

# Structure, Network, Discourse

## Anatomy of an Artists Association

**Maximilian Kaiser**

With its program the Hagenbund helped to shape Vienna's cultural life for nearly forty years. In that time the artists union averaged between twenty-two and seventy-one regular members (fig. 1) – as compared with the Künstlerhaus and the Secession, a rather manageable number. In its strategic orientation, however, the Hagenbund clearly differed from the other associations, since it placed more importance on its corresponding members who did not live in Vienna. They provided the basis for contacts with other artists and artists groups and thus brought outside stimuli to Vienna. Having the Zedlitzhalle as an exhibition space made it possible for the union to design an independent program. This is ultimately what lent the Hagenbund its rank and position among the three major Viennese art organizations. Moreover, it also served as the cornerstone for a system of exchanges with which the group could engage in exhibitions on a national and international level, and many of its guests became corresponding members after participating in its shows. Artists groups invited to Vienna made it possible for the Hagenbund to present itself in their home cities in return.

The union essentially supported itself with the entrance fees paid by exhibition visitors, public subsidies, donations from private individuals, members' annual dues, and a percentage of the sale prices of works of art. Its economic survival was ultimately dependent in large part on its program and its variety.

Against this background, and because of the complexity of the subject, a study using the network analysis method suggested itself as a way of obtaining an understanding of the mechanisms at work behind this system.<sup>1</sup>

### **Art-historical Network Analysis**

Simply put, a network describes the social relationships between people. Network analysis is simply the investigation of these relationships and the patterns and structures arising from them. To describe the characteristics of a network, it is customary to point to the rhizome, one of whose characteristics is the fact that it “can be broken and destroyed at any given spot; it [then] continues to grow along its own or other lines.”<sup>2</sup> A network's potential thus derives from the fact that it can be sampled in various ways with respect to dynamics, topography, or other such parameters and yet does not suffer any loss of its original significance.

As a scientific method, network analysis had its origins in sociology. Subsequently, in addition to economics and the communication sciences, it has become established mainly in the scientific disciplines. In the early 1990s, the scholars John Padgett and Christopher Ansell managed to demonstrate the applicability of network analysis to historical subjects and sources and popularize it with

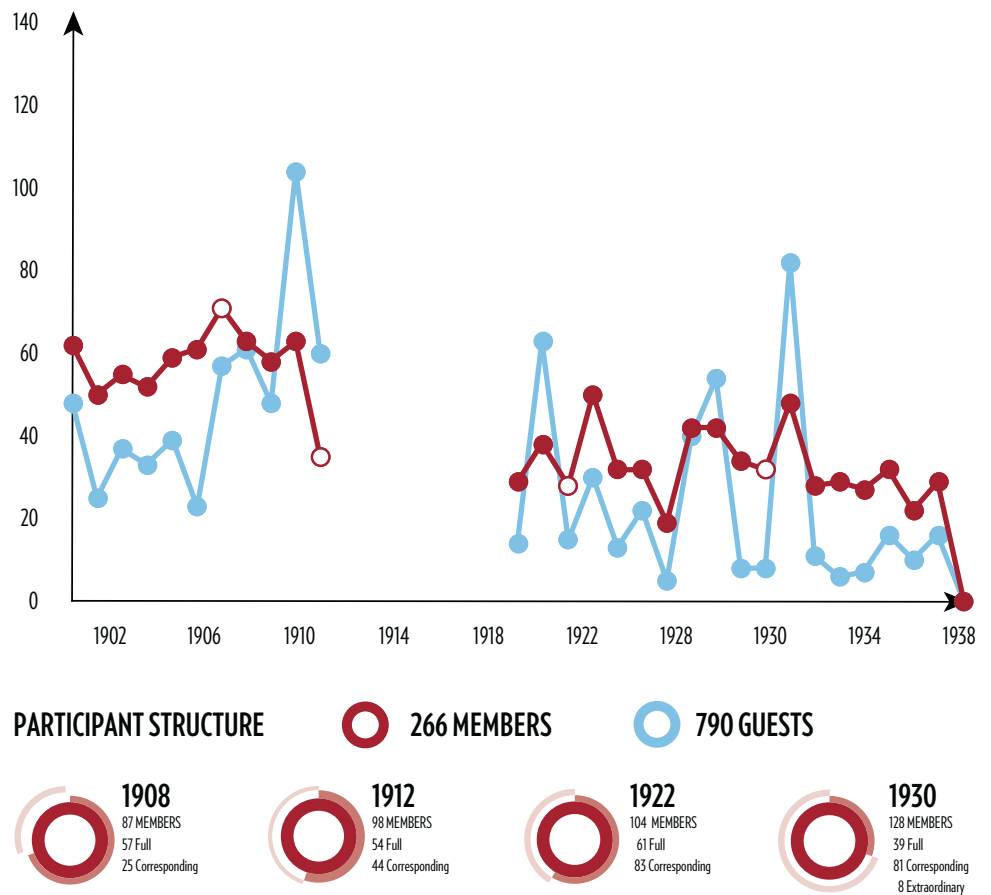


Fig. 1: Development of the membership and guest numbers in the Hagenbund between 1900 and 1938

their study “Robust Action and the Rise of the Medici (1400–1434).”<sup>3</sup> In the past few years, a new generation of historians, benefitting from the further development of the technique, has advanced and intensified methodical-conceptual discussion with network analysis. As opposed to using the term “network” purely as a metaphor, in their view “network-theoretical concepts” have the advantage that they are defined abstractly, “and thus make possible a more universal comparability. [. . .] Altogether, working with these network-theoretical concepts offers a chance to step back from established presuppositions within the source material or scholarly discussion and consider the actors’ relationships with an unprejudiced eye.”<sup>4</sup>

The Hagenbund was rediscovered as a subject for Austrian art history in the 1970s. First exhibition projects and monographs on individual artists followed.<sup>5</sup> Since no central archive for the union has survived, study has had to rely to date on fragments distributed among countless archives. It is only in the exhibition catalogues and reviews in the daily press and art journals that one finds a heterogeneous corpus of sources extending across the Hagenbund’s entire life span. From this perspective, it is understandable that from the beginning the project “Hagenbund Exhibition Chronology” has been thought of as a study of great benefit to scholarship.<sup>6</sup> The numbering and listing of exhibitions has expanded from time to time. However, it has to be recognized that in categorizing the exhibitions it is important to consider more than simply the group involved or the location. Today we know of a total of 252 exhibition projects associated with the Hagenbund (fig. 2). These can be categorized as either the Hagenbund’s own exhibitions in the Zedlitzhalle, its participation in shows elsewhere in Austria and abroad, and rentals of the Zedlitzhalle by other groups. One difficulty is the fact that an exhibition project can consist of several simultaneous individual, group, or special exhibitions. It is therefore necessary to break down the initial classification still further, to count the individual elements and assign them to the appropriate subcategories. All in all, one then arrives at 320 individual elements. However, this degree of detail in the chronology does not provide any more precise information about how frequently individual artists exhibited and in what context. In short, the individual, the group perspective, and the dynamics are all of interest. For the following analysis of the exhibition program as a network – from now on referred to for simplicity’s sake as the exhibitor network – the first two basic categories are most important.

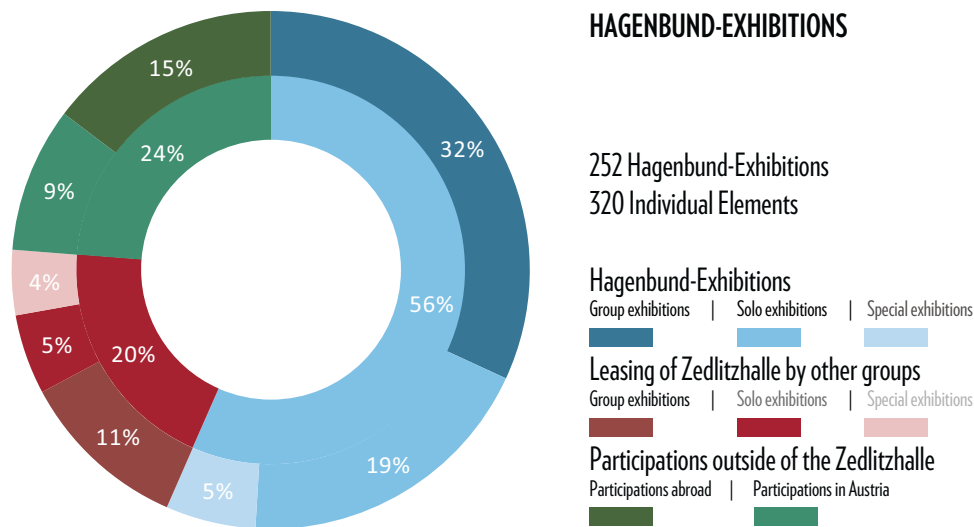


Fig. 2: Statistics of the Hagenbund-exhibitions according to categories

In art history there is a certain skepticism about network analysis as a method. Regina Göckede emphasizes, for example, that “such attempts to adopt it [will encounter] a series of methodological difficulties, mainly having to do with the field’s most basic tools, the exploitation and evaluation of primary sources.”<sup>7</sup> What may be true of relationships gathered from letters, diaries, and other manuscripts, which can reveal definite qualities from the perspective of the individual, can only rarely be readily transferred to entire groups of people. If only because such sources have often not survived and become available for study to the same extent. The starting point for a reconstruction of the exhibitor network is therefore published material like catalogues and reviews. In both types of sources one finds lists of the names of artists who participated in exhibitions associated with the Hagenbund. But with a single list one still has not created a complex network. It becomes a matter of the gathering all these lists and combining them, for ultimately it is those artists who repeatedly participated in Hagenbund exhibitions who establish the connections between the individual events. These structural similarities make it possible to reconstruct and analyze the entire program as an exhibitor network.

Julia Gelshorn points out another fundamental problem, namely that “immaterial relationships always tend to be visualized in the same way as material ones, as scaffolds, plumbing, circuitry, or embroidery [ . . . ] whose causality, stability, even reality are of a different kind than those of immaterial relationships.”<sup>8</sup> For that reason critical commentary and a system of reference are needed. To that end each link that ties the individual intersections together needs to be coded into the network with a series of attributes – for example the exhibition’s opening date, its title, the exhibitor’s membership status at the time of his participation, and his given role in the context of the exhibition. With this information various detail issues can be investigated, resulting in an understanding of the mechanisms at work behind the program.

### Network #1 Center and Periphery

In early 1922, Franz Ottmann made an interesting observation in a discussion of contemporary Viennese exhibition activity: “At present an overview is only made easier for us through the formation of groups, which are here not attuned to a common intent but simply thrown together by chance and the caprice of historical development.”<sup>9</sup> The mix of participants in the exhibition chronology or chain of events is determined not so much by chance as by “strokes of fate.”<sup>10</sup> Each separate exhibition was put together under specific conditions, its participants selected deliberately and with care. Therefore the individual exhibition per se represents a unique and non-repeating event.

One feature of network analysis is the possibility of counting frequencies in various ways.<sup>11</sup> Applied to the exhibitor network, it is the repeated participation in exhibitions that is of interest. If this were not the case, we would not be talking about an artists group or association. All the artists who helped to shape the program as participants form the inner circle. “The various applications of the reticular model nevertheless show that every network in which one node presents more connections than another must also be understood as the picture of a power structure, no matter how the power is distributed.”<sup>12</sup> Following this logic, one finds among the most frequent participants – the top

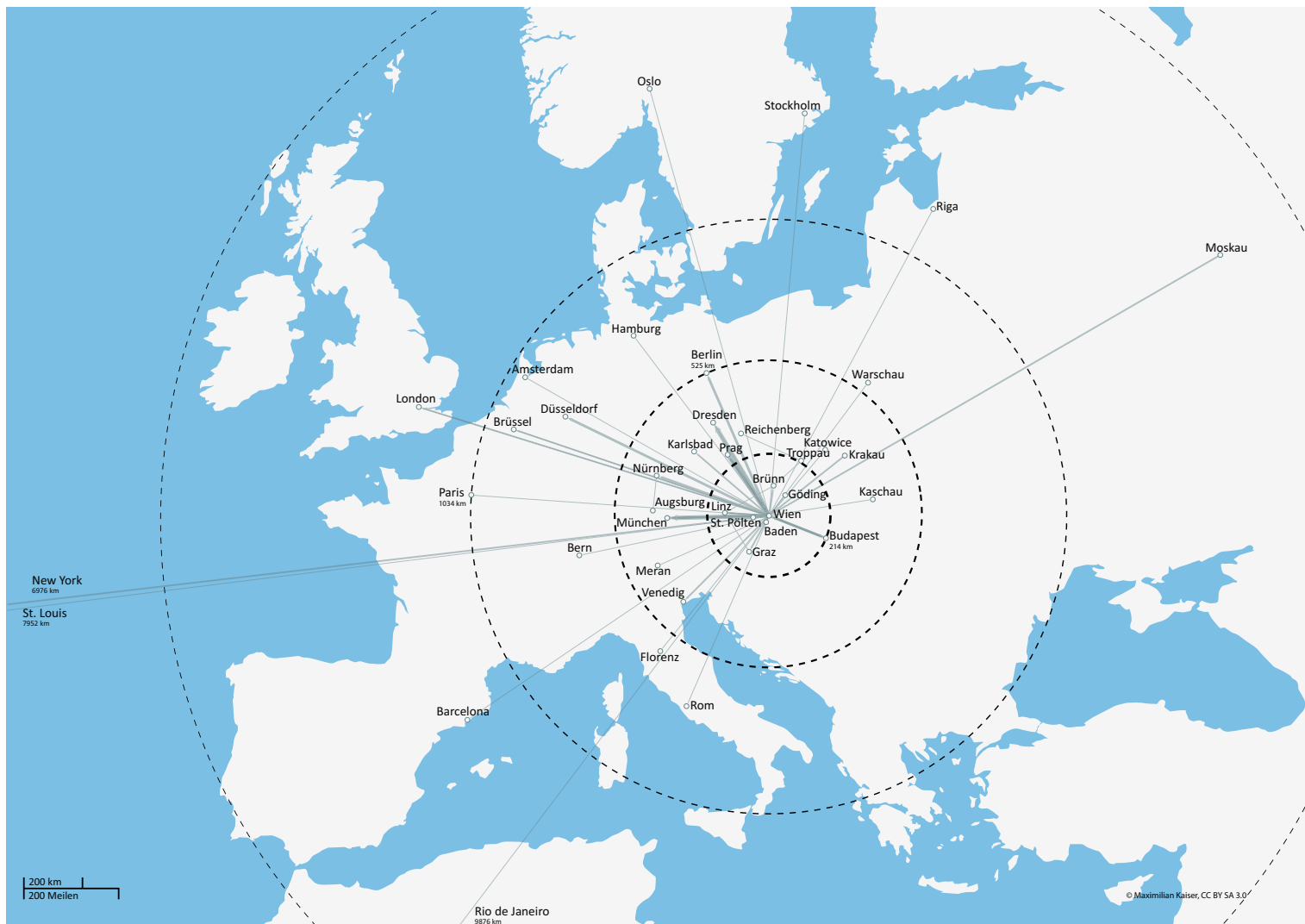


Fig. 3: The Hagenbund's sphere of influence: Road network with all group exhibitions in Zedlitzhalle by artists associations not from Vienna, all participations in Austria and abroad including Delegation and Wirtschaftsverband (Economic Union of Austrian Visual Artists) exhibitions between 1900 and 1938. In case of traveling exhibitions all venues were taken into account.

twelve artists, say – for the most part those artists who were not only regular members of the Hagenbund but also held its leading posts. But what about the guests, the members who did not exhibit so frequently and did not live in Vienna itself, namely those found on the periphery of the exhibitor network? How do they fit into the overall picture? In general the term “structural holes” is applied to those actors within a network who stand between two groups and connect one with the other. From this point of view, and by maximizing non-redundant information, they generate valuable insights.<sup>13</sup> Such patterns can also be found in the exhibitor network. They are generally guests who exhibit more frequently or corresponding members who after their first participation in a group show stay in contact with the Hagenbund as individuals, not as members of their original group.<sup>14</sup> As mentioned earlier, power is associated with highly connected actors in the center of the network. Nevertheless, there are also concepts that place other qualities in the foreground. A study of the most important people currently effecting change in Austria presented in February 2014 draws parallels between the periphery and the innovative potential of individual actors. “The established ones are successful only to the degree that they are capable of making contact with the periphery and using its potential – for that is where innovation takes place.”<sup>15</sup> This model can be applied to the Hagenbund exhibitor network. For the inner circle, contact with the periphery offered the potential not only for stylistic innovations, but also for contacts with outside organizations and chances to exhibit outside of Vienna. This helps to explain the Hagenbund's internationalism, and allows us to reconstruct its sphere of influence (fig. 3).

## Network #2 Discourse and Criticism

From the beginning, discourse about the Hagenbund centered on its “young art and moderate modernism” and “international art in the national context.” Because the various stylistic trends and currents tended to be of brief duration, the canonization of modern art can be traced over a relatively manageable span of time. Reducing the process of its acceptance to a purely art-historical level would mean ignoring the social circumstances. “Art critics provide another kind of documentation of acceptance, they not only discuss the artworks themselves but also the way the exhibitions were presented and the catalogue texts. Reviews show the extent to which critics identified with works of art and the exhibit, which various positions, from conservative to progressive, stand out.”<sup>16</sup>

Gregor Langfeld, who has studied the reception of German art in the United States, also asks “whether the reviewer’s intention was to canonize, upgrade, depreciate, or rehabilitate?”<sup>17</sup>

“It is very easy to overrate the potential of network study. The countless indicators of phenomena it provides always require more precise investigation.”<sup>18</sup> To confront this danger pointed out by Maximilian Schich, art criticism is introduced on another level as a kind of control over the results of the analyses. By way of this network level, it is possible to study more precisely the effect of the exhibition program. Not only were some artists canonized, there is also the interesting phenomenon that others were not recognized in the media at all or were mentioned only by specific critics. This group, along with vilified avant-gardists and well-respected Academy professors, constitutes a kind of white noise in the background of the Hagenbund exhibitions.

As yet there has been very little study of the everyday lives of Vienna’s art critics and the interactions between critics, art, and artists.<sup>19</sup> The many caricatures found in the period’s daily papers make it clear that attendance at an exhibition gave one a certain social cachet (fig. 4). One rare instance of personal contact between critic and artist is related in Arthur Roessler’s monograph on the artist Anton Faistauer. Roessler describes in detail his first encounter with Faistauer at the Galerie Pisko on the occasion of a press preview of an exhibition of the Neukunstgruppe in 1909.<sup>20</sup> Another indication of the influence of art criticism is the fact that in 1927 an Association for the Protection of Austria’s Creative Artists was founded with the express goal of helping artists defend themselves legally against negative reviews that affected their sales.<sup>21</sup> From the perspective of a Hagenbund artist, Georg Ehrlich provides a pointed and quite personal assessment: “I have learned a lot about myself from much criticism. My best published criticism has confirmed that I am still very young, for which I am obliged to my parents, and that my gift is not particularly great, something I wouldn’t even believe myself.”<sup>22</sup>

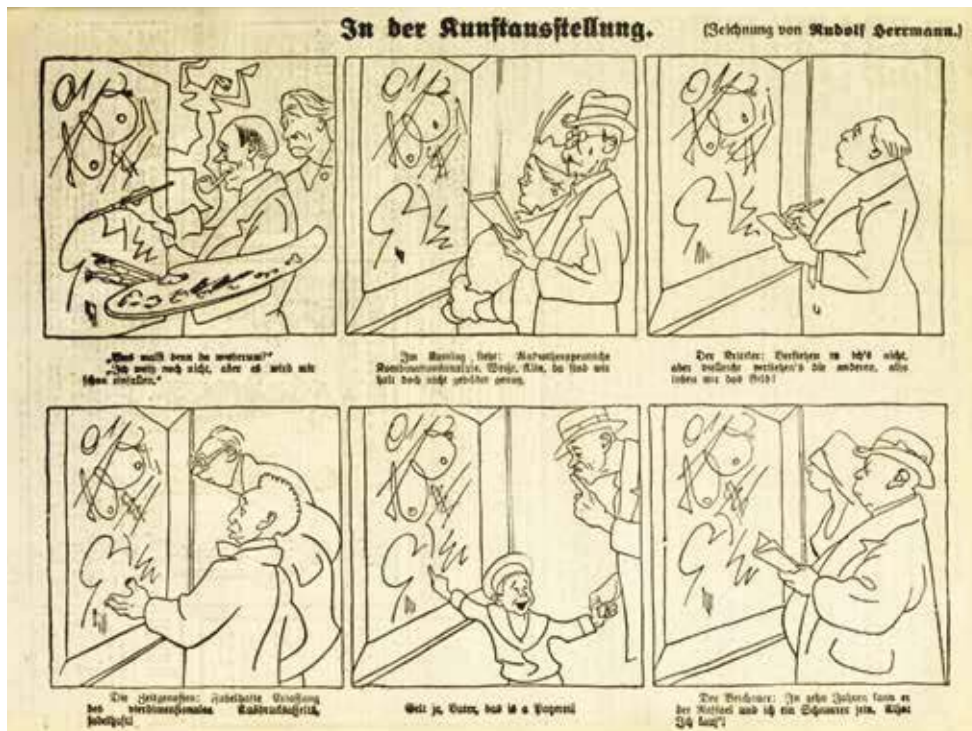


Fig. 4: RUDOLF HERRMANN cartoon “In the exhibition”, in: VZ, year 69, episode 150, June 3, 1923, p. 9

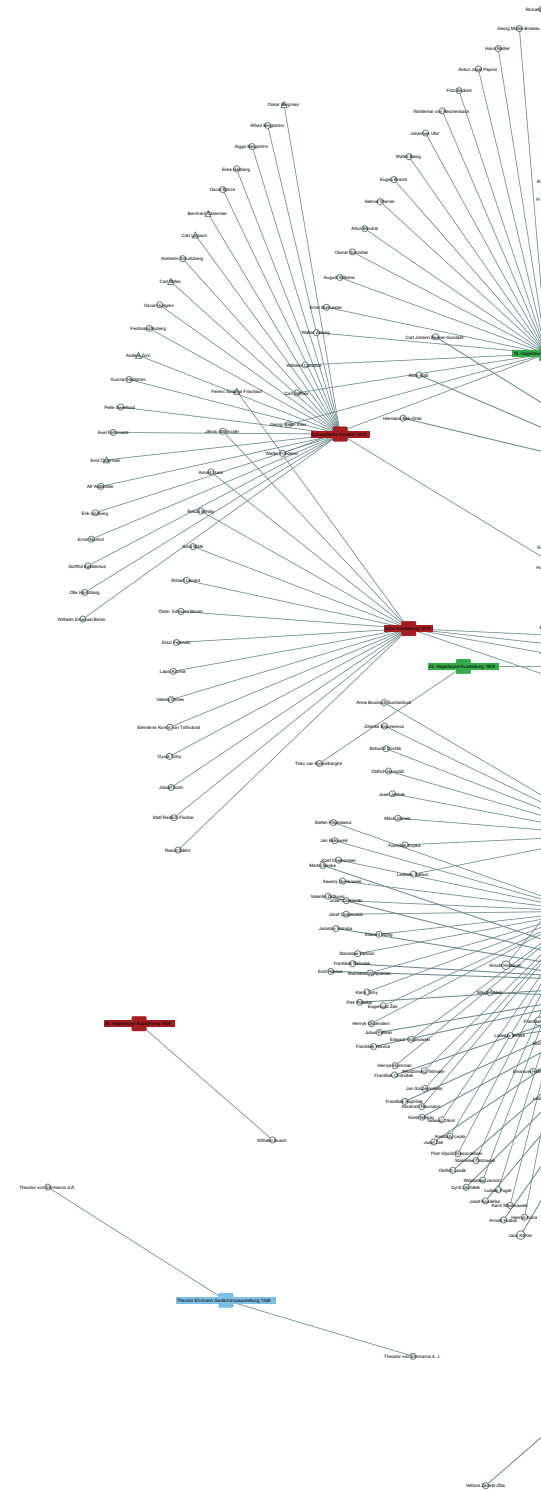
Fig. 5. Overall network of exhibitions and artists of the Hagenbund between 1899 and 1938

This bimodal network shows the two categories exhibitions and participating artists. The more often an artist took part in exhibitions, the larger his name is displayed in the diagram and the more centrally it is positioned. The frequency of participation was also directly proportional to the probability of an artist being a member, and in turn, of being elected to the association's board. When looking at the network over the course of the Hagenbund's entire existence, two centers can primarily be identified.

The first of these centers is formed by the exhibitions and artists in the early years of the Hagenbund. The program was strongly influenced by an inner circle of members, which resulted in the program of this period being somewhat homogeneous. Slightly removed from this inner circle, the group can be seen that moved back to the Künstlerhaus in 1905, made up of artists such as Ameseder, Kasparides or Suppantchitsch. Infrequent participants such as the group of Swedish or Norwegian artists are to be found at the edge of the diagram. However, those artists of the associations Mánes and Sztuka, who became members after their first participation in an exhibition, are grouped between the center and the periphery.

The loss of the Zedlitzhalle as an exhibition space and the outbreak of the First World War constituted a structural gap. This meant that the Hagenbund's exhibition activities in the period between 1912 and 1919 were limited. Those members who significantly shaped the period both before and after the First World War such as Laske, Barwig the Elder, Stemolak and Graf bridged this time period.

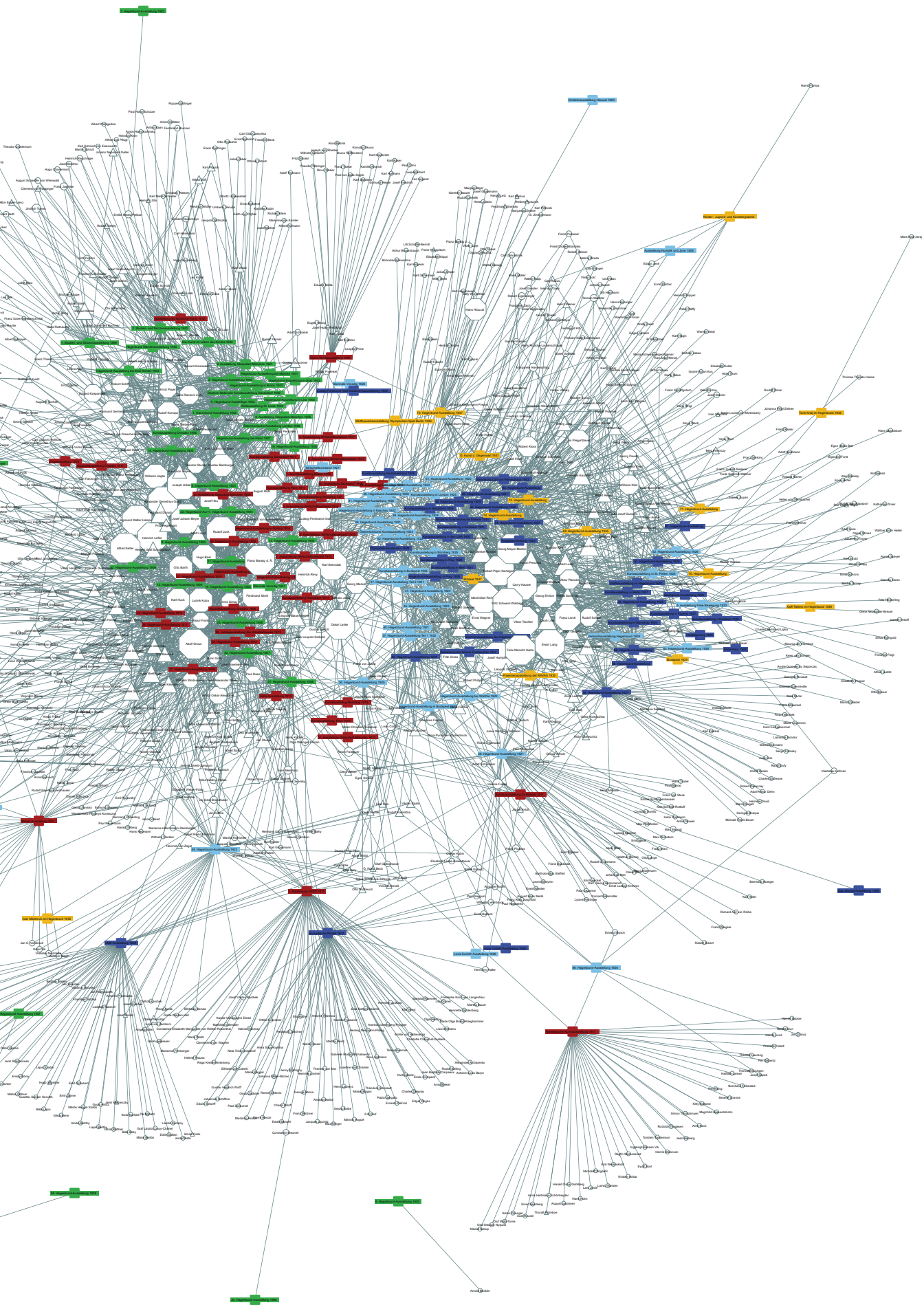
The second center is primarily defined by a group of younger artists such as Mayer-Marton, Pajer-Gartegen, Hauser and Peschka, who took part in the greatest number of exhibitions after the return to the Zedlitzhalle. The fact that the Hagenbund now had to share the exhibition space with other associations and that cultural-historical exhibitions and special shows were also held there meant that the program as a whole became more heterogeneous. This in turn influenced the artists' participations, which meant that in this period more members than guests exhibited here, bringing the first group into a more central position again.



Key:

- Guest
- △ Member
- ◻ Board
- Exhibition
- 1900–1908
- 1909–1919
- 1920–1926
- 1927–1934
- 1935–1938





### Network Analysis as a Branch of Digital Art History

Demonstrating the importance of network analysis for digital humanities in general, and for digital art history in particular, is a task of our time.<sup>23</sup> The most important challenge for the future, however, will be the development of the appropriate tools and their incorporation into the art-historical research process. Happily, museums, in which increasingly such digital methods as gamification, eye-tracking, and art-historical network analyses are being used, serve as a kind of catalyst. Recent exhibition projects like *In the Network of Modernism. The Art Critic Will Grohmann* (Staatliche Kunstsammlung Dresden, 2012) and *Inventing Abstraction* (MoMA, New York, 2013) confirm this positive trend.

- 1 The basis for this catalogue has been a study of sources within the framework of the two-year research project “Hagenbund – a European Network in Vienna 1900–1938,” financed by the Jubiläumsfond of the OeNB from April 1913 to April 1915. Idea and concept: Harald Krejci; project director: Matthias Boeckl; collaborating scholars: Verena Gamper, Kerstin Jesse, Maximilian Kaiser, and Axel Köhne.
- 2 Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Rhizom*, Berlin 1977, p. 16.
- 3 See John Padgett and Christopher Ansell, “Robust Action and the Rise of the Medici (1400–1434),” in: *American Journal of Sociology*, vol. 98, no. 6 (May 1993), pp. 1259–1319.
- 4 Martin Düring and Linda von Keyserlingk, “Netzwerkanalyse in den Geschichtswissenschaften. Historische Netzwerkanalyse als Methode für die Erforschung von historischen Prozessen,” in: Academia.edu, URL: <[http://www.Academia.edu/449150/Netzwerkanalyse\\_in\\_den\\_Geschichtswissenschaften.\\_Historische\\_Netzwerkanalyse\\_als\\_Methode\\_fur\\_die\\_Erforschung\\_von\\_historischen\\_Prozessen](http://www.Academia.edu/449150/Netzwerkanalyse_in_den_Geschichtswissenschaften._Historische_Netzwerkanalyse_als_Methode_fur_die_Erforschung_von_historischen_Prozessen)> (accessed May 15, 2014).
- 5 Among the most important exhibitions in chronological sequence were: *Hagenbund 1900–1938. Geschichte der Wiener Künstlervereinigung*, 1972, in the Vienna Museum, *Hagenbund 1900–1938*, 1983, in the Kulturverband Favoriten, and *Die verlorene Moderne. Der Künstlerbund Hagen 1900–1938*, 1993, presented by the Österreichische Galerie Belvedere in Schloss Halbturn.
- 6 The Hagenbund’s exhibition chronology in its present form is a result of the research project. Here, for the sake of completeness, it is necessary to mention two earlier listings: Antonia Hoerschelmann, *Tendenzen der österreichischen Malerei zwischen 1918–1938 and ihre Relation zur europäischen Kunst des 20. Jahrhunderts*, diss. Vienna 1989, pp. 157–164. – Peter Chrastek, “Verzeichnis aller Hagenbund-Ausstellungen,” in: *Die verlorene Moderne. Der Künstlerbund Hagen 1900–1938*, exh. cat. Österreichische Galerie im Schloss Halbturn, Vienna 1993, pp. 278–87.



- 7 Regina Göckede, "Neues Bauen in der Fremde," in: Burcu Dogramaci and Karin Wimmer, eds., *Netzwerke des Exils. Künstlerische Verflechtungen, Austausch und Patronage nach 1933*, Berlin 2011, p. 97.
- 8 Julia Gelshorn and Tristan Weddigen, "Das Netzwerk. Zu einem Denkbild in Kunst und Wissenschaft," in: Hubert Locher (ed.), and Peter J. Schneemann, *Grammatik der Kunstgeschichte: Sprachproblem und Regelwerk im "Bild-Diskurs"*, Berlin 2008, p. 58.
- 9 Franz Ottmann, "Kunstaustellungen in Wien. Winter 1921 bis Frühling 1922," in: *DBK*, vol. 5, 1922, p. 13.
- 10 See Rudolf Taschner, *Zahl, Zeit, Zufall. Geheimnisse der Wissenschaft*, Munich 2009, pp. 101–32. – Rudolf Taschner im Gespräch mit Hubert Christian Ehalt, "Die Vermessung der Geschichte. Zahlen und Fakten," Wiener Vorlesungen, January 29, 2013, URL: <http://vimeo.com/66392021> (min. 52:20–57:12 [accessed May 22, 2014]).
- 11 A series of centrality measures are available to scholarship like degree, closeness, or betweenness, which follow different concepts. They are important components of current network analysis software, for example UCINET, NetDraw, Gephi, visone, etc. – See Peter Mutschke, "Zentralitäts- und Prestigemasse," in: Roger Häussling and Christian Stegbauer, eds., *Handbuch Netzwerkforschung*, Wiesbaden 2010, pp. 365–78.
- 12 Gelshorn and Weddigen (as in note 8), p. 59.
- 13 Nicole Scheidegger, "Strukturelle Löcher," in: Häussling and Stegbauer (as in note 11), pp. 145–55.
- 14 Examples as guests are Karel Špillar (Mánes), Bernhard Österman (Swedish art exhibition), and Jakób Glasner (Sztuka), as corresponding members Jakub Obrowský (Svum), Teodor Axentowicz (Sztuka), and Jan Honsa (Mánes).
- 15 Sandra Baierl and Andrea Hlinka, "Netzwerke: die wichtigsten Veränderer Österreichs," in: *Kurier. Online Ausgabe*, March 10, 2014, URL: <http://kurier.at/karrieren/netzwerk-die-wichtigsten-veraenderer-oesterreichs/55.251.548> (accessed May 25, 2014).
- 16 Gregor Langfeld, *Deutsche Kunst in New York. Vermittler – Kunstsammler – Ausstellungsmacher. 1904–1957*, Berlin 2011, p. 14.
- 17 *Ibid.*, pp. 14f.
- 18 Maximilian Schich, *Rezeption und Tradierung als Komplexes Netzwerk. Der CENSUS und visuelle Dokumente zu den Themen in Rom*, diss., Munich 2009, pp. 19f.
- 19 The only two more thorough publications date from the early 1990s. See Rainer Fuchs, *Apologie und Diffamierung des "Österreichischen Expressionismus." Begriffs- und Rezeptionsgeschichte der österreichischen Malerei 1908 bis 1938*, Vienna 1991. – Arno Maierbrugger, *Federkiel und Meinungsmacht. Kunstkritik im österreichischen Feuilleton der Zwischenkriegszeit*, Vienna 1995.
- 20 Arthur Roessler, *Anton Faistauer. Beiträge zur Lebens- und Schaffensgeschichte eines österreichischen Künstlers*, Vienna 1947, pp. 13–20.
- 21 Anonymous, "Schutzverband schaffender Künstler Österreichs," in: *AZ*, vol. 40, no. 158, June 10, 1927, p. 8.
- 22 "Über den Wert der Kritik (Eine Rundfrage an die Künstler)," in: *Der Ararat. Glossen, Skizzen und Notizen zur neuen Kunst*, vol. 2, no. 4, 1921, p. 132.
- 23 A list of active scholars, teachers, and current projects can be found on the web site of the Arbeitskreis für digitale Kunstgeschichte. URL: <http://www.digitale-kunstgeschichte.de/wiki/Hauptseite> (accessed June 2, 2014).