for Moldova's lack of official participation at Venice that year, with the phrase "Artist Without Pavilion" stamped across it. Some of these shirts were worn around Chişinău as part of an action at the beginning of summer 2011 and, due to a lack of funding to travel to Venice, another set of these same T-shirts were displayed in Venice in an exhibition of Moldovan artists entitled "Ghost Pavilion," similar to Xhafa's 1997 *Clandestine Pavilion*, which took place during the Biennale.

Each of these artists used performance art to reproduce the global flow of goods and (cultural) capital, in order to circumvent the bureaucratic, financial, or other structures or obstructions that would have otherwise prevented them from exhibiting or being professionally present at the Biennale. In all of these examples, the artists' presence in Venice, whether at a pavilion or not, whether sanctioned or not, was not the ultimate goal of their infiltration. Rather, the artists utilized the potency of the space and institution to challenge its hegemonic structure and approach yet also negotiate their own place within it, through the circulation of artworks and individuals. Consequently, it is not the fact that the wine bottles in Moudov's *Wine for Openings* move from Bulgaria to Italy that is significant, but the fact that the bottle of wine becomes part of a ritual of shared experience—the casual conversation had over a communal consumption of alcohol, which can bridge numerous types of boundaries between individuals. Similarly, Xhafa's *Clandestine Pavilion* is at once an occupation and an ephemeral performance, a statement and an engagement or negotiation with audiences and the authorities (insofar as his "pavilion" was mobile, unofficial, and, technically, illegal); in essence, the artwork was a shared conversation or game of kick between the artist and others.

Cultural Goods: Clothing and Cuisine

While the performances and artworks in relation to Venice demonstrate the complicated relationship between artists and the institution, in particular the Biennale, as well as the effort required for some artists (and nations) to enter that institution, the focus in this section is on artists who take as their subject matter the goods and services that flow across borders, and the significance of these cultural objects and products in relation to place and identity.

In Tatiana Fiodorova's video performance, *European Clothing* (2010), she emphasizes the desire to travel to and be considered part of western Europe, represented by the acquisition of a new wardrobe. The piece documents the artist's journey through the streets of Chişinău to the Central Market, which is full of Western goods—or their cheap imitation from elsewhere. When she arrives at the market, she attempts to buy "European" clothing so that she can fit in in the "West," and manages to afford what the artist describes as Western-style T-shirt, skirt, and shoes, but has no money left for new underwear. Thus, she has to keep wearing her old-fashioned Soviet-style unisex underwear, which she recalls was worn by both boys and girls during the Soviet period. In the end, she realizes that no matter how

she manages to change her outward appearance with new clothing, the Soviet past that she experienced will still shape her identity.⁹ In the artist's words, the piece is a "metaphor for a complex and controversial transformation from Soviet girl to European woman through applying themselves the European standards [*sic*]"¹⁰—a transformation that the artist demonstrates is, while perhaps desired, nevertheless impossible, insofar as it is not possible to change or erase one's past, much less its influence on the individual. While physical borders may have changed, along with political structures, the impact of the past on the present remains, lingering beneath the surface of the everyday, much like the garments the artist wears underneath her street clothes.

Moldovan artist Ghenadie Popescu also reacted to the newly-introduced free market economy in his work with new clothes, by fashioning a suit for himself, one that signified the time of transition for him, made from the plastic plaid raffia bags often used by migrants and refugees—the same ones used by Fiodorova in *I Go*. Both artists utilized the bags as a reference to eastern Europe, Popescu commenting that for him the suit says, "I am from here. This is all that I can afford."¹¹ In 2006, the artist created a public performance entitled *Bag (Torba)*, in which he walked around Chișinău's Central Market wearing the suit, looking at different items—including the very bags that his suit was made of, which were for sale there. These bags started appearing in the country in the 1990s; prior to that, the plastic ones that are now customary in grocery stores were nearly impossible to come by throughout the Soviet Union. With the new commodity and throwaway culture came an influx of goods to buy—as well as the disposable bags to carry them home in. In the end, these bags represent a range of shifts that emerged with the new free market culture, as well as the global circulation of both people and goods.

In 2002, glancing at the cover of the *Manifesta 4* newsletter, Moldovan artist Pavel Braila discovered that it consisted of a map of Europe with no lines designating his small country of Moldova. The artist responded with his own ironic commentary—a poster that he created with Manuel Raeder, wherein they added a hand-written note, with the phrase *Probably Moldova Doesn't Exist*, to the map of that very same cover. Echoing Xhafa, this poster suggests that Moldovan artists are non-people from a non-place. Eastern Europe may have been "invented," the Balkans may be "imagined," but Moldova—at least for *Manifesta*, the roving European Biennale of contemporary art—is invisible (see Todorova, 2009; Wolff, 1996). Much like Flo, who created a performance in which she "represented" her country abroad, Braila followed this experience of discovering the inaccurate map with the sincere gesture of introducing parts of Moldovan culture to visitors to his exhibitions, through the vehicle of food. Following a screening of a video work by the artist, he would often host a food performance. Like Moudov, he serves the audience local wine, this time Moldovan and imported from Moldova to Germany or the Netherlands by his father, along with his mother's homemade *zeama* (chicken soup) and other local dishes. In importing this food, he makes use of the informal transportation channels and networks that citizens use to maintain contact between home and abroad, such as the truck and coach drivers who will take goods abroad along with their regular goods and passengers, for rates that are cheaper than DHL or FedEx, not to mention being faster and more reliable.

Ghenadie Popescu likewise uses food as a vehicle—literally and figuratively—to share Moldovan national traditions and bridge people across borders. In the

long-durational performance *MM* (2008), the artist pulled a model of a giant *Mămăligă*, a national dish made of polenta, across the country and into neighboring Romania. In crossing the Moldovan border into the EU (and the former border between the Soviet Union and its satellites), his movement and his mobile *Mămăligă* unite two regions, the nation-state of Moldova and the Romanian region of Moldavia, which share both language and cultural traditions, yet remain divided by a contrived geo-political (and EU) border. The aim of his performance was simply to walk the distance, meeting and chatting with people along the way, with the conversations struck and the connections made constituting the work of art. Here, Popescu uses the simple tool of human interaction, in perhaps a sincerer manner than Flo's *Multi Travels* video offered, to link people across borders, both metaphysical and real.

While the artists in the previous section demonstrated the manner in which art objects and artists themselves participate in the global circulation of goods, here Fiodorova and Popescu draw attention to particular everyday objects flowing across borders and their meaning and significance both for them and their compatriots in post-Soviet Moldova. Popescu and Braila then enter into this market with their own national cultural products—wine, *zeama*, and *mămăligă*, utilizing the platform of art to showcase the small nation on the international stage. Rather than accept the lack of acknowledgement by Manifesta, Braila urges the art world to recognize Moldova,



Plate 12 Ghenadie Popescu, *MM*, 2008. Video still of a performance in Moldova and Romania

Courtesy of the artist

or at least bribes them to, in a manner similar to Moudov with his *Wine for Openings*. Whether critiquing the market, acknowledging it, or rejecting it—as Popescu did in his remote country walk—all of the artists utilize the “continuing circulation of goods” as both the subject matter of their art and the method of its distribution.

The artists presented in this chapter highlight the various directional movements that their artwork takes, representing a continuous cycle of exchange. All of them share concerns with regard to their status as artists in relation to their country of origin and in relation to the international art world. The various strategies they employ, from resistance and resignation to infiltration and reconciliation, demonstrate the range of ways that they address their situations as contemporary artists in a global art world, constantly negotiating and renegotiating their positions. And these positions are varied: for Miljanović and Nikolić, their concerns relate to ethnicity and geopolitics in post-conflict Bosnia and Serbia; for Fiodorova, it is her socio-economic position that is of concern, and manifest in the rejection letter from the British Embassy; for Braila, and also for Moudov and Xhafa, the interest lies in questions of visibility, stemming from the fact that their countries do not even exist in the eyes—or maps—of the international art community; and for Flo Kasearu, who is also from a smaller country, visibility is equally important, as well as the fear of the individual national cultural identity of Estonia getting lost in the EU (as it had in the USSR), and in the global arena.

The complexity of these various situations is manifest in the conflicted attitudes demonstrated by the artists and their work: Nikolić laments the phenomenon of “ethno-art,” yet he participates in it by showcasing the work of a local dirge singer in his piece; Miljanović represents himself as both the marginalized other, reduced to hanging off the balcony at his exhibition openings, and also the purported aggressor, as an occupier of international art institutions; Xhafa and Moudov do have a presence at the Biennale but not in the official Albanian, Kosovar, or Bulgarian pavilion;¹² Fiodorova instantiates both the Eastern and Western aspects of her identity, wearing the clothes that she perceives to be of a Westerner but nevertheless being unable to travel to the UK. In utilizing travel, border-crossings, and national cultural markers, all of these artists present their experiences as artists in a global art world, where no position is stable or consistent, but a constant negotiation, thus constantly in flux. While the artworks discussed in this text have had at their core the issue of access to the art world (or its perceived center), these works are not meant to be taken as representative of these artists’ oeuvres, which are much more complex and diverse. In singling out these works, I have tried to demonstrate the manner in which some contemporary artists from the former communist countries of central and eastern Europe have dealt with the lingering issues of center and periphery, in addition to globalization, in very specific instances in work.

Notes

- 1 See the ABC Gallery website: http://acbgaleria.hu/index.php?searchenginerUrl=kiallitasok/mladen_miljanovi_at_the_edge.141.html&pageid=272&language=en.
- 2 The Zastava was a compact car popular in the 1970s and 1980s, manufactured in Yugoslavia, similar in popularity and cultural cache to the Trabant in East Germany and the Lada or Zhiguli in the Soviet Union.
- 3 The artist prefers to be referred to by her first name in written texts.

- 4 This type of rhetoric and approach is similar to one that I experienced when I was living in Latvia from 2004 to 2009. There was a constant drive to create a brand for the country, draw people to it for tourism or other reasons, and make its unique cultural contributions known.
- 5 The reference is to Timm Ulrichs' *Stolen Objects*, 1969–1972.
- 6 The debate as to whether Bulgaria had an avant-garde or neo-avant-garde is an ongoing discussion among cultural theorists in the country. As a case in point, Piotr Piotrowski stated that he did not include Bulgaria in *In the Shadow of Yalta* because it did not have an avant-garde tradition. While many art historians maintain that there was no real avant-garde tradition to speak of, others will claim that it did exist, but was hidden, or that there were various isolated examples that one can point to. Vera Mlechevska, in conversation with the author in Sofia, June 2014.
- 7 Ivan Moudov, in an interview with the author in Sofia, May 30, 2014.
- 8 While no official record of the reception of the piece has been recorded, the artist commented that, in general, people enjoyed consuming the wine as well as the cleverness of the mechanism concocted by the artist in order to infiltrate the various pavilions.
- 9 See <https://tatianafiodorova.wordpress.com/2011/11/15/oberlist-muzeul-zemstvei-chisinau-circumvention---expozitie-8-noiembrie-2011-ora-1900/>.
- 10 Ibid
- 11 Ghenadie Popescu, in an interview with the author in Chişinău, Moldova, March 31, 2014.
- 12 Moudov did exhibit his *Fragments* in Palazzo Zorzi, which was the location for the Bulgarian representation that year, but his wine bottles were not exhibited in the national pavilion of his nation.

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13 Artistic Responses to LGBTQI Gaps in Archives

From World War II Asian
America to Postwar Soviet
Estonia

Alpesh Kantilal Patel

In this chapter, I cast a gaze across the globe to consider artistic practices that suggest novel methods of addressing the gaps in material culture, or the complete erasure of the subjectivity of lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans*, queer, and intersexual (LGBTQI)-identified individuals in archives.¹ I consider San Francisco, California-based Tina Takemoto's video *Looking for Jiro* (2011) alongside Tallinn, Estonia-based Jaanus Samma's installation *Not Suitable for Work: A Chairman's Tale* (2016). Takemoto explores the homoerotica and material connected to World War II incarceration camps that are part of gay Japanese American Jiro Onuma's (1904–1990) archive, housed in the Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender Historical Society in San Francisco, California, whereas Samma considers documents that are culled from official Estonian historical archives regarding Juhan Ojaste's (1921–1990) sodomy trial during the early postwar era.

Minor Transnational Approaches to Sexual Geography, or, Where Homophobia Meets Communism

I will begin by sketching out the contexts of “Asian America” and Soviet-era Estonia, admittedly strange bedfellows, with respect to homophobia. Scholar of American history Erika Lee, in her book *The Making of Asian America*, notes that the construct “Asian America” broadly refers to twenty-four distinct immigrant groups and a history that goes back half a millennium (2015, 3). Here, I will narrow my discussion to subject matter that Takemoto's work partially addresses: the period in the United States immediately after the surprise attack by the Imperial Japanese Navy Air Service on Pearl Harbor, Hawaii in 1941. In part because of this event, President Franklin D. Roosevelt ratified Executive Order 9066 on February 19, 1942, which led to the placement of approximately 120,000 subjects of Japanese descent into wartime incarceration camps.² They were euphemistically referred to as “War Relocation Centers” by the government.³ Many would remain incarcerated for four years and three months, or until the war ended. Crucial to my argument is that the fear of the Japanese was accompanied by a more general rise in anti-communist paranoia; and this, in turn, was entangled with homophobia. Even at the highest level of government, homosexuality was seen as endemic to the communist Soviet Union. As the United States Department of the Bureau of Diplomatic Security readily

admits, “[h]omosexuals and Communism were quickly conflated” in and around the era of McCarthyism, which saw a series of accusations of treason by means of allegations rather than evidence (2011, 128). Though Onuma, whose archive Takemoto examines, was not officially persecuted for his homosexuality, he was doubly vulnerable, as both Japanese American and gay, to being cast as a traitor.

In another part of the world, in 1940, just two years before the onset of the incarceration of Japanese Americans, the Russian Federation’s Criminal Code replaced that of Estonia when the Soviets occupied the country and thereby re-criminalized male sodomy (Veispak 1991, 110).⁴ As noted by activist Lilian Kotter (1996, 53), though women were not explicitly named in the law, same-sex relationships between them were not condoned. As Estonian historian Teet Veispak perspicaciously writes, sexual liberation in the Soviet Union was considered as promoting individuality, supposedly a vice of the capitalist West (1991, 111). Homosexuality, then, was considered a threat to the core values of communism.

In both the US and the Soviet Union, homosexuality became tantamount to a betrayal of the state. What I am suggesting through reading these two histories/historical instances together is an alternative mapping of sexual geographies beyond the local and national toward something that is closer in spirit to what Françoise Lionnet and Shu-mei Shih have termed “minor transnationalism” (2005).⁵ Here, the transnational is understood as connections that are not between dominant, Western metropolitan locations but instead those that avoid the center and the metropolis. In addition, Lionnet and Shih suggest that an advantage of a minor transnational look is that it allows for a discussion beyond vertical relationships of power within nations. For example, LGBTQI Asian American subjects are positioned against an unmarked heterosexual, white American populace, while LGBTQI subjects from Estonia are situated against heterosexual Estonians. A minor transnational framework allows for a discussion of the specter of homosexuality and communism across these discursive spaces, rather than only within them as closed systems.

Minor Transnationalism and Horizontal Art Histories

At the same time as US-based Lionnet and Shih were theorizing their “minor transnationalism,” Poland-based art historian Piotr Piotrowski was fleshing out his “horizontal art history,” which is conceptually closely allied with it (Piotrowski 2006). More to the point, the latter allows me squarely to bring the conversation above, regarding a minor transnational approach to mapping sexual geographies, to the writing of eastern European art histories.⁶ In his theory, Piotrowski provocatively considers Edward Said’s term “Orientalism” in the context of how art history paradigms produced in the West are applied to art produced outside of it. He argues that, if the West is conceived as but one of the many regions in the world, it is possible to have conversations beyond the power differentials of the West as the center and everything else as the periphery (Piotrowski 2008, 4; 2015). Because the center often positions the periphery as being located or “rooted in a particular context,” while picturing itself as context-less, Piotrowski suggests exploring the idea of “provincializing centers” because “everything [even the center] is rooted in a particular context” (2015). He writes that such an approach allows for a comparison of “local” scenes. Drawing on US-based socio-cultural anthropologist Arjun Appadurai’s definition of “locality,” Piotrowski cautions that locality “should be

approached in open terms crossing mono-ethnic identity; as a theoretical construction open to exchange with other (e.g., neighboring) localities, as well as cultural centers” (2008, 4). It is in this vein that I am bringing together the works of Takemoto and Samma, which I discuss in the remainder of this text.

While the artists provide biographical details of the subjects whose archives they explore in their artworks, they are not documentary in any way. In fact, I will argue that, through a strategy that blurs truth and fiction, the artworks provide a means of inhabiting the trauma and victimization associated with the incarceration camps and the sodomy trials while simultaneously re-orienting these narratives toward more generative ends. Moreover, Takemoto’s work expands the conversation beyond gay male sexuality to other non-gender-specific subjectivities (not least of which is that of the artist), whereas Samma’s restores agency to the subject whose archive he explores. Both works suggest alternative ways of relating to the elision of LGBTQI subjectivities in archives. To define and expand upon this point, I will draw on a theory based on women and gender studies scholar Ann Cvetkovich’s writing on queer archive activism in my discussion of Takemoto’s work, and on Martinican philosopher Édouard Glissant on opacity in my discussion of Samma’s work.

Queer Feminist Archive Activism: Tina Takemoto’s *Looking for Jiro*

There is often a dearth of material culture of women as well as minorities in the few LGBTQI archives that are extant. Supplementing these archives is important where possible. At the same time, it is useful to keep in mind that archive theory suggests not only a critique of archives but also the impossibility of creating them in the first place: the desire for records escapes representation.⁷ Even queer theory eschews or is skeptical of what visibility offers. Neither of these concepts helps to address the very real issue of how to document queer lives without creating new normatives; and how to deal with absences typical of any archive on queer lives, the traces of whom often go unmarked. Drawing on Alex Juhasz’s conceptualization of “queer archive activism” (2006), Cvetkovich notes that at least one approach is to take “an activist relation to the archive that remains alert to its absences and that uses it to create new kinds of knowledge and new kinds of collectivities” (2011, 32). Instructive in this section is my conceptualization of a variant of Cvetkovich’s use of Juhasz’s term: “queer feminist archive activism,” or, an activism toward predominately gay archives that is feminist while simultaneously conjoined with a queer relation to gay male sexuality (Patel 2016, 257).⁸ Through this framework, I will discuss lesbian-identified Asian American artist Tina Takemoto’s artwork that engages with the modest archives of a gay Asian American man she did not know: Jiro Onuma. In the process, I will consider how she productively creates new collectivities that are not gender-specific.

Takemoto was first introduced to Onuma’s archives in 2009 by American artist E.G. Crichton, who was organizing the project *Lineage: Matchmaking in the Archive*, in which she paired contemporary artists with the archives of LGBTQI individuals who had passed away. Crichton paired Takemoto with Onuma, whose personal collection resides in the queer historical archives of San Francisco, California. His collection is modest: it includes two photo albums, personal documents, and an assortment of homoerotic ephemera—all of which fit into a six-inch-wide file box (Takemoto 2014, 241).

Takemoto was most intrigued by the material connected to Onuma's incarceration in a Japanese wartime camp (2014, 248). As she discusses in an essay about the project, she realized that she had always compartmentalized Japanese American history and LGBT American history as distinct from each other. She writes that "the struggles against the racial injustice of wartime incarceration remained separate in my mind from the challenges facing LGBT Americans during the pre-Stonewall era of the 1940s and 1950s" (Takemoto 2014, 244). Emboldened by what she found in Onuma's archive, Takemoto put out a call for others who were incarcerated to share their stories of queer intimacy (2011, 2). In the end, she was not successful in gathering more stories. In fact, she never again came across other photographs or visual evidence of LGBTQI-identified Japanese Americans imprisoned in the American concentration camps (Takemoto 2014, 246–248). Interestingly, Takemoto even discovered that some of the subjects identified as Onuma in images by other researchers in his archive were not in fact of him, but she remained attached to them nonetheless. Her reflections on this paradox are what led her to the black-and-white short video (five minutes, forty-five seconds) she produced: *Looking for Jiro* (2011).

The video begins with a grainy, black-and-white scene in which Takemoto, wearing a short-sleeved white shirt and dark-colored pants, unfolds an apron. It is the documentation of a live performance by Takemoto. At the loud "crack" made when Takemoto shakes open the apron, Madonna's single "Hung Up" (2005) begins to play. The lyrics "time goes by so slowly," which open the song, point to what the passage of time might have been like for those in the camps. It repeats in the title slides that indicate that the work is "A Queer Meditation on Japanese Americans incarcerated during World War II" and "Inspired by JIRO ONUMA (1904–1990), a gay inmate who worked in the mess hall and liked muscle men."⁹ With the text, it becomes clear that Takemoto's clothes signify that she is in drag as Onuma in the mess halls.

The video often includes quick cuts between Takemoto's performance and official WWII US propaganda footage of wartime incarceration camps—everything from pedestrian goings-on, such as food being served and eaten in the dining halls and a young man dreamily looking off into the distance, to training exercises of the 442nd Japanese American Regiment of the US Army. Ironically, while the Japanese were corralled into camps, the United States government allowed men of Japanese descent of a certain age to sign up for the armed forces. At first glance, each video clip is easily discernible as that of a staged performance or a document of the camps, but the quick editing eventually blurs these significations. The "documentation" of the camps is a propaganda film, as I previously noted, and therefore just as staged as the art performance. In addition, Takemoto's contemporary performance is shot in a grainy style that is more typical of footage that is dated, whereas the historical footage is clean, crisp, and sharp. What is truth and fiction or past and present becomes unclear in this sort of formal structure. By creating this condition, I argue, Takemoto provides the possibility for viewers to see Japanese American males not only as victims of the war but also—in the aforementioned specific mix of edited clips in Takemoto's work—as dreamers, American heroes, and even queer.

At a later point, the aforementioned title slides cut to a grainy scene again in which Takemoto is putting on a baker's hat; to more propaganda images of the wartime incarceration camps; and back to Takemoto, engaging in the mundane act of sweeping, at which point the upbeat dance and disco beats of "Hung Up" begin.

The music then switches seamlessly to the band ABBA's song "Gimme! Gimme! Gimme! (A Man After Midnight)" (1979), to which Takemoto lip syncs and dances (with her broom). The track, a sample of which Madonna used in "Hung Up," also continues to play in tandem with vintage footage of musclemen posing in homage to the trove of male physique magazines Onuma had collected (Takemoto 2014, 241–242).¹⁰ The themes of unrequited love and unfulfilled yearnings in the lyrics of "Gimme! Gimme! Gimme! (A Man After Midnight)" and "Hung Up" might refer to the improbability of a same-sex relationship for Onuma in (or outside of) the camps and the poignant, unfulfilled platonic desires of the artist to know more about Onuma.¹¹ However, the lyrics of both songs are paired with upbeat disco dance beats. In the end, the dissonance between the pathos of the lyrics and the glee of the tempo are held in tension. The work neither discounts Onuma's admittedly compromised position or the sparse material culture related to his gay life that Takemoto encountered, nor forecloses the possibility of hope or optimism for intimacy, sexual or otherwise.¹²

Toward the end of Takemoto's video, she is shown removing the bread she has kneaded and baked with Crisco, a vegetable shortening that she then uses to grease up her forearms.¹³ Making a fist with her hand, she inserts her arm into the hole of the bread and repeats the action with her other hand into the hole of another bread. The bread stays on her upper arms like floatables and becomes make-shift muscles when Takemoto takes up the poses of muscle men.

Images of her inserting her arms into the bread are repeated twice and conjure images of fisting, a sex act of inserting a hand or fist into a rectum that is typically



Figure 13.1 Tina Takemoto, *Looking for Jiro*, 2011. Production stills
Photograph by Bret Parker. Courtesy of the artist



Plate 13 Tina Takemoto, *Looking for Jiro*, 2011. Production stills
Photo by Maxwell Leung. Courtesy of the artist

associated with gay males. The bread glistens and resembles the flesh of a body. Rather than being abstracted by the state, as in the propaganda videos, and considered abject, the body here is transformed into a site of pleasure and empowerment. Takemoto's depiction of a butch Asian male is related to her identification "as a masculine-of-center gender nonconforming dyke" as she noted in an email to me on May 27, 2017. This gesture is a welcome redress of contemporary visual culture that effeminizes Asian and Asian American males.¹⁴ In this way, too, Takemoto's work expands the remit of the archive of Onuma beyond gay Asian male sexuality by bringing to the fore a range of non-gender-specific identities, including her own.

The Right to Opacity: Jaanus Samma's *Not Suitable for Work: A Chairman's Tale*

Takemoto's work re-considers the gaps in LGBTQI archives through what I have argued is an act of queer feminist archival activism. Jaanus Samma's work is concerned, I will illustrate, at least partially with the agency, or lack thereof, of Juhan Ojaste, the documents of whose trial can be found in the Estonian Historical Archives. Samma would often hear stories about Ojaste, a charismatic individual referred to as the "Chairman," while compiling oral testimonies for the 2011 special issue of Warsaw-based artist Karol Radziszewski's *DIK Fagazine* that focused on homosexuality in some of the countries of eastern Europe before 1989 (Viola, Põldsam, and Samma 2015, 1: 89). The moniker refers to the fact that he was, in fact, a chairman of several collective farms, or *kolkhozy*.¹⁵ *Kolkhozy* were an agricultural system based on collective farm ownership that was imposed upon Estonians after Soviet occupation and were implemented across the USSR (Viola et al. 2015, 1: 18). If successful, as Ojaste was, the head of a *kolkhoz* could receive privileges not available to most subjects. Despite being a successful chairman, accusations of homosexuality did not render him immune from being expelled from the Communist party, as he was in 1964 (Viola et al. 2015, 1: 19). As noted earlier, homosexuality was tantamount to treason and, in this case, anti-communism. The Chairman would endure a humiliating trial, complete eighteen months of hard labor, and, upon release, relocate, and work in low-paying jobs. From all accounts, the Chairman led a convivial, if sometimes contentious, life in the city of Tartu, to which he moved. His apartment was often the site of "raging parties," and in the 1980s many would come to his apartment to watch pornography—primarily heterosexual, since this was all that was available—on his VCR (rare for anyone to own at that time). Much of what we know about the Chairman's life, though, is based largely on gossip, and even the details of his death are unclear: he was killed in his home by an individual who was allegedly a prostitute and a Russian marine, in 1990 (Viola et al. 2015, 1: 19), incidentally the year homosexuality was decriminalized in Estonia and when Onuma died.

Intrigued by the stories about the Chairman, Samma decided to find out more about him. This eventually led him to the criminal files of the Chairman in the state's archives, where he found copious documents (167 in total) such as court rulings and transcripts of interrogations and court hearings, redacted versions of which are available in the catalog (Viola et al. 2015, 2: 1–65), for his installation *Not Suitable for Work: A Chairman's Tale*. The artwork was commissioned for the Estonian pavilion for the 2015 Venice Biennial and it was based on his research into

the historical archives as well as the oral histories he collected on the Chairman. I will be discussing this work as installed and presented a year later at Estonia's Museum of Occupations, which chronicles the subjugation of the country by Soviets and Germans from 1940 to 1991.

Outside of the installation, Samma hung a plethora of black-and-white photographs that depicted the supposedly quaint, bucolic, and happy life of Estonian subjects under Soviet rule. As one enters the installation, the first room presents a timeline of the life of the Chairman that acts as a foil for the propaganda images. A display case is also included in this room: on one side is ominous-looking forensic equipment, which we later see used by case investigators to molest the Chairman in the short film played in the adjacent room. On the opposite side of the display case are items such as gloves, a medal, and a green fedora—all of which are presumably material remains of the Chairman's life.

In this room are black-and-white stills from another short film playing in the adjacent room, which are hung on the walls, too. The stills are of a recreation of the moments between the Chairman and the (alleged) prostitute leading up to the Chairman's death. The backdrops of the *mise-en-scène* include painterly renderings of clouds through which rays of light are emerging. Though clearly the individuals are actors and therefore the film is not a documentary, the painted backdrops further instantiate the viewer's Brechtian distanciation from the depicted action. Taken together so far, the photographs outside and the stills inside are both staged.

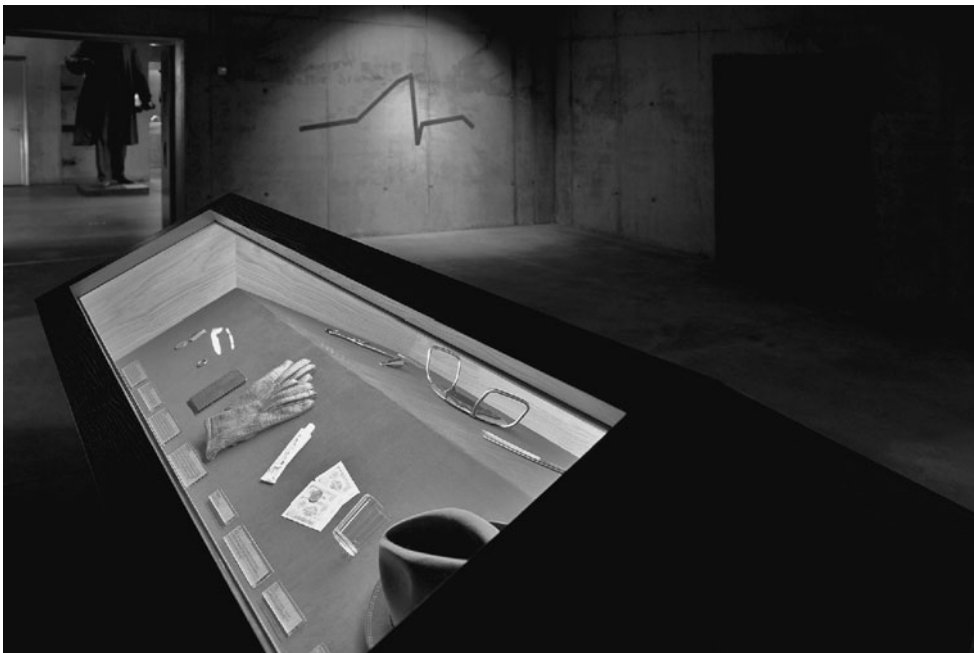


Figure 13.2 Jaanus Samma, *Not Suitable for Work: A Chairman's Tale*. Installation view from Museum of Occupations, Tallinn, 2016

Courtesy of the artist

Moreover, as Samma notes in the catalog, he has constructed one narrative of the Chairman from his conversations with three different individuals. Samma notes that this approach of merging stories emphasizes “the intermediated nature of the myth that surrounds him” and the “fragmented, sometimes conflicting perspectives” of the Chairman’s story (Viola et al. 2015, 2: n.p.). The veracity of the facts on the timeline and the authenticity of the material culture in the display cases are called into question as well. Much like in Takemoto’s work, Samma takes an approach that intertwines the documentary with fiction and, in the process, confuses them both. He opens up the possibility for the Chairman to be seen in a manner that goes beyond that which was found in the official archives.

There is a room on one side of the main room playing films (realized in collaboration with director Marko Raat) and on the other side a winding staircase. In the former, two screens are installed on opposite sides of the room from each other. A viewer can watch one or the other, but not both at the same time. A series of short films, loosely based on the interviews as well as the criminal files, are on view. One short film includes a scene of “watersporting”—erotic play involving bodily fluids, typically urine—in a public restroom between the Chairman and the prostitute.



Plate 14 Jaanus Samma and Marko Raat, *Public Toilet*, 2015. Production still, part of Samma’s installation *Not Suitable for Work: A Chairman’s Tale* in Museum of Occupations, Tallinn, 2016

Photo by Anna Stina Treumund. Courtesy of the artist

In another film, a penis covered in black ink is being marked for a print (as if a finger) and prodded by various instruments, some of which are in the display cases in the other room. The artist explained in an email to me on March 12, 2017, that there is no evidence a penis print was taken; it was a metaphor for the invasiveness of the entire court trial. Continuing the theme above of blurring truth and fiction, though the films appear to represent re-creations of actual court events, this is not always the case. The series of winding stairs to the left of the central room are reminiscent of those found in a theater or opera house. They lead up to a loge where opera music is playing—seemingly completing the effect of the artwork’s high drama.

Commissioned by Samma, the aria was composed by Maarja Kangro and written by Johanna Kivimägi (Viola et al. 2015, 1: 109–120). The drama is put into motion even before entering the installation: the walls of the ramp, down which one walks to the museum basement where Samma’s work is installed, have been lined with a plush red carpet that seems appropriate for an opera house. This all leads to an anticlimactic moment, though: when one looks out from the loge, there is nothing to see but a dark void.

Samma’s work sits at the crossroads of the haunting archival absences that accompany histories of violence and the desire to reveal suppressed queer subjectivities. As Cvetkovich writes, “the ephemeral nature of queer life often necessitates a creative approach to archiving . . . an acknowledgement of that which escapes the archive” (2011, 32). I argue that Samma accomplishes this by giving back to the Chairman what Édouard Glissant would characterize as his right to “opacity” that he was denied (1997, 189–195). Glissant’s opacity is a concept he deploys to defend the right of the postcolonial subject not to be appropriated by discourses of power that originate elsewhere.¹⁶ The opacity of Samma’s installation—its inability to be read either as truth or as fiction—poignantly provides the possibility for the Chairman to reclaim his subjectivity from the archives: the right not to be known or seen (literally in the void I referenced above) or understood. The phrase “Not Suitable for Work” in the artwork’s title is instructive in this context. It refers to language often used to announce content on the Internet that is purportedly not appropriate for viewing in the workplace, and Samma appropriates it to suggest that the Chairman’s criminalization was tantamount to the branding of “NSFW” on his forehead. This level of transparency would work against Glissant’s note that opacity is “the most perennial guarantee of participation and confluence” (1997, 191).

I argue, too, that the rectangular blocks over the Chairman’s eyes in the photographs in the catalog can be seen not only as protecting his privacy but also returning agency to him. Indeed, opacity is not the right to privacy but the right not to be interpellated into discourses of power, such as those of the Nazis and Soviets that the Museum of Occupations provides as context for the work. Samma’s work re-configures the experience of viewing some of the museum’s objects. For instance, across from his installation are the museum’s toilets, in front of which are installed larger-than-life sculptures of former high-ranking Communist officials from the collection. The museum certainly disempowers the depicted men by placing them adjacent to the toilets. However, the watersporting scene in the bathroom in Samma’s work brings fresh meaning to the metaphorical “draining” of power implied by the latter: for instance, the fact that homosexuality in western and eastern Europe was taboo resulted in many gay men meeting at saunas, parks, and public toilets (Hillhouse 1991, 67).¹⁷ In this way, I would argue that Samma’s more sexually explicit act of



Figure 13.3 Jaanus Samma, *Loge*, 2013. Part of Samma's installation *Not Suitable for Work: A Chairman's Tale* in Museum of Occupations, Tallinn, 2016

Photo by Johannes Säre. Courtesy of the artist

watersporting not only re-casts the toilets as sites of queer empowerment but also where opacity (the right not to be interpellated into the logic of the state) became possible.

Coda: Toward Subject-less Art Histories

At stake in this chapter in the context of this anthology is the importance of thinking about eastern European art histories beyond the region. Given the artworks I explore in this article, I would expand this to art histories of other discursively bound spaces, such as Asian America. Of course, this is not to replace or render obsolete the importance of recovering LGBTQI artistic practices within eastern Europe or Asian America. In terms of eastern European art history, Polish art historian Paweł Leszkowicz has been a trailblazer in making visible the practices of gay-identified artists from the countries of eastern Europe (Leszkowicz 2010a; 2010b). This project needs to continue, as does the bringing of attention to those by LGBTQI subjects from this region. Moreover, in 2017, the anthology *Queering Contemporary Asian American Art* also made visible a range of artistic practices of Asian American and LGBTQI-identified artists, including that of Takemoto (Kina and Bernabe 2017).

As Piotrowski's theory of horizontal art history indicates, though, considerations beyond vertical power dynamics within systems of thought can be crucial to realizing entanglements beyond the region.

It is worth noting that eastern European art history and Asian American art history are already based on a transnational approach to art history. That is, both these art histories are not inherently based on essentialized notions of regional identity. Kandice Chuh suggests in her seminal book *Imagine Otherwise: On Asian Americanist Critique* that a "strategic *anti*-essentialism," rather than bounded notions of identity, is what coheres Asian American studies (2003, 10).¹⁸ Chuh is concerned with literature, but her point is transferable to Asian American art history as well as to eastern European art history. Chuh provocatively writes that, rather than evincing a "desire for subjectivity," the field of Asian American studies should be "subjectless" (2003, 151). This chapter is consistent with this ideology, which is a reminder of the porousness rather than rigidity of the region or nation.

Notes

- 1 The asterisk in trans* refers to all transgender, non-binary, and gender non-conforming identities.
- 2 Statistic sourced from the Harry S. Truman Library and Museum website educational resource entitled "The War Relocation Authority & the Incarceration of Japanese-Americans During World War II."
- 3 The word "internment" is sometimes used to describe the camps. However, I prefer to use "incarceration," per historian Roger Daniels' compelling argument (2005).
- 4 Prior to this, the Republic of Estonia (1918–1940) had repealed similar laws inherited from the Russian Empire, but these amendments were moot in the newly-formed Estonian Soviet Socialist Republic (ESSR). Homosexuality was still punishable in the Republic of Estonia but only in the case that the partner was a minor or if violence was involved.
- 5 "Sexual geography" refers to a burgeoning field that recognizes that "sexuality is foundational to the making of social and spatial orders (cf. class, race, or gender)," as Phil Hubbard notes in his succinct overview of the field: <http://oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780199874002/obo-9780199874002-0026.xml>. The minor transnational sexual geography I map approximates my own movements. That is, I am a queer Asian American subject who was a visiting scholar in Poznań, Poland during most of 2015 and 2016, exploring contemporary artworks with LGBTQI themes.
- 6 I am putting the theories of Piotrowski, Lionnet, and Shih in conceptual contiguity in a manner similar to Belgium-based literary theorist and cultural studies scholar Mieke Bleyen's bringing together Piotrowski's horizontal art history with the writings on which Lionnet and Shih's "minor transnationalism" is partially based: those of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari on "minor literature." See Bleyen's chapter "A Minor History of Art" (2014, 53–62).
- 7 I am referring here to Jacques Derrida's *Archive Fever* (1996).
- 8 I invoke the word "activism" in "queer feminist archive activism" to be consistent with the genealogy of this theory: Cvetkovich's "queer archive activism," which in turn is based on Alex Juhász's conceptualization of it. I want to clarify, though, that activism, more broadly, has clear aims and outcomes; and, whereas an artwork might gesture toward such aims, it does not demand them. *Looking for Jiro* leans toward a kind of activism but it is not didactic.
- 9 Capitalization in original.
- 10 Onuma was particularly fascinated with the muscle man Earle Liederman, who ran a popular mail-order bodybuilding school during the 1920s and 1930s.
- 11 The following lyrics of Madonna's "Hung Up" suggest unrequited love: "Every little thing that you say or do/ I'm hung up/ I'm hung up on you/ Waiting for your call/ Baby night and day/ I'm fed up/ I'm tired of waiting on you," while those of ABBA's "Gimme!

- Gimme! Gimme! (A Man After Midnight)” suggest unfulfilled yearning: “Won’t somebody help me/ Chase the shadows away/ Gimme, gimme, gimme a man after midnight/ Take me through the darkness/ To the break of the day.” Madonna, “Hung Up,” lyrics by Madonna, Stuart Price, Benny Goran, Bror Andersson, and Bjoern K. Ulvaeus. Burbank, CA: Warner Bros. Records, 2005. Available from Google Play Music: https://play.google.com/music/preview/Tki33xvk4spjbyep5jmkbzolzii?lyrics=1&utm_source=google&utm_medium=search&utm_campaign=lyrics&pcampaignid=kp-lyrics. ABBA, “Gimme! Gimme! Gimme! (A Man After Midnight),” lyrics by Bror Andersson and Bjoern K. Ulvaeus. Stockholm: Polar Music, 1979. Available from Google Play Music: https://play.google.com/music/preview/Ta227zzqbhrep34u2uwxtejr2g4?lyrics=1&utm_source=google&utm_medium=search&utm_campaign=lyrics&pcampaignid=kp-lyrics.
- 12 Takemoto believed an image of Onuma with his lover Ronald in the archive was taken during their overlapping stay at the Topaz incarceration camps (Takemoto 2014, 266).
 - 13 Crisco only appears for the fisting scene on stage; it is not explicit in the performance.
 - 14 Tan Hoang Nguyen has published a provocative book that powerfully challenges the notion of bottoming as a disempowered position in the context of Asian American masculinity. See his book, *A View from the Bottom: Asian American Masculinity and Sexual Representation* (2014).
 - 15 His name is classified per the Estonian Personal Data Protection Act, so in the artwork only the moniker “Chairman” is used.
 - 16 Though Samma’s work is not about a postcolonial subject, it is about differentials in and abuses of power, and therefore I believe applicable here.
 - 17 See also Riikka Taavetti and Rebeka Põldsam’s essay “Rumors and Other Stories about Lesbians and Gays behind the Curtain and beyond” (Viola et al. 2015, 1: 89–107).
 - 18 Emphasis in original.

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