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Abstract

The article analyses the decentralisation of the European avant-garde canon by focusing on the Yugoslav avant-garde, presenting it as a polycentric and rhizomatic network of artistic practices. It introduces the transnational and network approaches and an interdisciplinary methodological framework that have contributed to reshaping the understanding of avant-garde movements. Central attention is given to key concepts and theories that support a rhizomatic approach to researching the avant-garde, with theoretical foundations highlighted through examples of Yugoslav Dadaism, Zenitism and Constructivism. Particular emphasis is placed on the concepts of "barbarogenius" and the "Balkanisation of Europe" as strategies of subverting imperial discourses, which are compared to the figure of the "cannibal" in the work of Latin American avant-gardist Oswald de Andrade. The article argues for a transnational reading of marginal avant-gardes, revealing global networks of resistance against Eurocentric narratives of modernity. By presenting the Yugoslav avant-garde as a dynamic network and grounding the network approach, the article contributes to broadening the understanding of the avant-garde beyond a Eurocentric perspective. It opens space for further research into marginalised or minor artistic practices, pluralising the image of European modernity.

Keywords: historical avant-garde, Yugoslav avant-garde, rhizomatic phenomenon, network approach, horizontal art history

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The Decentralisation of European Avant-Gardism and the Network of the Yugoslav Avant-Garde

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The article analyses the decentralisation of the European avant-garde canon by focusing on the Yugoslav avant-garde, which is presented as a polycentric and rhizomatic network of artistic practices.¹ This approach challenges the traditional, Eurocentric perspective that centres avant-garde history around Western cultural hubs such as Paris and Berlin. Instead, the article highlights the crucial role played by peripheral regions, particularly Eastern and Central Europe, in the development and understanding of avant-garde practices. By repositioning Yugoslav avant-garde movements – including Dadaism, Zenitism and Constructivism – as central to the European narrative of modernity, the article contributes to a broader and more pluralistic conception of avant-garde art.

The article introduces transnational and network-based methodologies, alongside an interdisciplinary framework that incorporates concepts from horizontal art history, critical geography and the global turn. These approaches replace the hierarchical centre-periphery model with one that emphasises connectivity, mobility and exchange. The rhizomatic model serves as a key theoretical foundation. This model conceptualises avant-garde movements as non-hierarchical and decentralised, defined by dynamic interconnections and transformations.

Piotr Piotrowski's concept of horizontal art history is central to this framework. He critiques the vertical art historical narrative, which marginalises Eastern and Central European avant-garde art as derivative or secondary. Instead, Piotrowski proposes a non-hierarchical, transnational perspective, emphasising the synchronic development of avant-garde movements across Europe. His distinction between the colonised Other and the Close Other (Eastern and Central Europe) shows how the latter has been subjected to marginalisation despite sharing cultural frameworks with the West.

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The spatial turn and critical geography further inform the article's methodological approach, recognising the importance of geographical and geopolitical conditions in shaping avant-garde practices. These concepts emphasise how art movements interact with their specific cultural and political environments, moving beyond abstract, universalist models of art history. The article also draws on digital humanities methodologies, particularly network analysis and mapping of avant-garde periodicals, as developed by Béatrice Joyeux-Prunel. Her research demonstrates the polycentric nature of avant-garde networks, revealing how peripheral regions often exhibited greater dynamism and interconnectedness than traditional centres like Paris. This finding is especially relevant to the Yugoslav avant-garde, whose key publication, *Zenit*, functioned as a transnational platform for artistic exchange and collaboration.

Through concrete examples from Yugoslav Dadaism, Zenitism and Constructivism, the article illustrates how these movements appropriated and transformed Western avant-garde models. These adaptations reflect the local cultural, political and social conditions of the Yugoslav context, resulting in distinctive avant-garde expressions. One notable example is Ljubomir Micić's concepts of "barbarogenius" and the "Balkanisation of Europe", which subvert Western stereotypes of the Balkans as backward or primitive. By reclaiming these pejorative images, Micić and his contemporaries asserted the Balkans as a source of cultural renewal and modernity. The article compares these strategies with Oswald de Andrade's notion of the "cannibal" in Latin American avant-garde discourse. Andrade's *Cannibalist Manifesto* (*Manifesto Antropófago*, 1928) advocates for the critical appropriation of colonial influences, transforming them into something new and empowering. These parallel underscores the shared logic of resistance among marginal avant-gardes, which use subversion and hybridisation to challenge imperial discourses. By proposing a transnational reading of these marginal avant-gardes, the article reveals global networks of resistance that operate outside dominant Eurocentric narratives of modernity.

In conclusion, the article contributes to the restructuring of avant-garde studies by decentralising the canon and foregrounding the role of the Yugoslav avant-garde as a dynamic network. This approach not only broadens the geographical scope of avant-garde history but also highlights the transformative processes of cultural exchange, hybridisation and subversion. By focusing on processes rather than material outcomes, the article aligns with the avant-garde's own emphasis on mobility, exchange and transformation, offering a more inclusive and complex understanding of avant-gardism and modernity in Europe.