

Paradoxes de l'avant-garde - La modernité artistique à l'épreuve de sa nationalisation

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Paradoxes de l'avant-garde: la modernité artistique à l'épreuve de sa nationalisation. Sous la direction de THOMAS HUNKELER, avec la collaboration d'ADRIANA COPACIU et FABIENDUBOSSON. (Rencontres, 96.) Paris: Garnier, 2014. 327 pp.

This stimulating collection of essays unites an array of new perspectives on the historical avant-garde. It seeks to illustrate the multifaceted — indeed problematic — relationship between the avant-garde, internationalism, and nationalism, as well as suggesting a form of ‘inverse nationalism’ in the case of Dada (p. 26). The Introduction highlights the unhelpful habit within this field of dividing the avant-garde by national tradition, something that limits inclusion of its varied aspects in favour of channelling towards a particular goal. This book instead pushes beyond the ‘canon’ of the historical avant-garde, indeed offering itself as a ‘contre-histoire des avant-gardes’ (back cover). Furthermore, the text's demonstration of the avant-gardes' productively antagonistic relationship with the past, in contrast with their often-expressed desire to sever from it, provides critical reflection on the national, international, and anti-national concerns of the movements, publications, and individuals discussed. Covering a wide range of historical and geographical moments, from Dada to the Lettrist International and from Romania to the United States, the book offers fresh insights into the well-known and the little-known alike. Moreover, despite highlighting the avant-garde's characteristically international nature and impetus, the text successfully outlines a periphery of the periphery, a sense of the unusual even amid heterogeneity. The collection is constructively subdivided into three sections, in which tensions are explored between internationalism and national rivalry, the centre and the periphery, and avant-garde tradition versus progress. The first section assesses some better-known avant-garde aspects — Dada, T. S. Eliot, *Der Sturm*, *Europe*, Blaise Cendrars, the Lettrist International — yet draws on facets of these to reveal underlying interconnectivities with national and international agendas. William Marx in particular demonstrates Eliot's unusual relationship with his nationality of birth on trying to integrate into another, strengthening his own sense of nationalism through the lens of internationalism. The second section sheds light on a group of slightly lesser-known groups, in taking on the Flemish, Danish, Serbian, and Romanian avant-gardes. While these contributions offer insightful analyses of the relationship between centre and periphery, sadly the dominance of the Romanian contingent both undermines the variety aimed for in the text as a whole — and indeed falls into the very division by national tradition that it sought to avoid — and also renders the periphery more singular and thus centralized, drawing its peripheral status into question. The third section, while more eclectic

in feel, highlights the historicization of the avant-garde as a valuable means of acquiring practical analytical distance. Delineating the conflict between the post-war 'retour à l'ordre' and the constant avant-garde need to reject traditional systems, this final section rounds off the book effectively, finishing where it began in 1910s Switzerland, and, aptly, questioning the very possibility of a unified definition of the term 'avant-garde'. This text is unique in that it is simultaneously dense and varied, covering both scope and analytical detail across its three hundred pages. One cannot help but feel that the work would have benefited from an attempt at a concluding synthesis, but perhaps that is the very paradox of the avant-garde.