

# Introduction: Towards a Minor Modernism?

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## ***Towards a Minor Modernism?***

This Reader emerged out of a pedagogical experiment: a German-affiliated Hungarian-born scholar and a Polish-speaking English-born scholar designing an English-language MA course on Central-European art and culture for an international group of students.<sup>1</sup> As we considered how best to teach modernism from a Central-European perspective at the Courtauld, and discussed the methodological and narrative shifts our task would entail, we were inspired by Deleuze and Guattari's 1975 essay 'Kafka. Toward a Minor Literature'. The philosophers were interested in Franz Kafka's lived experience of multiple cultural identification, as a German-speaking Jew from Austro-Hungarian Prague, and defined the particularly Central-European features of his writing as having the hallmarks of 'a minor literature'. They argued that such literatures have a 'high coefficient of deterritorialisation', that 'everything in them is political' and 'takes on a collective value', ultimately proposing that minor modernisms embodied the 'revolutionary conditions for every literature within the heart of what is called great (or established) literature'.<sup>2</sup> We were also seeking to define how the modernisms of East-Central Europe were at the revolutionary heart of the modernist enterprise as a whole. If, for Kafka, it was the 'situation of the German language, in Czechoslovakia, as a fluid language intermixed with Czech and Yiddish' that produced the 'possibility of invention', then, for the artists that interested us, likewise, it was the fluid interpretation of the modernist idiom and its intermixing with local twists that gave rise to the particular power of their creativity.<sup>3</sup>

Our course required students to rethink European modernism as an interdependent whole, from the starting point that it could not be understood properly without an understanding of the art of East-Central Europe. From an East-Central-European perspective, it was clear that the German and the Russian art scenes were at least as relevant as the French 'art-historically acknowledged' centre in Paris.<sup>4</sup> Just as European cultural production has always been closely bound up with the history of shifting borders and patterns of migration, the interchangeability of majority and minority positions became central to our thinking. The cultural identities of key actors within the art scenes of Austria, Germany, Hungary, and the Czechoslovak and Polish Republics often remained plural despite the formation of individual nation states after the collapse of the multinational Austro-Hungarian and German empires.<sup>5</sup> Seeking to embrace the challenges of art historiography in a multi-ethnic region, we combined the study of major 'isms' of art such as Dada, Constructivism, and Surrealism with research on local artists' particular aspirations. Our course explored the region's diversity of cultures to discover the critical debates in aesthetics and politics they occasioned, and how these relate to today's art-historical concerns. We were faced with a challenge: would we be able to populate our weekly reading lists with the requisite primary and secondary sources if we were limited, in the first instance, to texts available in English? We found that we were able to take advantage of a series of indispensable sources, but we also identified certain gaps.

While there was an excellent array of significant English-language scholarship on German and Soviet art (much of it produced by British and US-based art historians), generally speaking, there was less literature available in English on developments in Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Poland, or Romania. The Hungarian art historian Éva Forgács has proposed that East-European art has tended to fall 'between narratives':

The rediscovery and art historical restoration of the Soviet Russian avant-garde resulted in the creation and acknowledgment of a narrative parallel to that of Western modernism. Cubo-futurism, Rayonism, Suprematism, Constructivism, Proun, Productivism, and their prominent representatives arose as fully-fledged chapters and agents of the Russian avant-garde with their impact on their Western counterparts fully recognized. However, the East-European art of the same historic periods [was] only fragmentarily recovered. Art from the region had to fit either the Western or the Russian narrative. So Czech Cubism and Surrealism, Polish Constructivism

and the Expressionist and Constructivist tendencies in Hungarian art were soon discovered and integrated into what became “the avant-garde of the 1920s,” but the vanguard tendencies offer, in these countries, a particularly thin section of the entirety of their modernist art. A number of innovative, idiosyncratic, and important artists were active, who, for one reason or another, never joined movements, and therefore were not integrated into any of the master narratives of modernism.<sup>6</sup>

We noted that while émigré artists such as László Moholy-Nagy had been the focus of English-language exhibition catalogues and monographs, there was often a surprising international invisibility regarding other artists who had played definitive roles in their own national contexts.<sup>7</sup> Exhibition catalogues and specialist scholarly journals in the region had only recently, and far from consistently, begun to function bilingually and to include English-language translations and, historically, it had been more common to include English-language summaries in edited volumes and journals than full translations. While there is a fair amount of relevant literature in German and in French, this, too, often remains untranslated into English. Hungarian art historian Krisztina Passuth, for instance, first surveyed avant-garde artistic connections from Prague to Bucharest in her French-language monograph in 1987, and revisited the subject in a Hungarian-language book some ten years later, but while a German version of this latter work was published in 2003, it remained inaccessible in English until the publication of an excerpted chapter here.<sup>8</sup> We thus set out to fill at least some of the gaps by translating a collection of essays into English. We were aware that there was good material that ought to be translated and made more widely available to an international audience. But before introducing the rationale for our selection of texts for the Reader, and for their thematic presentation, we would like to offer a few methodological reflections on some of the key approaches taken by scholars of East Central European art whose work is available in English, weighing up their claims in relation to the key question posed by the Polish art historian Andrzej Turowski in his short, polemical book of 1986 (still only available in French): *Existe-t-il un art de l'Europe de l'est?*, or *Is there such a thing as East-European Art?*<sup>9</sup>

Steven Mansbach's major study *Modern Art in Eastern Europe. From the Baltic to the Balkans ca. 1890–1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999) made the case that there was, and that the art of Eastern Europe deserved a survey of its own. Drawing on the network of Soros centres of art—established across the region in the 1990s—for support in carrying out his research, he set out to produce an ‘interpretative overview’ that reclaimed the ‘essential role played by eastern European artists in the genesis of the modern aesthetics with which we are familiar in the West’ to allow ‘for a fuller understanding of the history of modern culture’.<sup>10</sup> Mansbach noted that the work with which his book was concerned represented ‘an extraordinary medley of art styles, references and meanings’.<sup>11</sup> He asked how it was that the material in his book has remained a ‘terra incognita’ for so many in the West and why it was that ‘our present understanding of the modern movement in general’ had become ‘so much more partial that it was a half-century ago, when Western critics, historians, artists, and the educated public were relatively well informed about and indebted to the artistic developments from the Baltic to the Balkans?’<sup>12</sup> In examining what ‘happened to eclipse this formative modern art from the general cultural consciousness’ he pointed to a combination of factors, ranging from the resurgence of various forms of ‘cultural narrow-mindedness’ in the region in the 1930s, to the decline of the avant-garde in itself, as well as the suppression of national histories of modernism under Soviet rule, and the inaccessibility of archives until the 1990s. Above all, though, Mansbach argued that ‘the greatest limitation for a Western public’ was a ‘general ignorance of the historical, political, and social conditions to which the respective modern movements were a creative response’.<sup>13</sup> The structure of his book—with chapters devoted to: The Czech Lands; Poland and Lithuania; The Baltic States of Latvia and Estonia; The Southern Balkans of the Former Yugoslavia: Slovenia, Croatia, Serbia, and Macedonia; Romania; and Hungary—reflected his ambition to remedy this ignorance and to give readers insight into ‘the distinctive cultural and political histories to which modern art in each land was a highly original response’. His aim was to ‘avoid perpetuat[ing] the monolithic mindset that has so long obscured the singular achievements of the lands of eastern Europe’.<sup>14</sup>

Mansbach was at pains to work against the grain of the ‘cold-war tendency in the West to envisage the entire region monolithically, and the commensurate Soviet policy to denigrate strategic differences within the Eastern bloc’.<sup>15</sup> In particular, he sought to examine and foreground ‘the causal connection between national identity and the creative diversity within the modern movement’, linking modern art in the region to ‘various mid- and late-nineteenth-century movements of “national awakening”’, often laden with local ethnographic references.<sup>16</sup> He argued that ‘what progressive artists in the East borrowed from modernists in the West was not likely to be a defiant political posture but rather a repertoire of visual styles and formal solutions that might be adapted selectively to suit the prevailing conditions—aesthetic and social—in the varied cultural landscape on the eastern margins of a rapidly modernising Europe’.<sup>17</sup> Mansbach claimed that there was a ‘general absence of regular, meaningful, and mutually beneficial contact among the principal figures of the eastern European avant-gardes—relative to the rich interconnections prevailing to the west as well as those in the multinational Soviet Union to the east’, though he conceded that avant-garde magazines served as a forum for the transmission of information, and that Western galleries and artists’ studios were other transit-stations. To summarise, his emphasis was on creative diversity, hybridity, and the particular pathways and trajectories to modernism that developed in different countries in greater or lesser degrees of isolation. If Mansbach’s is an account of minor modernisms in the sense outlined by Deleuze and Guattari, it is a narrative of deterritorialisation and of the political, but if it is also to be understood as a narrative of collectivity, then it has to be of a collectivity thought of, above all, in relation to the construction of national identity.

In the same vein, Éva Forgács has argued that the idea of East-European art ‘did not—could not—originate from Eastern Europe’, claiming that artists ‘did not identify themselves as East European either during the interwar era or throughout the cold war period’.<sup>18</sup> On the contrary, she noted, ‘if they related at all to being East European, it was with an aspiration to overcome this tag. They thought of themselves as Polish, or Czech, or Slovakian, or Hungarian, or Romanian, or Yugoslav ... and, ultimately, as *European* artists’.<sup>19</sup> Belonging to a generation of intellectuals with vivid memories of ‘four decades of isolation inside the Soviet bloc’, Forgács was keen to stress the ‘internationalism of the historical avant-garde’ and the sense of there having once been a ‘pan-European intellectual community’.<sup>20</sup> She noted that the catalogue of Kassák’s 1973 posthumous exhibition in Bochum included a text by the museum director Peter Spielmann, in which he observed that the 1920s avant-gardes ‘cooperated beyond national borders ... It is extremely important for us today to understand the trends of our own time through their activity, and, learning from them, to try to overcome our national isolations’.<sup>21</sup> In stressing the internationalism of the pre-Soviet period, however, there was also a danger of failing to take on board the internationalism of experimental art across post-war Eastern Europe, on the one hand, and, more widely, the global Socialist internationalism of the Cold War, on the other. While Forgács claimed that there was all but no ‘regional discourse’ in the post-war period, as artists (inheritors of the historical avant-garde tradition) turned for the most part to developments in the West as a point of reference, rather than entering into dialogue with artists in neighbouring countries, such a thesis of isolation has been challenged in recent years by a new generation of scholars, working with a different set of priorities. It transpires that despite the division of Europe at Yalta, both the Socialist cultural bureaucracies in different satellite countries and individual artists continued to value and to foster a wide range of official and unofficial regional and global exchanges in the period, whether before or after the respective ‘thaws’ that followed the death of Joseph Stalin, at different points, in different countries.

A watershed moment in overcoming some of the scholarly challenges outlined above came in 2002 with the publication of the primary source reader *Between Worlds. A Sourcebook of Central European Avant-Gardes, 1910–1930* (Cambridge, Mass., and London: MIT Press, 2002) in connection with the Los Angeles County Museum of Art exhibition *Central European Avant-Gardes: Exchange and Transformation*. Both exhibition and reader took a trans-cosmopolitan approach to the avant-garde art of the region, focussing on dialogues and exchanges among artistic circles in Belgrade, Berlin, Bucharest, Budapest, Kraków, Dessau, Ljubljana, Łódź, Poznań, Prague, Vienna,

Warsaw, Weimar, and Zagreb. The publications associated with the exhibition reflected the degree to which 'the avant-garde had become at once regionally diverse and irretrievably international' and foregrounded the 'ambition among the members of the avant-garde for universality in a world of nation-states'.<sup>22</sup> The curator Timothy O. Benson asked what it might mean to try to 'comprehend a world of locales without center or peripheries' in which artists sought to 'develop the grammar of a new mode of communication that would lead to a new collective consciousness'.<sup>23</sup> For the most part, he surmised, the Central European Avant-Gardes were 'neither nationalist, nor fully internationalist', just as Central-European identity itself could be said to be 'ambiguous, diffuse, fragmentary, contradictory'.<sup>24</sup>

The sourcebook *Between Worlds* noted that there had been increased interest in bringing the artistic avant-gardes of Central Europe back into focus since the fall of the Berlin Wall.<sup>25</sup> If 'the visual arts and art criticism of the Central-European avant-garde' had 'remained in relative obscurity for the English-speaking world', the editors noted, then 'in large part this was due to the inaccessibility of sources and lack of translations'.<sup>26</sup> The project of translating a vast selection of primary sources from all over the region and presenting the selected texts 'as an interrelated discourse'—structured thematically around shared areas of concern such as 'style as the crucible of past and future'; 'art and social change'; 'internationalism'; and 'the twilight of ideologies'—resulted in an extremely substantial publication, which proved in many respects exemplary of what Polish art historian Piotr Piotrowski referred to as 'horizontal art history'.

Piotrowski insisted that 'while Western art history has a vertical and hierarchical form, the Eastern one, due to its plurality, take[s a] horizontal, non-hierarchical and polycentric form'.<sup>27</sup> Piotrowski therefore argued that a 'pluralistic, heterogeneous view' was more appropriate than the production of a 'single narrative of East Central European art'.<sup>28</sup> His focus, methodologically, was on difference, proposing post-war Eastern Europe as distinct from 'the West', in the first instance, and as composed of diverse local experiences, in the second. In a paper entitled 'How to Write a History of Central-East European Art?', the late scholar argued that 'the stylistic narrative' characteristic of the Western art-historical paradigm was 'never simply reflected' in the Eastern and Central-European context, where 'modernism defined in terms of style has always been translated into heterogeneous mutations', such as 'Russian Cubo-Futurism, ... Hungarian Activism, Polish Formism, and Central European Surrealism except for the Czech variant'.<sup>29</sup> Piotrowski therefore concluded that it was more 'productive to stress the tensions between the local experience of art and the [Western] canon', arguing that 'attention should be concentrated on the deconstruction of the relationship between those two domains', emphasising the 'identity of place'.<sup>30</sup>

Arguably, a historical emphasis on national diversity has sometimes had the side-effect of further provincialising East Central European art. James Elkins, in his reader *Is Art History Global?*, used the argument that 'as a discipline and as a unit within universities, art history is very much a North American and Western European phenomenon', and that non-Western art-history textbooks 'tend to be deeply nationalistic in motivation': discrediting and even disavowing the existence of art historical research in other parts of the world, including in East-Central Europe.<sup>31</sup> Faced with this sort of historical amnesia, it has become all the more important to point not only to historical differences but also to historical connectivity: to do so in a 'pluralistic, heterogeneous' manner, as advocated by Piotrowski, is also the aim of our own edited volume. In addition to the English-language arguments and approaches articulated above, there have been a wide range of publications in the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia during the past decades relating to artistic developments in the period 1918 to 1956. Our Reader combines a selection of translated extracts from these publications with new writing produced especially for this volume, emerging out of a series of research events and workshops held as part of our wider, five-year-long research and educational project funded by the Motesiczky Charitable Trust.

One possible pitfall inherent in setting the methodological focus on difference and insisting on national specificity is the reification of inherited narratives that rely on vague, ahistorical perceptions of fixed European borders, nations as enduring collectives, and the purity of national-cultural identities. Newly-emerging transnational and global approaches to history

writing question exactly this sort of (over)emphasis on the ‘national container’, in other words, the practice of explaining historical processes and social change solely from developments taking place within national boundaries. Without denying the relevance of nation states as settings that greatly determine the macrostructure of cultural life (and thus bring about a heterogeneous landscape in any region, including Eastern Europe), we wish to argue that the phenomenon of interculturality and the broad circulation of artistic paradigms or intellectual movements in the modern world also need to be given equal weight.<sup>32</sup> Counteracting the importance attributed to national or regional specificity or to the supposed incommensurability of, say, Eastern and Western Europe, global studies and transnational history offer a different approach. These fields of study seek to promote critical reflection on how the world works as an interlinked, interactive set of processes and relationships. With this insight, the ‘impurifying’ impact of cross-border flows and connections as well as of itinerant biographies is eagerly recognised as a constituent part of national cultural history.

Whereas the term ‘globalisation’ is most commonly used to describe the processes of increased trade and cultural exchange that have characterised the past three to five decades and led to an ever-tighter integration of countries across continents, scholars working in global history point out that globalisation has been taking place for hundreds of years. They identify the pre-modern phase of economic interdependence as ‘archaic globalisation’ and the period from the last decades of the nineteenth century to the First World War as the age of ‘first globalisation’. The circulation of information, money, people, and goods across national boundaries reached an increased level in this era; proportionately it was even higher than it is today.<sup>33</sup>

Considered through the lens of global integration, the decades between the two World Wars appear as a period of nationalisation and de-globalisation, and this holds true for the region of East-Central Europe as well. After the First World War, nation states such as Poland, Hungary, and Czechoslovakia were (re)established, and in this new political climate Wilsonian idealism, with its promotion of national self-determination, found fertile ground. The 1930s, plagued by the Great Depression, were especially dominated by autarchic economic policies and nationalist ideologies. However, when non-economic flows are also considered, this characterisation does not seem to be quite as adequate. Pierre-Yves Saunier has explored labour migration, the movement of refugees, but also the intense cross-fertilisation taking place in the realms of the natural sciences, social activism, as well as in the circles of (often *émigré* or exiled) intellectuals and artists. In these fields, connectivity and the circulation of individuals and conceptual models did not abruptly halt even in the 1930s, the ‘hardcore of deglobalisation’ as canonical chronology would have it.<sup>34</sup> While conservative and nationalist circles played a prominent role within the cultural scene in many societies of interwar Central Europe, the artistic vanguard represented a cosmopolitan orientation and had strong links to the inter- or supranational avant-garde. Earlier decades and centuries also witnessed intense cultural exchanges, but progressive artists of the 1920s placed a persistent and conscious stress on internationality, exactly *because* internationality as a desired predisposition was *not* self-evident. Turning away from patriotism and embracing cosmopolitanism clearly entailed a refusal of the nationalist stance that was seen by many as the root of the conflict that had led to the First World War.<sup>35</sup>

And yet, while standard European art histories point to the internationality of the avant-garde as an unmistakable fact, this same internationality is persistently underplayed in *how* the history of modernism is constructed and narrated. The history of avant-garde movements is very often written in national frameworks: individual tendencies or movements are attributed to particular countries or cities where they were allegedly rooted. A transnational approach is less invested in pinpointing the moment of birth of artistic movements than in observing how they circulate, it can help to retrieve a broader spectrum and a deeper dynamism of the cross-border and cross-cultural reach of these phenomena.

Art history has, historically, tended to be compartmentalised not only by national boundaries but by stylistic movements. Modern art movements, especially when presented in time diagrams, are often conceived of as stations in a linear development. Some of these charts—

such as Alfred H. Barr, Jr.'s well-known catalogue cover for the 1936 exhibition *Cubism and Abstract Art* or Tate Modern's 2006 timeline by Sara Fanelli—do more justice to the way these trends were entangled and interrelated. Nevertheless, these diagrams remain comparable to some other, more schematic charts: in some respects individual art movements are, for the most part, assigned particular geographical locations rather than individual artists' names. Thus, the various 'isms' of cosmopolitan modernism become effectively nationalised or anchored to single localities as is the case with, for instance, German Expressionism, Italian Futurism, Zürich (and Berlin) Dada, Russian Constructivism, and French Surrealism.<sup>36</sup>

It is no new observation that this sort of linear art history has been selective and partial, composed in the interests of a progressive, developmental model, a linear or 'vertical' line from movement to movement.<sup>37</sup> As such, it is also less able to account for developments emerging and running parallel with one another; indeed, it very much blurs the historical reality that the modern 'isms' were not necessarily distinguishable at the time of their emergence. By focussing on the most important centres and best-known artists, such timelines create and reify a universal canon of art history. This is highly exclusionary, especially if seen from locations that are peripheral to this master narrative, as East-Central Europe arguably is. A few examples may aptly illustrate how this universalist—but in fact selective and exclusionary—canon occludes degree of modernism's internationality. Internationality is the word most often used to characterise the outreach of modernist tendencies, but it would be more terminologically-precise to point to its *supra-* and *transnationality*. This terminology is employed to suggest that artistic practices were exchanged and shared between different cultural communities, and, if so, identical elements of style or aesthetics will be self-evident in a cross-section of these different communities.<sup>38</sup>

From this perspective, the usual appropriation of modernist movements by nations or localities might need to be critically rethought. When referring to German Expressionism, for example, should we not rather say that some of the early centres of Expressionism were in German cities? For, as Hubert van der Berg noted in dissecting this seemingly-straightforward trope, the 'German' in 'German Expressionism' did not necessarily designate nationality, as this was a time when the educational and exhibition institutions of the art sector in German cities attracted great numbers of foreign artists. They converged on Berlin (an otherwise unspectacular new capital city), which became the centre of the international progressive art world in the 1920s.<sup>39</sup> Galleries and publishers exhibited and printed artists and authors from all over Northern, Western, and East-Central Europe, but also Japan and America. Those arriving from the former Habsburg and Prussian territories spoke the language, so the fact of being German-speaking alone does not necessarily allow for identifying protagonists as German either. Likewise art-historical labelling was far from being complete at the time: the usage of terms was still inconsistent, so that practically any new trend emerging in any country could be called Expressionism (or Futurism, for that matter), and these yet-unfixed labels denoted a complex assortment of supranationally-emerging styles.<sup>40</sup>

As is well known, Dada was first based in Zürich, even if only by way of an accident of geography, and Romanian-born Tristan Tzara (originally Samuel Rosenstock) is counted as a major proponent of this (non-)movement. Research carried out in the past ten to fifteen years has revealed how not only the famed Tzara, but a handful of Romanians around the Cabaret Voltaire were the *drivers* of the Zürich movement.<sup>41</sup> In this case, a biography-based research methodology was able to remove the national veil and bring to the fore the multi-ethnic medley of a geographical location that was a safe haven for émigré intellectuals from all over the world. (Vladimir Lenin is said to have lodged in the same street as the Cabaret Voltaire.)

Similarly, the Tate timeline only lists Italian artists as the chief propagators of Futurism. A more nuanced art-historical account might also mention the Russian Futurists. Harsha Ram has, instead, framed these two versions of Futurism in a genuinely transnational manner. In his contribution to *The Oxford Handbook of Global Modernisms*, he asserted that, in the early-twentieth century, Paris was a *detrterritorialised cosmopolitan core* (very much in the same way as Berlin was in the 1920s, drawing temporary inhabitants from Europe and beyond), and the aspiration of both Italian and Russian Futurists was *to re-territorialise* and appropriate or claim this core,

albeit through different strategies.<sup>42</sup> Italian artists set out to compete with Paris, the centre. In doing so, they continued to accept an art-historical paradigm that divided the map into centres and peripheries, and their aspiration was to assert their own leading position on the art-historical map. Rahm saw a clear indication of this in the fact that Marinetti's 'Futurist Manifesto' was very strategically first published in the French newspaper *Le Figaro*. The artists around Marinetti placed emphasis on their Italianness, but this 'patriotism' lacked pride in, or reverence for, national heritage. The Futurists wanted to obliterate the past, while, at the same time, they wished to place Italy on the global map of then-contemporary art. Except they did not say 'global', they said *mondial*.

Russian artists, however, set out to *undermine* the logic of the core's hegemony and to redefine the cosmopolitan tropes of modernity, claims Harsha Rahm.<sup>43</sup> Members of the Futurist circle themselves were newcomers to Russia's metropolitan centres from the provinces. They did not have the kind of cultural capital Marinetti possessed, who easily traversed European cities and cultures, but they had nonetheless experienced their own brand of Eurasian multiculturalism in their home regions. They shored up this heritage as a source of artistic innovation and as an equally cosmopolitan and culturally-mixed milieu, albeit with different 'ingredients' than that of Paris.

It is much less well known that there were a number of artists who declared themselves Futurists in Poland too, and grouped together under the name Formists (Formiści). They interpreted Futurism quite liberally: it appears that they embraced all manifestations of new art in one name, and 'Futurist' was often just a loose signifier for post-Symbolist literary innovation, a celebration of urban modernity, and an inclination towards public provocation.<sup>44</sup> They rejected the kind of poetic radicalism established by the international literary avant-garde: free-word poetry breaking with linear typography, conventional syntax, and logic. They even opposed Marinetti in certain regards and rejected the Italians' idealisation of modern technology and the machine. One could dismiss this Polish stance as a lingering aesthetic conservatism. Or, taking historical reality into account, one might argue that the Polish Futurists treated the machine differently because, in Poland at the time, 'the machine was an exotic [and] imported element', and as such did not exactly belong to the lived everyday experience of modernity.<sup>45</sup> Thus, taking a transnational approach reveals that Futurism, too, had a supranational presence in the 1910s and 1920s, and that different groups had different stakes in appropriating its basic ideas to their own needs and interests. An interdisciplinary angle will furthermore reveal that daring ideas did not travel in unhindered free space: the degree of industrial development and the (limited) availability of technology could enable or hinder their implementation.

The capacities of Polish industry at the time also put constraints on the ambitious designs of Polish Constructivists. In addition to the well-known Russian Constructivists, Constructivism also had its Polish, Hungarian, and Czech iterations. Members of the Polish groups Blok and especially Praesens designed furniture, individual apartments, and functional housing estates very much in the vein of the leading French architect Le Corbusier, even blocking out different designs for different social strata. But most of these could never be built or turned into prototypes for industrial production. Consequently, they entered the history of Polish avant-garde architecture as theoretical essays on artistic composition in three dimensions, based on a certain geometric abstraction.<sup>46</sup> At the same time, these artists critiqued the kind of architecture presented at the International Exposition of Modern Industrial and Decorative Arts (Exposition internationale des arts décoratifs et industriels modernes) in Paris in 1925. These pieces deployed elements of folk art and craftsmanship, which were felt by these avant-garde critics to be anachronisms, the historical residue of an earlier age, a 'parochial ghetto'.<sup>47</sup> Significantly, these structures mostly used wood, iron, and brick as building materials instead of the steel, glass, and reinforced concrete considered the materials of cutting-edge architecture at the time, not only for their aesthetics but also for their physical capacities. But, as David Crowley has rightly noted, if architects were not only keen on producing artistic manifestos but actually wanted to build, they were forced to arrive at (or settle for) construction materials they had available. That is to say, their choice of what to build with was not necessarily driven by enthusiastic support for a national cause.<sup>48</sup> Giving due consideration



to the material conditions that influenced the possibility to partake in the global flow of artistic trends and practices is an approach that was also advocated by editors of the volume *Circulations in the Global History of Art*.<sup>49</sup>

Finally, and as a gesture toward another anniversary besides 1989, we wish to point to the example of the one-hundred-year-old Bauhaus, a school that is generally considered a German institution and whose history has long been linked to only a handful of—mostly German—masters. In recent years, scholarly research has revealed that, by the end of the 1920s, over a quarter of Bauhaus students in each year were foreigners, typically coming from Switzerland, Austria, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Poland, and the USA. Playing the ‘East-European card’ and including Eastern-European students and masters in Bauhaus history sharpens the picture of a ‘multicultural’ institution operating in Weimar, Dessau, and Berlin,<sup>50</sup> on the one hand and, on the other, contributes to analytical efforts to transnationalise national (in this case, German) cultural histories. Tracing these protagonists’ post-Bauhaus mobility and the works they created during their voluntary or forced migration has the potential to further map the school’s outreach in time and space.<sup>51</sup>

The brief cases above exemplify some of the approaches we intended to convey during our pedagogical experiment at the Courtauld and the series of events (closed-door workshop, conference panel, public lecture) we organised during the years of collaboration.<sup>52</sup> Taking a broader regional look and reading developments within national borders together with events and tendencies in other geographical locations is also either an explicit practice or a methodological subtext in many of the readings selected for this anthology.

Four years on from delivering our course and tentatively identifying a range of English-language readings for our students, and now thirty years since the fall of the Berlin Wall in November 1989, we are ready to make our open-access online contribution to expanding the East-Central-European art-historical field in the English language. Our aim has been both to identify previously-untranslated but valuable secondary materials and to translate some of the most interesting recent scholarship in the field, and to make an expanded body of secondary literature available to international students, to complement the pioneering translations of primary materials that were undertaken as part of the LACMA-based collaboration. Our contributors examine the projects of modernism and modernity from a range of East-Central-European perspectives, crucially proposing to call into question European modernism’s usual framing as an interwar phenomenon by taking the period 1918 to 1956 as our timeframe. In so doing, we deliberately include periods of national autonomy, more radical and more conservative moments, democratic, and state Socialist periods. As Luiza Nader has pointed out, the logic of the twentieth-century art-historical periodisation operated according to a logic of exclusion, taking the question of the Holocaust and its representation off the table. Our own aim has been to seek to acknowledge the war and the Holocaust, which are erased by a traditional art-historical division of modernism into ‘interwar’ and ‘post-war’. Besides those post-war movements that emerged organically or outside the official cultural sphere, this collection extends to include Socialist Realism, the prescribed aesthetic doctrine of East-Central-European states from c. 1948 to 1956. Socialist Realism has been notably redefined by Boris Groys as representing not only the liquidation of modernism but also its continuation, perpetuating the ideals of ‘historical exclusiveness, internal purity and autonomy’.<sup>53</sup> More concretely, analysis of specific local incarnations of Socialist Realism reveal a negotiation between Realist and modernist formal practices, sometimes by erstwhile avant-gardists.

As co-editors, we have selected chapters from within our respective areas of linguistic and cultural competence, and thus our selections focus on Polish, Hungarian, Czech, and Slovak art. (Our third editor, Jonathan Owen, joined this project specifically to help develop the Reader, and his fluency in Czech and Slovak added to our existing linguistic competencies.) In selecting our chapters, we have sought a roughly equal balance of focus between these countries, an aim that we felt was especially important with regard to Slovak culture, which has typically been marginalised by—or elided with—Czech culture, despite the often distinct nature of Slovak artists’ inspirations and cultural-historical context. Of course, this aim is complicated by the difficulty at certain

points of assigning a single nationality to the works or movements discussed: for instance, should the film *The Earth Sings* (*Zem spieva*, 1933)—an ethnographic work about rural Slovakia produced with the cooperation of the Slovak Cultural Association (Matica slovenská) but directed, edited, and scored by Czech artists—be considered primarily a Czech or a Slovak work?

In developing the Reader we initially developed a series of thematic headings under which to organise the various chapters. As the book's contents evolved, as chapters were replaced and new themes and ideas arose, this structure became less and less possible to sustain. Nonetheless, the important areas of concern indicated by these headings remain present: these include historiographies of readings of modernism (as in Marie Rakušanová's and Krisztina Passuth's texts, which showcase, respectively, encounters between Czech and international theories of Cubism, and affinities across the spectrum of the regional avant-gardes); discussions of abstraction and of various Realisms (as in the chapters on two Hungarian 'schools'—The European and the Roman School—which illustrate artistic pursuits in opposite directions: towards abstraction or towards Realism, while both remained within the modernist paradigm); analyses of gender representation or performance (as in Martina Pachmanová's study of the gendered nature of the campaign against ornamentalism in Czechoslovakia in the 1920s or in Júlia Cserba's presentation of the cross-dresser sculptor Anton/Anna Prinner); and consideration of the role of institutions, from museums and training schools to commercial producers, in fostering artistic experiments or sustaining national traditions (as in Kinga Bódi's close reading of the genesis of the plans for the national Pavilion at two different editions of the Venice Biennale). The chapters cover not only the traditional arts of painting and sculpture but also industrial design, film, photography, and typography, along with the intermedial forms produced under the impact of these modern technological media (Ágnes Kusler and Merse Pál Szegedi demonstrate, for instance, how social photography impacted on Gyula Derkovits's painting). Our hope is that this wide-ranging collection will help to further open up the field of Central-European art histories, stimulate further international dialogue and promote the teaching, at an international level, of a more nuanced and inclusive account of modernism.

1 The development and implementation of the course *A Minor Modernism? Central European Art and Culture 1918–1956* was generously supported by the Marie-Louise von Motesiczky Charitable Trust, established with the legacy of the turn-of-the-century Viennese artist. Our sincere thanks to the M-L v M Charitable Trust, for their long-term commitment to that project and this follow-on publication.

2 Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Kafka. Toward a Minor Literature*, trans. Dana Polen (Minnesota and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), pp. 16–17. First edition: *Kafka. Pour une littérature mineure* (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1975).

3 Deleuze and Guattari, *Kafka. Toward a Minor Literature*, p. 20.

4 Krisztina Passuth, 'Berlin – Mittelpunkt der Kunst Osteuropas', in Ingo F. Walther (ed.), *Paris, Berlin, 1900–1933. Übereinstimmungen und Gegensätze Frankreich-Deutschland. Kunst, Architektur, Graphik, Literatur, Industriedesign, Film, Theater, Musik* (Munich: Prestel, 1979), pp. 222–230.

5 See, for instance: Pieter M. Judson and Marsha L. Rozenblit (eds.), *Constructing Nationalities in East Central Europe* (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2005).

6 Éva Forgács, 'How the New Left Invented East-European Art', *Centropa* 3/2 (May 2003): pp. 102–3.

7 We found no English-language translation of Lajos Kassák's autobiography, for instance.

8 Krisztina Passuth, *Les Avant-Gardes de l'Europe centrale, 1907–1927* (Paris: Flammarion, 1987); *Avantgarde kapcsolatok Prágától Bukarestig, 1907–1930* (Budapest: Balassi, 1998); *Treffpunkte der Avantgarden Ostmitteleuropa 1907–1930*, trans. Anikó Harmath (Budapest and Dresden: Balassi and Verl. der Kunst, 2003).

9 Andrzej Turowski, *Existe-t-il un art de l'Europe de l'Est? Utopie et idéologie* (Paris: Editions de la Villette, 1986).

10 Steven Mansbach, *Modern Art in Eastern Europe. From the Baltic to the Balkans ca. 1890–1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. xiii.

11 Mansbach, *Modern Art in Eastern Europe*, p. xiii.

12 Mansbach, *Modern Art in Eastern Europe*, p. 1.

13 Mansbach, *Modern Art in Eastern Europe*, p. 3.

14 Mansbach, *Modern Art in Eastern Europe*, p. xiii.

15 Mansbach, *Modern Art in Eastern Europe*, p. 3.

16 Mansbach, *Modern Art in Eastern Europe*, pp. 3, 4, 5.

17 Mansbach, *Modern Art in Eastern Europe*, p. 5.

18 Forgács, 'How the New Left Invented East-European Art', p. 93.

19 Forgács, 'How the New Left Invented East-European Art', p. 93.

20 Forgács, 'How the New Left Invented East-European Art', p. 93. See also: Klara Kemp-Welch, *Networking the Bloc: Experimental Art in Eastern Europe 1965–1981* (Cambridge, Mass., London: MIT Press, 2018); Jérôme Bazin, Pascal Dubourg Glatigny, and Piotr Piotrowski, *Art beyond Borders. Artistic Exchange in Communist Europe (1945–1989)* (Budapest: Central-European University Press, 2016).

21 Peter Spielmann, 'Introduction', in *Lajos Kassák 1887–1967*, exhibition catalogue, Museum Bochum (Bochum, 1973), unpaginated. Cited in Forgács, 'How the New Left Invented East-European Art', p. 97.

- 22 Timothy O. Benson, 'Introduction', in Timothy O. Benson (ed.), *Central European Avant-Gardes: Exchange and Transformation 1910–1930* (Los Angeles and Cambridge, Mass.: Los Angeles County Museum of Art and MIT Press, 2002), p. 16.
- 23 Benson, 'Introduction', p. 19.
- 24 Benson, 'Introduction', p. 20.
- 25 Timothy O. Benson and Éva Forgács, 'Introduction', in Timothy O. Benson and Éva Forgács (eds.), *Between Worlds. A Sourcebook of Central European Avant-Gardes, 1910–1930* (Los Angeles and Cambridge, Mass.: Los Angeles County Museum of Art and MIT Press, 2002), p. 17.
- 26 Benson and Forgács, 'Introduction', p. 17.
- 27 Piotr Piotrowski, 'How to Write a History of Central-East European Art?', *Third Text* 3/1 (January 2009): pp. 6–7.
- 28 Piotrowski, 'How to Write a History of Central-East European Art?', p. 8. He explained that a universal approach to the post-war art of the region was not possible because the art of the region developed in relation to the very different 'Ideological State Apparatuses' in place in different countries (p. 5).
- 29 Piotrowski, 'How to Write a History of Central-East European Art?', pp. 5–6.
- 30 Piotrowski, 'How to Write a History of Central-East European Art?', p. 5. One might also add here that such a perspective also has certain blind spots: in privileging the centrality of place to the question of identity formation, one occludes other central features of identity formation, not least ethnic and religious. What space, in such an account, might there be for the Jewish communities of Central Europe, for Roma artists, and for those displaced by war across the region?
- 31 James Elkins, 'Art History as a Global Discipline', in James Elkins (ed.), *Is Art History Global?* (New York and London: Routledge, 2007), p. 10.
- 32 Here, the use of the term 'circulation' is meant to signal the changing conceptualisation of intercultural encounter and exchange from 'influence' to 'circulations', also observing cases of cultural transfer, adaptation, and appropriation but also resistance and hybridisation, pointing toward transculturation.
- 33 Tony Makin, 'Globalisation: Context and Controversies', *Agenda: A Journal of Policy Analysis and Reform* 7/4 (2000): pp. 293–302.
- 34 Pierre-Yves Saunier, 'Globalization', in Akira Iriye and Pierre-Yves Saunier (eds.), *The Palgrave Dictionary of Transnational History* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), p. 458.
- 35 T.J. Demos, 'Circulations. In and Around Zürich Dada', *October* 105 (Summer 2003): p. 148. See also: Hubert F. van den Berg and Lidia Gluchowska, 'Introduction. The Inter-, Trans- and Postnationality of the Historical Avant-Garde', in Hubert F. van den Berg and Lidia Gluchowska (eds.), *Transnationality, Internationalism and Nationhood. European Avant-Garde in the First Half of the Twentieth Century* (Leuven, Paris, Walpole: Peters, 2013), pp. ix–xx.
- 36 On this, see also: Hubert F. van den Berg, 'Expressionism, Constructivism and the Transnationality of the Historical Avant-Garde', in van den Berg and Lidia Gluchowska (eds.), *Transnationality, Internationalism and Nationhood*, pp. 23–42.
- 37 Dawn Ades, 'Reviewing Art History', in Alan Leonard Rees and Frances Borzello (eds.), *The New Art History*. (Atlantic Highlands: Humanities Press, 1988), pp. 12–13.
- 38 Hubert F. van den Berg puts this theoretical proposition to practice in his essay referenced above: van den Berg, 'Expressionism', pp. 23–4.
- 39 On Berlin's particular magnetism, see: Éva Forgács, 'Romantic Peripheries: The Dynamics of Enlightenment and Romanticism in East-Central Europe', in Per Baeckström and Benedikt Hjartarson (eds.), *Decentering the Avant-Garde* (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2014), pp. 43–63.
- 40 van den Berg, 'Expressionism', p. 32.
- 41 See: Tom Sandquist, *Dada East. The Romanians of the Cabaret Voltaire* (Cambridge, Mass., and London: MIT Press, 2006).
- 42 Harsha Ram, 'Futurist Geographies: Uneven Modernities and the Struggle for Aesthetic Autonomy: Paris, Italy, Russia, 1909–1914', in Mark Wollaeger (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Global Modernisms* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 313–340.
- 43 Ram, 'Futurist Geographies', pp. 321, 332.
- 44 Przemysław Strożek, "'Marinetti is foreign to us": Polish Responses to Italian Futurism, 1917–1923', in Günther Berghaus (ed.), *Futurism in Eastern and Central Europe* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2010), p. 95. See also Strożek's contribution to this Reader.
- 45 Aleksander Wat, quoted in Strożek, 'Polish Responses to Italian Futurism', p. 106.
- 46 Monika Król, 'Collaboration and Compromise: Women Artists in Polish-German Avant-Garde Circles, 1919–1930', in Benson (ed.), *Central European Avant-Gardes*, pp. 349–352.
- 47 David Crowley, *National Style and Nation-State: Design in Poland from the Vernacular to the International Style* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992), pp. 80–89.
- 48 Crowley, *National Style and Nation-State*, pp. 94–95.
- 49 Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann, Catherine Dossin, and Béatrice Joyeux-Prunel, 'Introduction: Reintroducing Circulations: Historiography and the Project of Global Art History', in Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann, Catherine Dossin, and Béatrice Joyeux-Prunel (eds.), *Circulations in the Global History of Art* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2015), pp. 1–2.
- 50 Over the years there have been a handful of research and curatorial enterprises laying the groundwork for such investigations: Susanne Anna (ed.), *Das Bauhaus im Osten. Slowakische und Tschechische Avantgarde 1928–1939* (Stuttgart: Ostfildern-Ruit Hatje, 1997); Dora Wiebenson (ed.), *Central-European Students at the Bauhaus*, special edition of *Centropa* 1 (2003); the exhibition *A művészettől az életig—magyarok a Bauhausban (From Art to Life—Hungarians at the Bauhaus)*, Janus Pannonius Museum (Pécs, Hungary, December 2010–February 2011); Jadranka Vinterhalter (ed.), *Bauhaus—Networking Ideas and Practice*, exhibition catalogue, Museum of Contemporary Art (Zagreb, 2015).
- 51 Further enterprises pursuing similar goals include: Beáta Hock, 'Bauhaus—A Laboratory of Modernity and Springboard to the World', in Rafał Makala and Beate Störckuhl (eds.), *Nicht nur Bauhaus – Netzwerke der Moderne in Mitteleuropa* (Berlin and Boston, forthcoming); and the online research platform and travelling exhibition project *Bauhaus Imaginista* with autonomously-conceived iterations in Japan, China, Russia, Brazil, and Berlin throughout 2018–2019. <http://www.bauhaus-imaginista.org>, accessed 30 October 2019.
- 52 'Continuities and Ruptures: Art in Pre and Post-War Central and Eastern Europe', workshop at The Courtauld Institute of Art, 12 June 2015; 'After the Great War / After the Cold War: Nations, identities and art histories in Central and Eastern Europe', panel at the 41<sup>st</sup> AAH annual conference, University of East Anglia, Norwich, 10 April 2015; 'Brno, city of the avant-garde?', public talk by Prof. Matthew Rampley at The Courtauld Institute of Art, 26 February 2016; 'Interdisciplinarity and Central-European Modernism 1918–1956', closed-door workshop at The Courtauld Institute of Art, 3 June 2016.
- 53 Boris Groys, 'A Style and a Half: Socialist Realism Between Modernism and Postmodernism', in Thomas Lahusen and Evgeny Dobrenko (eds.), *Socialist Realism Without Shores* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1997), p. 79.

