

SITUATING
NARRATIVES.

IN EASTERN
EUROPEAN ART

STRATEGIES
OF HISTORY
WRITING

PROGRAM

Regional Meeting #1

Bucharest,
hosted by the Czech Centre
(11 Ion Ghica St.)

2—3.11.2018

● Friday, 2.11

10:00—13:00

Alina Șerban
(Institute of the Present)

Argument:
Situating Narratives

Tomáš Pospiszyl

Tasks for the Art Histories in Eastern Europe

In recent years Eastern European art history becomes aware that terminology developed by western art history cannot always appropriately describe local art. More importantly, such terminology can describe only practices shared both in the West and the East. The most original part of Eastern legacy—the socialist art—thus remains for a large part not written up for global audiences. The contribution shall include a few propositions how shall we proceed with writing our histories.

Tomáš Pospiszyl is a Czech critic, curator, art historian, and teacher. He has published extensively on 20th and 21st century art and heads the Department of Art Theory and History at the Academy of Fine Arts in Prague. He co-edited, with Laura Hoptman, *Primary Documents: A Sourcebook for Eastern and Central European Art Since the 1950s* (MIT Press, 2002). His latest book is *An Associative Art History; Comparative Studies of Neo-Avant-Gardes in a Bipolar World* (JRP Ringier & Les Presses du Réel, 2017).

Magda Radu

Towards a New Vocabulary: Art History and the Socialist Period

The presentation looks into how the post-1989 art historical discourse has imposed a valorisation of certain terms and positions regarding the art of CEE in the Soviet bloc. Against this viewpoint, my intention is to critically assess the vacuous use of such terms, which yielded schematic and ultimately unproductive ways of analysing many cultural and artistic developments. I would like to advocate for finding new ways of describing the relation between art and the wider context, be it social and political, local and transnational, between art and its relationship with power and the many „official” and ideological registers. Is it still feasible to imagine other identities—identities that would eschew the monolithic viewpoints formed under the gaze of the global centres of power—for the art produced in Eastern Europe during the communist period? How can we rethink the imbrications and entanglements between local and global when analysing a set of artistic practices too intricate to be reduced to stereotypical interpretations and worn-out formulas?

Magda Radu is a curator and art historian based in Bucharest. She is a founder of the independent art space Salonul de proiecte, a platform for art production and research. She is the editor or co-editor of several exhibitions catalogues and books, among which: *Art in Romania Between 1945-2000. An Analysis from Today's Perspective* (2016), *Dear Money* (2014) and *André Cadere / Andrei Cădere* (2011). In the last few years she also curated exhibitions at institutions including ArtEncounters Biennale, Timișoara; The National Museum of Contemporary Art, Bucharest; MUSAC, Leon; Spinnerei, Leipzig; and Photo España, Madrid. She curated the Romanian participation at the 57th edition of the Venice Biennale in 2017 with the project *Geta Brătescu – Apparitions*.

● Lunch break

13:00—14:00

14:00—18:00

Daniel Grůň

The Loss of the Social After Real Socialism. The Role of Contemporary Artists in Historising Conceptual Art

Over the last two decades contemporary art in Czech and Slovak republics has played the part of an active mediator, between the artists of “generation sixties” and its delayed public. Without simplifying, one may say that contemporary art is a place for the belated reception of conceptual works that originally emerged and circulated outside of the institutional cultural practice, in various substitute forms of exchange, meeting, and postal correspondence. We may associate this, on the one hand, with an expansion of the institutional framework for contemporary art and the new roles of the artist as researcher or cultural anthropologist; it is also connected, however, with a mapping of cultural memory of the period of real socialism. Now that the conceptual artists’ works have belatedly found reception in contemporary art, what is its contribution and in what direction is it tending? Is it that contemporary art is where one would find the living legacy of the conceptual art, practiced in a way that is not exclusively bound to the logic of the market mechanisms? I trace the legacy of neo-avant-gardes in contemporary art in connection with the production of solidarity, such as we find in the authentic

artists’ communities of the 1970s, not only in Czechoslovakia but also in other countries of the former East European bloc. With today’s social networks artists have been drawn to a different kind of work with the participation of the public. In my opinion, what will be of greatest interest is conceptual art as a set of practices examining the issue of collective experience, social isolation and exclusion, both then and now.

Daniel Grůň is an art historian, curator, and art critic. Currently, he teaches at the Department of Theory and History of Art, Academy of Fine Arts and Design in Bratislava, and he works as artistic director of The Július Koller Society. In 2010, he was a grant recipient of the Igor Zabel Award for Culture and Theory. He was also involved as a co-curator in the first international retrospective of Július Koller organized by MSN/Warsaw, mumok/Vienna, and Museion/Bolzano. Most recently he co-curated the exhibition *Poetry & Performance. Eastern European Perspective* in Nová Synagóga, Žilina. In his research he is mostly focused on the legacy of neo-avant-gardes in former Eastern Europe.

Klara Kemp-Welch

‘Dissent’ as Discourse: Uses and Abuses

The presentation will discuss issues around dissidence both in relation to historical debates among Eastern and Western writers and critics, focusing on attempts to nuance the understanding of dissidence by authors such as Havel, and to present ‘Dissent’ as a common front, in the manner of the much-maligned Biennale of Dissent in Venice in 1977. I will go on to consider the extent to which contemporary debates about the recuperation of past artistic gestures within the framework of ‘dissent’ have often occasioned accusations of the perpetuation of ‘heroic narratives’ and evinced strong reactions from people

in different places or of different generations. What do these concerns and debates, shared across decades, though at each point differently inflected, tell us about our aspirations, and about our limitations, as writers on art, today?

Klara Kemp-Welch is Lecturer in 20th Century Modernism at the Courtauld Institute of Art in London. She is the author of *Antipolitics in Central European Art. Retention as Dissidence under Post-Totalitarian Rule 1968-1989* (London and New York: IB Tauris, 2014) and *Networking the Bloc. Experimental Art in Eastern Europe* (Cam-

bridge Massachusetts and London, England: MIT Press, 2018). She is co-editing a Reader in Central European Modernism with Beata Hock and Jonathan Owen (forthcoming Courtauld Books Online, 2018/19) and working on a new book *Two-Speed Europe? Art, Labour and Migration*.

Andres Kurg

My talk will address post-Stalinist architectural history in the Soviet Union in the context of recent discussions of modernity as coeval and globally simultaneous, not outruling at the same time its heterogeneity or its uneven character in different parts of the world. My aim is to understand how the locally emerging discussions and artistic production could be accounted as existing inside the globally entwined power structures and cultural frameworks that came to be defined as postmodern in the late 1970s and early 1980s.

Authors in postcolonial theory have written about an imagined community of artists who might not know each other but debate common ideas. Similarly one could argue that art and architecture groups from the Soviet Union could be seen as engaging in a dialogue with their colleagues across national and state borders, debating issues related to the transforming environment and increasing modernization. In this framework their exhibitions, writings or competition entries offered not only critical and reflexive comments on the state-socialist society, but also contributed to the cosmopolitan discussions on architecture's disciplinary boundaries, its relationship to new technologies and a stance against authority in these years. Question that emerge from here include: What made the reception and adaptation of critical ideas possible (as well as impossible) in different social and cultural contexts? How to go beyond of seeing this dialogue as based on a merely abstract connectivity?

Soviet Architectural History in the Framework of Uneven Modernity

I will look at the architecture group NER from Moscow and their project and book from 1966, *The New Unit of Settlement: Towards the New City*; published in English as *The Ideal Communist City* in 1971. Outlining a theory of settlement for the new communist society they combined Marxist ideas of the social progression of history with emerging cybernetic theory and communication theory and prescribed free communication as the principal function to be accommodated in the future context of increasing leisure time.

Andres Kurg is Visiting Professor at the Institute of Art History, Estonian Academy of Arts in Tallinn. His research explores the critical architectural practices in the Soviet Union from the 1960s to the 1980s in relation to technological and institutional transformations and modernisation discourses. He has published articles in *AA Files*, *ArtMargins*, *Journal of Architecture*, *Home Cultures* and contributed to several collected volumes and exhibition catalogues. In 2008 he co-edited *Environment, Projects, Concepts: Architects of the Tallinn School 1972–1985*; in 2012 he co-curated *Our Metamorphic Futures. Design, Technical Aesthetics and Experimental Architecture in the Soviet Union 1960–1980* in Vilnius National Gallery of Art and Estonian Museum of Applied Art and Design. He has received research grants from the Graham Foundation and EU Culture program and held guest fellowships at the Getty Research Institute (2015) and Yale University (2017).

● Saturday, 3.11

10:00—13:00

Bojana Piškur

Cultural and artistic production in Yugoslavia between 1945 and 1991 is usually interpreted and contextualized within the Eastern European art historical narrative. This narrative was largely constructed after 1989. In socialist Yugoslavia, there was however another “story,” a different one from that of the Eastern Europe. This network was politically constructed and promoted on the basis of Yugoslavia's foreign relations with the Third World. With Yugoslav membership in the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) and the first conference in 1961 in Belgrade, the concept of non-alignment became the main component of the country's foreign policy.

The NAM frequently addressed the question of cultural imperialism and cultural equality became one of the important principles of the movement. Interpreted from today's point of view this quest also envisioned new kinds of historicisation, rewriting historical narratives or even writing history anew, or in other words: the emphasis was put on questioning epistemic colonialism and cultural dependency. However, this has not really been the case in the socialist Yugoslavia; after the Second World War the main narrative in arts and culture was primarily the one following the Western epistemic canon. So, the departing question for us to answer is: How did those contacts with other modernities, those “cross-fertilizations” affect the cultural landscape in Yugoslavia and what kind of seeds remained from such encounters?

Yugoslavia: Other Histories, Other Modernities

Dipesh Chakrabarty suggests Europe appears different when seen from within the experience of colonization. Perhaps these contacts of formerly colonized and the new post-war Yugoslavia, unaffected by colonialism, had a potential to produce different histories (different modernisms, arts, narratives etc.) that would have gone beyond the Eurocentric ones. But in order to do so they would have “to think with a difference” that would destabilize universalist idioms, historicize the context and pluralize the experiences of modernity. Was it really so? In the presentation we would look at some examples.

Bojana Piškur is an art historian, curator, living in Ljubljana. She graduated in art history from the University of Ljubljana and received her Ph.D. at the Institute for Art History at the Charles University in Prague. She is a senior curator at the Moderna galerija Ljubljana and Museum of Contemporary Art Metelkova. Her focus of professional interest is on political issues as they relate to or are manifested in the field of art, with special emphasis on the region of Yugoslavia. She has written for numerous publications and lectured in many parts of the world on the topics such as post avant-gardes in Yugoslavia, radical education, cultural politics in self-management and the Non-Aligned Movement, always in relation to the wider social and political environment.

Emese Kürti

It seems that the critique of the West and the Western genealogy of Hungarian culture historically has been the privilege of the conservative (including communist rhetorics) or national/nationalist discourses. But how to interpret those artistic positions that stood outside of such perceptions, since their art historical identity

Other Voices. Relativizing Western Discourses in Hungary and Yugoslavia during the Cold War

was constructed by a Western terminology, and which rejected the critical specificity of their art to be oriented towards this kind of narrative. Nevertheless art history still neglects theories and practices that would affect the critical reconsiderations of the hegemony of Western appropriations. In this case study focusing on

Hungarian artistic positions I would not intend to reconstruct some similarly heroic myth on the basis of a disruption of the Western narrative or the critical self-positioning in global art history. Although some artistic approaches seemed to be prepared even for a theoretical confrontation with the dominant canons, I would like to outline the specific in-and-out situation of these authors. By adopting the Western terminological apparatus, they clearly articulated their critical positions inside of a neo-avant-garde narrative, while being part of an art scene defined by local traditions and the state Marxist discourses. When inserting these positions in the mainstream art history, I hope to achieve a result which is beyond the discourses on the self-colonizing concept, based on the uncritical appropriation of Western-oriented narratives. Insisting on the need for a methodology based on theorising practices combined with primary research I will try to consider the possibilities of critical art history with more focus on the reevaluation of the local.

Emese Kürti is an art historian, researcher and art critic based in Budapest. Former curator at Ludwig Museum Budapest (2009–2011), she was the head of acb ResearchLab in Budapest (2015–2018). She was a member of the Kassák Museum's research group on 60s and 70s in 2016 and 2017. Her current research focuses on the experimental art of the 60s and 70s in Hungary and Yugoslavia, the poetical aspects of the actionism, and the interference of esoteric philosophy and the New Left in the neo-avant-garde. Recent publications include: *Screaming Hole. Poetry, Sound and Action as Intermedia Practice in the Work of Katalin Ladik* (2017); "Poetry in Action. Language as a Performative Medium in the Hungarian Neo-Avant-garde," in Sándor Hornyik, Edit Sasvári, Hedvig Turai: *Art in Hungary 1956-80. Double Speak and Beyond*, Thames and Hudson, London, 2018 and *Glissando és húrtépés. Kortárs zene és neoavant-gárd művészet az underground magánterekben 1958-1970* [Glissando and plucking strings. Contemporary Music and the Neo-Avantgarde in the Underground Spaces 1958-1970], L'Harmattan, Budapest, 2018.

scholar at the Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, Williamstown, USA in 2017. His studies have appeared in journals, books and monographic studies published by Taylor and Francis, Routledge, Hatje Cantz Verlag, Kettler Verlag, MNAC Bucharest and Verlag für Moderne Kunst, or Presses Universitaires de Sorbonne (forthcoming).

Cristian Nae

Expansion, Transference or Adaptation? Versions of Realism, Varieties of Conceptualism in Romanian Art between 1968 & 1974

The traditional term "influence" has been under sustained critique for some time. Advocating a more "horizontal" approach of the relation between centers and peripheries, critical historiography of art proposed replacing the uni-directional notion of influence with the more nuanced notions of cultural transference and artistic adaptation. The latter imply the creative agency of the otherwise passive subjects of art history placed at its margins. Acknowledging its critical efficacy, I nevertheless intend to question the extent to which these notions are adequately describing the context of the new, experimental art practices in Romania in the period of so-called "cultural relaxation." On a theoretical level, I would like to analyse the underlying value of innovation mobilized in this "horizontal" approach and analyse its procedures. In relation to the case studies presented, I investigate whether there were significant contacts or formative

experiences that may justify the application of umbrella-terms such as "pop," photorealism or conceptual art to art practices that, while sharing some technical or stylistic traits with their western counterparts, at the same time adapted to local economies, social configurations, aesthetic conventions and political constraints.

Cristian Nae is an art critic, curator and theorist based in Iași, Romania. He works as a Ph. D. Associate Professor of Art History and Theory Department at National University of the Arts in Iași. He has received research grants and fellowships from the ERSTE Foundation, Vienna; CNCS-UEFISCDI (Romanian National Research Council); the Getty Foundation, Los Angeles and the New Europe College Institute for Advanced Studies, Bucharest. He participated in the CAA-Getty International Program in 2012 and 2017 and was a short term visiting

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