

Abstract

The essay outlines two attempts to revolutionise the relationship between the periphery and the centre in Central and Eastern Europe. The first belongs to the historical avant-gardes of the 1920s and 1930s. The second one belongs to the retro-avant-gardes at the turn of the century, which re-enacted some of the basic ideas of Constructivist and Futurist utopian questions. The retro-generations announced that they were the heirs of the artistic generation of the Constructivists and Zenitists, who wanted to promote Ljubljana, Zagreb, Belgrade and Trieste as centres of new art to establish a new bridge between East and West.

Keywords: historical avant-gardes, retro-avant-gardes, horizontal history of art, Delak, Černigoj, Micić

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Trieste, Ljubljana, Zagreb and Belgrade between Periphery and Centre: From Historical Avant-Gardes to Neo-, Post- and Retro-Avant-Gardes

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Summary

The essay explores the absence of a unified map of 20th-century Western art in Eastern Europe. It challenges the periphery-centre relationship by examining avant-garde groups in Slovenia, Croatia and Serbia. It delves into the historical avant-gardes of the 1920s and 1930s and the retro-avant-gardes at the turn of the century, identifying common features and highlighting their relationship to the international avant-garde. The essay questions whether these Central European avant-gardes can be considered impure versions of movements centred in Paris or Berlin. It explores how they redefined centrality and marginality while resisting cultural appropriation. The focus is on movements like Zenitism, Slovenian Constructivism, Dada Tank, Serbian Surrealism and Neue Slowenische Kunst. These movements eclectically incorporated foreign ideas into their cultural frameworks. The essay engages with the concepts of centre versus periphery, universal versus particular and international versus local, showing that these issues are central to both historical and retro-avant-gardes. All the above historical avant-garde movements took the ideas developed by various avant-garde movements, ranging from Italian to Russian Futurism and from Expressionism and Dadaism to Constructivism. They eclectically assimilated some “foreign” ideas into their own cultural frameworks and added specific features. Similar procedures were at work during the period of the 1980s and 1990s with the eclectic retro-avant-garde artistic characteristics of the postmodern politicised art like Neue Slowenische Kunst (NSK) and its collectives Irwin, Laibach and Sisters Scipion Nasice.

The author draws inspiration from scholars like Steven A. Mansbach, who questioned why these avant-garde figures and movements from Eastern Europe, which once played a critical role in advanced art, have been largely overlooked. The essay

contributes to discussions about rebalancing perspectives in the history of modern art, challenging the dominance of Western narratives and the tendency to reinterpret Central and Eastern European art within Western frameworks.