

The Role of Central European Avant-garde Reviews in the 1920s (Hungary, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Romania, Bulgaria and Yugoslavia)

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Abstract: After the collapse of four empires during World War I, several new European states emerged, with new energy, anti-military and progressive attitudes among the youth, and shared optimism for a peaceful future. A new generation of writers, poets, artists, theorists, philosophers, architects, musicians, and film makers helped revitalize the cultural life in Central European countries (Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Romania, Yugoslavia and Bulgaria) in the early 1920s by publishing a variety of reviews that promoted new ideas and radical forms of expression, often linked to progressive social positions and leftist political influences. In spite of different orientations and local historical, cultural, social and political conditions, they often had similar objectives and clearly expressed attitudes about multinational and cosmopolitan culture, new forms and fresh approaches, with an ideological commitment to considering culture as primarily a social issue. The review editors exchanged articles, manifestos, poems, reproductions of plastic and applied arts, methods and practices in theatre, film, music, photography and architecture. They invented new media, organized international exhibitions, performances, conferences; participated in provocative activities and discussions and often shared similar artistic worldviews. Some were successful; others were banned for political reasons, but all were important elements in avant-garde movements of the time.

After the end of World War I and the collapse of four empires (Austro-Hungarian, German, Ottoman and Russian), several new European states were created. They offered a different

identity and image of the Old Continent in response to war. There were rapid changes, new ideas, the world was full of hope and positive energy. Although artists came from different cultural and historical backgrounds, they shared the same disillusion because of the war disasters and had similar antiwar aspirations. Positive perspectives about Europe and the world, and about a peaceful cosmopolitan future prevailed - at least for a while. The central part – the so-called “heart of Europe”, was not well known; it was considered peripheral, and in many ways it remains so until today, even though Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania, and Bulgaria are all members of the European Union. Without arguing about how realistic, autochthonous or homogeneous Central Europe really is (the territory is primarily the successor of the former Habsburg Empire) – we will begin with the assumption that there really is such a thing as “Central Europe”. It is important to emphasize that two remarkable art historians, professors Andrzej Turowski¹ and particularly Krisztina Passuth² were among the first experts who contributed to raising the awareness about the richness of ideas, variety of manifestations, important artworks and outstanding figures in the avant-garde sphere of the Central European cultural milieu. On the other hand, we must also accept

¹ Andrzej TUROWSKI, *Existe-t-il un art de l'Europe de l'Est? Utopie & Idéologie*. Penser l'Espace. (Paris: Editions de la Villette, 1986).

² Krisztina PASSUTH, *Les Avant-Gardes de l'Europe Centrale, 1907–1927* (Paris: Flammarion, 1988).

Timothy O. Benson's³ considerations of the complexity of Central European identity as "ambiguous, diffuse, fragmentary, and contradictory": "Not one avant-garde, but many avant-gardes, interacting with one another yet each retaining its unique characteristics".

Young generations of writers, poets, artists, theorists, philosophers, architects, musicians, and film makers helped editors in the early 1920s revitalize the cultural life of the region by, among else, publishing a variety of reviews, journals or magazines supporting new ideas and radical forms of expression, often connected to progressive social positions and leftist influences. In spite of different orientations and local historical or social conditions, different languages used, frequent changes of locations and even countries where those reviews were edited, they often had similar objectives. They had clearly expressed attitudes about multinational and cosmopolitan culture, and they supported new forms and fresh ideas, with an ideological commitment to considering culture as primarily a social issue. The editors exchanged articles, manifestos, poems, reproductions of plastic and applied arts, thoughts and practices in theatre, film, music, photography and architecture. They invented new media, organized international exhibitions, performances, soirées, conferences; participated in provocative activities and discussions with radical slogans about the need to improve the conditions of institutions and, in general, to change social and often also the larger political situation. They stimulated dialogues between the traditional and the modern and were among the first to understand the importance of new technical and technological developments which they introduced to their publications and activities.

³ Timothy O. BENSON, "Introduction", in *Central European Avant-gardes: Exchange and Transformation, 1910–1930*, ed. Timothy O. BENSON, 12–21 (Los Angeles: County Museum of Art; Cambridge, Mass. – London, England: The MIT Press, 2002), 16, 21.

In this rush to present and even accept new events and new statements, we can sometimes recognize the overlapping of different – if not opposed – phenomena, with a dynamic structure, diverse subjects and a variety of stylistique forms.

In spite of this very active, frequent and fruitful international communication, cooperation and sharing common ideas about utopian expectations, the avant-garde reviews could not contribute to the creation of a united and unique avant-garde movement. Therefore, we will discuss different avant-garde "voices" in Central European reviews and their particularities within distinct cultural, historical, political and social conditions; their isolated expressions but also often with very close points of view.

Reviews were important as the easiest and most direct, independent way to express and confront statements and ideologies, to gather people with same or similar attitudes, to be international and interdisciplinary, able to enlarge the number of collaborators from distant locations, to be, in a word – a forum for the exchange and dissemination of new ideas and complex new tendencies in various disciplines. It is incredible how this communication was intense and quick, rich and productive – in spite of the only possible technology of that time – traditional letters delivered by mail, and sometimes direct contacts among the involved editors and artists established in big cultural centers – Paris, Vienna, Berlin.

Both the similarities and the differences evident in these reviews will reveal simultaneous autochthonous and independent developments in their respective milieus. At the same time, however, the major European metropolis and the unofficial European capital of that time, Berlin, was extremely important as the meeting point and the crossroads of artists coming from the East and from the West. Above all, there was Herwarth Walden and his *Der Sturm*, established in the 1910s, as an example and a source of information. However, it also of-

ferred space for presentations of fresh ideas and forms coming from all over the world, including various Central European artists. There were many Hungarians in Berlin who left their country because of Miklós Horthy, or Bulgarians who escaped from Cankov's dictatorship, Romanians and Austrians, Poles, some Croats, Slovenians and Serbs, Ukrainians and Belarusians, but mostly - hundreds of thousands of Russians of all colors, white and red, left and right, progressive and conservative, gathered round the Nöldorfplatz. The so-called *Russian Berlin* had a particular role in spreading outside of Russia the ideas of utopian Constructivism, headed by Lazar El Lissitzky, as well as the shortlasting review *Veshch/Objet/Gegenstand*, which he edited together with Ilya Ehrenburg. Ehrenburg's momentous novel *It does Revolve* was reflected in some Central European avant-garde reviews, as it was the *First Russian Exhibition of New Art* in the Van Diemen Gallery from October to December 1922.

Reviews and the emerging ideas were often presented and developed in popular cafes that the artists occupied at that time, such as *Japan Café* or *Café Central* in Budapest, *Narodni Café*, *Slavia*, *Tumovka*, *Union* or *Metro* in Prague, *Polish art Club* in *Polonia Hotel* in Warsaw, *Kasina* and *Korzo* in Zagreb, *Moscow* in Belgrade, *Café Capsa*, *Teresa Otelesteanu* or *Café Enache Dinu*, near Bucharest *Piata Mare*, *Schloss Café* and *Café Beethoven* in Vienna.

Among the very first, most influential and longest lasting avant-garde journals, reviews or periodicals, probably in the entire Europe, was the antiwar review *MA* [Today], representative *par excellence* for our narrative. (See Fig. 1. on Plate I.) It appeared in 1916, succeeding the review *A Tett* [The Deed], banned during World War I. The founder, the charismatic Lajos Kassák and his *Activists* celebrated social justice and the moral role of art, revolutionary changes not only on the political but also the technological level. They strongly emphasized and promoted new values of industrial production, design,

architecture, technology and all other new inventions, such as photography, collages, photomontages, new typography and newly invented alphabet. After supporting the ideas of Cubism and Futurism, *MA* embraced Dadaist humor and sarcastic behavior. Kurt Schwitters' *picture-poems* were reflected in Kassák's works. His *picture-architecture* became a proto-model for geometrical compositions: proto-Constructivism appeared here for the first time. Exceeding Russian *Obmokhu*, the review became the loudspeaker of the most radical pan European Constructivist abstraction, "social and technological utopia", or "Romantic Constructivism", according to Ilya Ehrenburg. Artworks that appeared in *Ma* were identified as promoters of a better world to come. Kassák believed that it was a symbol of a future without nationalism and social class stratification. The review had a great impact on other avant-garde periodicals almost all over Central Europe: after Kassák's articles and woodcuts appeared on cover pages of *MA*, they were soon replicated in *Der Sturm* and *Veshch/Objet/ Gegenstand* in Berlin, *Zenit* in Zagreb/Belgrade, *Contimporanul* in Bucharest, *Zvornica* in Cracow, etc.

The year 1922 was important for the Hungarian avant-garde: after the collapse of the Commune, Kassák and *Activists* chose Vienna as their new stage. An even larger international collaboration was established with deeper Communist influence, particularly in Béla Uitz's journal *Egység* [Unity]. Quoting Jaroslav Andel, Oliver A. I. Botar argues:

The Hungarians' concept of "Proletcult" was equivalent to what was known in Soviet Russia as "Proletarian Art", e.g., art in the service of the Communist Party. "Proletarian Art" was not only separate from the Proletcult, an autonomous movement founded by Aleksandr Bogdanov and others to encourage artistic production among workers,

but was promoted by the Party in opposition to it.⁴

Dadaism became visible in Sandor Barta's *Akasztott Ember* [The Hanged Man] – together with Proletcult ideas and simplicity of its expression, on the one side, and on the other, with George Grosz and Berlin Dada there was humor full of satire, sarcasm and absurdity. In that respect it was similar to the spirit of Yugoslav *Zenit* or Romanian *Urmuz*. Although Kassák rejected Dadaist mood in his *MA*, he considered the Hungarian Dadaists' review *Út* [Path] from Novi Sad & Subotica (in Voivodina) as a "brother's review". Kassák and Moholy-Nagy published their important overview of different avant-garde movements in the book *Buch Neuer Kunstler* (*Book of New Artists*). Moholy-Nagy's *Picture-architecture* (*Bildarchitektur*) manifesto was accepted as a guide to spiritual constructivism.

Ma had a rather dissolute organization, with various interests and backgrounds during its long life. Important participation of various Hungarian artists such as Béla Uitz, János Máttis Teutsch, Iván Hevesy, Sándor Bortnyik, Lajos Tihanyi, Aurél Bernáth, Lajos Kudlák, and "prophetic poets" Endre Ady, János Mácza and Béla Bartók created a rich scenery for the review's concept. Ernő Kállai was the key link to the international context. On the other hand, Socialist Berlin was present through connections with Franz Pfemfert's journal *Die Aktion*. Collaboration with other progressive magazines, institutions and figures was intense as well, such as for exam-

⁴ Oliver A. I. BOTAR, "From the Avant-garde to »Proletarian Art«: The Émigré Hungarian Journals *Egység* and *Akasztott Ember*, 1922–23", *Art Journal* 52, No. 1 (1993): 34–45, 44, endnote 4. [Online]. Available at: http://www.academia.edu/10993842/From_the_Avant-Garde_to_Proletarian_Art_The_Emigre_Hungarian_Journals_Egyseg_and_Akasztott_Ember_1922-23. [Accessed 5 June 2017].

ple, with *Periszkop* and *Genius* in Arad (Transylvania), with Hannes Meyer, Bauhaus etc.

Back in Budapest in 1926, new challenges did not surprise Kassák: in his review he gave support to another international uprising movement, Surrealism, confirming his permanent confidence in art as a social activity but without political involvement.

In cosmopolitan Prague, the cultural atmosphere was favourable for new events: there were plenty of exhibitions, collections (for example the famous Vincenc Kramář's early Cubist collection with works of Picasso, Braque and other French painters), in addition to emerging local new art movements such as Czech Symbolism, Cubo-Expressionism based on local Baroque experiences with Otto Gutfreund, Bohumil Kubišta or Antonin Procházka, followed by specific Czech Cubism in art, design and architecture. The entire Prague cultural scene, where Franz Kafka lived, Roman Jacobsen worked as a distinguished linguist, Albert Einstein lectured, many prominent European artists visited and White Russians stayed after the October revolution, contributed to the intellectual environment and creativity of the 1920s.

Umělecký Svaz Devětsil [Art Union Nine Powers], the art group and avant-garde movement, founded in 1920 in Prague and in 1923 in Brno, had a loose program in the early period, combining different ideas and aesthetic platforms, first of all willing to mobilize the post-war energy and creative potentials of young artists. The first phase was close to Expressionism, combined with Magic Realism and Primitivism or Primordialism. This early Czech modernism was immediately represented in the review *Zenit*, Zagreb, nos. 6, 7, 8, 9, and 10, 1921. (See Fig. 2. on Plate I.) The leading theoretical figure Karel Teige, who in a way had a similar role as Lajos Kassák in Hungary, was at the same time an eminent writer, poet and radical plastic artist. He advocated clear proletarian positions, especially after his visit to the Soviet Union in 1925. For him, art should be con-

nected to social life and in that respect all the limitations should be abolished through new forms of creativity. Therefore, he supported new experiments in art, such as the technique of photo-collages where film procedures of cutting and interpolation were practiced, or new typography, as well as real objects from everyday life introduced into the exhibitions, both in photos or as “readymades”. Teige created his *picture – poems* as the basis of Czech Poetismus, which was “not one more *ism*, but the necessary complement of Constructivism” – according to his statements. Poetismus was gradually moving towards Surrealism, both in literature and in plastic and visual arts, and *Devětsil* was its full supporter.

Devětsil members published a series of publications: the regular monthly review ReD [Review of *Devětsil*], *Disk*, *Pasmo* [Zone], *Stavba* [Construction], and also important almanacs in 1922 – *Revoluční sborník Devětsil* [Revolutionary Collective volume *Devětsil*] and *Život* [Life] I & II with a great number of international contributions (among others – Yvan Goll, Ilya Ehrenburg, Jeanneret & Ozenfant, Micić etc.). Beside the charismatic Teige, very active were painters Jindřich Štyrský and Toyen (Marie Čermínová). Already living in Paris for years, they were close to leading Dadaist and Surrealist circles around Breton, Arp, Dalí, Max Ernst, Masson, Miró, Paalen, Tanguy, Giacometti, De Chirico etc. Therefore, it was not surprising that Surrealism would be present early in major Czech avant-garde reviews.

Great contribution was given by Czech poets and writers, such as Jaroslav Seifert, Vladislav Vančura, Adolf Hoffmeister, Jaroslav Rössler, Bedřich Václavěk, Konstantin Biebl, Vítězslav Nezval or Jiří Voskovec, leader of *Osvoboždene* [Liberated] *Theater*, who put on stage progressive plays by Alfred Jarry, Apollinaire, Breton and Cocteau.

Important activity was realized by the Architects' club with participation of many local members and also with contributions by Pieter Oud, Walter Gropius, Le Corbusier,

Adolf Loos, Theo van Doesburg and many other prominent architects. Czech Functionism immediately attained special recognition worldwide.

Among the most attractive *Devětsil* activities were exhibitions and anti-exhibitions, which were reflections of the Berlin Dada Fair. After the first, *Jarní výstava* [Spring exhibition] in 1922, the following exhibition, *Rudolphinum* first in Prague and then in Brno in 1923–24, was much more radical: called the *Bazaar of Modern Art*, this exhibition expanded the notion of exhibits. It included stage design and architectural projects, reproductions exposed close to the original works, special combinations of pictures & poems, photomontages, fashion design, installations, such as mirrors instead of portraits, or window dummies instead of sculptures...

The next show organized by the Review was held in 1926 when Constructivism and Poetismus dominated. The exhibits promoted machine production, modern technology and the technical world. The “electric century” glorified telephone, radio, airplanes, railroads, ships and cars. The new order was established – emotions were governed by mathematical laws, not by individual expressions in art. In a way, this preceded the ideas of *L'Esprit Nouveau*. Teige declared that no more pictures in frames are needed, originals will disappear, and instead reproductions and prints will dominate.

Devětsil was quickly acknowledged abroad and became also an important part of the local scene, which was not the case with many other reviews of that period in other cultural milieus.

Another distinct periodical *Fronta* appeared in 1927 in Brno under the slogan “an international journal for current activity”. Its editors František Halas, Zdeněk Rössman and Bedřich Václavěk summarized the actual state of art and culture, with another socialist idea. According to them: “The new art in life is to create new people who will create a new society”. Little by little – all those utopi-

as will sink in deep seas of different aspirations and ambitions, and not only in Czechoslovakia...

Since Poland also obtained its independence and unification in 1918, a new strategy for rediscovery of national identity was developed, with new ideological expressions, but without Dadaist sarcasm or irony, like in many other countries. They had some typical local issues. It was believed that folk elements may offer truly national, unique, archetypal and eternally modern and original spirit. In that respect a group of *Formists* put its roots of modernism in Poland. Supported by the great Polish and European writer Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz – Witkacy, *Formists* represented a variant of Polish Cubism, with some Futurist and folk elements. They stated that the aim of painting is not to reproduce the real world, but to construct an unbreakable whole from various planes. This was the path towards Constructivism.

In May 1923 visual artists organized an exhibition with a very special installation in a special place – the luxury car show room, in a way similar to the Czech *Bazaar*: postcards replaced traditional painted landscapes, periodicals and books on modern art were displayed together with works of art. This exhibition stimulated the foundation of an art group called *Blok* – Group of Cubists, Constructivists, and Suprematists (1924–26). They were editing the homonym review *Blok* in Warsaw, also active in Vilnius. (See Fig. 3. on Plate I.) Here again the general concept had a strong social commitment, reflected in theoretical writings and pragmatic art works. The most prominent representatives were Henrik Berlewi, Mieczysław Szczuka, Teresa Żarnower (Żarnowerówna), Władysław Strzemiński and Katarzyna Kobro. In the *Blok* Manifesto “What is Constructivism?” we recognize the closeness to the concept of Alexander Rodčenko’s *Lef* (Left Front of the Arts), especially when questions about the relationship between art and social revolution are raised. The same goes for utilitarianism and industrial production in service of

social change. Mechanical objects were reproduced, and use of new materials stimulated (iron, glass, cement). Consequently – new forms were expected. Szczuka and Żarnower, on the other hand, attended *Vhute-mas* (*Vysšhiye Khudozhestvenno-Tekhnicheskiye Masterskiye* [Higher Art and Technical Studios]) and accepted positions of El Lissitzky and Naum Gabo.

Władysław Strzemiński, artist, critic, theorist, teacher and organizer of cultural life in Łódź, the author of the most radical concept in Polish avant-garde *Unism*, had a distinguished international career: as a Belarusian, he was one of the most prominent Polish avant-gardists, who also contributed to the organization of the first avant-garde art exhibition in Vilnius (in Poland, at that time), together with his wife Katarzyna Kobro, a prominent Polish sculptor of Russian, Latvian and German origin. Their theory of *Unism* was influenced first by Moscow INHUK (*Institut Hudožestvenoi kulturi* / Institute of Art Culture), but soon their theoretical approach has changed: they announced the idea of a complete unity of various elements in the artwork. Strzemiński’s paintings found the inspiration in Unistic musical compositions by the Polish composer Zygmunt Krauze and he also created his *architectonics* – compositions in space – and was interested in making new typography. His revolutionary book *The Theory of Vision* speaks in a different way about Constructivism and its social purpose. Strzemiński stood for the idea that art should be autonomous and artists should have “laboratory conditions” in artistic experimentation. In that respect, for him, Productivism had a pejorative meaning.

The successors of *Blok* – the group *Praesens* (1926–29) and later *a.r.* (1929–36) were transferred to Łódź where the first Museum of Modern (e.g. Avant-garde) Art was created in one textile factory thanks to the artists Szczuka, Strzemiński, Kobro, Henryk Stażewski, and poets Julian Przyboś and Jan Brzękowski. It remains until now one of the most important museums for avant-garde art.

Łódź was also home of the influential *Jung Idysz* group and its publications that were introducing various Expressionist feelings, referring to Mark Chagall: Jankiel Adler, Marek Szwarz, Henryk Barciski, Ida Brauner, Neuman were its promoters. El Lissitzky, on his way from Vitebsk to Berlin, spoke in their club about international Constructivism. He also went to Warsaw.

The Cracow based review *Zwrotnica* [Railway Switch] was ideologically also on the left, launching new forms and media, thanks to the editor and poet Tadeusz Peiper who was an active and successful mediator: he introduced Polish avant-garde artists to the international scene, and among others also introduced Malevič to Gropius and Moholy-Nagy. In his review, he also supported Kazimierz Podsadecki, prominent constructivist and abstract painter, who made photomontages and experimental films.

Contimporanul [The Contemporary] was an avant-garde political, satirical and art weekly journal, with plenty of fresh news and up-to-date comments, published in Bucharest since 1922. (See Fig. 4. on Plate I.) It claimed to continue the tradition of the homonym former newspaper from Iasi, which was sponsored by Socialist societies in the 1880s. There was a new series from 1946 on, with a slightly changed name (*Contemporanul*) which continues to be published until today, but obviously without avant-garde connotations.

This political orientation of the review already changed in 1923, but the review remained committed to serious social issues, attacking anti-Semitism or bourgeois mentality. It was oriented more and more towards cultural and artistic subjects, treating Cubism, Futurism, Constructivism, and Surrealism (one entire issue was dedicated to it) and thus became the meeting place of journalists, editors, writers, artists and architects. The two major personalities responsible for *Contimporanul* avant-garde beginnings were Marcel Janco and Ion Vinea. Janco was once a prominent Dadaist, one of the

organizers of the Zurich *Cabaret Voltaire*, although the Romanian review did not support Dadaism nor Tristan Tzara's changed views regarding this movement. Ion Vinea was a fervent opponent of the ruling *National Liberal Party* and he was openly against art imitating nature; therefore he was struggling to find new forms and consequently a new reality. The review established international collaboration with numerous reviews all over Europe.

Radical, abstract Constructivism was not often present on the pages of this review because more attention was given to the synthesis called "integralism" of Cubism, Futurism and some forms of mild Constructivism. Little by little, the direction towards Romanian Surrealism prevailed due to the imaginative works with subconscious messages by leading Romanian painters Viktor Brauner, Jacques Herold and Jules Perahim (aka Iulius Blumenfeld).

Contimporanul paid particular attention to modern architecture, probably thanks to Marcel Janco's revolutionary vision of urban planning nourished with some expressionist ideas of Cubist dynamism in construction. As a real Renaissance man, Janco made projects for various innovative constructions in the city center, and was recognized for his sculptures and reliefs with slight reminiscence to Constructivism, for his paintings, prints, illustrations, furniture and stage design; he also wrote essays on art, film and theater, arguing that "Constructivism is the left extreme of Cubism".

The third important collaborator and editor of *Contimporanul* was the painter Maxim Max Herman Maxy, responsible for the organization of the International Exhibition of this review in December 1924 in *Sala Sindicatului Artelor Frumoase* (Exhibition Hall of the Plastic Artists Trade Union). He was assisted by Marcel Janco in organizing this huge show. The most impressive was the section of Romanian artists who sent their works from various parts of Europe: from Paris, Berlin, Rome, Zurich; among others, there

were exhibits by Arthur Segal, one of the founders of *Novembergruppe*, Tristan Tzara's portraits, Maxy's and Janco's constructions, Viktor Brauner's Surrealist and Janos Mattis-Teutsch's abstract paintings, four important sculptures by Konstantin Brancusi (*Melle Pogany*, *Kiss*, *Maiastra* and *Child's Head* and a photo from his Paris studio), as well as several works of his student Milita Petrascu.

Beside works of modern art, the show had an eclectic agenda – it included Dida Solom's puppets, East Asian idols, Ceylonese masks, applied art objects, architectural drawings, abstract designs, and Viking Eggeling's films, alongside the works by Arp, Klee, Richter, Lajos Kassák, Kurt Schwitters and others (such as, for example, the Zenitist Jo Klek). The double issue (nos. 50–51) of the review *Contimporanul* served as a catalogue of the exhibition, as was the case of the *Zenit* exhibition in April 1924.

The inauguration of the *Contimporanul* show was in a Dada mood: with “Negro jazz” musicians as “modernist ritual”, drumrolls, sirens, inaugural speeches in darkness with candles. “It was chaos”, visitors remembered. There were no commercial issues, but many articles about this event remained.

Even earlier, while they were still in high school, Tristan Tzara, Marcel Janco and Ion Vinea edited the magazine *Simbolul* [The Symbol] Also in early 1920s, a group of young revolutionaries in Yambol, Bulgaria, who opposed the mainstream cultural and social environment published a small review entitled *Crescendo* (1922), which published articles and reproductions by progressive Bulgarian artists and also included works by Celine Arnault, Ozenfant and Jeanneret, Teo van Doesburg, Tristan Tzara, Ilya Ehrenburg, Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, Benjamin Péret, Kurt Schwitters, Alexandre Tairov, etc. (See Fig. 5. on Plate II.) This activity was possible thanks to the European contacts of the major figure in Bulgarian modernism, Geo Milev, a poet, writer, journalist, translator, and editor of several reviews (*Vezni/*Scales, *Plamk/*Flame etc.). He fell victim to Cankov's

dictatorship because of his famous poem *Septemvri* (September, 1924), which railed against the military *coup d'état* in June 1923.

There were several other Romanian avant-garde magazines with different concepts and positions: *Unu* (editor Sasa Pana) was a leftist periodical, making a transition from Romanian avant-garde to Surrealism; *Urmuz* (editor Demetrescu-Buzau) was the predecessor of absurdity in literature and new language; *Integral* (edited by Ilarie Voronca) preferred Futurist ideas; *75 HP* was nominally anti-*Contimporanul* and pro-Dada; *Punct* (editor was the socialist Scarlet Callimachi). This Dadaist-Constructivist journal also cultivated abstract lyricism.

In the newly founded Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (in December 1918), Zagreb played a particularly important role in connecting with Western centers and contributing to the quick modernization of life. Therefore, it was not surprising that it was there that *Zenit* (Zenith), the international magazine for new art and culture appeared in February 1921. *Zenit* published manifestos declaring antimilitarism and brotherhood among nations; it was open to the international avant-garde scene (this character of the review was ensured by the French-German writer Yvan Goll who was co-editor of *Zenit* in 1921–22, nos. 8–13). A great number of contributions came from almost all parts of the world, seeking absolute freedom, with an emphasis on liberated language and poetry (*words in freedom*, *words in space*), accepting all innovative, progressive ideas, forms of expression and stylistic differences.

In that respect, the founder and editor of the review *Zenit*, Ljubomir Micić, in the beginning supported the international Expressionist mood with works by Egon Schiele, Vilko Gecan, Jovan Bijelić, Mihailo S. Petrov etc. (See Fig. 6. on Plate II.) Soon the Italian Futurist enthusiasm for dynamic movements and technological novelties also appears in *Zenit* with works by F.T. Marinetti, Buzzzi, Depero, Azari. Nikola Tesla was celebrated

as a genius-inventor. Simultaneously present was the Dadaist revolt, with its claim for the abolishment of traditional culture, old forms of expression and freedom for interpreting reality (Dragan Aleksić, Branko Ve Poliansky, and Hungarian Dadaists from Voïvodina). *Zenit* also included French Cubist Orphism and its research into formal structures and colors, materials and relations to music (Robert Delaunay, Serge Charchoune, Alexander Archipenko). Particularly successful was the collaboration with the Russian avant-garde from Berlin – the direct connections with Lazar El Lissitzky and Ilya Ehrenburg who edited the special Russian issue of *Zenit*, no. 17–18, October–November 1922) dedicated entirely to new Russian literature, plastic arts, theater, music etc. *Zenit* also supported early manifestations of Surrealism (around Paul Dermée and Max Jacob), and finally social commitment in culture (dissemination of statements from De Stijl, Bauhaus and Purism).

The Zenitist idiosyncrasy culminated with the slogan *Balkanisation of Europe* by means of a metaphoric figure *Barbarogenius* – coming from innocent, wild areas of the Balkans and ready to recover old, tired and degenerated Europe – responsible for the unprecedented tragedies and traumas of World War I. In that respect, Micić's book *AntiEurope* shows a fundamental anti-European state of mind.

Two year later, in 1923, Micić had to move from Zagreb to Belgrade because of his radical and severe criticism of Croatia's *petit-bourgeois* in culture and politics. But Belgrade was also not ready to accept his isolated behavior, sharp judgments and suspicious ideas published in *Zenit* and related to the Bolshevik Soviet Union. For various reasons, being subversive, critical, and autonomous, Micić was put on trial and the police banned *Zenit* editions on several occasions. Finally, because of the article *Zenitism through the Prism of Marxism*, signed by a certain "Dr. M. Rasinov", obviously a fictional character (*Zenit*, no. 43, 1926), Micić was accused of

organizing a Bolshevik Communist Revolution and *coup d'état*. This turned out to be the last issue of *Zenit*. Micić escaped to Paris and was back in Belgrade only ten years later, in 1937. His heroic years were almost forgotten and they remained so until his death in 1971.

To quote one example of the international position of *Zenit* in the 1920s: Ljubomir Micić's program text "Zenitosophy or the Creative energy of Zenitism" (originally published in *Zenit*, nos. 26–33, 1924) was translated and printed in *Der Sturm* and *Blok* (September 1924), in *7Arts* (March & April 1925), *Het Overzicht* (1925), and according to Micić in several other reviews (with no data).

One of the most important activities during the existence of the review *Zenit* was the First (and only) International *Zenit* Exhibition of New Art, inaugurated in one music school in Belgrade in April 1924. The best example of plastic ideas that *Zenit* disseminated was the work by Josip Seissel, in Zenitism called *Jo Josif Klek*. His system *PaFaMa* (Papier-Farben-Material), abstract paintings and temperas, his Dada and Constructivist collages and photomontages, were published in *Zenit* and exhibited in various shows as representative of *Zenit*. The other works exhibited and collected in the *Zenit* gallery first in Zagreb and also in Belgrade, came from eleven European countries and the United States, including Vassily Kandinsky, Alexander Archipenko, Robert Delaunay, László Moholy-Nagy, Lajos Tihanyi, El Lissitzky, Jozef Peeters, Albert Carel Willink, Albert Gleizes, Louis Lozowick, Serge Charchoune, Helen Grünhoff...and several Yugoslav artists (Mihailo S. Petrov, Jovan Bijelić, Vilko Gecan, Vjera Biller...). The stylistic variety of exhibits in this show was the deliberate indicator of pluralism that the review *Zenit* declared.

In Zagreb, in 1922, Dragan Aleksić, close associate of Micić's, published his small but important reviews *Dada Tank* and *Dada Jazz*, trying to formulate *Yugo-dada*, following his interest in Dadaism awaken in Prague where

he stayed with Micić's brother, Branko Ve Poliansky (aka Branko Micić; called also Valerij Poljanski), a Zenitist poet, writer, editor and later painter. The answer came from Poliansky who immediately published his review *Dada- Jok* and *Dada Express* pamphlets/papers – defending Zenitist positions with Dadaist tools: criticism, sarcasm, irony, photomontages, new typography etc. Poliansky was also the editor of the proto-Zenitist reviews, published in Ljubljana in 1921/22 – *Svetokret* (Turning World) and *Kinofon* – the first review on cinema predicting the arrival of sound film. (See Fig. 7. on Plate II.)

An anarchist poet Anton Podbevšek, author of the book *Človek s bombami* (Man with the Bombs, 1925) published in Ljubljana, was the only editor of the review *Rdeči pilot* (Red Pilot, 1922) and its *Proletcult* program. He inspired young generations with "cosmic anarchism" – ideas coming from Nietzsche, Whitman and social criticism. Some information and ideas also came from Micić and his review *Zenit*, as was the case with August Černigoj, a Bauhaus student, identified with Slovenian Constructivism, published in *Der Strum* in 1928. Černigoj's exhibition in Ljubljana in 1925 was considered politically dangerous, and for that reason he had to leave the country. Back in Ljubljana from Trieste, together with Ferdo Delak he published three issues of the review *Tank* (1927) where basic Constructivism was amalgamated with Zenitist vocabulary, traces of Futurism, Proletarian theater of Enrico Prampolini and Erwin Piscator – freed from traditional literature narrative. (See Fig. 8. on Plate II.)

Another Slovenian poet and Marxist, Srečko Kosovel, leader of the avant-garde review *Mladina* [The Youth] represents a clear example of Constructivism in poetry, the so-called "velvet modernism" leading towards later proletarian social radicalism. He practiced constructions of poetic motives - montage of fragments, a kind of visual poetry *avant-la-lettre* in his collection of *Integrali* [Integrals]. Kosovel died very young, in 1926,

and his work remained almost unknown until it was revalorized only in the late 1960s.

The geopolitical situation after World War I affected greatly artists all over the world, particularly in the territories of the newly founded states. Among other things, the Dusseldorf declaration in May 1922 proclaimed: "Art is a universal and real expression of creative energy, which can be used to organize the progress of mankind." This stimulated the proliferation of collaboration and an upsurge in new ideas in culture and art, expressed in numerous reviews which served as the mediators of communication all over Europe and especially among Central European countries. These reviews contributed to the transformation of traditional forms of expression to modernist and avant-garde models, with a belief in creating new order and new societies. Obvious transformation occurred from various forms of Expressionism and Cubism, towards Dadaist and Constructivist international language. This was possible due to powerful personalities like Kassák, Uitz, Moholy-Nagy, Teige, Seiffert, Peiper, Strzemiński, Kobro, Janco, Maxy, Milev, Micić, Poliansky, Černigoj...

Some Central European reviews were dominated by writers (*Devětsil*, *Fronta*, *MA*, *Zenit*, *Vezni*, *Crescendo*, *Zwrotnica*), others by plastic artists (*Blok*, *Contimporanul*), but all disciplines were included and great attention was paid to interdisciplinary forms, to layout, to new typography and to reproductions of art works. Photography – artistic and from real life, posters, reportage, new media (*picture-poems*, *picto-poetra*, *picture-architecture*, *PaFaMa*, *Bildarchitektur* / *Képarchitektúra*) and advertising, as a new way of communication, were the organic part of all Central European reviews of the 1920s. In various ways music and particularly jazz was present in those avant-garde reviews, as well as film and radio, circus, architecture and applied or decorative arts.

Some periodicals put an accent on pre-modern values, national mythology and archetypal ethno-symbolic elements as eternal

sources of creativity (Barbarogenius in *Zenit*; preexisting ethnicities and folklore in *Vezni*; Primordialism in *Contimporanul*, early Poetism in *Formists*).

Along with a theoretical approach, most reviews organized practical events— conferences, discussions, soirées, literary circle, and huge, truly international exhibitions covering multiple tendencies and artists' works from various countries (*MA*, *Blok*, *Devětsil*, *Zenit*, *Contimporanul*) in general public instead of professional spaces, as the official art institutions were bypassed. Some exhibitions had great success (*Bazaar of Modern art* or *Contimporanul* show), others (like *Zenit*) – were ignored or criticized.

Exhibits were not only art works but also ready-made objects – the arte-facts of life; new machine era and technology were included, as they were glorified in articles and poetry as well. Poetry spoke about everyday modern life, social crises and workers' problems. The critical approach was supported by the presence of Charlie Chaplin and a leftist orientation throughout articles and images, poems, collages, photomontages and films with V. I. Lenin (*Ma*, *Devětsil*, *ReD*, *Černigoj*, *Tank*, *Blok*, *Zenit*). All the editors paid great attention to the new, modern and attractive graphic design of their reviews or journals, often full of irony and criticism.

Although being predominantly a masculine affair, Central European avant-garde reviews show the signs of the coming era with the new roles for women: we encounter many women either as prominent female artists (Katarzyna Kobro, Teresa Żarnower, Toyen, Ida Brauner, Milita Petrescu, Margarete Kubicka) or as companions and active members of avant-garde societies, circles and reviews (Neil Walden, Jolan Simon, Ljubov Kozincova Ehrenburg, Lucia Moholy, Erzsébet Kassák Ujváry, Anuška Micić – Nina-Naj, Mela Maxy, Lilia Milev). And we discover some forgotten names and their works, vanished with the flow of history (Thea Černigoj, Vjera Biller, Helen Grünhoff /Elena Gringova).

The contacts among the editors were intense and constant: they exchanged letters, opinions, ideas, materials for reviews and magazines, for exhibitions and collections.

The destiny of each review was, as usual, very distinct: some were banned; some survived difficult times and were transformed according to new demands of new times. Some faded away gradually from the scene together with their founders and leaders. Some have accomplished their historical objectives, some have just tried to. The story goes on... but the traces of those heroic times remarkably remain and always invite new research and new interpretations.

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PLATE I



Fig. 1. *MA*, Vienna, 1924.
Cover design by Lajos Kassák



Fig. 2. *Devětsil*, Prague, 1922

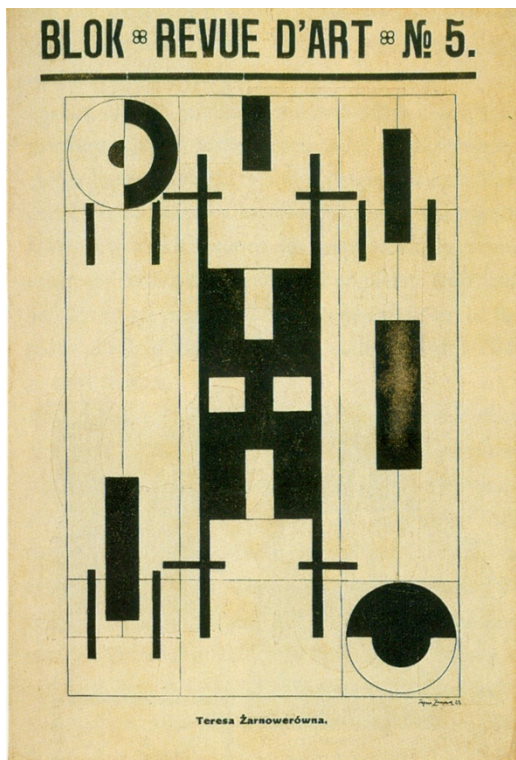


Fig. 3. *Blok*, Warsaw, no. 5, 1924.
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Fig. 4. *Contimporanul*,
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PLATE II



Fig. 5. *Crescendo*, Yambol, no. 2, 1922



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