Artl@s Bulletin

2014

At the periphery of architectural history – looking at Eastern Europe

Carmen Popescu
Université Paris I-Sorbonne, crmv@noos.fr

Follow this and additional works at: https://docs.lib.purdue.edu/artlas

Part of the Architectural History and Criticism Commons, and the Arts and Humanities Commons

Recommended Citation

At the periphery of architectural history – looking at Eastern Europe

Cover Page Footnote

Art and architectural historian, Carmen Popescu works mainly on identity, politics and historiography. Her work on Eastern Europe, presented in numerous conferences and publications, combines all these three directions. Her publications include: "Behind the Iron Curtain: architecture in the former Communist bloc, between isolation and fascination" (guest editor, Journal of Architecture, February 2009), "L'autre Europe" (guest editor, Ligeia, July-December 2009).

At the Periphery of Architectural History – Looking at Eastern Europe

Carmen Popescu*
Université Paris I-Sorbonne

Abstract

Long-time absent or only briefly mentioned for those examples fitting into the schemata, Eastern Europe has started to integrate in the past few years the mainstream discourse of architectural history. The reason of this inclusion is to be sought for not only in a certain globalization – both of the practice and of the academic discipline – but also in the mutations operated recently in the field of architectural historiography. However, in spite of the renewed context, Eastern Europe remains still marginal, both geographically – though globalization turned peripherality into a relative issue – and disciplinarily. The paper looks at Eastern European architecture as an epitome of marginality, analyzing the tactics and strategies employed for gaining visibility.

Résumé

Long temps absente, ou mentionnée uniquement à travers les exemples qui conviennent au discours dominant, l'Europe de l'Est a commencé depuis peu à intéresser l'histoire de l'architecture. La raison de cet intérêt doit être cherchée non seulement du côté de la mondialisation mais aussi des mutations subies par le champ de l'historiographie architecturale. Toutefois, en dépit de ce contexte renouvelé, l'Europe de l'Est reste marginale, à la fois géographiquement – même si la mondialisation a rendu le concept de périphérie relatif – et disciplinairement. Considérant l'architecture est-européenne sous l'angle d'un paradigme de marginalité, cet article analyse les tactiques et stratégies qu'on emploie afin de lui apporter plus de visibilité.

* Art and architectural historian, Carmen Popescu works mainly on identity, politics and historiography. Her work on Eastern Europe, presented in numerous conferences and publications, combines all these three directions. Her publications include: "Behind the Iron Curtain: architecture in the former Communist bloc, between isolation and fascination" (guest editor, Journal of Architecture, *February 2009), "L'autre Europe" (guest editor,* Ligeia, *July-December 2009).*

In 2012, two of the shows presented at the Pompidou Center in Paris staged an Albanian and a Romanian: Anri Sala (May 3 – August 6, 2012) and Mircea Cantor, recipient of the Duchamp Award 2011 (October 3 2012 – January 7 2013). From the Venice Biennale to different other prestigious venues, like the New York MoMA for instance, Eastern European artists are everywhere – or, at least, those of them who meet the Western expectations.[1] The same is not true for Eastern European architects.

One could argue that this presence on the international scene of (some of) the artists coming from the former Communist bloc is but natural, given the political and social relevance often associated with their works. As much as the lack of visibility of their colleagues architects could be explained by the economic and societal determinism of architecture in general. However accurate, these are but partial explanations.

The issue is not new: with few exceptions – thematic and chronological-wise – the architecture of Eastern Europe was rarely, if ever, part of the grand narrative, neither in terms of practice nor of historiography. Not taken in account by the nascent discipline (founded on historical bases and stylistic criteria) in the nineteenth century and largely left aside the following century – with the exception of the interwar episode –, the architectural history of Eastern Europe remained a marginal territory of the architectural historiography.

What decided for its marginality was less the geographical distance from different centers, but mainly its alterity – both cultural and political. In the architectural historiography, Eastern Europe appears as twice a periphery. To start with, its marginal status was defined as such for cultural and political reasons – pointed out as the "internal other" since the Enlightenment,[2] it was

marginalized once again by the Cold War polarization. Globalization and the post-1989 geopolitical reassessments did not really changed its status – just rendered it more ambiguous. Not too far, not too different – Eastern Europe remains marginal today as well, in spite of the concept of periphery being reconsidered. And here intervenes the second reason of its marginalization, which is methodological. How to address the architecture of Eastern Europe from the perspective of the grand narrative? There are two approaches, that I will address in depth further on, both typical for peripheries and which pertain both of them of tactics and strategies of visibility: I will refer to these approaches as 'contextualization' and 'decontextualization.' Contextualization was developed for the sake of comprehensibility: how to render a periphery visible when its history is not legible if not by defining its peculiar context and thus enhancing its particularities? On its side, decontextualization aimed to follow, no matter what, the canon and thus wipe off all specificities (which, precisely, lead to contextualization), by situating the periphery in the picture of the (familiar) grand narrative.

Looking at the marginality of Eastern European architecture, my paper will insist less on the misrepresentation of this latter in the dominant discourse, in order to focus on the different modalities of integrating it – through the before mentioned tactics and strategies of visibility. After following this thread, in the final chapter of the paper, I will present what I consider as the innovative outcome of the Eastern European architectural history as a field of study, by briefly exploring the tools and methods it engendered.

Geographically speaking, I will look at Eastern Europe in a broad perspective, whose limits are mostly determined by the idea of 'otherness.' Chronologically, I will include the nineteenth century only when the *longue durée* will help to contextualize the twentieth century – otherwise said, I will follow the thread of modernity instead of that of modernism.

---

[1] See what notes Hans Belting in relation to the 1994 *Europa-Europa* show: "[the] large scale-exhibition […] presented the astonished visitor with the flawless image of an Eastern European avant-garde which met Western taste, while the bulk of art production in this area was missing, since it would have spoiled the desired image". Hans Belting, *Art History after Modernism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 59.

[2] See Larry Wolff, *Inventing Eastern Europe. The Map of Civilization on the Mind of the Enlightenment*, (Stanford, Ca.: Stanford University Press, 1994).

Ruling canons

There was a short period in the architectural historiography of the twentieth century when Eastern Europe was on the verge to get rid of its status of peripherality thanks to a new dynamics developed after the World War I, whose most notorious and efficient exponent was Jozef Strzygowski. An Austrian citizen of Polish origin, trained in Vienna, Berlin and Munich, Strzygowsky elaborated – as response to the centric vision of the Vienna school – a geohistorical approach that integrated peripheries to the mainstream discourse thanks to transfers, circulations and correspondences.[3] If his methodology was greatly influential in the early twentieth century especially among scholars coming like him from the cross-cultural space of Central Europe,[4] it had little impact (if ever) on the nascent modernist historiography. The reason, aside Strzygowsky's extreme nationalism and anti-semitism which undeniably played against him, was to be sought in modernism's comprehension of history and values.

These two crucial elements were already central to the discourse of art history at the turn of the century. Riegl laid the theoretical ground for setting the notion of value as fundamental in defining both the object and the territories of art history, the latter being seen as 'creative' centers and 'following' peripheries.[5] Generally speaking, Eastern Europe was most often assimilated to this second condition: a periphery roughly imitating the shining icons of the center(s). Its cultural peripherality engendered its disciplinary marginalization.

Almost in the same time, the fourth edition of Fletcher's *A History of Architecture*, introduced a novelty in defining the styles of architecture as "historical" and "non-historical."[6] The book opened on a "Tree of Architecture", whose roots were pictured as a series of deterministic features (Geography, Geology, Climate, Religion, Social and History) and whose branches bore the fruits of architectural labeled as geographical/ national productions. None of the latter referred to Eastern Europe, whose existence could eventually hide behind the "Byzantine style" or the different "German" styles.

At the turn of the century, Eastern Europe appeared thus to be outside History as non-producing values. This status was to be definitively confirmed after the Second World War by the now established modernist historiography. All the canonic texts[7] which founded its field were based on the notion of "absolute value," a notion forged by Bruno Zevi.[8] Zevi aspired to 'purge' architectural history of its "numerous prosaic debris, numerous imitators and numerous minor works"[9] so it was no surprise that Eastern Europe was hardly allotted a place in these canonic texts. Whenever included, the examples from this area were secured by an acknowledged participation in the mainstream discourse. Among the regularly, but briefly, quoted cases were Russian constructivism (sometimes completed by the urban experiments from the early 1930s in USSR) and Czech functionalism.

Even historians who followed in the steps of the *Kunstgeographie*, such as Udo Kultermann, who had a clear interest in the architecture of peripheries, got trapped by the normative force of the canon. His *Contemporary architecture* (1967) displays one page for Eastern Europe versus six pages for Southern America.[10] This distribution was not the result of a polarized discrimination (though politics was surreptitiously involved), but

---

3 See among other articles, Georg Vasold, "Riegl, Strzygowski and the developement of art," *Journal of Art Historiography* 5 (2011), 102-116. Accessed October 19, 2013. http://arthistoriography.files.wordpress.com/2011/12/vassold.pdf
4 See the special issue "The Vienna School beyond Vienna. Art history in Central Europe," guest edited by Matthew Rampley, *Journal of Art Historiography* 8 (2013), 102-116. Accessed October 19, 2013. http://arthistoriography.wordpress.com
5 Alois Riegl, *Die spätrömische Kunstindustrie nach den Funden in Österreich-Ungarn dargestelltvon Alois Riegl* (Vienna: K. K. Hof- und Staatsdruckerei, 1901); Alois Riegl, *Der moderne Denkmalkultus. Sein Wesen Und Seine Entstehung* (Vienna: Braumüller, 1903).

6 Banister Fletcher & Banister F. Fletcher, *A history of architecture for the student, craftsman and amateur being a comparative view of historical styles from the earliest period* (London: B. T. Batsford, fourth edition, 1901).
7 Among the canonic texts, one could count Bruno Zevi, *Storia dell'architettura moderna* (1950), Henry-Russell Hitchcock, *Architecture Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (1958), Leonardo Benevolo, *Storia dell'architettura moderna* (1960).
8 See on Zevi Paolo Scrivano, "Entre histoire de l'art et philosophie : les formes multiples du discours de Bruno Zevi sur l'architecture," *20/21.siècles, Cahiers du Centre Pierre Francastel* 5/6 (Fall 2007), 75-83.
9 Zevi, "Benedetto Croce e la riforma della storia architettonica," *Metron* 47 (1952), 7-14; quoted in Scrivano, 80.
10 Udo Kultermann, *Baukunst der Gegenwart* (Baden-Baden: Holle Verlag, 1967).

of a vision built around the narrative of modernism, much better and spectacularly represented in the South American countries.

No wonder that under such authoritative framework, based on the modernist discourse, Eastern Europe scholars chose to follow the thread of the canon. The best example and also a pioneer in its geographical field was *East European Modernism*, with essays covering the interwar period.[11] Under this general regional framing were listed only examples from Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Poland – thus the book remained on the safe side, both chronologically (by treating what was thought to be the Golden Age of Eastern Europe's modernism) – and geographically. No former Yugoslavia, or Bulgaria or Romania, which in those times (and even afterwards, at least for the last two) seemed so far from the Western canon.
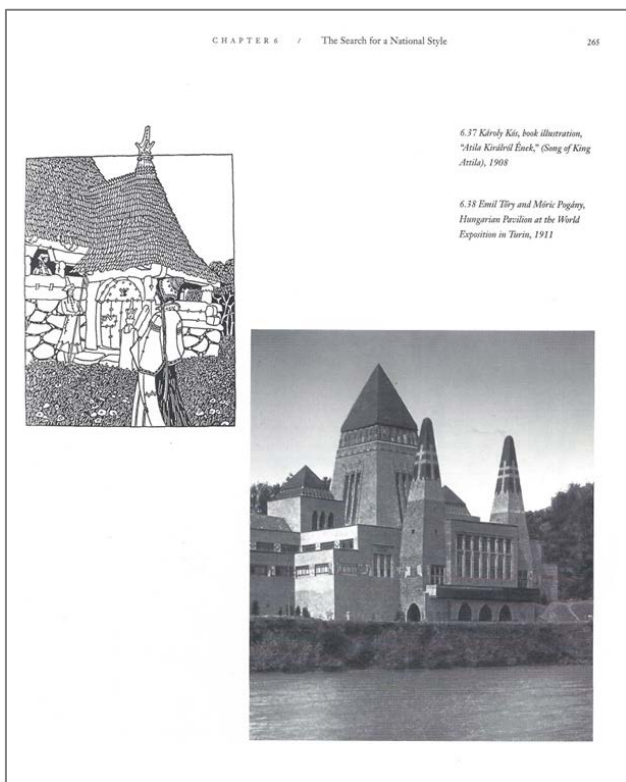

Figure 1
Illustrations for the chapter on "The Search for a National Style," in Ákos Moravánszky's *Competing Visions*

Western readers got hardly the time to get accustomed to the Eastern European version of the canonic modernism that they were presented with a different approach. Only two years later, Ákos Moravánszky's *Competing Visions. Aesthetic Invention and Social Imagination in Central European Architecture 1867-1918* turned modernism into a simple architectural alternative among others (Fig. 1).[12]

Specificity: contextualization as a strategy of visibility

Three main threads weave together or separately the historiography of Eastern European architecture – the canon, the particular, the political. Particularism, translated in terms of "competing visions," was at the core of Moravánszky's book, which suddenly made Eastern Europe interesting for its difference.

In the following years, exploring identity issues was to become the rising methodology in analyzing Eastern European topics. Examined either under its aesthetical dimension or its political charge, identity was turned into a trademark – if not into an (internal) canon. Deprived of a meaningful history, Eastern Europe had to prove that at least its geography, dressed up in folkloric clothes – as Le Corbusier took pleasure to describe in his young years –,[13] could provide interest for Western audiences.

By using specificity as a strategy of visibility, historians were following in the steps of the architects, who had already experienced it as such for over one century. In the nineteenth century, in a context that widely promoted culture as national idiosyncrasy, specificity came as an imposed figure for the countries in Eastern Europe, one that allowed them, according to Western theories, to step into (Hegelian) historicity. But if the architects of the area exploited lengthily particularisms as a powerful tool, in terms of

---

[11] Wojciech Leśniovski (ed.), *East European Modernism c. 1919-1939* (New York: Rizzoli, 1996).

[12] Ákos Moravánszky, *Competing Visions. Aesthetic Invention and Social Imagination in Central European Architecture 1867-1918,* (Cambridge, Ma.: MIT Press, 1998).
[13] See his *Voyage d'Orient* in 1911.

historiography, identity issues came only later to interest historians. This interest was propelled by two different reasons. On the one hand, under the influence of the new field exploring national identities, architecture appeared as one of the most relevant forms of cultural (and political) idiosyncrasy. On the other, on the background of modernist crisis, the postmodern "return to history" and the new sensibility for "critical regionalism"[14] pushed Western scholars to start to consider identity as a possible historiographical criterion.

The last editions of Sigfried Giedion's seminal *Space, Time and Architecture*, which opened the door to particularisms, included one phrase on Central Europe – nevertheless, this mention appeared in the chapter on "Scandinavian regionalism."[15] Four decades and a methodological shift later, Barry Bergdoll dedicated a whole chapter "Gothic and the rise of nationalism in Central Europe."[16] While gothic constituted a prolongation of the Western architectural issues, Central Europe had become since Moravánszky's book a territory of competing nationalisms. In 2006, three important studies were teasing architectural identity on Eastern Europe, all three authored by Western scholars: Alofsin's *When Buildings speak*, Clegg's *Art, Design and Architecture in Central Europe*, Howard's *East European Art.*[17] I would like to briefly stop here on Alofsin's approach. Starting from the premise that the architecture from Central Europe has a "limited ability to speak to us now,"[18] he subsequently structured his study around the notion of language, thus providing an architectural translation of the Herderian national theories – all national culture is based on a specific language. By doing so, Alofsin succeeded both to introduce the

Western reader to the hardly known architecture of Central Europe and to confirm, meanwhile, the marginal position of this latter which – once again – needed a code in order to be understood.

Figure 2
Map of ethnolinguistic distribution in Anthony Alofsin's *When Buildings Speak*.

Two important things are at stake here. As a periphery, Central Europe requires contextuali--zation – the maps at the beginning of the book being the first tool of contextualization (Fig. 2). As a matter of fact, how many books on architectures in the centers – like France, Germany, United States, etc. - do contain such maps, unless they assess a geographical issue? Geographical contextualization comes together with conceptual contextualization. Hence the book proposes a series of concepts which are introduced as different "languages", each making the object of a separate chapter: the "language of history," the "language of rationalism," the "language of organicism," etc. These concepts could be seen as a means of decontextualizing decontextualize the

---

[14] Starting with the 1950s, from Sigfried Giedion's to Kenneth Frampton's studies, passing through Alexander Tzonis and Liane Lefaivre's writings, critical regionalism was presented as the viable alternative to modernism.

[15] Sigfried Giedion, *Space, Time and Architecture: The Growth of a New Tradition* (Cambridge, Ma.: Harvard University Press, third edition 1954; fourth edition 1962; fifth edition 1967).

[16] Barry Bergdoll, *European Architecture 1750-1890* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

[17] Anthony Alofsin, *When Buildings Speak. Architecture as Language in the Habsburg Empire and Its Aftermath, 1867-1933*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1900); Elizabeth Clegg, *Art, Design and Architecture in Central Europe 1890-1920* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2006); Jeremy Howard's *East European Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

[18] Alofsin, *When Buildings Speak,* 8.

topic by creating connections with the methodology of the mainstream discourse, such as Collins' study *Changing Ideals in Modern Architecture*,[19] which operated with similar notions.

However efficient, these strategies and tactics discussed above form altogether a matter of vicious circles: while contextualization stamps Eastern Europe as different, decontextualization situates it as marginal – a simple follower, as Riegl put it, of creative centers.

Cold War dynamics

Dealing with Eastern Europe is about vicious circles in general. During the Cold War, both the information and the understanding of what happened behind the Iron Curtain were considerably blurred. For different reasons, access to information was a challenging issue on both sides – though not insurmountable.

The absence of references on Eastern Europe in the Western canonic texts could be related – though not exclusively – to the lack of information. When Kenneth Frampton wrote his history of modern architecture, he made the effort to find local publications in order to document Czech functionalism, that, by the way, he considered inadequately represented in architectural histories.[20] By leaving aside the other Eastern European countries in his assessment of the "themes and variations" of the International style, Frampton decisively contributed to the Western narrative on Czech functionalism. In 1987, a show on this subject opened at the Architectural Association in London; commenting on this show, *Blueprint* was publishing an article declaring modernism as the true "national identity" of Czech architecture.[21]

Did Frampton left aside the other Eastern European interwar modernisms because of the difficulty to document them or because he did not consider praiseworthy the local productions? One can suppose that both reasons concurred to his decision. However, had he really wanted to write on those countries, he could have succeeded to put together a local bibliography, as did the American architectural writer and photographer G. E. Kidder Smith for his chapter on Eastern Europe in *New Architecture of Europe*.[22] This inclusion, motivated by the choice to present European architecture as a whole and its "provocative post-war architectural achievements", is striking in the context of the time, both in terms of politics and of historiography. Nevertheless, the "Note on Eastern Europe" is not only very reduced (three pages out of 324), but also permanently related to Western references. Brno is "the city of Mies van der Rohe's famous Tugendhat house," while Hungary is "the land that for its population has in our time given more creativity to the world […] than in any other, and which […] sent to the USA Marcel Breuer, Roland Wank, Gyorgy Kepes and the late Moholy-Nagy, among others." Architecture in Zagreb is praised for reminding one Le Corbusier and that of the Romanian Black-Sea coast for its resemblance to Brasilia's Presidential Palace (though "in a clumsy fashion"; Fig. 3)

Figure 3
The restaurant in the resort of Mangalia (Romania), to which refers Kidder Smith in his *New Architecture in Europe.*

---

[19] Peter Collins, *Changing Ideals in Modern Architecture 1750-1950* (London: Faber and Faber Ltd, 1965).
[20] Kenneth Frampton, *Modern architecture. A critical history* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1980), 251. He refers, in the bibliography section, to O. Dostál, J. Pechar and V. Procházka, *Modern architecture in Czechoslovakia* (1970), that he describes as "best available recent documentation of the Czech Modern Movement," (pg. 360).
[21] Maurice Cooper, "National identity," *Blueprint* 42 (1987), 32-34.

[22] G. E. Kidder Smith, *The New Architecture of Europe* (Cleveland: The World Publishing Company, 1961) – for the quotations I used the Pelican Book's edition (1962). "Although in recent years I have been unable to visit any of the countries of eastern Europe, conversation with nationals visiting the United States and study of the Polish, Czech, Hungarian, Yugoslav, Romanian and Soviet architectural magazines and books give cause for considerable architectural hope," 322.

The *New Architecture in Europe* reveals that the Iron Curtain was porous and subjects on Eastern European architecture were eventually accessible if one was really interested. The fact that during the Cold War, Eastern European topics were published in the Western architectural periodicals but not in the surveys proves the authoritarian line of the grand narrative: while periodicals offered a 'raw' material to be decanted later on by the selective eye of history, books aimed to provide a rationale, framing the canon.

The fall of the Wall in 1989 had certainly changed both the circulation of information and (even if partially) the vision on Eastern Europe. Many hoped, like Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann, who was in Berlin at that time working on his *Court, Cloister and City. The Art of Central Europe 1450-1800*, that the art history field will undergo an important mutation, as he later affirmed in the introduction of that book.[23]

Without any doubt, Kaufmann was right: the dismantling of the Soviet bloc induced a considerable historiographical mutation. However, the changes were neither that rapid nor that radical that one could have expected. While an increasing number of publications dealing with Eastern European topics was released, this did not render contextualization/ decontextualization irrelevant. Thus, Eastern Europe remained, this time disciplinarily-wise, a marginal territory.

Forging tools and methods

Meanwhile, it is precisely this marginality that triggered a series of innovative tools and methods or, at least, of less customary framings.

These tools and methods – which do not form yet a coherent corpus but which are gaining more and more consistency – are engendered by the particularities pertaining to Eastern European architecture.

The first scholars who treated the architecture of this area for what it was (and not as a simple reflection of its capacity to reliably reproduce Western models) were faced with a predicament: how to assess something for which there were no methods prescribed yet? How to speak about ordinariness – mainly that of mass-housing, which represented the largest percentage of the architecture in the Communist bloc –, a production which seemed deprived of any value either because of its humbleness and anonymity or because of all the consequences related to mass dimensions: recurrence, monotony, lack of aesthetics? And how to deal with extra--ordinariness, be it political or economic, like the architectures of the Stalinist years, or the socialist brutalism or the seaside leisure ensembles?

The specific objects of Eastern Europe architecture as well as its vectors – in this latter category ideology and politics holding an important place – not only demanded for new approaches inside the discipline of architectural history but also required a certain interdisciplinary perspective.[24] Thus, the scholars working on Eastern European architectural topics were among the first to explore interdisciplinarity or at least to use cross-analysis methods: from the studies on identity and nationalisms to the more recent works on the communist period or the transition years after 1989. Cultural history, sociology, anthropology, history of politics are the main (but not the only) fields to be regularly crossed by the architectural historian working on Eastern Europe.

It is true that interdisciplinary methodology was already in the air, being debated and assimilated by the adepts of the New Art History when Eastern Europe stepped into the enlarged historio--graphical scene. Ordinariness, for instance, which was already developed as a topic per se before 1989 in the Western milieus – and here Henri Lefebvre's and Michel de Certeau's influence was seminal –, gained a new importance thanks to the Eastern European topics. A number of publications

---

[23] Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann, *Court, Cloister and City. The Art of Central Europe 1450-1800* (London: Weidenfeld and Nickolson, 1995).

[24] I have developed this topic in the special issue "L'autre Europe," that I have guest-edited for *Ligeia* (93-96, 2009), and particularly in "Une nouvelle histoire de l'art: réorientations et percées interdisciplinaires," 45-53.

treated ordinariness not only in terms of mass-housing but also concerning the every-day life through the bias of material and visual culture.[25]

The scholars working on Eastern European architecture have also massively – and fundamentally – contributed in the past years to another kind of cross-analysis approach by examining their own field in the light of transfers and circulations – a transversal methodology which joins in many aspects the horizontal reading proposed by Piotr Piotrowski in art history.[26] There are two recent projects both encompassing exhibitions and publications and which exploit the most efficiently (in intellectual and methodological terms) this transversal approach. Łukasz Stanek initiated in 2009 a large research project on transferring architecture and urban design from socialist countries to postcolonial countries in Africa, Asia, Latin America during the Cold War.[27] (Fig. 4) Looking at this export of architectural expertise from the Second to the Third World allows not only to expand the field of vision, but also, by exploring two different types of peripheries, to question the mechanisms of geopolitics. A larger picture of the architectural history of that period – with consequences in today's production – is thus depicted, addressing the Western discourse through these peripheral exchanges.

The second example deals with a different type of transversality, focusing on a single case-study – the architecture in the former Yugoslavia.[28] (Fig.

5) If this project, developed by Maroje Mrdulaš and Vladimir Kulić, works on a smaller scale, it nevertheless addresses a complex architectural dynamics that encompasses a narrative which is meaningful for both East and West. Its meaning go beyond modernism addressing an essential question in the perspective of post-history: what are the fruits of modernity and to what extent can a periphery absorb modernization? Is this the general condition of modernity – to achieve only "incomplete modernization" as Fredric Jameson put it[29] or is it simply the failure of the project of modernity?

The latter seems to haunt both architectural historians and artists working on the former Communist bloc. The dereliction of socialist architectures in Eastern Europe post-1989, [30] followed by that of their Western counterpart, the welfare projects stimulated the rich theme of ruinophilia of modernism which lately became a genre in both former camps.

Figure 5
Invitation for the opening of the exhibition *Unfinished Modernisations. Between Utopia and Pragmatism,* February 10, 2012. Maribor, Slovenia.

[25] See, among others, on mass housing: Kimberly Elman Zarecor, *Manufacturing a Socialist Modernity: Housing in Czechoslovakia, 1945-1960* (Pittsburgh, University of Pittsburgh Press, 2011); Henrieta Moravčíková et al., *Bratislava Atlas of Mass Housing. Welcome to Prefab Story!* (Bratislava: Slovart, 2011). A cross-vision, between art history, anthropology and visual studies in Susan E. Reid, David Crowley (eds.), *Style and Socialism. Modernity and Material Culture in Post-War Eastern Europe* (Oxford, New York: Berg, 2000); David Crowley, Susan E. Reid (eds.), Socialist Spaces. *Sites of EverydayLife in the Eastern Bloc* (Oxford, New York: Berg, 2002); David Crowley and Susan E. Reid, eds., *Pleasures in Socialism: leisure and luxury in the Eastern Bloc* (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 2010). For the postsocialist period, see Ewa Bérard and Corinne Jacquand, eds., *Architectures au-delà du Mur 1989-2009* (Paris: Picard, 2009); Alfrun Kliems and Marina Dmitrieva, eds., *The Post-socialist City* (Berlin: Jovis, 2010).
[26] Piotrowski elaborated in many occasions on this approach; I will quote here the founding essay: Piotr Piotrowski, "Between place and time: a critical geography of 'new' Central Europe,", in *Time and Place. The Geohistory of Art*, ed. Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann and Elizabeth Pilliod (Hants: Ashgate, 2005), 153-171.
[27] The project, which is still going on, encompasses exhibitions, publications, conferences. In terms of publications, the most relevant are: "Export Architecture and Urbanism from Socialist Poland," special issue of *Piktogram* 15 (2010-2011), guest edited by Łukasz Stanek; Łukasz Stanek, Postmodernism is almost all right : Polish architecture after socialist globalization (Warsaw: Fundacja Nowej Kultury Bęc Zmiana/ Museum of Modern Art, 2012).
[28] Launched in 2011, the research project comprises a series of exhibitions entitled "Unfinished Modernizations. Between Utopia and Pragmatism", and curated by

Maroje Mrdulaš and Vladimir Kulić. The main publication is: Vladimir Kulić, Maroje Mrdulaš and Wolfgang Thaler, *Modernism In-Between. The Mediatory Architectures of Socialist Yugoslavia* (Berlin: Jovis, 2012).
[29] See Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or the Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991), 310.
[30] There are several articles, publications and exhibitions which constituted in the past years a field of 'ruinophilia' of communist architectures, exploring their moral and physical decline after 1989. See, among others, Richard Pare (with an essay by Jean-Louis Cohen), *The Lost Vanguard. Russian Modernist Architecture 1922-1932* (New York: Monacelli Press, 2007); Armin Linke and Srdjan Jovanovic Weiss, *Socialist Architecture: The Vanishing Act* (Zürich: JRP-Ringier, 2012).

Instead of conclusions: Global? Art History

The new dynamics at work in the post-1989 context, with the mutations induced by globalization and the turn in art/ architectural history, changed as well the notion and the status of periphery. Europe itself got provincialized, if we are to believe Dipesh Chakrabarty.[31] Postcolonial studies contributed to shift the perspective, but in the same time to deprive of operativeness the concept of marginality as applied to smaller and nearer peripheries.

But if the field of architectural history has considerably – and suddenly – expanded, the rules of the game changed without really changing. Eastern Europe is but a provincial territory of this expanded field, one that has skipped its status of periphery – too central, not enough spectacular from the point of view of the otherness – but which is still unable to produce "absolute values". Because this criterion remained in a different manner essential, as proves *A Global History of Architecture*, where Eastern Europe is present with the same examples of the pre-2000 historiography.[32] Putting aside the thematic structure as well as the updated vision on understanding architecture, there is eventually little difference in terms of approach between this volume and Fletcher's *History of Architecture*: the geographic horizon has grown wider, the chronology got longer and more refined, the canon underwent some changes and succeeded to displace, here and there, the dominant discourse – however, this latter still lingers in the current historiography.

Extrapolating from Eastern Europe to the condition of peripheries in general, what matters is not (only) the spatial expansion, that provides a 'world history' not far from the line elaborated by Fletcher,[33] but a manner to look at these architectures from their own perspectives. To switch from the canon for a series of key (local) concepts. It seems to me that the question of provincialization – which is absolutely real as shown by a certain "vernacularization" of the architectural phenomenon as well as informalization, developed especially in the "peripheries" – and the question of marginality are but collateral. It is clear that in the changed context of art/ architectural history Eastern Europe has a place, even if limited – the question is not how to extend this place but how to render it more significant.

To paraphrase Lyotard,[34] the expansion of the territory(ies) of art/ architectural history is inevitable, what is at stake is to render this expanded history effective. From the postmodern perspective, setting up centers against peripheries is an "unremittingly modernist" mode of thinking.[35] The 'world history' resulting from this mapping is but a single narrative, based on the game of powers. Rewriting modernity would mean to deconstruct this single, dominant narrative – to render it plural, multiple.[36]

If the condition of a global history would lie on multiplying the discourses, this would imply, in the same time, a narrative developed on a quantitative level. But then, such an approach would differ not that much from the 'world history' (see the predicaments as explained before, for *A Global History of Architecture*).

And there is also another predicament: is global history possible without a normative discourse? In *Le Siècle*, Alain Badiou denounces the dictatorship of the "brotherly we" – *le nous fraternel*.[37] How global can a history be when it still requires massive contextualization when it speaks about peripheries? Because all the tactics and strategies of visibilities that I have quoted above lead, in the

---

[31] Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe. Postcolonial thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).
[32] Francis D. K. Ching, Mark Jarzombek, and Vikramadiitya Prakash, eds., *A Global History of Architecture* (Hooken: J. Wiley and sons, 2007).
[33] See Gülsüm Baydar, "Toward Postcolonial openings: Rereading Sir Banister Fletcher's 'History of Architecture,'" *Assemblage* 35 (avril 1998), 6-17.

[34] Jean-François Lyotard, *La condition postmoderne* (Paris, Les Editions du Minuit, 1979), 85.
[35] Introduction to the section "Periphery and Postmodernism", in *Postmodernism, a Reader*, introduced by Thomas Docherty (London, New York, Toronto: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993), 445-447.
[36] On deconstructing the modernist narrative, see Nelly Richard, "Postmodernism and Periphery", in *Postmodernism, a Reader*, 463-470. On multiple discourses, see James Elkins intervention in the Artl@s conference "Global Art History and the Peripheries" (Ecole Normale Supérieure, Paris; June 12-14, 2013).
[37] Alain Badiou, *Le Siècle* (Paris: Seuil, 2005), 145.

same time to a clusterization of the subject. A global discourse is meaningless if it does not provide tools of comprehensibility for all its compounds – or, such a reading is possible only in conditions of discontinuity and plural but integrative narratives. Thus, why not considering the alternative, close to Popper's "piecemeal vs. utopian engineering" or Lyotard's "small narratives"?[38] The challenge would be then to develop the skill to assemble these resulting fragments into a "choral vision."[39]
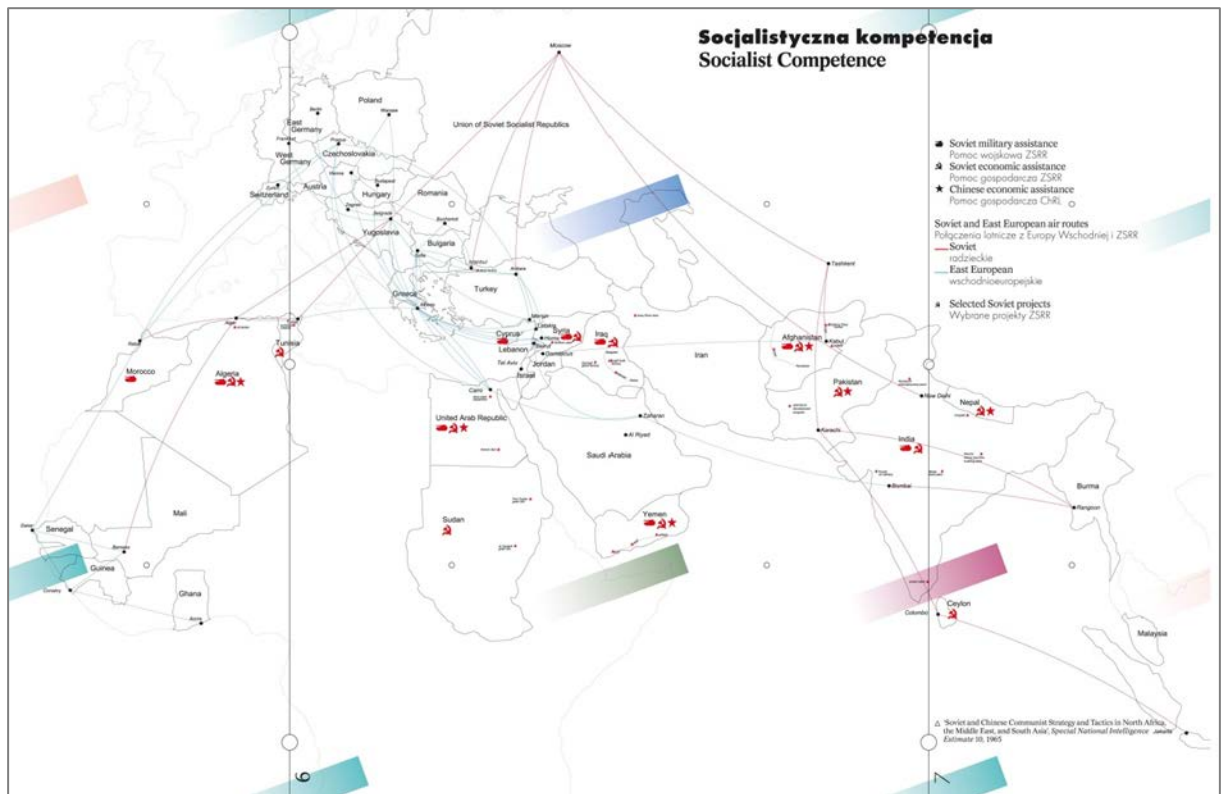

Figure 4
"Socialist competence" – map of the expertise transfers from the Second to the Third World.
Published in Łukasz Stanek, "Export Architecture and Urbanism from Socialist Poland," special issue of *Piktogram* 15 (2010-2011)

[38] Popper, *The Poverty of Historicism*; Lyotard, *La condition postmoderne*.
[39] See Foucault's distinction, between the centralized rhetoric of a "global history" vis-à-vis the choral discourse of multiple historicities of what he calls "general history;" Michel Foucault, *L'Archéologie du savoir* (Paris: Gallimard, 1969), 18.